

Wesleyan Theological Journal

Publication of the
Wesleyan Theological Society

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Volume 45, Number 1
Spring, 2010

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Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60606. E-mail: atla@atla.com, or visit <http://www.atla.com/>. Available on-line through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Series), Latham, New York, and DIA-LOG, Palo Alto, California.

Available in Microform from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Dept. I.R., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Other than the most recent issues, the journal is available electronically at this online address: <http://wesley.nnc.edu>

WTS on the Web: www.wesley.nnu.edu/wts

Views expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Wesleyan Theological Society, the Editor, or the Editorial Committee.

Printed by
Old Paths Tract Society
Shoals, Indiana 47581

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EDITORIAL NOTES

The 2009 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened at Anderson University in Indiana in March, 2009. Under the careful guidance of Dr. Thomas A. Noble, the program was organized around the theme “All the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge: The Centrality of Christ.” From the many scholarly papers delivered, a select group appears in this issue.

Of particular note are the keynote presentations of I. Howard Marshall and Bruce L. McCormack and the presidential address of Thomas J. Oord. The centrality of Christ is explored by these essays in biblical, historical, and theological terms, and in recent literature and from within Roman Catholic and African contexts. In addition, Laurence W. Wood continues a conversation launched by Kenneth J. Collins in the previous issue of this journal.

Be aware that all issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1966-2009, are now available on a searchable CD (see the Wesley Center, Northwest Nazarene University, at <http://wesley.nnu.edu>). This is a rich research tool! Many new books have been published recently from within or about some aspect of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Eight are reviewed in this issue.

Whatever information is needed about the Wesleyan Theological Society is readily available here, including all officers of the Society and their email addresses. The WTS web site is Wesley.nnu.edu/wts. Also found here is an application for membership in the Society. The WTS officers to contact for particular needs you may have are:

1. If you wish to apply for society membership—Dr. Sam Powell
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3. If you wish to place a book ad—Dr. Barry Callen
4. If you wish to submit material for publication—Dr. Barry Callen

Barry L. Callen, Editor
March, 2010

A SURVEY OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY FOR THEOLOGAINS

by

I. Howard Marshall

New Testament christology is a topic so vast and complex that this paper cannot avoid being selective and superficial.¹ All that I will attempt to do is survey the current state of scholarship on the topic in a way that will hopefully be relevant and helpful for those whose primary interest is in the realm of systematic or dogmatic theology. One thing that will emerge is the variety and range of opinions on many of the topics discussed, so that it is rarely that one can speak of a consensus. In this respect, my survey may be like a political paper where the speaker defends a party point of view as the only one that a rational being can adopt, while being well aware that an equally large body of opinion may think very differently.

¹My original intention for this paper was to work on the basis of the Bultmann/Kümmel approach to New Testament theology. These two scholars confined their expositions to the main witnesses, Jesus, Paul, and John, but with some attention to the Old Testament and Jewish background and to the earliest church as the bridge between Jesus and his followers. This is what I have done. Hebrews and Revelation (for example) cry out for attention in their own right, but their voices would not significantly alter the chorus. Unfortunately, Jesus and the earliest Christians have grabbed the lion's share of the space available to me, and my treatment of Paul and John is less thorough than I had intended.

For a compact introduction to the whole topic, see Hooker, "Nature." For fuller studies see the works of Matera, *New Testament Christology*; Tuckett, *Christology*; and the symposia: Longenecker (ed.), *Contours*; Porter (ed.), *Messiah*; Powell and Bauer (ed.), *Who do you say that I am?*

We need to address two problems. The first is the historical development of christology, and especially whether what we can know about the mind of Jesus himself and his earliest followers forms a defensible historical foundation for what was later built upon it. This raises questions about the reliability of the sources. The second problem is the interpretation of the evidence. Do New Testament writers actually teach, for example, that Jesus Christ shares the nature of God, and, if so, what would such a statement actually mean?² By discussing these two questions I hope to present the raw materials that are the basis on which the systematic theologian must work.

The Old Testament and Jewish Background

In the Old Testament God makes various promises about what he will do in the future. One such statement of intent concerns the perpetuation of the people with whom he made his covenant, to whom he made the promise that he would raise up a prophet like Moses to guide them, or a king, in the line of David and similar to David, to rule over them. In many such instances the thought was apparently of the immediate future and certainly nothing supernatural (beyond the divine direction of history). The line of David would simply continue. Sometimes these rulers are described in poetic language as exalted figures, although they are ordinary human kings. With the coming of the exile, and later still when there was no king, these hopes were pinned more on the distant future and influenced by the hope of the “Day of the Lord” when God would take decisive action against his enemies and establish his rule.

Since the term “anointed” was used metaphorically of a divine appointment (that could coincide with a literal ceremony), it was natural to refer to such a future king simply by the designation “the Lord’s anointed,” and so there gradually developed the concept of a future divinely “anointed” or appointed king who would reign in a hoped-for paradisaical kingdom that would last forever.

Texts embodying such a hope have come to be called “messianic” after this figure, but of course the concept of such a ruler could easily be present in texts where the precise expression was not actually used. Vari-

²For earlier treatments of the same topic, see my articles on “Jesus Christ, Titles of” in *NBD*, 575-83, and “Incarnation” and “Jesus Christ” in *NDBT*, 576-81 and 592-602.

ous other terms could have a similar reference. Thus, both kings and prophets could be referred to by God simply as his servants, and the servant-figure in Isaiah 40-55 shows both prophetic and kingly features in different passages. Despite the absence of the term “messiah,” I do not think there can be any doubt that in some of the Servant texts “servant” is another way of referring to the same kind of figure. In Zechariah 4-5 the future hope, partly being realized in the present time, envisages two anointed figures, a king and a high priest; this two-man team reflects the earlier historical separation of the two roles in Israel in contrast to the practice in some other near-eastern countries where the king was also the chief religious functionary.

Debate continues regarding the presence and spread of this hope, complicated by the problems of dating the relevant Old Testament documents and the traditions and sources that they incorporate. The current tendency is to ascribe the hope to the late monarchical and exilic periods.³

A special position is taken by the visionary figure described in Daniel 7:13 as “like a human being.”⁴ The figure is symbolic, like the hybrid animals that precede it, and therefore does not refer to a literal man. It could be a symbol for the people of God, but the fact that he

³For representative treatments, see Satterthwaite, *The Lord's Anointed*; Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come*; J. J. Collins and A. Y. Collins, *King and Messiah*; Porter, *Messiah*. Fitzmyer explores the history of the concept of Messiah in a minimalist fashion; he tends to restrict it to passages using the actual term, and he does not take account of re-interpretation in later periods (contrast Alexander in Satterthwaite, *Lord's Anointed*, 29, on Gen 3:15). J. J. Collins focuses on the divinity of the Israelite kings as sons of God and takes this seriously in the light of the near-eastern background; it is strong metaphor for the closeness of the ruler to God and is conditional upon the continuing obedience of the monarch (summary in *King and Messiah*, 47). Satterthwaite and his colleagues find a more pervasive messianism in the OT texts, but sidestep questions of dating and origin (e.g., *Lord's Anointed*, 21).

In passing, note how in A. Y. and J. J. Collins, *King and Messiah*, there are statements of the “it is quite possible” variety alongside others qualified by “not necessarily” (e.g., 10, 107), depending on whether a maximalist or minimalist case (for these terms, cf. R. Schultz in Satterthwaite, *Lord's Anointed*, 145-47) is being developed (as with ideas of divine kingship on the one hand and the concept of pre-existence on the other hand).

⁴The Aramaic is word-for-word “like a son of man” (so the literal rendering in ESV), but the translation above (NRSV) or “like a man” is what it would have conveyed to its original readers (cf. TNIV fn.). The figure is naturally assumed to be male.

comes with the clouds strongly suggests that he is a heavenly figure who looks like a man.⁵ He is given judgmental and kingly authority. These are the same functions as the Messiah exercises, and therefore, in my opinion, this is a messianic figure, but now one who is clearly more like an angel in human form sent from heaven. This vision comes in what many regard as the latest book in the Old Testament, the final form of which dates to the second century BC.

During this same period, the books of the Old Testament were beginning to be regarded as a canonical collection, and it is probable that this process led to readers finding messianic meaning in places where it had not previously been identified. Thus, it is very plausible, although probably beyond proof, that earlier texts about ordinary earthly kings to whom God had made promises were now interpreted in reference to what God would do in the future—getting rid of unacceptable usurpers like the Hasmonaean and Roman rulers and restoring the monarchy and setting up his final, lasting rule.⁶ In short, a messianic understanding of the Psalms developed along with their canonization in the pre-Christian period.⁷

We have now reached the stage where the so-called apocalyptic understanding of history is developing. Hopes are pinned on God intervening in history in a big way to bring evil and oppression to an end and set up his eternal kingdom, which has strongly supernatural features. This hope gave rise to the creation of a considerable literature. A regular feature of some of it is the hope of a king who would resemble David or what David had come to symbolize. In the Qumran scrolls the sect looked forward to God's decisive action in history, with the coming of a prophet, a priest, and a king who would lead the sect in the re-establishment of

⁵J. J. Collins, *King and Messiah*, 78-79 (summarising his previous contributions).

⁶For traces of this phenomenon in the LXX translation, see especially the work of W. Horbury and J. Schaper, although they go further than other scholars are prepared to go; contrast the treatment by Fitzmyer, *The One*, 65-81.

⁷Here I follow Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 99-107, who speaks of a messianic reading of certain Psalms, rather than the view developed by G. H. Wilson who finds some kind of editorial organization of the whole collection to give it messianic significance; see the brief summary and critique by T. Longman, "Messiah", in *DOTWPW*, 470-71. The weakness of Mays' view is admittedly that this reinterpretation does not rest on signs of later revision but is simply a plausible hypothesis. Cf. Marshall, "Some Thoughts," 154-59.

Israel as it ought to be. The language probably implies that these people hold office eternally, although the thought of a permanent succession unbroken by coups and conquests is perhaps also possible. Similar hopes existed in other documents: Psalms of Solomon; 1 Enoch 37–71; 4 Ezra; T. XII; 2 Baruch.⁸ Heavenly agents are also mentioned: the armies that win the final showdown contain both human and angelic figures. There is evidence for the prophecy in Daniel 7 being taken up. In one text (4Q246) a messianic figure appears who is clearly modeled on the Son of Man, although that designation does not appear in the fragmentary remains of the text, but who is called Son of God and Son of the Most High.⁹

There is considerable debate as to whether all that Judaism offers us is a set of separate, disparate messianic ideas or whether there is a reasonably firm common set of beliefs. The former view is stated vigorously by J. H. Charlesworth,¹⁰ but I think that other scholars, such as W. Horbury, give a more convincing interpretation of the data.¹¹

We thus have a set of ideas and terminology that were readily at hand for Christian use within Judaism. Here there is a dilemma in interpretation. On the one hand, it could be argued that the thought of early Christians was accidentally shaped by their environment and the ideas that were current in it. Had Jesus been born in Australia in the middle ages, a different set of ideas would have been around and he would have been understood in the light of them. So it could be argued that New Testament christology is relativized as being simply a product of the religious culture of the time. On the other hand, it could be claimed that Jesus was born providentially at this specific point when the tools for understanding his significance were already in place.

⁸See Fitzmyer, *The One*, for a complete listing of the texts. Evans, "Messianism," gives a remarkably full but succinct survey of the material. J. J. Collins, *King and Messiah*, is primarily concerned to look for material describing the Messiah as Son of God, and argues for this interpretation of 4Q246.

⁹However, the identification of the figure as the messianic king is contested. See the paper given at this Wesleyan Theological Society conference by A. J. Tomasino.

¹⁰Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, gives the impression that the speakers who gave the conference papers forming this collection share his own point of view, but this is somewhat of an exaggeration; see Marshall, "The Messiah in the First Century."

¹¹Horbury, *Jewish Messianism*.

The Earthly Jesus

But now Jesus comes onto the scene, and we must consider our two basic questions concerning him, the historical one of what he did and said and the theological one of whether and how it affects christology. My focus is on the former one.

One school of thought argues strongly that the accounts in the Gospels go back to eye-witnesses and to the reliable transmission of traditions about him. At the same time, there continue to be powerful skeptical voices which argue for a combination of little or no reliable eye-witness testimony surviving and strong ideological forces shaping the traditions that were created by early Christians.¹² Neither tendency is generally carried to extreme lengths by responsible scholars. Few conservative scholars would hold that we have a literal word-for-word transcript of what happened; one has only to compare the accounts of the same events in the synoptic passages in the Gospels to see that this possibility simply does not arise. Equally, few radical scholars would dismiss the entirety of the New Testament evidence as fictitious and resort to interpretations based either on their own fancies or on other extra-biblical sources such as Gnostic Gospels.

The case for the reliability of the material in the New Testament is based on good historical arguments and is not simply a dogmatic conclusion drawn from a fundamentalist theology. Even if those who uphold it tend to be evangelical Christians, they are by no means alone, and they can defend their intuitions by sound historical reasoning. It is as foolish to reject their arguments for historicity simply on the grounds that they are

¹²The “reliable” position with regard to the Synoptic Gospels is represented in major works written with due scholarly caution by R. Bauckham; J. D. G. Dunn; M. Hengel; J. P. Meier, N. T. Wright and others. In the English-speaking world the more skeptical position is that of the publications of the Jesus Seminar and some of its leading members (Funk, *Five Gospels*; Funk, *Acts of Jesus*). For the continuing debate on Bauckham’s thesis that the Gospels rest substantially on eye-witness testimony, see the contributions by a range of scholars in *JSNT* 31:2 (December 2008) and *JSHJ* 6:2 (2008). A forthcoming symposium (late 2009) edited by R. L. Webb and D. L. Bock will contain essays assessing the historicity of several major events in the Gospels. There are good survey articles in Evans, *Encyclopedia*. A particular problem is posed by scholars who reconstruct the putative source “Q” and argue for successive strata in it, with very little material going back to Jesus himself. For a more positive view, see Meadors, *Jesus the Messianic Herald*.

Christian believers as it is to reject the arguments of their opponents simply because they have vested interests in negative conclusions.

The Synoptic Gospels¹³ present a Jesus who announces the imminence of the Kingdom of God; in the context of Judaism this theme expresses the hope of God's intervention in history to establish his just and compassionate rule over his people and the overcoming of the forces opposing its establishment. As we have noted above, in Judaism this expectation is the correlative of the messianic hope. The notion of the kingdom in the Gospels is a complex one. There is a blurring of the line between the earthly and the heavenly, so that the kingdom may be seen as the terrestrialization of the existing heavenly realm. Similarly, there is a blurring of the distinction between the present and the future. Again, God's kingdom is both a realm or space into which one may enter and an event that happens or comes. There is fairly widespread agreement among scholars that the coming of Jesus and his activity and teaching constitute the realization of God's rule here and now in this world, but that there will be a future consummation when that which has already arrived but is not yet fully realised will be fully achieved.

The result is that in the message of Jesus the Jewish concept of the kingdom undergoes something of a transformation. God's rule is not brought about by military action, nor is it a political entity. It is more of a spiritual reality, although it has consequences for ordinary earthly life and for politics. It brings judgment upon the forces of evil. Sometimes this is expressed in human disasters, such as the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44), but usually the imagery of a final judgment issuing in exclusion from the kingdom of God is found (Luke 13:27-28). Jesus is thus a teacher and prophet, condemning sin, comforting and healing sin's victims, urging repentance and commitment, and proclaiming a new personal and social way of living. All this activity can be seen as directed to a renewal of Israel.

But, if the kingdom comes into realization in this new way, it follows that the concept of the Messiah undergoes a similar transformation. For followers of Jesus, messiahship is shaped by how Jesus performed it rather than by how Judaism envisaged it. Jesus has the task of persuading people not only that he is the Messiah but that they must accept his new

¹³To avoid the controversies surrounding the historicity of the Gospel of John, I follow the standard practice of basing my discussion on the Synoptic Gospels. See further below.

definition of what it means. This statement assumes that he undertook this task. Can this be defended?

1. Jesus had a powerful sense of being sent with a mission by God. He acted as the agent of the realization of the Kingdom of God, i.e., as Messiah. There was a strong note of personal authority in his teaching reminiscent of the prophets but lacking the appeal to divine authority (“Thus says the Lord”) characteristic of them. Instead, we have the “Amen, I say to you” claim to his own authority. He was a figure claiming an authority like that of God himself, although this authority was opposed by many of his hearers.¹⁴

2. Human destiny is made to depend on his hearers’ response to him (Matt 7:24-27).¹⁵

3. The Evangelists tell the first part of the story of what Jesus did in such a way that his teaching and activity led to the question, “Who do you think that I am?” (Mark 8:27-30). This elicited the confession by the disciples that he was the Messiah (or some equivalent term), and then Jesus taught them that the Messiah must suffer and die and be raised from the dead (Mark 8:31-33). Although some have argued that this two-stage structure is created by Mark and is artificial, one can equally claim that it is historically credible.¹⁶ In any case, the Evangelists recognized that the central elements in the mission of Jesus were Kingdom and messiahship.

It would be easy to overlook the fact that what the Evangelists do is to tell a story or narrative about what Jesus did and said; it is through this medium that their christology finds expression rather than simply through the epithets and designations that they use of Jesus. The same point is broadly true of the New Testament writers generally; their christology is tied up with narrative.¹⁷

¹⁴Hengel-Schwemer, *Jesus*, propounds this thesis in convincing detail.

¹⁵Even if Jesus did not identify himself as the coming Son of Man (see below), the latter’s verdict on people depends upon their response to Jesus.

¹⁶The objection to it partly arises from the view of form-critics that the traditions originally circulated in discrete, unconnected units with no indications of their historical settings and order, but this is an assumption that has been shown to be at the very least a gross exaggeration.

¹⁷Cf. Rowe, *Luke’s Narrative Christology*. The move away from an exclusive concentration on titles was signalled by Keck, “Renewal.” “Narrative” is probably the better term to use rather than “story” since the latter tends to mean “fiction” for many people; admittedly “narrative” may be naively understood as a plain account of “what really happened” without any interpretation.

4. Jesus was put to death as “the king of the Jews.” The accusation must have had some plausibility arising out of what he was commonly accepted to have said and done.

5. The *activities* of Jesus, as distinct from any *self-descriptions* in his teaching, showed messianic traits that make it highly unlikely that he could not have had some awareness of fulfilling this role.¹⁸

6. His conviction of coming and being sent may mean nothing more than consciousness of a divine commission, like prophet, but it could express a conviction of being a heavenly agent who came from heaven to earth, in other words a pre-existent figure. This point can be made only with considerable caution. It is one question whether the Evangelists took the references to have this interpretation. It is another question whether this was the view of Jesus himself.¹⁹

7. Jesus was normally very reticent about using messianic designations to describe himself and dissuaded other people (and demons!) from confessing who he was, but he did not deny this designation and accepted it from the mouth of Peter.

8. He spoke of himself as “the Son of Man” on earth. However, the interpretation of the sayings using the Greek phrase *ho huios tou anthrōpou* continues to be fiercely debated. M. Casey has recently defended his oft-repeated view that Jesus used an Aramaic phrase that referred to people in general, including specifically himself. The phrase is thus self-referential, but the speaker says things that are true of others besides himself. This interpretation takes the sayings in ways that do not demand the special status of Jesus traditionally seen in them and requires the scholar to dismiss as inauthentic any sayings which refer to the Son of Man as a unique person.²⁰ Casey’s view has been questioned on linguistic grounds by various scholars.²¹ The counter-claim that in at least some of

¹⁸E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 15-47, paradoxically held that Jesus spoke and acted in messianic ways but still denied that Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah. A classical case, one might say, of having one’s cake and not eating it!

¹⁹The recent defence of a pre-existence christology in the Synoptic Gospels (at least in the minds of the authors) by S. J. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, has had a somewhat mixed reception among reviewers (e.g., A. Y. Collins, *King and Messiah*, 123-26).

²⁰See Casey, *Solution*, with the (critical) summary by Owen, “Review.” A somewhat similar view is adopted by Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 290-306.

²¹See Owen, “Review,” and A. Y. Collins, *King and Messiah*, 149-74.

the authentic sayings of Jesus the phrase reflects an understanding of the man-like figure in Daniel 7 as an individual messianic type of figure remains more credible. Collins herself adopts the view that in a small number of sayings Jesus referred to a figure other than himself who was expected to fulfil the prophecy in Daniel 7, and that after the resurrection the early church came to recognize Jesus himself as the person who would fulfil this expectation. This view had been propounded earlier by R. Bultmann and others, but it faces numerous difficulties. The view that Jesus used a term that referred to himself in a cryptic way as a self-reference but also identified himself as the figure in Daniel 7 continues to be plausible.²²

The question remains as to why Jesus used this phrase in preference to others.²³ Two reasons may be adduced. One is that the Son of Man may be understood as a figure from heaven, which was not the usual understanding of the Messiah. The other is that Jesus wished to express the suffering that was part of his role. That the Son of Man had to suffer may perhaps be part of the interpretation given in Daniel 7 (although in my view the imagery is more of opposition and oppression than of suffering, and the concept of Jesus himself suffering owes more to the Psalms and Isaiah 53).

9. Jesus announced the future activity of the Son of Man as judge. I accept this as a self-reference. But, even if those scholars are right who argue that he did not see himself as this figure and looked for some other figure to come, the statements are still highly significant, since in some of them Jesus is affirming that the final destiny of people when they are judged by the Son of Man will depend on their attitude to himself here and now (cf. the wording in Mark 8:38; Luke 12:9).

10 Jesus certainly spoke in an intimate way of God as his Father, but also as the Father of his disciples. His references to himself as Son are disputed, but they fit in with his messianic consciousness.²⁴ The Evangelists all present him as the Son of God.

²²Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 724-61; cf. Hengel-Schwemer, *Jesus*, 526-41.

²³It should be noted that, even if in some of the sayings of Jesus the term was a later addition or originally was no more than a self-designation, what is said about the Son of Man in these texts may still be authentic and have christological significance.

²⁴Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 708-24, is very positive on the implications of Jesus' use of "Abba," but does not go so far as to infer a sense of unique sonship. Hengel-Schwemer, *Jesus*, 542-44, are prepared to take Luke 10:22 par. Matt 11:27 more seriously.

11. Jesus saw himself as a suffering figure and used the imagery of ransom and sacrifice to interpret his death.²⁵ This is a unique feature in that the Jewish martyrs did not announce beforehand the inevitability of their own deaths (except towards the point of death itself); they might express their readiness to die (e.g., 2 Macc 7:2), but not the inevitability of their martyrdom as part of a divine purpose. The suffering element arouses echoes of the Isaianic Servant (i.e., in my view a messianic figure), even though the term Servant was not directly used by Jesus.²⁶

12. Jesus announced also that he would be raised from the dead. Admittedly this is more controversial. A skeptic could understand intimations of his being raised from the dead by God to mean nothing more than that he would be taken to be with God in the same way as Jewish martyrs believed God would raise them. It would then be necessary to come up with a convincing explanation for the rise of the belief among his disciples that this had actually happened just after his death. The prophecy is also perhaps less easy to defend against the suspicion of its being a *vaticinium ex eventu*, but the case for a historical basis is well presented by Jeremias.²⁷

In the light of these considerations what did Jesus imply in his teaching about himself? And what impression did he leave upon people? As a bare minimum we might say that most of the gospel story is about him as a man who acts like a prophet commissioned and empowered by God and conscious of a close relationship with God like that of a son to a father. This is as far as some scholars are prepared to go. They accept this purely human understanding of Jesus as what was historically the case. Jesus is represented as a man, and the main stream of christology that was to develop never questioned this.²⁸

²⁵McKnight, *Jesus and his Death*, discusses the point in detail.

²⁶The significance of the Servant for Jesus and the early church is another topic on which scholars are still much divided; see Bellinger and Farmer, *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*; McKnight, *Jesus*.

²⁷See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 818-24, and Hengel-Schwemer, *Jesus*, 540-41, for a positive approach, while recognizing that Jesus may not have expressed the hope as clearly as it now appears in the Gospels.

²⁸Later docetism, however, thought of the human Jesus as a man inhabited temporarily by a divine spirit (the Christ) that left him before the crucifixion. Or should we say that it thought of the Christ as a divine spirit that temporarily inhabited the human figure of Jesus? Cf. Irenaeus, *AH* 1:19.

One may be agnostic and simply claim that the sources are so unreliable that we *cannot be sure* of anything beyond such a bare minimum. This minimum would not go beyond anything that could be true in a closed universe. In particular, anything that looks like later christological development would be heavily under suspicion as the reading back of a later understanding in order to give it a fictitious basis, and anything supernatural would be counted as dubious on the basis that any naturalistic interpretation is more probable than a supernatural one.

Or one may go further beyond this position of agnosticism and argue that historical criticism *rules out* the possibility of Jesus being other than this ordinary human figure. Here the rejection of anything supernatural is taken as a basic assumption of historical investigation, and the attempt to explain the christology as developing in the early church is held to produce a more convincing explanation of its origin than seeing it as emanating from Jesus himself.²⁹ I don't need to discuss the ideology that affects the reading of the evidence and the rejection of it that largely determines this conclusion.

I personally adopt the alternative to both these positions in arguing for the authenticity of the other elements in the story that have been mentioned, and others beside. The three Evangelists understood Jesus to be the messiah (albeit not strictly along the lines of contemporary Jewish expectations), identified him as the Son of Man who would come back as judge, and understood him to be the Son of God in a way that went beyond a human relationship with the Father. Further, there are the so-called miraculous events, mainly healings and exorcisms, but not necessarily every account or every single account exactly as it stands; we also have those stories where Jesus appears more as a supernatural figure, the walking on the water and the transfiguration, the episodes that have been

²⁹Typical of this approach would be the assumption of J. Knox: "I, for one, simply cannot imagine a sane human being, of any historical period or culture, entertaining the thoughts about himself which the Gospels, as they stand, often attribute to Jesus" (*The Death of Christ* [New York: Abingdon Press, 1958], 58). The case for Jesus as a purely human prophet who could not have been understood as divine within a Jewish-Christian setting, but who was eventually so understood by John in a Gentile setting, is defended in depth by Casey, *From Jewish Prophet*. The case for the understanding of Jesus as divine within a Jewish-Christian setting is set out by Bauckham, *God Crucified*. For a clear statement of the hermeneutical problems, see Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*.

characterized as “secret epiphanies.”³⁰ Nor should we overlook the birth stories, which teach that the conception of Jesus involved the action of God in an unusual way, and the resurrection story which is interpreted as the return of the pre-existent Messiah to his pre-incarnational status.

There is a further set of elements that needs to be mentioned at this point. All the evidence so far comes from the Synoptic Gospels. But what about the Gospel of John? This Gospel corroborates the others with its stories of mighty works of a similar character. But it goes beyond them in the teaching ascribed to Jesus, which focuses frequently on his status as Messiah and particularly as Son of God, and as a figure conscious of a divine identity that existed before the time of Abraham. Not only is the teaching on these matters given more openly in confrontations with Jewish religious leaders, but also there is a far stronger focus on Jesus as the absolute provider of eternal life and his appeal to people to believe in him if they want to be saved. The concept of faith in Jesus that is anticipated in the other Gospels is developed and emphasized in a way that far exceeds anything in them.

Most studies of the historical Jesus take their material from the Synoptic Gospels and leave John on one side, except for small details that may slightly alter the picture (like the question of the actual day of the crucifixion) or add to it (like the Jewish plot to do away with him), but do not substantially change it. There are two ways in which John may alter the picture.

First, if the account in John is taken as being on a par with the Synoptic Gospels, then the picture of a pre-existent figure conscious of his own pre-existence, and acting more like a revealer of God than a prophet, is arguably historical. This understanding of John is almost non-existent among scholars, even very conservative ones, but it flourishes in the underworld of evangelical evangelism where gospel preaching often expounds the divinity and the consequent authority of Jesus on the basis of the Gospel of John understood as word-for-word reliable testimony to what Jesus taught about himself. Such preaching is blissfully unaware that there might be historical problems at this point. It operates on the

³⁰The historicity of at least some miraculous events is upheld by Hengel-Schwemer, *Jesus*, 461-97. There is a growing consensus that the recognition of Jesus as a worker of miracles belongs to the earliest form of the gospel traditions and is not a post-resurrection creation (whether or not the deeds in question were actually miraculous). Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 667-96.

basis of a faith-commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture that does not need any proof or support for its view and that does not take into account the need to explore what the biblical writers were actually doing.³¹

Second, we may take John seriously as a source for the historical Jesus, but recognize that it is an interpretation of his mission and message, and that it is extraordinarily difficult to unravel the material to determine what is literal-historical and what is the fruit of interpretation.³² C. L. Blomberg, the strongest scholarly defender of Johannine reliability, explicitly admits that “John has written up his material in his preferred vocabulary and style” and talks of the author’s “freedom to write up his material as distinctively as he did while also constraining him to limit himself to what Jesus really did and taught.”³³ There is no doubt a spectrum of opinion within this position, and I suspect that I may see more interpretation than Blomberg himself does. But even on this basis, John can be seen as interpreting the same Jesus as we already know from the Synoptic presentation. If so, his Gospel can be seen as corroborating the picture that I have presented and showing how it was understood in at least one stream of early Christian teaching. The discussion is ongoing, and for the time being it may be safest to stick to the basic position concerning the historical Jesus and his self-understanding founded on the Synoptic Gospels that I have outlined.³⁴

For us as theologians it is highly significant that the question of who Jesus was and what he did is thus not expressed in the Synoptic Gospels in terms of whether he is divine or God; the term “Son (of God)” is used without reflection on the resulting problem of how this fits in with monotheism. The christology is primarily messianic. But it is devastatingly new in that it is a christology of a dying servant-messiah.

Such a representation raises important questions that evangelical

³¹Whether this is an honest use of Scripture is a matter for debate.

³²A beginning has been made by Ensor, *Jesus and His Works*.

³³Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 290, 292; cf. 203. This view is in contrast to that of Lincoln, *John*, who understands John as essentially a creative reinterpretation of material in the Synoptic Gospels. Blomberg’s particular target is Casey, *Is John’s Gospel True?*, which attacks both the history and the interpretation in John.

³⁴We await especially R. Bauckham’s commentary on John, which will work on the basis that the Gospel was written by an eye-witness; but Bauckham explicitly admits that the author has interpreted the story.

scholars generally shy away from. There is the critical question of what kind of self-awareness Jesus may be presumed to have had. The only scholar whom I know to have raised the question seriously and attempted to answer it was J. R. Michaels, and he lost his teaching post for his temerity; but sacking the teacher does not make the question go away. Did Jesus speak on the basis of a package of memory-data that he brought with him from heaven, so to speak, or was he dependent upon moment-by-moment communication with God (and are these mutually exclusive alternatives)? What does real humanity mean for a divine being?

The Earliest Christians

It is time to move over to the next stage, which we shall find to be equally contentious. Whether we take 1 Thessalonians (the majority position) or Galatians (the minority position which I personally favor) as the first book of the New Testament to be written, a period of only some twenty years had elapsed since the death of Jesus. By the end of that comparatively short time the basic facts of christology had been established.

First Thessalonians is addressed to a church which is said to be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The naming of the Father and the Lord together as a pair (1 Thess 1:1; 3:11) puts them, as one might say, on the divine side of reality. Christ is a spiritual being and believers are "in him," a phrase which suggests some kind of spiritual union or relationship and envisages the risen Christ as somehow able to be in relationship with believers anywhere in the same kind of way as the Spirit is envisaged as omnipresent and able to be "in" believers. Jesus is acknowledged as Lord (1 Thess 1:1, 6; 2:15; 3:8 13; 4:1, 2, 6, 16; 5:9, 23, 27, 28), and there are pieces of tacit evidence in the letter that this title is beginning to be understood as the septuagintal way of referring to God now taken over and applied to Jesus as the supreme Lord (cf. the word of the Lord, 1 Thess 4:15). Jesus is further referred to as God's Son who will rescue people from the coming wrath. The parousia or future coming of the Son of Man is now the coming of God's Son Jesus. Christ was raised from the dead by God, is now in heaven, and he died for us so that we might receive salvation instead of experiencing the wrath of God (1 Thess 5:9-10).

Exactly the same picture is found in Galatians, but there it is even clearer. In particular, Paul's commission as an apostle is not from a man but from Jesus Christ and God the Father (Gal 1:1). It was the Son of God

who died for Paul (Gal 2:20), the Son whom God sent born of a woman (Gal 4:4).

The crucial point for my exposition is to emphasize that not only did Paul himself reach this understanding of a crucified carpenter within 20-25 years of his death, but also that he assumed that his readers shared it and he had no need to prove or expound it. It is not surprising that some of my colleagues sport coffee mugs on their mantelpieces, indicating their membership in the EHCC: “the early high christological club”!³⁵ Here then is a clear, fixed, datable point for which we have undeniable evidence. The question is: how did the early Christians reach this point? How did they come to this kind of understanding?³⁶

Paul’s own statements are not, of course, the only evidence. Especially in his writings but also in other parts of the New Testament there are numerous places where features of the wording that is used strongly suggest that the writer is echoing turns of phrase which were in existence in the church before he used them. One such would be the prayer “Maranatha” (1 Cor 16), which must have been coined by Aramaic-speaking Christians. These words and phrases tend to be expressive of Christian beliefs about Christ and his significance for salvation. They take us back before the date of the writing of the documents in which they occur. I would use them with caution for two reasons. The first is the element of subjectivity in identifying some of these putative early materials with certainty (e.g., Rom 1:3-4; Phil 2:6-11), and the second is the uncertainty in dating their origin. A so-called pre-Pauline fragment in a letter as late as Philippians or Colossians need not be any earlier than some of Paul’s own earlier letters (but could well be even earlier). Nevertheless, with caution, this material may be significant for our quest.

Further, controversial evidence comes from the book of Acts. Here we have a two-part account of the life and preaching of the early Christians. In the earlier part, up to Acts 15 (roughly the date of Paul’s earliest letters), we have the sermons by Peter, apologetic, prophetic and evangelistic, delivered to Jewish audiences, together with a judicial defence by Stephen and an evangelistic sermon by Paul, both of which consist largely of surveys of Old Testament material. In the second part there are evan-

³⁵Note the unexplained dedication “To the EHCC” in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

³⁶Of course, there were some who didn’t reach it, and those who did do so did not necessarily come to it at the same, early time.

gelistic sermons to Gentiles and apologetic speeches by Paul before Jewish and Roman audiences which belong around AD 60. There is sufficient similarity within these groups of addresses in content, structure and phraseology to cause the majority of scholars to insist that they are literary constructions by Luke himself, with little if any basis in tradition, valuable witnesses to the christology of Luke's own time (scholarly dates for which actually stretch from c. AD 65 to c. AD 150), but no help in reconstructing early christology. That the speeches show these Lucan characteristics cannot be denied, and, as they stand, they have manifestly undergone shaping and wording by the author of the book, but that they are firmly based on early traditions is not excluded by this fact. I suppose that, if we did not possess Mark and Matthew for comparison, similar things could be said erroneously about the teaching of Jesus in Luke's Gospel being largely Lucan composition.

Putting these early sermons together, we learn that Jesus was a man anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and the consequent spiritual power. He went about doing good and healing people afflicted by the devil. The Jewish leaders put him to death, an event that took place by God's plan and will, but was carried out by human people. God raised him from the dead and exalted him to sit at his right hand as Messiah and Lord; he is the agent through whom God poured out the Spirit. He was recognized as the exalted Son of Man by Stephen, and he is the appointed judge of all people. He is now Lord of all and his followers obey him above any human rulers.

The christology is thus presented in the form of a story or narrative, and the focus in this telling of the story is the resurrection which is attested as a certainty on the grounds that the followers of Jesus saw him alive after his death and that it is a fulfilment of Scripture concerning the Messiah. It has the effect of vindicating Jesus despite his death as an alleged criminal. Next to nothing is said about the positive, saving significance of his death, and the impression is given that simply by virtue of the authority given to him he is able to offer salvation, which is implicitly forgiveness for those who crucified him and those who supported them.

Alongside the preaching we must take into account what the early Christians did. Two related things are important here. The first was their behaviour, specifically giving a high place to Jesus and treating him as their Lord. This topic has been treated in a series of publications by L. W. Hurtado who has adduced convincing evidence from a wide variety of

sources for the practices of Christian devotion. He draws his initial evidence from early Pauline Christianity and from other evidence, including Acts, for the earliest Christian believers. His comments relate to such features as early Christian hymns, prayer to Christ, use of the name of Christ in baptism and healings, the Lord's Supper (so called), confession of Jesus and calling upon him, prophecy and its source in the risen Jesus. All of this reflects a position for Jesus that places him alongside God the Father.³⁷

The question of precedents for this kind of estimate has led to much discussion. There are references to various divine agents in Judaism, including personified divine attributes such as Wisdom and Logos, and also to exalted patriarchs (principally Enoch), and to principal angels. Hurtado is sympathetic to the role that such speculations may have played in helping to form Christian convictions and providing the language for expressing them.³⁸

The second action of early Christians was their use of the Old Testament to gain an understanding of Jesus. A. H. I. Lee, who is skeptical of the relevance of these Jewish speculations, makes a strong case for a christology of a pre-existent Son of God based on early Christian exegesis of Psalms 2 and 110 and in the light of Jesus' self-consciousness of divine sonship and divine mission. The latter is the foundation and the former is the catalyst.³⁹

Now either this represents what the early Christians said, based on memories of the people involved, or Luke in particular displayed superb historical intuition in reconstructing their thinking. The former alternative makes good historical sense. The first difficult tasks that the early Christians had to undertake must have been to overcome the scandal of the cross, whose existence is frankly admitted by Paul (1 Cor 1:22-23), and to persuade people of the truth of the resurrection. The appeal to Scripture and to eye-witness testimony were their only possible weapons for this

³⁷Hurtado, *One God*; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*. For criticism, see A. Y. Collins, *King and Messiah*, 211-13. Hurtado tends to speak of "devotion" and to avoid the term "worship."

³⁸There is a considerable literature on what may be called "angel christology," the attempt to understand Christ in the light of angelology (especially with reference to the imagery in Revelation). See Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*. A critical stance is developed by Lee, *From Messiah*.

³⁹Lee, *From Messiah*. This seems to be much the same position as that briefly developed by Bauckham, *God Crucified*.

purpose. At this stage, the deeper explanation of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sins was secondary in importance. Moreover, there is nothing in this understanding of Jesus that conflicts with the picture that we were getting from Paul.

The alternative is that we do not know at all what the early Christians believed and taught, and that the christology and soteriology of Luke represent a deliberate attempt to play down and even reject the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus. To the best of my knowledge those who take this position have not offered any remotely plausible account of why Luke should have rejected the universal belief in the atoning death of Jesus. Let us note the crucial features of this christology:

1. The center of attention is the death and resurrection of Jesus rather than his earthly mission and teaching, exactly as in Paul.
2. The categories used to explain who Jesus is include prophet, Son of Man, Christ, Lord, and Son of God. These all indicate in various ways his authority as the agent of God and his future role in judgment.
3. The resurrection is understood as vindicating Jesus and confirming his status.

Here, however, there is some difficulty. It would be possible to understand Acts 2 as teaching that God *appointed* Jesus as Lord and Christ by raising him from the dead, so that we have two stages in christology, an earthly life when Jesus is a prophet and apparently no more than a human figure, and a second stage when he is raised and exalted to a new position that he did not previously have. If you take this view, then presumably the belief that he has some kind of ontological nature that he shares with God the Father as his Son is a later development still.

There are scholars who take this kind of view. But it is problematic. In the first place, it stands in tension with the depiction in the Gospel of Luke, which readers are expected to have read before they start on Acts, for here Jesus is born as the Son of God by the power of the Spirit, and he is depicted as a Messiah (and Son of Man) who has to suffer, rather than as a Messiah-designate who has to suffer before he can become Messiah; he is also referred to by the narrator himself as “the Lord” during the course of the story. Thus, the two-stage account of Jesus is not that of Luke himself, unless it is allowed that he is after all incorporating early traditions that had this original significance, but that took on a new significance for Luke himself.

But is that what the material meant in its original setting? Various

attempts have been made to find parallels to it, especially in Romans 1:3-4 where Jesus “as to his earthly life was a descendant of David (i.e., Messiah) and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.” Here, it is suggested, Messiahship and divine Sonship are two distinct stages in his career. Clearly Paul himself did not believe this, and the proposal has to be that this was the hypothetical meaning of a statement that he took over and reinterpreted. Of course, it is not a perfect parallel since it has Jesus as Messiah at stage 1 whereas in Acts 2 he becomes Messiah at stage 2.⁴⁰

These attempts are palpably weak, and they depend upon speculative reconstructions of earlier materials used by Paul and Luke himself. A further point to be remembered is that we have already commented that what Paul taught c. AD 50 was of such a character that he did not need to defend it to his readers. He provides evidence for the resurrection, yes, but obviously such a crucial event would face attack and need defence. Not only so, but two related facts are significant. First, in what is almost universally regarded as early tradition, because that is what Paul says it is (1 Cor 15:3-5), the preaching that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures is said by Paul to be the common apostolic message. Second, this was what was passed on to Paul and we may presume that he got it from Jewish Christians at the time of his conversion or not long afterwards. But the chronology absolutely forbids us placing his conversion any more than about three years after the death of Jesus. We are very close to the actual events.

When, therefore, we get a picture in Acts which is historically plausible and which fits in closely with the beliefs of Paul who was closely linked to Peter, James and John, we are on solid ground.

Christology in Paul

We now turn directly to Paul himself⁴¹ Some of his beliefs have already come to light. We have seen how he took over an understanding of Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ and Lord, who will return from

⁴⁰We also know of a small group of Ebionite Christians who persisted in believing in Jesus as a human Messiah and not as Son of God in a unique sense; some scholars suggest that this kind of view was the original one.

⁴¹The standard work is now Fee, *Pauline Christology*. But any works on New Testament theology or Pauline theology will contain discussion of the topic. Cf. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*.

heaven as judge and saviour, the one who bore our sins and died for us. But there are other significant features to be taken into account.

1. Jesus is spoken of as the Son of God, a description which reflects both the teaching of Jesus himself and also the status of the Messiah as understood from the Old Testament. Paul uses the term when thinking of Jesus as sent by God and also as so close to God that the depth of God's love is conveyed by the sending of his Son (Gal 4:4; Rom 5:10; 8:32).

2. The exalted Jesus is the One who was incarnate on earth as the son of a woman (Gal 4:4). Whether this implies belief in the virgin birth as the means of his entry into earthly life is not clear.⁴²

3. The defining element in Paul's gospel is Christ crucified and risen (1 Cor 1:23; 15:3-5; Rom 14:9). The point to be emphasized here is not simply that Paul taught this but that it is absolutely central.

4. A second, absolutely central feature is that Christ is now a cosmic figure such that believers have some kind of spiritual relationship with him. Somehow they all died with him and experience new life with him (2 Cor 5:14-15). They are "in Christ", an expression which means more than just that they trust in him and that their existence is determined by the fact of his death and resurrection; it indicates in some (though not all) of its occurrences that there is a spiritual relationship with him (e.g., Phil 1:1). Prayer is made to him and he is the source of spiritual blessings (2 Cor 12:8-9; Gal 1:3-4).

5. Much of what is said about this spiritual relationship is also said in terms of the believer (or believers) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9-11), so that Christ is to be thought of as sharing the spiritual nature and powers of the Spirit. This, of course, also makes him like the Father, in line with the Johannine statement that "God is a Spirit."⁴³

6. He is assigned a role in creation alongside God the Father. This is found in 1 Corinthians 8:6, which is a daring revision of the Shema and indicates that Paul is placing Jesus as the object of worship alongside the Father. This understanding is also found in the exalted language of Philipians 2:6-11 where Jesus Christ is declared to have been in the form of God and equal with God, and then humbled himself to become a human being.⁴⁴ Probably the majority view is still that this is a traditional formu-

⁴²It is emphatically not contradictory of it.

⁴³The credit for stressing the christological implications of this mode of speaking must go to Moule, *Origin*.

lation adopted by Paul, and if so this confirms that Paul was not alone in this kind of understanding; but with some reluctance I have to admit that Pauline composition seems to me to be much more likely. The hymn then closes with the humbled Christ, now made a man, dying and then being exalted and placed alongside God in that things normally associated with God the Father, namely having a supreme name (status) and worship from all creation, are now assigned to Christ, although care is taken to insist that this does not denigrate from the worship due to God the Father.⁴⁵ Equality with God does not lead to independent action.

Such language has been interpreted as being modeled on the Jewish concept of Wisdom as a figure alongside God sharing in the work of creation, but this hypothesis has been strongly criticized and should probably be rejected.⁴⁶

7. In the later Pauline letters, which are probably not all that much later than Philippians, although many scholars would regard them as post-Pauline, these two themes are expressed even more powerfully. Colossians 1:15-20 depicts Christ as being the image of God, his firstborn, superior to all creation and indeed the agent of all creation and the goal of all creation. The continued existence of the created order depends on him as its head (Col 2:10). Parallel to this is his relationship to the church which is the body of which he is the head, the source of its life and supreme over it (Col 1:18). Whether or not the term “head” includes the idea of supremacy, this is already clearly established by his designation as Lord. Alongside this is the notion that the fullness of God is in him (Col 1:19; 2:9); this refers to the full sum of God’s powers and qualities, especially including his love and grace.

That is awesome enough. But it is repeated and taken further in Ephesians. Christ is not only head of the universe, but his presence fills everything in every way, like God (Eph 1:22-23). Evidently the power of

⁴⁴The arguments of Dunn that this and similar statements do not affirm pre-existence have not gained much acceptance among other scholars.

⁴⁵There is debate over whether the term “God” is used of Christ in the Pauline corpus (Rom 9:5; Tit 2:13). Fee, *Pauline Christology*, is a notable dissenter.

⁴⁶For wisdom christology in Paul, see the many scholars cited by Lee, *From Messiah*, 286 n. 6, 287 n. 10, and especially Dunn, *Christology*, and the running critique throughout Fee, *Pauline Christology*, especially 595-630; cf. Lee, *From Messiah*, 284-96.

Christ is accessible everywhere. This may sound mind-boggling, but it is no more so than the concept of a physical universe in which cosmic radiation that has been travelling for light-years is detectable wherever one may go. If we can envisage the reality of the physical forces that hold the universe together, the concept of God's omnipresence becomes more comprehensible.

8. Alongside all this is the fact that in the Graeco-Roman world the language of lordship and taking a place among the gods was also used of human rulers. Some were understood to be deified on their death, whereas others were thought to be manifestations of gods during their earthly life. Paul's language goes beyond this, though opinions differ as to how conscious and deliberate this is.⁴⁷ The expression of christology is shaped to some extent by the ideas current in the surrounding world in the context of the belief that, whatever can be said about other objects of veneration and worship, the Christian God and Christ are in a higher category.

On any account there is continuing progress and development in thought: which Paul are we thinking of when we talk about the christology (or theology) of Paul? At what point in his life do we anchor our soundings?⁴⁸ There is not a lot of difference between conservative and radical here; both have to reckon with development in Paul or in the corpus.⁴⁹ Does the later teaching affect how we understand the earlier teaching?⁵⁰

The Christology of John

The christology of John (Gospel and Letters) uses a simple vocabulary to convey profound truths.

1. The Gospel of John commences with the self-revelation of God

⁴⁷The degree to which Paul's language (and that of other New Testament writers) is consciously and deliberately anti-imperial is debated. It is clearly open to that interpretation in several places (e.g., Philippians and Revelation).

⁴⁸I have not, for example, included the Pastoral Epistles in my survey.

⁴⁹The point is well made by Hooker, "Nature," 77. We are not dissecting "an inanimate corpse" but watching people vigorously "theologizing."

⁵⁰A. Y. Collins again comes to mind. She tends to work on the "does not necessarily imply pre-existence principle" (cf. fn. 3), but, if Paul clearly accepts pre-existence in some cases, this might well be thought to tip the balance in favor of finding it in other less certain cases as well. Again, even if some of the letters attributed to him are deutero-Pauline, they could still be echoing reliable traditions of Paul's teaching. His followers must have had some teaching from him!

that takes place through communication by his Word. It can be verbalized through teaching, but it is also identified with Jesus himself who is at one and the same time both the revealer and the revelation. In this capacity he is also the conveyor of life; eternal life, however, does not depend simply on receiving a revelation and living by God's commands but is a spiritual experience and transformation brought about by spiritual means. There is an experience of being born again by the Spirit or receiving the Spirit. The effect of faith is to convey eternal life, which is explicated in terms of knowing God and of a close personal relationship with the Father, Christ, and the Spirit.

2. In the body of the Gospel, who Jesus is is explained in various ways. There is, first, the question whether he is the Messiah, the fulfillment of Jewish and Samaritan expectations.

Second, already in the prologue he is identified with the Word, John's name for an entity closely related to Old Testament ideas of the torah and of wisdom that undergo some kind of personification (although hypostatization is probably too strong a term). This technical term is not present in the subsequent discussions in the Gospel itself. John the Baptist is not asked whether he is the Word or the source of life, but whether he is the Messiah or some allied figure like Elijah. Nevertheless, the Gospel clearly depicts Jesus acting as the Word by revealing God and conveying light and life.

Third, various images for conveying life are used of Jesus (e.g., bread, water, light), bringing out his superiority to other such agencies and what they bring.

Fourth, the concept of being God's Son becomes prominent; this is more than a messianic title, and conveys the sense of a close, ontological relationship to God, and it becomes the subject of intense debate with his opponents. It leads to statements of pre-existence, as noted earlier, and to the use of the actual term "God" (John 20:28; cf. 1:1), as well as to the "I am" statements.

Fifth, there is the concept of a close spiritual relationship between believers and the Son, essentially a relationship of love but somehow expressive of a union with him.⁵¹ The nature of the Son, Jesus Christ, is such that there can be some kind of personal relationship involving a spiritual union between him and believers, whatever that might mean (cf.

⁵¹We are dealing here with something that lies beyond the realm of physical sense-perception, a spiritual relationship that is nevertheless real.

Paul's use of "in Christ").⁵² Similar language is used about the relationship of believers to the Father (John 14:23; 17:21). And there is also a relationship of oneness between believers like that which exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:20-23). These sets of relationships, between believers and one another, between believers and the Father and the Son, and between the Father and the Son, need to be explored for their implications for the spiritual nature of all the participants,⁵³ but in the present context especially for their significance for the nature of the Son in relation to the Father and to believers. What is implied when the relations between Father and Son are expressed in this kind of way?

3. In the letters of John stress is laid on the Father/Son relationship which has become integral to messiahship (1 John 2:22-23). Great importance is attached to the love of God for his people which is realised in the sending and dying of the Son. The union of the Father and Son is essential for the death of Christ to be understood as the incarnate love of the Father. No lesser person, separate from God, can be love incarnate. Likewise, the eternal life conveyed by Christ is understood as divine life, and as such it must be conveyed by the divine agent. Hence the importance of right belief about the Father and the Son. To deny the Son is thus to deny the Father, and John's concern is that, if a person does not believe that Jesus is the Son of the Father, then that person is denying that Jesus is qualified to be the Saviour and is thereby cutting himself off from salvation. It should be needless to say that doctrinal orthodoxy in itself is not the basis for receiving salvation; this is not so clear in the letters, where faith tends to be right belief, but is clear in the gospel where the need for faith in Jesus is central.

The christology of John thus says much the same as Paul, but is the product of a different mind that uses language differently. The key question is doubtless whether either John or Paul, reading the writings of the other, would want to express agreement or disagreement or perhaps say "I

⁵²Unlike Paul, John uses the language of reciprocal indwelling for the relationship between the Father and the Son (John 10:38; 14:10-11) as well as for the relationships between believers and the Father (see John 17:21) and believers and the Son (John 14:20; 15:4-5). It is a use of language where two apparently contradictory statements (how can I be in you if you are in me?) are put together to convey a deeper truth.

⁵³There are important implications for anthropology, specifically for the question of the capacity of human beings for spiritual relationships with one another and with God.

agree, but that's not quite how I would put it." Would that George Caird's apostolic conference had taken place and been recorded.⁵⁴

Some Conclusions

My closing comments fall into two groups. First, I will summarize some of the main points concerning the character of New Testament christology. Second, I will consider their significance for the program of the theologian.

Foundational Material. What, then, are the important points arising out of all this for the theologian who wants to build on the christological foundation laid in the New Testament?

1. There is a rock-bottom, quite universally agreed consensus in understanding Jesus as a real human being who functioned as a teacher and prophet and proclaimed the kingdom of God with its blessings and demands and believed that his mighty works were indicative of its presence or near approach.

2. There is strong reason to believe historically that Jesus was enacting the role of Messiah, although shifting the role to be significantly different from some Jewish expectations; that he laid claim to high authority; that he saw his role as including a death on behalf of other people; and that he was conscious of an intimate relationship with God as his father.

3. The first followers of Jesus undoubtedly believed that he had been raised from death and that their experience of the Holy Spirit indicated his continuing activity. They understood him to have been exalted by God, thus confirming his authoritative position alongside the Father expressed in such terms as that he was Messiah, Son of Man, Lord, and Son of God. These expressions were increasingly understood as evidencing a close relationship to God that went beyond the intimacy of friends or close colleagues.

4. Nevertheless, the followers of Jesus did not all understand the relationship of Jesus Christ to God in the same way, and the question of whether we are dealing with diversity, tensions, contradictions, stages in development, or whatever needs careful investigation. The temptation to conservative, evangelical scholars is to smooth out any such differences

⁵⁴On Johannine Christology, see, for example, Matera, *New Testament Christology*, 215-42, and Caird, *New Testament Theology*, 18-26.

by harmonization, just as the temptation to radical scholars and non-Christian scholars is to magnify the differences in the interests of showing that the New Testament is a mass of contradictions that cannot be dissolved away.

Here the work of A. D. Hultgren is particularly important in attempting to provide an analysis of four different types of christology in the New Testament in terms of the relative roles of God and Christ. He distinguishes:

- a. Redemption accomplished in Christ (God acts in Christ; Paul and Mark).
- b. Redemption confirmed through Christ (God confirms his redemptive purpose through Christ; Matthew and Luke-Acts).
- c. Redemption won by Christ (Christ acts to redeem humanity [Christus Victor]; later Pauline corpus, Hebrews, Revelation).
- d. Redemption mediated by Christ (Christ reveals God to believers; John).

Hultgren regards these as mutually exclusive types of doctrine and adopts one of them over against the others as most adequate and basic for a contemporary formulation of the gospel. Although his interest is soteriology, he sees here the expressions of different types of christology. His provocative analysis is a good starting point for discussion.

5. Jesus' followers were concerned very much with what he did and taught. They saw him as the climactic figure in the history of Israel, the people of God, renewing and restoring their life and opening it up to Gentiles as well as Jews. The story of Jesus was the climax of salvation history, which was seen as leading up to him. Old Testament Scriptures were seen as pointing to him, although he himself has no role in the Old Testament story.⁵⁵ His followers identified him as the fulfilment of some prophetic passages, so that they could say that he was the subject of prophecy, and they also understood him to have been involved (along with the Spirit) in creation itself, taking on the role assigned to Wisdom.

6. In his exalted state, Jesus was active through the Spirit, and the church acted by his name and prayed through him and to him. He was conceived to be active through signs and wonders. He was spiritually with his people and they were incorporated in him as their representative

⁵⁵Recent commentators interpret 1 Cor 10:4 in this way, but even if so, the thought remains marginal.

and leader in his death and resurrection. Yet he was also with them both individually and corporately.

7. The followers of Jesus also recognized him as the ruler of the universe, calling his people to join in his opposition to the powers of darkness until victory is finally won. They looked forward to a future consummation, conceived in various types of imagery, but generally understood to involve the setting up of the eternal kingdom of God in a new world with God, Father, Son and Spirit at its center.

The most promising attempt from the angle of a New Testament scholar to explain this understanding of Jesus comes from R. Bauckham, who argues that Jesus is seen as being included in the unique identity of God.⁵⁶ Christ possesses those same characteristics that make God unique. He is not to be understood by placing him in “a Jewish category of semi-divine intermediary status, but by identifying [him] directly with the one God of Israel, including Jesus in the unique identity of this one God.”⁵⁷ This “christological monotheism” arose before the composition of any of the surviving Christian writings. The concept is not exactly original with Bauckham; Charles Wesley (for example) already expressed it in those hymns where he refers to the mystery of God being crucified for us.

Some Suggestions to Theologians. What are Christian theologians to do with this New Testament material?

1. The range of points that have just been catalogued indicates that a christology based on the New Testament and guided by it must be concerned with far more than the traditional questions of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ and the relationship between them. These terms are not New Testament terms. This certainly does not disqualify them for theological usage, but it does add some weight to the argument that we are illegitimately narrowing down the scope of christology if we limit it to the two questions of how divinity and humanity are related in Jesus (incarnation) and how Father, Son, and Spirit are mutually related (trini-

⁵⁶Bauckham, *God Crucified* (based on his Didsbury Lectures at the British Isles Nazarene College [now the Nazarene Theological College, Manchester]); an enlarged version of this 1998 book is scheduled to appear this year. See also Watson, “Triune Divine Identity,” who defends a similar position over against what he finds to be a deficiency in Dunn, *Theology of Paul*.

⁵⁷Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4.

tarianism). Rather, we must take our lead from the New Testament and ask about the relationships of Jesus Christ to the act of creation and to the created universe; to the ongoing history of humanity; to the powers of evil; to the human rulers of this world; to people in general and to believers in particular.⁵⁸ These same questions can all be asked about God the Father, and the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit to the world. Further, the question of the relationships to one another of Father, Son, and Spirit need to be tackled.

Put in slightly different terms: much of the New Testament material is concerned with status, relationships, and functions, but traditional christology has largely restricted its discussion to talk about natures and persons.

2. We need to consider the question of the different stages in the being and status of Jesus Christ and discuss the nature, status, functions and relationships of this person at such different points as: before and at creation; during the history of Israel; during the period of incarnation; at his death; in his continuing resurrected and exalted state; and at the end when he hands over the universe to his Father (1 Cor 15:28).

3. We are making a historical study of an ongoing process of theologizing. At what points do we make our cross-sections and what do we include in our scope? Whose christology are we investigating? Are we looking at Jesus' own view of himself; the changing views of his disciples in his lifetime; their fresh understanding after his resurrection and the developments in course of time; what his enemies made of him; how inadequate or wrong Christian views developed? The phrase "New Testament christology" is a vast simplification of a many-faceted and developing phenomenon.

4. Another relevant question is: what led to christology? What was its basis? Different sources include: Jesus' own action and teachings; the use of Scripture;⁵⁹ the place, if any, of direct revelations; personal and corporate Christian experience; the influence of the cultural environment

⁵⁸Thus Matera, *New Testament Christology*, 243-55, closes his work with a summary of "The Diverse Unity of New Testament Christology" under the five headings of: Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel; Jesus Christ, Israel and the Nations; Jesus Christ, the Church and the World; Jesus Christ and the Human Condition; and Jesus Christ and God.

⁵⁹There has not been space in this paper to take up the question of the way in which Old Testament materials provided the basis for christology, a topic which is in itself a focus of much contemporary scholarship.

with the resulting attempt to claim “Anything Caesar can do, Jesus can do better”; and the influence of pagan religions and beliefs. Answering these questions will surely affect the nature of our answer to the central question of the identity of Jesus.

5. I would suggest a definition of christology as the attempt to delineate an understanding of Jesus Christ which will account for the various ways in which the early Christians depicted him. Such an understanding will go beyond what they themselves understood.

Consider the situation where a person is playing a piano in a somewhat odd situation. To make my analogy work, the piano is so constructed and sealed that it is not possible to open it up and see what is inside. An observer or the player can see and hear what is done and view the outside of the piano. But what is there inside the piano that enables the pianist to play it and make music? It is possible to learn to play a piano without ever opening it up to see what is inside, to learn what it can do without understanding how it works (as with people who can drive their cars perfectly well but have never once opened the hood).⁶⁰ But we are concerned not just with playing the piano, but also with understanding what is going on.

So too christology is the attempt to explain what there is that lay beneath the surface of the early Christian experience of Jesus Christ, as it is reflected in the witness of the New Testament and gave rise to it. To talk of New Testament christology is to say that the experience of the New Testament writers is the normative authoritative source with which the theologian must work. However, the theologian will also need to take other material into account, including: (1) the historical experiences of the early Christians and of Jesus himself rather than just the teaching of the New Testament writers; and (2) our subsequent Christian experience and the development of human knowledge and philosophy that may provide fresh subject matter and fresh ways for understanding that need to be taken into account. The theologian thus comes to an understanding of what must be assumed to underlie the New Testament experience, and this will involve going beyond what the New Testament authors themselves did or could have worked out.

Christology is thus the attempt to frame a hypothesis regarding what

⁶⁰Of course, different theories may be propounded. And there may be entirely different things inside the piano, depending on whether it is a real piano or a digital electronic device!

would have given rise to the early Christian understanding(s) of Jesus, even though the contents (or some of them) of this hypothesis were unknown to the early Christians, were possibly beyond their grasp, and had not been thought of fully at the time. There could, for example, be “trinitarian” phenomena that they lacked the intellectual tools to comprehend fully.

6. For orthodox, evangelical Christians the normative material is the biblical evidence. A relative authority attaches to the conclusions reached by theologians from the biblical evidence, but it is an authority arising from the biblical teaching that they are seeking to expound faithfully. Moreover, since the dividing line between biblical scholars and systematic theologians is an indeterminate one, both of them can speak with this relative authority, and the community of the faithful will know that it has to try the spirits, examining them for their intellectual cogency and trying them against the evidence of Scripture (as supreme) and Christian experience (as a secondary authority).⁶¹

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⁶¹The point of this paragraph is to reject any suggestion that it is improper for New Testament scholars to take on the role of Christian theologians as an essential aspect of their calling.

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**WHY SHOULD THEOLOGY
BE CHRISTOCENTRIC?
CHRISTOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS
IN PAUL TILLICH AND KARL BARTH**

by

Bruce L. McCormack

The question posed by my title is one that I will address through a comparison of two theologians: Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. I have chosen them because the first represents christocentrism in a pure form; the second seeks to build christocentric elements into what finally is a metaphysical scheme. But I have also chosen Barth and Tillich for autobiographical reasons. Engaging the two together allows me to reflect upon my own theological journey from a Wesleyan-Arminian to a Reformed perspective, from Tillich to Barth, and to give a partial answer to why my mind changed.¹

When I began the study of theology in 1973, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich were widely regarded as antipodes. Indeed, it did not take long before I was asked: “Are you a Barthian or a Tillichian?” It was almost taken for granted that these were the only alternatives. Choose you this day whom you will serve! After some thirty-five years from those rites of initiation, it now seems to me that the differences between Barth and

¹It was Herbert Prince of Point Loma Nazarene University and Albert Truesdale of Nazarene Theological Seminary who introduced me to Tillich’s theology and, in the process, gave me a firm grounding for further study in the field of Christian dogmatics. This essay is gratefully dedicated to them.

Tillich are not such as ought to prevent our recognition of the shared heritage in which both did their work, and the considerable overlap in their differing perspectives.

Born in the same year, the theologies of Barth and Tillich were first forged in response to the same set of intellectual conditions in the first decade of the twentieth century. Both experienced the upheaval brought on by war and its aftermath, the cultural, ecclesial and theological crisis of the Weimar period. Both were Religious Socialists for a time. Both belonged, in their differing ways, to the “dialectical theology” movement (Barth as a leader and Tillich standing on the fringe of that movement). And both were, in their differing ways, quintessentially modern theologians. The differences between them have to do with the fact that Karl Barth fully embraced the Ritschlian rejection of the use of metaphysics to ground Christian theology; Tillich did not. Indeed, Barth’s highly christo-centric dialectical theology can be understood as one possible permutation on the anti-metaphysical revolution of the Ritschlians, while Tillich’s apologetic or “answering theology” is best understood as a revised form of the older “mediating theologies” which dominated the German scene in the mid-nineteenth century.

How then did Barth and Tillich come to be regarded as antipodes? Tillich himself bears a good deal of responsibility for creating the myth of the neo-orthodox Barth.² Certainly, his description of Barth under the heading of “kerygmatic theology” presupposes an account of “supranaturalism” which is foreign to Barth’s anti-metaphysical thought world. “Supranaturalism” means for Tillich the “duplication”³ of this world in a higher, metaphysical world, a conception which is unthinkable apart from attachment to the classical, cosmologically-based metaphysics. But Barth was no more attached to this ancient metaphysic than was Tillich.⁴ The claim that Barth somehow had no place for the “situation” in his theology, that the situation “cannot be entered,” that no answer can be given to the questions implied in the situation, that the Christian message can only be

²For other factors contributing to the creation of this myth, see my *Karl Barth’s Critically-Realistic Dialectical Theology; Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1-28.

³Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 20.

⁴On this point, see Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by John Webster (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 104-123.

“thrown at those in the situation, thrown like a stone,”⁵ all of this is easily refuted by close attention to what Barth actually says in his dogmatics.

Consider, for example, what Barth writes about the dogmatic norm in theology. “In its testing of the Church’s proclamation, dogmatics must orient itself to the concrete situation towards which Church proclamation itself must today be geared. . . , i.e., to the Word of God which is spoken in the present to the present. . . . An ecclesial attitude excludes the possibility of a dogmatics which thinks and speaks in a timeless way.”⁶ The difference between Tillich and Barth is not that the latter has no place for the “situation” while the former does. The difference is that Tillich’s “correlation” of situation and message is built on a foundation laid in the Lutheran understanding of the priority of law over gospel, while Barth’s “correlation” presupposes the Reformed priority of gospel over law.⁷ Finally, the idea that Barth treats dogmatic propositions as identical with revelation or as somehow derived directly from revelation is an accusation wide of the mark.⁸ The dialectic of veiling and unveiling which structures Barth’s concept of revelation, from his *Romans* on through to the end of his life, does not allow doctrine to be anything more than a *witness* to revelation; indeed, the intention from the beginning was to render impossible a direct identification of dogmatic propositions and revelation itself.⁹

Could Tillich really have misunderstood Barth as badly as he appears to have done? Did he really believe what he was saying? Or was

⁵Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p.7.

⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 840. Cf. idem., “*Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*,” *Bd. 1: Prolegomena, 1924*, ed. by Hannelotte Reiffen (Zürich: 1985), 357: “Dogmatics may not turn its back on the *present*, the moment. As a dogmatician, I may not think and speak timelessly as if I were a person living in the fourth or the sixteenth centuries.”

⁷Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 27, n.57.

⁸The term “neo-orthodoxy” is used by Tillich to speak of a theology which treats dogmatic propositions as directly revelatory. “In attempting to derive every statement directly from the ultimate truth, for instance, deriving the duty of making war against Hitler from the resurrection of the Christ, he falls into using a method which can only be called ‘neo-orthodox,’ a method which has strengthened all trends towards a theology of repristination in Europe.” See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I., 5.

⁹On the dialectical structure of Barth’s concept of revelation, see Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 11-20; 162-65; 245-62; 269-74. On the inherent inadequacy of dogmatics statements to bear witness to revelation, see *ibid.*, 337-46.

he simply telling a story whose purpose was to strengthen his own position in the country in which he had been forced to seek refuge? I suspect that the answer is a bit of both. Tillich entered the academic arena in the conventional way. He did a Ph.D. in philosophy (Breslau, 1910), followed by a *Licenciate* and a second Ph.D. in Theology (both in Halle, in 1912 and 1915).¹⁰ Tillich's reward for passing over these academic hurdles was to work for five years as a *Privatdozent* in Berlin after the war. He was only finally made an *Ausserordentliche Professor* (something akin to an "Associate Professor" in today's American system) at the University of Marburg in 1924. By that time, Karl Barth had already been teaching for three years at the University of Göttingen without so much as a *Licenciate* (the most minimal qualification).¹¹ But for reasons that remain unclear, Tillich was less than happy teaching theology in Marburg,¹² and moved to Dresden where he was given a chair in religious studies.

¹⁰Werner Schüßler, "Tillich's Life and Works" in Russell Manning, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5. It is worth noting that Tillich only just squeezed through the Habilitation process. His professors in Halle regarded his work as "too philosophical" for a degree in theology. However, "in view of the difficult geo-political situation, the Faculty was reluctant to obstruct Tillich's chances of an academic career." See *ibid.*

¹¹Barth's call to an Honorary Chair in Göttingen in 1921 had been based on the first edition of his *Romans*; the more famous second edition was only published after he had begun his academic career. Barth was given an honorary doctorate by the Protestant Faculty in Münster in the spring of 1922, which solidified his academic standing. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 128.

¹²Tillich would later write, "During the three semesters of my teaching there I met the first radical effects of the neo-orthodoxy on theological students: cultural problems were excluded from theological thought; theologians like Schleiermacher, Harnack, Troeltsch, Otto, were contemptuously rejected; social and political ideas were banned from theological discussions." To describe Marburg as a haven for neo-orthodoxy is strange since the leading light on the theological faculty was Bultmann and Martin Heidegger was the star of the philosophical faculty. Hans Georg Gadamer remembers things differently. "I would like to think that Tillich was not very lucky in Marburg. At that time, the Theology Faculty was very much determined by Bultmann, von Soden and indirectly by Heidegger, and the faculty was very critical of Tillich's dialectical skill. . . . Those of us who were students of Heidegger found Tillich's work only superficially grounded in real research, and I must say that in certain respects Tillich showed us to be correct. Nonetheless, we were friendly, and he was so charming that it is impossible to speak ill of him. His warmth and good nature prevented these small academic differences from clouding the atmosphere." See Schüßler, "Tillich's Life and Work," 8.

After three years in Dresden, Tillich sought (once again) to obtain a position in theology, this time at the University of Berlin. But his efforts failed because of the lack of evidence of a clear ecclesial commitment in his writings.¹³ And so he moved instead to a chair in philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt in 1929, where he remained until his suspension by the National Socialists in April, 1933.¹⁴ At that point, he emigrated to America and was forced to climb the academic ladder all over again, working for four years as a Lecturer at Union Theological Seminary in New York (1933-1937), at which point he became an Associate Professor in philosophical theology. He was finally made a full professor in 1940.¹⁵ All of this is to say that, if Tillich had been somewhat embittered at how his life had turned out or envious of Barth, it would have been understandable. The narratives we tell others are often ones we tell ourselves first. And the story Tillich told himself and his American readers was that Barth was “neo-orthodox.”

Be that as it may, there can be little doubt that the story Tillich told about Barth’s theology was one that played well in an American ecclesial scene which was still feeling the effects of the painful and often vitriolic clash between Fundamentalists and Modernists in the 1920s. Barth was cast as a woolly-minded pre-modern theologian, a repristinator who was seeking to turn back the clock, a theologian with no interest in society or culture.

¹³Schüßler, “Tillich’s Life and Work,” 9.

¹⁴The recent publication of a critical edition of Tillich’s lectures on philosophy of history and social pedagogy has brought renewed attention to the unusual circumstances of Tillich’s call to Frankfurt. Tillich’s appointment was made against the wishes of the faculty and in spite of damning reviews by external referees by Prussian Minister for Science, Art and Popular Education, Carl Heinrich Becker. See Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Review: *Paul Tillich, Vorlesungen über Geschichtsphilosophie und Sozialpädagogik*, ed. by Eerdman Sturm (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2007), *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologieggeschichte* 15 (2008): 179. The evidence for these claims consists of evaluations from Nicolai Hartmann, Martin Heidegger, and Hans Cornelius, and they make painful reading. Tillich was clearly seen as working on a popular rather than an academic level. Cornelius said of Tillich’s *System der Wissenschaften* that its author “has very insufficient knowledge about the arts and sciences he endeavours to furnish with a systematic approach” and that “It contains—if one ignores banalities of all kinds—not a single sentence which does not employ thoroughly ambiguous terms.” See *ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

I now argue that Tillich and Barth had more in common than either were able to realize. The truly substantive differences between them were a function of Tillich's willingness to provide theology with a foundation in metaphysical reflection and Barth's refusal to do so. It will become clear that it is Tillich who is the more traditional of the two; Barth sets forth the more radical option. More importantly, however, my treatment of Tillich is an exercise in showing what goes wrong when theology is *not* christocentric.

I. Paul Tillich's "Answering Theology"

A. Formative Influences. Like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich began his theological studies in 1904—and therein lies a tale. The first decade of the twentieth century belongs to one of the most exciting periods in the history of modern German theology. The Schleiermacher Renaissance, which had begun in earnest with the appearance of a critical edition of Schleiermacher's *Speeches* on the 100th anniversary of its original publication, was well underway.¹⁶ The discovery of Luther's heretofore lost lectures on Romans and their publication by Johannes Ficker in 1908 combined with the work of Karl Holl to initiate a Luther Renaissance which paralleled the renewed interest in Schleiermacher.¹⁷ But the greatest excitement in (and incitement for!) theological reflection in this period was provided by Ernst Troeltsch. Troeltsch had burst on to the theological scene in 1891 with a dissertation which challenged the received notion that Luther's Reformation inaugurated the modern period in theology.¹⁸ Troeltsch emphasized instead the medieval elements in Luther's thought, leading to a radically new understanding not only of the roots of modernity but of its very nature. Troeltsch's real claim to fame lay in his role as the theologian of the history of religions school. He is the man who, more than any other, laid the intellectual foundations for what today is consid-

¹⁶Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, ed. with a foreword and an afterword by Rudolf Otto (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1899).

¹⁷The history of the Luther Renaissance has been thoroughly treated by Heinrich Assel, *Der andere Aufbruch: Die Lutherrenaissance—Ursprünge, Aporien und Wege: Karl Holl, Emanuel Hirsch, Rudolf Herrmann (1910-1935)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

¹⁸Ernst Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melancthon: Untersuchung zur Geschichte der altprotestantischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1891).

ered the scientific study of religion. His historicism was, in fact, the single greatest challenge to church theologians, and only those perceived to have adequate answers to him were of serious interest to the majority of students of theology at the time.

The pertinence of these factors for my story lies in the fact that the real “storm centers” of German theology in this period were, above all, Heidelberg (where Troeltsch held court) and Marburg (where Wilhelm Herrmann, Troeltsch’s arch-critic, was to be found). The other great center was, of course, Berlin where the most important historical theology was being done. Seen in this light, Tillich’s chosen educational path is a somewhat conservative one. He studied for one semester each in Berlin and Tübingen, before arriving in Halle. It was here that he would receive not only his initial grounding in theology, but also his Licentiate degree, his second Ph.D. and an honorary doctorate in 1925.

Halle was, by any standard of measure in the first decade of the twentieth century, a theological backwater. This is not to say that students could not receive a fine education there; they could and Tillich did. It is only to say that the big name in systematic theology in Halle was Martin Kähler, a man whose time had already passed when Tillich studied with him. Kähler’s most significant work was *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, first published in 1892. His goal in this work was to render faith immune to the challenges created by critical research into the life of Jesus. He achieved this aim by means of a broad use of the category of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the idea that the real significance of a great figure is to be found in his/her impact upon others. Thus, the real Jesus of history is not the “historical Jesus” (the reconstruction of the critics), but the preached Christ of early Christian faith. In this way, Kähler thought himself able to purchase confidence in apostolic testimony even as he surrendered the Jesus of history to whatever his fate in the hands of the critics. But such a solution to the problem of faith and history was almost immediately overtaken by the rise of the “history of religions” school in the mid-1890s.

This history of religions school sought to understand the Christ of faith in the broadest possible historical context, which in practice meant in the light of surrounding religions. So, in the long run, apostolic testimony could not provide a secure fortress against the ravages of historical study since it too became an object of historical study. And as Troeltsch rightly noted, “If...one stresses the mediation through the community and

the living effect by means of subsequent Christian personalities, one is then dealing not with the historical fact but with its infinitely modified and enriched continuing effects, and it is impossible to say for certain what comes from Jesus and what from the later period and the present.”¹⁹

What Tillich would take from Kähler was less the latter’s solution to the problem of faith and more in a different area. Kähler, Tillich would later say, “was an imposing figure, powerful in face and in thought, an heir of the classical period of Goethe and Schelling, a fighter, a convert of the German revival in the ’thirties and ’forties of the nineteenth century, a fighter against the liberal theology which slowly conquered most of the theological chairs in Germany.”²⁰ It was Kähler’s devotion to the cause of “mediating theology” which constituted his most significant gift to Tillich. “My experiences as a student of theology in Halle from 1905 to 1907 were quite different from those of the theological student Leverkühn in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* in the same period. . . . One thing we learned above all was that Protestant theology is by no means obsolete, but that it can, without losing its Christian foundation, incorporate strictly scientific methods, a critical philosophy, a realistic understanding of men and society, and powerful ethical principles.”²¹ What we catch sight of in this passage is the program of mediation between Christian faith and scientific culture which would animate Tillich to the end of his life.

Tillich’s approach would differ in one important respect from the originating version of mediating theology, however. The older mediating theologians of the mid-nineteenth century had been influenced to a significant degree by Hegel. Tillich turned instead to the later Schelling.

B. Tillich’s So-Called “Method” of Correlation. Tillich describes the method he employs in his “answering theology” as a method of correlation. He offers the following brief description of it early on in his *Systematic Theology*. The “method of correlation,” he says, “tries to correlate

¹⁹Ernst Troeltsch, “The Significance of the Historical Jesus for Faith” in Robert Morgan and Michael Pye, eds., *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 189.

²⁰Paul Tillich, “Foreword” to Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Christ of Biblical Faith*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), ix.

²¹Paul Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections” in Charles W. Kegley, ed., *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, rev. and updated (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 10.

the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the [Christian] message.”²² To call correlation a *method*, however, is somewhat misleading. Correlation is a program. It is Tillich’s version of the program of mediation. Methodological questions first begin to surface when we ask: (1) how does Tillich thematize the questions “implied” in the situation? And (2) how does he elicit the answers to those questions which are “implied” in the message?

The answer to the first question is that Tillich adopts a transcendental-idealist startingpoint in the answer provided by Schelling to the subject-object problem. He then fleshes out this starting-point materially in terms of a metaphysics of being which effects a shift from concentration on the Subject in whom/which subject and object are originally identical to a concentration on the “ground of being” (or being-itself) in which the estrangement proper to finite being (threatened as it is by the possibility of non-being) is eternally overcome. Since both of these moments are already to be found in Schelling, Tillich did not depart from his transcendental-idealist starting point by effecting this shift. The answer to the second methodological question is that Tillich employs a kind of phenomenology of religious experience in order to find in apostolic testimony a picture of Jesus as the Christ in accordance with which the eternal victory of being-itself over the threat on non-being is realized in an historical event, in a personal life. Correlation, then, insofar as it belongs in a discussion of Tillich’s “method,” constitutes the final step in a process by means of which the results of the two sorts of inquiries just described are combined. It should be noted that the fact that being-itself has already conquered non-being in principle (eternally) means that the triumph of New Being over existential estrangement in history is guaranteed in advance. That, then, also means that the success of Tillich’s correlation is guaranteed in advance. The link between the metaphysics of being and the phenomenology of religious experience consists in the transcendental-idealism by which they are bound together.

All other mediations in Tillich—that between the Christian tradition and the modern scientific spirit as well as that between ontology and psychological dynamics—are derived from and subordinate to the more fundamental mediation of ontological separation and reunion and cannot be

²²Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol.1, 8.

properly evaluated in the absence of strict attention to the metaphysical scheme which underlies the whole.²³

I will defend these theses in what follows in this section through a consideration of Tillich's understanding of God and his Christology. But first, we must attend briefly to Schelling. It is Schelling who provides the lynch-pin that holds Tillich's various methods together.

C. Being and Non-Being in Schelling's Philosophy. The emergence of the subject-object problem at the dawn of the modern period in theology constitutes one of the most decisive turning-points in the history of metaphysics and, therefore, in the history of theology. What took place was a massive shift from a cosmologically-based metaphysics to an anthropologically-based metaphysics. And with that shift, the need for a new concept of God became immediately apparent since the older cosmologically-based metaphysics had provided the basis for the conception of God which had been shared by theologians from the early church right on through the post-Reformation. Even the Enlightenment did not effect a decisive break with this God-concept. What Kant did, of course, was to restrict theoretical knowledge to the phenomenal, to things as they appear to the human knower. The German idealists were not happy with this split; they wanted to establish a real knowledge of the real world, but had to find a new basis upon which to do so. Their solution was to posit the existence of an original point of identity. To know this original point of identity is to know the unity which continues to underlie subject and object, even in their separation in human consciousness.

Schelling's contribution to this discussion took the following form. He understood the "ground of being" (to use Tillich's phrase) as manifesting itself not only in human consciousness, but also in nature. The purpose of his early *Identitätsphilosophie* was to overcome the gap between the unconscious productivity of nature and the conscious activity of thought by locating the origins of both in one and the same source. Initially, he understood human access to this source, this ground, to lie in an act of aesthetic intuition. But concern for the development of a philosophy of nature which could make sense not only of its rational structures

²³To put it this way is also to suggest that the questions and answers given in other parts of the *Systematic Theology* function as so many riffs upon the question that is posed in Tillich's doctrine of God and the answer provided in his Christology.

but also the surd-like character of the evil resident in it led him to posit in God the source of both being and that non-being in which evil finds its root.

The key to his analysis of this problem lay in a distinction in God Himself between God's being in act, if you will, and the ground of His existence.

Since nothing is prior to, or outside of God, he must have the ground of his existence in Himself. All philosophers say this; but they speak of this ground as of a mere concept without making it into something real and actual. This ground of his existence, which God has in Himself, is not God considered absolutely, that is, insofar as He exists; for it is only the ground of His existence. It [the ground] is *nature*—in God, a being indeed inseparable, yet still distinct from him.²⁴

Schelling's suggestion is that God *ex-ists* (in the strict etymological sense of "arising out" of His own ground), an "arising" which takes place through an act of primal willing. Thus, the root of human freedom is made to rest finally in an act of *primal willing* in which God chooses to *be* (and thereby rejects the possibility of non-being), an act of primal willing in which God gives to Himself His being. Why is there something rather than nothing? Because God *chooses* to be. Which precedes? The *ground* of God's existence or His *act* of primal willing? In truth, any decision in this arena would inevitably be wrong, since the act of willing is primal (i.e., eternal). "God has in himself an inner ground of his existence . . . that precedes him in existence; but, precisely in this way, God is the *prius* [what is before] of the ground in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*."²⁵ Schelling's point is that the inner ground of God's existence could not *be* His ground if He did not also exist in act. The two are given, together, simultaneously, in a single eternal act of primal willing.

²⁴F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 27. Schelling was very much aware that, as soon as he says that nothing is "outside of God," he would be accused of pantheism. And he was content to live with that, so long as those making the accusation realized that pantheism, rightly conceived, does not eliminate the infinite difference between God and creation. See *ibid.*, 12.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

Moreover, this primal act of willing is constitutive of God's being as triune. The first *moment* in the constitution of God as triune is to be found in "the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself."²⁶

[C]orresponding to the yearning, which is the still dark ground in the first stirring of divine existence, an inner reflexive representation is generated in God himself through which. . . God sees himself in an exact image of himself. This representation is the first in which God, considered as an absolute, is realized [*verwirklicht*], although only in himself; this representation is with God in the beginning and is the God who was begotten *in* God himself. This representation is at the same time the understanding—the *Word*—of this yearning and the eternal spirit which, perceiving the Word within itself and at the same time the infinite yearning, and impelled by the love that it itself is, proclaims the word so that the understanding and yearning together now become a freely creating and all-powerful will and build in the initial anarchy of nature as in its own element or instrument.²⁷

I submit that this account of the Trinity is, in its way, quite traditional. Certainly, the understanding of the Spirit as the power of Self-knowledge and the bond of love between the first two "persons" calls to mind Augustine's doctrine. But more importantly, the Self-constitution of God as triune is something that is accomplished in Himself, before anything else is. Therefore, unlike Hegel, Schelling has an immanent Trinity in protology.

Tillich takes a definite stand on the subject-object problem; he casts his lot decidedly with Schelling (as opposed to Hegel, most especially). In taking this step, Tillich is functioning as a philosopher in spite of the caveat he issues against doing so. He tells us, for example, that "systematic theology cannot, and should not, enter into the ontological discussion as such. Yet it can and must consider these central concepts from the point of view of their theological significance."²⁸ But if Tillich decides a philosophical issue, if he takes sides in this old idealist debate, then he can only do so by stepping out of his role as a theologian. That he then tries to draw consequences from the decision made here for his own theology can only mean that he is building on a foundation laid in a particular philoso-

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 30.

²⁸Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 164.

phy. And the consequences he draws are quite direct in nature; they are entailments of the startingpoint. This can be seen quite easily in his doctrine of God.

D. Tillich's Understanding of God. Gunther Wenz has described the development of Tillich's concept of God in terms of a shift "from subject to being"²⁹—that is to say, from the Subject of the transcendental idealists to a metaphysics of being."³⁰ The phrase is an apt one so long as it is not seen as strictly developmental, so that the former could be assigned to an early phase while the latter is made to characterize his more mature philosophy. As Wenz rightly suggests, this shift "from" transcendental Subject "to" a metaphysics of being rightly describes Tillich's basic commitments in all phases of his development, though with varying degrees of emphasis. Still, if we do not see that the transcendental-idealist startingpoint is basic to his metaphysics, we will never fully understand him. In any event, it is the startingpoint in transcendental idealism which allows for non-symbolic statements about God.

According to Tillich, "The statement that God is being-itself is a non-symbolic statement. It does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly. If we speak of the actuality of God, we first assert that he is not God if he is not being-itself. Other assertions about God can be made theologically only on this basis."³¹ This statement contains more than is sometimes realized. To say that God is being-itself is to speak directly of the being of God; it is to say what God truly is. It is to speak referentially. But symbolic language can rightly be used to speak of God, where such language is carefully tested and controlled by the leading concept of "being itself." It is not as though Tillich means by "symbolic" language for God what sometimes today passes for "metaphorical"

²⁹Gunther Wenz, *Subjekt und Sein: Die Entwicklung der Theologie Paul Tillichs* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979), 13. Wenz is also surely correct to say that Tillich evidenced a certain "discomfort" from the beginning with the "abstract autonomy of transcendental philosophy." So he could not remain standing with the concept of an Absolute Subject. But it must be remembered that Schelling had already sought to understand the Subject in terms of "being-itself." See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, ed. by Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 108.

³⁰Martin Leiner, "Tillich on God," *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. by Russell Re Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39.

³¹Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 238-9.

language. When used correctly, symbolic language participates in the divine reality to which it points. It is not simply an imaginative construct which gives expression to human ideals and values.

But the claim just made, that God as being-itself contains more than is sometimes realized, is true in another sense as well. To speak of God as being-itself is, for Tillich, to say that God is the power of being which resists non-being.³² It is to say that God is “beyond” the split between essence and existence; in God, there is no unactualized potentiality.³³ Therefore, to speak of God as being-itself is also to speak of the divine aseity.³⁴ God gives being to Himself; He does not receive it from another source. Beyond this, Tillich’s discussion of what he calls the “trinitarian principles” stands on the knife-edge between the description of God as being-itself and God as living, between non-symbolic and symbolic speech. To see why this is so requires explanation.

In theory, Tillich treats as symbolic language every effort to speak of God as “living,” as actualized being. He does this because every attempt to speak of “life” must, in his view, begin with finite life and, indeed, with human life.³⁵ And so, in order to describe God’s life, Tillich has recourse to the “ontological elements” which disclose themselves in and to human experience.³⁶ Such elements are treated by Tillich in pairs, reflecting the basic polarity of self and world (individualization and participation, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny).³⁷ In God, “each ontological element includes its polar element completely, without tension and without the threat of dissolution, for God is being-itself.”³⁸ That is why God can only be spoken of symbolically when using these elements. And yet it also has to be said that the split between essence and existence, self and world, and the polarity of the elements, is *prepared for* in being-itself, so that what Tillich says of God symbolically finds a root in being-itself.

It is in this context that we should seek to understand the status of the “trinitarian principles.” Though Tillich takes up these principles in the

³²Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 236.

³³Ibid., 242.

³⁴Ibid., 196, 236.

³⁵In Tillich’s view, the appropriate place to take up the *analogia entis* is here, in the context of symbolic speech about God. See *ibid.*, 131, 239-40.

³⁶Ibid., 244-49.

³⁷Ibid., 174-86.

³⁸Ibid., 243.

context of God as “living” and, therefore, under the heading of symbolic speech, the principles themselves offer a further elaboration of being-itself in its abysmal and creative character. To just that extent, they cross over the line into non-symbolic speech. Here is what Tillich says of the trinitarian principles.

First, they are the necessary “presuppositions” of any Christian *doctrine* of the Trinity “in an idea of God.” The dogma of the Trinity was built up historically by starting with the concept of the Logos. But any discussion of the principles which ground this dogma in truly responsible speech about God must begin with the basic assertion that God is Spirit, a description of the *whole* of God. Tillich then unpacks the meaning of this initial statement through a consideration of each of the three principles in turn. The trinitarian principles, he says, are “moments within the process of the divine life.” The first such moment is “the basis of Godhead, that which makes God God. It is the root of his majesty, the unapproachable intensity of his being, the inexhaustible ground of being in which everything has its origin.”³⁹

The second moment is the *logos*, the principle which “unites meaningful structure with creativity.... The *logos* opens the divine ground, its infinity and its darkness, and makes its fullness distinguishable, definite, finite. The *logos* has been called the mirror of the divine depth, the principle of God’s self-objectification. In the *logos*, God speaks his “word,” both *in* himself and *beyond* himself. Without the second principle, the first principle would be chaos, burning fire, but it would not be creative ground.”⁴⁰ The third “moment” is the Spirit. And here Tillich again registers his belief that to speak of God as “Spirit” is both to speak of God as a whole and as a special principle in God. As the latter, the Spirit is the power which holds together the first two moments. There could be no unity between divine ground and divine *logos* if the Spirit did not re-unite them in their separation.⁴¹ This is already true in God Himself, for which reason God is also called “Spirit” as a description of the whole of the divine being (in its three “moments”). Separation and reunion are already true of God in Himself, as a description of the process God is. But, then, precisely as the power which re-unites the first two principles, the Spirit

³⁹Ibid., 250.

⁴⁰Ibid., 251 (emphasis mine).

⁴¹Ibid.

is also the power by means of which “God goes out from himself,” giving actuality “to that which is potential in the divine ground and ‘outspoken’ in the divine *logos*.”⁴²

At this point, three observations are in order. First, Tillich is talking about a speaking of the divine Word which takes place both *in* Himself and *beyond* Himself. To the extent that Tillich is here speaking of an event which takes place in God Himself, he is speaking directly of being-itself and, therefore, non-symbolically. Like Schelling before him, Tillich does not think it is possible to think about God as “abysmal” in the absence of reflection upon God as the source of rational structure (meaning) and creativity (which includes non-being). The two are given together in the same eternal moment. God is only “abysmal” (Schelling’s “ground”) because He is also, at the same time, the unity of meaningful structure and creativity (Schelling’s being in act). And that means, too, that the talk of the Spirit as eternally re-uniting the first two principles is also meant non-symbolically. What we have before us here is Tillich’s version of an ontological or immanent Trinity.⁴³

Second, the eternal event in God is itself the divine movement *ad extra*. The “in Himself” and “beyond Himself” speak of the same event, and that is why I said earlier that the trinitarian principles stand on the knife-edge between being-itself and the life of God. It is not finally true, though Tillich suggests it is, that the life of God can only be spoken of on the basis of human life. Tillich speaks of it non-symbolically on the basis of his transcendental-idealist startingpoint. And everything he says about the divine life on this basis conditions everything he then says about finite being in the first half of each of the parts of his system. Everything in his system flows from his metaphysical conception of God.

Third, separation and reunion are an eternal event “before” they are actualized in history, in creation/fall and the emergence of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. The whole of what takes place in history is fully prepared for by what happens in eternity; indeed, it is only because it has already happened in eternity that any of this can and must happen in time.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³It should be noted that Tillich’s “doctrine” of the Trinity (as opposed to his treatment of the “trinitarian principles”) sets forth a treatment of the economic Trinity and, for that reason, is rightly situated in volume 3. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 283-94.

Tillich is able, on the basis of the foundation he has laid in an idealistic conception of God, to map on to it a number of elements thought by most to be proper to classical theism. He rejects the thought of a “becoming God” on the grounds that such a conception would destroy the balance between dynamics and form in God.⁴⁴ For the same reason, he upholds the ancient concept of divine impassibility.⁴⁵ Even the category of divine “substance” is dusted off and given a place of honor, after having been rendered symbolic, of course.⁴⁶ Tillich’s refusal to speak of God in personal terms must not be allowed to mislead. His goal in speaking this way is simply to say that God does not “exist” as the things and persons of our experience exist. It is not intended to say that God is impersonal or even only sub-personal. It is rather to say that He is more than personal. At the end of the day, “Tillich’s doctrine of God remains remarkably traditional”⁴⁷—not just in his treatment of the “attributes,” but in his description of the ontological Trinity as well.

E. Tillich’s Christology. In a recent essay, Anne Marie Reijnen raised an interesting question which will provide us with an entree to Tillich’s Christology. “[I]s Jesus as the Christ [only] the bearer of New Being or does he ‘create’ it? . . . [I]s he the [co]creator of a decisive change in the history of humankind?” Reijnen’s own response is that “Tillich’s answers fluctuate.”⁴⁸ In this, I think she is correct. What creates the vacillation is the fact that the victory of New Being over existential estrangement has already been resolved by Tillich in his description of the separation and reunion that is God’s eternal triune life.⁴⁹ To be sure, Tillich wants and needs an historical actualization of this victory in a personal life. But the question of *whose* personal life this takes place in is a

⁴⁴Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1, 247.

⁴⁵Ibid., 270: “Genuine patristic passivism. . . rightly was rejected by the early church. God as being-itself transcends non-being absolutely. On the other hand, God as creative life includes the finite and, with it, nonbeing, although nonbeing is *eternally conquered* and the finite is *eternally reunited* with the infinity of the divine life. Therefore, it is meaningful to speak of a participation of the divine life in the negativities of creaturely life” (emphasis mine).

⁴⁶Ibid., 238.

⁴⁷Leiner, “Tillich on God,” 52.

⁴⁸Anne Marie Reijnen, “Tillich’s Christology,” *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, 65.

⁴⁹See above, n. 46.

subsidiary question. For this reason, Tillich is able to handle the faith/ history problem with a high degree of radicality, which has the effect of leaving the reader to wonder whether it is even necessary that Jesus have done the things ascribed to Him by the New Testament writers.

Much of Tillich's Christology is already anticipated in his discussion of the problem of a "final" revelation. "Christianity claims to be based on the revelation in Jesus as the Christ as the final revelation. This claim establishes a Christian church, and, where this claim is absent, Christianity has ceased to exist. . . ." ⁵⁰ That Jesus is "final revelation" means not only that he is the "last genuine revelation," but that He is the "decisive, fulfilling, unsurpassable revelation, that which is the criterion of all others." ⁵¹ But how does Tillich know this to be the case? Are there criteria which enable us to establish that Jesus as the Christ is the "final revelation" in the sense just described? Tillich says yes, and they are contained in the final revelation itself, thereby making that revelation to be self-authenticating. "[A] revelation is final if it has the power of negating itself without losing itself. This paradox is based on the fact that every revelation is conditioned by the medium in and through which it appears.

The question of the final revelation is the question of a medium of revelation which "overcomes its own finite conditions by sacrificing them, and itself with them." ⁵² Tillich here gives evidence of having passed through the school of the dialectical theologians in the 1920s. Self-negation on the part of the One who would be the medium of the final revelation is, ostensibly, what makes Him to be that medium. ⁵³

He who is the bearer of the final revelation must surrender his finitude—not only his life but also his finite power and knowledge and perfection. In doing so, he affirms that he is the bearer of final revelation (the Son of God in classical terms). He becomes completely transparent to the mystery he reveals. But, in order to be able to surrender himself completely, he must possess himself completely. And only he can possess—and therefore surrender—himself completely who is united with the ground of his being and meaning without separation

⁵⁰Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 132.

⁵¹Ibid., 133.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³See below, 34-5.

and disruption. In the picture of Jesus as the Christ we have the picture of a man who possesses these qualities.⁵⁴

And yet, a subtle shift in thought occurs in the final statement of this passage. Is it really necessary that a man named “Jesus of Nazareth” lived this life of perfect self-negation (which preserved his unity with His ground of being)? Or is it only necessary that someone did—and that the early church believed it to be Jesus? It is at this point that the faith/history problem intrudes itself.

Tillich’s answer to the faith and history problem is finally the same as Kähler’s. It is the picture of Jesus that is important. The difference between the two—and it is not an insignificant one—is that Kähler believed the picture to be accurate, a faithful depiction of what actually took place in Christ. Tillich does not even need that much. Such a claim *might* seem, at first glance, to be contradicted by Tillich’s claim that “Jesus as the Christ is both a historical fact and a subject of believing reception.”⁵⁵ But, at the end of the day, the most that can be said of the relation of the faith embodied in biblical symbols and the personal life which stands behind it is that there is an *analogia imaginis* between the two.⁵⁶

All Tillich really needs is that there be a personal life of some kind behind the transforming event by which that faith was awakened and then expressed in the biblical symbols. It is “participation, not historical argument” which “guarantees the reality of the event upon which Christianity is based. It guarantees a personal life in which the New Being has conquered the old being. But it does not guarantee his name to be Jesus of Nazareth. Historical doubt concerning the existence and life of someone with this name cannot be overruled. He might have had another name.”⁵⁷ The reason the “analogy” between faith and historical reality within the bounds of the biblical witness need rise no higher than the level of imagination is that the event which founds the church is not an event which takes place in Jesus Himself.

It is the picture of Jesus in the New Testament “which created both the church and the Christian, and not a hypothetical description of what

⁵⁴Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 133.

⁵⁵Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 98.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 114.

may lie behind the biblical picture.”⁵⁸ Thus, in the relation of historical fact and believing reception, it is believing reception which does all the heavy-lifting. In fact, it is believing reception which is the link between then and now, between the apostles and ourselves. The transforming experience which led to the formation of the picture of Jesus as the Christ is our experience as well. And it is because we too experience New Being conquering existential estrangement that we are able to understand the biblical symbols and the reality embodied in them.

And so, when Tillich says that “historical research has given systematic theology a tool for dealing with the Christological symbols of the Bible,”⁵⁹ he overstates the case fairly dramatically. In fact, historical research, as drawn upon by Tillich, gives us nothing more than an account of how these symbols functioned in the surrounding religious culture. The second step (by means of which these symbols are alleged to have been taken up by biblical writers and used to express the answers they received to their existential questions), the third step (by means of which these symbols are then employed by the writers to describe the event which gave rise to these answers), and the fourth step (by which the picture was re-mythologized by being tied to crudely literal descriptions of the event which lay behind the picture) are no longer the work of the historian as historian, but of the historian as believer (as a person who shares in the experience which is alleged to have given rise to the history-like picture embodied in the Christological symbols).⁶⁰

We return to Reijnen’s question. On the face of it, it certainly seems as though historical actualization of the eternal victory of reunion over separation requires that perfect self-negation be realized in a personal life (although the name attached to that life might not have been Jesus). And in some moods, Tillich can speak as though the real Jesus of history (not the Jesus of the historical-critics, but the real Jesus) impressed Himself upon His disciples in such a way that they had to construct the picture they did. But, given the importance of the believer’s experience of the New Being for establishing the contours of the biblical picture of “Jesus” as the Christ, and given the fact that it is this picture which created the

⁵⁸Ibid., 115.

⁵⁹Ibid., 108.

⁶⁰The four steps are sketched in *ibid.*, 109. Tillich uses these four steps in analysis to uncover the true meaning of the Christological symbols of the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah and the Logos. See *ibid.*, 109-12.

church and continues to create believers, the question of whether New Being was merely manifested in Jesus or co-created by Him would seem to lose something of its gravity. The answer I give to this question is that Tillich wanted to believe that Jesus is co-creator of the New Being; that under the impact of the continuous activity of the Spirit in “grasping” Him, Jesus remains united to the ground of His being under the conditions created by existential estrangement.⁶¹ Such a “grasping” does not preclude the exercise of finite freedom in Jesus, but it does ensure that freedom is directed towards self-negation. However, Tillich cannot be sure that any of this is really true of Jesus Himself. What is important, in the final analysis, is to participate in the victory of New Being over existential estrangement, a participation which is made possible by a believing reception of the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ. And, after all, “The Christ is not the Christ without the church.”⁶² So, a participation in Jesus (in His human reality) would not seem to be necessary.⁶³

F. Provisional Results. I began my exposition of Tillich by raising the question of his method or methods. How does he go about thematizing the questions “implied” in the situation? How does he uncover the answer “implied” in the biblical message. The answer I have given is: through a combination of a transcendental-idealist move with a phenomenology of religious experience.

The first move is to posit the reality of a transcendental ground in which subject and object belong together in a relation of identity. The description of this ground also provides the ontological conditions in God necessary for explaining how being-itself conquers non-being. Thus, Tillich’s metaphysics of being is subordinated (and intended to be derived from) his transcendental startingpoint.

When Tillich turns to the problem of elucidating the answer implied

⁶¹For Tillich’s discussion of “Spirit Christology,” see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 144-49. It should be noted that Tillich rejects the traditional account of the incarnation as mythological distortion. His Christology consists, at the end of the day, in the claim that it is the divine indwelling of the man Jesus (or “Spiritual Presence” to and in Him) which makes Him to be “divine” (i.e., the Christ). See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 135.

⁶²Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 137.

⁶³Tillich’s claim that Jesus’ life of self-negation is “the end of Jesuology” contains far more than might appear at first glance. See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 136.

in the biblical message, it is the experience of New Being in the present which provides the key which unlocks the doors. This transforming experience is what enables Tillich to find in Scripture precisely that “event” in which the eternal overcoming of non-being by being-itself is actualized in history in the form of the victory of New Being over existential estrangement. There can be no question but that there is a lot of two-way traffic here. Religious experience contributes to the articulation of the question; the articulation of the question anticipates the answer which will be given. But it is finally the transcendental ground which holds together Tillich’s metaphysics of being and his experientially-based Christology, and which guarantees in advance the success of his correlation.

Now it has to be said that Tillich is not the first theologian to come to Christology with a pre-packaged understanding of the being of God and the being of the human (as created and fallen). Christian theology began as an apologetic endeavor. It is inevitable in such efforts that common ground will be sought between the Christian apologete and his/her unbelieving audience. Metaphysics has been resorted to in the ancient and modern worlds because it moves from generally-valid first principles (which should be shared by all) to the particularities of Christian belief. But the move from the general to the particular unavoidably determines the *content* of the Christology which is then elaborated. As I say, this is nothing new. It is not a weakness peculiar to Tillich. In fact, his dialectic of being-itself and non-being is reminiscent of nothing if not the dialectic of immortality and mortality found in Athanasius’ apologetic work, *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione*. You want a modern version of Athanasius? I give you Paul Tillich. Certainly not Karl Barth! But such an identification in no way warrants or justifies the weaknesses resident in this apologetic procedure. Can any theology be adequate which is erected on the basis of a metaphysical scheme? If the example provided by Tillich’s Christology means anything, the dogmatic yield of such efforts is awfully thin.

II. Karl Barth’s Christocentric Ontology as an Alternative to Metaphysics

It might seem to the untrained observer that any theology which makes room for a robust Creator-creature (or God-world) distinction cannot help but be “metaphysical.” After all, talk of a God who is “other” than the world is necessarily talk of One who is “meta-” the “physical”

(i.e., above or beyond the realm of the physical). If that is all that “metaphysics” rightly means, then, of course, Barth would have had to embrace metaphysics in one form or another. But Barth employed the word “metaphysics” as Ritschl and Herrmann did, as an epistemological category, as the path taken to acquiring knowledge of that which is meta-physical.⁶⁴ For him, the bottom line was this: if, in order to speak of God in His otherness, we first speak of something else—be it cosmology (as in the ancient world) or anthropology (as in the modern world)—we are doing “metaphysics.” We are engaged in a reasoned attempt to provide a final explanation either for perceived order in the natural world or for the possibility of real knowledge of an “objective” world which seems to be cut off from the human knower.

For Barth, the problem with metaphysics in either the ancient or the modern form is that it cannot yield knowledge of the true God (i.e., the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ). From the early days of his dialectical theology to the very end, he remained convinced that if, in wishing to speak of God, one were to begin with something other than God, then at the point at which a transition is sought from that “something else” to God, one would still be speaking of that “something else” and not of God. The “three ways” of Pseudo-Dionysius (the *via negativa*, the *via eminentiae*, and the *via causalitatis*) are a classic illustration. What lies at the end of these ways is a concept which is constructed by means of adjustments introduced into some aspect of created reality. Faced with this insuperable difficulty, there could be only one solution: if one would rightly speak of God, the one true God, one must begin with Him and end with Him. By the late autumn of 1923 at the latest, that meant for Barth *beginning with Christology*—understood as the *Self-revelation* of God, the presence of God in the sphere of human knowing, God’s personal act of making Himself an “object” of human knowing in such a way that He remains Subject.

Now the most important thing that can be said at this juncture is that Barth’s post-metaphysical attitude did not lead him to forego engagement with theologies and philosophies which were metaphysical in character.

⁶⁴Albrecht Ritschl, “Theology and Metaphysics” in idem., *Three Essays*, trans. by Philip Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 151-217; Wilhelm Herrmann, “Die Metaphysik in der Theologie (1876)” in idem., *Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie*, Teil 1, ed. by Peter Fischer-Appelt (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), 1-80.

To the contrary, his opposition metaphysics, by freeing him from having to come to any final conclusions with regard to *any* issue which had been decided on metaphysical grounds, meant that he was free to engage, in a wholly positive way, a wide-range of theologians (dogmatic and philosophical) without feeling the need to commit himself in any way to their philosophical underpinnings. The subject-object problem, for example, as dealt with by the great German idealists, was not his problem. Since he did not see it as his task to resolve that issue, he could treat a number of the proposed solutions as “parables” which helped to illuminate his own wrestling with strictly theological issues. And so, Hegel’s treatment of the “Speculative Good Friday” could become a parable of his own theology of the cross. Or, more controversially, Schelling’s talk of “primal willing” in God could be seen as a parable of Barth’s doctrine of election. Certainly the latter has many similarities with the former. In any event, Barth was free to approximate both at different junctures in his thinking because he had not committed himself in a principled way to either. And he could do so with complete consistency because the sinews which held his dogmatics together were strictly theological in nature, not metaphysical.

In what follows, I would like to defend this description of Barth’s post-metaphysical attitude in three steps. First, I will treat his *Romans* commentary, laying emphasis upon those elements which Barth shared with Tillich. I will end this section with a discussion of the 1923 debate between Barth and Tillich. Second, I will say something about Barth’s doctrine of election and its importance for his doctrine of God. And finally, I will take up his Christology in an effort to show why his differences from Tillich, far from making Barth a reactionary, actually make him the more progressive and contemporary of the two!

A. Romans and the Shift to a Christological Grounding of Theology. At no time did Paul Tillich’s theology approximate that of Karl Barth more closely than it did in the phase of the latter’s second *Romans* commentary.⁶⁵ In fact, it is quite astonishing, given the antipodal characterization of their later relationship, just how many of the perspectives articulated by the early Barth are retained, years later, in Tillich’s *System-*

⁶⁵I have written extensively on Barth’s early formative influences, his early development, and his two *Romans* commentaries. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), chapters 1-6.

atic Theology. Tillich himself hinted that this was the case in an unpublished “Foreword” to his great work. There he wrote, “no confusion can be admitted between any preliminary and our ultimate concern, between our conditional possibilities and that which is unconditional in meaning, demand and giving. In this sense, I read Barth’s commentary to [sic] the Romans and was grasped by it because of the power with which it restates the paradoxical Pauline-Lutheran message of grace. (And the same is true of his ‘Dogmatic’ insofar as it is a large monograph on the doctrine of justification by faith, but only insofar). For this reason, I have been counted by many American theologians as another representative of ‘Continental Neo Orthodoxy’; and I don’t want to deny that there is some justification for this label.”⁶⁶ God is known through God. God gives Himself to be known as “object” while remaining Subject.⁶⁷ These two emphases, so important to Barth’s *Romans*, remained basic to Tillich’s conception of revelation throughout his life. But there is more.

Barth’s understanding of the God-world relation in his *Romans* is the product of many influences. Among them are the Marburg Neo-kantian concept of the Origin, Franz Overbeck’s concept *Urgeschichte*, and Kierkegaard’s “infinite qualitative difference” between time and eternity.⁶⁸ But there is also a hint of Schelling in the mix, mediated to Barth through his friend, Hermann Kutter.⁶⁹ Schelling’s contribution lies in the idea of an original but lost immediacy in the relation of the human individual to God. Barth’s uniqueness here, and this does distinguish him from Tillich, is that he makes this loss of immediacy to be the source of a penetrating critique of religion.⁷⁰ Still, Barth’s depiction of the fall anticipates to some extent

⁶⁶Paul Tillich, “Personal Introduction to My Systematic Theology,” *Modern Theology* 1 (1985): 85.

⁶⁷Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 172: “If there is a knowledge of God, it is God who knows Himself through man. God remains the subject even as he is made the logical object (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12).”

⁶⁸See McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 218-40.

⁶⁹See Cornelis van der Kooi, *Anfängliche Theologie: Der Denkweg des jungen Karl Barth* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987), 76, n. 1. Whether these influences amount to a betrayal of Barth’s intention to overcome metaphysics is a question for itself. I do not think he intends any of this to be taken with ultimate seriousness. He understands philosophical work, at its best, as parables of the theological subject-matters with which he is dealing, not as the thing itself.

⁷⁰Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 247.

Tillich's later discussion of the transition from "dreaming innocence" to existential estrangement through the exercise of finite freedom.

Even more fascinating is the overlap between Barth's early and Tillich's mature Christology. In his *Romans* commentary, Barth does not yet have a doctrine of the incarnation. His attention is absorbed by the doctrine of revelation and the soteriological dialectic of sin and grace, judgment and grace, which is embedded in that doctrine. And so, he can say, in a way of speaking that foreshadows Tillich's later formulations, that. . . .

The faithfulness of God is His entrance into and His abiding in the deepest human questionability and darkness. The life of Jesus, on the other hand, is perfect obedience to the will of this faithful God. He gives Himself up to sinners as a sinner. He places Himself completely under the judgment which rests upon the world. He places Himself there, where God can only still be present as the question of God. He takes the form of a servant. He goes to the cross and dies there. At the high point, at the goal of His way, He is a purely negative magnitude; not a genius, not the bearer of manifest or hidden psychic powers, not a hero, a leader, a poet or thinker, and precisely in the negation ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"), precisely in that He *sacrifices* every brilliant, psychic, heroic, aesthetic, philosophical, every thinkable human possibility whatsoever to an impossible *more*, to an unintuitable *Other*. He is the One who fulfills to the uttermost those mounting human possibilities born witness to in the law and the prophets. *Therefore*, God exalted Him, *therein* is He recognized as the Christ, *thereby* He becomes the light of the last things which shine forth above everyone and everything. Truly we see in Him God's faithfulness in the depths of hell. The Messiah is the end of the human. There too, precisely there, God is faithful. The new day of the righteousness of God wants to dawn with the day of the "sublated" human.⁷¹

Clearly, Barth's Christology at this stage is a "two subject" Christology. God is at work in and through the man Jesus to effect revelation (and the reconciliation which is embedded in it). Jesus' "divinity" consists in His submission to what God is doing in and through Him. Jesus sacrifices all that is human in Him in obedience to God. He acknowledges the just

⁷¹Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief, 1922* (Zürich: TVZ, 1940, 71-2; E. T. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 96-7 (translation mine).

character of God's judgment which rests upon all things human. In that He does all of this, God's judgment is perfectly manifested in the shattering of the sinner. God is then "free" to raise Jesus to new life.

Like Tillich, Barth also treats the various revelations which occur before and after Jesus as known and understood in the light of the revelation that occurs in Him. "The faithfulness of God is that divine persistence, in virtue of which there are, again and again, possibilities, opportunities, witnesses to the knowledge of His righteousness at many scattered points of history. Among these many points, Jesus of Nazareth is that point in which the rest are recognized in their connected significance as a line, as the red thread of history.... The revealed and seen light of this one point is the hidden, the invisible light of all other points."⁷² Seen in the light of such statements, it is hard to avoid the impression that Tillich's later Christology owed a rather large debt to Barth's early Christology.

Finally, there is the matter of eschatology. Barth provided a rather neat summary of his eschatology in the phase of the second *Romans* in a passage found in his book *The Resurrection of the Dead*.

Last things, as such are not last things, however great and significant they may be. He only speaks of last things who would speak of the end of all things; of their end understood so absolutely, so fundamentally, of a Reality so radically superior to all things, that the existence of all things would be grounded in it, in it alone. . . . The end of history [*Endgeschichte*] would have to be synonymous for him with the Primal history [*Urgeschichte*]. The boundary of time of which he speaks would have to be the boundary of all and every time and thereby, necessarily, the *origin* of time. . . . Whoever clearly grasps this is removed from the temptation to confuse the end of history [*Endgeschichte*] with a termination of history [*Schlußgeschichte*], however impressive and wonderful it may be. Of the *real* end of history it may be said at any time: the end is near!⁷³

⁷²Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief, 1922*, 70, 71, E. T. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 96 (translation mine).

⁷³Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1924), 59, 60; E. T. *The Resurrection of the Dead* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1933), 110, 112 (translation mine). It should be noted that this book first saw life as a series of lectures given in the summer semester of 1923. The timing here is important as Barth's views on many of the issues pertinent to the shape of this eschatology were already in flux.

Barth would later show himself to be highly critical of his early conception of the “end” of all things. In *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Barth says of his early eschatology that he had sought to identify God’s “eternity” with its “post-temporal” dimension only. In doing this, however, he had made the “end” to be something that is equally near and equally far from every moment in time; something, in other words, which can never truly *arrive*. In spite of his intentions, he had slipped back into the Neo-Protestant restriction of the same to “supra temporality.”⁷⁴ What he had come to see in the meantime is that without a genuine incarnation of God, without a divine being-in-the-act-of-incarnate life which transforms history from within, there can be no inner-historical direction of history to a real end. A mere *disclosure* of what, in the final analysis, is an “eternal” victory will not suffice. It will not drive history forward to an appointed end. It is not *human participation* in an “eternal” triumph of being-itself over non-being which gives rise to new creation; it is *God’s participation* in the conditions of estrangement and his conquering of those conditions within His own being that makes all things new.

Tillich’s theology never experienced anything approximating this radical exercise in self-criticism. He continued on with the eschatology he had found in Barth’s *Romans*, as if nothing had happened. What follows is a consideration of the “double meaning” of the phrase “end of history.” “End,” in English, means both “finish and aim.” Both meanings are needed, Tillich says, in order to bring to expression the “two sides of the Kingdom of God, the transcendent and the inner-historical meaning.” But “finish” is understood by Tillich simply in terms of the running-down of the universe, the passing of the earth out of existence as a physical inevitability. Such a conception is helpful only to the extent that it forces a de-mythologization of the apocalyptic views which find expression in the Bible. It is as “aim” that the word “end” has a positive theological significance. “The end of history in this sense is not a moment within the larger development of the universe (and analogously called ‘history’) but

⁷⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 635: “At that time we had not sufficiently considered the pre-temporality of the Reformers or the supra-temporality of God which Neo-Protestants of all shades had put in such a distorted way at the center. Hence we had not seen the biblical conception of eternity in its fullness. The result was that we could not speak about the post-temporality of God in such a way as to make it clear that we actually meant to speak of God and not of a general idea of limit and crisis.”

transcends all moments of the temporal process; it is the end of time itself, it is eternity. The end of history in the sense of an inner aim or the *telos* of history is ‘eternal life.’”⁷⁵ Tillich’s eschatology (early and late) is nearly identical to Barth’s early eschatology.

By the late autumn of 1923, Barth’s thinking was on the move. In part, this was due to the lectures he had given the previous summer on the Reformed confessions. So he was ready to announce a new development in his thinking when Tillich launched a debate with him in *Theologische Blätter* in November. It is important to observe that Tillich saw himself at this time as an ally of Barth’s. To be sure, he understood the critique he advanced as a supplement to Barth’s “position” which would make it even more effective. Had he not seen it this way, he tells his readers, he would not have chosen to participate. “For every criticism of their criticism runs the risk of lessening the disquiet which it has aroused, and of giving the impression that the cutting edge of their radical criticism should be dulled. Nothing could be more fatal than that. Rather, everything must be done to make the cutting edge of this criticism felt in wide circles inside and outside the church.”⁷⁶

Tillich argued that Barth was right, to the extent that he recognized that “A direct, unparadoxical relationship to the unconditioned which does not pass through the constant radical No is a relationship not to the unconditioned, but to a conditioned which makes the claim to be unconditioned, that is, to an idol.” He saw it as Barth’s “greatest service” that he had “led the struggle against the unparadoxical claim of religion to be absolute. . . .”⁷⁷ But a dialectical negation of all things conditioned cannot transcend itself. “Barth and Gogarten frequently emphasize that their own position also stands under the crisis. . . . That is consistent, but the necessary conclusions are not drawn from it. The dialectic transcending of dialectic remains dialectic, and if this dialectic which has been transcended dialectically is again transcended, then that too remains dialectic on and on without end. The completely endless row of self-transcendings,

⁷⁵Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 394.

⁷⁶Paul Tillich, “Critical and Positive Paradox: Discussion with Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten,” *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. by James M. Robinson (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 133.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 138. The passage continues: “. . . and every word on this subject, particularly in Karl Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*, is destruction of idols.”

however, is not transcended. It is the position on which the dialectician stands, but it itself is no longer dialectic."⁷⁸

Tillich's point is that there must be a standpoint which lies beyond the dialectical negations of the dialectical theologians, a positive point in which No and Yes are themselves *united* and, to that extent, a paradoxical point, a "positive paradox" which grounds and makes possible the entire series of negations. In point of fact, Barth had already said something similar about the limits of dialectic. It does not attain, in and of itself, to the divine Word which it would like to make heard.⁷⁹ And Barth, too, believes that there is a point which transcends the endless series of dialectical negations which he is carrying out with the help of his friends. But Tillich thinks this point is the Unconditioned. He thinks that the unity of No and Yes is to be found in the "positive paradox" that is the Unconditioned (as eternal source, ground and abyss).⁸⁰ It is on this point that Barth would take issue.

In his response, Barth acknowledges that there exists a "subterranean community of work" between himself and Tillich. "It gives me little pleasure to spread out before the eyes of those smug persons, who are not involved in our joint concerns, my differences with a man like Tillich who, even across appreciable gaps yet stands so close to me, and I begrudge them this spectacle."⁸¹ And he too is "of the opinion that nothing less than *all* depends on the exact and thorough determination of the positive point which is here in question. . . ."⁸² The question is: just what is the "positive paradox"? In what does it consist?

In Barth's view, Tillich's "positive paradox" does not escape the evils of self-transcendence against which he rightly protests. The Unconditioned is a *postulated* unity of No and Yes. It is the result of an intellectual act on the part of the philosophical theologian. "[W]ho transcends

⁷⁸Ibid., 134.

⁷⁹Karl Barth, "*Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie*" in idem., *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1922-1925*, ed. by Holger Finze (Zürich: TVZ, 1990), 171: "But this possibility, the possibility that God *Himself* speaks where He is spoken of, does not lie on the dialectical way as such, but rather there, were this way *breaks off*."

⁸⁰Tillich, "Critical and Positive Paradox," 135, 136.

⁸¹Karl Barth, "The Paradoxical Nature of the 'Positive Paradox': Answers and Questions to Paul Tillich," *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, 142.

⁸²Ibid., 143.

here? . . . Are we not confronted here with a philosophical story in the style of Baron von Münchhausen?"⁸³ And if the Unconditioned is a postulated entity, how can we possibly *begin* with it?⁸⁴ Surely one is here beginning with a problem to be resolved, and the postulate comes in at the point where a solution is adduced.

For Barth, the "positive paradox" is a "*divine* paradox." What makes it "divine" is the fact that it consists in "free, personal action" on the part of God.⁸⁵ And what makes it paradoxical is that it consists in the act of the unintuitable God making Himself intuitable through the assumption of human flesh. "*Christ* is the 'positive paradox.'"⁸⁶ He is this *not* simply because the uniting of divine and human in one person took place at a single point in human history, in a single human being. He is this, pre-eminently, because the uniting took place without confusion of the "natures." That, for Barth, is the paradox. The unintuitable God made Himself to be intuitable without ceasing to be unintuitable—surely a paradox! And it is precisely because all speaking of Christ is a speaking of this paradox that all such speaking "remains necessarily dialectical."⁸⁷

This was the parting of the ways. Tillich never let go of his starting-point in a metaphysical postulate. And Barth never let go his attempt to ground all speech about God *in the Christ event*. Both wanted to maintain the unintuitability of God and, on that basis, the dialectical character of theology. For his part, Tillich thought that Barth had abandoned his own principles in making an "objective historical factor" (*viz.*, Jesus) to be identical with revelation. The result was that "the imperceptible, non-objective character of faith is broken down."⁸⁸ In this, he was clearly wrong. In Barth's view, on the other hand, Tillich's metaphysical approach effected a separation of redemption as an eternal event from

⁸³*Ibid.*, 146-7. Baron von Münchhausen was an eighteenth-century nobleman who, in later life, regaled his listeners with stories of his exploits in the military, including riding a cannonball, traveling to the moon, and lifting himself out of a swamp by his own hair.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 148.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 150.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 152. Barth explicitly makes it known that, in setting up the Christological problem in these paradoxical terms, he is self-consciously setting forth a "*Reformed Christology*."

⁸⁸Tillich, "Critical and Positive Paradox," 140.

Jesus of Nazareth, a result that was completely unacceptable on the grounds of a Christian understanding of revelation.⁸⁹ In this, he was clearly right.⁹⁰

B. Barth's Doctrine of Election. From his earliest days on through to the end of his life, if Karl Barth had a central problem, a problem whose solution had ramifications for all of his other doctrines, that central problem would be: the Godness of God in His Self-revelation. In the early years, this problem took an epistemological form: how can God be God before, during, and after revealing Himself? How can He enter into the sphere of human knowing without subjecting Himself to human epistemic control, thereby setting aside His sovereign freedom (i.e., His deity)? Barth's answer in those days was: by means of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, an answer which was explained by means of Christology after the 1923 debate with Tillich. But such an answer has ontological implications. The question of the Godness of God in His Self-revelation eventually became: how can God live a human life, suffer and die without undergoing change on the level of His being?

If the door to a Nestorian separation of the natures is closed to us (so that suffering cannot be assigned to the human nature alone), how can God have such an experience without undergoing change? Barth does not shrink from understanding God as the subject of the human experiences of suffering and death. If we think that God cannot experience death, that he is incapable of such things, he says, then "our concept of God is too narrow, too arbitrary, too human, all too human. Who God is and what it means to be divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed Himself and, thereby, His nature, the *essence* of the divine. And when He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ as the God who *does* such things, then it must lie far from us to wish to be wiser than he and to maintain that such things stand in contradiction to the *divine essence*."⁹¹

⁸⁹Barth, "The Paradoxical Nature of the 'Positive Paradox,'" 152.

⁹⁰Tillich, "Critical and Positive Paradox," 141: "The theology of crisis is right, completely right, in its struggle against every unparadoxical, immediate, objective understanding of the unconditioned. . . . But it has a presupposition which is itself no longer crisis, but creation and grace. It can be spoken of. . . as eternal redemption, itself imperceptible and ungiven, which is evident only to faith. . . ."

⁹¹Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, 203; E. T. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 186 (the first and the third emphases are mine).

Barth's solution to the ontological form of his central problem is clear: suffering and death do not change God because they are *essential* to Him. But how can this be? How can the human experiences of suffering and death be *essential* to God? And how can this be true without making creation and redemption necessary acts—the outworking of a teleology that is inherent in the divine “essence” (as was the case with Hegel, for example)? Barth's answer is given in his doctrine of election. Karl Barth takes up the doctrine of election as the completion of his doctrine of God. That move already was a novel one in the history of theology. The older Reformed theologians had considered election as the first of God's works *ad extra* and located it between God and creation as a distinct locus. In placing it with the doctrine of God, Barth was testifying to his belief that election is a divine act of *Self*-determination.

No Barth scholar I am aware of questions the fact that Barth thinks of this act of *Self*-determination as freely willed and, indeed, purposive. God chooses Himself to be a God for us in Jesus Christ, that is the basic meaning of election which makes the election of the human race in Christ to be a derivative notion. On that, all would agree. But the question of what this means for the *being* of God is disputed. I have written extensively on this problem and will not rehearse the arguments in support of my own reading here.⁹² It will suffice to simply summarize my earlier conclusions and connect them with what we have already seen in Tillich.

The *Self*-determination of God is a determination of His *essence*, not simply a determination to undertake an act in a particular direction, but first and foremost a determination of the divine essence. “The Godhead of the true God is not a prison whose walls have first to be broken through if He is to elect and do what He has elected and done in becoming man.... The Godhead of the true God embraces both height and depth, both sovereignty and humility, both lordship and service. It is only the pride of man, making a God in his own image, that will not hear of a determination of divine essence in Jesus Christ.”⁹³ Two observations are in order with respect to this move. First, a determination of the divine essence *makes essential*. Second, Barth has broken through the logic and limita-

⁹²See, in the first instance, Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 183-277. It should be noted that, since the four essays which comprise Part 3 of the just cited book first appeared, I have written six more.

⁹³Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, 92.

tions of traditional substance metaphysics. He does not treat the divine essence as something that is beneath, behind, or before the divine Subject in His act(s) but as something that is given *in* the one eternal act in which He constitutes Himself as God “for us” in the covenant of grace. The reason, then, God undergoes no change when He experiences suffering and death is that there is no divine “essence” that is complete in itself apart from and prior to the act of Self-determination. And that then means that there is no ontic “step” from an “essence” understood as complete to an “essence” understood as determined. If the determination given to the divine essence meant that, it could only mean that an essential change had taken place.

Now the proximity of this line of thought to what we saw in Schelling should be clear. Like Schelling, Barth understands the being of God to be “constituted” in an act of “primal willing.” He does not understand the act of Self-constitution as a necessary act which “precedes” the act of Self-determination. The act of Self-determination makes what is contained in it to be essential to God. Therefore, there can only be *one* eternal act. If we were to ask, “Who is the Subject who performs this act?,” an answer could only be given in terms of that which is given in the act itself (it being understood that there is no modality of being in God which precedes the act). An answer to this question which seeks to specify what and who God would have been had He not made this particular decision could only be speculative, an exercise in abstracting intellectually from the act itself. Seen in that light, it would not really matter whether speculation led to an Absolute Subject that is complete in itself or to a tri-unity that is equally complete; both responses gesture towards an *indeterminate* and therefore finally unknowable being in God (a hidden “essence”).

If one were then to say that a refusal to answer the (wholly speculative) question of who and what the Subject of the eternal act is still makes one guilty of presupposing the existence of “dark metaphysical background,” a wholly unknown Subject standing back of the act itself, which constitutes no real improvement upon the speculative character of all metaphysical treatments of the being of God, the answer would be as follows. As Schelling rightly noted, *it is the act itself* which makes the so-called “background” to be the “background” of this act. Recall what Schelling said: “God has in himself an inner ground of his existence . . . that precedes him in existence; but, precisely in this way, God is the *prius*

[what is before] of the ground in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*.”⁹⁴ Expressed in the theological language proper to Barth, it is the eternal act of Self-determination which makes the “Father” to be “Father” and the “Son” to be the “Son.” There is nothing prior to this act.

But, then, this also means that even the tri-unity of God is given in the one eternal act of Self-determination which makes essential. This step is the most controversial of all. But it is made necessary by the fact that Barth makes the *obedience* of the Son to the Father to be essential to God. “If the humility of Christ is not only a behavior of the man Jesus of Nazareth, if it is the behavior of this man because there is . . . a humility grounded in the essence of God, then something else is just as grounded in the essence of God itself. If now, God is in Christ, if what the man Jesus does is, at the same time, God’s own work, then this character of the self-emptying and self-humiliation of Jesus Christ as an act of *obedience* cannot be alien to God Himself. Rather, we have to recognize in it the inner side of the mystery of the divine nature of Christ and therefore the mystery of the nature of the one true *God*.”⁹⁵ Now obedience differs from humility in that the latter could be present as a disposition without any willed activity. But obedience is something that exists only where there is willed activity. Obedience is strictly purposive in nature. And if it belongs to Christ’s *divine nature*, if it is proper to God as God, then this can only be because the act which gives rise to obedience is itself essential to God.

To make the act of willed obedience *essential* to God is to suggest that the divine decision which sets in motion the economy of salvation is the act which constitutes God as God. And so Barth can say, with respect to the trinitarian relation of Father and Son: “Not only may we not deny, much rather must we affirm and understand as *essential* to the being of God the offensive fact that there is in God an above and a below, a prius and a posterius, a superiority and a subordination.”⁹⁶ The most natural conclusion to draw from this line of reasoning is that it is precisely the “command” of the Father in the covenant of grace which generates the Son as a modality of being in the one true God which is capable of obedi-

⁹⁴See above, n. 26.

⁹⁵Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, 211; E. T. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 193.

⁹⁶Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, 219; E. T. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 200-1 (emphasis mine).

ence. Barth himself does not say this and there is much in his work which would contradict it. But once he has made obedience to be essential to God, once he has made obedience to be a personal property of the second person of the Trinity, there is no turning back from the conclusion that the eternal missions simply *are* the eternal processions. And both find their ground in election.

I submit that it is Barth, ironically, who stands closer to Schelling at this point than Tillich. Tillich thought he could map aspects of classical theism on to Schelling's concept of the divine Subject. In truth, the shift in concentration from Subject to a "metaphysics of being" meant a lapse back into the logic of substance metaphysics and, with that, an undermining of the real potential contained in Schelling. Tillich could say (repeatedly) in his treatment of Christology that "being precedes act."⁹⁷ At this point, Tillich's "metaphysics of being" has completely overwhelmed the logic of the being-in-act of the divine Subject. And the price Tillich pays for this is the opening up of a cleft between God in Himself and God for us, between his Christ principle and Jesus of Nazareth. Barth, on the other hand, has remained closer to the turn to the Subject in modern philosophy and theology, and teased out the significance of that turn by means of a Christological grounding which puts an end to the speculation that was endemic to the original vision of the German idealists. To explain why that should be the case requires that we turn now, finally, to Barth's later Christology.

C. Barth's Later Christology. If Barth's doctrine of election provides the ontological ground of his Christology, his Christology sets forth the epistemological ground of his doctrine of election. The co-ordination of the two ensures that nothing is said of God which does not find its ground in the narrated history of Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture. Others have said that the only access to the immanent Trinity is through the economic; few or none have been as consistent as he in limiting what is said of God to what can be justified by reference to Christology.

In Barth's hands, Christology is a thorough actualization of the two "natures" of Christ. What it means to be "divine" is set forth in the *history* of the Self-humiliation of the Son of God. What it means to be "human" is set forth in the *history* of the exaltation of the royal human, Jesus of Nazareth. And the unity of the two lies in the fact that these are not two histories, but one. This also means that the "subject" of this one history

⁹⁷Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 122-23.

can be neither the Logos *simpliciter* nor the man Jesus *simpliciter*. The “subject” is the one God-human, understood as a “compound person.” And the unity of this compound subject is guaranteed by the humility and obedience of the eternal Son, which leads to Him to relate to the human Jesus in the modality of (sovereignly willed and active) *receptivity*. It is this receptivity that ensures that all that Jesus does, God does, and all that He experiences, God experiences.⁹⁸ This reconstruction of the categories employed in the Chalcedonian Formula brings Barth quite close to Hegel’s “Speculative Good Friday” and it allows him to say that the second Person of the Trinity takes death, destruction, and perdition (i.e., the human experience of death in God-abandonment) into His own life. “The incarnation, the taking of the *forma servi*, means not only God’s becoming a creature, becoming a man. . .but it means His giving Himself up to the contradiction of man against Him, His placing of Himself under the judgment under which man has fallen in this contradiction, under the curse of death which rests upon Him. The meaning of the incarnation is plainly revealed in the question of Jesus upon the cross: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mk.15:34).”⁹⁹

It is the history of the one God-human understood in this way which provides the epistemic ground of Barth’s theological ontology. His ontology is not the result of an attempt to address a philosophical problem on metaphysical grounds. Barth never looks away from this concrete history as the basis for all that he says about God.

The fact that Barth never took a principled stand on the philosophical issues that once divided Schelling from Hegel gave him the freedom to approximate both at differing junctures of his theologizing. And that, I would say, gave him a decided advantage over Tillich. Tillich had little room for Hegel, primarily because Hegel’s philosophy led to an overcoming of estrangement *in history*. “The common point in all existentialist attacks [on Hegel] is that man’s existential situation is a state of estrangement from his essential nature. Hegel is aware of this estrangement, but he believes that it has been overcome and that man has been reconciled with his true being. According to all the existentialists, this belief is Hegel’s basic error. Reconciliation is a matter of anticipation and expecta-

⁹⁸I have discussed these matters most fully in McCormack, “Divine Impassibility or Simply Divine Constancy?”

⁹⁹Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, 202.; E. T. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 185.

tion, not of reality.”¹⁰⁰ The sympathy expressed in this passage with existentialist critiques of Hegel, stretching from Schelling and Schopenhauer to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, reflects what we saw earlier, viz., Tillich’s tendency to engage in a flight from history, to make redemption eternal rather than historical.

By contrast, Barth’s Christology is historicized in a way that allows him to do justice to suffering as an event in God’s own life, without having to take the step that Hegel himself finally did, viz., that of identifying the second person of the Trinity with a human being. The consequence is that he has overcome Hegel’s metaphysics even as he appropriates the soteriological values resident in Hegel’s scheme.

Conclusion: Why be Christocentric?

Seen in the light of the foregoing comparative study, four conclusions may be drawn in response to the question posed by the title of this article. Why should Christian theology be christocentric? Because:

1. It puts an end to speculative treatments of the being and attributes of God. Barth’s christocentrism, by putting an end to metaphysics, also puts an end to speculation. Where nothing can be ascribed to God which does not find its root in Christology, there speculation cannot get off the ground.

2. It makes coherent the church’s confession that “Jesus is Lord” to a degree never seen in the history of Christian theology prior to Barth. If the Self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is not only the manifestation but also the actualization in time of what God is in Himself, in eternity, then there can be no clearer explanation of T. F. Torrance’s memorable claim that “there is no God behind the back of Jesus.”

3. It provides a better apologetic in the long run. Barth’s christocentric theology, by refusing to speak directly to a particular situation, is free to speak to changing situations. Tillich’s “answering theology” attempted to speak directly to a Cold War situation. His talk of “metaphysical” or “ontological shock” found resonance in the America of the 1950s and early 1960s. But by the time Woody Allen made *Annie Hall* in 1977, existentialism was in tatters. The young Alvy Singer (Allen’s character) is

¹⁰⁰Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 25. One might be forgiven, I hope, for thinking that it is precisely his belief that estrangement has been overcome in a single, historical event which makes Hegel’s philosophy to be so very Christian.

taken by his mother to a psychologist because he is depressed and won't do his homework. The psychologist asks what is depressing him. Something he read, his mother answers. What was that? asks the doctor. Alvy answers: "the universe is expanding. The universe is everything. And if the universe is expanding, someday it will break apart and that will be the end of everything." His mother erupts: "What is that your business?" and, turning to the doctor, "He stopped doing his homework." "What's the point?" asks Alvy. His mother, now very agitated, says, "What does the universe have to do with it? You're in Brooklyn. Brooklyn is not expanding." And the doctor very helpfully adds: "The universe won't expand for billions of years yet, Alvy. We've got to try to enjoy ourselves while we are here. Huh? Huh?" (fade to laughter). Tillich seriously underestimated the capacity of men and women to adjust themselves to a lack of meaning and a future.

Tillich's "answering theology" is seriously dated not just because of its existentialist themes. It is dated because of its "essentialism," its foundationalism. And it is dated because few thinking people today would have any interest in a theology which proposed as an answer to the theodicy problem a doctrine of divine impassibility. God overcomes existential estrangement without suffering? The present moment in theology would seem to belong to those sympathetic to Hegel, not to mediating theologies like Tillich's. Barth's theology, by speaking to the situation only indirectly, by not attaching himself to any one philosophy or psychological model, has proven to have greater staying power. And that is a good reason, even on the grounds of Tillich's concern with the situation, to prefer Barth.

LOVE AS A METHODOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL SOURCE FOR SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY¹

by

Thomas Jay Oord

Christians typically claim that God is active in the world. God's activity is evident in the beauty and diversity of the natural world. Christians witness to an active God when they observe acts of kindness and generosity, see a mother loving her child, or witness care for the destitute, impoverished, and dying. Major social events like the end of apartheid or the demolition of the Berlin Wall are occasions during which many Christians say that God was especially active. Various people are particularly revelatory of God action. We often call them "saints." And Christians typically witness to their belief that God was active in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. John Wesley's theology is replete with claims about God being active in these several kinds of ways.²

¹This paper was delivered as the Wesleyan Theological Society presidential address at the 2009 meeting held in Anderson, Indiana. Many ideas in this paper emerged while I flew to Akron, Ohio, to participate in a research team exploring love in the Pentecostal tradition. I thank the Stephen Post, Margaret Paloma, and Matthew Lee for the inspiring paper that served as the catalyst for "gelling" my thoughts about the variety of divine-action theologies.

²For a collection of essays on John Wesley, science, and contemporary Wesleyan theology as it pertains to science, see Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation: Wesleyan Forays in Science and Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009). This book is comprised primarily of papers delivered at the 2008 WTS meeting at Duke University.

These events and creaturely activities are also the domain of scientific investigation. In the last centuries, even the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been subjected to scientific scrutiny. A variety of questions arise when considering the relationship between scientific inquiry and theology. Perhaps no set of questions is more complex than the set accounting for God's action in the world. We wonder: What does God *actually do* in our lives and in the world around us? What should we mean when we say God creates, designs, sustains, and redeems the universe? Can science tell us anything about divine action?³ Can God's activity be tested by science? Or are we better off allowing science to give one set of answers, theology another set, and appealing to mystery when the two disagree?

John Wesley himself was very interested in science and how scientific theory and data might influence theology.⁴ This essay offers a new response, a new paradigm, for thinking about divine action in relation to science. I propose that a particular view of divine love overcomes central methodological and metaphysical conflicts in the science-and-theology dialogue. These conflicts are serious ones, and failure to resolve them only perpetuates confusion. Confusion ultimately undermines the urgency for righteous and holy living. I will argue that a particular view of divine love accounts for divine causation and supports vital commitments in both theology and science.

My appeal to love as the new paradigm is not a way of asking, "Can't we all just get along?" Love does not function as a way of asking theologians and scientists to be gracious and kind to one another. While I hope that those involved in these discussions conduct themselves in lov-

³Among the better collections of writing on divine action in science are Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, and Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur R. Peacocke, eds. *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican Observatory Foundation, 2000), and Keith Ward, *Divine Action* (London: Collins, 1990).

⁴For essays exploring John Wesley's approach to science and philosophy of science, see the following chapters in Oord, *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation*: Laura Bartels Felleman, "Degrees of Certainty in John Wesley's Natural Philosophy," John W. Haas, Jr., "John Wesley's Vision of Science in the Service of Christ," Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent for Theological Engagement with the Natural Sciences," and Marc Otto and Michael Lodahl, "Mystery and Humility in John Wesley's Narrative Ecology."

ing ways, this essay proposes that a particular understanding of love solves central methodological and metaphysical conflicts.

Method and Metaphysics

Most conflicts pertaining to God's action emerge from methodological and metaphysical assumptions—the methods of science and the assumed metaphysical nature of God's causal activity. Many people assume that claims about divine causation are irrelevant to science and its methodologies. This view, often called methodological naturalism, is understandable for at least two reasons. Because of these two reasons, scientists, both Christians and non-Christians, often do not refer to God's activity in their scientific theories and explanations.

First, scientists are justifiably nervous when theists give supposedly full and sufficient theological explanations for events and things in nature. This nervousness is due in large part to the wide-ranging authority over science that the church once maintained and the assumed sufficient nature of theological claims. Some scientific theories thought to oppose official church positions were once deemed unacceptable by ecclesial leaders.⁵

Many scientists today consequently resist theories that require or seem to imply that science should assume a subordinate position to the authoritative claims of theology and the church. Contemporary science resists the notion that theology gives full and sufficient explanations for events and things in the natural world. For many scientists, in fact, theology is irrelevant.⁶ No doubt, this resistance to or apathy toward theology motivates some who oppose the Intelligent Design movement, a move-

⁵See John Hedley Brooke for a nuanced historical account of the relation between science and theology, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The paradigm case for the clash between the church and science is the case of Galileo, and the authority on that conflict is William R. Shea, with Mariano Artigas, *Galileo in Rome: The Rise and Fall of a Troublesome Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *Galileo Observed: Science and the Politics of Belief* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2006).

⁶See Karl W. Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa, *Species of Origins: America's Search for a Creation Story* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), and Karl Giberson and Mariano Artigas, *Oracles of Science: Celebrity Scientists versus God and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

ment that in recent years has gained power in the public arena but remains almost entirely absent in academia.⁷

A second reason why God's activity has been assumed to reside outside the domain of science has, unfortunately, received much less attention. Theologians of various types, especially Christian theologians, have affirmed that God's constitution is spiritual: "God is spirit," says Jesus, "and we worship him in spirit and truth." Insofar as spirits cannot be perceived by our five senses, it makes little sense to think that an empirical method based upon sensory perception could detect divine activity.⁸ God's spiritual constitution suggests that science is not capable of describing God's direct causal action.

Due mainly to these two assumptions, many scientists, even scientists with Christian beliefs about God being creator, designer, sustainer, and redeemer, assume a form of methodological naturalism for their scientific work. Methodological naturalism says that scientific research, theories, and explanations should not refer in any way to God's activity. Methodological naturalism allows scientists who are Christians to do and think about scientific work in the same way as atheistic scientists.

When asked about the ultimate explanation of things, scientists with Christian commitments are likely to mention God's activity. Some distinguish between the order of nature, which science can explain without reference to divine causation, and the order of grace, which appeals to the mystery of faith or to special revelation. By following this practice, these Christians affirm methodological naturalism while denying metaphysical naturalism (where metaphysical naturalism amounts to atheism).

⁷Key texts for the Intelligent Design movement include Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), William Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial, revised edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). For a strong Wesleyan critique of Intelligent Design, see W. Christopher Steward, "On Giving Intelligent Design Theorists What They Want," in *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation: Wesleyan Forays in Science and Theology*, Thomas Jay Oord, ed. (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009).

⁸For what a Wesleyan approach to perceiving God through nonsensory perception might entail, see my essay, "Prevenient Grace and Nonsensory Perception of God in a Postmodern Wesleyan Philosophy," in *Between Nature and Grace: Mapping the Interface of Wesleyan Theology and Psychology* (San Diego, Calif.: Point Loma Press, 2000).

The dual affirmation of methodological naturalism and metaphysical supernaturalism intensifies the temptation to view science and theology as separate and autonomous domains. Theologians such as Langdon Gilkey and Rudolf Bultmann represent this perspective. They generally consider science and theology as two independent modes of inquiry.⁹ Narrative theologians in the Wittgensteinian tradition, such as George Lindbeck, typically consider science and theology to possess separate and independent language systems, with their separate forms of life.¹⁰ Biologist Stephen Jay Gould calls science and religion two non-overlapping magisteria. Religion is concerned with meaning and values, says Gould, while science deals with the facts and physical existence.¹¹

A growing number of scholars, however, criticize the view that science and theology can be neatly separated.¹² I share this criticism. Many Christians reject the view that theology is unconcerned about facts and the physical world. Theology is concerned with the real world, in all its dimensions.¹³ And it has become increasingly clear that science is value-

⁹See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) and Langdon Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

¹⁰George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

¹¹Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999).

¹²See Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science: The Gifford Lectures 1989-91, Volume One* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), Philip Clayton, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 2000), John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2000), Alan G. Padgett, *Science and the Study of God: A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), Ted Peters, "Theology and Science: Where Are We?" *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 31:2 (June 1996): 323-343.

¹³On the issue of realism and the epistemology of theology and science, see Paul Allen, *Ernan McMullin And Critical Realism in the Science-theology Dialogue* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008), Ian Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1966), Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1989), Alister McGrath, *A Scientific Theology* (London, T&T Clark, 2001), Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), Arthur Peacocke, *Intimations of Reality: Critical Realism in Science and Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

laden and has important implications for morality. Reality cannot easily be divided into neat little compartments, some religious/spiritual/moral and others scientific/factual/physical. One critic of the independent view, Ian Barbour, says that “we cannot remain content with a plurality of unrelated languages if they are languages about the same world. If we seek a coherent interpretation of all experience, we cannot avoid the search for a unified worldview.”¹⁴ I share with Barbour this quest for a unified worldview.

Many Christians worry that methodological naturalism is *de facto* metaphysical naturalism. Assigning God no causal role in scientific explanations easily eliminates God from playing *any* meaningful role. The idea of God becomes an unnecessary addition to what can apparently be explained by natural causes alone. John Wesley’s worry that Christians are “practical atheists” when they *act* as if God does not exist, even if they cognitively affirm God’s existence, is a worry that seems to apply here.¹⁵

The loudest voices claiming that methodological naturalism is *de facto* metaphysical naturalism are found in the Intelligent Design movement. A quick look at the movement’s key voices reveals their worry that science, especially as it affirms one form of evolution and affords no role for an intelligent designer, supports a form of metaphysical naturalism leading to atheism.¹⁶

But philosophers and theologians of diverse persuasions, such as Philip Clayton, David Ray Griffin, John Milbank, and Alvin Plantinga, also worry that methodological naturalism affords God no real explanatory or causal role in the world.¹⁷ Research on human interaction, espe-

¹⁴Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science: The Gifford Lectures 1989-91, Volume One* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 16.

¹⁵John Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, Frank Baker, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984 ff), 1:516-517.

¹⁶The key Intelligent Design texts opposing naturalism are Phillip E. Johnson’s *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law & Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995) and *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

¹⁷Clayton addresses these issues in several books, but see especially *God and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998). Griffin deals with the problem by arguing for a religious and scientific naturalism, whereby God acts but never interrupts the causal structures of the natural world. Griffin argues that science need only reject a form of supernaturalism that entails the possibility that God could and would occasionally interrupt the causal laws of

cially religious experience, seems especially undermined when scientists assume methodological naturalism. It fails to answer our fundamental questions about God's activity. It can easily be interpreted as providing sufficient answers to the phenomena of our world, despite lacking any reference to God.¹⁸

Christians who want scientific methodologies to include a legitimate place for divine causation, both methodologically and metaphysically, have a series of theological options from which to choose. I identify below eight such options. They do not exhaust all of the possible ways of thinking about God's causal activity, but they do cover the most important options.

1. **Incessant Divine Coercion.** This way of thinking about scientific method and divine action views God as the sole cause of every event or thing. Humans may think that created entities have a natural cause. They may think that self-determination or freedom exists such that at least some creatures report exerting genuine causal activity. But God is actually the hidden, unilateral cause of all things. Some forms of Calvinist theology either explicitly affirm or imply this view of God's action.
2. **Frequent Divine Coercion.** God completely controls the vast majority of events and things in the universe. But occasionally, God grants freedom to humans for genuine self-causation. Christians who want to make a strong split between occasionally free humans and entirely determined nonhumans typically presuppose this scheme. It also seems to fit a form of popular theology that describes a God who remains in control and yet, out of a desire for relationship, occasionally gives freedom to humans.¹⁹

existence (*Religion and Scientific Naturalism*). Milbank addresses naturalism in several publications, see especially *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, [1990] 2006). Plantinga deals with the problem in several writings, including "Methodological Naturalism," in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 (Sept. 1997): 143-54.

¹⁸For arguments from scientists for the compatibility between belief in God and contemporary science, see Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), Richard G. Colling, *Random Designer: Created from Chaos to Connect with the Creator* (Bourbonnais, Ill.: Browning, 2004), Darrel R. Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2004), Karl Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

¹⁹See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

3. **Accidental Freewill Theism.** The difference between the Frequent Divine Coercion and Accidental Freewill Theism is a difference of degree, not kind. The accidental freewill theist may assume that many creatures have a measure of God-given freedom and causality. She may believe that chance events occur and that God typically works in and with creation without trumping creaturely agency. But accidental freewill theists also claim that God could withdraw, override, or fail to offer freedom to creatures. Some accidental freewill theists say that God occasionally controls others completely to perform miracles. Others in this camp say that God could but never does withdraw, override, or fail to offer freedom. They argue that God voluntarily became self-restrained at the creation of our universe. I think most Wesleyan theologians are accidental freewill theists.²⁰
4. **Essential Freewill Theism/Essential Kenosis.** This view says that God necessarily provides freedom to creatures and calls them to cooperate. God is personal, and God empowers, inspires, and calls creation to love. Creatures are utterly dependent upon God, but God cannot withdraw, fail to offer, or override the freedom God necessarily gives. Giving freedom to others is one aspect of the love part of God's essential nature. Because God is love, God must give freedom. But the efficacy and form of God's causal activity oscillates, in the sense that divine causation varies from event to event, depending on the circumstances and the creaturely responses. I will return to this scheme, because I prefer it to others.
5. **Steady-State Divine Influence.** The basic difference between schemes four and five is the issue of oscillation in God's causal activity. Steady-State Divine Influence says that God necessarily provides freedom to and cooperates with creatures. But this fifth scheme says that God's causal activity remains in all ways constant with regard to influence on creatures. God may be called the Ground of Being or a Holy Reality. God is not personal, in the typical sense of personal giv-

²⁰In a personal email, Kenneth J. Collins notes that his understanding of divine action probably fits best here. For Collins's explication of John Wesley's theology, see *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2007).

ing and receiving in relationship. As such, God's permeating influence is unchanging in content and character. Prominent theologians who understand divine action in the steady state sense would include Paul Tillich and process theologians like Henry Nelson Wieman.²¹

6. **Natural and Supernatural Action.** This scheme has many versions. Perhaps the most common says that there are some events that can be entirely explained by creaturely action. The causes of these events are natural. Other events, sometimes called "miracles," are acts of God alone. Such miracles are divine interventions. A third category has both divine and creaturely causes. Some forms of the Natural/Supernatural scheme propose a primary and secondary scheme whereby God sometimes acts as the primary or direct cause but often as a secondary or indirect cause. It remains difficult, however, to determine the nature of divine action when God functions as a secondary or indirect cause in this scheme. And it becomes difficult to determine when it is that God acts alone, when God and creatures cooperate, or when natural causes are all-determining. The Natural/Supernatural scheme resides at the heart of much confusion about the relationship between science and theology. A theologian who understands divine action in this way is M. C. D'Arcy.²²
7. **Deism.** The deistic scheme suggests that God initially used coercion to create the universe *ex nihilo* and set its fundamental laws. But after this initial burst, God has left the world alone to follow God-designed laws. Although we would not find any evidence of divine action occurring in the present, we hypothesize that divine action was required at the beginning. The regularity of the laws, the fine-tuning required, and the exquisite design of the universe suggest a Creator. Deism supports the "God at a distance" approach to theology that John Wesley strongly rejected.²³

²¹Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951). Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

²²See his book, *The Mind and Heart of Love: Lion and Unicorn: A Study in Eros and Agape* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956).

²³See John Wesley, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," (*BE* 1984, I:516f).

8. **Mysterious Divine Action.** Mystery should always play some role in every discussion of how God acts in the world. This final scheme, however, assumes that God's activity is absolutely mysterious. God's action is entirely unlike creaturely action, and God's ways are utterly incomprehensible. This option assumes a complete *via negativa*. Proponents may argue that God exerts real influence in the world, but they simultaneously claim that we cannot know anything about what that influence is like. This option is tempting to a variety of theologians who wish to protect theology from becoming an enterprise in anthropology or politics. Those who want to allow space for theology in an age dominated by science also find it attractive.

We might compare these eight options in several ways. One of the more interesting compares them in relation to our interest in scientific methodology. Does one or more options help us make a judgment about divine causality? Which of these eight provides a theoretical basis for testing divine action?

Below are four options from the eight above that at least allow us to test divine action in the world. All four share in common the view that God at least sometimes provides free agency to creatures and, therefore, seeks cooperation. Each of these schemes supports, in one way or another, the view that *both* God and creatures exert causal influence. Notice that testability requires some variability of God's action in relation to creaturely action. Theologies not conducive to testing are those in which God (1) controls everything, or (2) always acts in the same way, or (3) has no current active role, or (4) acts in incomprehensible ways. Those conducive to testing are four of the above eight models: Frequent Divine Coercion, Accidental Freewill Theism, Essential Free Theism/Essential Kenosis, and Natural and Supernatural Action.

1	Frequent Divine Coercion	God is generally all-controlling or coercive, but God sometimes gives freedom to and cooperates with creatures (testable?)
2	Accidental Freewill Theism	God generally provides freedom and works with creatures, but God occasionally coerces (testable)

3	Essential Freewill Theism/ Essential Kenosis	God necessarily provides freedom and works with creatures, but the efficacy and form of God's causal activity oscillates (testable)
4	Natural and Supernatural Action	Some events can be entirely explained by creaturely action, some entirely by coercive divine action, and some by both (testable?)

A question mark goes with two of these four options. Frequent Divine Action has a question mark because it suggests that God is generally the sole cause of events. Only occasionally would events occur that included a measure of non-divine causation. A question mark has been placed here because I know of no clear scheme to distinguish which events result from God's absolute determination and which events do not. This inability to distinguish makes it difficult to gauge which events should be credited to divine causation and which are the product of divine and creaturely causes.

A question mark has also been added to the Natural and Supernatural Action option. In that scheme, some events or things result entirely from creaturely causation and others result entirely from divine causation. The ones occurring without direct divine causation would, of course, not be capable of testing for divine activity, at least direct divine causation. Theologians should rightfully reject the increasingly popular idea that some event might occur without God's causal activity.

Championing Love in Scientific Method and Metaphysics

Which of the options best fits with the central Christian claim that God is love? The answer would be important to theological traditions that affirm love as God's supreme or reigning attribute.²⁴ It would appeal to

²⁴See Craig A. Boyd, ed., *Visions of Agape: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008), and Gary Chartier, *The Analogy of Love: Divine and Human Love at the Center of Christian Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint, 2007). For Arminian accounts of love as God's reigning attribute, see Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001), Pinnock, et. al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1994); Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Nashville: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Suffering*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2007).

Wesleyans who typically believe that the sentence “God is love” resides at the heart of the Christian revelation of God.²⁵ It was Wesley who called love God’s “reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all [God’s] other perfections.”²⁶ The theological vision of divine action that best champions divine love would likely be most persuasive to those who believe that love always and necessarily characterizes God’s causal activity.²⁷

What if we also affirmed the widespread intuition that love *never* coerces? Coercion and love are antithetical. Empirical evidence seems to support the view that love is never coercive, insofar as coercion is defined as completely controlling others. If God’s nature is love, it would seem to follow that God’s causal activity would *never* be coercive. In fact, the God whose essential nature is love would seem *incapable* of coercion. Divine causal coercion would mean that God withdraws, overrides, or fails to offer freedom to others and thereby controls them entirely. I argue that God cannot do this. Rejecting divine coercion does not entail that God fails to exert force. I think God exerts force on everything, which is part of what it means to say that God exerts causation. God exerts force as the most powerful being that exists. God is almighty, in the sense of being the mightiest being that exists and in the sense of exerting that might in some way upon all others. But God always exerts power in love, and God’s power never entirely controls others. By virtue of God’s nature as a loving Spirit, God cannot coerce.

Creatures are not free to do just anything, however. Here, Augustine was right to object to the view that creatures are entirely autonomous and completely free agents. Creaturely freedom is limited. Both theology and science suggest this. Theologians have noted the important effects that sin

²⁵See Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1972), Barry L. Callen, *Discerning the Divine: God in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2004), Barry L. Callen, *God as Loving Grace: The Biblically Revealed Nature and Work of God* (Nappanee Ind.: Evangel, 1996), H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1988), and Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005).

²⁶John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 1 John 4:8.

²⁷For a powerful argument in the regard, see Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

and environment have on limiting the range of creaturely freedom. And scientists speak about the genetic, biological, neurological, embodiment, and social constraints to freedom.²⁸ But limited freedom is freedom nonetheless! Wesleyans are right to emphasize our tradition's denial of predestination and its ancillary notions. Wesleyans are right to affirm that prevenient grace provides creatures the conditions for free response.²⁹

If we deny that God ever coerces, because God always loves, one option remains from the four potentially testable schemes. I label this option Essential Freewill Theism or *Essential Kenosis*. For the rest of this article, I will use the term "Essential Kenosis." Doing so is not only convenient, but "Kenosis" better emphasizes the Wesleyan notion of prevenient grace, whereby God acts first to give the gift of God-self to others.

Essential Kenosis

Essential Kenosis avers that God's essential nature is love, and God necessarily gives freedom and/or agency to others. Because God's nature includes freedom-giving love, God cannot withdraw, override, or fail to offer freedom/agency to others. Creatures are essentially free, although that freedom is limited. To use the language of the apostle Paul, "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

My proposal shares affinities with how Randy Maddox talks about John Wesley's understanding of divine power in relation to divine love. Maddox suggests that "perhaps the best way to capture Wesley's conviction . . . is to say that he construed God's power or sovereignty fundamentally in terms of *empowerment* rather than control or *overpowerment*. This is not to weaken God's power but to determine its character! As Wesley was fond of saying, God works 'strongly and sweetly.'"³⁰

²⁸One of the better scientific books to address the constraints to freedom is Nancey Murphy and Warren Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁹See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994). See also John B. Cobb, Jr., who titles his book on divine love and free creaturely response *Grace and Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995). For the importance of prevenient grace in religious pluralism, see Al Truesdale, *With Cords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism*, with Keri Mitchell (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2006).

³⁰Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 55.

Sometimes, creatures use their God-given freedom and/or agency badly. Evil is the result of this misuse. Essential Kenosis clears God from any legitimate charge of culpability for causing or failing to prevent evil, injustice, and debilitating confusion that creatures or conditions of existence cause. God is not to blame for the genuine evil of the world.

The Essential Kenosis view of God's love and causal activity has the benefit of solving the theoretical aspect of the problem of evil.³¹ This view also resolves the question of why a loving God would not see to the fair distribution of goods to the poor and needy. It solves the problem of why a loving God would allow an errant and ambiguous revelation of information that this God apparently deems necessary for full salvation. Essential Kenosis solves the theoretical aspects of all these problems and more by claiming that God cannot withdraw, override, or fail to offer freedom and/or agency to creatures, and creatures sometimes use that God-given freedom badly. Essential Kenosis offers a conceptual scheme that clears God from being culpable for causing or failing to prevent evil, injustice, and debilitating confusion.

Essential Kenosis provides a new paradigm for thinking about divine action in relation to science. This new paradigm, with its particular view of divine love, overcomes many key metaphysical and methodological conflicts that arise in the science-and-theology dialogue. To support my argument that Essential Kenosis may be a helpful paradigm for thinking about divine action in relation to science, I outline what this view entails. Essential Kenosis proposes the following.

1. No creaturely event or thing is entirely caused by God. God cannot coerce. Because no creaturely event or thing is entirely caused by God, divine causation should never be considered the full or sufficient explanation for any particular event. This statement overcomes the fear that theology or the church makes science unnecessary. The rejection of methodological and metaphysical supernatural sufficiency means that sci-

³¹On how Essential Kenosis overcomes the theoretical aspect of the problem of evil, see Thomas Jay Oord, *A Turn to Love: The Love, Science, and Theology Symbiosis* (forthcoming from Brazos, 2010), ch. 6, "An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation and Solution to the Problem of Evil" in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, Thomas Jay Oord, ed. (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009), and "Championing Divine Love and Solving the Problem of Evil," in *The Many Facets of Love: Philosophical Explorations*, Thomas Jay Oord, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007).

ence should always play an explanatory role in our attempts to make sense of existence in general and any event or thing in particular.

To say that God never unilaterally determines any event or thing also means that attempts to wed science and theology by selecting particular events as explainable only by divine design are unwarranted. For instance, Essential Kenosis rejects intelligent design claims that the irreducible complexity of any particular molecular structure is best explained as the work of God alone. God never designs unilaterally, which means that all complex organisms emerge from both divine and creaturely causes. The argument that creatures or natural forces play no role in evolution in general or the emergence of anything in particular runs contrary to Essential Kenosis.

2. Creatures and/or non-divine forces never entirely cause events. Creatures cannot coerce. Because creatures or non-divine forces cannot unilaterally determine any event or thing, creaturely causation should never be considered a sufficient explanation. Methodological and metaphysical naturalism are rejected. Any attempt to explain *fully* a particular event by reference to natural causes alone is inadequate. Creaturely causal closure does not exist. Instead, God exerts causal influence, but never complete control, on all existents whatsoever. God's causal activity is all-pervasive.

John Wesley was especially insistent that God's causal activity pervades all things. He argued that "God is in all things, and . . . we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature." He insisted that we "should use and look upon nothing as separate from God." God "pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is in a true sense the soul of the universe."³²

To say that creatures never entirely cause any event or thing because God always plays a causal role is also, obviously, to deny metaphysical atheism. According to my proposal, any claim that science provides a full and sufficient explanation of any particular event without reference to divine action is unjustified. Of course, some explanations may require more appeal to divine action than others because of the complexity of the organisms involved and the degree of value that pertains. Contrary to the arguments of some well-known apologists for scientism, Essential Kenosis argues that divine causation is necessary for every event or thing.

³²John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," (*BE* 1984), I:516f.

Every event or thing emerges through the causation of both divine and non-divine causes. This consistency of combination causes overcomes the conceptual problems in the Natural and Supernatural Action option, as well as similar conceptual problems in the other theological options. Most other options either require or allow God to be the sole cause of some events. Or they allow for the possibility that creatures act as sole causes for some events. Essential Kenosis insists that God is a necessary cause in the evolution and continued existence of all things.

3. The efficacy of God's causal activity oscillates. While every event has both divine and creaturely causes, Essential Kenosis proposes that God's causal efficacy varies from event to event. Divine causation oscillates in the sense that God's will is more or less expressed as creatures respond well or poorly to God's freedom-providing activity.³³ God's activity is most clearly expressed when an event profoundly promotes overall well-being. God's activity is less clearly expressed when an event profoundly undercuts overall well-being. In other words, the presence or absence of creaturely love indicates the degree to which God is active. When well-being is undermined in any particular event, God's purposes are not accomplished. And yet God exerts some causal influence on even those who do not love or do not respond well to God's calling.

It is important to note that the oscillation of divine causation is not a function of the divine will. To say that divine causation oscillates does not mean that God chooses sometimes to be more influential and other times to remain relatively uninfluential. Instead, God's nature as love prompts God to exert the most influence possible in any situation. To use an engine metaphor, God always runs at full throttle. Divine oscillation occurs as creatures cooperate in greater or lesser degrees.³⁴

³³This is similar to what David Ray Griffin calls "variable divine influence." God's influence upon others, says Griffin, is always formally the same but variable in content (*Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 147).

³⁴The notion that God offers to creatures possible options for action is perhaps best articulated in the writing of some process theologians. See, for instance, John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (Routledge, 2003), and Marjorie Hewett Suchocki, *God-Christ-Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

It is also important to note that God's causal activity does not oscillate arbitrarily. One disadvantage of the word "oscillate" is that it connotes to some an arbitrary and periodic increase or decrease. I do not intend this connotation. Rather, God's causal oscillation depends on the choices God and others make and upon the conditions and features of any particular situation. Divine oscillation is not random.

The claim that God's causal activity oscillates is particularly important for Christians doing research on love and who also think that God is the source of dramatic events, signs, and wonders. Essential Kenosis accounts for dramatic events by claiming that God's causal activity is especially effective during those times. And yet, the scheme does not claim that God is the sole cause of such events. God can do and does new things, and God's activity is profoundly revealed when creation conforms to the lure of divine love. The theory of divine oscillation should be helpful for those who want to point to particular events as especially revelatory of divine action. These events are rightly called "miracles."

4. God's causal activity is diverse. God's causal activity varies in form as God lovingly offers opportunities to each creature relevant to that creature's situation and potential. How God loves a worm will be different from God's love for an eagle. God's love for bacteria differs from God's love for people. The form of God's causation varies depending on the diversity of the situations and opportunities.

The fact *that* God loves all creation is unwavering and uniform; God seeks overall well-being. But *how* God chooses to love each creature, in each situation, at each moment, varies. *How* God loves is pluriform. The diversity of the form of divine causation is possible in part because of God's omnipresence. But God's diverse causal activity also hinges upon the diversity of the creatures with which God relates. Diverse causation arises from God's own varying plans and desires. God's causal diversity emerges from the diverse relations and communities that influence each creature. And God's diverse causation depends upon what possibilities for the future are genuinely available in the present moment. The diversity of the divine vision and the diversity of creation result in diversity of God's causal activity.

5. Love always characterizes God's causal activity. Essential Kenosis understands divine love in a particular way. We need to explore this particularity. I define love as acting intentionally, in sympathetic (or

“empathetic”) response to God and others, to promote overall well-being. Love requires free and intentional agents who exist in relationship with others, especially in relationship with God, and love is concerned with promoting the common good. To use the language of St. John, “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). This definition of love applies both to creatures and to God, although only God expresses love necessarily.³⁵

Love is a deliberate, free, and motive-laden activity, expressed in response to one’s community of others that includes God, other agents, and one’s own past actions. Love aims to promote overall well-being. By promoting overall well-being, I mean enhancing the kind of quality of life, health, happiness, wholeness, and flourishing that is well expressed in the Hebrew word *shalom*, the biblical word “blessedness,” and the abundant life Jesus said he came to offer.³⁶ The insertion of the word “overall” reminds us of the social justice aspect present in love. Heaping benefits on the few at the obvious detriment to the whole is unjust and therefore not loving.

Wesleyans are prone to regard love as God’s chief attribute or super-essential characteristic. All divine acts have been, are, and will be acts of love.³⁷ God cannot not love.³⁸ Divine causation always endeavors to promote overall well-being.

³⁵I defend this definition of divine love in several publications, but one of the fullest defenses is “The Love Racket: Defining Love and *Agape* for the Love-and-Science Research Program,” *Zygon* 40:4 (December 2005): 919-938.

³⁶Promoting well-being involves enhancing the mental and physical aspects of reality. It may involve acting to attain sufficient food, clean air and water, adequate clothing and living conditions, personal security, and the opportunity for intellectual development. It may involve attaining the satisfaction of being cared for and sense of belonging, diversity of life-forms and cultural expressions, appropriate level of leisure and entertainment, and economic stability. Promoting well-being may involve acting responsibly to secure a feeling of worth, medical soundness and physical fitness, deep personal relationships, social and political harmony, and the opportunity to develop spiritual/religious sensibilities and practices. Acting responsibly to increase well-being may involve acting in ways that develop the person’s virtuous dispositions, habits, and character. To promote well-being is to act to increase flourishing in at least one but often many of these dimensions of existence.

³⁷This seems to be the position of H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988).

³⁸Jürgen Moltmann argues this point well in *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 52-56. See also Mark Lloyd Taylor, *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986).

Although love is God's essence, God freely chooses how best to love each creature in each situation. God is not free not to love because love is God's nature. But God is free to decide how to love. As a personal being, God freely chooses some ways instead of others as God loves creation.³⁹ As essentially kenotic, God lovingly empowers and inspires others by providing them freedom in relationship. Because God's nature is love, God cannot withdraw, fail to offer, or veto the freedom God provides to all creatures capable of acting intentionally. God can be counted on to love relentlessly, because, as Charles Wesley put it, God's nature and name is love.⁴⁰

Testing Divine Love

We are ready to see what this new paradigm means for scientific method. I want to focus on one of two main areas of research that the Essential Kenosis research program illumines.

The first area is the scientific testing of divine action. We've seen that many of the options examined earlier require or allow divine coercion. God's alleged capacity to coerce makes those options inherently difficult if not impossible for testing divine action. But the Essential Kenosis scheme, which requires both divine and creaturely causation for any creaturely event and suggests that God's causal activity is diverse and oscillates in effectiveness, provides a uniform theory for testing divine action.

If, as the Essential Kenosis option presupposes, God is a necessary cause in every event, scientific testing will not determine if God acts as a cause. God always plays some causal role. Essential Kenosis affirms the words of the Apostle Paul that "In all things, God works for the good with those who love him" (Rm 8:28, RSV). The scheme does suggest a research program, to use the language of Imre Lakatos,⁴¹ that presupposes

³⁹On this, see "Divine Love," in *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays*, Thomas Jay Oord, ed. (Kansas City: Mo.: Beacon Hill, 2002).

⁴⁰This line comes from a Charles Wesley hymn by the same name. It also serves as the title of the book *Thy Name and Thy Nature is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*, Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord, eds. (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood, 2001).

⁴¹See Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). For a compelling case for why Lakatos's approach is helpful for relating science and theology in pursuit of research programs, see Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

a particular view of divine causation while rejecting the view that God is ever causally absent or inactive. Testing cannot gauge *whether* or not God acts in the world. God always acts, and in God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Essential kenosis allows for testing the degree to which divine causation is effective. Divine causation is more effective in one or some events compared with others. This level of effectiveness can be tested. Such testing does not involve putting events or things under a microscope in the attempt to see more or less of God. As spirit, God’s actions are not discernible by our five senses. Testing to gauge whether God’s causal activity is more effective in some events compared to others requires a different measuring stick.

The general measurement most helpful for gauging divine action is the *measurement of love*. That is, divine causation is most evident in those events or things that express love, in the sense of promoting overall well-being. Divine causation is less effective and therefore God’s causal efficacy is less observable in those events or things that undermine overall well-being. In short, testing divine action in the world directly relates to the promotion of what the Hebrew prophets called “shalom” and Jesus called “abundant life” (Jn. 10:10) The extent to which an event promotes overall well-being reveals the extent to which God’s causal activity is effective.

I foresee several possible objections to love as the criterion for scientific testability of divine action. I answer these objections in hope that the plausibility and fecundity of this research program may be more apparent. While answering these objections, the contours of my proposed research program, with its methodology and metaphysics of love, should become clearer.

Objection #1: Assumes the existence of God. First, some may object to the whole enterprise of testing divine action on the ground that Essential Kenosis *assumes* the existence of God and then promptly moves to test how God acts in the world. These critics would like prior proof of God’s existence before trying to test divine action.

Response: Yes, I assume that God exists. But all scientific research programs make assumptions. A number of strong arguments for God’s existence suggest to me and many others that it is more plausible to assume that God exists than not. I know of no absolute proof; faith always plays a role in the believer’s claim about God.

Any adequate research program contains hard-core presuppositions that researchers accept upfront as reasonable, although perhaps not capable of proving. For instance, the vast majority if not all scientific research programs assume some view of cause and effect. But proving cause and effect is, as David Hume pointed out, inherently impossible.⁴² And the vast majority if not all scientific research programs assume value-laden criteria to claim that some explanations are better than others (e.g., some explanations are more simple, more elegant, more comprehensive). Proving values and aesthetics is also inherently difficult if not impossible.

Those searching for the most adequate research program should compare the relative superiority of one program to another based upon how each accounts for what seems important facets and facts of existence. We are likely willing to accept one research program as superior if that program accounts well for what we know best. The Essential Kenosis methodology I propose accounts for existence better than a naturalistic or atheistic methodology. Here I agree with my philosophy colleague, Joseph Bankard, that the best overall explanation for existence in general and morals in particular is an explanation that includes the presence and activity of God.⁴³

My proposal takes seriously the widespread accounts of religious experience, including claims about God's working in human lives and in creation. Claims about divine action based on religious experience are non-negotiable to many Christians, even if Christians may not affirm all religious claims.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Essential Kenosis program does a better job than most for accounting for love in general and the view that love is not coercive in particular. Accordingly, this program seems potentially more fruitful for love research than others.

Objection #2: This research program does not offer certainty.

Some may object to the criterion of love as the ultimate measurement for divine action because the efficacy of divine love cannot be deduced with

⁴²See David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748.

⁴³Joseph Bankard, *A New Defense of Universal Morality: Synthesizing the Natural and Social Sciences with Theism* (doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2008).

⁴⁴On the importance of religious experience, see Stephen T. Franklin, *Speaking from the Depths: Alfred North Whitehead's Hermeneutical Metaphysics of Propositions, Experience, Symbolism, Language, and Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990).

certainty from observed phenomena. “God” and “love” cannot be perceived by our five senses. They evade certitude.

Response: Neither science nor theology offers absolute certainty. The Essential Kenosis research program does not support claims of absolute certainty. At its best, however, contemporary science also does not claim to have obtained absolute certainty. Essential Kenosis does support scientific practices that are central to the scientific enterprise such as induction and inference. It supports the scientific practice of moving from observed data to a hypothesis and then testing that hypothesis by further observation. Simultaneously, it reminds us that science, relying as it does on fallible sensory perception, does not provide grounds for absolute certainty. Science deals in the provisional, not the absolutely provable. Theology does as well. We all live by faith.

Objection #3: It is impossible to measure overall well-being.

Some may object to the criterion of love as the ultimate measurement for testing divine action, because this criterion requires an assessment of nearly everything. That is, if love means promoting *overall* well-being, the critic might wonder how one could do such all-embracing measuring.

Response: Like other scientific research, the Essential Kenosis program examines limited samples and makes generalizations to the whole. All-inclusive measuring is not possible for localized creatures, but this should not prevent researchers from speculating about the whole based upon observations and experiments from a limited set. In fact, this speculation is a bedrock practice of science. Researchers examine the few and make provisional claims about what this means for the whole.

Likewise, while love intends to promote overall well-being, it must assess what might be done to promote the global good when acting locally. Insofar as an intentional response to promote well-being is helpful to some, and not an obvious determinant to the whole, it can provisionally be deemed an act of love. Researchers need not measure all things when speculating about how overall well-being is promoted.

Of course, we not only find it impossible to measure overall well-being, but we also recognize that differences can arise as to which courses of action best promote overall well-being. Diverse people in diverse cultures have diverse ideas about how best to promote the common good. This healthy diversity of views can, of course, lead to epistemic problems. We should remember that we can hold different views about the

details of what constitutes the greatest well-being without thinking that embracing this diversity necessarily entails embracing radical epistemic relativism. Here, the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace can once again be helpful, insofar as we want to claim that human moral intuitions have their basis in God's love as revealed to our hearts and minds, even if that revelation can be misunderstood and partially ambiguous.

Objection #4: Testing divine causal action requires research on creaturely causal action. Some may object to Essential Kenosis as a basis for testing the Creator's action because it requires appropriate responses from creatures. This objection rightly sees that Essential Kenosis claims that the efficacy of divine causation relates directly to the love that non-divine beings may or may not express.

Response: In an interrelated universe of multiple causes, we make inferences about which actors exert primary causation given what we have reason to believe about these actors. This objection reminds us that one agent is never entirely responsible for any particular event. All events and things in the world arise through the influence of multiple causes. Existence is interrelated. My scheme builds upon this interrelatedness and accepts a multiple causation view. But it also agrees with the widespread intuition that, despite interrelatedness and multiple causes, we can plausibly attribute more causal responsibility to one agent or some agents than others. We may justifiably assert that the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer, "Thy will be done," is more evident in some events than in others.

Let's look at an example. What do we regard as the causal explanation when we say that a boy threw a ball through a window? Assuming that the boy actually threw the ball, we may simply attribute responsibility to the boy. We would be correct in doing this, so long as we do not claim that the boy is the *sufficient* cause of the event. After all, wind, gravity, the hardness of the ball, the thickness of the glass, and a host of other factors played contributory causal roles. When we say the boy is responsible, we are making a claim about a particular cause, the boy's throwing, as playing the primary causal role. But we need not also claim that the boy's throwing was the full and sufficient role.

Likewise, saying that divine action is more prevalent in the world when creatures respond appropriately in love is compatible with saying that divine action is the primary cause of this love. This is especially true if one has reason to believe that God is the source of love. "Every good and perfect gift is from above," to quote St. James (Js. 1:17).

Objection #5: All creatures should be equally revelatory of divine action. Some may object to love as the ultimate measurement for testing divine action because it affords greater revelatory capacity to complex creatures, e.g., dogs, dolphins, and humans, and less revelatory capacity to simpler entities, e.g., atoms, cells, or microorganisms. This objection is based upon the view that all creatures are equally capable of revealing divine love.

Response: Complex creatures are potentially more revelatory of God's causal activity because they enjoy greater and more varied freedom and responsibility. If divine causation is necessary for all events and things, nothing is absolutely incapable of revealing God's activity. However, more complex creatures afford greater opportunities for testing divine action in the world based, in part, on the nature of human inquiry. What we know best is our own complex experiences, although we still have much to learn. And we make more accurate inferences about complex creatures similar to ourselves than we make about creatures less similar. We are more likely, for instance, to rightly attribute sadness to a dog after watching her listless behavior than we would sadness to a worm.

Additionally, the degree to which atoms, cells, and microorganisms can respond appropriately or inappropriately seems impossible at present to gauge with scientific instruments. I know of nothing beyond metaphysical speculation to say that the smallest entities of existence have the capacity for responses. But this does not mean that God is not active as a necessary cause in the smallest entities of our universe. Nor does it mean that such entities are entirely devoid of all capacities for responsiveness. It only means that our ability to test divine activity at the micro-level is seriously hampered. Our ability to recognize divine activity increases among complex creatures, in part because the diversity of their responses provide a wider range of possible actions to assess as possibly promoting or undermining overall well-being.

Christians have a strong precedent for claiming that more complex organisms are more revelatory of divine love. That precedent is Jesus Christ. That the highest revelation of divine love would take human form suggests that our best scientific measurements for divine love are likely to be most accurate when evaluating complex forms of existence. I know of no strong argument or evidence that God has been incarnated among beetles to the degree of complexity and diversity that God was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. As John put it in the first of his three letters, "In this

way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” (1 Jn. 4:9).

Testing Creaturely Love

Below is an abbreviated explanation of what Essential Kenosis suggests for testing creaturely love. These comments are meant to help researchers wanting to explore love while avoiding methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism. They are brief and will be expanded in work set to be published elsewhere.

1. Robust research on creaturely love includes reference to effective divine causal activity, insofar as the creaturely actions in question are deemed loving. The researcher who operates from the Essential Kenosis research program will be unable to account well for creaturely love without some reference to divine love as a necessary cause. The more complex the organism, the more important reference to divine activity becomes. Research purporting to offer a robust explanation of creaturely love without reference to God runs the risk of adopting methodological naturalism. This essay might be taken as a clarion call to scientists who believe in God to be bolder in their references to divine action, or at least to adopt a less definitive or conclusive tone to love research that omits reference to God. If the researcher believes in God and believes that God is the source of all love, explanations of creaturely love will be incomplete and less robust if God goes unmentioned.

Essential Kenosis also suggests that God’s empowering not only transforms the creature; it also empowers the creature to be an agent of loving transformation for others. Christians who believe that God empowers and inspires love may be eager to accept an Essential Kenosis methodology that not only accepts but requires an explanatory role for divine action.

Of course, a key element in this work is an adequate definition of love. Too often love research is bogged down or largely irrelevant because love has not been defined well enough. Naturally, I recommend my own definition (to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being) as potentially more adequate than others. This definition requires a role for both divine and creaturely causation in any act of creaturely love.

2. Robust research on creaturely love will include reference to the lover’s presumed intent or motives. If love requires intentionality,

robust research on love cannot neglect reference to the agent's motives and intent. An appeal to particular consequences will not suffice. After all, sometimes good emerges despite an agent's intentions to generate ill instead of good. We should not call such unintended good the fruit of love. This means that researchers must either infer intent based upon particular indicators or ask the subject of research themselves to confess their motives. Either of these options will not provide indubitable grounds for measuring intent. But they do allow for significant degrees of probability, and they are necessary for research on love, if acting lovingly involves right intentions and motives.

3. Robust research on creaturely love will include references to the lover's environment, relationships, and/or embodiment. If love involves a sympathetic (or empathetic) response to others (including God), robust research on love will make references to the lover's relations. These relations may be social, societal, or cultural. They may be personal, familial, or romantic. The relations a person enjoys also include the bodily members, genetic structures, and mental capabilities. And these relations will always include a relationship with God, positive or negative, mature or immature, conscious or unconscious. Some of the most interesting research on love explores how these various types of relationships and constraints shape or hinder complex expressions of love.

4. Robust research on creaturely love will include reference to the consequences or outcomes of presumed loving or non-loving acts. Perhaps the most common way to do research on love is to examine the consequences of various acts and habits. This is important for the Essential Kenosis scheme because the scheme defines love in part as promoting overall well-being. To a greater or lesser degree, promoted well-being is measurable in part by the consequences of various events.

Assessing these consequences can take many forms. Researchers might set up experiments designating some events as value-positive (say, the giving of money to the poor). Others may research acts that are value-negative (say, the stealing of money from the poor). Some may do objective, statistic-based research based on the consequences. Some researchers may pursue qualitative analysis through use of testimonials and interviews. A very wide range of possible scientific methods avail themselves.

Conclusion

We need a philosophy of science that accounts for theological claims about God's action in the world. In humility, Christians should make con-

structive claims about who God is and what God does. Wesleyans will likely be favorably disposed to my proposal that love is the divine attribute through which Christians should make sense of God's other attributes and God's interaction with others.

Some readers may want to ponder further my proposal that God's love is never coercive, in the sense that God cannot fail to offer, withdraw, or override the freedom and agency God provides. This proposal is tied to the claim that God's very nature is kenotic self-giving love. God's relentless and steadfast love never fails to empower and inspire creatures. My proposal is really the view that prevenient grace is an essential feature of God. Understood in this light, I hope fellow Wesleyan theologians will see the proposal's merits.

This article also proposes that the form and efficacy of God's love varies and oscillates as our personal and relational God interacts with others. This may be the most novel idea of the essay, but I think readers will find it attractive upon reflection. Wesleyans have often implicitly recognized the importance of measuring divine action, although they rarely have suggested a conceptual scheme for doing so. I propose that the variety and oscillation of the efficacy of God's love allows for the possibility of testing God's action in the world by the degree to which events and individuals express love. My scheme may help both scientists and theologians make sense of claims about God's activity in the world. The conceptual and ethical stakes are high enough that bold proposals like the one I offer are desperately needed.

The logic present in most paradigms relating science and theology leads to major problems. This logic leads to hostility between scientists and theologians and their disciplines. It leads to deep confusion and frustration, and it can lead to severe apathy and hopelessness about making some sense of life.

These negative consequences, at best, fail to inspire and motivate Christians to live holy lives of love. At worst, the usual ways of relating science and theology encourage humans to abandon loving God with their minds. At worst, the usual ways implicitly or explicitly reject a reasonable account of why a life of love and wisdom should be pursued at all. I find this unacceptable.

My humble hope is to have provided a proposal that many will find helpful. I endeavor to encourage us to live lives of love in response to the God. For God makes such love possible. This message seems most clearly revealed in light of the revelation of love as we find it in Jesus Christ and as expressed in the church's Christ-life.

JOHN WESLEY'S CHRISTOLOGY IN RECENT LITERATURE

by

Richard M. Riss

There have been a variety of interpretations of John Wesley's Christology, some claiming that Wesley was well within the boundaries of orthodoxy as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), others saying that he moved in the direction of monophysitism, and yet others indicating that he may actually have come close to advocating a form of docetism.¹ This spectrum of perspectives seems broad enough to be consistent with William J. Abraham's observation that "there are as many Wesleys as there are Wesley scholars."² Nevertheless, it will be assumed here that it should be possible to determine Wesley's own view on this important theological matter.

The following review of some of the relevant literature is in chronological order and will concern itself primarily with interpretations of Wesley's Christology by Robin Scroggs (1960), William Ragsdale Cannon (1974), Charles R. Wilson (1983), Albert C. Outler (1984), John Deschner (1960, 1985, 1988), Kenneth J. Collins (1993, 2007), Randy L. Maddox (1994), Thomas C. Oden (1994), Timothy L. Boyd (2004), and Matthew Hambrick and Michael Lodahl (2007). There will also be an attempt to assess this literature in light of some of Wesley's own writings.

¹According to docetism, Jesus was not a real man, but only appeared to be. He thus only appeared to have a body. See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books), 311, note 128.

²William J. Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40 (spring 2005): 13.

Although Wesley never wrote a systematic theology, in various places he discussed many aspects of Christology, including the atonement, the work of Christ, the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king, the incarnation, the person of Christ, and the nature or natures of Christ. Although there is a considerable body of literature on all of these aspects of Wesley's Christology, the ensuing discussion will be confined primarily to the last of these, Wesley's understanding of the divinity and/or humanity of Jesus.

Much of the work in English on Wesley's Christology seems to have been dependent, either directly or indirectly, on the work of David Lerch, a Swiss scholar who wrote on this topic in 1941.³ With respect to Christology, Lerch's study, which may be translated as *Salvation and Sanctification in John Wesley, with particular consideration of his Notes on the New Testament*, is concerned with Wesley's views of the person of Christ, the two states (humiliation and exaltation), and the three offices of Christ. According to Lerch, the key to Wesley's Christological position lay in the doctrine of shared properties, the *communicatio idiomatum*. John Deschner, a key interpreter of Wesley's Christology, with certain qualifications, agreed with Lerch on this point.⁴ Lerch also made reference to what he believed to be a weakening of Jesus' humanity in Wesley's Christology resulting from his fights against deism and a lack of emphasis upon *Heilsgeschichte*.⁵

John Deschner. The first edition of John Deschner's work, *Wesley's Christology*, was published in 1960, and followed David Lerch's lead in attributing to Wesley an emphasis upon the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity.⁶ Deschner's work was originally written as a doctoral dissertation under the direction of Karl Barth at the University of Basel in 1956. While there may have been some influence, neither Deschner's nor Lerch's work was specifically mentioned in a 1960 article

³David Lerch, *Heil und Heiligung bei John Wesley, dargestellt unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Anmerkungen zum Neuen Testament* (Zürich: Christlichen Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1941).

⁴John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1985), 37.

⁵Deschner, 40, note 10.

⁶John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology* (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), 6, states, "Wesley betrays a decided emphasis on the divine nature and a corresponding underemphasis on the human."

by Robin Scroggs in the *Journal of Bible and Religion*, which stated that, “since the Jesus of John’s Gospel is largely the inspiration for Wesley’s Christology, it is perhaps not surprising that Wesley does not always hold rigorously to the true humanity of Jesus. There are hints that at times Wesley came close to docetism.”⁷ The reasoning that Scroggs provided was that, in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Wesley, in his comments on John 8:59, “accepts the view that Jesus probably concealed himself by becoming invisible and passed through them as if there had been no physical obstacle. This raises some doubt as to whether the flesh of Jesus is very real to Wesley.”⁸ One example provided by Scroggs was Wesley’s explanation of John 11:33, according to which “the affections of Jesus were not properly passions, but voluntary emotions, which were wholly in his own power.”⁹

In June of 1962, Franz Hildebrandt wrote a review of the first edition of Deschner’s book on Wesley’s Christology.¹⁰ There is no specific reference in the review to the extent to which Wesley may have emphasized or de-emphasized the divinity or humanity of Christ, but Hildebrandt did observe of Deschner’s work that there are several points at which the reader is “inevitably and avowedly taken beyond Wesley,” and that he suspects that at certain points Deschner is “reading Wesley through Barthian spectacles.”¹¹

Both the 1985 and 1988 editions of John Deschner’s book *Wesley’s Christology: An Interpretation* reaffirmed his understanding that “it is not especially significant that it is possible to construct a doctrine of the two natures from Wesleyan fragments; it is significant, however, to learn that when his material is made to speak to this point, Wesley betrays a decided emphasis on the divine nature and a corresponding underemphasis on the

⁷Robin Scroggs, “John Wesley as Biblical Scholar,” *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 28 (October 1960), 420.

⁸Scroggs, 420. See also John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 342, where Wesley wrote as follows on John 8:59: “*Then took they up stones—To stone Him as a blasphemer. But Jesus concealed himself—probably by becoming invisible. And so passed on—With the same ease as if none had been there.*”

⁹Scroggs, 420-421, and Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 353.

¹⁰Franz Hildebrandt, “Wesley’s Christology,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 23 (June 1962): 122-124.

¹¹Hildebrandt, 123.

human.”¹² Deschner’s comments are based on Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, his “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (Dublin, July 18, 1749), and sections of his sermons on “the Lord Our Righteousness,” “The End of Christ’s Coming,” and “Spiritual Worship.”¹³ For Deschner, the *Notes* were “by far the most fruitful source for Wesley’s Christology, doubtless because the character of this book is peculiarly suited to illumine Wesley’s presuppositions.”¹⁴ In other words, Deschner felt that there were certain assumptions that Wesley was making, not necessarily explicitly stated by Wesley, that would throw light on his Christology, and that these assumptions were most evident in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*.

Deschner observed that, although Wesley expressed a distrust of abstract Christology, he nevertheless had an elaborated Christology which accompanied and reflected his soteriology.¹⁵ Wesley’s distrust of abstract Christology is evident in the sermon “On the Trinity,” where he wrote, “Again: ‘The Word was made flesh.’ I believe this fact also. There is no mystery in it; but as to the *manner* he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it: It is no more the object of my faith than it is of my understanding. . . . But would it not be absurd of me to deny the fact, because I do not understand the manner?”¹⁶

Deschner acknowledged that in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Wesley’s expressions of his views on the two natures of Christ were within the Chalcedonian framework.¹⁷ Some of the expressions that Wesley used in the *Notes* included “real God, as real man,”¹⁸ “perfect, as God and as man,”¹⁹ “the Son of God, and the Son of Man . . . the one [title] taken from His divine, and the other from His human nature.”²⁰ Deschner also acknowledged that Wesley considered his Christology “to

¹²John Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology: An Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1988), 6.

¹³Deschner (1988), 5.

¹⁴Deschner (1988), 10.

¹⁵Deschner (1988), 14.

¹⁶Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 6:204.

¹⁷Deschner (1988), 15.

¹⁸Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 730, on Philippians 2:6.

¹⁹Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 815, on Hebrews 2:10. Deschner, 15, inadvertently leaves out the second occurrence of the word “as.”

²⁰Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 290-291, on Luke 2:70.

be that of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles*, and therefore of the ecumenical creeds.”²¹ Nevertheless, Deschner noted what he believed to be “the very heavy emphasis on the divinity [of Christ] throughout the Wesleyan writings.”²² On the other hand, Deschner admitted that, in Wesley, “there is a clear teaching about the human nature, and he intends it to fall within Chalcedonian limits,”²³ and that for this reason, “it is too much to say that Wesley’s is a docetic Christology.”²⁴

William Ragsdale Cannon. In a 1974 work, *The Theology of John Wesley*, William Ragsdale Cannon made no reference either to Deschner or to Lerch, but offered his own opinion that “Wesley, in line with the thought of the Council of Chalcedon, is content merely to affirm the two natures in Christ and to say our Lord Jesus Christ [is] ‘the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man.’”²⁵ However, Cannon’s conclusion is based primarily on sermon 141, “On the Holy Spirit,”²⁶ which is now known to be authored, not by John Wesley, but by John Gambold.²⁷ The second part of this sermon, on the person of Christ, states, “what does more obviously present itself in the Saviour of the world, than an union of man with God?—an union attended with all the propriety of behaviour that we are called to, as candidates of the Spirit; such as walking with God in singleness of heart, perfect self-renunciation, and a life of sufferings.”²⁸

Charles R. Wilson. In 1983, Charles R. Wilson provided a fairly extensive discussion of John Wesley’s Christology in which he advocated the idea that Wesley “adhered to the Chalcedonian creed and to the *Thirty-*

²¹ Deschner (1988), 15.

²² Deschner (1988), 17.

²³ Deschner (1988), 28.

²⁴ Deschner (1988), 28.

²⁵ William Ragsdale Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley with Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1974), 206.

²⁶ John Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 7:508-520.

²⁷ See Frank Baker, ed., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 4:547, where Albert C. Outler lists four sermons not by John Wesley, but included in Jackson’s edition.

²⁸ Wesley, *Works*, 7:513-514.

Nine Articles of the Church of England.”²⁹ Wilson supported this view with Wesley’s *Letter to a Roman Catholic* (July 18, 1749), in which Wesley wrote of Jesus, “I believe that he was made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person; being conceived by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost, and born of the blessed Virgin Mary. . . .”³⁰ Wilson also contended that, according to Wesley, salvation is only possible because Christ united in himself both divinity and humanity. In support of this contention, he quoted from John Wesley’s sermon on Justification by Faith, I. 7, in which he made reference to Christ as the second Adam: “In the fullness of time he was made man, another common head of mankind, a second general parent and representative of the whole human race.”³¹

Albert C. Outler. In the first volume of *The Bicentennial edition of the Works of John Wesley*, in his notes to Wesley’s “Sermon on the Mount, I,” Albert C. Outler made reference to “Wesley’s practical mono-phsytism.”³² In this sermon, Wesley wrote:

Let us observe who it is that is here speaking [the sermon on the mount], that we may “take heed how we hear.” It is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all, who, as such, has a right to dispose of all his creatures; the Lord our Governor, whose kingdom is from everlasting, and ruleth over all; the great Lawgiver, who can well enforce all his laws, “being able to save and to destroy,” yea, to punish with everlasting destruction from his presence and from the glory of his power. It is the eternal Wisdom of the Father, who knoweth whereof we are made, and understands our inmost frame: who knows how we stand related to God, to one another, to every creature which God hath made; and consequently, how to adapt every law he prescribes to all the circumstances wherein he hath placed us. It is he who is “loving unto every man, whose mercy is over all his works”: the God of love, who, having emptied himself of his eternal glory, is come forth from his Father to declare his will to the children of men, and then

²⁹Charles R. Wilson, “Christology,” in chapter 9 of Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1983), 1:346.

³⁰Wilson, 1:346, quoting Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 10:81.

³¹Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 5:55.

³²Wesley, *Works* 1:470.

goeth again to the Father; who is sent to God to “open the eyes of the blind,” “to give light to them that sit in darkness.” It is the great Prophet of the Lord, concerning whom God had solemnly declared long ago, “Whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him,” or, as the Apostle expresses it, “Every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.”³³

In a footnote to this passage, which refers to Acts 3:23, Outler wrote, “‘The Apostle’ here is St. Peter. Note the direct correlation between the human Jesus and the Second Person of the Trinity: no *kenosis* here, but more than a hint of Wesley’s practical monophysitism; cf. §9 below.”³⁴ Outler referred to Wesley’s exhortation to observe that the one who was speaking the Sermon on the Mount was no ordinary person. The passage that he cited for comparison is along similar lines:

At the same time with what authority does he teach! Well might they say, “not as the scribes.” Observe the manner (but it cannot be expressed in words), the air with which he speaks! Not as Moses, the servant of God; not as Abraham, his friend; not as any of the prophets; nor as any of the sons of men. It is something more than human; more than can agree to any created being. It speaks the Creator of all—a God, a God appears! Yea, *ó ’ów*, the being of beings, Jehovah, the self-existent, the supreme, the God who is over all, blessed for ever!³⁵

Wesley’s point was that we must pay careful attention to the words of Jesus because he was divine. His strong emphasis on Christ’s divinity in the practical outworking of his theology in these two passages led Outler to conclude that, despite any statements that he may have made affirming Christ’s humanity, in practice, Wesley tended toward monophysitism.

Kenneth J. Collins. In his 1993 work, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley’s Homiletical Theology*, Kenneth J. Collins affirmed that John

³³Wesley, *Works* 1:470.

³⁴Wesley, *Works* 1:470, note f. See also Outler’s comments in Wesley, *Works* 4: 97-98.

³⁵Wesley, *Works*, 1:474.

Wesley held to both the divine nature and the human nature of Christ.³⁶ In his discussion of Wesley's adherence to the divine nature, Collins made extensive use of Wesley's sermon, "Spiritual Worship," with reference to several other sermons. He examined Deschner's comments comparing some of Wesley's statements to nestorianism, concluding that Deschner underestimated Wesley's conception of the humanity of Christ.

Collins provides two primary reasons for this conclusion, the first being that "Wesley, unlike Nestorius, affirmed, taught, and expounded the communication of properties . . . between the divine and human natures."³⁷ In his *Explanatory Notes* on John 3:13, Wesley wrote, "He is omnipresent; else He could not be in heaven and on earth at once. This is a plain instance of what is usually termed the communication of properties between the divine and human nature: whereby what is proper to the divine nature is spoken concerning the human; and what is proper to the human is, as here, spoken of the divine."³⁸ Collins wrote that "the de-emphasis of the humanity of Christ in the Christology of Nestorius grew out of his separation of the two natures and out of his denial of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Wesley, on the other hand, neither devalued the human nature of Christ nor did he reject 'a communication of properties.'"³⁹

The second reason that Collins gives for his belief that Deschner underestimated Wesley's view of the humanity of Christ was that, while Wesley did indeed underscore the divinity of Christ, this should not be taken as a necessary indication that Wesley did not fully appreciate Christ's humanity. All of this, according to Collins, should be "viewed against the backdrop of Wesley's prior commitment to the language of the Anglican second article which affirms 'one Christ, very god and very man.'"⁴⁰ He also points out that both Wesley's affirmations that Jesus was born of a virgin and his statements regarding the incarnation as a condescension would argue in favor of his understanding that Jesus had a human nature.

In the third chapter of a recent book, *The Theology of John Wesley*, Collins makes some additional observations with respect to Wesley's

³⁶Kenneth J. Collins, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology* (Wilmore, Ky.: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993), 35-43.

³⁷Collins (1993), 41.

³⁸Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 312, on John 3: 13.

³⁹Collins (1993), 41.

⁴⁰Collins (1993), 41-42.

Christology.⁴¹ His comments on Wesley's view of the human nature of Christ begin with some comments reminiscent of Oden's discussion of the "descent motif." Collins writes, "For Wesley, the Word becoming flesh—this descending movement from the form of God to a more humble human form (that of a servant)—bespeaks of the divine love in a remarkable way."⁴² This *kenosis*, bridging the gap between God and humanity, "demonstrates a basic tension in Christian theology, as Wesley understood it, between transcendence on the one hand and immanence on the other."⁴³ The incarnation, for Wesley as understood by Collins, brings an accompanying illumination; yet, at the same time, God does not simply remain distant, but comes into our very midst.

Collins says that Wesley believed in the virgin birth of Christ, but "nevertheless apparently balked at too close an identification with Mary and 'her substance.'"⁴⁴ Here, following Deschner⁴⁵ and Maddox,⁴⁶ Collins points out that, regarding Mary, Wesley omitted the phrase "of her substance" in the second of his *Twenty-Five Articles* while retaining this type of language with respect to the Father, indicating that Wesley "was unwilling to affirm, for whatever reason, that Christ was of one substance with Mary."⁴⁷ Collins points out, however, that Wesley did maintain in the same article of faith that "two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God, and very man."⁴⁸

⁴¹Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2007).

⁴²Collins (2007), 92. In support of this statement, Collins made use of Wesley, *Works*, 2:428: "What manner of love is this wherewith the only-begotten Son of God hath loved us! So as to 'empty himself,' as far as possible, of his eternal Godhead! As to divest himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world began! As to 'take upon him the form of a servant, being found in fashion as a man!' And then to humble himself still farther, 'being obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross!'"

⁴³Collins (2007), 93.

⁴⁴Collins (2007), 94.

⁴⁵Deschner (1988), 25.

⁴⁶Maddox, 116.

⁴⁷Collins (2007), 94.

⁴⁸Collins (2007), 94. Wesley's omission of the words "of her substance" in his abridgement of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles* may have been for the purposing of omitting a redundancy and/or making the article easier to understand for his contemporary readers in the United States, many of whom lacked formal education.

Attention is also called by Collins to Wesley's omission, in his edition of the epistles of Ignatius for his *Christian Library*, of passages referring to Jesus as born "of the race of David according to the flesh,"⁴⁹ and to Wesley's reticence to use such phrases as "Dear Lord" or "Dear Saviour," which Wesley judged would express too great a degree of familiarity. He pointed out, though, that the latter phenomenon was due to Wesley's understanding that the use of common, sentimental language of this kind would constitute "knowing Christ after the flesh."⁵⁰ In his sermon of that title, Wesley wrote, "I have indeed particularly endeavoured, in all the hymns which are addressed to our blessed Lord, to avoid every *fondling* expression, and to speak as to the most High God, to him that is 'in glory equal with the Father, in majesty co-eternal.'"⁵¹

Collins says that, "despite some of the material that appears to downplay the human nature of Christ in Wesley's writings, and thereby moves in a direction of monophysitism, we nevertheless must conclude that Wesley's Christology is in line with orthodoxy, with the Council of Chalcedon in particular . . . even if there was admittedly some hesitancy on Wesley's part in the genuine affirmation of the human nature of Christ."⁵² It was out of respect and honor, according to Collins, that Wesley tended to emphasize the divinity of Christ, though Wesley truly considered him to be both divine and human.⁵³

Randy L. Maddox. The fourth chapter of the careful and comprehensive work *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* by Randy L. Maddox is devoted to Wesley's understanding of Christ. The

⁴⁹Collins (2007), 94, citing Maddox, 116.

⁵⁰Collins (2007), 95. In his sermon, "On Knowing Christ after the Flesh," *Works* 4:104, Wesley wrote, "And let it not be thought that 'the knowing Christ after the flesh,' the considering him as a mere man . . . is a thing of a purely indifferent nature." Some of Albert Outler's comments on this sermon in *Works* 4:97-98, were that "Wesley's targeted heresy here is psilanthropism, 'thinking or speaking or acting with regard to our blessed Lord *as a mere man*,' as though any professing Christian in the eighteenth century had ever thought or spoken of Jesus Christ 'as a *mere man*' and nothing more. It would be interesting to speculate on Wesley's response to a possible turning of the tables to a charge against him that in his zeal against psilanthropism he had fallen into its opposite—*viz.*, monophysitism."

⁵¹Wesley, *Works* 4:101-102.

⁵²Collins (2007), 95.

⁵³Collins (2007), 95.

concluding pages of this chapter begin with the observation, supported by Wesley's "Letter To a Roman Catholic," that Wesley "would have understood himself as simply affirming the traditional position of the historic Church."⁵⁴ Maddox then observes that Western theologians have been concerned to maintain the distinctness of Christ's two natures, while Eastern theologians, within the limits of the classic Christological creeds, have emphasized participation in God and God's deification of human nature. To Western observers "this has often appeared to reach the point of monophysitism, with the divine nature swallowing up the human nature. Naturally the East denies this, countering that the West places inadequate stress on the co-inherence of the two."⁵⁵ Maddox also points out that one of Wesley's major concerns was to combat Arianism and Socinianism, which Wesley believed denied Christ's full divinity.

Maddox refers to Wesley's "discomfort, noticeable throughout his *NT Notes*, with those biblical accounts that highlight Jesus' humanity."⁵⁶ Following Scroggs, Maddox cites Wesley's comments on John 11:33 and 35 as examples. He further observes that, in commenting upon John 11:41 where Jesus lifted up his eyes to pray, Wesley "added that it is not that Jesus needed assistance from the Father, he was merely thanking the Father for arranging this situation so that he could demonstrate his power."⁵⁷ Maddox also observes that, in his edition of the Ignatian Epistles for the *Christian Library*, Wesley consistently omitted passages describing Jesus as "born of the race of David according to the flesh,"⁵⁸ and that in his edition of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Wesley deleted the phrase according to which the human nature of Christ was "of the sub-

⁵⁴Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1994), 114.

⁵⁵Maddox, 114-115.

⁵⁶Maddox, 115.

⁵⁷Maddox, 116. In his *Explanatory Notes*, 354, on John 11:41, Wesley wrote, "*Jesus lifted up his eyes*—Not as if He applied to His Father for assistance: there is not the least show of this. He wrought the miracle with an air of absolute sovereignty, as the Lord of life and death. But it was as if He had said, I thank Thee that, by the disposals of Thy providence, Thou hast granted My desire in this remarkable opportunity of exerting My power and showing forth Thy praise."

⁵⁸Maddox, 116, citing Ted Allen Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1991), 81.

stance of Mary.”⁵⁹ Maddox judges that Wesley’s comments on Ephesians 1:3 indicate that, while he did not deny that Christ had a human nature, Wesley considered the human nature of Christ to have been a direct creation of God.⁶⁰

In attempting to understand why Wesley might have been reticent to emphasize Christ’s humanity, Maddox mentions Deschner’s suggestion that “it is a reflection of his concern that a stress on Christ’s active obedience undercuts our own obedience,”⁶¹ stating that while this was possible, Wesley’s reticence to emphasize Christ’s humanity may have been “more an expression of his distaste for being overly ‘familiar’ with the Great Lord of Heaven,”⁶² a concern that Wesley expressed at length in his sermon “On Knowing Christ After the Flesh.”⁶³ Maddox disagrees with Deschner’s hypothesis that Wesley betrayed a negative attitude regarding human nature. On the contrary, Wesley emphasized humanity as created in God’s Image and Likeness, and as having a destiny of regaining both in their fullness.

Maddox argues that Wesley’s emphasis on the divine nature resembles a characteristic trait of Eastern Orthodox Christology. Was Wesley, like the Eastern Orthodox, “drawn to Christ’s divinized human nature as an expression of what all Christians can become through restored participation in God?”⁶⁴ His answer is that this was not the central focus of

⁵⁹Maddox, 116. Regarding this omission, see also Henry Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Easton & Mains, 1908), 16, which states regarding the article in question (article II) that “Wesley omitted but one brief phrase, the words ‘of her substance.’ The phrase is borrowed from the controversies of the first four Ecumenical Councils as to the relations of the two natures in the one divine person of Christ. It may be that Wesley deemed them superfluous, as the nature of Christ is unequivocally stated without them.”

⁶⁰Maddox, 116. See Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 702, on Ephesians 1:3, according to which, “He is His *Father*, primarily with respect to His divine nature, as His only-begotten Son; and secondarily, with respect to His human nature, as that is personally united to the divine.”

⁶¹Maddox, 116, citing Deschner (1960), 167, according to which, “Wesley’s dislike of the antinomian understanding of imputed holiness has led him to play down Christ’s active human obedience. This agrees with, if it is not actually the root of, Wesley’s general reserve about Christ’s human nature.”

⁶²Maddox, 116.

⁶³Wesley, *Works* 4:98-106.

⁶⁴Maddox, 117.

Wesley's Christological agenda. Rather, "he was interested in Christ primarily as the locus of God's activity in our midst, rather than as an example of what the Divine power can effect in human nature."⁶⁵ For Maddox, Wesley's emphasis on Christ's deity was "an expression of his conviction that God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation; it is God who died in Christ to make possible our pardon," and who in Christ the Prophet awakens us to our need of grace and drives us to Christ the Priest.⁶⁶ "It is God who initiates our restored relationship in Christ the Priest; and it is God who guides us as Christ the King, leading us into all holiness and happiness."⁶⁷

Thomas C. Oden. Thomas C. Oden also wrote a chapter on Christology in his work *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, beginning with the observation that "Wesley at no point hinted that there is a needed purification, progression or remodeling of ancient ecumenical Christological definitions."⁶⁸ Wesley, according to Oden, "effortlessly employed the language of Chalcedon" in his descriptions of Christ's humanity and divinity,⁶⁹ and was distrustful of novelty, not only in theology generally, but most of all with respect to Christology.⁷⁰ He quotes statements on Wesley's view of the humanity of Christ, including his sermon "Justification by Faith" in which Wesley states (i. 7) that "in the fullness of time he was made Man, another common Head of mankind, a second general Parent and Representative of the whole human race."⁷¹ Another statement on Christ's humanity may be found in Wesley's notes on John 1:14, upon which Oden comments that, according to Wesley, "in becoming 'flesh,' God becomes fully human, not simply body but all that pertains to humanity."⁷²

⁶⁵Maddox, 117.

⁶⁶Maddox, 117-118.

⁶⁷Maddox, 118.

⁶⁸Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 177.

⁶⁹Oden, 177.

⁷⁰Oden, 177, note 1.

⁷¹Oden, 178, quoting Wesley, *Works*, 1:185-186.

⁷²Oden, 178. See Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 304, on John 3:16.

Oden notes that Wesley “anticipated the nineteenth-century historian’s interest in the biography of Jesus,”⁷³ in that he commented on Christ’s temperament, interpersonal relationships, psychological dynamics, and courage, without displacing the theandric premise that he was God/man. “In all this there is no hint of a docetic (flesh-repudiating) tendency in Christology. Above all, his humanity is seen in his death and burial.”⁷⁴ Oden adds that Wesley “explicitly affirmed the classic principle of *perichoresis*,” the communication of properties between the divine and human nature, which he pointed out was understood by David Lerch to be the Christological key to Wesley, a point also made by Franz Hildebrandt.⁷⁵ In an ensuing discussion of the Christology of Wesley’s *Articles of Religion*, Oden notes that Article 2 on the Son of God was a clear statement in agreement with the ancient creeds. “In one person we have not half God or half man, not an arian-like almost god, not part God, but, according to the teaching of the ancient Christological tradition, Godhead and humanity joined together in one hypostatic union of two natures in one person never to be viewed as separable.”⁷⁶

Timothy L. Boyd. In 2004, Timothy L. Boyd wrote *John Wesley’s Christology*,⁷⁷ the fourth chapter of which discusses the incarnation and the atonement. Boyd observes that “Wesley was not interested in circumventing the classic and balanced formulas of Chalcedon.”⁷⁸ Although he “had a preoccupied tendency to emphasize the divinity of Jesus,” he did not in any manner “intend to deny, eliminate, or reduce the reality of Jesus’ humanity.”⁷⁹ According to Boyd, Wesley’s comments on Matthew

⁷³Oden, 179.

⁷⁴Oden, 179.

⁷⁵Oden, 180. On David Lerch, see above. Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), 40, did not specifically indicate that the *communicatio idiomatum* was central to Wesley’s Christology, but wrote of one of the early Methodist hymns that Christ “is pictured, in exact correspondence to the Lutheran doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, as ‘our flesh and blood’ at God’s right hand.”

⁷⁶Oden, 181.

⁷⁷Timothy L. Boyd, *John Wesley’s Christology: A Study in its Practical Implications for Human Salvation, Transformation, and its Influences for Preaching Christ* (Salem, Oh.: Allegheny Publishing, 2004).

⁷⁸Boyd, 100.

⁷⁹Boyd, 100.

17:2 provide evidence that Wesley believed in “a relationship of interpenetration between the natures of Christ.”⁸⁰ Wesley wrote:

The indwelling Deity darted out its rays through the veil of His flesh, and that with such transcendent splendour that He no longer bore the form of a servant. His face shone with divine majesty, like the sun in its strength; and all His body was so irradiated by it that His clothes could not conceal its glory, but became white and glittering as the very light with which He covered Himself as with a garment.⁸¹

According to Boyd, although it was typical of Wesley to prefer emphasis on Christ’s divinity, the language of humanness is also present. Wesley seemed to imply that “the properties of Jesus’ being could co-indwell in such a manner as to ‘change from one of these forms into the other.’”⁸² The purpose of Christ’s humanity for Wesley was “to effect a means of redeeming man.”⁸³

For Wesley, as Boyd understands him, the purpose of the incarnation was the reversal of the fall of humanity; God became man in order that humanity might partake of the divine nature and likeness.⁸⁴ For example, in his *Explanatory Notes* on John 1:14, Wesley wrote:

And in order to raise us to this dignity and happiness, the eternal Word, by a most amazing condescension, was made flesh, united Himself to our miserable nature, with all its innocent infirmities. And He did not make us a transient visit, but tabernacled among us on earth, displaying His glory in a more eminent manner than ever of old in the tabernacle of Moses.⁸⁵

Wesley thus “understood Christ’s coming in the flesh to redeem mankind as an act of condescension.”⁸⁶ According to Boyd, when Wesley affirmed the human nature of Christ, the witness to the divine nature was usually not far from his mind. His habit was “to press the divinity of the glorious

⁸⁰Boyd, 101-102.

⁸¹Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 84, on Matthew 17:2.

⁸²Boyd, 102, quoting Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 167, on Mark 9:2.

⁸³Boyd, 102.

⁸⁴Boyd, 103.

⁸⁵Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 304, on John 1:14.

⁸⁶Boyd, 103.

Christ.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, there were clear statements by Wesley affirming Jesus’ full humanity.⁸⁸ Such affirmations may be found, for example, in his *Explanatory Notes* on Luke 2:52, Luke 22:43, John 5:27, 2 Corinthians 13:4, and 1 John 1:2.

Crucial for Boyd’s understanding is the role that Christ’s humanity served in redemption. In explaining this, Wesley “affirmed the classic Christological witness to the suffering and servanthood of Christ.”⁸⁹ The role that Christ served was “in the form of a servant, the fashion of a man.”⁹⁰ He “takes human nature upon him . . . [because] it was highly fit and proper, yea, necessary, in order to his design of redeeming them. *To be made all things*—That essentially pertain to human nature, and in all suffering and temptations.”⁹¹

According to Boyd, Christ’s coming as a servant, renouncing His glory and humbling Himself, was for Wesley “a radical expression of God to display the lengths He assumes to redeem and save humans.”⁹² Wesley, therefore, affirmed the *kenosis* or emptying of Christ’s glory, insisting that “He always had it, till he emptied himself of it in the days of his flesh.”⁹³ Wesley reiterated this understanding in his *Explanatory Notes* on Philipians 2:7, 8.

Boyd indicates that “Wesley did not speculate about the manner of Christ’s incarnation. Instead, he affirmed the fact of the incarnation as attested in Scripture: Jesus being born of a virgin and possessing a full human nature.”⁹⁴ He agrees with John Renshaw that “whereas the Wesleys always viewed the incarnation as preparatory to Christ’s sacrificial self-offering on the cross, they nonetheless regarded the former event as an essential or integral part of the work of atonement wrought by Christ.”⁹⁵ Boyd concludes this section of his work with this: “Wesley also

⁸⁷Boyd, 104.

⁸⁸Boyd, 104.

⁸⁹Boyd, 104.

⁹⁰Boyd, 104, quoting Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 778, on 1 Timothy 3:16.

⁹¹Boyd, 104, quoting Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 816, on Hebrews 2:16 and Hebrews 2:17.

⁹²Boyd, 104.

⁹³Boyd, 105, quoting Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 374, on John 17:5.

⁹⁴Boyd, 105.

⁹⁵Boyd, 105-106, quoting John R. Renshaw, “The Atonement in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1965), 225.

affirmed the classic Christian witness to Jesus' full humanity as being a person of thandric nature, meaning existing in being with both natures of God and man simultaneously."⁹⁶

Matthew Hambrick and Michael Lodahl. In 2008, Matthew Hambrick and Michael Lodahl wrote an article on John Wesley's view of Jesus in the epistle to the Hebrews, responding to "the problematic defense of Wesley's Christology offered by Randy Maddox."⁹⁷ The authors believe that Wesley's Christology is "insufficiently attentive to the biblical and traditional witness to Jesus' true humanity."⁹⁸ One concern is that "Wesley's questionable Christology disallows appreciation for the power of Hebrews' message regarding the sufferings, struggles, and obedience of Jesus as the paradigm for Christian discipleship and growth in holiness."⁹⁹

Following Deschner,¹⁰⁰ Hambrick and Lodahl make reference to the comments that Wesley made on Mark 6:6, that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief: "As man. As He was God, nothing was strange to Him."¹⁰¹ The authors also follow Descher¹⁰² in observing that Wesley wrote as follows in his comments on Mark 13:32, "*Neither the Son*—Not as man: as man He was no more omniscient than omnipresent; but as God he knows all circumstances of it."¹⁰³ According to Hambrick and Lodahl, Wesley thereby "undercut the human nature of Jesus immediately after acknowledging it ever so perfunctorily. He thereby compromised, and so effectively dismissed, the human limitations of the Nazarene."¹⁰⁴ These authors quote Deschner's comment to the effect that "even more curious" was "Wesley's repeated explanation for Jesus' escape from angry crowds: He simply becomes invisible (Jn. 8:59, Lk. 4:30)!"¹⁰⁵ They conclude that

⁹⁶Boyd, 106.

⁹⁷Matthew Hambrick and Michael Lodahl, "Responsible Grace in Christology? John Wesley's Rendering of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43 (spring 2008), 87.

⁹⁸Hambrick and Lodahl, 87.

⁹⁹Hambrick and Lodahl, 91.

¹⁰⁰Deschner (1988), 31.

¹⁰¹Hambrick and Lodahl, 91-92, citing Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 157, on Mark 6:6.

¹⁰²Deschner (1988), 31.

¹⁰³Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 185, on Mark 13:32.

¹⁰⁴Hambrick and Lodahl, 92.

¹⁰⁵Hambrick and Lodahl, 92, quoting Deschner (1988), 25.

it is “problematic that Wesley even countenanced such disappearing acts by Jesus ‘during the days of his flesh.’”¹⁰⁶ They write:

The Logos or divine nature, in this (heretical) case, occupies and manipulates the human body (*a la* “the ghost in the machine”), relegating Jesus’ human consciousness to irrelevance if not outright non-existence. If Wesley were willing to imagine the possibility that the indwelling divine nature could even make Jesus’ body disappear on demand, his Apollinarianism becomes more extreme. We wonder if it really is “too much to say that Wesley’s is a docetic Christology.” If it is, it certainly is not *way* too much.¹⁰⁷

These authors then examine Wesley’s abridgement of Anglicanism’s *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* to the *Twenty-Five Articles* for the Methodists, and his elimination of the phrase “of her substance” from Article II, observing:

Randy Maddox daringly suggests that, while Wesley “did not deny that Christ had a human nature,” he “apparently considered it a direct creation of God.” That would seem to be the implication of Wesley’s subtle sidestepping, by silence, of the church’s traditional affirmation that Christ received the very “substance” of his mother Mariam. Given an adequate appreciation for the solidarity of the human race, even to leave the door ajar to the notion of a uniquely created human nature in the person of Jesus is to remove him thoroughly from participation in our common humanity. It is to deny the incarnation itself.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Hambrick and Lodahl, 92, note 11. The authors did not mention that, regarding the disappearance of Philip in Acts 8:39, Wesley wrote in his *Explanatory Notes*, 427, “*The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*—Carried him away with a miraculous swiftness, without any action or labour of his own. This had befallen several of the prophets.”

¹⁰⁷Hambrick and Lodahl, 92-93. Note, however, that in his *Explanatory Notes* on Matthew 27:50, Wesley stated that He could have “retired from the body,” not that He could have “retired the body,” as if the body were a mere appendage.

¹⁰⁸Hambrick and Lodahl, 93. On the other hand, Wesley seemed to imply that it was because of Christ’s participation in our common humanity as the second Adam that redemption was made possible. In his sermon on Justification by Faith, I, 7, *Works* (Jackson), 5:55, Wesley referred to Christ as the second Adam as follows: “In the fullness of time he was made man, another common head of mankind, a second general parent and representative of the whole human race.”

In a footnote, Hambrick and Lodahl add that, “while Wesley’s deletion of the phrase ‘of her substance’ raises serious questions, it is not entirely clear that Wesley therefore necessarily believed Jesus’ human nature to be ‘a direct creation of God,’ as Maddox suggests.”¹⁰⁹ The authors suggested that Wesley’s comments on Ephesians 1:3, which Maddox provided as evidence for this possibility, might rather be “construed as claiming . . . that, by virtue of the union of the Logos’ divine nature with human nature, the human being Jesus is properly denoted the Son of God.”¹¹⁰

These authors consider Wesley’s editing of his Article III to provide further evidence of “Wesley’s nervousness, if one may call it that, about Christ’s human nature in general.”¹¹¹ In this case, Wesley omitted the phrase “with flesh, bones” from the article which stated that Christ “took again His body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature.”¹¹² They note that, while Maddox explained Wesley’s emphasis on Christ’s divinity by explaining it in terms of “the sovereignty of mercy displayed,” this interpretation would need to be reconciled with Wesley’s understanding that “divine grace . . . never replaces or annuls human response, but in fact evokes and empowers such response. God initiates, of course; but God does not pre-empt human agency and responsibility.”¹¹³ According to Hambrick and Lodahl, “Wesley’s Christology tended to conflict with his soteriology, which did indeed take seriously the element of real human responsibility. Wesley does not appear to have allowed the dimension of human response its full and proper place in Jesus.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹Hambrick and Lodahl, 93, note 15.

¹¹⁰Hambrick and Lodahl, 93, note 15. In his *Explanatory Notes*, 702, on Ephesians 1:3, Wesley wrote, “He is the *God of our Lord Jesus Christ*, as man and Mediator; He is His *Father*, primarily, with respect to His divine nature, as His only-begotten Son; and secondarily, with respect to his human nature, as that is personally united to the divine.”

¹¹¹Hambrick and Lodahl, 94.

¹¹²Henry Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1908), 18.

¹¹³Hambrick and Lodahl, 95.

¹¹⁴Hambrick and Lodahl, 95. However, see Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 822-823 on Hebrews 5:8, where Wesley wrote of Christ, “He *learned obedience*, when he began to suffer; when he applied himself to drink that cup; obedience in suffering and dying.”

According to Hambrick and Lodahl, Wesley “downplayed or even avoided Hebrews’ strongest affirmations of Jesus’ humanity.”¹¹⁵ They wrote that this is evident in Wesley’s translation of and commentary on Hebrews 2:10, “For it became [God], for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the captain of their salvation by sufferings.”¹¹⁶ These authors point out that Wesley had never addressed the proposition that God perfected Jesus through suffering, and that his commentary on Hebrews 2:10 was “untypically belabored.” They conclude that there was, for Wesley, “little (if any) pedagogical value in suffering for Jesus, and relatively little for Jesus’ followers as well—which is the inverse of Hebrews’ argument.”¹¹⁷ They say:

Where Hebrews lifts Jesus as a model of patient and enduring suffering (Heb. 12:1-4), whose example is to inspire his disciples to like faithfulness, for Wesley the category of “suffering” was relevant only in terms of Jesus’ “atoning sufferings” (narrowly conceived) for us, and the only “perfection” Jesus undergoes is “the bringing Him to a full and glorious end of all His troubles.”¹¹⁸

In a discussion of Hebrews 4:15, these authors state that Wesley’s translation of the phrase “in all points tempted like we are” received no comment in his *Explanatory Notes*.¹¹⁹ This, they judge, suggests that Wesley preferred to avoid acknowledgements of Jesus’ humanity and his struggles with temptation, leading to “a reticence, historically, for Wesley’s followers to reflect often or deeply on the pedagogical possibilities of suffering, especially suffering as a result of faithful obedience to God in the midst of resistance and persecution.”¹²⁰ In this context, Hambrick

¹¹⁵Hambrick and Lodahl, 96.

¹¹⁶Hambrick and Lodahl, 96, quoting Wesley’s translation of Hebrews 2:10 in his *Explanatory Notes*, 815.

¹¹⁷Hambrick and Lodahl, 97. On the other hand, Wesley, in his *Explanatory Notes*, 847, on Hebrews 12:3, wrote: “*Consider*—Draw the comparison and think. The Lord bore all this; and shall His servants bear nothing? *Him that endured such contradiction from sinners*—Such enmity and opposition of every kind. *Lest ye be weary*—dull and languid, *and so actually faint* in your course.

¹¹⁸Hambrick and Lodahl, 97.

¹¹⁹Hambrick and Lodahl, 97.

¹²⁰Hambrick and Lodahl, 103. On the other hand, a major thesis of D. Dunn Wilson, in *Many Waters Cannot Quench* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), is that early Methodism was able to endure persecutions because of Wesley’s understanding of the redemptive value of suffering, all of which is under the direct control of God, who uses suffering for character development.

and Lodahl do not specifically address Wesley's comments on Matthew 16:24 or Acts 6:1. Regarding Acts 6:1, Wesley wrote that persecution is "a means both of purifying and strengthening those whose heart is still right with God."¹²¹

Evaluating Multiple Perspectives

The wide variety of perspectives that have been articulated recently regarding Wesley's Christology result from a number of possible factors. One such factor is that Wesley may not always have been internally consistent in his theological thought over the course of a ministry that spanned a good portion of the eighteenth century. Also, certain tensions in Wesley's theology often become evident when attempts are made to categorize him. Another possibility is that interpreters of Wesley often single out specific considerations of Wesley's without balancing them with the entire corpus of his writings.

In any case, it would be difficult to maintain that Wesley's Christology was simultaneously Chalcedonian, nearly Docetic, nearly Monophysite, and/or nearly Nestorian, since these are usually considered to be mutually exclusive categories. Did Wesley understand Christ only to have appeared to be a real man, as was the case for Docetism? Alternatively, did he believe that Christ's humanity was united with his divinity in such a way that his humanity was not the same as ours, as would be the case for Monophysitism? Or did Wesley believe that Christ shared our humanity without change? Did he understand Christ's divine nature to be separate or divided from his human nature, as the Nestorians did, or did he consider his humanity to be united with his divinity without division and without separation? In answering these questions, it is necessary to consider the entire corpus of Wesley's writings; it will not do simply to isolate certain statements made by Wesley and consider them to be definitive for an understanding of his theology.

Any evaluation of Wesley's Christology should take into full account that he repeatedly asserted that he believed in both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. If his numerous statements to this effect are to be regarded as inconsistent with his practical theology, then one should seek to understand why he was giving lip service to a fully Chalcedonian Christology without adhering to it in practice, and try to ascertain if it

¹²¹Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 414, on Acts 6:1.

could have been possible for him to have been totally unaware of such an inconsistency. One should also seek to understand how such a discrepancy, if it existed, could have escaped the notice of his critics and the enemies of early Methodism.

John Wesley's Christology should be re-evaluated in light of his own statements regarding the humanity of Christ, the context of his comments emphasizing Christ's divinity, his cultural context, the Christology of Charles Wesley's hymns, his own adherence to the theology of the Anglican Church, and his soteriology.

THE EPISTEMIC PRIORITY OF CHRIST: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHRISTOLOGY

by

Rustin E. Brian

Although Roman Catholic theology has always been Christological because of its being Christian, the extent to which this classification can claim centrality in Catholic faith and practice is up for debate. Some of the best sources of Christology can be found in the classic affirmations of faith, still affirmed and maintained by Roman Catholics. Some would add that they have been best preserved there. Yet, many Christians see in Roman Catholicism a system of faith based, not on Christ alone, but on Christ and something else, or perhaps just something else entirely. These other points of emphases include but are not limited to the Virgin Mary, humanity itself (in terms of positions such as Natural Theology and Pure Nature, *et al.*), and the church. Whatever the historic case, it is my belief that in the later period of the twentieth century and continuing into the early twenty-first there is an increasing trend in Roman Catholic Theology toward a more heavily Christocentric theology.

Many theologians within the Catholic tradition have placed a renewed emphasis on the centrality of Christ for Roman Catholic theology. Much of this renewed emphasis can be traced back to the influence of Karl Barth through his various Roman Catholic colleagues and students. Two powerful contemporary examples of this Christological renewal are Thomas G. Guarino's *Foundations of Systematic Theology* and Robert Barron's *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholi-*

cism. I will examine each theologian's attempt at a Christocentric Roman Catholic Theology.

The latter does so in terms of a post-liberal influence on narrative and virtue, arguing that the epistemic priority of Christ is the paramount starting point for any Christian theology. The former, though in dialogue with many of the same theologians and philosophers, takes a more "traditional" Roman Catholic approach to theology, that of *prima philosophia*, and attempts to argue for what he would call a more balanced starting point for Christian theology. Comparing and contrasting the work of these two contemporary Roman Catholic thinkers, I will attempt to show the strengths of each and ultimately why Protestants need to pay attention to these and others within recent Roman Catholic theology. I think these works are wonderful contributions to contemporary theology, and I will show the ecumenical and theological challenges and benefits of a thorough engagement with them.

Karl Barth and Roman Catholicism

An older friend of mine once had the opportunity to translate for Hans Küng, who was giving a lecture. Afterward, Küng told him the story of meeting Pope Paul VI at the second Vatican Council. The story goes that the Pope asked Küng about his studies, having heard that he was studying under Karl Barth. The Pope said to Küng that, in his opinion, Barth was the greatest example of true Reformed theology since Calvin, perhaps more so than even the great Genevan reformer himself. Upon relaying this statement to professor Barth, Küng says that Barth replied, "Maybe there really is something to the whole infallibility business after all!"

Karl Barth was concerned that theology have no other starting point, no prolegomena, than Jesus Christ. He usually dealt with this subject matter when discussing the issue of the human possibility of the knowledge of God. Under this category, he dealt with the engagement of philosophy and theology, most notably in terms of Natural Theology and the *Analogia Entis*. Barth was ever concerned with the question: "Is it possible for humans to know God, existentially and/or salvifically, apart from Jesus Christ?" Barth's answer, predictably, was that "apart from and without Jesus Christ we can say nothing at all about God and man and their relationship one with another."¹ So, for Barth, true human knowledge, espe-

¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1* (NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 45.

cially of God, cannot be founded upon a prior revelation of God in creation or the lingering effects of creation in the human being or the natural world. The latter position, that of natural theology, is critiqued extensively by Barth throughout his life and written works. The former position, that of analogy, or more aptly, the *analogia entis*, is likewise the object of continual chastisement and scorn.

Although Barth's arguments concerning both of these positions are quite commonly caricatured, according to which Barth is often painted as an angry, dogmatic tyrant, bereft of even basic sensitivity and academic candor, a closer reading reveals his theology to be much more diverse and complicated than one might suspect. The point, however, is that Barth would not allow any foundation for Christian thought and practice save Jesus Christ alone. Anyone, therefore, who would propose a starting point other than Christ was guilty of derailing the program prior to even beginning. It is in Christ that all knowledge and truth is revealed, both about God and humanity. For Barth, any coherent system of knowledge must begin there as well.

Barth believed that Roman Catholic theology was often guilty of this faulty starting point. What comes to mind is his infamous rejection of "the *analogia entis* as the invention of Antichrist. . . ." ² Yet, what many do not take into account is Barth's subtle affirmation of Roman Catholicism found in this very critique. Barth says that the *analogia entis* is the doctrine, the only doctrine, which makes it "impossible ever to become a Roman Catholic, *all other reasons for not doing so being to my mind short-sighted and trivial.*" ³ Furthermore, this critique comes after a very strong critique of Protestant liberal theology which does not receive a similarly cloaked affirmation. Continuing down the path of Protestant Liberalism, according to Barth, would surely result in the "plain destruction of Protestant theology and the Protestant Church." Moreover, from Barth's further comments, his proposed way forward was apparently heralded by some as a return to scholasticism; he is even accused of being a "crypto-Catholic."

Seen in this light, I would classify Barth's mature theology as the work of a Reformed catholic. Holy Scripture, as it attests to the life, death

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1* (NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), xiii.

³Ibid. Italics mine.

and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is always the central starting point for Barth's theology. While Barth does not begin with a general theory of hermeneutics, political ideology, or even the teachings of the magisterium, his emphasis on Scripture places him in the company of the great theologians of the church, most of whom stand in the Catholic tradition. Indeed, as one who follows after, albeit in a very critical way, John Calvin, Karl Barth claims the scholastic, medieval, and patristic resources of Christian theology, just as any Roman Catholic theologian. The fact that Barth's theology is not shaped exclusively or even primarily by the Protestant tradition is one of his great strengths. Some have even described Barth's theology as the greatest example of Reformed theology since John Calvin. My point is that Karl Barth had much sympathy for and reflected many similarities to Roman Catholic theology.

His various incidents of extreme criticism, such as the infamous passage from the preface to CD I.1, highlight not his hatred for Roman Catholicism, but rather his intrigue and his dialogue. In fact, as Barth grew older, he acknowledged that he was astonished at his impact upon and debate with Roman Catholics. He saw in these theologians worthy counterpoints and close friends.⁴ Barth's engagement with the Roman Catholic Church was not one-sided. Through personal engagement, engagement with his works, and mediated among his close friends and students, Barth probably had more impact upon the Roman Catholic Church than any other Protestant theologian since the time of the Reformation.

This impact is most effectively seen in his influence upon and friendship with Roman Catholic theologians such as Erich Przywara, Gottlieb Söhngen, Hans Küng, and the various *Ressourcement* theologians, none greater than Hans Urs von Balthasar, who is known to have said that he wrote every single word of his theological works for Karl Barth. I argue that the effect of Karl Barth through those such as von Balthasar is currently so strong that much, if not the majority, of Roman Catholic theology critically engages Barth in some manner. I believe this has led to a Christological renewal of sorts within Catholicism, and it is to two such exemplary works that I turn now.

⁴One example of this truth is a comment made by Barth at the opening of his book on Anselm, where he states, "...it seemed to me that the Roman Catholic observations were more pertinent, more reasonable and more worthy of consideration than others." He goes on to show preference for Hans Urs von Balthasar's understanding of his theology. Barth, Karl. *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), 11.

Thomas Guarino's *Foundations of Systematic Theology*

Thomas Guarino is a Roman Catholic priest and a professor of systematic theology at Seton Hall University, who considers himself to have considerable ecumenical interests. His work reveals exactly this. Guarino's *Foundations of Systematic Theology* is a wonderful example of contemporary Roman Catholic scholarship that reveals significant engagement with both Catholic and Protestant theology as well as modern and especially postmodern philosophy. Revealing the breadth of his interest, Guarino states at the outset,

The argument of this book is that the doctrinal form of the Christian faith, in its essential characteristics, calls for certain theoretical exigencies. This is to say that the proportion and beauty of the form is not served or illuminated by simply any presuppositions. Rather, a determinate understanding of philosophy, of the nature of truth, of hermeneutical theory, of the predication of language, and of mutual correlation is required if Christian faith and doctrine are to maintain a recognizable and suitably meditative form.⁵

Guarino is concerned with the truth and effectiveness of the Christian proclamation. He asks, "Can the Christian notion of doctrine and contemporary philosophical accents be reconciled?"⁶ He believes that as truth, Christian doctrine should be reconcilable and indeed enhanced by things such as philosophy, (general) hermeneutical theory, linguistic theory and basic correlation. For Guarino, the truth of Christian doctrine is not a foreign ingredient in the world, and therefore it is not at odds with human reason and experience. As such, Guarino believes that theologians should seek to critically appropriate basic principles of philosophical reasoning in service of the exposition of Christian doctrine. Doing so does not weaken Christian teaching, according to Guarino, but rather strengthens it by philosophically undergirding the church's claims about revelation and doctrine.⁷ This, for Guarino, is *prima philosophia*, which serves to provide a robust metaphysics in order to support the universal and normative truth claims of Christian doctrine.

⁵Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (NY: T&T Clark, 2005), X.

⁶Guarino, 5.

⁷Ibid., 14.

Aside from Guarino's foundationalist appeal to *prima philosophia*, he says that theology's central and paramount proclamation is the cross of Jesus Christ. In fact, Guarino carefully praises the Reformation emphasis on the *theologia crucis*. He rightly says, "The Reformation philippics were against a metanarrative of cosmic glory that unconsciously reduced the cross, the central moment in salvation history, to an essential footnote. The starkness of Calvary became secondary to a prior unity and beauty given with creation."⁸ The central point of contact between God and creation, and indeed the definitive act of Divine revelation and salvation is the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Thus, it would seem that, for Guarino, any critical appropriation of philosophy, even in terms of *prima philosophia*, must be utilized in service and defense of this fundamental claim.

This tense relationship between the sole centrality of the revelation of God in Christ and *prima philosophia* appears to be contradictory for many. Indeed, how can Christ be the basis of one's theology, and yet find the need to appeal to basic first philosophical principles which are rooted not in Christ, but in universal human reason or experience for justification? For Guarino, however, this is not a problem, as the truth of the Christian proclamation need always be re-examined for the purposes of contemporary exposition of the classic truth of Christian doctrine. Here Guarino's position is very much in line with the Vatican II emphasis on *agornimento*, or bringing up to date. He finds conceptual support for this position from Bernstein's take on Gadamer's hermeneutic, saying that "truth emerges from a 'dialogical encounter with what makes a claim on us.'"⁹ Understood in this sense, the atoning work of Christ as the central tenet of the Christian faith is clearly that which makes a claim on us. Christian faith and practice are in constant dialogue with this event, seeking ever-new understanding through the use of reason and experience.

For Guarino, this pursuit includes, if it is not dependent upon, *first philosophy*. This dialogical encounter can be characterized in Gadamerian fashion as endless play, wherein the Christian is always drawing nearer to God. In this ceaseless hermeneutical play of Christian truth, philosophy has its place. Indeed, Guarino thinks that theology can adequately address and incorporate the challenges of postmodernity. To this end, he consis-

⁸Ibid., 21.

⁹Quoted in Ibid., 90.

tently engages philosophers such as Heidegger, Rorty, Bernstein, Gadamer, Derrida, Caputo and Marion, as well as contemporary Christian theologians who share this engagement, though perhaps with different outcomes. These thinkers include Lonergan, Rahner, Pannenberg, Sokolowski, VanHoozer, and Milbank.

Guarino turns to the topic of language, specifically arguing that Christian faith and doctrine need a type of language that can both “mediate and explain God’s revelation in Christ,” and the *Deus Absconditus*.¹⁰ In this section he analyzes the role that analogy plays in balancing the language of God’s presence and absence.¹¹ Essentially, the point of this discussion is determining what role human language plays in disclosing the relationship between God and creation.¹² For example, Guarino points out Matthew 5:48, “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Clearly, “perfect” predicated upon humanity cannot mean the same thing as “perfect” predicated upon God. However, it also cannot be said that there is no correlation. In this simplified argument, complete consonance between the two uses of perfection, which is to be avoided, is the univocal approach. Likewise, complete dissonance between the two uses of perfection, the equivocal approach, is to be avoided as well. The resulting option, for Guarino, is the analogical role of language. Guarino points out that the Roman Catholic Church, while not missing the mark altogether, struggled with this concept from the neo-Scholastics all the way up until the entrance of the *Ressourcement* theologians prior to Vatican II.

The rediscovery of the valuable role of analogy, according to Guarino, reinvigorated the church with a depth or range of hermeneutical meaning that had been lost for some time. Essentially, analogy enables the church to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of historicism and fideism.¹³ The discussion of analogy necessarily leads to a discussion of the *analogia entis*, and therefore to one of the greatest opponents of this teaching, Karl

¹⁰Ibid., 209.

¹¹Chapters 7 & 8 are probably the key to Guarino’s argument.

¹²Of course, the discussion, like the concept of analogy itself, is concerned with much more than just language. Of crucial import is the analogical role of creation in relationship to God. Guarino argues that analogy is best thought of as a linguistic device which helps Christians discuss the relationship between God and creation and not, in light of Barth’s heavy-handed critiques, an ontological *a priori* for all of doctrine.

¹³Guarino, 216-217.

Barth. As was discussed earlier, Barth essentially saw in this doctrine the grounding of revelation outside of itself in the procrustean bedrock of universal reason or philosophy. As a result, Barth believed that Catholicism dissolved grace into nature, because of the teaching that grace was owed to nature by God. For Barth, grace is only lent by God to humanity; it is a completely free and unwarranted gift.¹⁴ Here, Barth prefers the *analogia fidei* to the more troubling *analogia entis*.¹⁵ Guarino, attempts to be as generous to Barth as he can. For this reason, he cedes much ground to Barth saying, “his argument possesses a sterling logic and clarity.”¹⁶ Essentially, Guarino grants that if Barth’s assessment of the *analogia entis*’ role in Catholic faith is accurate, then his staunch refusal of this “invention of the Antichrist” is accurate. But is Barth’s assessment correct?

To answer this question, Guarino turns to a Roman Catholic theologian of the *Ressourcement* tradition who is exceedingly enamored with Barth’s theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar. He says, “Balthasar is willing to concede to Barth every possible point about the priority of grace over nature, Barth’s central concern.”¹⁷ This grace-dependant nature is most easily seen in von Balthasar’s interesting assessment of Henri de Lubac’s theology, where he describes de Lubac’s view of nature as existing in a “suspended middle” always already dependant upon grace.¹⁸ The tension in von Balthasar’s dialogue with Barth’s theology is that, while von Balthasar wants to cede virtually all of Barth’s critiques, he nevertheless believes that “within the order of grace there exists a relative autonomy of the order of nature, that is, God has graciously established the creature and creation in truth and goodness.”¹⁹

In sum, it would seem that von Balthasar agrees that humanity has sinned and therefore has completely lost its analogous relationship to the

¹⁴Ibid., 221.

¹⁵It should be pointed out this the *analogia fidei* is not really Barth’s at all. He says that it is the teaching of his friend and colleague Gottlieb Söhnngen and he highly praises it. Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics II.1* (NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 81-2.

¹⁶Ibid., 222.

¹⁷Ibid., 225.

¹⁸Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 15. This comment is actually about the interdependent role of philosophy and theology in Henri de Lubac’s work.

¹⁹Guarino, 226.

creator, it's *Imago Dei*, and yet God's goodness and love caused God to nonetheless continue to extend a degree of relative autonomy to creation (specifically humanity), wherein humanity is not owed grace, but can and will benefit from grace regardless. Thus, for von Balthasar, the *analogia entis* is not so much an ontological category of existence as it is a gratuitous and unilateral effect of the *analogia fidei* grounded solely in Christ Jesus.

While Guarino is more cautious than von Balthasar in ceding so much ground to Barth, he seems to essentially go along with von Balthasar's presentation of the discussion. Aligning himself with von Balthasar, and thus retaining the *analogia entis*, serves Guarino's hermeneutical project quite well, enabling him to say, "the church hardly possesses a rigidly enclosed metaphysics. In fact, conceptual pluralism is essential to Christian theology."²⁰ And so, through engagement with contemporary philosophy, especially Gadamer, and through the critical adoption of Barth's Christocentrism via von Balthasar's work with analogy, Guarino posits a Christocentric theology that nonetheless makes use of, and I would venture, needs philosophy for both internal and external coherence.

Robert Barron's *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism*

Robert Barron is a Roman Catholic priest and the chair of Faith and Culture at the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary. Barron considers himself a Catholic evangelist, and the evangelical nature of his work does not go unnoticed. His book *The Priority of Christ* is one of the best examples of the fruition of the Vatican II effort at *Ressourcement*, or returning to the sources, and *Aggiornamento*, or bringing up to date. The purpose or question that Barron is trying to answer in this book, he says, is:

What I propose to develop in this book is neither a modern form of Christianity nor a Christian attack on modernity, but rather a postmodern or postliberal Catholicism, a view of God and the world that flows from the still surprising event of

²⁰Ibid., 231. Note, Guarino does not use "pluralism" in the sense of religious pluralism, but rather hermeneutical pluralism *vis-à-vis* a hermeneutical range.

Jesus Christ and that pushes beyond the convictions of both modernity and conventionally construed Christianity.²¹

Barron believes that Christology must be the key for Christian theology to be faithful. This impulse can definitely be traced back to Barth *via* von Balthasar. Yet modern theology of almost all persuasions demonstrates a Christology that is seriously out of balance. For Barron, this distortion in modern theology, along with modernity itself, can be said to be an “energetic reaction to a particular and problematic version of nominalist Christianity.”²² Barron begins his story with, “the whole thing started with Duns Scotus!” Essentially, Scotus wanted to explain why and how creatures are able to talk about the Creator. “In an effort to make the to-be of God more immediately intelligible, Duns Scotus proposed a univocal conception of existence, according to which God and creatures belong to *the same basic metaphysical category*, the genus of being.”²³ This, of course, is contrary to Aquinas’ analogical conception of being which said that creatures were analogically related to the creator in a relationship that can be characterized as similarity within an even greater dissimilarity.

The univocal conception of being was picked up by William of Occam, who furthered this conception by saying that beings, which would include God, are distinguished by intensity or the ability to be over-and-against one another.²⁴ The resulting univocal view introduced a fundamental antagonism into the relationship between beings and thus between creatures and their Creator. This breed of nominalism was quite influential on both Luther and Calvin and eventually blossomed its most deadly flower in Lessing’s infamous ditch. The result of this gap between history and faith is the central and yet usually concealed notion of modern theology that Jesus is merely a symbol. Thus, we have the common distinction between the “Christ of Faith” and the “Jesus of History,” which I call the two basic flavors of modern liberal theology. This resulting modern liberal theology is basically neo-Nestorianism.²⁵ The first flavor, “Christ of Faith,” can be best seen on the Protestant side in Paul Tillich,

²¹Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 12.

²²Barron, 13.

²³Ibid. Italics mine.

²⁴Ibid., 14.

²⁵Ibid., 33-4.

who according to Barron is essentially just a blending of Schleiermacher and Heidegger. On the Catholic side, Barron says that the “Christ of Faith” flavor can be seen in the voluminous works of Karl Rahner. The other primary flavor offered by modern liberal theology is the “Jesus of History.” Again, Barron offers a Catholic and Protestant example. The Catholics listed as proponents of this flavor are Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx. Some of the Protestants listed are Marcus Borg, Burton Mack, and especially John Dominic Crossan.²⁶

Barron’s proposed way of combating the neo-nesorianism of modern liberal theology is narrative. The term “postliberal” is used in the title and throughout, so it need not be pointed out that the “Yale” school, especially Frei, Lindbeck and Wittgenstein, further tempers Barron’s Barthianism.²⁷ This proposal can be seen in Barron’s understanding of the reflexive nature between Jesus and Christ²⁸ and the interrelatedness of doctrine and scripture.²⁹ Barron counters the hermeneutics of suspicion with the belief that the Holy Spirit has guided the tradition.³⁰ He prefers Nicholas of Cusa’s analogical statement that God is both *totaliter aliter* and *non-aliud*.³¹ Finally, he believes that this method of combating the nominalist univocal mistakes of modern liberal theology allows one to say with St. Thomas, who affirms Pseudo-Dionysius, that God is Good and that this Goodness means being-for-others. This is Barron’s response to the antagonistic relationship between divinity and humanity presupposed by modern liberal theology.

As a result of his emphasis on narrative, Barron proposes the Scriptural narrative, specifically those concerning Jesus, as a way to ground theology. Barron insists that faithful theology must begin with narrative rather than modernity’s preoccupation with epistemology.³² Thus, Barron proposes the age-old, and non-modern belief that theology is exegesis. This proposition is meant to combat the modernist tendency to either start

²⁶Interestingly, Barron traces the roots of the historical-critical method back to Spinoza’s quest for a universal religion. *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁷Though Barth clearly has nominalist tendencies, Barron sees him not ultimately as being part of either flavor of modern liberal theology.

²⁸Barron, 49.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 51.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 54.

³¹*Ibid.*, 55. Totally-other and Non-other.

³²*Ibid.*, 133.

with philosophical foundationalism or natural theology. The former, be it the version offered by Kant, Locke and Hume or Tillich, *et al.*, is to be avoided by beginning with Christ Jesus. According to Barron, starting with anything outside of Christ, or with some sort of *prolegomena* as Barth would say, is to work in “the arena of sin and death.”³³

While foundationalism can be attributed more to modern Protestantism, natural theology can be more easily attributed to some of the medieval and most modern expressions of Roman Catholicism. Essentially, natural theology affords a type of “pure nature” to creation wherein it is granted a supernatural beatitude capable of reaching God through human reason. This erroneous but persuasive teaching places a greater emphasis on creation than on the “Christ Event,” that is, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Barron believes that the mind must be converted or remade from within to be able to see divine things. Thus, to know anything to be true is a Christological statement.³⁴ Barron calls this the “epistemic priority of Christ.”³⁵ By reading Scripture, participating in the life of the Church and by attending to the sacraments, Christians are gifted with new eyes and ears and are to have their minds transformed into the mind of Christ. This transformation, made possible by the work of the Spirit, as the Father’s gift of love in obedience to the Son’s sacrificial death, forms the basis for Barron’s “unabashedly Christoform epistemology.”³⁶

Conclusion

Both Guarino and Barron stand firmly in the Roman Catholic tradition. Both pick up the Vatican II task of *agorniamiento* and *ressourcement*, seen especially in their critical engagement of modern and postmodern philosophy. And both hold the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and His atoning work on behalf of all of humanity, to be the centerpiece of Chris-

³³Ibid., 144.

³⁴Ibid., 148.

³⁵Ibid., 152.

³⁶Ibid., 188. It seems that Barron’s argument for the “epistemic priority of Christ” is quite akin to Barth’s argument in “Fate and Idea in Theology.” One of Barth’s primary points in this essay is that theology is essentially the same as philosophy *but for grace*. “Fate and Idea in Theology” in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth*, ed. Rumscheidt, H. Martin (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986).

tian doctrine. In this final instance, both thinkers are seen to be heavily influenced by Karl Barth, each revealing a degree of both praise and critique for the theologian from Basel. Yet, despite many similarities, these two theologians are also quite different. The primary difference concerns the role of philosophy.

For Guarino, Christian doctrine needs philosophy, not to guarantee its claims, but rather to enable them to be logically proclaimed.

Christian doctrine needs a certain view of philosophy, not for the sake of its ultimacy, of course, which is guaranteed by God alone, but for the sake of its logical explication; that doctrine needs a certain notion of truth if the cognitive status of theological statements is to be truly meditative, allowing for ostensive and “representational” elements; and, such affirmations also need a particular interpretative theory if Christian teaching is to claim coherently that there are certain perduring beliefs, normative from epoch to epoch, from culture to culture.³⁷

It is not all philosophy that can be of service to theology in this fundamental manner, but only that which has a “genuinely metaphysical range.”³⁸ For Guarino, the content of Christian doctrine is everlastingly true, but its form needs philosophy in order to square with human understanding and to be accessible to each subsequent generation. Only in this way, with the aid of *prima philosophia*, can the eternal mystery of the Trinitarian God be made known to humanity.

For Barron, philosophy plays a very similar role, though non-necessarily. That is, for Barron, the Word of God is always compatible with human understanding. To claim otherwise is to force an unnecessary wedge of non-compatibility between Creator and creation. According to Barron, theology does not need philosophy. This is not to say that the use of philosophy is not both permitted and useful for theology. “Philosophy is not a foundation or preparation for theology, nor does it clarify the language that theology uses; rather it is employed for pedagogical purposes in order to make its subject matter more accessible.”³⁹ For Barron, all human thought and action, and therefore philosophy, is rooted in and made intelligible by the redeeming work of Christ. This is true whether it

³⁷Guarino, 209.

³⁸Guarino, 300. Referring to *Fideis et Ratio*.

³⁹Barron, 151.

is acknowledged or not. Thus, at the root of all doctrine, all philosophy, and indeed all thought and action is the epistemic priority of Christ. As such, Christ, and Christ alone, grounds and provides meaning and truth. In this, Barron is much closer to Barth's theological concerns than Guarino's appeal to the necessity of *prima philosophia*.

In their mutual appreciation and appropriation of philosophy, especially in terms of a fundamental Christian metaphysics, it should be clear that both Guarino and Barron transcend many of the boundaries laid out by Karl Barth in his theology. Unlike much of classical Roman Catholic theology, however, these areas, specifically the use of philosophy and metaphysics, are kept in check to a lesser or greater extent by the fundamental centrality of Christ. I believe that it is clear that Barron is more successful at this, but both deserve a good deal of attention for putting forth fine examples of Roman Catholic theology which are heavily engaged with the Christological impulse of Karl Barth. Roman Catholic scholarship over the past few decades reveals an increasing engagement with Protestant theology. It is perhaps the case that through theologians such as Barth, the Roman Catholic Church is finally undergoing many of the changes that have been called for since before Martin Luther posted his infamous theses. Barron and Guarino point out many of the mistakes and dead-ends of contemporary theology, both Catholic and Protestant. Perhaps it is time that Protestants began to more seriously engage the works of our contemporary Catholic sisters and brothers in the hope of greater theological reformation.

CHRIST OUR ANCESTOR: AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY AND THE DANGER OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

by

Rodney Reed and Gift Mtukwa

Modern Africa has been racked by ethnic conflict. As D. W. Waruta wrote in 1992, “One of the burning moral issues in contemporary African societies is that of tribalism. From Monrovia to Maputo, Dakar to Durban and Cape to Cairo, Africans have been killing each other in the name of protecting ethnic interests. . . .”¹ The numbers of deaths in recent decades is staggering and the impact of ethnocentrism on the daily lives of Africans is pervasive. In many parts of Africa, people are hired on the basis of tribe, politicians campaign by raising tribal fears, choosing government ministers is a delicate balancing act in finding agreeable ethnic representation, marriage partners are restricted to those of “one’s own community,” housing in major urban areas is unofficially segregated according to ethnicity, etc. Ethnic instability has been a major factor in the retarded economic development of many African countries.

¹D. W. Waruta, “Tribalism as a Moral Problem in Contemporary Africa,” in *Moral Issues in African Christianity: A Challenge for African Christianity*, ed. J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999), 119. Despite the stigma associated with the use of the words “tribe” and “tribalism,” the authors have consented to their use for at least three reasons: (1) African scholars like the one quoted here freely use the terms; (2) “Tribe” is the “lingua franca” of most of the people across Africa for how they refer to their own ethnicity; and (3) We hope by the use of the term “tribalism” that ethnocentrism (wherever it is found) is seen as the evil that it is.

We are not painting here a picture of Africa as a uniquely “dark continent” that suffers alone with this problem of ethnocentrism—it certainly is not and does not. What we do intend is to make the point that ethnocentrism is a scourge across Africa, one that scholars, politicians, developers, and Christian theologians cannot afford to ignore. Unfortunately, all of this ethnocentrism has not been eliminated by the fact that sub-Saharan Africa has supposedly been “Christianized.” In many of the conflicts, the populations would overwhelmingly identify themselves as Christian. How is it that such large majorities which claim to be Christian cannot do more to stop this kind of destructive tribalism? Even worse, how is it that people who claim to be Christian engage in such ethnic atrocities and injustices themselves? Does Christianity in Africa have a word to say about African ethnocentrism? Perhaps more pertinent to the study at hand is what some prominent African theologians are currently saying about African ethnocentrism and Christian faith?

That African theologians need to “speak out” and be heard is abundantly clear. There is a great need in Africa today for Christian theologians to contextualize the Gospel message. Far too often, the Western church with its global reach has delivered a pre-packaged theology (often Western theology) to the rest of the church in its endeavor to take Christ to the nations. In the words of John Mary Waliggo:

. . . the Christian missionaries who came to evangelize Africa in the nineteenth century presented a limited and defective Christology. They came with ready-made questions and answers. They came with Christology developed in Europe throughout the centuries. It was a highly conditioned Christology, made to respond to specific situations and peoples. They did not pause for a moment to ask: What is Jesus Christ for you Africans? What do your African religions and cultures say about the Jesus Christ of faith?²

This is seconded by J. T. Taylor:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs a westerner

²John Mary Waliggo, “The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, eds. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1998), 111.

would feel, the saviour of the world of the European worldview, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would He look like? If He came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand Him, would He be recognizable to the rest of the Church universal? And if Africa offered Him the praises and petitions of her total uninhibited humanity, would they be acceptable?³

African Christian theologians are increasingly “finding their voice” and calling for the “Reconstruction of Theology” in the African context.⁴ This reconstruction has been applied to Christology. These theologians seek to explicate the relevance of Christology for modern Africa. They are seeking to answer within the African context the perennial question that Jesus put to Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Among the many answers is one that has found expression among several African theologians: Christ as Ancestor. It is claimed that, since ancestral veneration and mediation are such a great part of most African traditional worldviews, to interpret the significance of Jesus in terms of the concept of “ancestor” would help Africans to more deeply appreciate and appropriate the person and work of Christ.

The purpose of this paper is to review this vision of Christology (Christ as Ancestor) and assess whether it offers a sufficient critique of African ethnocentrism/tribalism. This will be accomplished by outlining the African worldview, noting especially the communal and familial nature of traditional African society, and by describing the important role that the ancestors (both living and dead) play in society according to that worldview. We will introduce African Christian theology, with particular attention to the work of modern African theologians who are contextualizing Jesus as Ancestor. Finally, I will critique that Christological image in light of the nature and prevalence of ethnic conflict in Africa today.

³Quoted in Judith M. Bahemuka, “The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, edited by J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1988), 6.

⁴For the call for the “Reconstruction of Theology,” see J. N. K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology & Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003); and Mary N. Getui & Emmanuel A. Obeng, eds., *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, 2nd ed., with Foreword by J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003).

The African Communal Worldview

Africans are often noted for viewing the world not from the perspective of their own individuality, but from the perspective of their particular communities. Mbiti's famous statement speaks to this reality, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am."⁵ The individual does not exist except in the life of the concrete community. Without the community, the individual has no life and no meaning. Writing about the Bantu peoples of Africa, but which may just as well apply to all of Black Africa, Placide Tempels writes,

The Bantu cannot conceive of . . . the human person as an independent being standing on his own. Every human person, every individual is as it were one link in a chain of vital forces: a living link both exercising and receiving influence, a link that establishes the bond with previous generations and with the forces that support his own existence. The individual is necessarily an individual adhering to the clan.⁶

This communal worldview influences all moral decision-making for the African. According to Bujo,

Every member of the community, down to the least significant, shares the responsibility for strengthening the force of the tribe or clan and of each of its members. The morality of an act is determined by its life-giving potential: good acts are those which contribute to the community's vital force, whereas bad acts, however apparently insignificant, are those which tend to diminish life.⁷

This strong emphasis on community has been and rightfully should be applauded as a necessary corrective to excessive Western individualism. Indeed, Western individualism, even subtly packaged in Christian missionary evangelism, has been destructive of the fabric of African society.

⁵John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 106.

⁶Quoted from Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, trans. by Brian McNeil (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 86.

⁷Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. by John O'Donohue, first revised ed. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 22.

It is essential to note that this emphasis on community does not end with death. Physical death is not the end of human existence. While the body may cease to exist, the spirit will continue to live and may have communion with those who remain in physical existence. The cult of the ancestors in the African context is the extension of community to the members of the community who have physically died. However, it important to be reminded that, even though the community encompasses those who are dead, it is still limited only to members of the community in which one is part. If one does not belong to the community, he or she is considered an outsider and cannot participate fully in the life of the community.

Understanding Ancestors in the African Worldview

The ancestors and other spiritual beings figure very prominently in the traditional African worldview. Mbiti notes, “The spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead. . . . To understand their religious ethos and philosophical perceptions, it is essential to consider their concepts of the spiritual world in addition to concepts of God.”⁸ Jean-Marc Ela agrees,

In many traditional societies, the cult of the dead is perhaps that aspect of culture to which the African is most attached—the heritage clung to above all else. Indeed, the cult of the ancestors is so widespread throughout Africa that it is impossible to avoid the questions this practice raises for Christian life and reflection.⁹

Therefore, we will seek to answer the questions: Who are the ancestors? What is their role? Where do they stay? What is their relationship to the living?

Describing the place of the ancestors in traditional African life is difficult for at least two reasons. The first is that the ancestors are understood differently in various African communities. Africa is a diverse continent with thousands of cultural and language groups. Nevertheless, there are enough similarities to allow some cautious generalizations. Secondly, linguistics is also an issue. The English word “ancestor” does not do jus-

⁸Mbiti, 74.

⁹Quoted in Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 133.

tice to the African terms that are used to describe those who have gone before us in death and yet are still with us and in some ways affecting our lives. Mbiti does not use the term ancestor at all because:

“Ancestral spirits” or “ancestors” are misleading terms since they imply only those spirits who were once the ancestors of the living. This is limiting the concept unnecessarily, since there are spirits and living-dead of children, brothers, sisters, barren wives and other members of the family who were not in any way the “ancestors.” . . .¹⁰

He prefers the terms “spirits” or “living dead.” Nevertheless, because the term “ancestor” has come into common usage among African theologians, so much so that it is central to how some are describing the person and work of Christ, and because there is a need to distinguish those spirits who have kinship ties with the living from those which do not, we consent to its usage.

Mbiti’s comments move us to consider the identity of the ancestors. According to him, just because one has died does not make that person an ancestor. To “qualify” as an ancestor one must have been a person of exemplary morality, a good role model to the community, married and have had children who will be the descendants who will remember the deceased.¹¹ One must have sought the well being of the community in one’s earthly life. Elevation to “ancestor-hood” was dependent on the community of the living remembering the deceased person. Those who were negative influences in the community would be quickly forgotten by the community and pass into the realm of unnamed spirits—the forgotten dead. Thus, becoming an ancestor is a goal which one aspires to reach. From childhood, children are told stories about the ancestors of that particular clan so that they become mentors in absentia to these young ones. Virtues like courage and generosity are instilled through the heroism of those who have gone before us.

The role of the ancestors in African life is closely tied up with African religion. God in most African religions is seen as so great and powerful that He is almost unapproachable by ordinary humans. In the

¹⁰Mbiti, 83-84.

¹¹This partially explains why barrenness is such a curse and large families are such a blessing in traditional African culture. It also sheds light on why in some cultures marriages are not truly legitimate until the birth of the first child.

same way, if an ordinary member of the community wants to make a request of an important chief, he would not go himself to make that request but would send an intermediary; the ancestors serve as mediators between God and humans.¹² To Mbiti, these are the closest intermediaries that men have with the spirit world.¹³ To an African, what comes to mind when he/she hears about ancestors is the idea of intermediaries, those who communicate our prayers to God.

Furthermore, the ancestors serve as guardians of morality in the community. If members of the community behave in ways that diminish the life force of the community, the ancestors of those members may cause some kind of calamity or evil to come upon them. On the other hand, if the members behave in a positive manner, the ancestors will be pleased and bless them. This, then, is the reason why both fear and fondness come to mind among traditional-minded Africans when they think of their ancestors. It is noteworthy that the anger or blessing of the ancestor is directed to those who consider this ancestor their ancestor—that is, family or clan members.

Eventually these living-dead become known as “its.” At this stage they no longer have personal relationship with the living because no one remembers their names or new generations have replaced older generations both among the living and the living-dead.¹⁴ Ancestral spirits can only affect members of their own family, except ancestors of royal families who can affect the whole tribe.¹⁵ Africans care nothing about ancestors of other communities because it is only their ancestors whose actions affect them.

Another issue worth noting is that ancestral influence does not last forever. It is most felt immediately after death and slowly diminishes with the passage of time. That influence is only there when the descendants remember them by name, but eventually vanishes as people forget their identity. Instead of referring to them by their names, they are now greeted by the “children” as “to all those whom we cannot remember.”¹⁶ In Shona traditions (a tribe in Zimbabwe) they are referred to as *varikumhepo*,

¹²Mbiti, 67.

¹³Ibid., 82.

¹⁴Mbiti, 79-83.

¹⁵Richard German, *Who Are the Living Dead?* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1984), 24.

¹⁶Ibid, 25.

“those who are in the air,” meaning that they are not just one but many and are now a community of the living-dead.

Because the ancestors have the power to bless or curse the community, the relationship of the community and its individual members with them must be carefully maintained.¹⁷ Oblations, offerings, and sacrifices are traditionally made to the ancestors to ensure their favor and placate their wrath. This is where the common accusation of ancestral worship arises and why the western missionaries almost universally have condemned participation in ancestral veneration. Several scholars refer to it as the “cult of the ancestors” or the worship of ancestors.¹⁸ Charles Nyamiti summarizes the various elements of African ancestors by saying:

. . . the African traditional conception of ancestors is determined by the following elements: (i) consanguineous kinship between the ancestor/ancestress with his/her earthly kin; (ii) superhuman sacred status usually acquired through death; (iii) mediation between the Supreme Being and the ancestor’s earthly kin members; (iv) right or title to regular sacred communication with ancestral terrestrial relatives through prayers and ritual offerings (oblations) in token of love, faithfulness, homage and gratitude towards the ancestor; (v) exemplarity, as models of good behavior.¹⁹

In some cultures the ancestors even have a representative, a person of their choice who speaks on their behalf. This person is often possessed by the ancestral spirits, and when that takes place you don’t hear the person but the ancestors. In some communities there is often a bull which is named after this ancestor. The bull often behaves strangely, for example

¹⁷Ambrose Moyo, “Material Things in African Society: Implications for Christian Ethics” in *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: A Challenge for African Christianity*, ed. by J. N. K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999), 52.

¹⁸Yusufu Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and World-view* (Nairobi: World Alive Publishers, 2006), 68. There are some voices within African Christianity which, in an effort to inculturate Christianity, are advocating for rituals of oblation to the ancestors. See, for example, a report entitled, “Let Africans Honor Ancestors with Blood Libations in Mass, says Bishop,” in *Christianity Today* (April 10, 2000).

¹⁹Charles Nyamiti, “Models of the Church in Africa,” in *Faces of African Theology*. Patrick Ryan ed. (Nairobi: CUEA Publishers, 2003) 82.

leading the other cows home after a day in the woods. This bull is given special foods; it is not supposed to be punished because it is special.

Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, when an ancestor comes to possess someone and speak through them, certain conditions must be met. Those who are not of the same totem, the strangers, are not welcome. The ancestor may not come as long as those who don't belong to that clan are present. They will be asked to vacate the hut where the ancestor is supposed to speak from. Among these people who are not welcome are those married from other communities, and any other person who does not belong to the community in question.

To summarize, we have discussed the traditional worldview of Africans with its strong emphasis on community and the essential role that the ancestors play in it. We now will reflect on some of these issues in our critique of the model of Christ as Ancestor.

Christology in African Perspective

Various African theologians have tried to understand Christ from an African perspective. Different models have been used to explain the meaning of Christ. They include Christ as Liberator, Healer, Elder Brother, and Ideal Elder.²⁰ The one that concerns us here is Christ as Ancestor. We will look at the Christology of Kwame Bediako, Benezet Bujo, and Charles Nyamiti in order to see how Christ is understood as an African ancestor.

Kwame Bediako. Bediako is a Presbyterian theologian from West Africa, particularly Ghana. He is one among many African theologians who understands Christ as an African ancestor. He argues that Christ, by virtue of his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension into the realm of Spirit power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor. Christ brings life and, above all, an ancestor is a giver of life to his/her people.²¹

Realizing the problems associated with the ancestorship of Christ, Bediako concludes that one of the values of an Ancestor Christology is

²⁰See Stinton's book for a well-researched summary of these various conceptions, along with P. N. Wachege, *Jesus Christ Our Muthamaki (Ideal Elder): An African Christological Study Based on the Agikuyu Understanding of Elder* (Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers LTD, 1992), 2.

²¹Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 1995), 217.

precisely that it helps us clarify the place and significance of natural ancestors. By making room among the “living dead” for the Lord, the Judge of both the living and the dead, it becomes more evident how they relate to him, and He to them.²² Bediako is categorical that ancestors cannot become rivals of Christ since they still remain human. “Just as there is a clear distinction between God and divinities, so also there exists a qualitative distinction between Christ the Ancestor and natural ancestors”²³ Bediako takes the direction that is unique to himself in that, instead of seeing natural ancestors as the ones who can help us understand Christ, he sees Christ as one who helps us understand our natural ancestors. That is his contribution to African Christology.

Benezet Bujo. Benezet Bujo, a Congolese Catholic theologian, in trying to come up with an African Christian ethic, traces the issue of ancestor and discovers that Jesus can fit that model as Ancestor par excellence—that is, “Proto-Ancestor.” He says, “We can only arrive at a true understanding of the words, actions, and rituals of the ancestors when we realize that they, the ancestors and elders, have here ‘written down’ their autobiography.” Their experiences, a combination of misfortunes and successes, constitute an inheritance handed down to their descendants. When the latter rehearse this inheritance, they are not only relating the lives of their ancestors, but confronting their own lives with what these people did or said—they are rewriting the ancient autobiographies on their own account. In appropriating their inheritance, the living turn it into a source of life for the next generation.²⁴ The path of the ancestors is known to bring life if one follows it. According to Bujo, Christ fulfills this role with unparalleled excellence.

Bujo draws some parallels between the end of life for ancestors and Jesus of Nazareth. An ancestor’s final moment with family members is very important. According to Bujo, the episode of the washing of the feet, in John chapter 13 is the final hour for Jesus. Jesus’ last will was: serve one another, love one another. To Bujo, only those who carry out the terms of this last will and testament will have life, and only they can transmit life to others.²⁵ He is aware that critics will raise an objection concerning the

²²Ibid, 218.

²³Ibid, 218.

²⁴Bujo, *African Theology*, 71.

²⁵Ibid, 73.

fact that ancestors were not always good people, so how can Jesus be identified with such people? To that objection he has a ready answer. The ancestors he is referring to are not bad ancestors whose earthly life cannot serve to edify the clan or tribal community. When Bujo looks at Jesus of Nazareth, he sees one who not only lived the African ancestor ideal in the highest degree, but one who brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfillment. Jesus in Bujo's words brought life and life-force in its fullness.²⁶

Bujo cautions that the term ancestor should be used analogically since to treat Jesus otherwise would be to make him only one founding ancestor among many. That is why in Bujo's words the title Proto-Ancessor is reserved to Jesus alone. This is because Jesus not only realized the authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to new completion. To him, African ancestors are forerunners or images of the Proto-Ancessor, Jesus Christ. To his credit, this serves as a protection against syncretism in Bujo's thought. His emphasis on Jesus as Proto-Ancessor means that Jesus defines or sets the standard for what a good ancestor is. He goes on to say that "the title of Proto Ancestor for Jesus Christ, translated into a corresponding theology and catechesis, will have much more meaning for Africans than titles such as *Logos* (Word) and *Kurios* (Lord)."²⁷ His goal is to show the African that being truly Christian and being truly African are not opposed to each other. Bujo summarizes his Christology when he says:

Above all, Jesus Christ himself becomes the privileged locus for a full understanding of the ancestors. The African now has something to say about the mystery of the Incarnation, for after God has spoken to us at various times and in various places, including our ancestors, in the last days he speaks to us through his Son, whom he has established as unique Ancestor, as Proto-Ancessor, from whom all life flows for his descendants (cf. Heb. 1-2). From him derive all those longed-for prerogatives which constitute him as Ancestor. The African ancestors are in this way forerunners, or images, of the Proto-Ancessor, Jesus Christ.²⁸

²⁶Ibid, 73-75.

²⁷Ibid, 77.

²⁸Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* in Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 49.

Charles Nyamiti. Charles Nyamiti from Tanzania is another African Catholic theologian who has attempted to talk about Jesus as an African Ancestor. He does not start with Jesus, but with God himself. God the Father is the Ancestor of God the Son and the latter is the Descendant of the Father. In God, ancestorship and descendancy are sacred, pneumatological (inseparable from the Holy Spirit), ritual, doxological and Eucharistic properties.²⁹ It is through these that we fulfill our regular communication with God. Nyamiti goes on to extend the same in his Christology.

The same ancestral characteristics are found in Christ in his relationship to us thanks to his brotherhood with us (kingship), his holiness or sacredness, and exemplarity of Christian behavior, his salvific mediation, and his right to our regular sacred communication with him through prayers and oblation, particularly the Eucharistic sacrifice.³⁰

According to Nyamiti, Christ is not only our elder brother but our Ancestor, to be specific, our Brother Ancestor. The basis of that is rooted in the mysteries of the Trinity (God as Father and Son), incarnation (Jesus becomes one of us, the “brother of humanity”), and redemption (Christ protects the family from imminent danger as an ancestor would). Christ’s redemptive ministry caused his ancestral status to grow until it reached its climax in his glorification.³¹

Responding to the question of how this ancestorship is exercised, Nyamiti says it is by Christ’s divine Spirit. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit Christ has become our Bother Ancestor. Thus, we have two divine Ancestors, the Father (our Parent Ancestor) and His Incarnate Son (our Brother Ancestor). Therefore, we become brother and sister descendants of Christ and also son and daughter descendants of God the Father.³² Although he does not have a descriptor to the word ancestor like Supreme for Bediako and Proto for Bujo, Nyamiti still differentiates this ancestorship from the others. In his words, “This ancestorship is different from all others because it transcends all clanic, tribal, racial or sexual distinctions.

²⁹Charles Nyamiti, “Models of the Church in Africa” in *Faces of African Theology*. Patrick Ryan ed, (Nairobi: CUEA Publishers, 2003) 83.

³⁰Nyamiti, 83.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 84.

It is a participation in God’s own ancestral kinship and is sacred, pneumatological, doxological, Eucharistic, and eschatological.”³³

We have tried to capture the direction of thought that African theologians have taken in their Christology. Their message is essentially the same, that Christ has to be understood as African Ancestor to make sense to Africans. The core question is asked by John S. Pobee (a Christian theologian from Ghana): “Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe or nation?”³⁴ Pobee and Bujo echo the same sentiments concerning the cultural connotations in the traditional titles used for Jesus (e.g., Christ, Lord, Messiah). To them the language used is alien to current African language and thought forms.³⁵ When Christ is known as an ancestor, He ceases to be a stranger; He becomes one with Africans.

Bediako suggests that Christ is our Supreme Ancestor who helps us to understand our natural ancestors. When we look at Christ we can’t fail to see parallels between Him and our ancestors—parallels such as Example, Mediator, Protector, Unifyer. This way Christ is not a stranger to us because we have our ancestors to compare him with. Bujo’s assessment is that Christological language is always cultural, just as the current titles for Christ came from another culture. Africans need to formulate their own titles. This becomes a way of introducing Christ to the African mind. The question then is, “Is this way of talking about Christ sufficient enough to critique tribalism in Africa? Does this model cause hindrance to Christian unity among different tribal communities?” These and other questions will be answered in the next section.

Critique of “Christ as Ancestor” Image

Diane Stinton, in an extensive field research project conducted among both Protestants and Catholics in three African countries, found that African Christians, both clergy and laity, were sharply divided over the legitimacy of this image of Christ.³⁶ In general, while many, espe-

³³Ibid., 84.

³⁴John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) 81. Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 83-84.

³⁵Ibid., 81-82.

³⁶Stinton, 145-9.

cially Catholics and those theologically trained, may have an appreciation for imaging Christ as an ancestor, most clergy and laity seem to be reluctant to actually use the image of Jesus as Ancestor. By and large, this is still an image that is floating around in academic circles but has not filtered down to the “real world” of ministry in the local church and personal devotion.³⁷

The main reasons that this image remains controversial are: (1) There is a danger that conceiving of Christ as an Ancestor may actually encourage people to think of their ancestors as intermediaries, while the scriptures clearly teach that we have just one mediator between God and humanity: Jesus Christ;³⁸ (2) Africans may be encouraged to actually worship the ancestors and place them in a position that only God should hold by offering to them sacrifices and oblations; (3) It seems to make Jesus just another human being rather than God-incarnate;³⁹ (4) The scriptures clearly condemn necromancy (consulting the dead)⁴⁰ and that is precisely what happens in much focus on the ancestors.

However significant and weighty the above reasons for rejecting the image of Christ as ancestor are, our focus here has not been on any of them. Our focus has been exclusively on the question of whether the image of Christ as Ancestor, if it were to become commonly employed in the churches of Africa, would contribute to or diminish the kind of ethnocentrism and tribalism that were mentioned at the beginning of this article.

In addressing this, it should be acknowledged that the very African theologians who have put this image before us are not oblivious to the dangers associated with this kind of inculturation or contextualization. Indeed, they are very much aware that inculturation taken too far can easily lead to syncretism. They have fought valiantly to couch their Christologies in ways that protect them from incorporating unchristian practices into the church. Bujo is a good example at this point. In the following quote he even notes that his understanding of ancestorship transcends ethnic and tribal boundaries.

³⁷Ibid., 148.

³⁸See 1 Tim. 2:5.

³⁹Stinton, 156-7.

⁴⁰See, for example, Lev. 19:31; 20:6; 20:27; Deut. 18:10-13; 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; 1 Chr. 10:13; 2 Chr. 33:6; Isa 8:19; 19:3; 1 Sam. 28:3-25.

At the same time, Jesus corrects and completes the traditional morality. The moral perspective is no longer limited to my clan, my elders, my friends, but extends to the whole human race, in loving service of the Father. The morality of the disciple who accepts Jesus as Model and Proto-Ancestor is a personal re-enactment of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. . . . It is this new perspective which must be henceforth the constitutive principle of African Christian ethics. The history of the Crucified One must be subversive for the customs and practices of both traditional and modern Africa. From the standpoint of tradition, the remembering of Jesus is a challenge to conscience, urging the elimination from life of those mistakes which might be labeled 'the specific errors of African group life'. The integration of the memory of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is leaven which, when necessary, precisely in the name of a wider humanizing of Africa, causes certain venerable clan traditions to be abandoned.⁴¹

He goes on to mention as examples of the traditions that need to be abandoned in light of the Crucified Christ's transformation of African culture the harsh attitudes toward childlessness and the evils of corruption and African political power-grabbing. This is very admirable, but is it adequate? But do their cautions adequately safeguard the image of Jesus as ancestor from being seen as supporting an ethnocentric outlook? In the final analysis, we will not know for sure until this image filters down to the common people and is utilized in local ministry and devotion. But we can do some elementary "deconstruction" of the image of Jesus as ancestor to see if it will likely tend toward ethnocentrism or not.

We take note of how closely tied the ancestors are to particular ethnic communities. African ancestors are almost by definition ethnocentric in nature. Physical or genealogical descent is a strict requirement for being an ancestor. The whole idea of community in the African context, at the headwaters of which are the ancestors, is based on the extended family, clan and tribe. Stinton writes in this vein, "One vital component here is that they [the ancestors] continue the ties of kinship beyond death, linking together family and clan members in the visible and invisible worlds. Thus kinship lies at the very heart of ancestral concepts."⁴² This being the

⁴¹Bujo, *African Theology*, 81-83. Cf., Bujo, *Foundations*, 86.

⁴²Stinton, 135.

case, one must seriously question whether the concept of the ancestor can ever be dissociated from a tribal mentality.

Indeed, it is our suspicion that, no matter how many qualifications we attach to it, such as “proto-,” “par excel lance,” or “Supreme,” the term “ancestor” will always carry with it a residue of ethnocentricity. Furthermore, the moral obligation the individual has toward the community in the African context is an obligation which by nature is ethnocentric. The very use of the phrase “ancestral home land” connotes an ethnocentrism that is alien to Christianity which follows a Jesus who claimed to have “no place to lay his head.” In many African societies, it is very important when a person dies to lay the body to rest in the ancestral homeland. They may have lived life in the big city far away, but no expense will be spared to return them to their ancestral home so that their spirits can take their place with the rest of the family’s ancestors. Again, Christianity knows no such tradition. We are taught that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. Can a Jesus who is conceived as an ancestor be buried in a borrowed tomb? Can such a Jesus really expect a politician to cast a vote that he knows will not be in the best interest of his own ethnic community, but is in the national interest?

Indeed, the veneration of ancestors of Africa is very much tied to land. In this regard, there is more affinity of African traditional culture with the Old Testament “tribes” of Israel, each being allocated a piece of land and through the year of Jubilee never being able to be permanently alienated from it. However, Christianity is markedly different from the religion of the Old Testament on this issue. Christianity never was tied to the land of Palestine or any land for that matter. Christianity, in its earliest stages, had to overcome the prevailing ethnocentrism of Judaism. The Book of Acts and the letters of Paul tell the story of a faith that began in some people’s minds as little more than a splintered sect of an particular ethnic group in Judea, but which transcended that and became a multicultural, universal religion.

As many African scholars have noted, there is no separation between the sacred and secular in African life. Religion is not compartmentalized to one day a week or specific times of the day. All of life is religious. Culture, religion and ethnic identity are indistinguishable. As such, African traditional religions are religions of specific ethnic communities. There is little “evangelistic” or “missionary” mindedness, no need to “convert” someone outside the community. Mbiti writes,

[African] Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. . . . Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another. Similarly, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. . . . Therefore, a person has to be born in a particular society in order to assimilate the religious system of the society to which he belongs. An outsider cannot enter or appreciate fully the religion of another society. Those few Europeans who claim to have been “converted” to African religions—and I know some who make such fantastic claims!—do not know what they are saying.⁴³

Ancestral veneration is an essential part of African traditional religious devotion. If African religions are tribal, and ancestral veneration is tied up with these religions, can we truly conceive of Jesus as an ancestor who transcends that tribal loyalty and outlook and commands us to do the same? Can a Jesus who is conceived as my ancestor truly command me to “Go and make disciples of all nations (Greek: *ethnos*)” and expect me to do it?

The liability of this image in light of ethnocentrism is seen in some of the interviews done in Stinton’s research. Stinton asked her respondents if they felt that the image of ancestor was appropriate to apply to Christ. Some of them rejected this image because Jesus was not their biological or physical ancestor. One nearly ninety-year old Ugandan woman stated that she had never heard of Jesus as ancestor before that interview, and she argued that Jesus would not fit into that category “because he is not of my tribe. The ancestors of Buganda must have been the Baganda—only.”⁴⁴ Likewise, a Protestant clergywoman testified that “an ancestor in the context of the African is your kith and kin, mother, father, grandfather, great grandfather,” and that any attempts to construe Jesus as kindred to Africans are simply “academic gymnastics.” A Catholic Archbishop interviewed also expressed concerns over the image, stressing that “ancestor is very restrictive” because it is an “ethnocentric concept.” He explained, “You don’t have the ancestors of the Asantes, you have the ancestors for the clans. My father is my ancestor; he’s not your ancestor. And so before you adopt Jesus as an ancestor, you must be able to first of all convince

⁴³Mbiti, 4.

⁴⁴Stinton, 154.

the whole world that Christians are one family.” While he admitted this could possibly be done using the concept of the African extended family as a model for the church, he also cautioned as follows:

It can be very good and it can be very dangerous, in the sense that the African family is characterized by love, sharing, sensitivity to one another, sharing problems, joint ownership of property, and so on. These are all excellent things. But, at the same time, the African family excludes other families. It’s very ethnocentric. And what is happening in the African world, in Rwanda, in Burundi, is all an enlargement of the idea of the African family. The person who is outside my family is not as important as those in my family. I can band together with my own family members against another person from another family. When somebody from my family has done something, no matter how obnoxious, I support him or her, you see? So whereas the concept of family can be used beautifully as for the church, in some respects it can be very dangerous.⁴⁵

This is precisely the fear that we have regarding this conception of Jesus. If we think of Jesus as our ancestor, will it only make Rwanda and Darfur more likely to happen again?

Several other attempts to contextualize Jesus for Africa may suffer from the same inherent weakness, ethnocentrism. The context of Africa is one that emphasizes family, kinship ties and community, but these very ideals have weaknesses, not just strengths. And the weaknesses are that they can lend themselves to an idolatrous defense of “my people, my family, my clan, my tribe.” So, the danger here may not be so much from the images of Christ as Ancestor, but from the nature of the African context itself. It is probably possible to develop a Christology based on the image of Christ as a Proto-Ancestor or Supreme Ancestor and affirm that this understanding of ancestorship transcends and thoroughly re-defines traditional ancestorship so that the concept is “entirely sanctified.” But our concern is with how that sanitized understanding of ancestorship will be “heard” by African ears and minds in the African context.

Conclusion

We have attempted to show (1) that modern Africa suffers significantly from patterns of ethnocentrism in terms of loss of life, destruction

⁴⁵Ibid.

of property, and underdevelopment; (2) that the traditional African worldview is very communal in nature; (3) that ancestral veneration stands as a pillar of that communal worldview; (4) that several African theologians have attempted to develop a contextualized or inculturated Christology utilizing the ancestor-image; (5) that there is just cause to be concerned that a Christology based on the image of Christ as ancestor will have an inherent susceptibility toward ethnocentrism and will not be able to generate a commanding rejection of tribalism in its many forms.

We acknowledge the tremendous need for contextualization and inculturation of the Gospel so that it “connects” with Africans in their various settings. We applaud the efforts of African scholars such as Bediako, Bujo, and Nyamiti who have been bold enough to develop Christologies specifically for the African context. We affirm that there is much of value in the specific attempt to understand Jesus as a Supreme Ancestor, Proto-Ancestor, or Brother Ancestor. Indeed, there are many parallels between the person and work of Christ and the person and work of the ancestor. We further acknowledge that there is some modest biblical support for an image of Jesus as our ancestor (Jesus as our Brother and First-born over all Creation, etc.) and the related conception of the church as an African extended family or clan (Family of God, children of God, etc.). In addition we admire the attempts of these theologians to develop their images of Christ as ancestor in such a way that Christ transforms the ancestor concept and purges the unchristian aspects from it. Still further, we admit that this dilemma of when does contextualization morph into syncretism is not unique to African Christian theology. It is an issue the church must struggle with wherever it seeks to take root and grow.

Nevertheless, we find that the image of Christ as Ancestor has an inherent weakness with regard to ethnocentrism. It can very easily put up a “blind eye” toward the kind of tribalism that has racked Africa in recent decades. What Africa desperately needs in a theology is not one which reinforces tribalism and clanism, but one which challenges them. What Africa desperately needs is not a Jesus formed in its (African) image, but Africa shaped in Jesus’ image. What Africa desperately needs in a Christology is not one which makes Christ out to be the property of a particular ethnic community but the Lord of all. We believe these African theologians recognize these needs. But we question whether the means (Jesus as ancestor) will accomplish the end (Jesus as Lord of all).

We close with the words of J. M. Waliggo who, while not adamantly opposing the image of Christ as ancestor, cautioned that “the model of ancestor may not change much in society. It may make us re-own our culture within Christianity, but may not touch very much the injustices that have been done to us and which we are doing to each other.”⁴⁶ This is precisely our concern with the image of Jesus as our ancestor.

⁴⁶Quoted from an interview in Stinton, 157.

SHARING OUR WEAKNESS: CHRIST, CREATION, AND FALLENNESS

*for Gordon Thomas**

by

Christina M. Gschwandtner

Much of the Christian tradition has tried to understand what it means for Christ to be truly human. Often this has been a discussion about how Christ's true divinity and his true humanity can be held together without one canceling out the other. At times various parts of the tradition have also tried to examine his divinity more fully by explaining or defining intra-Trinitarian relations, i.e., Christ's relation to the Father and (to a lesser extent) to the Spirit (especially in light of various heresies, such as Arianism that would deny his full divinity). To a large extent the creeds were formulated in response to this need. It is also crucial to ask, however, what exactly is meant by Christ being "truly human." To what extent does Christ share our condition, in what ways is he like us, and what sort of "human nature" does Christ possess?

*This paper (and the larger project of which it is a part) was first inspired by Gordon Thomas, who taught at Nazarene Theological College in Manchester, UK, before he died of cancer much too early on August 20, 2006. Gordon was not only an incredible teacher, but someone with a profound dedication to the life of the church and a tremendous passion for a theological grounding of the Christian life. Gordon was the one who raised—at least for me—most clearly the question of what it means for Christ to be truly human, to share fully in our weakness, and thus to enable us to live a holy life.

Christ's "True Humanity"

These questions have always been guided to a large degree by concerns regarding soteriology and hamartiology. Christ must save us (and thus be without sin himself) and yet must be like us, otherwise he would not be able to identify with our plight or do much about it. As much of the Western tradition has regarded human nature as irretrievably sinful since the fall, Christ is said to take on human nature as it was originally intended: pre-fall (pre-lapsarian), paradisaical human nature, a nature without flaws and with the possibility for a holy, sinless life. This is particularly clear in Augustine's theology. While it is the general condition of human nature that it is impossible for humans not to sin (*non posse non peccare*), Christ in contrast is able to lead a sinless life,¹ or he would not be able to redeem humans.

Not only does Christ not commit any sort of personal sin (that goes without saying), but he also emphatically does not share in original sin.² His miraculous birth by the virgin Mary preserves Christ from contracting the stain of original sin which, Augustine asserted, is transmitted in the

¹At the very least, *posse non peccare* (able not to sin), possibly even *non posse peccare* (not able to sin). For the development of Western conceptions of original sin, see Julius Gross, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas: Von der Bibel bis Augustinus* (München: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1960); Henry Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan (New York: Alba House, 1972); F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1903). Obviously, see also Augustine's own treatises on this topic: *On Baptism*, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins*, and *on the Baptism of Infants*, *On Nature and Grace*, *On the Grace of Christ*, and *on Original Sin*, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, and *On the Soul and its Origins*.

²Augustine ingeniously combined various parts of the tradition available to him (such as the common practice of infant baptism in North Africa, the belief in Mary's virginity, a particular interpretation of a [mistranslated] passage in Romans of our seminal inclusion in Adam, a belief in traducianism, the danger of Pelagianism) into the doctrine of original sin. As such, the doctrine does not exist before Augustine, although some of his immediate predecessors (especially Ambrose and Ambrosiaster) had formulated stronger versions of Adam's sin than circulated previously. For an argument that there is no concept of original sin in Augustine's sense in the early Fathers, see my "Threads of Fallenness According to the Fathers of the First Four Centuries" in which I examine six different metaphors for sin in the early Fathers (especially in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Methodius, Athanasius, and the Cappadocians). *European Explorations in Christian Holiness* (2), Summer 2001, 19-40.

sex act through the male seed and the sinful pleasure of concupiscence. A later tradition thought it necessary to add that Mary also must have been conceived immaculately, so that she would not have inherited a stain she could have passed on (it is not entirely clear why Anna and all previous earthly ancestors of Christ would not have needed a similar immaculate conception in an infinite regression or why the miracle was not sufficient to happen just in the case of Christ).³ Christ's human nature is thus fundamentally different from ours. Even Western traditions that no longer subscribe to a strictly Augustinian version of original sin (and do not make statements about immaculate conception) usually assume that Christ assumes pre-lapsarian human nature, since fallen human nature, post-lapsarian nature, would be sinful and thus prevent the redemptive act.

Why might it be worth revisiting this age-old question that has been discussed since the Patristic age? For several reasons. First, if Christ truly has a nature fundamentally different from ours, it becomes very difficult to formulate how it might be possible for us to lead a holy life like that of Christ.⁴ If we are irretrievably sinful by nature and thus utterly different from Christ, how is he able to serve as pattern for what it means to live as a Christian?

Second, contemporary Christology (especially liberation theologies, feminist theologies, Asian theologies, and others) has emphasized Christ's humanity much more strongly than has often been the case in the past, maybe more strongly than has *ever* been the case, certainly since the early docetic controversies.⁵ Christologies from below at times struggle to

³For the present official statement of the Roman Catholic Church on this, see "The Immaculate Conception," *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori Publications, 1994), 123-128.

⁴Gordon Thomas puts this difficulty as follows: "Was Christ's humanity sinful? Was it fallen? Was Jesus born with Original Sin or not? In the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, was he really made like his brothers and sisters in every respect? If he was, how could he be sinless and therefore our sinless sin-bearer? If he wasn't, how could he truly be said to have been tempted in all points as we are? After all, being free of any inner propensity to sin would seem to give him a horribly unfair advantage over the rest of us, would it not?" Gordon Thomas, "Humanity, Humanity: 'A Monster of Depravity?'," *European Explorations in Christian Holiness* (2), Summer 2001, 249.

⁵For example, the christologies of Jürgen Moltmann, Edward Schillebeeckx and most liberation and feminist christologies (as well as christologies from other parts of the globe). See also Elizabeth Johnson's *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) as a good introduction to these concerns.

explicate exactly what is meant by the claim that Christ “saves” us, and often find traditional theories of atonement unpalatable.⁶ If Christ is truly human (does not have full knowledge or “beatific vision” or might even make mistakes, e.g., about the date of his imminent return, etc.), what exactly does that mean? To what extent does he “share our weakness”?

Third, our sense of “sin” and “sinfulness” has also shifted. Increasingly, we are addressing questions of corporate or systemic evil that do not seem easily linked to personal culpability (or at least where a clear bearer of guilt is difficult to find). Contemporary science, in particular evolutionary theory, has also challenged more simplistic notions of a historical fall (not to speak of a historical Adam), as well as making “genetic” transmission of guilt (or a notion like “immaculate conception”) difficult to articulate in any credible fashion.⁷ What about the existential situation of being enmeshed in systems of production and consumption that can to some extent be identified as evil (although maybe not wholly or in any simplistic fashion) and yet seem to leave little choice for individual behavior that is not already implicated in these often so oppressive and unjust systems? Can Christ be said to “share” or “understand” that sort of experience? How is a Christian to respond to these situations when attempting to “follow Christ”?⁸

Ecological or environmental concerns are particularly urgent in this context. The environmental crisis is global, implicating all of humankind from every corner of the globe, and it is clearly an issue of justice. The theological category of “sin” is present, although more difficult to deal with. Not everyone may agree whether decimation of species, destruction

⁶See, for example, Gerard Sloyan’s chapter on atonement theories in *Tatha Wiley, Thinking of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 2003) and Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Quaestio Disputata, The Atonement Paradigm: Does It Still Have Explanatory Value?” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 418-432. This is particularly evident in theologies that attempt to be more in tune with contemporary science. See especially Arthur Peacocke’s *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), which expresses great discomfort with most traditional atonement theories.

⁷For a contemporary discussion of this, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 226-237.

⁸Regardless of whether that is formulated in terms of *imitatio Christi* or the (rather more controversial) Social Gospel question: “what would Jesus do?” Of course, this does not imply quiescence to such situations. In Christ’s ministry, structures of evil are consistently challenged (see below).

of wildlife habitat or other actions affecting nature can be considered sin,⁹ but most would agree that the impact on humans is sinful, in particular the disproportionately dismal effects on the poor, including such issues as distribution of resources or location of waste facilities with all the health and employment issues they carry in their wake.¹⁰ Do Christology, soteriology, and hamartiology have anything to say to this kind of more global and systemic evil that cannot always be neatly traced to anyone's personal responsibility? Can there be such a thing as an "ecological Christology"?

I will here focus in particular on the christological questions, while recognizing that they cannot ultimately be disconnected from their soteriological and hamartiological implications. What I would like to suggest is that these crises¹¹ call for a Christology in which Christ shares fully in human weakness and creatureliness, a Christology in which Christ embraces a human nature that is subject to the results of the fall. Most fundamentally, an ecological Christology must be a Christology that is *material*. Christ must be said to live in the material world, subject to nature in all its environmental and ecological dimensions. Christ's bodily nature must be emphasized, including his participation in natural death. The material and the spiritual in Christ must be integrally related and neither can "overcome" or invalidate the other. Let me sketch briefly what it might mean for Christ to be fully human, to "share our weakness" in every way, by reflecting on the physical dimensions of probably the most important christological moments: Christ's birth, his life, his death, and his resurrection.¹²

⁹I would contend that they are indeed sinful, that sin is not merely a human category but that it can be perpetrated also against other creatures and creation itself. Certainly in the Hebrew Scriptures sin against people was believed to have calamitous effects on the land. The reverse was also true.

¹⁰This is an issue addressed especially by social or political ecology and by environmental justice. See, for example, the work of Murray Bookchin, James O'Connor, Paul Hawken, Michael Zimmermann, and others. For authors addressing this specifically from a theological perspective, see Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, eds., *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (London: SCM Press, 1995), and Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), especially sections IV and V.

¹¹We usually refer to "the environmental crisis," but I am not sure that the singular is still appropriate, as there are many different crises that compound each other in a complicated fashion.

¹²I am most interested in the potential of this for an ecological theology which I do not have the space here to explore fully. I regard an emphasis on Christ's physicality and materiality as an important first step toward such an ecological christology.

I. Christ's Birth

Although it would be difficult (and maybe undesirable) to dispute that Christ became human (instead of, say, a lion or a spider or a crocus), it is his materiality that is particularly at stake for an ecological Christology, and it must be a materiality that shares in that of all creatures, that is part of the ecological web of this universe, that shares its basic protein and molecular structure and that ultimately also derives from the explosion of first generation of stars, as all living beings and non-living entities in this universe do.

In the doctrine of the incarnation, developed especially in response to the various docetic controversies, the Christian tradition has always emphasized Christ's fully physical nature. It has affirmed emphatically that Christ had a material body and a human will. Throughout the many christological controversies, the church held fast to this insight that Christ must be completely like us and that his divine nature may not take over his human nature. This is particularly obvious in the various treatises written on the incarnation. Athanasius emphasizes quite strongly that Christ takes on a fully human body, a body that shares our corruption and is similarly subject to death.¹³ He goes to great lengths to justify that Christ's body was indeed of physical and corruptible material, defending this against Gnostic (or more common Greek) assumptions which associate the divinity with the unchanging realm of the stars and planets rather than the changeable and corruptible earthly realm. Humans, animals, and the ground are linked together as physical and opposed to the spiritual or divine. Similarly, Cyril of Jerusalem in his early catechetical lectures emphasizes the material aspect of the incarnation,¹⁴ as does Tertullian in his writings on the incarnation.¹⁵

This is also evident in the way in which the early church applied Aristotelian biology to Christ's conception within Mary's womb. Generally, it was expressed as Mary giving human flesh to the divine seed. While God provided the form, Mary provided the matter, the human

¹³"Incarnation of the Word," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994). This is a prominent theme of the entire treatise.

¹⁴See especially Lectures VI and VII of "Catechetical Instructions," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 33-47.

¹⁵See especially his arguments against Marcion in "On the Flesh of Christ," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 521-543.

“stuff.” Of course, Aristotelian biology is not particularly convincing anymore, as we know far more about the processes of conception and generation. It is interesting, however, that Aristotle’s assumptions about human conception and generation are grounded in his observations about how conception works in animals. He makes no fundamental distinctions between non-human and human animals in regard to these biological issues (and in that respect he is basically correct). Apparently the early church, including those who were well versed in Greek philosophy and natural science, did not object to applying these animal processes to Christ. Christ’s body is made of human stuff, animal stuff, material stuff, flesh. The Fathers, Basil in particular, used the best available biology and science of their time to express these insights about Christ’s flesh.¹⁶

How might contemporary insights about biology, ecology, and psychology shape our thinking when we try to ascertain what it means for Christ to be truly human, to take on a material and corruptible body, to be like us in every way? Most fundamentally, it must mean that Christ was subject to the same laws of science as we are. This, of course, is one of the reasons why the early church rejected the *Gospel of Thomas* and similar early miracle stories that give the infant Christ supernatural powers and depict him in quasi-magical fashion. The church recognized that if Christ does not assume our weak human nature, he cannot ultimately redeem it. If Christ cannot empathize with our weaknesses, including our limitations, our desires and passions, he cannot heal these weaknesses, cannot help us within them. In Christ, material and spiritual meet. If he provides access to the spiritual for us material beings, in a sense he also provides for God access to the material.¹⁷ In Christ, God becomes part of God’s own creation, becomes an intimate part of that creation. God becomes a creature made of stardust, molecules, and chromosomes. Christ is subject to the same history of the universe, is as much (although not solely) a product of the evolutionary process, in this universe that has its source of life in God.

This is not to deny Christ’s divinity. Yet this divinity is recognized only in retrospect, tentatively in the disciples’ affirmations and more explicitly in the faith and doctrinal statements of the church. And it is expressed

¹⁶D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1968).

¹⁷About a year ago my six-year-old fosterchild explained to me in mid-January the meaning of the huge (and rather gaudy) plastic nativity scene still displayed prominently in a neighbor’s front yard: “That is so God can look down and remember what it was like when he was a baby.”

most clearly in the activity of the Spirit in the (probably rather late) accounts of Christ's conception. Christ's matter is hallowed by the Spirit who overshadows Mary at the Annunciation. The incarnation affirms this material creation as a possible dwelling place for the Spirit who sanctifies the material taking form in Mary's fleshly womb. In a homily on Theophany or Christmas, Gregory Nazianzen expresses this beautifully to his congregation: "And He Who gives riches becomes poor, for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the riches of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself, for He empties Himself of His glory for a short while, that I may have a share in His Fullness . . . inasmuch as He imparted the better Nature, whereas now Himself partakes of the worse."¹⁸ Christ takes on our weak human nature in order to sanctify it and redeem it.

II. Christ's Life

Christ's life is a similarly human life. Christ is subject to cultural and social conditions, to his Jewish upbringing, the peculiar history of his family and the Galilean context in which he was raised. And Christ struggles with temptations, with anger and frustration, as we do, although of course within the context of the first not the twenty-first century (thus, he was probably neither morbidly introspective, nor rabidly individualistic, nor capitalist or consumerist in attitude). And while first-century Galilee probably did not suffer from global warming or deal with acid rain, it was subject to droughts and ecological devastation of its own sort.¹⁹

¹⁸"On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 349.

¹⁹One might contend, of course, that such a Christology would be utterly anachronistic as the first century would not have seen ecological devastation and could know nothing of acid rain, nuclear waste or global warming. While the current extent and degree of ecological devastation is certainly completely out of proportion with that of early times, it is not correct to say that our problem is completely new. Humans have always impacted their environment and at times that impact has reached truly suicidal proportions, especially in contained environments, such as island communities. Particular striking examples are the stories of the Easter Islands, some Polynesian islands, and Greenland, as Jerry Diamond argues in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fall or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005). See also J. R. McNeill in *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W.W. Norton: 2000). And there certainly was environmental devastation to the Galilean countryside from the repercussions of Herod Antipas' building projects. See, for example, Elizabeth Johnson in *Truly Our Sister*, 153-59. Yet, all these historical reflections aside, a *contemporary* Christology must be able to address *contemporary* concerns, even if they did not pose themselves in the same fashion for previous generations.

Christ certainly knew what it meant to live on and from the land. His parables about farmers and shepherds are clear evidence of that. And like us, Christ required food. He did not live off ambrosia like the Greek gods. This food had to be produced and consumed and disposed of. Surely there were times that Christ was hungry or had a stomachache or desired a particular food. We know he fasted and feasted, ate bread and drank wine. To ignore all of these aspects of Christ's life is to deny his real humanity. To claim that Christ was not genetically related to all other animals, that he was not part of the food chain, that his community had nothing to do with the local ecosystem, that he required no water, no soil to survive, is an essentially docetic stance.

Do we have any evidence of Christ's relation to nature and to creation in his life? Did he use and exploit it, as we now do so glibly and freely? Would Christ have approved of our consumerist stance toward nature, our attitude that sees it as a mere resource to be exploited, as something essentially different from us, to which we are superior and which we can consume at will? Certainly not. Christ's parables speak tellingly of close observation of nature. He blesses food, uses it to feed people, and even makes sure that none of it is wasted. Even when miracles are reported, they do not usually constitute abuse of nature. Christ stills the storm, grants peace to the waves. Christ multiplies food without exploiting the ground. Christ speaks of careful husbandry and of punishment on those who think they own the vineyard and can keep all its fruits. He points to flowers and birds as examples of life in the kingdom.

Christ lives a truly human life upon earth, in close relation to the ground and the animals and people that live on and from it. Christ could have used or abused matter for his own purposes. Instead he hallows and blesses it. This is expressed in many Patristic homilies. Gregory affirms, "perhaps He goes to sleep, in order that He may bless sleep also; perhaps He is tired that He may hallow weariness also; perhaps He weeps that He may make tears blessed."²⁰ And Gregory seems to link this to the insight that Christ assumes fallen human nature: "But, in the character of the Form of a servant, He condescends to His fellow servants, nay, to His servants, and takes upon Him a strange form, bearing all me and mine in Himself, that in Himself He may exhaust the bad, as fire does wax, or as

²⁰"On the Words of the Gospel," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 338.

the sun does the mists of the earth; and that I may partake of His nature by the blending.”²¹

So if Christ does indeed find himself in a situation that is already affected by the fall, a creation already marred, in which there are temptations to participate in and perpetuate evil, does that mean that Christ sins? Hilary of Poitiers would suggest that both can be held together: “For He took upon Him the flesh in which we have sinned that by wearing our flesh He might forgive sins; a flesh which He shares with us by wearing it, not by sinning in it.”²² Christ wears the flesh, our weak and fallen flesh, and in and with it lives an earthly life, thereby hallowing and sanctifying it. It is very clear in the Gospel accounts that Christ does not simply give in to the context and situations in which he finds himself. In Christ’s ministry, structures of evil are consistently challenged. It is clear that Christ is born into a patriarchal society with various prejudices against women, lepers, tax collectors, and Samaritans, and that he is a part of that society. And yet Christ associates with women and children (upbraiding his disciples when they attempt to send them away), dines with tax collectors, touches lepers, and converses with Samaritans (and speaks of one as an example of kenotic charity).

Christ is not exempt from these structures and does not challenge them because he has a fundamentally different (non-Jewish?) nature. Rather, as a participant in his society, he reaches out and invites the unacceptable. Christ affirms these groups most closely associated with the ground, those who harvest and prepare food, those who suffer physical illness and even death. Matter has a consistent place in Christ’s ministry through his touching, healing, and feeding. Throughout his life he worked at healing matter and flesh from all its weakness and pain.

How was he able to do so? Simply because he has magical divine power? The accounts of the beginning of his ministry give an indication: Christ’s ministry is blessed by the Spirit who descends on him at baptism, as the church has always affirmed to be the case for all believers in their own baptism into the church. God works through Christ and the disciples recognize the presence of God’s Spirit in him. It is the Spirit who hallows Christ’s early ministry, and it is this same Spirit which he breathes on the church after his passion and death.

²¹“Fourth Theological Oration,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 311.

²²“Homily on Psalm LIII,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 244.

III. Christ's Death

The church has always been extremely emphatic that Christ really suffered and died a real death. If Christ does not suffer death, he cannot redeem it, cannot provide access to life. His sufferings under Pilate and on the cross were not phantom pains, but were real physical pains. He died a physical death. Hilary of Poitiers explains in his *Homilies on the Psalms* why this was necessary: "Yet in order that He might present to us a perfect example of human humility both prayed for and underwent all things that are the lot of man. Sharing in our common weakness He prayed the Father to save Him, so that He might teach us that He was born under all the conditions of man's infirmity. This is why He was hungry and thirsty, slept and was weary, shunned the assemblies of the ungodly, was sad and wept, suffered and died."²³ Christ took on a corruptible body, a flesh subject to decay, disintegration and death (as we have already seen in Athanasius). Cyril is emphatic in his lectures that Christ's sufferings on the cross were no "illusion" or "show" but that his passion was real.²⁴ Cyril goes on to point out in the very same lecture that Christ's physical suffering and death (including his burial) are for the redemption of all of nature: "For this cause also was He buried in the earth, that the earth which had been cursed might receive the blessing instead of a curse."²⁵

The most obvious and important commentary of the church on Christ's suffering and death is the celebration of the Eucharist, which has been at the core of Christian practice since the very beginning. Our earliest Christian prayers and liturgies center around the Eucharist. And the Eucharist is preeminently a place where material and spiritual meet. Material items are brought to the table, but they do not remain simply material. From early on, the liturgy of the Eucharist included a prayer later called the epiclesis, a prayer for the Spirit to descend and sanctify the gifts.²⁶ The Spirit's role in sanctifying Christ's birth, life, and death, is then reiterated in the Eucharistic ceremony. Material items are brought to

²³"Homily on Psalm LIII," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 245.

²⁴Lecture XIII, 83.

²⁵Lecture XIII, 87. He actually emphasizes this several times within the lecture.

²⁶See, for example, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 537-568.

God as the church's gift and these material items are hallowed through the action of the Spirit within the holy space and time of the assembled people. This hallowing and sanctifying does not deny their material and physical nature. The bread is still bread, the wine still wine, and yet they are also the body and blood of Christ through the sanctifying action of the Spirit. Christ's words "This is my body, This is my blood, Do this in memory of me" are re-enacted within the community, which itself becomes the physical and spiritual body of Christ in the world. At the very core of the life and identity of the church stands this affirmation of the material.

Early homilies, like those of Cyril, Gregory, and others, tried to impress this not only on catechumens but on the whole church. The Eucharist has transformative power. All of life becomes sanctified and holy. In the Eucharist, earthly matter is offered as a gift to God. We consume it as a spiritual sustenance with our material bodies. It becomes assimilated into our flesh and bone, as we eat and drink Christ's death and resurrection. We participate with our physical bodies in this mystery. Our bodies become hallowed by the divine. Within the Eucharist we offer ourselves, our bodies, and all of material creation as a gift to be hallowed by God through the Spirit. And when we participate in the Eucharist and our bodies assimilate this divine gift, the Spirit begins its work in us. "This is my body; this is my blood" is a statement not only for a material christology, but also for a material soteriology. And the early church also read it as a promise, a promise of resurrection. This brings us to our final christological reflection on the resurrection and ascension.

IV. Christ's Resurrection and Ascension

The church has always affirmed that Christ was bodily raised, ascended in his physical body, thus carrying materiality into the divine life, and that this foreshadows our own physical resurrection and a transformation of the material creation. Methodius of Olympus affirmed in his early fragments on Christ's resurrection that this belief implies that God does not give up on creation: "But it is not satisfactory to say that the universe will be utterly destroyed, and sea and air and sky will be no longer. For . . . God did not work in vain, or do that which was worst. God therefore ordered the creation with a view to its existence and continuance. . . . The creation, then, after being restored to a better and more seemly state, remains, rejoicing and exulting over the children of God at the resurrec-

tion.”²⁷ Maximus the Confessor also had much to say on the cosmic dimension of Christ’s resurrection.²⁸ According to the accounts of Christ’s appearances after his death (particularly clear with Thomas), the wounds in his flesh are still visible after the resurrection. Furthermore, these wounds, this flesh, and this body, is what he carries with him in his ascension to the Father. Christ thus brings the material into the very life of God.

The early Fathers are almost unanimous in seeing the resurrection as an affirmation of the redemption of matter. Cyril, for example, after having gone to great lengths to show that bodies are originally holy and undefiled and that Christ is not ashamed of taking on a body himself, strongly emphasizes bodily resurrection, adducing various Pauline proof texts as support for this.²⁹ In this context, he also speaks of a resurrection, not only of human bodies, but of all of creation: “This created world is to be re-made anew. . . . And the Lord rolleth up the heavens, not that He may destroy them, but that He may raise them up again more beautiful . . . so we look for a resurrection, as it were, of the heavens also.”³⁰ Gregory similarly speaks of “the transformation of the heavens, the transfiguration of the earth, the liberation of the elements, the renovation of the universe.”³¹ For the early church (as Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 15) Christ’s resurrection is a foretaste of our resurrection. And “our” does not refer only to humans, but much more fundamentally to all of creation. Athanasius describes the effect of Christ as that of a king who visits a particular part of a country. The presence of the king transforms the entire place, affecting people, animals, and the countryside. Everything has changed because the king is present. The influence of evil has been banished.³²

Yet resurrection and ascension also mean that now we are to become Christ’s body and flesh in the world. We are to be broken and poured out.

²⁷“From the Discourse on the Resurrection,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 365.

²⁸See especially his *Mystagogia*. See: Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003).

²⁹Lecture XVIII (especially page 139). He links this very closely to ecclesiology.

³⁰Lecture XV, 105.

³¹“Panegyric on his Brother S. Caesarius,” 237.

³²“Incarnation of the Word,” 41.

The activity of the Spirit is again central here. Christ breathes his Spirit on the disciples and promises them that the Spirit will be with them, teach them, and guide them (this promise is fulfilled at Pentecost). Christ is present through his Spirit and evident in the saints. Many of the early Patristic accounts of martyrdom affirm this, seeing Christ physically present in the sister or brother who is dying for the faith and carrying Christ's wounds in his or her mortal flesh.³³ It becomes the task of the church to carry on and complete the deification and sanctification of all of creation. We are now the ones who are to hallow the material as Christ did.

Ecological Implications

What are the ecological implications of these christological reflections? First, an ecological theology must affirm and embrace matter and the entire cosmos. Christology must be radically fleshly and material.³⁴ This includes Christ's descent into a fallen human nature, into a marred creation, a place of death and at times willful destruction. Christ is implicated within this environment, shares our "fallenness" to the fullest extent (and fallenness can therefore not be simply equated with sin). Christ shares in our condition fully, including the human experience of finding ourselves in a situation which precedes us, is larger than we are, maybe assumes our participation, but does not necessarily imply personal culpability. This situation may well indict us even personally if we contribute to its perpetuation and do not attempt to confront its evil structures, but it does recognize that much of the evil precedes us and is not always unambivalent.³⁵

³³This is a common theme in many early accounts of martyrdom. It is also prominent in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*.

³⁴That this is not merely about human flesh is shown by the iconoclastic controversies which come to the conclusion that the incarnation validates and hallows the material to such an extent that wood and paint are appropriate materials for portraying the divine penetration of matter—a separate argument could be made here and has been made to some extent by John Chryssavgis. John Chryssavgis, "The World of the Icon and Creation: An Orthodox Perspective on Ecology and Pneumatology," in Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 200), 83-96; Idem, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1999).

³⁵For example, it may well be quite correct to speak of the evils of capitalism, but it probably would be an overstatement to regard capitalism as unequivocally and inherently evil and imply that everyone contracts personal guilt when born into a capitalist system (and ought to be punished for it).

One might be able then to formulate an ecological hamartiology that is able to distinguish between personal or individual sin and transgression and at the same time speak of a more general sense of fallenness that is able to take seriously systemic and structural evil as a reality, a reality which even Christ faced. This may allow us to formulate an ecological soteriology that grants all of creation “a place in the choir”: a soteriology that includes creation, makes it possible to conceive of redeeming creation from ecological devastation and includes an eschatological vision that goes beyond human beings to deal with the entire cosmos. We may then be able to affirm that indeed Christ assumed physical matter and by assuming it hallowed and sanctified all of creation.

**PURSUING AN ONTOLOGY OF
ATTUNEMENT THROUGH
ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHRISTOLOGY**

by

Nathan Crawford

Let me begin with a story. It takes place in a local coffee shop; the time is the time that I write the bulk of this paper. While in the coffee shop, there were other people and there was music playing. An odd place to write perhaps, but a quiet one when the other option is writing with a two-year-old present. So, the coffee shop it was. While at the coffee shop, something happened that was both ordinary and shed significant light on my thinking. The music was not loud, was not unusual, and was meant to just be there, in the background. The selection of music was quite varied and, for the most part, I paid little attention to it, only noticing that it was there. I was engrossed in my writing. However, in a moment of my writing, I heard the opening chords to “Here Comes the Sun” by The Beatles. This is one of my favorite songs.

All of a sudden, I was no longer writing. I was enraptured by the song, taken up by it, living in it. No longer was the music simply there; rather, it was the very reason I was there. Instead of tuning the music out, I was now tuning the music in, attuning myself to the music through the tapping of my foot, the mouthing of the words and the strumming of a non-existent guitar. I was now different, no longer writing but listening; no longer doing, but enjoying. This all took place because of a change in song. The song, instead of just being there, called to me, committed itself to me, and, in turn, I could commit myself to it.

This story is a small exhibition of what I will offer in this piece. I will argue that a properly Christian ontology must take into consideration two things. First, it must understand the commitment that the Triune God makes to humanity in the sending of the Son to earth, reconciling God to humanity through the mediation of the Son. This sending of the Son is the condition of the possibility for any properly Christian ontology. Second, we must take into consideration the commitment needed on the part of the person/community to participate in this reconciliation of God to humanity. In order for there to be a properly Christian ontology, there must exist a transformative moment in the life of both the person and community where there is a commitment to this Triune God. Through these two movements, we see that ontology should look like I did in the coffee shop while enjoying “Here Comes the Sun.” There is an involvement, a participation that occurs because the music catches me and I give myself up to it, playing along. I argue, then, that what is needed is an understanding of ontology within Christian theology that takes seriously this double movement of commitment—I deem this an ontology of attunement.¹

The argument that I make consists of two sections. First, there is an analysis of the current understanding of an ontology of participation. I do this through an analysis of the work of Radical Orthodoxy. Through this, we see the inadequacy of such an ontology for Christian theology. Second, then, I articulate how we should understand an ontology of attunement through a reading of St. Augustine, focusing primarily on his Christology. What is needed is an ontology based on a hermeneutic that is open to the work of God in Christ and the necessary movement of the person to God because of this work. This is attunement.

A Critique of the Ontology of Participation

To continue to flesh out what I have just said, let us turn to the work of Radical Orthodoxy.² We start here because this group of thinkers has

¹As I use the word “attunement” in what follows, it should become aware that I am using it in a phenomenological way. While aware of the neuroscientific, psychological, and therapeutic uses of the term, this paper does not take these into account. I hope to show the consonance between the phenomenological and other ideas of attunement in a future essay; however, that is outside of the scope of this paper.

²I will deal, in this paper, with the three main voices of the movement called Radical Orthodoxy: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward. I

placed a strong importance on the notion of participation. Specifically, they argue that the material and temporal can only be upheld when they are acknowledged to participate in the transcendent.³ In fact, participation becomes the center of the theological framework which Radical Orthodoxy constructs, specifically deriving the notion from Plato and early Christianity. The taking up of this motif is important because it is impossible to reserve any territory of creation that is independent of God. Thus, the turn to participation allows all things to exist only because of this participation, while still maintaining the integrity of the material.⁴

As this notion of participation is worked out, a central theme is that there cannot be strictly finite matter. Rather, Radical Orthodoxy seeks to save the appearances of matter and the temporal by exceeding them. This means that materialism can only exist with an appeal to some external source, developing a certain spirituality. This spirituality does not seek to mitigate the finitude of the material, devoiding it of meaning and signification. Rather, the external source which opens the spirituality so imbibes the appearances of various objects that they exceed their limitations and definitions. However, the only reason they are there in the beginning is because of this external source. So that, for Radical Orthodoxy, the material gains not only its meaning but its very existence from this external source.⁵

John Milbank further articulates this idea in his essay "Materialism and Transcendence." Here, he says, "If matter is to be more than inert, and even capable of subjectivity and meaning, then it must be innately

mention these three specifically because they are the editors of the volume *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. For an introduction to the thought of this group, see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); for the specific content on the importance of participation, see 185-231. See also D. Stephen Long, "Radical Orthodoxy," in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126-145.

³John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), i. This is actually one of the four crucial claims of Radical Orthodoxy.

⁴Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, "Introduction: Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1998), 3.

⁵Ibid., 4.

more than a spatially or mechanistically limited substance; it must rather be forcefully self-transcending.”⁶ Here, Milbank espouses the claim that the material and temporal can have no meaning outside of their participation in the transcendence. The self-transcending nature of the finite, then, is what gives it its meaning and subjectivity because, as was argued in the previous paragraph, the material is given its meaning and subjectivity only as it participates in the transcendent, which is how it becomes self-transcending. Thus, the material only is able to transcend itself and gain meaning when it participates in the transcendent.

However, this participation in the transcendent does not necessitate a closing of the gap between the finite and infinite. Rather, an ontological gap must exist between the two. In fact, there must be sustaining of distance and otherness between the finite and the infinite in order for participation to take place. This is where Pickstock’s reading of Plato becomes so important. She looks to his treatise *Phaedrus* to articulate her understanding of participation (developed from the Platonic idea of *methexis*). She argues that in the *Phaedrus* Plato does not “drive a wedge between form and appearance.” Rather, he develops an understanding of participation of the appearances in the transcendent forms. This participation in the forms is what enables Plato to see the appearances as beautiful, which develops into a love for beauty through the beautiful appearances. For Pickstock, then, it is only in the distance and otherness of the forms that they are able to sustain the beauty of the appearances. The distance allows for a participation in the transcendent, as the knowledge and understanding and love that develops only comes about through the representations formed in the participation.⁷

Furthering the notion of participation, the thinkers in Radical Orthodoxy use the ontology of participation as a way to articulate what it is to think and reason. Pickstock, again turning to the *Phaedrus*, argues that it is through participation in the transcendent that one gains knowledge and gazes upon the beautiful. She says that for Plato the transcendent is beyond being, appearance, and objectification. However, this transcendence, which Plato calls the good, cannot be contained and “spills over

⁶John Milbank, “Materialism and Transcendence,” in *Theology and the Political*, eds. John Milbank, Creston Davis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 394.

⁷Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 14.

into immanence, in such a way that the good is revealed in the beauty of physical particulars."⁸ It is through our participation in the transcendent, then, that we are able to know the beautiful and gaze upon it as it comes to the fore in other objects.

In order for the person to participate in this transcendent, though, there must first be an illumination of the mind by God. This "divine illumination theory" is developed especially by Milbank. He argues that both faith and reason come from participation in God, and specifically in the mind of God. He says, "[T]o reason truly one must be already illumined by god, while revelation itself is but a higher measure of such illumination. . . ."⁹ Both faith and reason come from the illumination of the mind by God. This illumination takes place in the participation of the person by the transcendent, which takes place through the giving of existence to the mind. Thus, participation becomes the condition of the possibility for thinking and reasoning since it is the only means by which we are able to participate in the mind of God.

Milbank and Pickstock both bring the notion of participation in the mind of God to a conclusion in their co-authored text *Truth in Aquinas*. Here they argue, through a reading of Thomas Aquinas, that the very power of thought—both as it comes naturally and as it is given in grace—only comes through one's participation in God, and specifically in "uncreated and intelligible light of the divine intellect."¹⁰ This leads them to conclude that for Thomas the only way to know is to be able to see how something participates in certain transcendental attributes given by God.¹¹ Knowledge, then, is to see the divine light shining through the created order, understanding existence as it participates and is reliant upon God. Ultimately, Milbank and Pickstock see this as leading to the ability of a thinker to then name God. Through the participation in the divine intellect, which allows us to see all things as participating in God, we see everything as more than is seen and seeing the invisible in the visible. Thus, certain things can be seen as analogically naming God because they participate in

⁸Ibid., 12.

⁹John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1998), 24.

¹⁰John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 22.

¹¹Ibid., 23.

God and function analogically to reveal God.¹² With this, participation becomes the condition of the possibility for naming God as the doctrine of analogy is reliant upon a metaphysics and ontology of participation.¹³

As I have sketched the notion of participation in Radical Orthodoxy, we see that our existence and very being are reliant on our participation in God/the transcendent. There is nothing that we do to receive this gift, but it overtakes us. There seems to be no one who does not participate, implying that the idea of participation is a universal phenomena.¹⁴ However, within the group of Radical Orthodoxy, there seems to be a problem for the ontology of participation. This problem is that there needs to be a commitment on the part of the person in order to participate. And, the end is not strictly participation, but something else.

Let me come back to the musical metaphor to highlight what has been said. Radical Orthodoxy articulates a way of being like the person who sits in the coffee shop, listening to the radio, but mostly unaware of the fact that it is there. The person's existence is merely there with the existence of the music, not really changed by the music because the person is unaware of the music; or, worse, the person consciously chooses to "tune out" the music to turn to other matters, inherently ignoring the music. There is a certain degree of participation in the music, but not a full participation, only a forced participation.¹⁵ There is a need for something else, for a commitment on the part of the person to engage in the world of the music.

We see this idea that participation needs something else—commitment—most explicitly in the work of Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward. Let me begin with Pickstock. In *After Writing*, after she has worked to articulate the ontology of participation sketched above through her reading of the *Phaedrus*, she makes explicit that in order to participate to the fullest degree requires a commitment. Pickstock believes that the *Phaedrus* ends in an act of "doxological expression," a liturgical act. In

¹²Ibid., 47.

¹³Ibid., 48.

¹⁴However, I do believe that Radical Orthodoxy's ontology of participation does imply a certain amount of varying degrees of participation. As an example, see *Truth in Aquinas*, 24.

¹⁵Here, one must ask whether a forced participation is actually participation at all. This is not often how we think of participation, although I would say there is a degree of participation even in being forced to participate.

order for the person to fully appreciate and participate in this liturgical act, there must be a commitment on the part of the person. This is absent in the above, where participation is strictly given by God. Rather, here, Pickstock makes explicit that participation, in order to be full participation, requires an act of commitment, a decision to participate.¹⁶

Graham Ward makes a similar argument in relation to the Eucharist. He argues that the bread and wine in the event of taking the Eucharist remain bread and wine if we do not decide to participate in it. But the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Christ when we make the decision to meet God there. In this decision, God also meets us there, transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood. Thus, the transformation of the elements takes place because of the double attunement to the other that takes place in the Eucharist—the attunement of God to us and our attunement to God.¹⁷ For Ward, the condition of the possibility of this double attunement is in the double work of the Triune God in creation and the incarnation.¹⁸ Through this double work, closely associated with the Second Person of the Trinity, full participation occurs because it is only through this double work that we are able to meet God in the Eucharist, making the Eucharist the transformative event it is.¹⁹

It is this deconstructive moment of commitment as the condition of the possibility for full participation that undoes participation as a way to account for a Christian ontology. Rather, a Christian ontology must take into account both the commitment made by the Triune God in the work of creation and the incarnation as well as the commitment of the person (people) to encounter this God. It is this double move, with the move of God always first, that makes possible the understanding of participation. Thus, I argue in the following that a Christian ontology is an ontology of attunement, which both incorporates and exceeds an ontology of participation.

¹⁶Pickstock, *After Writing*, 39. I would argue that it is this notion of commitment that allows Pickstock to develop her ideas on the Eucharist, and her subsequent Eucharistic hermeneutic in the last section of the text. To take this further, Pickstock runs into a problem because the Eucharist, on which she bases so much of her thinking, needs baptism to properly be. Baptism is the place of commitment, of entering the community. Pickstock lacks this in her thinking and yet must implicitly argue for it so that she can offer an explicitly Eucharistic hermeneutic.

¹⁷Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 84-5.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 94-5.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 95.

In making this argument for the role of commitment in a Christian ontology, let me make a few remarks of caution, again returning to my opening story. The commitment I speak of is not a purely rational or cognitive decision. This commitment can (and, often, does) include the rational, but this is commitment on a different level. The commitment implied here is a giving of oneself over to, to the kind of commitment made in loving the other. It is not a commitment whereby I decide one day that I will love, but is rather a commitment where I “feel” or intuit (to use Husserl’s language), and this gives credence to make a cognitive decision. So, turning back to the beginning story, I made a commitment to throw myself into “Here Comes the Sun” when it came on the radio. However, this was not a cognitive decision; I would rather have worked. Instead, the song caught my attention, the beat had me tapping my foot, my mouth naturally sang the song. It was almost as if I either had to fight against this feeling or I had to give myself over to it. This is how I am conceiving of commitment. It is this idea of commitment that will lead to an ontology of attunement.

In order to articulate this ontology of attunement, I will turn to the work of St. Augustine, ironically a major source for Radical Orthodoxy. I will specifically look at how his Christology opens up an understanding of an ontology of attunement in two texts: *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Trinitate*.²⁰ The focus in these will be on the Christological arguments Augustine makes for rethinking how Christians should think about their existence. This opens the door for my articulation of an ontology of attunement.

Sketching an Ontology of Attunement with St. Augustine

Let me begin my discussion of Augustine by examining his text *De Doctrina Christiana*.²¹ Here, we see Augustine concerned with teaching

²⁰In what follows, my critique is similar to that of James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). Both Smith and I offer a critique of Radical Orthodoxy by turning to the central point of the work of Christ, especially in the Incarnation. However, Smith continues to perpetuate an ontology of participation while I am concerned with showing that this notion cannot account for either its own ground or its end. Rather, as I have said, we must pursue an ontology of attunement, which is why I turn to the Incarnation, the attuning act of God to humanity.

²¹Augustine, *Teaching Christianity in The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century I/11*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996). All references to *De Doctrina Christiana* will be to this translation and refer to the book and paragraph per this translation.

how it is to correctly interpret Scripture.²² He wants to show what type of hermeneutic is the properly Christian hermeneutic as it pertains to interpreting Scripture. This hermeneutic does not simply offer a way of interpretation apart from the Christian life, but also seeks to see the interpreter transformed into someone who can preach the whole Gospel with the whole person, as that which best communicates the Gospel that is both lived and taught.²³ The basis for this life is the Christology Augustine articulates in Book I, where we find the impetus toward an ontology of attunement.

Augustine begins Book I of *De Doctrina Christiana* by showing the difference between things and signs. In his understanding, a thing is what is signified, while a sign is that which does the signifying.²⁴ For Augustine, then, we use signs in order to get to things. The ultimate thing is that which we come to which we are able to enjoy, and not use as a sign to get to something else. For him, the ultimate thing is the Triune God.²⁵ However, for Augustine, this leads to a certain dilemma. We have signs that signify things, but how is it that we can signify God, the ultimate thing who is ultimately great, eternal, and unchangeable? We must posit God as inexpressible,²⁶ which leads us into a certain bind. We must talk of God, but how is it that we can talk of God? How is it that signs lead us to contemplate this God? For Augustine, the answer comes in the decision of God to be revealed in the Incarnation.

The mediating role of Christ, in Augustine's thinking, necessitates a double movement. First, it is the choosing of the created world by God, in such a way that God becomes part of this created world, effectively mediating divinity to creation. Christ comes to earth, purifying the person in such a way that they can see the thing God through the signs of earth. We realize that the creator created everything and that the music of the creator resounds through all of creation.²⁷ The achievement of this is through God's decision to dwell among the creatures in the incarnation, which opens up a way of existing which is transformed. As Augustine says, "We

²²Ibid., I.1

²³Ibid., IV.59-61.

²⁴Ibid., I.2.

²⁵Ibid., I.4-5.

²⁶Ibid., I.5-6.

²⁷Ibid., I.11-2. For more on how Augustine looks to "hear" the music of God in all things, see his treatise *De Musica*.

were deceived by the wisdom of the serpent; we are set free by the folly of God. . . . We made bad use of immortality, and so ended up dying; Christ made good use of mortality, so that we might end up living.”²⁸ Thus, the act of the Triune God in the incarnation is a decision to attune Godself to humanity so that humanity may then not only choose God, but be able to see the God who is in all things.

This decision on God’s part can result in the transformation of the person (people) so that they can also be attuned to God. Due to the work of Christ in the incarnation, God has made it possible to be attuned to God because God has first attuned Godself to the creation.²⁹ This attunement results in a transformation of the person, so that one can continue to be more attuned to God, which allows for further attunement. The entire time, Christ is transforming the person in order to be able to interpret Scripture correctly. For Augustine, then, the attunement to God, made possible by God’s attunement to humanity in the incarnation, results in a transformative hermeneutic, where the emphasis is on developing love of God and love of neighbor.³⁰ All Scripture leads to the development of these two loves, to a way of interpreting to form the believer to love—and, as we have seen previously, Augustine believes that in order to preach something with words, it must also be lived in a life.³¹ Thus, the work of Christ is transformative for the person, allowing the person to not only participate in the creation (which is only made possible by God’s attunement to the created), but also to become attuned to the Triune God, existing in the divine life. The very essence of the person is now different, redeemed, attuned to God.

In order to more fully articulate the ontology of attunement that Augustine is pursuing, let us now examine his famous doctrinal treatise *De Trinitate*.³² This text is not strictly a doctrinal treatise, but is also a meditation on what it means to know God. This meditation also consists of showing how knowledge of God leads to a certain way of life,³³ specif-

²⁸Ibid., I.13.

²⁹This is the same logic that Nicholas of Cusa uses in *De Visione Dei*.

³⁰Ibid., I.27-28.

³¹See also Ibid., I.28.

³²St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991). All references to Augustine’s *De Trinitate* are from Hill’s translation, and will be made following book and paragraph number.

³³This is how Pierre Hadot described ancient philosophy. See his *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase and ed. Arnold I. Davison (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

ically that of attunement to God in *sapientia* and contemplation.³⁴ It is my contention that this treatise revolves around Augustine's understanding of the work and person of Jesus Christ in Book IV. From here, we can then begin to see how he develops his ontology of attunement.

In Book IV of *De Trinitate* Augustine wants to articulate the mediating role of the Second Person of the Trinity between God and humanity, which opens into a transformation of humanity into a new creation. The problem that exists, the reason that mediation is needed, is sin. Humanity has been sinful and it is only the action of the Triune God which can overcome the destruction and alienation caused by sin.³⁵ In the incarnation, then, Christ mediates between God and humanity by becoming God and dwelling among the creation.³⁶ In doing so, Jesus "applied to us the similarity of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity of our iniquity, and becoming of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity."³⁷ In doing this work, Jesus tunes God and humanity to each other, creating a "harmony" between the Infinite and finite.³⁸ In this "harmony of salvation" it is Jesus, the mediator between God and humanity, who "intercedes for us in so far as he is [human], while not concealing that as God

³⁴For the structure of *De Trinitate* that I work from, see my "The *Sapiential* Structure of St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Pro Ecclesia* (forthcoming). A brief survey of some of the literature that propagates this claim (and upon which I am, at least, partially reliant) is needed here. See Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," *Augustiniana* 40, no. 1 (1990), 317-332; Edmund Hill, "Introduction," to St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991); John Cavadini, "The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992) 103-23; Joanne McWilliam, "The Study of Augustine's Christology in the Twentieth Century," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 183-206; Basil Studer, O.S.B., "History and Faith in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 28:1 (1997), 7-50; Lewis Ayres, "The Christological Context of Augustine's *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV," in *Studies in Patristic Christology*, eds. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1998) 95-121; and Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 139-59. I am especially indebted to many conversations with Mark McIntosh on the subject.

³⁵*De Trinitate*, IV.1-3.

³⁶*Ibid.*, IV.4.

³⁷*Ibid.*, IV.4.

³⁸*Ibid.*, IV.4-5.

he is one with the Father. . . .”³⁹ This work of Jesus, then, in the incarnation “bonds” us and “reconciles” us to the Creator,⁴⁰ attuning our humanity to hear the song of God played throughout the creation.

We see in Augustine that when Jesus does the work of the Incarnation, mediating the Infinite to the finite and the finite to the Infinite, he is performing the ultimate act of attunement. Jesus’ ability to perform this mediation is because his divinity is perfectly attuned to humanity, while his humanity is perfectly attuned to divinity. The result is the fact that Jesus becomes the way that the Christian becomes transformed, the condition of the possibility for the person being attuned to God. Alluding to my beginning story, Jesus becomes like the one who plays the song, making me able to become attuned, and is also the song itself, making him the one to whom I am attuned.

This attunement to God is further played out by Augustine in Book VII of *De Trinitate*. Here, due to the mediating work of Christ in the incarnation, there is a new end for humanity. No longer is the created stuck in the grip of sin, but there is a transformation that takes place in being attuned to God. Book VII begins with the concern as to how we can speak about God (a recurring motif in Augustine).⁴¹ The answer he develops, again, is that the power is given through the incarnation of Christ who empties himself of divinity in order to offer humanity a return to God.⁴² The necessary step on the part of humanity is to make a commitment to become like God, to be made an imitator of God. So, then, it is only in being properly transformed through the encounter with Christ that one can begin to speak properly of God. This transformation results, for Augustine, in humanity reclaiming its heritage as the image of God. The reclaiming of the image of God takes place in the actual imitation of God, which, for Augustine, is an imitation of the life of Christ.⁴³ Because of the work of Christ in the incarnation, we are able to be similar to Christ, imitating the God who emptied Godself to mediate between God and humanity. Again, the result of this is love of God and love of neighbor, which takes place through a transformation that attunes oneself to God.

³⁹Ibid., IV.12.

⁴⁰Ibid., IV.13.

⁴¹Ibid., VII.1-2.

⁴²Ibid., VII.5.

⁴³Ibid., VII.12.

However, this is only an outward movement. We still need an inward transformation as well, which is what Augustine begins to articulate in the second half of *De Trinitate*, beginning with Book VIII. Here, Augustine's concern is to move the discussion of knowing God to an inward knowledge, where to know the Triune God is not to just imitate Christ, but to contemplate God in holy *sapientia* (or wisdom). The concern for Augustine is to see that the whole person—both inward and outward—becomes attuned to God so that one can be transformed into a person of love. So, Book VIII begins by opening the inward person to the work that Christ has already done, showing how the divine has been mediated to the created. He argues that God has been revealed as Ultimate Truth and the Unchangeable Good.⁴⁴

In his discussion of God as Unchangeable Good,⁴⁵ Augustine leads us through thinking of the good by seeing the changeable goods in all things. We love these things because they contain these changeable goods. For Augustine, this should push us to a love not just of changeable goods, but of the Unchangeable Good that bestows goodness to all the changeable goods.⁴⁶ And, so, the goal is to love God for God and this will allow us to turn our gaze from the good which resides in creation, to the Good that resides in the Creator.⁴⁷ This love first comes through the faith we are given by God through God's decision to reveal Godself to the creation. Through this love, one is able to become cleansed in such a way as to become "pure in heart," which allows one to see God.⁴⁸ We can love

⁴⁴Ibid., VIII.2-5.

⁴⁵Augustine sees the ultimate good as only being the person of God—God is the Good. See *Confessions* I.20, *City of God* XI.10 and XIX.4, *De Doctrina Christiana* I.35, *Concerning the Nature of the Good, Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* 31, and *Enchiridion* 10. See also William Augustus Banner, *The Path of St. Augustine* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 31-48. For a discussion of Augustine and the good, especially as it revolves around his dealings with the Manichees, see Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, *Augustine, Manicheism and the Good* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

⁴⁶For a discussion of how Augustine finds the good through order and harmony in creation, see Peter Slater, "Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 151-160.

⁴⁷To see how Augustine believes that the Trinity is revealed in creation, see *City of God* XI.24.

⁴⁸Ibid., VIII.6.

something if it is not known, if it is believed. Stemming from this, we initially love God when we believe the faithful proclamation of God as Trinity—the three persons who are completely equal, unified, and eternal (VIII.8). While we do not “know” this God, we initially believe in this Triune God through love and this allows us to begin our journey towards knowledge of God.⁴⁹

After this exposition of the commitment God makes to humanity through the work of Christ, Augustine then concludes Book VIII by opening us up to being attuned to God. For him, the answer to the question of the knowledge of God is found when one sees “simply what love is” (VIII.10). For him, love is twofold—love of God and love of neighbor.⁵⁰ It is through this twofold loving that one finds God because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). When we love and are filled with love, we become full of who God is (VIII.11-12), able to make an inward commitment to this God. Ultimately, for him, being full of love is being full of God because we see in love a Trinity that opens us up to thinking of the Triune God. Due to the fact that we are full of God, encountering God in love (both God’s and ours), we are more and more attuned to God. It is this meditation on love that opens the reader to the inner person being brought to the contemplation of God through a restored *imago dei*.

This inward turn, made possible in the incarnation and due to the mediating role of the Infinite to the finite (and vice versa) through Christ, opens the way to contemplation of God in *sapientia*, which is what results in a more full attunement to God.⁵¹ Book XIII shows the redemption of humanity from sinfulness in such a way that people are able to move to *sapientia*. First, Augustine shows that he deals with faith, saying that faith

⁴⁹For a discussion of Augustine’s epistemology, see Gareth B. Matthews, “Knowledge and Illumination,” in *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171-185. Matthews’ discussion is more interested in the philosophical import of Augustine’s thought; for a good theological counter, see the discussion in McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology*.

⁵⁰This is a dominant theme in Augustine’s thinking. See *City of God* XIV.7, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 65.2.1 and *Letter* 189 among other places where Augustine talks about love of God and love of neighbor in detail.

⁵¹This attunement is never full or complete. Rather, we are always moving to become more attuned to God, attaining more *sapiential* knowledge of God. For a similar argument, see Cavadini, “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.”

resides within the believer and is only evident to the believer.⁵² Second, he talks about happiness, saying that all people want to be happy, but true happiness is only found with immortality.⁵³ He brings these two discussions together to say that it is one's faith that promises the immortality of the whole person—both body and soul, outer and inner person, and therefore, truly gives people happiness, attuning them to God as God has attuned Godself to them. The possibility of this is the faith that says that the Son became human, mediating between God and humanity. Augustine says,

For surely if the Son of God by nature became son of man by mercy for the sake of the sons of men. . . , how much easier it is to believe that the sons of men by nature can become sons of God by grace and dwell in God; for it is in him alone and thanks to him alone that they can be happy, by sharing in his immortality; it was to persuade us of this that the Son of God came to share in our mortality.⁵⁴

Christ becomes the point where the person's sinful nature is overcome and we can begin to approach God, being made children of God through grace.

Augustine uses this to launch into a rehashing of what the reader's faith says about Christ's redemption of humanity. The decision made in faith is the commitment necessary to be attuned to God. To show this, he talks of the work of Christ to become incarnate, die on the cross and be resurrected. He also shows how this is salvific for humanity. However, Augustine sees this as strictly a human knowing (*scientia*) because it talks about what Christ did in time and space—as he articulated earlier in Book IV. It only gives us knowledge of the temporal things that Christ did. This type of knowledge, a purely rational knowing, does not bring attunement. Rather, the temporal work of Christ that gives *scientia* serves in pushing the believer to contemplate the eternal God who would do this for humanity—toward *sapientia*. Reiterating this, he says, “Our knowledge [*scientia*] therefore is Christ, and our wisdom [*sapientia*] is the same

⁵²Ibid., XIII.5.

⁵³Ibid., XIII.11. For Augustine's explication of happiness, see his treatise *The Happy Life*. See also *City of God* XI.8 and XXII, *On Free Choice* II.16,41, and *On Psalm 32*, Sermon 3,15-16. See also Mary T. Clark, *Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 26-33.

⁵⁴Ibid., XIII.12.

Christ.”⁵⁵ The *scientia* of the earthly, human Christ leads the reader to progress in faith toward contemplation of God in the divine, eternal Christ. It is the *scientia* of our faith that leads to our ability to have *sapientia*.⁵⁶ And, it is my contention that Augustine’s movement of the person and community to *sapientia* is where attunement to God takes place.

The goal is the vision of God that results in *sapientia*, which transforms the person to become attuned to God.⁵⁷ This *sapientia* is only possible because of the *scientia* which says that God has revealed Godself to the believer in such a way that God loves the believer and gives grace to the believer so that the believer may become a partaker of the divine life. It is in the knowledge of the temporal events of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation in history that leads the person to a place where *sapientia* is possible.⁵⁸ It is in our knowledge of our life residing in the self-imparting of God to bring us into the divine life that we have *sapientia*, attuning us to the Triune God and allowing us to dwell in this divine space. This knowledge is only possible because of the self-imparting of God, but it raises our gaze to God and allows us to live in the contemplation of God as a restored and transformed *imago dei*. When we find our life being consumed by the divine life, we are attaining *sapientia*. It must be noted, though, that Augustine does not believe we can fully attain this *sapientia* in our earthly life.⁵⁹ Rather, the attainment of *sapientia* moves us into deeper attunement with God in such a way that we are always becoming more attuned to God, so that eventually we can see the vision of God in Heaven. The goal, though, is further attunement to the Divine so that one can dwell in the divine space.

For Augustine, the result of this is attunement to God, which is similar to that which we articulated in our discussion of *De Doctrina Christiana*. Augustine believes the person, through the encounter with God, results in the loving of God and neighbor. While acknowledging the limitations of his argumentation, Augustine uses Book XV to push the reader

⁵⁵Ibid., XIII.24.

⁵⁶See the discussion in Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” 101-104.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XIV.25-26.

⁵⁸Again, on the economy of salvation in *De Trinitate*, see Basil Studer, O.S.B., “History and Faith in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” 7-50.

⁵⁹On the glimpse, but non-attainment of the beatific vision, see *On Psalm 36*, Sermon 2, 8.

to the point of becoming Christlike through one's contemplation of God because of their attunement to God in their imitation of Christ and in *sapientia*. We see this especially at the end of Book XV. In XV.49 Augustine shows us what it is to move into the divine life. It is to have faith in the gift of God that comes from the scriptures, believing that God is Triune and that Christ did come to mediate between God and humanity. It is because of this gift of God in the Incarnation, as told in the scriptures, that we can understand God as supreme, inexpressible, incorporeal, and unchangeable. Augustine implores the reader to set his or her gaze not upon the knowledge of how God *may be* like this, but upon the contemplation of the God who *is* like this, because this God has encountered the believer and allowed him or her to have power to "see invisible things," attuning the person to God. This power results in the believer living in the divine light of God, basking in the glow of the divine life of the Triune God, living as both *imitatio Christi* and *imago Dei*.

We have seen, then, with our discussion of Augustine's Christology, that his concern is with that attunement of believers to God. This attunement is due to the transformation that takes place through the encounter with God. This encounter is a double movement. First, it is the choice on God's part to both create and then become incarnate, effectively mediating divinity to humanity and allowing the created to dwell in the divine. Second, the movement is from a state of sinfulness, with the inability to see or hear God, to a place of dwelling with God, hearing God's song and the harmony of God's salvific work being played throughout the whole cosmos. For Augustine, this is not to just participate in God, but it is to be attuned to God. This attunement, then, is not only the telos of participation, but is also what grounds participation and makes it possible. For participation to occur, there must first be attunement, both on the part of God and the part of the believer(s). To not be attuned is to not have the ability to participate; to be attuned is to be able to not only hear it, but to also play God's song with God throughout all eternity.

Let me conclude by returning to my beginning story. In the story, we saw that attunement happened in the commitment that I made to give up the writing of this paper and listen and dwell with the music. This is only possible because the music is played by someone, given to me. The music, once given, can either be listened to and enjoyed or it can be rejected. It is only through the acceptance of the music that one can become attuned to God. In a similar way, Augustine would say that Jesus

is the DJ playing the song, opening the space for the person to dwell with the music by tapping the foot, mouthing the words, and strumming the non-existent guitar. It becomes necessary on the part of the person to actually commit to performing, to participating. It is the commitment that attunes one to God, opening the place where we can dwell with God in a continued movement to love God more.

JOHN WESLEY AND “IMITATING” CHRIST

by

Geordan Hammond

William George Anthony Van Reyk has recently argued that, in eighteenth-century Britain, “the imitation¹ of Christ was an ideal of Christian personhood believed in and promoted by Christians from a range of theological positions.”² The imitation of Christ was closely linked with Christian ideals of manliness, although “not in itself a gender specific model.”³ It was a goal that encouraged commonality shared by Anglicans from

¹“Pattern,” “example” and less frequently “resemble” are used as synonyms of imitation in John Wesley’s writings and those of his contemporaries. The closely related language of “likeness” to and “participation” in God and Christ was thought to naturally lead to imitation.

²“Christian Ideals of Manliness During the Period of the Evangelical Revival, c. 1730 to c. 1840,” D.Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 2007), 25; cf. Van Reyk, “Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Historical Journal* 54:4 (2009): 1053-73. J. Sears McGee has shown that this was also true in seventeenth-century England, especially for Anglicans (*The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 107-113. Van Reyk’s thesis develops ideas found in Jeremy Gregory’s “Homo Religiosus: Masculinity and Religion in the Long Eighteenth Century,” in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen, ed., *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 1999), 85-110, esp. 99-101.

³Van Reyk, 1, 19.

diverse spectrums of churchmanship and Dissenters.⁴ The imitation of Christ was “an all-encompassing ideal; it required the change of a man’s entire nature. Imitation above all required practicing the virtues of duty and charity.”⁵

“Imitation” Influences on Wesley

Duty and charity were defined as loving God and neighbor. The ideal was advocated through the genre of sermons and devotional manuals, biography and autobiography, religious periodicals, novels and plays.⁶ John Wesley explored the imitation of Christ through these genres, with the exception novels and plays. He was a central promoter of the *imitatio Christi* ideal. It is well-known that his spiritual journey was shaped by what were arguably the three most significant devotional authors for contemporary Anglicans that appealed to the imitation of Christ: Thomas à Kempis (*The Imitation of Christ*), Jeremy Taylor (*Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*), and William Law (*Serious Call* and *Christian Perfection*). Wesley published editions of these works to encourage his fellow Methodists to model their lives after the imitation of Christ.⁷ He invoked these authors as foundational to the spiritual journey that led him by 1729 to recognize “the indispensable necessity of having the mind which was in Christ, and of walking as Christ also walked . . . in all things.”⁸

⁴On the Anglican side this was shared by “Latitudinarians,” high churchmen and Nonjurors, and evangelicals. On Dissenters and imitation, see Isaac Watts’ *A Humble Attempt towards the Revival of Practical Religion* (1731) and Phillip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745). According to Van Reyk, this commonality was brought under strain by differing conceptions of regeneration and disagreements over moralism (45-68). In the late eighteenth century, the imitation of Christ took on an increasingly partisan tone as it came to be associated with Methodists and Evangelicals (64, 66).

⁵Van Reyk, 23.

⁶Van Reyk, 16-17, 37.

⁷Wesley published six distinct editions or extracts of à Kempis. See Frank Baker, *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Stone Mountain, GA: George Zimmermann, 1991); Frank Baker, “John Wesley and the ‘Imitatio Christi’” *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 166 (1941): 74-87; Isabel Rivers, “Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity,” in idem, ed. *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 153-54.

⁸John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 11.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that à Kempis, Taylor, and Law were not the only influences on Wesley's adoption of the *imitatio Christi* ideal. Without underestimating the impact of this oft-cited triumvirate, Wesley would still have been well acquainted with imitating Christ as a central theme in the works of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Anglican devotional writers such as the Cambridge Platonists⁹ and John Norris.¹⁰ The imitation of Christ was also a key emphasis of other writers affected by mysticism such as the author of the *Theologia Germanica*,¹¹

⁹Henry More, *Extracts from the Sermons of Dr. Henry More*, in *A Christian Library*, ed. John Wesley, vol. 39 (Bristol: E. Farley, 1754), 53. Ralph Cudworth, *The Life of Christ the Pith and Kernel of all Religion: A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at Westminster, March 31, 1647*, in *A Christian Library*, ed. John Wesley, vol. 27 (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1753), vi. Based on I John 2:3-4 Cudworth argues that imitating Christ is keeping his commandments both inwardly and outwardly, although his emphasis is on inward holiness; he also defines holiness as participation or partaking in the life of Christ and God (see pp. v, 30, 32, 34). Wesley also printed this sermon in the *Arminian Magazine* 5 (1782): 257-61, 318-21, 371-74, 419-21, 481-82, 535-37, 593-96, 655-60. On Wesley and the Cambridge Platonists see John C. English, "The Cambridge Platonists in Wesley's 'Christian Library,'" *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 36 (1968): 161-68.

¹⁰[John] Norris, *A Treatise on Christian Prudence*, ed. John Wesley, 2nd ed. (London: W. Strahan, 1742), 9, 34. He also published extracts from Norris's *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life* (1734). Wesley read Norris more than any other writer at Oxford and Norris was regularly studied by the Oxford Methodists.

¹¹Wesley read the *Theologia Germanica*, an anonymous work written around 1350 that was published by Martin Luther and esteemed by German Pietists with the Methodists at Oxford. Wesley re-read it on the voyage to Georgia. See Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists," Ph.D. diss. (Duke University, 1972), appendix IV; John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries I* (1735-38), ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 18 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), Diary, Dec. 30, 1735, Jan. 2, 4, 8-9, 11-17, 1736, 335-42 (hereinafter cited as JWD). William Law, who recommended this work to Wesley during Wesley's second visit to him, seems to have been the impetus for this. See William Law to John Wesley (May 19, 1738), 544 and John Wesley to William Law (May 20, 1738), 547 in *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Although the *Theologia* predated à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, Christ as our pattern is a theme of the work.

Johann Arndt (e.g., his *True Christianity*),¹² and Henry Scougal,¹³ all of whom wielded significant influence on the devotional life of the young John Wesley. While recognizing the importance of imitation to a wide range of devotional writers who influenced Wesley, this essay analyzes two understudied sources: Wesley use of à Kempis to promote the imitation of Christ and his thoughts on imitation in his early sermons from 1725-37.

In addition to the authors who had an impact on him, John's parents were certainly key influences on his adoption of the *imitatio Christi* ideal. After reading à Kempis in 1725, he wrote to his mother and father about his admiration for à Kempis' "great piety and devotion" and his revulsion toward à Kempis' declaration that God has "irreversibly decreed that we should be miserable" in the world. Wesley also objected to à Kempis' contention that "mirth is vain and useless."¹⁴ While Susanna's reply to her son contains a fairly strong critique of à Kempis, her spiritual diaries indicate that she shared his overarching concern for the imitation of Christ.¹⁵ Samuel's reply to his son endorses à Kempis. Samuel's published writings are largely made up of polemical and poetic works that do not have the imitation of Christ as a particular concern.¹⁶ This may be misleading since he preached twelve sermons on Luke 9:23 ("And he said to them

¹²Wesley mentions reading Arndt while in Georgia. This was probably Arndt's *True Christianity*. See JWD, March 24-29, 31, 1736, 18:371-73. Wesley later published extracts of this work in volumes one and two of his *Christian Library*.

¹³Wesley read Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677) and his sermon(s) with the Methodists at Oxford and re-read him in Georgia (Heitzenrater, Appendix IV; JWD, Feb. 23 and July 18-20, 22-23, 1736, 18:360, 403-04). Wesley published an abridged version of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* in 1744 in which the imitation of Christ features as an important theme (Newcastle Upon Tyne: John Gooding), 10-15.

¹⁴John Wesley to Susanna Wesley (May 28, 1725), *Letters*, 25:162-63. While Susanna strongly criticized à Kempis on both accounts, Samuel conceded that à Kempis went too far in these matters, but Samuel nonetheless insisted that "mortification is still and indispensable Christian duty." He generally believed à Kempis "may be read to great advantage" and should inspire the pious reader into "imitating his heroic strains of humility, piety, and devotion." Susanna Wesley to John Wesley (June 8, 1725) and Samuel Wesley to John Wesley (July 14, 1725), *Letters*, 25:164-66, 171.

¹⁵*Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, ed. Charles Wallace, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 322, 349.

¹⁶Nonetheless, in one of his polemical works against the Dissenters, he declares himself bound to imitate the life of Christ. Samuel Wesley, *A Reply to Mr. Palmer's Vindication of the Learning, Loyalty, Morals, and most Christian Behaviour of the Dissenters towards the Church of England* (London: Robert Calvel, 1707), 119.

all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”) in which he argued that the three great duties of religion are self-denial, mortification, and the imitation of Christ.¹⁷

Wesley’s Oxford diaries and first-published *Journal*, along with his first publication, *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week* (1733), illustrate the significance of the imitation of Christ to the spiritual life of the Oxford Methodists. Christ, “who went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), is featured in the preface to Wesley’s *Journal* as a key motivating factor for the devotional practices of the Oxford Methodists. The first question Wesley said he put to their opponents was “Whether it does not concern all men of all conditions to imitate him, as much as they can, ‘who went about doing good?’”¹⁸ “Have I been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?” was one of the “General Questions” of self-examination that he reflected on daily (even hourly) in recording his Oxford diary.¹⁹ This question was later included in his *Collection of Forms of Prayer* (to aid devotional reflection), and Acts 10:38 was used as an exhortatory tool in later sermons.²⁰ The *Collection* specifically refers to imitating Christ’s love, meekness, and humility, and contains a general prayer for “Grace to walk after thy [Christ’s] Pattern, to tread in thy Steps.”²¹

While Wesley has much to say about the imitation of Christ in his early sermons and preface to à Kempis, it is important to make clear that the theme of imitation in Wesley’s thought is wider. He writes about imitating God the Father as much as Christ.²² This tendency to advocate the

¹⁷Samuel Wesley, *Sermon Notebook*, MS D2/5, Wesley College, Bristol, fols. 268-354.

¹⁸*Journal*, October 19, 1732, *Journal and Diaries*, 18:128 (hereinafter cited as JWJ).

¹⁹Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 60.

²⁰For example, see “The Reward of Righteousness” (1777), *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of The Bicentennial Edition of the *Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 412, and “On Visiting the Sick” (1786), *Sermons*, 3:394.

²¹*A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week*, 5th ed. (Bristol: J. Palmer, 1755), 15, cf. 22; 24, 36, 41. Although the prayers were first published in 1733, the first extant edition was printed in 1738.

²²See “The General Deliverance” (1781), *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2 of The Bicentennial Edition of the *Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 449. On the theme of the imitation of God in scripture, see Leviticus 19:2 and Ephesians 5:1. In his questions for self-examination written at Oxford, Wesley refers to God as “my Pattern.” *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (London: Mason, 1829-31), 11:521.

imitation of God and Christ was shared by many of the devotional writers who were formative influences on him.²³ It was conceived as a unified imitation: one “follow[s] Jesus as [he] himself followed his Father.”²⁴ In various contexts, Wesley exhorts his hearers to imitate Moses, the prophets, St. Paul, angels, and Christ.²⁵ Imitating the primitive Christians, though prominent in Wesley’s thought from at least 1732, is not a common theme in his early sermons or preface to *à Kempis*.²⁶

Jeremy Taylor believed people “have fondness of imitation” and would “do well to make our imitations prudent and glorious” by imitating Christ.²⁷ In Wesley’s conceptualization of life, imitation is inevitable. All

²³Jeremy Taylor, “An Exhortation of Imitation of the Life of Christ,” in *Antiquitates Christianae: Or, the History of the Life and Death of the Holy Jesus . . .*, ed. William Cave, 9th ed. (London: J. Leake, 1703), ii; “Sermon VI: Via Intelligentiae,” in *Jeremy Taylor: Selected Works*, ed. Thomas K. Carroll, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 379; and *Holy Living in Extracts from the Works of Jer. Taylor, D.D.*, in *A Christian Library*, ed. John Wesley, vol. 16 (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1752), 90. Henry Scougal, “Sermon II: The Indispensable Duty of Loving our Enemies,” in *A Christian Library*, ed. John Wesley, vol. 45 (Bristol: E. Farley, 1755), 82, 88. A few pages later Scougal writes about imitating the example of Christ (see pp. 91, 92). William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, in *The Works of the Reverend William Law, M.A.*, 9 vols. (Setley/Brockenhurst, Hampshire: G. Moreton, [1726] 1893), 3:149; William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (New York: Vintage, [1728] 2002), 48, 129.

²⁴Taylor, “An Exhortation of Imitation of the Life of Christ,” iv. This resonates with Richard A. Burrige’s recent comment that Jesus’ *imitatio Dei* ethic was based on “The Jewish tradition that the imitation of the rabbi was an imitation of Torah and thus ultimately an imitation of God [which] reflects the central command in the Torah, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’ (Lev. 19:2).” *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 75.

²⁵In “On Mourning for the Dead,” Moses, the Prophets and Christ are cited and St. Paul in “On Corrupting the Word of God” (*Sermons IV*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 4 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 4:241, 246; cf. Law, *A Serious Call*, 178. According to Wesley, angels imitate God as “their business, and pleasure, and glory”; therefore, “we are to imitate them” (“On Guardian Angels,” preached September 1726, *Sermons*, 4:229; “In Earth as in Heaven,” *Sermons*, 4:348). In the surviving fragment of his sermon “In Earth as in Heaven” (written April 1734) Wesley outlines his “doctrine of angelism,” stating that humans were created “to be angels” (*Sermons*, 4:346, 348). For this reason, God designed that humans should imitate angels in their lives on earth.

²⁶On this topic see Geordan Hammond, “High Church Anglican Influences on John Wesley’s Conception of Primitive Christianity, 1732-1735,” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 78:2 (2009).

²⁷Taylor, “An Exhortation of Imitation of the Life of Christ,” ii.

people will either "imitate the politics of the dark kingdom" or Christ.²⁸ In his sermon "Wiser than the Children of the Light" (date unknown) drawing on Luke 16:8 ("The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of the light"), Wesley argues that "the great bias of mankind" is to seek their temporal interest. For the children of the world, "the world is their God" and possessions are their "chief happiness." In sum, the lives of the children of this world are tantamount to imitating "the politics of the dark kingdom."²⁹ Although "Wiser than the Children of the Light" is primarily focused on exposing the foolishness of worldliness,³⁰ an alternative vision of imitating the Father and Son is offered throughout Wesley's early sermons.

In Wesley's early sermons there is a consistent equation of holiness with the imitation of God the creator and Christ the redeemer. This theme of holiness and imitation can, in part, be attributed to the influence of Thomas à Kempis' devotional classic *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418) which Wesley read as early as 1725 (the same year his first surviving sermon was written).³¹ However, the impact of à Kempis on Wesley should be seen as one considerably mediated through the Anglican tradition of holy living related to the Anglican and Puritan emphasis on practical piety powerfully advocated by the seventeenth-century exemplar of the holy living school, Jeremy Taylor.³² Taylor's *The Great Exemplar . . . the His-*

²⁸Henry Scougal also wrote about the danger of "false imitation." "Sermon I: The Superior Excellency of the Religious," in *Christian Library*, 45:58 and *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, ed. John Wesley, 2, 7, 17, 33).

²⁹*Sermons*, 4:363, 366-67, 368-69, 370.

³⁰Condemnation of worldliness is a consistent feature of Wesley's sermons that reaches its peak between 1732 and 1735, a period in which he was increasingly influenced by William Law.

³¹John Wesley to Susanna Wesley and Samuel Wesley, Senior to John Wesley (May 27 and July 14, 1725), *Letters*, 25:162-63, 170-71. The importance of this work to Wesley can be seen in his resolution made at Oxford to use à Kempis as a meditation tool every Sunday. *Works*, ed. Jackson 11:522.

³²In his *Holy Dying*, Taylor praised the *Imitation of Christ* (*Christian Library*, 16:256; cf. 124). On Taylor and Wesley, see H. Trevor Hughes, "Jeremy Taylor and John Wesley," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (Oct. 1949): 296-304, and T. Francis Glasson, "Jeremy Taylor's Place in John Wesley's Life," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 36 (1967): 105-07. For a perspective on Anglican practical piety in John Wesley's family background, see Geordan Hammond, "The Revival of Practical Christianity: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Samuel Wesley, and the Clerical Society Movement" in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, eds. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, vol. 44 of *Studies in Church History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 116-27.

tory of the Life and Death of the Ever Blessed Jesus Christ (1649) has been described as “the most extensive [seventeenth-century] Anglican elaboration” of the imitation of Christ.³³

Likewise, William Law had a tendency toward the rigorous disciplined spirituality of the Puritans with its emphasis on obeying one’s conscience. He also was attracted to mysticism, being highly influenced by à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi* and Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying*.³⁴ It is worth noting that, while stress on the efficacy of imitation was a prominent characteristic of Anglican piety, it was treated with suspicion by some Dissenters who emphasized human depravity and were concerned that it would blur the distinction between Christ and the Christian.³⁵ A similar concern seems to have encouraged the Anglican reluctance to promote the imitation of Christ in a literal manner. The value of imitating Christ was an idea both High Churchmen and Latitudinarians³⁶

³³McGee, *Godly Man*, 110.

³⁴B. W. Young, “William Law and the Christian Economy of Salvation,” *English Historical Review* 109 (1994): 310. Law recommended à Kempis to Wesley at the time of their first meeting in July 1732. Baker, “John Wesley and the ‘Imitatio Christi,’” 77. In his May 19, 1738, letter to Wesley, Law stated, “You can’t but remember what value I always expressed for Kempis, and how much I recommended it to your meditation” (*Letters*, 25:543). With his increased emphasis on justification by faith from 1738, Wesley later criticized Law by quoting the mystic Anna Maria Van Schurman’s statement that there is “no more sure way to the imitation of Christ than faith in Christ crucified.” Wesley to Law (Jan. 6, 1756, Telford, ed., *Letters*, 3:354).

³⁵McGee, *Godly Man*, 107, and McGee, “Conversion and the Imitation of Christ in Anglican and Puritan Writing,” *Journal of British Studies*, 15:2 (1976), 27-28; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142. During the turbulent decades of the seventeenth century, Anglicans encouraged the imitation of Christ as a method for avoiding controversy and promoting Christian unity. It also became a polemical tool to criticize Puritans who were so preoccupied with intellectual knowledge that they would persecute those who imitated Christ. McGee, “Conversion and the Imitation of Christ,” 30, 32. Recently Robert Webster has sought to counter contemporary Protestant objections to the imitation of Christ by arguing for the uniqueness of Christ and the usefulness of the imitation of Christ for Christian morality. “The Imitation of Christ,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986): 95-120.

³⁶Wesley read the Latitudinarian Archbishop John Tillotson’s *Sermons Preach’d Upon Several Occasions* with the Oxford Methodists (see Heitzenrater, appendix IV). Wesley later published two of Tillotson’s sermons in the *Christian Library* wherein the theme of imitating Christ is invoked. *Extracts from the Works of Archbishop Tillotson*, in *A Christian Library*, ed. John Wesley, vol. 45 (Bristol: E. Farley, 1755), 343-4.

could agree on, illustrating the fact that Wesley’s emphasis on this theme places him squarely within the mainstream of Anglican moral theology.³⁷

For Wesley, imitation should be viewed in the context of the happiness that comes from a restored relationship with God and enables both the power and desire to live a holy life. In “The Wisdom of Winning Souls” (preached September, 1731) one of the motivations for evangelism that Wesley argues for is the personal motive of imitating God. Winning a soul is an act of imitating God’s goodness which allows one to experience true happiness that comes from God.³⁸ Given that Wesley sees imitation as inevitable, in the same sermon he declares that there is “a general commission . . . given to all the servants of Christ to tread in his steps” in saving souls.

Since Wesley sees the imitation of Christ as a universal duty of Christians, what does it consist of? His contemporary Samuel Johnson (1709-84) defined imitation as “The act of copying; [the] attempt to resemble.”³⁹ Henry Scougal wrote about “Religion being a Resemblance of the divine Perfections.” Scougal’s emphasis was on embodying the characteristics of Christ such as “His diligence in doing God’s Will,” patience in suffering, “constant Devotion,” charity to all people, meekness, purity, and humility.⁴⁰ William Law believed that imitating Christ was “necessary to salvation,” but Christians are not called to literally imitate the life of Christ but the “Spirit and Temper” of Christ.⁴¹ Jeremy Taylor took a slightly more literalistic approach than Law by encouraging the imitation of Christ’s “Actions or his Spirit.” In addition to highlighting the imitation of many of the same virtues of Christ as Scougal and Law, Taylor also mentions Christ’s justice, temperance, chastity, zeal, and simplicity.⁴²

Along with Law and Taylor, Wesley does not recommend a literal copying of Christ, but an “attempt to resemble” Christ.⁴³ In common with

³⁷Van Reyk, 25-70.

³⁸*Sermons*, 4:310.

³⁹*A Dictionary of the English Language*. . . , vol. 1, 2nd ed. (London: W. Strahan, 1755), n.p.

⁴⁰*The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 5, 10-15.

⁴¹*Christian Perfection*, 216, 224; cf. 217, 232, *Serious Call*, 82.

⁴²*Ibid.* Justice: iii, v; temperance: iii; chastity: iii; zeal, simplicity: v. Taylor also mentions giving of alms, comforting a brother in affliction, penance and compassion, and meditation as acts pleasing to Christ.

⁴³For Law’s use of the language of resemblance, see *Christian Perfection*, 16, 32. Taylor, “An Exhortation of Imitation of the Life of Christ,” iv, v.

Scougal, Wesley also uses the language of resembling God.⁴⁴ His focus is on embodying virtuous characteristics of God and Christ. For example, in “The Circumcision of the Heart” (preached January 1, 1733) he refers to the lowliness of mind “learned of Christ [by those] who follow his example and tread in his steps.”⁴⁵ Modern theologians have shown the same reluctance to be overly literalistic or prescriptive about the imitation of Christ, calling it “an active dynamic process . . . sustained and directed by the Spirit” and a “metaphor” to challenge one to ask, “How might I imitate Christ in this moment.”⁴⁶

In Wesley’s early sermons, the subject of imitation is most prominent in his sermon “On the Sabbath” (written July 1730). Indeed, it is perhaps the dominant theme of the sermon. For Wesley, the very reason God declared the Sabbath and memorialized it in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8) is so “man might learn to imitate God.” Not only is the Sabbath for imitating God, but humans were created “for the imitation of God.” For Wesley, to imitate God is a logical expression of the fact that God created humanity in his image. Imitation of the Creator becomes the desire of those whose corrupted human nature has been restored to God’s image. Basic to the Sabbath is the pattern that God set by “bestowing six days on the works pertaining to this world, and resting from all these works on the seventh, to retire to a better world.” In this way, the Sabbath provides a foretaste of heavenly rest and contentment. As Wesley put it, Christians are to “work together with him” who created them and “conform . . . to his likeness, to be holy as he is holy.” Such an intimate partnership or participation in the life of God is expressed by Wesley in the mystical language of perfecting “his image in our souls.”⁴⁷

John Wesley’s Preface to Thomas à Kempis’ *The Christian’s Pattern*

Despite Wesley’s initial mixture of admiration and revulsion for à Kempis he read the work with the Oxford Methodists and returned to it

⁴⁴Scougal, 5; Wesley, “The Wisdom of Winning Souls,” *Sermons*, 4:310.

⁴⁵*Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 404.

⁴⁶E. J. Tinsley, *The Imitation of God in Christ: An Essay on the Biblical Basis of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 1960), and Margaret Ruth Miles, *The Image and Practice of Holiness: A Critique of the Classic Manuals of Devotion* (London: SCM Press, 1988), cited in Robert Jeffery, “Imitating Christ: Wesley’s *Christian Pattern and Spirituality for Today*,” (Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, 2006), 12, 13.

⁴⁷*Sermons*, 4:270, 275.

repeatedly in Georgia.⁴⁸ There are fifty-five references to reading à Kempis in Wesley's Georgia diaries. Wesley and the Moravian August Spangenberg discussed their "friend [à] Kempis" in the colony.⁴⁹ The frequency to which he turned to à Kempis makes it clear that he saw the imitation of Christ as a central goal of Christian spirituality. The fairly negative tone of his 1725 exchange of letters with his parents may be somewhat misleading, at least in light of his 1738 and subsequent assessments of à Kempis' primarily positive impact on his Christian pilgrimage.⁵⁰

Wesley published his abridged edition of à Kempis in the summer of 1735 during a time of transition between his father's death and his departure for Georgia. The work was published by Charles Rivington, Wesley's High Church friend with Nonjuror sympathies.⁵¹ *The Christian's Pattern; Or, a Treatise on the Imitation of Christ* was advertised in the *Gentleman's Magazine* "Register of Books" for June, 1735. In the following month Rivington made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) to enter the book into their catalogue. This rejection was almost certainly due to the perception that Wesley did not sufficiently cleanse the book of its Catholic elements; Wesley's friend, benefactor of the Oxford Methodists and longstanding member of the SPCK, Sir John Philipps, strongly criticized Wesley's edition for this reason.⁵²

By publishing an edition of à Kempis, Wesley placed himself within in a long-standing tradition of English productions of this perennially popular book. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, demand was such that a regular stream of *The Christian's Pattern* was needed to satisfy public desire.⁵³ It went through over one-hundred editions in the eighteenth century alone. George Stanhope produced a popular paraphrased translation which went through nineteen editions between 1698 and 1814.⁵⁴ Through Stanhope's translation, Wesley first became

⁴⁸On his reading of the work at Oxford, see Heitzenrater, appendix IV.

⁴⁹JWJ (manuscript), March 9, 1736, 18:354-55. The patron of the Moravians, Count Zinzendorf, was influenced by à Kempis (Jeffery, 15).

⁵⁰JWJ, May 24, 1738, 18:243-45.

⁵¹*The Diaries of Thomas Wilson, D.D. 1731-37 and 1750*, ed. C. L. S. Linnell (London: SPCK, 1964), Sept. 9, 1734, 119.

⁵²Wilson, *Diaries*, July 22, 1735, 128-29.

⁵³Van Reyk sees "a revived interest on the imitation of Christ from the mid-seventeenth century" (26).

acquainted with à Kempis in 1725. However, Wesley's 1738 *Journal* comment that "I read him [à Kempis] only in Dean Stanhope's translation" reveals that he was unhappy with Stanhope's edition.⁵⁵ Relying on his predecessors, Wesley informs the reader that his own version is based on a revision of the 1677 reprint of John Worthington's revised translation of the Latin text.⁵⁶ In a 1738 letter to William Law Wesley stated that he "correct[ed] a translation of [à] Kempis, and translate[d] a preface to it."⁵⁷ The twenty-five page preface to his octavo edition is divided into five sections (he also published a duodecimo pocket edition in 1735 with the same content as the octavo edition, except the preface, which only contains a slightly revised version of section four of the octavo edition preface). His dependence on his predecessors is evident in the preface, which he states was extracted from the 1677 English edition along with the prefaces of three seventeenth-century Latin editions.⁵⁸ The fifth section was written by Wesley. Despite his reliance on the work of others, Wesley compiled the preface and was responsible for promoting its content; therefore, it reveals why the treatise appealed to him and is reflective of his views.

Following a brief introduction to the life of à Kempis, the preface opens with some general statements on the nature of the book. It is said to comprehend "all that relates to Christian perfection," including directions on "internal worship."⁵⁹ Although mystical contemplation is one of the means to attaining perfection, it is not something that is realized through sheer passivity. Perfection consists in active participation in the life of

⁵⁴Gregory, "Homo Religiosus," 101 and note 62.

⁵⁵JWJ, May 24, 1738, 18:243-44.

⁵⁶Worthington's first edition was published in 1654. He was closely associated with the Cambridge Platonists. John T. Young, "Worthington, John (*bap.* 1618, *d.* 1671)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Wesley read Worthington's *The Great Duty of Self-Resignation to the Divine Will* (1675) in Georgia (JWD, Sept. 2-3, 1736, March 10, 17, 1737, 18:418, 487, 490) and published an extract of it in his *Christian Library* volume 24, 5-104.

⁵⁷John Wesley to William Law (May 20, 1738), *Letters*, 25:546.

⁵⁸*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, iii.

⁵⁹Susanna Wesley shared her son's interest in the teaching of Roman Catholic mystics on Christian perfection. One of her favourite works was Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, a book John Wesley used in his study with the Oxford Methodists. John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 136-37; Heitzenrater, appendix IV; Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 107-08, 251-52.

God. It is something "every Christian is bound to aspire to." And it is brought to fruition in the "perfect love" that is possible in the union of the soul with God.⁶⁰ Active mysticism that emphasizes participation in the life of God is the type of mysticism Wesley consistently embraced.⁶¹

Corresponding with the established medieval tradition of mystical devotion literature, a series of stages are prescribed that lead to perfection. First, the startingpoint is "entire humility;" second, "absolute self-renunciation" is required; but within this step there are two degrees of renunciation. The first type is the rejection of worldliness, while the second and superior degree involves the cleansing of the soul to allow a single-minded focus on "heavenly and spiritual things." The third stage is "unreserved resignation" to God's providence.⁶² Lastly, in harmony with the mystical tradition of the Cambridge Platonists and Henry Scougal, the goal of the previous stages is "union of our will with the divine, as makes the Christian one spirit with God . . . whereby he that loves God is made partaker of the Divine Nature."⁶³

The preface continues on the theme of spiritual stages to cover a further fundamental feature of the mystical tradition, the intimate connection between purgation and illumination. Purgation is acknowledged as a branch of self-renunciation accomplished through the entire mortification of one's passions. Purging oneself from sin leads to enlightenment of the understanding by which virtue can be understood; the comprehension of virtue, however, is of no effect apart from putting it into practice. To further underscore the importance of practical application, the union of the soul with God is described as something reached in an "experimental manner." Complementary to these stages are the means to cultivate Christian perfection. These include: "above all and in all, the grace of God," "prayer, self-examination, reading the scriptures, and the holy communion."⁶⁴

⁶⁰*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, ix-x.

⁶¹Although Wesley was highly-critical of mystics from 1736, he continued to recommend the work of select mystics such as à Kempis and Law.

⁶²See Wesley's question of self-examination for Thursday evening prayers: "Have I laboured to be wholly indifferent to whichsoever Way He shall ordain for me?" *Collection of Forms of Prayer*, 54.

⁶³These stages can be compared with the five central Christian duties cited in the preface to Wesley's *Collection of Forms of Prayer*: self-renunciation, devotion to God, self-denial, mortification, and "Christ liveth in me" (iv-vi).

⁶⁴*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, x-xiv. Robert Jeffery has claimed that one reason à Kempis appealed to Protestants is because he advocates frequent communion while not promoting a specific doctrine of the Eucharist (9).

In the third section of the introduction on “the temper required in order to read it with improvement,” more is said about the essence of the treatise, the nature of imitating Christ, and the temper needed to profitably read à Kempis. The heart of *The Christian’s Pattern* is identified as “being transformed into the image of God, or in the author’s language, the Imitation of Christ in humility, self-renunciation, resignation and love.”⁶⁵ Here it appears that union with God, embodying the image of God, and imitating Christ are all presented as ways of describing the single goal of the Christian life. Justification for imitating Christ is based on his “perfect Pattern of all Holiness,” resembling Wesley’s prayer “give me Grace to walk after thy Pattern, to tread in thy Steps.” But what is the pattern he set? The closest we get to an answer is “the zealous observance of all those rules delivered by our Lord in his sermon on the mount.” The section closes with a further appeal to “that inward, practical, experimental, feeling knowledge, so frequently commanded by our author.”⁶⁶

In the section following, guidance is provided for reading à Kempis.⁶⁷ First, time should be set aside daily for the task; second, the text should be approached with “purity of intention;”⁶⁸ third, reading should be undertaken at a leisurely pace to allow time for self-examination and God to enlighten the understanding. At the same time, a serious approach should be taken with the intention of practicing what is learned. Fourth, the reader should actively seek to rouse their inner self to combine warmed “affections” with enlightened understanding. All of this

⁶⁵Compare this to Wesley’s references to imitating Christ’s love, meekness and humility in his *Collection of Forms of Prayer* (24, 36).

⁶⁶*The Christian’s Pattern*, ed. Wesley, iii, xvi, xviii, xxi; cf. *Collection of Forms of Prayer*, 41. In his later spiritual autobiography of events leading up to his Aldersgate experience, Wesley mentioned that à Kempis taught him that “true religion was seated in the heart” and this inspired him “to aim at and pray for inward holiness.” JWJ, May 24, 1738, 18:243-44.

⁶⁷Wesley states that these directions come from “Praemonitio ad Lectorem, prefix to that printed at Cologne in 1682.” Directions that are similar but lengthier than Wesley’s can be found in the *Nonjuror*, George Hickeys’ edition of *The Christian Pattern*. Hickeys, *The Christian Pattern: Or, the Imitation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (London: John Nicholson, 1710), no pagination.

⁶⁸This is a key theme in Wesley’s early sermons, which is also found in à Kempis, Taylor, and Law. See, for example, “The One Thing Needful” (written May 1734), *Sermons*, 4:358-59 and “A Single Intention” (written January-February 1736), *Sermons*, 4:372-77.

should be concluded with a short prayer asking God that the reading would "bring forth fruit" in the reader's life.⁶⁹

The fifth and final section of the preface (the only one written by Wesley) outlines the goal of Wesley's edition to revise Worthington's translation in order to bring *The Christian's Pattern* "closer to the original" by avoiding paraphrase, rendering à Kempis words in a "literal" manner, and making the translation as a whole "plainer" and "clearer."⁷⁰ Based on Wesley's editorial policy, one can understand why Sir John Philipps criticized his "literal translation" for not editing out the "passages relating to Popery."⁷¹ The preface concludes with a brief exhortation containing phrases that Wesley returned to often in his later writings: the condemnation of "Half-Christians" in favor of becoming "altogether a Christian" and fixing one's "single eye" on the one thing needful, loving God with all of one's heart.⁷²

Conclusion

In comparison with Wesley's sermons, the preface to à Kempis provides a remarkably similar view of the path to holy living. Rejection of worldliness begins with humility and self-renunciation; holy living is conceived as the imitation of Christ and participation in the life of God; the goal of Christianity is perfect union with God consisting in pure love. Wesley's affinity with à Kempis was in no way a passing phase. He continued to reread the devotional classic, recommend it to others, and publish it.

The lasting importance of *The Christian's Pattern* for Wesley was demonstrated in at least three ways. First, he published six distinct editions or extracts from the work which assured it would reach a large audience. Three of these were reprinted multiple times. His 1741 abridgement, *An Extract of the Christian's Pattern*, continued to be reprinted into the twentieth century.⁷³ Second, in the 1763 *Large Minutes*, published as

⁶⁹*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, xxii-xxiv.

⁷⁰*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, xxiv-xxv.

⁷¹Wilson, *Diaries*, July 22, 1735, 128-29.

⁷²*The Christian's Pattern*, ed. Wesley, xxvi-xxvii.

⁷³The 1741, 1746, 1753, and 1756 editions do not have a preface. Editions from 1759, including the edition in vols. 7-8 of *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (1772), contain the same preface as the 1735, 1750, and 1763 pocket editions of *The Christian Pattern*, which has a slightly revised version of section four of the larger 1735 edition providing advice on how to profitably read à Kempis.

a summary of the Minutes of several previous Methodist annual conferences to provide guidance for Methodist preachers, Wesley declared that à Kempis should be found in every society and home.⁷⁴ Third, à Kempis' *imitatio Christi* continued to inform his theology and spirituality. In his 1765 letter to John Newton, Wesley explained that Taylor and à Kempis inspired him "to give God all my heart," and forty years later, "This is just what I mean by Perfection now: I sought after it from that hour."⁷⁵

The imitation of Christ was a persistent theme in Wesley's sermons and ministry, which was placed in the context of a stronger emphasis on "Faith working by Love" after his Aldersgate experience.⁷⁶ The dictum "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked," a combination of Philippians 2:5 and 1 John 2:6, is the most frequently found biblical expression in his sermons with over fifty occurrences. Richard Heitzenrater has argued that this scriptural appeal to the imitation of Christ was Wesley's "most common way of expressing the nature of Christian perfection."⁷⁷ A burning zeal to imitate Christ was a defining characteristic of his early life and lifetime of ministry.

⁷⁴*Works*, ed. Jackson, 8:319; cf. John Wesley to George Merryweather and John Wesley to Joseph Taylor (January 24, 1760 and September 24, 1782), Telford, ed. *Letters*, 4:83; 7:143. Wesley also encouraged Thomas Rankin to publish and distribute à Kempis in the American colonies. Wesley to Rankin (July 28, 1775), Telford, ed., *Letters*, 6:168.

⁷⁵John Wesley to John Newton (May 1765), Telford, ed., *Letters*, 4:299. See also John Wesley to John Fletcher (March 20, 1768) and John Wesley to James Macdonald (October 23, 1790), Telford, ed., *Letters*, 5:84, 8:243.

⁷⁶See John and Charles Wesley's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: William Strahan, 1739), vii-ix.

⁷⁷"The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley's Ministry with the Poor," in *Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. M. Dougals Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 58, 60. Compare John Deschner's statement that, for Wesley, "the 'mind of Christ' theme . . . serves widely as a definition of perfect holiness." *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1960), 161.

TREASURES BOTH NEW AND OLD: FIGURATION IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

by

Karen Strand Winslow

The title of this article is an allusion to Jesus' summation of his parables about the Kingdom of Heaven: "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13.52). Figuration is an approach to the entire Scriptural canon by scholars (scribes) thoroughly aware of the benefits of historical, form, and redaction criticism (old treasures), but who also recognize their limits—what these approaches do not admit methodologically: that Scripture is a living document for living faith communities. Figuration finds meanings to texts that the author could not have known (new treasures), but to which the shape of the canon points. Figuration uses Scripture to make sense of later events and movements and highlights the significance of Scripture's own reuse of texts—its intertextuality—to make meaning for present and later recipients.

While typology—especially in the case of finding Christ in the Old Testament—is known for its disinterest in the specific historical contexts of the texts in question, modern figural reading values the early textual contexts while still comprehending God's work in Israel, in Christ, in the apostles, in the Holy Spirit, and in the two-testament canon. Precedents for figural reading are found in the New Testament, which reports that Jesus found his story in the Scriptures (e.g., Luke 24.13-35). This paper analyzes figuration by noting its contributions to Christology, while cautioning against the excesses that plague typological, allegorical, and other "spiritual" approaches.

I am a bit wary of “figuration in biblical interpretation” for all the usual reasons, beginning with my training in historical-critical and socio-political approaches to the Bible. I find the social settings that provoked the formation of the diverse library that we call the Bible, and its individual traditions and stages of development, to be extremely helpful for interpretation. On the other hand, I am convinced that literary/synchronic and theological approaches are most useful for reveling in the Bible’s meanings.

In addition, I advocate the view that the Scriptures emerge from and are produced for faith communities who receive it with reverence, then preserve and interpret it for God’s people who are alive today. The Bible was and is at the center of the synagogue and the church, and remains living Scripture by its application to every present. As much as investigating how history and tradition have unfolded both piques and satisfies our curiosity, many of us love the Bible most because it mediates to us the living God and God’s Christ, the quintessential mediator.

As we all know, those who claim they are freshly inspired have misused the Bible in amusing, unruly, and dangerous ways. Excesses aside, the faithful realize that the Holy Spirit inspires meanings that the biblical authors did not foresee. Sorting these out is not the province of the academy, but belongs to the church and synagogue. Parameters on interpretation are necessary, but we recognize that Scripture provides a common language between God and God’s people. Thus, though wary and a bit worried, I come to figuration with an eye to the new treasures it brings forth, especially concerning the centrality of Christ in the Scriptures. Perhaps figuration will be an antidote to overly historicized and politicized methods that confine the Bible’s texts to their ancient settings and many of its themes to the will of the elite that confirms their own status.

Figuration Defined and Discussed

What is figuration in biblical interpretation? Who is advocating it? What does it see and how? What questions does it ask? How does it relate to allegory, typology, and spiritual readings? Does it depend on literal meanings or cut loose from them?

Figuration is a theological stance—a conviction that the Scriptures are inspired and open to further inspired reflections and interpretations. Those who propose figural readings claim that the descriptive task (historical and plain meanings for the earlier receivers) should not be rigidly

separated from the constructive task of understanding the meaning of the Bible for today. Figuration rules out the sort of historicism that appeals exclusively to the human dimension of Scripture and the historical moments of its making, without concern for theological meaning or reader response.¹ Thus, in figuration, faithful receivers of Scriptural traditions hear and see, find and make words for living generations of God's people out of the fabric of the Bible, not as if it came straight to and for them, but as the product of a long line of faithful receivers *and producers* of God's words and happenings. I quote Christopher Seitz, who practices and explains figuralism.

Modern figural reading wants to appreciate the highly specified character of historical time underscored by this most recent phase of the church's and academy's reflection [critical approaches]. . . . Figural reading is then historical reading seeking to comprehend the work of God in Christ, in Israel, in the apostolic witness, and the Holy Spirit's ongoing word to the Church, conveyed now through this legacy of Prophet and Apostle, Old and New Testament, the two-testament canon of Christian Scripture.²

One immediately sees similarities between the emphases of figuration and the work of Brevard Childs who said:

By defining one's task as an understanding of the Bible as the sacred Scriptures of the church, one establishes from the outset the context and point-of-standing of the reader within the received tradition of a community of faith and practice. . . . The heart of the Bible lies in the mystery of how a fully time-conditioned writing, written by fragile human authors, can continu-

¹The New Historicism is defined quite differently in that it is not a method, but a stance or a way of seeing, and attends to all the moments of the Bible's use to the present. It sees history as a reconstruction and a processing of the past, tied to the present and the historiographer's particular representations of the past, which cannot be identified as the actual past. The relation of the past to ourselves and attention to ideological influences in the production of history distinguishes the New Historicism from the old. See Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 24-29.

²Christopher Seitz, "History, Figural History, and Providence in the Dual Witness of Prophet and Apostle," in *Go Figure: Figuration in Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Stanley D. Walters; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, Princeton Theological Monographs, 2008), 6.

ally become the means of hearing the very Word of God, fresh and powerful, to recipients open to faithful response.”³

Like Childs, figural readers determine that the Bible is the sacred Scriptures of the church and synagogue, and the reader stands within a community of faith and practice. They confess that Scripture is the vehicle of God’s self-disclosure, which continues to confront the church and the world in a living fashion.

Thus, it is no surprise that the leading proponents of figural readings are Childs’ former students, such as Christopher Seitz. I see in Seitz’s description of figuration an accepting of Childs’ challenge for interpreters to demonstrate how Scripture conveys God’s self-disclosure and to press on to be illuminated and shaped theologically, even as they critically unearth and unpack the nature and culture of its human authorship. For figural readers, as with Childs, the divine and human dimensions of Scripture can never be separated. Figuralists claim that theology need not be divorced from history. Within figuration, one need not shed the view that Scripture is inspired revelation of God, while using historical-critical, literary, or redactional approaches. I assume that figuralists would not expect to be able to demonstrate figural readings historically, given that figuration is about the present understandings of the interpreter who uses ancient texts to see something new. Figurative usually means building upon and deriving from the literal sense of a passage; it is different from but not opposite to the literal. The literal sense serves the figurative meaning.⁴

Defining figuration as a construct of Christian biblical theology, Seitz approvingly quotes James Barr who said that we do not use Christ as a lens through which to view the Old Testament. Rather, one moves from the God of Israel to the Christ of the church—to note how the former is manifest in the latter—how the God of Israel is manifest in Christ.⁵

³An interview with Brevard S. Childs, “Essential Readings for Scholars in Religion,” Westminster John Knox Press, Fall [2000]; <http://www.philosophy-religion.org/bible/childs-interview.html>.

⁴We know that many plain meanings depend on figurative language. The writer employs metaphor and the like to communicate concepts and abstracts. She has no intention of communicating something about the metaphor used; the metaphor is used to convey a meaning beyond the metaphor itself. The plain or literal meaning depends on concrete images that have their own referents and thus serve the communication goals of the author.

⁵Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 6.

“God’s identity in Christ must be situated in relationship to God’s identity with and to Israel.”⁶ According to Seitz, “The entire Christian Scripture is a single witness to the triune God, through the dual testimony of prophets and apostles.”⁷ Furthermore, “figured” means that the God of Israel is manifested in Jesus’ death on a cross and that God is figured and accessible to the eyes of faith in death and corruption, that the Holy Spirit moves Christians to receive the cross, to accept it as God’s will, and that the I AM *even of Exodus* is Jesus as Lord.⁸

Thus, figuration in biblical interpretation means recognizing God’s accessibility through concrete and physical realities of Israel, Jesus, and the church, as well as through Spirit-inspired theological interpretations of the same. This sounds familiar and orthodox from the church’s point of view.⁹ This is old treasure—far older than historical criticism, its children, and subsequent adversaries. Seitz writes:

The dynamic character of scripture in its two-testament form does not allow for propositional or technical flattening, given that this witness is received in faith, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, disciplined by prayer, Eucharistic fellowship, and the teaching of the church in its baptismal interrogatories and credal affirmations.¹⁰

Certainly, the New Testament authors and other Christian interpreters discovered second-order or derived meanings from the Old Testament that came to them in the light of the gospel of Christ. Thus, for many Christian scholars, figuration is not controversial but a traditional way of using the Old Testament for the church. But the new figuralists claim that, while they are interested in far more than what historical criticism can do with the text, they use it and other contemporary approaches. On the other hand, they rule out the new spiritualism, which claims that the Holy Spirit speaks new words about topics either not addressed in the

⁶Ibid, 131.

⁷Seitz, *Figured Out*, 193.

⁸Ibid, 4, 85, 137.

⁹Jewish interpretation excludes Christ-centered figural readings, but includes derived meanings and several levels of interpretation, even esoteric or “secret” readings. Childs often has noted that the Scriptures address each new generation of believers, both Jews and Christians. As figuration is loosely defined, Jewish biblical interpretation can be productively mined for examples.

¹⁰Seitz, *Figured Out*, 9.

Bible or addressed but wrapped in too much cultural baggage to be heard as relevant.¹¹ In contrast to the new spiritualism, figural reading submits to the rule of the faith of the early Christians and within the boundaries of the prophets and apostles of the Scriptures as they bear witness to God and Christ.¹²

Before I move to examples of figurative readings, I will allow Frank Spina to summarize these efforts to define figuration.

Figuration involves the very nature of the biblical text in its canonical form. Properly considered, the text even at its most literal dimension is essentially figural. This is because there is no one-to-one direct correlation between the text and the God of whom it testifies. Christian Scripture is primarily a “revelatory text” whose language is necessarily metaphoric, parabolic, symbolic, artful, poetic, and imaginative.¹³ I use the word *figuration* to capture all these nuances. The biblical tradition is rooted in history, and necessarily so, in the sense that the deity whose story is told participated in space and time in the life of the elect people Israel and incarnationally in Jesus the Christ. However, technical language is inadequate for narrating this story. Critical biblical scholarship picked up on this by demanding that its proponents conduct their study as methodological atheists. But this is only possible if one studies the Bible as a haphazard and arbitrary collection of ancient texts. It is not possible when reading the Bible *as Scripture* . . . as a witness to divine revelation. And that is where attention to Scripture’s figural make-up is crucial.¹⁴

The examples I provide in order to further explain figuration come from the books *Go Figure* edited by Stanley Walters and *Figured Out* by Christopher Seitz.

¹¹Seitz discusses the interpretive moves in the Episcopalian/Anglican debate over homosexuality in *Figured Out*, 9-10, 117-129.

¹²Idem, 6.

¹³Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (2nd ed.; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

¹⁴Frank A. Spina, “Multiplying Division: A Figural Reading of the Story of the Levite’s Concubine 9 (Judges 1921),” 2008 Weter Lecture, Seattle Pacific University.

Examples of Figural Readings

The figural readings of Keith Bodner and Stan Walters of John 4 and three royal/messianic psalms, respectively, direct us to “The Centrality of Christ.” They avoid distorting earlier meanings, while deriving profound secondary meanings from their texts or their ordering.

Keith Bodner sees the Samaritan woman at the well story as a type scene that recalls many Old Testament “come to the water to meet your spouse” stories, such as Gen. 29, the account of Jacob and Rachel.¹⁵ While wells are images of betrothals in the Jewish scriptures, especially when women are there, John uses this image with a twist. Bodner points out that in John 4, Jesus comes to the well, not looking for a wife, but for a witness who will recognize the Messiah and invite the Samaritans to himself.¹⁶ Thus, John uses this familiar type scene to make what I would call a much more than argument (*qal vehomer*); Jesus finds what he needed—much more than a wife—a witness. The woman of Samaria finds much more than a husband—she does not need a husband—she finds the Messiah! John 4 recalls traditional betrothal scenes to show us that the water found in Jesus—not in the well—is more fulfilling than marriage, than water, than even—I am adding this to Bodner’s discussion—the temple (John 4:19-24).

In an exciting way, this unites diverse parts of Scripture; it suggests that the ancient promise has been fulfilled. It shows the fruitfulness of the Samaritan woman’s witness, just as Rebekah, Rachel, and Zipporah were fruitful life givers and preservers for nascent Israel. On the other hand, I cannot accept what Keith Bodner claims: “. . . the gospel writer would have us see the Lord Jesus in the earlier passages such as Gen. 24.” I do not think John intends anything of the kind. This claim does not proceed from Israel to Christ to the church, but rather backwards, from Jesus to the wells of Genesis.

To use the well scene of the Scriptures to tie Jesus to Jacob comports with the figural reading “rules,” but to export Jesus back into Genesis breaks them. Figuration as it has been defined *is* present in the Gospels—images from the literary and historical traditions of the past are brought forward to the present and work to powerful effect. We can claim, in ret-

¹⁵Bodner’s chapter is, “Go Figure: Narrative Strategies for an Emerging Generation,” in *Go Figure*, 18.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 21.

respect, that the past (as presented textually in Gen 29) *literarily* pre-figures the future textual pericope of John 4. However, this is hardly profound, since perspective about the literary traditions of both testaments in our hands describes our position in time relative to the position of the testaments in time. In other words, we can affirm that John 4 intentionally draws on the well scenes of Genesis to make claims about Jesus, because they were his to claim and use, just as it is our prerogative to claim that the Genesis well scenes *pre-figure* John 4's well scene, because they come long before John in the story. Certainly, the Gospel writer uses Genesis to make sense of Jesus and his enthusiasm to offer living water apart from debated sacred spaces. Nevertheless, I cannot be persuaded that the Gospel writer wants us to see Jesus in Genesis—that is proceeding from Christ to Israel, which is what Seitz claims figuration does *not* do. Can Christ be central to our theology without appearing at the wells of Genesis? I believe so.

Although Bodner's conclusion goes too far for me, overall his figural reading of John 4 points to the literary and theological craftsmanship, even the inspiration, of John. I am equally impressed with Walter's vision of the centrality of the Messiah in Psalms 44-46. In his discussion of the significance of these Psalms for a messianic understanding of royalty, Walters writes: "I'm speaking of the capacity of written or spoken text to *contain* or to *acquire* additional meaning beyond the historical sense of its words, under the constraint of a changed context... both literal and cultural . . . *The plain sense moves over to make room for another.*"¹⁷ This definition and use of figuration welcomes historical understandings of a text and uses them to show a shift in political realities and subsequent interpretive realities.

Walters argues: "Ps 45 is a wedding song until Ps. 44 (a communal lament over national disaster) and Ps. 46 (praise for victory over Israel's vindication) move up upon it . . . [then it] becomes a picture of the Messiah." This is true, he writes, given not only the loss of a human king and centuries without one to replace him, but also the picture of God enduring forever as a refuge who makes all wars to cease.¹⁸ Thus, a psalm celebrating the elaborate wedding of an anointed king comes to reflect an expectation of the emergence and rule of a future anointed one because of its

¹⁷Walters, "Finding Christ in the Psalms," in *Go Figure*, 36; my emphasis.

¹⁸*Ibid*, 37.

juxtaposition after a lament processing a defeat, perhaps to Babylon, and before a song of praise for the victory of God over the nations and his presence with his people.

Walters is not taking Jesus back into the Psalms. He explicitly avoids claiming that the Psalm writer or the redactor of Book II knew about Jesus: "In this I am still paddling on historical waters." Nor does he suggest that God inspired the writers to use such words to pertain to the future. More modestly, he proposes that placing biblical texts within other texts and within their received communities makes them "susceptible to additional levels of meaning that may include reference to Christ." A new location gives a text fresh force, additional and profound meanings that the author could not or at least did not intend.¹⁹

Walters continues to give us fresh grounds for affirming the centrality of Christ in the Psalms. He says that the first century CE preservers of the Jewish Scriptures (and I presume those before that time) were forming living Scripture, not collecting archives about what once was. They collected the royal psalms as bearers of messianic hope, for these psalms had come to refer to the King that is to come. The earthly king's significance moved over for the messiah-king.²⁰ This messianic meaning is derived. In the absence of what once meant the king of Israel now refers to the coming King-Messiah. As we all know, Christians later identified King-Messiah with Jesus of Nazareth, but that does not change the messianic import for those who ordered the second book of the Psalms and all Jews since then.

With due respect to historical critical questions about what Jesus knew and said *vs.* what the Gospel writers report, Walters affirms that Jesus of Nazareth understood his mission in terms provided by his Scriptures, especially Isaiah's suffering servant. He adds: "*In trusting ourselves to that mission, we have already trusted ourselves to his reading of scripture...in seeking Christ in the Psalms we are also walking where he walked and seeking to read as he read.*"²¹

Walters concludes with questions relevant to Christology. Is Jesus everywhere in the Psalms or just in the royal psalms? Should we limit locating him to the places NT writers found him? And this question I ask

¹⁹Ibid, 38.

²⁰Ibid, 40.

²¹Ibid, 44, Walters' emphasis.

of all of figural interpreters: What will stop wild allegorical flights that embarrass us rather than nourish our minds and hearts?²²

Further examples of figurative interpretations provide intriguing grounds for discussion and potentially powerful models of interpretation. For example, Nathan McDonald suggests that the *Sotah* ritual of Numbers 5 is placed beside the Nazarite ideal of Numbers 6 before Israel entered the land in order to show that Israel had two options. She could play the harlot, even though married to YHWH, or be utterly faithful in fulfilling her vows. I am convinced that McDonald is on to something, not only because of my discomfort with the gender bias against wives in the plain interpretation. The location and ordering of this “legal material” is unusual—why are they not in Exodus or Leviticus with other such legislation? McDonald’s convincing argument leads us to question whether Numbers 5 was ever about jealous husbands. Certainly, the Bible is a *theological* treatise designed to build Israel’s faith and that of all subsequent generations of God’s people. Although the Bible was produced within patriarchal social frameworks, which would lead us back to the “plain” rendering, its stories and their implications frequently shatter patriarchy and other systems.

While the Walter, Bodner, and McDonald examples are instructive and inspiring, I have more questions about Ephraim Radner’s explanation of the value of figuration.²³ He writes:

. . . if we cannot search for—and somehow come to find—Jesus in Genesis and *Acts together* . . . in Leviticus and Philemon, in 1 Samuel and Jude . . . and in Revelation, *and with the same particularity* as in the Gospels, then we have not yet opened ourselves to the forming of our spirits by the Holy Spirit of God. . . .²⁴

Though willing to be informed by a position that makes the Bible relevant to every present, I question whether we must find Jesus in Genesis *with*

²²Ibid.

²³See Radner’s “The Truth that Casts our Fear: A Sermon on Leviticus 12 and Luke 2.21-40,” in Walters, *Go Figure*, 23-29; and his *Hope among the Fragments: the Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

²⁴Quoted by Keith Bodner in “Go Figure: Narrative Strategies for an Emerging Generation,” in *Go Figure* (ed. Walters), 18, from Ephraim Radner, *Hope among the Fragments: the Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

the same particularity as we find him in the Gospels and in Revelation. Why cannot the Old Testament be the story of what God does in the world and through Israel and convey God's word to us as well? Radner also affirms that figuration is "an openness to all of history as being filled with the body of Christ."²⁵ Whereas I can agree that Christianity includes an openness to the theological claim that history and all of reality as filled with Christ, to define figuration this way sets figuration beyond the reach of Jewish interpreters, as well as those who use it more moderately or to different ends.

Thus, one of my apprehensions about the new figuralism is Jewish-Christian relations. Jews understand, and with good reason, that the practice of early Christian interpreters called "typology" included reading the Hebrew Bible primarily as a preparation for Christianity. I quote from a Jewish Dictionary's entry on "Christianity":

This position inevitably led to a complicated and ambivalent attitude toward Israel in which affirmation and utter rejection, acceptance and hatred, were intertwined. In order to come to its own, the church had to picture Israel as dispossessed, rejected, or even cursed. . . . [This has provided] the basis for the tragic history of Christian anti-Semitism.²⁶

I think the more correct term is Christian anti-Judaism, which has had terrible effects and may be associated with anti-Semitism. In any case, two-testament Christian interpretation and one-testament Jewish interpretation can thrive side by side and interactively if constructed with respect to the Christian story and to the ongoing Jewish story—a rich and complex interpretive tradition that mines the riches of the Scriptures, often figuratively. Nonetheless, I think we should remain sensitive to the effects of typology—or any interpretive practice, including figuration, on ideology.

A related concern of figural interpretation may be difficult to pull off: how to connect the two testaments of Christian scripture without harm to their literal or plain sense. If "plain meaning" has anything to do with the intention of the human author, many figural readings cannot claim to be the plain, literal meaning. Derived meanings are just that,

²⁵Ephraim Radner, "The Truth that Casts out Fear: A Sermon on Leviticus 12 and Luke 2:21ff," in *Go Figure* (ed. Walters, 28, his emphasis).

²⁶"Christianity," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Encyclopedia* (ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky and Geoffrey Widgoder; Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2001), 158-9.

derived from earlier texts that serve as foundations for meanings later authors find or create. Trinitarians may accept a *figural* reading of Jesus as Lord in the I AM of Exodus, given the Johannine Jesus and the New Testament's claim that Jesus is Lord, the same term that is used to translate YHWH, but this is not the plain or literal meaning of Ex. 3:14. I fully agree that as living Scripture, a passage *can come to mean* more than the author intended and the early audiences heard, and figuration represents an interpretive process that mines the texts for these, but we have to admit that this changes those earlier meanings. "Figural" used this way cannot be defined as staying within the plain sense.²⁷

Of course, interpreters have always disagreed upon the literal or plain sense—we wish it did not have to be this way—we wish that the plain or *peshat* reading could be a kind of standard from which we move on to do our particular (and sometimes parochial) interpretive readings.²⁸ "Literal" is especially slippery because some figuralists use the term to include figural interpretations that make analogies by use of metaphor.²⁹

Conclusion

Figuralists say that reading one testament in light of the other is urged by the text itself. Can one read one testament in light of the other? This is true of the New Testament; it must be read in the light of the Jewish Scriptures. But can we affirm that the Old Testament requires that we read it in light of the New Testament and still honor its many plain and literal senses? Where does this leave Jewish interpreters? Jews *and* Christians can read and value the Scriptures as the constitution of Israel, as a library containing a massive educational program for the people of God without reference to the New. For Christians, this limited viewing and valuing would never be permanent, but it must be undertaken in order to understand Israel, Judaism, antiquity, and the communities from which Christianity eventually sprung.

As a Christian, I submit to John's affirmation that the Word was in the beginning with God and (much later) the Word became flesh and

²⁷*Figured Out*, 135-138.

²⁸Even the *peshat* method of the rabbis cannot readily be distinguished from *derash* in many cases, for both methods are homiletical and many examples of *peshat* as practiced in the Talmud are neither plain nor literal.

²⁹Nathan MacDonald, "'Gone Astray:' Dealing with the *Sotah* Num 5:11-31," in *Go Figure*, 62.

dwelt among us. Thus, I accept that the second person of the Trinity—as the Word—was with God during creation. This Word became flesh and dwelt among us, born of Mary, named Jesus, and grew up in Nazareth. I reserve “Jesus” for the earthly incarnate form of God, the baby born of Mary, who grew in wisdom and stature, was crucified, raised, and given a name above every name. I claim with Paul that through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and by the Spirit of God, he was shown to be the Messiah, the Christ.

The hope for the Messiah lived long before Jesus did, and expressions of the coming Christ appear in the Old Testament. These are made more central by the incarnation, the birth of Jesus, so that we can look backwards and find their significance in the OT. The Jewish Scriptures made sense of Jesus as Christ for his followers, but they had authority and meaning in themselves before the coming of Jesus as Christ. Figuration is and was one way of using the Jewish Scriptures to shed light on the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth and the story of his church, but figuration, as we have seen, can make other enlightening interpretive moves. In addition to those I have cited above, Frank Spina’s lecture, “Multiplying Division: A Figural Reading of the Story of the Levite’s Concubine” (Judges 19-21) promises a scintillating Christian interpretation of this extremely troubling narrative. While figuration does not attempt to clean up the violence, bawdiness, or earthiness of stories to make them more palatable or gloss over their difficulties, it can provoke theological insights—true instruction to God’s people that may—or may not—have been intentional for the authors, redactors, and/or those who gave the Bible its canonical shape.

I admit I may have misrepresented or misunderstood the figural readings I find excessive. That said, I close with a paraphrase of Seitz’s statement regarding two testament figural readings with which I heartily concur: “The New Testament becomes more instrumental in comprehending the theological significance of earthly Jesus. . . . The Old Testament is essential in establishing Christological claims coherent against a backdrop of all time and God’s sovereign purposes in Israel and in the world at large. . . . A consideration of earthly Jesus apart from the Old Testament is fragmentary and a category error.”³⁰

³⁰Seitz, *Figured Out*, 110.

**THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS
AND THE SANCTIFICATION
OF BELIEVERS IN
HEBREWS 7-10**

by

David A. Ackerman

The Epistle to the Hebrews represents a significant milestone in the development of Christology in the early church. The dominant Christological motif is Jesus as high priest, a description unique to Hebrews. This theme is first mentioned in 2:17, which defines the essential elements of Jesus' priesthood: (1) his identification with humanity (he "had to be made like his brothers in all ways"), (2) his divine commission ("in service to God"), and (3) his salvific mission ("he might make atonement for sins"). The goal of the author is to urge the readers to appropriate the full salvation made available through the sacrifice of Jesus, the high priest (7:25).

Although we cannot determine who the author and readers were, evidence within the document suggests that the readers were struggling to accept and appropriate fully the message about Jesus Christ because of internal questions and external pressures (10:32-39; 12:1-11). They were in danger of drifting away (2:1), possibly to return to the old ways of Judaism. The author points them to a "new and living way" through Jesus (10:20). Hebrews articulates vividly and persuasively that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus make it possible for people to be in relationship with the holy God.¹

¹Jesus' resurrection is not a major topic in Hebrews (the only explicit reference is in 13:20), but it is assumed in numerous places through the exaltation of Jesus after his suffering (2:9, 14; 4:14; 5:7; 7:23-24).

The author recognizes the problem of the separation between the holy God and sinful humanity articulated throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23) and later vividly experienced in the various divisions of the tabernacle.² Only that which was holy could be in the presence of the holy God.³ God's holiness excludes everything unclean. The author puts it this way: "pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14).⁴ This verse also gives the goal of human existence: to "see" God, that is, to be in divine presence. The author describes this goal in 12:1-2 as following the path to the throne of God already trodden by Jesus. The critical issue is how one achieves this.

The barrier of sin that separates humanity from God, represented in the old cultic system and vividly experienced in human life as the weights and sins that easily trip us along the race to the throne (12:1), has been overcome "by a new and living way" (10:20).⁵ For the author, the new way came through Jesus' identification with humanity as high priest. Jesus' incarnation provides the source for "full salvation" (7:25). Hebrews offers a glimpse of Jesus' humanity like no other New Testament document and interprets this humanity in profoundly theological concepts in order to urge intended change in the readers. Jesus' death not only atoned for sins, thus fulfilling the requirements of the old covenant, but at the same time confirmed a new covenant. In Jesus' self-sacrifice, the requirements of both the old and new covenants converge, providing the author with the theological basis for reading both covenants Christologically.

²The closer one got to the Ark of the Covenant, the "throne of God," the more holy one needed to be. The place closest to God was called the *Most Holy Place*. The farthest place, the most "unholy" place, was outside the camp where the defiled had to go (see Lev. 13:46 as example).

³Everything related to the worship of God in the tabernacle had to be consecrated and made holy, including people, furnishings, objects of worship and the tabernacle itself (Ex. 40:9-10; Lev. 10:10; Num. 1:51).

⁴Translations are author's own unless otherwise noted.

⁵The author's most common word for "sin" (*harmartia*) is a word rich in meaning, involving legal, cultic, and ethical applications (see W. Grundmann, *TDNT*, I, 302-16). Sin leads to defilement, which must be purified (1:3). As transgression sins must be atoned for (2:17). Sin deceives and results from disobedience and disbelief (3:13, 17-19). Temptation is not a sin (4:15). Some sins are due to ignorance and are unintentional (9:7). Deliberate sin of apostasy will not be forgiven (10:26), although the unforgiveness must be conditioned upon the permanence and rebellion of one's rejection of God (cf. 4:11).

By opening the way to the Most Holy Place, Jesus, the high priest, inaugurates a new covenant, resulting in the possibility of holiness and direct access to the Most Holy Place to those who appropriate it through faith. How this perfection is to be experienced is worked out in the paraenetic sections of the letter. One of the key theological contributions of Hebrews is how the author intersects an incarnational understanding of Christ with the need for holiness within believers.

Hebrews is one of the most rhetorical and carefully crafted documents in the New Testament, yet we know so little of the author and the situation of the readers, which hampers our ability to analyze the rhetorical situation. The author's method gives a clue to the theology of the epistle. The author alternates between interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures (especially Ps. 8; 40:6-8; 95; 110; Jer. 31:31-34),⁶ theological interpretation of the person and work of Jesus, and exhortation of the readers, although not always in this sequence.⁷ The author compares Jesus to some of the key aspects of the Jewish faith, including the law, tabernacle, covenant, priesthood, sacrifices, and other cultic elements. The comparisons are both explicit (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24), and implicit (2:2-4; 3:3-6a; 5:4-10; 10:27-28; 12:25).⁸ Through this method, the author adeptly bridges the past and present, interpreting old paradigms to show the superiority of the new way of Jesus Christ.

In the first half of the epistle, the author sets out the essential qualifications of Jesus as the high priest. In chapters 7-10, the author compares the Levitical priesthood, tabernacle, covenant made by Moses, and cultic system to the new way opened through Jesus. With each new section, the author adds further evidence to the newness that Christ brings. The fundamental question of the epistle from the perspective of the readers is, why

⁶William L. Lane points out that the author uses *midrash* to show that "God intended to do something radically new. In each instance he interprets God's new action in terms of his convictions about Jesus" (*Hebrews*, WBC, vol. 47A [Dallas: Word, 1991], cxxx).

⁷A simple perusal of the first few chapters demonstrates this tripartite concern: quotation in 1:5-14 of a number of texts (Ps. 2:7, 2 Sam. 7:14, Deut. 32:43, Ps. 104:4, Ps. 45:6-7, Ps. 102:25-27, and Ps. 110:1); exhortation in 2:1-4; *peshet* on Ps. 8:4-6 in 2:5-10; Christological application in 2:10-17; exhortation in 3:1-3; Christological application and comparison with Moses in 3:3-6 in preparation for *peshet* on Ps. 95:7-11, followed by exhortation, and so on.

⁸Lane, *Hebrews*, vol. 47A, cxxix.

would anyone want to remain in sin and follow the old way of doing things when a much superior era has begun? The author uses the image of Jesus as high priest in chapters 7-10 to bridge the past struggle in sin under the old covenant to the hope of a new covenant and how this provides holiness to those who look to Jesus, the one who opens the way and brings their faith to perfection (12:2).

I. The Perfecting of Jesus, the High Priest

Hebrews invites us to think deeply about the implications of Jesus' humanity. Hebrews, perhaps more than any other document in the New Testament, argues against the claims of Docetism, that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. In Hebrews, we see a savior who identified with us at the very point of our raw humanness, at the very juncture between faith and rejection of God's will. The author begins the epistle with the proclamation of Jesus' divinity in 1:1-4, using some of the boldest language in the New Testament to describe the man from Nazareth: (1) his *being*—God's Son, heir of all things, creator, the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of God's nature, upholding the universe by His power; (2) his *mission*—to make purification for sins (cf. 2:9); and (3) his *exaltation*—sitting at the right hand of God, with all things subject to him (2:8). At the heart of the divine plan was the need to provide a way to restore fellowship with the holy God through the purification of human sinfulness (1:3), which logically necessitated the Son's identification with humanity, which the author begins to explore in chapter 2.

A. Identification. We cannot understand the Christology of Hebrews without taking seriously the humanity of Jesus and his solidarity with the human race. The author begins describing this solidarity by quoting Psalm 8:4-6 in 2:1-8, with the key thought being, "you made him for a little while lower than the angels," which is repeated in 2:9 and begins the theme of Jesus' death, including his suffering, and how this makes salvation available to everyone. Two points show the need for Jesus to be made completely human. First, after 2:9, the reader is left with the paradox of Jesus' sinlessness as God's Son and his utter humanity. How can he be both human and divine? For the author, the answer comes in the logical need for someone to bring God to humanity and humanity to God. As 2:17 says, "He *had to be made* like his brothers" in order to qualify as high priest. In order to have an eternal solution to sin, a perfect sacrifice was needed, and that sacrifice needed to be sourced from outside of

imperfect creation. Thus, Jesus had to be divine. In order to deal with death on its own terms and to provide the path for humanity, Jesus had to be human (2:14-15). The author touches here upon the divine logic of salvation.

Second, some of the identification is one-directional: Jesus' identifies with us, but how much can we identify with him? We cannot completely because of his exalted status as Son, a level that even the angels cannot reach. Since we cannot ascend to heaven, we need someone from outside of human sin, someone who knows the human side of the equation, yet remains untainted by the contamination of sin. That someone must descend to earth. Only such a person would qualify as both a perfect and adequate sacrifice and mediator to bring us to God.

For the author, the most profound way Jesus showed his humanity was through suffering—both the pain of living and the pain of dying. Two passages develop the suffering of Jesus, 2:9-17 and 5:7-10, both ending with the qualification of Jesus as our high priest because of his suffering as a human. The author begins discussing Jesus' suffering in 2:9, which states that Jesus' exaltation was *because of* his suffering of death. Suffering was necessary to fulfill the purpose of incarnation and for incarnation to be truly complete. The only way for humanity to experience glory was through the suffering of Jesus (2:10). Jesus' death had two effects: (1) to free humans from the fear of death (2:14-15), and (2) for the Son to be perfected as high priest (2:17).

The key phrase in 2:10 is "to make perfect through suffering." There has been much discussion on the use of the *teleios* word group in Hebrews.⁹ *Teleios* (and its cognates) is one of the more significant word groups in the New Testament to describe the goal of the Christian (e.g., Phil. 3:14), but also one of the more difficult to interpret because it can mean perfect, complete, mature, goal, finish, and achievement, and these words are easily misunderstood because of their English usage. The word can be used in various contexts, for example, to describe moral, physical, temporal, spiritual, and cultic situations. At its core, *teleios* refers to something that has completed its intended purpose, has reached its aim, end or fulfillment. Ultimately, the literary and theological contexts should

⁹One of the more significant studies is David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

be carefully considered to interpret the nuance of the word. In 2:10, the key idea is that Jesus' goal as the founder of our faith was related to his suffering. Suffering was the condition of Jesus' *fulfilling* his mission of bringing "many sons to glory." Without suffering, there would have been something lacking in this mission.

The goal of the Son's mission on earth, opening the way to the holy God (4:16; 10:22; 12:1-2), was accomplished as he progressively identified more and more with humanity until he reached the point of death (13:12). He shared in the "flesh and blood" experience of suffering and death (2:11, 14). When Jesus came to the point of identifying with humanity at our greatest point of fear (2:15), his identification was complete. Through his resurrection and subsequent exaltation, he was able to overcome the devil, the holder of death (2:15), thereby freeing the way to eternal salvation (5:9) and becoming *perfect* as high priest. For the author of Hebrews, Jesus' suffering was more than substitutionary and more than the death of a martyr. His suffering and death demonstrate a "suffering with" (4:15), a standing alongside, successfully coming out on the other side of death to exaltation (12:2). If he made it, so can we with his help as our high priest. The infinite Son became one with us so that we might share in his glory.¹⁰

The application of Jesus' suffering to the daily lives of the readers comes through victory over temptation, a victory we win not through individual effort but because our high priest has already opened the way (12:1-2). The temptations Jesus faced were a form of suffering, and the positive outcome of these temptations was the ability to help us when we are tempted (2:18). Jesus had to participate in everything human to qualify as a high priest, including temptation. Facing temptation speaks to the base human predicament of whether or not to obey God's will, a critical issue for the readers (see especially 3:7-4:13). The author quotes Psalm 40:6-8 in 10:5-7 and restates in 10:9 the phrase, "Behold, I have come to do your will." In this context, the "will" of God meant "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). Although Hebrews does not mention a temptation to walk away from impending crucifixion, 2:18 says that Jesus suffered when tempted, and in 5:7 that he "offered prayers and

¹⁰The early Christian hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 comes close to this idea, though lacking is the element of the affect upon us. Paul adds this element in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

supplications with crying and tears,” a possible allusion to Gethsemane, where Jesus asked for the cup of suffering of death to be removed, but even at that point, chose to conform his will to the Father’s (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44). Jesus determined that it was God’s will for him to suffer, or as Hebrews says, “it was fitting for [God] . . . to perfect through sufferings the founder of their salvation” (2:10).

In 2:14 the author states that Jesus “partook of the same things,” and in 4:15 that he was tempted “in all things” like us. These are strong statements and not easy to interpret theologically. For Jesus’ temptations to be real and for him to be tempted like us, there had to be the actual possibility of sin, otherwise the temptations would be meaningless. Jesus had to have been in the same condition of human weakness as we are, or he could not fully sympathize with our weaknesses. Oscar Cullmann writes, “. . . Hebrews understands the humanity of Jesus in a more comprehensive way than the Gospels or any other early Christian writing. This follows from the idea that the High Priest not only completely enters the realm of humanity, but within that realm must participate in everything that is human.”¹¹

Therein lies the crux of Hebrew’s Christology: how could Jesus be both fully human and sinless at the same time? Does not being a descendant of Adam mean that all humans are bound by a “sin nature”? The author keeps a distinction between the nature of Jesus and fallen humanity in 7:26 (“holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners”), but is this distinction intrinsic or something that came about through the obedience of Jesus to God’s will for him? The author does not appear to be concerned about a fallen condition of “original sin” inherited from Adam, like Paul does in Romans 5-6. Rather, as Gordon Thomas suggests, “It seems truer to the book of Hebrews to affirm that all humans are fallen, that Jesus shared our fallenness and our temptations completely, but that in him fallenness did not lead automatically to sinfulness.”¹² The only point at which Jesus differed from humanity was the committal of sin (4:15), which meant that he did not have to offer a sacrifice for himself (7:27). Giving in to temptation would have disqualified him from being

¹¹Oscar Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 94.

¹²Gordon J. Thomas, “The Perfection of Christ and the Perfecting of Believers in Hebrews,” in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. by Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 298.

the needed perfect sacrifice. Failing to be completely human would have meant (1) that he could not have shown us the way through our own temptations (an external experience, 2:17), but more profoundly, (2) that he could have not brought about a new covenant and the perfecting of believers (an inward transformation, 10:14). Both Jesus' humanity and sinlessness are needed in the logic of the author.

B. Perfection through Suffering. Returning to 2:10, the question remains, in what way was Jesus perfected through his suffering? The condition of his perfection was victory *through* his suffering. To put it another way, in his complete identification with the human condition, Jesus did not let human weakness triumph but gained victory over the very condition that traps all people. In other words, Jesus became "perfect" by being victorious through his humanness, thereby becoming fit to be high priest. What enabled Jesus to remain sinless through his suffering? The author writes that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8). It was a process of constantly conforming to God's will. Luke Timothy Johnson offers an interpretation worth consideration:

. . . the human Jesus progressively grew into his stature of divine Son. Through his human faith and obedience, he progressively opened himself to the mystery of God. Such opening to mystery inevitably involves pain or suffering, just as pain and suffering have the capacity of opening humans to the mystery of God. . . . the divine within him progressively found more explicit expression in the freedom of the human person Jesus. Viewed in this fashion, the moment of death, which appears from the outside to be the final and ultimate closure, the shutting down of existence, became for Jesus the ultimate opening of his humanity to the presence of God.¹³

Jesus' perfection began morally through his victory over sin, not any sin that he ever committed, but the potential for sin that has existed since Adam and Eve were first created and placed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16-17). Jesus was able to do what no other human has ever been able to do—to be the perfect human in obedience to the Father's will. This perfection was not simply something that happened inherently because he

¹³Luke Timothy Johnson, "Hebrews' Challenge to Christians: Christology and Discipleship," *Preaching Hebrews*, eds. David Fleer and Dave Bland (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 2003), 21.

was the pre-existent Son who created the universe, because as Son he still had to learn obedience (5:8). If we are to take Jesus' humanity seriously, like the author of Hebrews, we have to recognize that the personal holiness of Jesus came through his decision to conform to the will of God—in *all ways*. We are still left with the problem, how did Jesus do what we cannot? Therein lies the uniqueness of Jesus as Son and perhaps why the author begins his epistle with reminding the readers of the deity of Jesus, why no one else in all creation can qualify as high priest except the Son of God.¹⁴ Nils Dahl wrote, "The flesh of Jesus is the point where the heavenly and the earthly worlds meet, but meet in a way which leaves the heavenly world hidden."¹⁵

Through his obedience in life, Jesus showed his moral qualifications to be high priest, but he was not perfect as a high priest until he experienced the suffering of death. David Peterson concludes, "In the final analysis, it is his redemptive death that qualifies Christ to act as heavenly high priest since the primary function of priesthood is 'to expiate the sins of the people' (2:17; cf. 5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:28)." Peterson then agrees with Spicq, who states:

. . . his incarnation and his piety render him physically and religiously capable to offer the only sacrifice fully acceptable to God, being at the same time priest and victim. When it is said that God makes this priest "perfect through suffering" (2:9-10) and that effectively the Saviour offers himself to his Father (10:1-18), it is necessary to understand that it is solely to realize the object of his priesthood: to obtain pardon for sins, to unite men to God (5:9).¹⁶

This makes Jesus' suffering more than simply exemplary or as a model of perfect morality, though these are still a part, but sets the idea of *teleios*

¹⁴It is at this point that one can talk of Jesus being the "second Adam" for the author of Hebrews, someone who came just as Adam was created, perfectly human yet still with the potential of sinning. The one difference between Adam and Jesus is that Adam lived in a perfect paradise—he had it all; Jesus lived in the mundane world of pain and misery found in first-century Palestine. This makes Jesus' humanity even more significant because his world was very much like our world. His was not a Garden of Eden but a Garden of Gethsemane.

¹⁵Nils A. Dahl, "A New and Living Way: The Approach to God According to Hebrews 10:19-25," *Interpretation* 5 (1951), 405.

¹⁶Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 102-103, quoting C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux, Études Bibliques*, vol. II (Paris, 1952), 222.

more in the context of mission: to enable others to experience God's glory as well. Jesus' suffering of death (1) provides atonement for sins (our past, 2:17), (2) delivers from life-long slavery (from this point onward, 2:15), (3) offers the way out of temptation (the present, 2:18), and (4) gives assurance of eternal salvation to those who are sanctified through him (7:25; 10:14).

C. Mediation through Death. Jesus' attainment of perfection qualifies Him to mediate a new covenant between God and humanity. Jesus is called a mediator three times in the epistle, each time in association with a new covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). The concept of mediator has the basic idea of one who goes between two parties, an intermediary, someone who establishes a relationship between two parties. It may also have the connotation of a guarantor, one who acts upon the mediation to confirm the relationships involved.¹⁷ Jesus' suffering and death qualified him to bring together two parties separated by human sin by making "atonement for the sins of the people" (2:17). In 8:6, Jesus' ministry as mediator of a new covenant is far superior to the old covenant since it was enacted on better promises. These promises are described in the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in verses 8-12. The critical issue at this juncture is how these "promises" were enacted. The very fact that the old covenant and its sacrificial system failed to bridge the void between God and humanity showed that a new way was needed (8:7). The author does not make explicit the link between Jesus' sacrifice and his mediation of a new covenant, although he earlier wrote of Jesus offering himself once for all (7:27), and the concept is still fresh in the readers' minds.

Atonement language appears more clearly in the other two passages in which Jesus' mediation is mentioned. The author continues to discuss the former covenant in 9:1-10 and shows how it "cannot make perfect the conscience of the worshipper" (9:9). A greater, more perfect sacrifice was needed. Verse 15 begins with "for this reason", showing a causal relationship between verse 14 and what follows. Jesus qualifies as mediator of a new covenant because he offered himself "without blemish" to God (9:14). This is a cultic word that denotes something without fault or blemish. It can be used religiously to describe moral blamelessness, supremely in God himself (2 Sam. 22:31).¹⁸ The author has already established the

¹⁷A. Oepke, *TDNT*, IV, 598-624.

¹⁸F. Hauck, *TDNT*, IV, 829-31.

moral perfection of Jesus (4:15; 7:26) and now shows that the blood of this perfect sacrifice ratified the new covenant. The results are purification (9:14), an eternal inheritance, and redemption for believers (9:15). Finally, in 12:24 the author concludes a comparison between the ratification of the first covenant on Mount Sinai, experienced by great fear among the people, and the joyous gathering of saints and angels in the new heavenly Jerusalem on Mount Zion, a symbol for the presence of God. Under the old system, the people could not approach the holy mountain and the presence of God because of God's holiness.¹⁹ With the new covenant, believers can approach God's presence because of Jesus (4:16) and the new covenant he mediates. Like the first covenant (Ex. 24:8), the new covenant was ratified by the sprinkling of blood. The blood of Christ is a clear reference to his suffering of death (9:12, 14). Just like the first covenant (9:19-21), the blood of Christ has a cleansing effect upon that which receives it (10:19). Jesus' death was the covenant sacrifice that not only objectively brought about a new era, but also inwardly cleanses the conscience of believers (10:22), thereby making it possible for them to be in the presence of the holy God. Verse 23 describes them as "the spirits of the righteous who have been made perfect," a perfect passive participle being used attributively to describe the righteous who at some point received perfection and remain in that state. Those who are part of the new covenant will gain entrance into the heavenly sanctuary through Jesus.

Through his suffering, death, and exaltation, Jesus became not only the perfecter but also the one who opens a new way to salvation. God's purpose for humanity is to bring "many sons to glory," and to do this, God appointed his Son to open the way (2:10). According to J. Scott, this "designates an individual who opened the way into a new area for others to follow, founded the city in which they dwelt, gave his name to the community, fought its battles and secured the victory, and then remained as the leader-ruler-hero of his people."²⁰ Lane suggests that the term be translated as "champion": "Jesus is the 'the champion' who secured the

¹⁹Exodus 19:11-14, 21-24. Although the reason for the people to stay off the mountain is not clearly stated in this chapter, the assumption is that it is a matter of holiness because for them to even approach the mountain, they had to be washed and consecrated.

²⁰J. Julius Scott, "Archêgos in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JETS* 29/1 (March 1986), 52.

salvation of his people through the sufferings he endured in his identification with them, and more particularly through his death.”²¹ Scott writes that Jesus is “the one through whose sufferings (the ‘birth pangs of the Messiah’) the new age becomes a reality and whose personal honor and glory, which is shared with his ‘sons,’ is a major characteristic of it.”²² Jesus became the hero and perfecter of faith by “enduring the cross.” His journey of suffering opened the path to the throne of God. As the forerunner, he has already entered the “inner place,” the very presence of God in our behalf (6:19-20). The readers are challenged to respond to this promise of salvation by following in the footsteps of their founder and perfecter by *looking* to him (12:1). The nominative masculine participle is used adverbially to clarify the main verb (“let us run”) and can be taken either temporally (“while gazing”) or instrumentally (“by gazing”). Although neither one can be ruled out, the instrumental helps offset the runners’ need to “look away” from the distractions of temptations (“the sins that so easily entangle”) and “look toward” the one who has already gained victory over the weights that trip up humanity.

In summary, the message to the readers is that Jesus, who became one with us in our human struggle, will help us as our victorious great high priest to be able to be in God’s very presence as people who have been made holy by his submission to suffering and death and his exaltation to the highest place of honor before God.

II. Jesus as the Way to Perfection

The author develops the theme of Jesus as high priest in chapters 7-10 using typology to show that the old system of Judaism was insufficient, transitory, and anticipated a new way to approach the holy God. The author looks backwards to the formation of Israel as a people under the leadership of Moses and sees the ancient covenant and its cultic practices as types for a new era brought about by Jesus’ inauguration of a new covenant by his self-sacrifice through suffering and death, and his exaltation through resurrection. The priests, tabernacle structure, and sacrificial system are the “shadows” of greater promises brought through Christ (8:5). Ladd comments, “Hebrews is describing heavenly things in earthly, symbolic language. What Christ did on the cross, although an event in

²¹Lane, *Hebrews*, vol. 47A, 57.

²²Scott, “*Archēgos* in the Salvation History,” 50.

time and space, was itself an event in the spiritual world. Eternity at this point intersects time; the heavenly is embodied in the earthly; the transcendental occurs in the historical.”²³ This comparison may have had the intended affect upon the readers of convincing them to go on to perfection by appropriating Christ and his full salvation (6:1) rather than remaining bound by an evil conscience symbolized in the old system of Judaism.

A. Jesus as High Priest (ch. 7). The author introduces a new element to Jesus’ priesthood in 6:20 that is developed further in 7:1-10: Jesus as a “high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek serves as the perfect archetype for the author’s purposes because he (1) is king of righteousness and peace (7:2), (2) has an eternal priesthood because he had no identifiable genealogy in scripture (7:3), and (3) was greater than the Levitical priesthood by extension because he received tithes through Abraham (7:4-10).²⁴ Beginning in 7:11, the author builds on the last two premises (the first does not seem to fit into the major point the author wants to make) to show why a new priesthood is needed.

The author begins chapter 7 by describing two key characteristics of the priest-king Melchizedek: (1) the eternity of his priesthood (v. 3); and (2) his superiority over Levi, and hence the priestly descendants of Levi who administer the terms of the old covenant (v. 9). The author then argues that the ministry of the priestly order of Aaron (the Levites) is inadequate to provide a lasting solution to the alienation caused by sin. Importantly, a definition of perfection is implied in verse 19 when the author compares the inability of the law to “perfect” and the better hope by which we are *able to see God*. The former law could not perfect because the barrier of sin still remained; the law could not make a person holy enough to be in God’s presence (vv. 11, 18-19a). A better way to God was needed.

The author addresses the issue of why the former system was inadequate to bring people to God. The first evidence is that God had spoken

²³George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 575. There is debate about the worldview of the author and how influenced it was by Platonism. See Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Scriptural World Of Hebrews,” *Interpretation* 57:3 (July, 2003): 237-250.

²⁴This last argument assumes that “the ancestor embodies, symbolizes, and represents the whole group of his descendants. Abraham is not simply an individual, but a representative figure in this context” (Lane, *Hebrews*, vol. 47A, 168).

(Ps. 110:4) about another priesthood, one from the order of Melchizedek: “you are a priest *forever* after the order of Melchizedek” (v. 17). Jesus qualifies for being in this priestly order because of his “indestructible life,” a reference to his resurrected and exalted status (v. 16). Second, the law was unable to perfect because it could not permanently solve the sin problem (vv. 11, 18-19). The old system was temporary because of its insufficiency. Sacrifices had to be repeated on a daily basis (v. 27). Third, the former priests had no oath from God (vv. 20-22); a person can be a priest only when called by God (5:4). Fourth, the former priests could not continue in office because of death (v. 23). This adds to the fleeting nature of the old system. Finally, the priests needed to offer sacrifices repeatedly (daily) for their own sins (v. 27; 5:3).

The midrash on Ps. 110:4 shows that a new way of doing things was needed. The key qualifications of Jesus as high priest are permanence and adequacy because of his victory over suffering and death, resulting in what the author calls “the indestructible life” (v. 16). Though the word “resurrection” is not used in this passage, the assumption is that Jesus came out of the other side of his suffering and death with full victory (v. 24). The oath of God about the permanence of Jesus’ priesthood confirms beyond doubt the adequacy of Jesus’ victory (v. 21). Jesus is in a class of his own. Each of the qualities listed in verse 26 (holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens) came through his victory over temptation and suffering.

Verse 25 uses present tense verbs along with a temporal adverb to show that Jesus’ ministry as the resurrected and exalted one continues on, thereby making it possible for the readers to draw near to God *now*. His present status as high priest qualifies him to perfect those who come to God through him. What this perfection entails is suggested in verse 25 in the phrase “to save completely.” This implies that the full salvation in the author’s mind is the ability to draw near to God. Consequently, full salvation involves being made holy by having the problem of sin removed in order to be qualified to come before the holy God. The problem of sin is taken care of by Jesus’ perfect sacrifice “once for all” (v. 27).

Having been perfected, Jesus now is able as the perfect sacrifice to sanctify those who put their faith in him and bring them to the throne of God (2:10-11). Having established the qualification for Jesus to serve as high priest, the author moves on to discuss the affects of Jesus’ victory over the problem at the core of human struggle.

B. Jesus as Mediator (ch. 8). Beginning with 8:1, the author shifts from Jesus as priest to Jesus' ministry as priest. The author begins with the summative declaration of confidence that our high priest now serves at the throne of God. The mission of the high priest, "bringing many sons to glory" (2:10), continues beyond resurrection.

God intended the first covenant to be only temporary. God had something better in mind, a plan that would provide a lasting solution to sin (1:1-4). The author logically argues that since God promised a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), there must have been a problem with the old one (v. 7). What was its fault? One clue comes in verse 6. It was enacted on inferior promises. It is assumed that the promises of the old covenant are the same as with the new covenant—to perfect the conscience of the worshippers (9:9-10) in order that they might enter the holy places (that is, to be in God's presence; 10:19). The specific fault of the first covenant appears in the quotation of Jeremiah 31:32 in verse 9: "they did not continue in my covenant." The author has already shown the problem in 3:7-4:13, disobedience (4:6). They could not succeed because the law was powerless and only external; it never dealt with the deeper heart need of cleansing, or as the author puts it, the perfecting of the conscience (9:9, 14; 10:22). Again, something or someone outside of sin needed to provide a remedy for the malady of sin.

Where the old system failed, Jesus the high priest succeeded. Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant provides the means for this deeper cleansing of the conscience. The new covenant is enacted on better promises (v. 6) bought by a high priest who was able to offer the perfect sacrifice once for all (7:27). Jesus' self-sacrifice, his own blood (9:13; 13:20), ratified the new covenant. The affects of the new covenant are significant and consistent with the author's argument.

First, the terms of the covenant (the laws) are written in the minds and hearts of God's people (v. 10). The problem was not the laws but the inability to keep them because of a sinful conscience. Bruce comments, "What was needed was a new nature, a heart liberated from its bondage to sin, a heart which not only spontaneously knew and loved the will of God but had the power to do it."²⁵ Something had to be done to purify and empower the conscience. Second, intimate relationship with the holy God

²⁵F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 173.

is restored (v. 10). This relationship lies at the heart of the faith of Israel (Ex. 6:7) and the church (2 Cor. 6:16). Relationship with the holy God can only be present when the separation caused by sin is removed. Third, new insight to the person and character of God is given (v. 11). The intimacy of relationship is intensified with knowledge. This knowledge is linked to and a result of the intercession of Jesus as high priest, the exact imprint of the divine nature (1:3) and the object of confession (3:1, 4:14). Considering him confirms and keeps the new covenant in us while we face the challenges of our own sufferings (12:3). Finally, forgiveness is provided (v. 12). Mercy is the only way sin can be removed, and God has provided “a merciful and faithful high priest . . . to make atonement for the sins of the people” (2:17). The perfected sacrifice overcomes the penalty of death once and for all (9:16).

C. Jesus Opens the Way to the Most Holy Place (God’s Presence) (ch. 9). Chapter 9 is significant in the author’s overall argument. Often termed the “atonement chapter,” it compares the sacrificial system under the first covenant to the once and for all sacrifice offered by Jesus that inaugurated the new covenant. The chapter is more or less divided into two parts, the first describing the regulations surrounding the first covenant and their inability to solve finally and completely the sin problem (vv. 1-10), and the second with how Jesus’ sacrifice surpasses the first covenant by being able to purify the conscience (vv. 11-28).

The author further explains the “full salvation” offered through Jesus, the great high priest, by interpreting several key components of the first covenant, especially the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. God’s plan of redemption is consistent because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (v. 22; see Lev. 16:16). A life must be offered for breaking the terms of the covenant (v. 15; cf. Rom. 6:23). Under the old system, the priests offered sacrifices to atone for sin, but these sacrifices never solved the problem of the sinful conscience but only dealt with the “flesh” (vv. 9, 13). By not dealing with the inner issue, the first covenant never enabled the people of Israel to obey God’s laws because their disobedience remained (4:6, 11). The earthly tabernacle was a place where people could experience God’s holiness, but only in indirect and protected ways, with the most direct being limited to only one day a year, the Day of Atonement, when the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, which housed the ark of the covenant (9:4), the “throne of God.”

The priestly ministry of Jesus solved the problem of sin once and for all. His ministry was similar in purpose to the earthly priests, to open the way to God, but where they could only partially and temporarily succeed by making annual atonement for their sins and the sins of the people, Jesus succeeded completely and eternally. To make the new covenant promises a reality, the root of the problem had to be dealt with. First, the transgressions needed to be atoned for, and then God would forgive them (vv. 15, 22; 2:17). There is no difference in the means and outcome between the old system and Jesus' sacrifice, for when a life was given, God would forgive the sins (v. 22). The difference lies deeper, with the need to deal with sin in a permanent way.²⁶ If the problem of inner sin had not been dealt with, Jesus would have been like any other high priest and would have needed to offer himself continually as sacrifice (v. 25). The author gets to the deeper issue, what sets the new covenant off from the old, the cleansing of the conscience.

The author uses the word "conscience" five times in the epistle. Christian Maurer comments, "It is man aware of himself in perception and acknowledgment, in willing and acting."²⁷ Lane states that "the 'conscience' is directed toward God and embraces the whole person in his relation to God."²⁸ In 9:9, the old covenant could not "perfect in regard to the conscience" because it only affected the worshipper externally. It had no power to bring permanent change because of its need to be repeated; it only sanctified the flesh (v. 13). Bruce writes, "A conscience stained with sin is the one effective barrier to fellowship with God."²⁹ The "awareness of" or "direction of the mind towards" sin remained, effectively cutting off fellowship with the holy God. As long as the stain of sin remains, one is hindered from fellowship with God. Once the conscience is cleansed from sin and perfected by the appropriation of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, one can then draw near to God (10:22). The old covenant failed because it could not purify the conscience. Holiness was only outward—a cleansing of the flesh (v. 13)—and not deep enough to allow one to enter the Most Holy Place.

²⁶The use of the singular in 9:26 is noteworthy. Every reference to the removal of sin in the old system is plural, suggesting the transgressions (5:3; 7:27; 9:7, 22; 10:2, 3, 4, 11). Here, Jesus dealt with the problem of the entity of sin itself, not simply the manifestations of it.

²⁷Christian Maurer, *TDNT*, VIII, 914.

²⁸Lane, *Hebrews*, vol. 47B, 225.

²⁹F. F. Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 23 (January, 1969): 14.

Jesus mediates a new covenant because he is able to change the inner person, making it possible for the law to be obeyed (because of a purified conscience) and for relationship with God to be established (because of victory over sin). This is only possible because of Jesus' ministry as high priest, offering up his own blood "without blemish" (v. 14) to establish a new covenant. In the office of high priest, Jesus cleanses that which has been defiled through disobedience. Through his victory over temptation and death, Jesus showed himself worthy to inaugurate the new covenant because only his life was pure enough to cover the sins of the whole world—his life to replace the untold numbers of human lives. His sinlessness also enables others to follow in his footsteps to the presence of God. A purified conscience is the essential qualification for perfection.

D. Jesus' Blood as the Seal of a New Covenant and the Means of Purification (10:1-18). With chapter 10, the author comes to the pinnacle of his argument, linking the earlier discussion with what follows. The author returns to the theme of Jesus' humanness by quoting Psalm 40:6-8. The crucial part of this psalm for the author is stated in verse 10: "we have been sanctified through the offering of the *body* of Jesus Christ once and for all." Our being made holy rests on the ability of Jesus to reach perfection as a *human* by complete victory through suffering and his exaltation after death (v. 12).

Here, the author has come full circle and his argument is complete. Jesus as high priest offered himself as sacrifice, something that came at the high cost of suffering and death. It is noteworthy that the author only cites here two parts of Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant: (1) Jesus' victory provides access to the holy God by removing the barrier of the defilement of sin in the inner person, enabling a new disposition of obedience because of the law being written on the heart (v. 16; 13:12), and (2) his victory also provides access to the holy God by removing the penalty for disobedience through complete and lasting forgiveness (v. 17). The result for those who look to Jesus is perfection, "unimpeded access to God,"³⁰ through a constant sanctifying process. Jesus as high priest helps *now* those who look to him during their moments of suffering and temptation (see 4:16; 12:1-2).³¹ Victor Pfitzner writes:

³⁰Bruce, *Hebrews*, 44.

³¹In terms of holiness theology, we see implied in this verse both the crisis (in the perfect tense) and the process (in the present tense) of sanctification.

The Letter views sin in two ways. It is *defilement* that prevents access to a holy God (1:3; 9:14, 22-23; 10:22; 12:15; 13:4). This is removed by the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Second, sin is *unfaithfulness* and disobedience (2:1-4; 3:6-19; 4:11; 6:4-6; 10:21-31, 35-39; 12:1-3, 25). The solution to this problem is to look to Jesus “the pioneer and perfecter of . . . faith” (12:2), and so to endure to the end where there is a perfect Sabbath rest for God’s pilgrim people (4:1-9).³²

III. Paraenesis of Perfection (10:19-25)

The author shifts to exhortation in 10:19 where he applies his theology to the present needs of his readers and expresses a pastoral concern for them. Although there is a future aspect to entering heaven (9:28), there is present experience of relationship with the holy God. Entry into this relationship comes through the “curtain,” a reference to Jesus’ “flesh,” again describing Jesus in his humanness. Jesus as *high priest* not only identified with us, died for us as the perfect sacrifice, but also sets the course for our own victory because of the inner change he makes through the new covenant. The result of Jesus’ high priesthood is that we can *come near* to God with consciences that have been purified and bodies washed pure (v. 22).³³

The final barrier between humanity and God is removed through the new covenant hope of Jesus the high priest. This sanctifying of the believer leads to the ability to “*hold firm* to the confession.” With the way opened to God and the inner person cleansed from sin, the new covenant hope of knowing God is possible. This knowledge will keep a person confident in the midst of trials and temptations (10:35, 39; 12:3). Finally, the forgiven and purified believer contributes to community by *spurring* others on to love and good works (vv. 24-25). The new covenant community is vital for running a successful race to the finish line. This community expands to include the “great cloud of witnesses” of chapter 11 (12:1). The new covenant community is characterized by “peace” and “holiness,” which are to be constantly pursued so that no one in the community “fails

³²Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 43.

³³The washing by water is most likely a reference to baptism which consists “in the outward application of water as the visible sign of the inward and spiritual cleansing wrought by God in those who come to him through Christ” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 251).

to obtain the grace of God” (12:15). The author’s concluding benediction expresses well the overall purpose of the epistle:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, *by the blood of the eternal covenant*, equip you with everything good *that you may do his will*, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.³⁴

Conclusion

The author of this great epistle was a realist who understood human weaknesses and also had hope in a sure source of help for victory through those weaknesses. Jesus as the great high priest came not simply to die as a substitute for sinners, but as a priest, became one with us, succeeding where we fail. He became the Perfect One by overcoming the same temptations that plague us. His perfection came at a price, for he needed to overcome the greatest struggle we face—death. By becoming the spotless sacrifice, he ended any need for other sacrifices, which never dealt with the real issue of inner sin. Jesus’ death opened a new way of relationship with the holy God by which we can approach God as people made holy inwardly by a change of disposition through the cleansing of our conscience. What the Old Testament longed for, expressed poignantly through the prophet Jeremiah, becomes a reality for those who look to Jesus for their help. Jesus makes it possible for us to reach a perfection that begins with an inner change and works out in faith and obedience and ever increasing victory over sin. Holiness as expressed in Hebrews is not an abstract hope but a livable reality through Jesus, the great high priest.

³⁴13:20-21, English Standard Version, emphasis added.

NARRATIVES OF TESTIMONY, WITNESS, AND RECONCILIATION

by

R. M. Keelan Downton

Narrative theology has a significant pedigree. While found in H. Richard Niebuhr's use of story to locate revelation in internal history,¹ it did not begin to take off until the 1970s. The flurry of scholarship during this period included Stephen Crites' "The Narrative Quality of Experience" (1971), Paul Ricoeur's "Hermeneutics of Testimony" (1972), Hans Frei's *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (1974), James W. McClendon's *Biography as Theology* (1974), David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975), and John Navone's *Towards a Theology of Story* (1977). Narrative theology then gained popularity in the wider academy as a complex debate divided along two trajectories.

In 1987, Gary Comstock summarized a number of attempts to categorize the essential disagreements in a way that moved beyond their informal associations with Yale and Chicago. He rejected both the anti-foundationalist/foundationalist typology of Ronald Thiemann and the cultural-linguistic/experiential-expressivist typology of George Lindbeck as misleading in their imprecision, proposing instead a typology of pure/impure. This characterization is most helpful in terms of associating the purist insistence that "the biblical story must set the boundaries for what can be said and done in theology" with Wittgensteinian descriptivism and the impurist understanding of Christianity as "a way of con-

¹H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

struing the world . . . that competes with other stories” with Gadamerian expressivism.²

In their 1989 introduction to a reader entitled *Why Narrative?*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones repeatedly emphasized the field’s resistance to classification: “The essays do not form any single coherent perspective”;³ “there have been tensions and a diversity of uses which defy easy categorization about who is arguing for what”;⁴ “what unites these essays is not so much a common argument as a recognition that narrative has a crucial methodological significance for theology and ethics.”⁵ In 1992, Edward T. Oakes pressed this even further, articulating four dimensions of *apparent* convergence before declaring, “a closer look at the contours of the debate will reveal the fundamental fissures that run right through the whole narrative debate, fissures that do not correlate neatly with the different fields of application where the narrativists are working.”⁶

In the intervening decade and a half, there have been a number of significant forays into particular areas such as ethics⁷ or public theology,⁸ but comparatively few attempts to encompass the discourse as a whole. This problem is helped to some extent by Scott Holland’s *How Do Stories Save Us?* (2006)⁹ in which he emphasizes the contrast between the *intra*-textual interests of George Lindbeck and the *intertextual* interests of David Tracy, suggesting that the Yale/Chicago binary has not succumbed to the critique of incoherence. The difference between those for whom narrative theology is primarily a means of engaging scripture itself and

²Gary L. Comstock, “Two Types of Narrative Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, 4 (Winter, 1987): 696.

³Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 5.

⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

⁶Edward T. Oakes, “Apologetics and the Pathos of Narrative Theology,” *Journal of Religion* (1992): 38.

⁷Alexander Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

⁸Mary Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology* (State University of New York Press, 2004).

⁹Scott Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us? An Essay on the Question with the Theological Hermeneutics of David Tracy in View*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 35 (Dudley, MA: Peeters / Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006).

those for whom it functions as a tool for navigating difference more generally create natural enclaves of discourse.

Of particular interest here is a concern voiced by Alan Jacobs in 2003 that narrative theology was neglecting personal testimony in order to avoid charges of individualism, charging that the influence of Lesslie Newbigin, Stanley Hauerwas, and George Laughlin made work on narrative too ecclesiocentric.¹⁰ Such claims are symptomatic of a general neglect of the contributions of John Navone and James McClendon, as well as a strange presupposition that testimony is extra-ecclesial, or perhaps an activity conducted only outside of “church in the proper sense.”

Nevertheless, Jacobs raises an important concern. Though helpful in clarifying the relevant arguments in one aspect of the subdiscipline, the concern with the nature and meaning of *texts* has tended to focus theological discussion on the doctrine of revelation or a theory of hermeneutics, leaving performative dimensions of narrative to the disciplines of ethics or psychology. The categories of testimony, witness, and reconciliation that feature prominently in the life of American-born churches may help to address this by both highlighting such performative dimensions anew and providing a point of contact for engaging ecclesiological difference.

Testimony

Bruce Hindmarsh’s *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* serves as an important starting point for understanding testimony. After noting precedents in Augustine’s *Confessions*, medieval hagiography, and conversion accounts of sixteenth-century reformers (which he downplays), Hindmarsh explores a diverse range of conversion narratives authored between 1730 and 1790. He is primarily concerned with the function of such narratives for ordering experience and their relation to the development of modern individualism. In this respect, he regards conversion narratives as a paradox suspended between pre-modern *bestowed* identity and modern *constructed* identity. Though the patterns expressed in the conversion narratives he examines vary considerably, they share the quality of obtaining coherence precisely within the larger story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation espoused by Christian communities. Public gatherings served as a mechanism to achieve such coherence by

¹⁰Alan Jacobs, “What Narrative Theology Forgot,” *First Things* (August 1, 2003).

both presenting the pattern and inviting a response in kind (whether immediately or much later).

These groups, and the preachers who led them, fostered a culture in which one discovered the possibilities of a narrative identity shaped by the gospel message. It was within these meetings that you would hear the testimonies and sing the hymns. Here you would begin to learn the story and ask yourself, Could my life be like this in any way? How might I “enact” or experience that sort of autobiography?¹¹

Hindmarsh rightly describes a complex “evangelical sense of self” that involves “both creativity and discovery, both individuation and community,” but he does not delve further into how the public quality of testimony is uniquely situated to bridge such divides—particularly among churches for whom expressions of personal conversion become more important than liturgical order (and indeed, for some become the primary measure of whether the word has been rightly proclaimed).

Lest it be supposed that voluntary identification of one’s own life with particular elements of a community’s pattern presupposes a centered rather than a bounded set,¹² it is important to remember that testimony can be used as a measure of inclusion as easily as a creed or catechism. The very dynamics that make it possible to discern patterns in community speech also make it possible to establish certain patterns as normative. In the face of Thomas Hooker’s rigid “morphology of conversion” and Jonathan Edwards’ desire to verify testimony through examination of a person’s daily life, Alan Jacobs notes strong disincentive for deviating from established patterns: “A newcomer . . . will be reluctant to deviate very far from the shape of the testimony as she has discerned it through prior experience with that community, especially if the expectations for one’s testimony are specific and precise.”¹³ This does not diminish the importance of the voluntary quality of testimony as a kind of inquisition-in-reverse, but rather reiterates

¹¹D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 345

¹²See Darrell Guder, et. al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

¹³Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 37.

the capacity of testimonies to function as conduits for tradition. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a practice that would more express the *sensus fidelium* more perspicuously than public vocalization of things believed.

The role testimony plays in tradition heightens its epistemological significance. In summarizing the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Anna Carter Florence writes, “We can no longer speak of theology as a series of absolute claims. The One to whom we testify may be absolute truth and grace, but our speech itself is not—and theology is speech.”¹⁴ Florence gravitates to testimony as a model for preaching in a postmodern context not simply because it is an effective method of communication utilized by a long line of female preachers, but because it circumvents the notion of objective proof to place unique responsibilities on listeners to choose: “Testimony is not something that can be true or false; it can only be believed or rejected. The only proof of testimony is . . . whether we are willing to seal our lives to our words.”¹⁵ Arthur W. Frank takes this idea further by drawing attention to the ways in which certain testimonies (for his analysis, stories of illness) not only call on hearers to receive but implicate others who could have acted or spoken out but failed to do so.

Testimony connects with aspects of Roman Catholic theology if it can be understood in terms of *sensus fidelium*, but its epistemological dimensions suggest incompatibility with many articulations of episcopacy—particularly those that assume some form of primacy. Charles Morerod illustrates this problem well when he writes, “The possibility of a common testimony of faith has been a central topic from the beginning of the Ecumenical Movement,”¹⁶ but places the accent unequivocally on faith and its abstract content. He first directs readers to Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of two conditions of faith, followed by Thomas de Vio Cajetan’s articulation of the Holy Spirit’s guarantee against error “in the proposing and explicating of what is to be believed . . . the *sensus* and teaching of the church.” And so testimony, is quickly jettisoned (perhaps because of its inherent lack of guarantees in practice) to proceed to the magisterium, infallibility, and primacy.¹⁷ During the crisis of authority that characterizes

¹⁴Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching As Testimony* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007), 86.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁶Charles Morerod, “The Ecumenical Meaning of the Petrine Ministry,” in *Ecumenism Today: The Universal Church in the 21st Century*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Christopher Asprey (Ashgate, 2008), 123.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

our postmodern context,¹⁸ neither adversarial apologetics nor appeals to venerable sources appear credible. Even martyrdom seems easily dismissed as an unfortunate byproduct of a persistent delusion. In this sense, testimony is not so much an alternative epistemology as the outward limit of what a truth claim signifies in postmodern culture—believing not *what* is claimed but *that the one speaking* believes it to be true.

The real potential of testimony for proclamation lies in carrying the cycle that began with hearing the testimonies of others through to the other side, bringing about a kind of doubling. The coherence established between events of one's life and the narrative of a community must lead to a subsequent coherence between things proclaimed and actions taken; this is the form of coherence typically signified by the word "authenticity." Florence's use of Ricoeur to relocate the truth of a claim, from an abstraction outside of the speaker to concrete actions of the speaker, points us to the second major theme of this essay, witness.

Witness

In a linguistic convention that reflects how the Greek root *martus* may be expressed as the noun *marturia* or verb *martureo*, most authors use testimony and witness interchangeably. Theologically, it is useful to extend this distinction beyond grammatical conventions to treat them as particular forms of narrative for two reasons. The first comes from Ricoeur's discussion of prophetic speech as a peculiar form of testimony. In prophetic testimony,

the witness does not testify about isolated and contingent fact but about the radical global meaning of human experience. It is Yahweh himself who is witnessed to in the testimony. . . . What separates this new meaning of testimony from all its uses in ordinary language is that the testimony does not belong to the witness. It proceeds from an absolute initiative as to its origin and its content.¹⁹

¹⁸National Council of Churches USA, Faith and Order Commission, *The Authority of the Church in the World*, <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/newAOC.pdf>, §55-57.

¹⁹Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics of Testimony" in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). Available at <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1941>. Translated by David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan. This article originally appeared as "L'hermeneutique du temoignage," *Archivio di Filosofia (La Testimonianza)* 42 (1972):35-61.

In focusing on the global meaning of human experience, Ricoeur is clearly addressing something distinct from conversion narratives, even though their intent is precisely to connect contingent events with the absolute.

The second, and more important, reason is that the phrase “bear witness” has taken on particular significance in ecumenical discourse as a much broader category that points beyond individual speech to include various forms of collective action. Though the language of witness obviously has a much longer history, its repetition in *Unitatis Redintegratio* places it in the center of Roman Catholic approaches to ecumenism. The first time the phrase appears it refers to a duty for Catholics to attend to the Catholic household itself, to “bear witness more clearly and faithfully” to the teachings of the apostles.²⁰ The second instance is a prayer that all Christians would “bear witness to our common hope.”²¹ The third is a celebration of Christ-centered longing for union among “separated brethren” that “inspires them . . . to bear witness to their faith among the peoples of the earth.”²² These references suggest three motions of this wider sense of witness. The first is an internal motion affirming the narrative a community collectively preserves. The second is a coordinating motion that requires listening attentively to discern the common orientation of a broader range of stories and then synthesizing a collective expression of it. The last suggests an outward motion through which witness becomes functional in the context of difference.

The *Evangelical—Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission* notes the use of witness in the New Testament primarily in reference to what the apostles had seen and heard and its more general use to describe the act of commending Christ to others on the basis of personal experience before defining it as “any Christian activity which points to Christ, a usage made familiar by . . . *Common Witness and Proselytism* (1970) and *Common Witness* (1980).”²³ Though this definition risks being too expansive to be helpful, the report goes on to specify seven aspects of such witness—Bible translation/publishing, use of media, community service, social

²⁰*Unitatis Redintegratio*, §4.

²¹*Ibid.*, §12.

²²*Ibid.*, §20.

²³*Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984*, section 7.2, http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/e-rc/doc/e_e-rc_ev-cath.html

thought/action, dialogue, worship, and evangelism—and it denounces unworthy witness characterized by impure motives, coercion/manipulation, or misrepresentations of alternative viewpoints. The fact that many of these activities are typically forms of collective rather than merely individual action suggests witness as a designation of public presence in contrast to those activities typically understood as testimony.

For churches more familiar with witness(ing) as a synonym for evangelism, Bryan Stone provides a helpful extrapolation, drawing together the work of Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Howard Yoder to reclaim evangelism from captivity to the Constantinian story on one hand and the story of modernity on the other. The first rivals evangelism by positing the state as the measure of success and locus of hope, while the second presents a similar challenge in relation to the market. Resisting such stories, argues Stone, requires a more robust ecclesiology that grounds evangelism in a logic of witness rather than a logic of production. His conception of witness as an ecclesiological practice invites ongoing discourse around the poles of memory and suspicion to distinguish the internal goods of evangelism from external goods like numerical growth and social influence. This means not only a theology of embodiment, such as the category of witness suggests, but also a relocation of apologetics to the realm of aesthetics rather than epistemology or metaphysics. For Stone, such aesthetics are grounded in the beauty of holiness—the action of the Spirit who blows unpredictably.²⁴

This pneumatological emphasis sets up a second doubling effect: the absolute outwardly witnessed to is also an active subject bearing witness to us from within. The Spirit enables escape from the market calculus by negating the relevance of effectiveness for validating actions, yet raises new epistemological questions that are not so much resolved as reconfigured by narratives of testimony.

Reconciliation

This brings us to the third component of this exploration: narratives of reconciliation. The sharing of memories in the form of testimony can only take a community so far. Narratives of reconciliation open up possibilities for navigating difference in the absence of an Amen—those all-too-frequent occasions when attempts to testify to or bear witness to truth

²⁴Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 12.

yield only a cacophony of unresolved dissonance. A simplistic reading of such narratives treats them simply as models for replication and imitation; if it is possible to transform conflicts of Apartheid and the Troubles, surely it can be accomplished in other places and times (especially at the micro-level of our own networks of interpersonal relationships). While this is of some value, deeper consideration of those models reveals that such efforts inevitably bump up against the issue of memory and identity, that is, with narratives of testimony and witness.

In a dialogue at the University College Dublin in 1998, Ricoeur describes a “paradox of imagination-memory.” Imagination can bring us to unreal worlds, yet also places memories in the foreground of our thought. Though any attempt to get at history (i.e., the memories themselves) must be accessed through imagination, “the difference *remains* between the unreal and the real.” Testimony links imagination and memory as the one testifying claims authority on the basis of *having been there*, and by doing so invites hearers to *imagine* having been there.²⁵ It is the capacity of testimony to bring memory and imagination together, especially in telling the story “otherwise,” that makes it so important for transforming conflict.

If history is inaccessible, it is the memories themselves that must be navigated to bring about reconciliation. The actual process of bringing those memories to light takes a dramatically different form than the development of methodological approaches. This is apparent in the way Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz describes narratives as a bridge between Hispana/Latina experience and theoretical arguments about justice through which those in power can become aware of those situated differently,²⁶ but also has relevance in conflicts where those most at risk are less easily identified.

In an essay on autobiography and the healing of memories, Mary Duffy draws from Ricoeur’s account of testimony to explore its possible role in reconciliation using first-hand accounts from *Bear in Mind—Stories of Troubles*. Duffy suggests that narrative

²⁵Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination, Testimony and Trust,” in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), 16-17.

²⁶Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 49-50.

can contribute to the search for peace and reconciliation by challenging the way in which society deals with wounded memory so that conflict itself can be a source of healing rather than sustenance of division. . . . stories can powerfully evoke or awaken the civic spirit to an “ethical imagination.” Not the kind which perpetuates hate or the seeking of revenge, but another kind of revolution of the heart, that consists of learning to see and to love instead of being disgusted by, “imperfect human beings.”²⁷

For Duffy, autobiography creates space to sensitively cherish memory of suffering by making perspectives that run counter to the dominant story present. Honest remembering makes it possible to imagine new relations with others by opening up the possibility of new relations to the past. Recognition of the viewpoint of those who suffer “of itself is an act of reconciliation with the past.”²⁸

This approach to reconciliation through the healing of memories is enhanced by reflection on biblical understandings of reconciliation for which Robert Schreiter is an indispensable resource. His seminal work *The Ministry of Reconciliation* begins with a five-point summary of Paul’s teaching on reconciliation:

. . . reconciliation is the work of God. . . . is more a spirituality than a strategy. . . . makes both victim and wrongdoer a new creation. . . . is to be found in the story of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . [and] will be fulfilled only with the complete consummation of the world by God in Christ.²⁹

Schreiter expands on these themes by exploring six stories of encounters with the resurrected Jesus. The women arriving at an empty tomb becomes a place to take one’s own incapacity to imagine “a way out of a traumatic past.”³⁰ The Emmaus story suggests how God can speak through re-imagining the perspective of a lost loved one as a model for

²⁷Mary Duffy, “Conversation Peace: Autobiography and the Healing of Memories” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and P. De Mey (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 848.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 852.

²⁹Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 14-19.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 39.

action (and is ironically enacted as the disciples extend Jesus-like hospitality to Jesus himself).³¹ Jesus' appearance in the upper room and subsequent proclamation of peace expresses the resurrection as a remembering "in a different way" that manifests itself as forgiveness before it is requested.³² Such remembering serves to both affirm the agency of the victim and also the distorted humanity of the victimizer. The account in which Thomas' alienation and disbelief is transformed by touching Christ's wounds provides a model in which stories of past suffering function as evidence that, though such suffering was real, it is not the sum total of our life and need not be for others.³³

The seashore appearance illustrates the activities of accompaniment, hospitality, making connections, and commissioning that help to create communities of safety, memory, and hope in which reconciliation can take place.³⁴ Finally, the departure of Jesus indicates the mandate to become, as 2 Corinthians suggests, ministers of reconciliation who extend the reality of the resurrection out in "truth that will not be suppressed" and "justice that goes beyond retribution."³⁵ Reading Paul's desire to "know Christ *and the power of the resurrection* and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death"³⁶ in light of Schreiter's analysis reminds that reconciliation is an activity of both memory and imagination that requires spiritual power. It points toward both an epistemology of Christological encounter and the Spirit-filling that precedes apostolic acts of reconciliation, and later, martyrdom.

The need to "tell otherwise" arises precisely from exercises of power that make specific claims to truth and justice. The Faith and Order study document *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation* describes this problem and suggests a path away from it. Power "to define the 'correct' understanding and representation of reality" may be used oppressively as part of a system of domination, but also "plays a role in exacerbating conflicts by portraying the 'other' as a threat or as 'the enemy.' . . . How a group perceives itself in relation to and over against others depends, to a

³¹Ibid., 51.

³²Ibid., 66-67.

³³Ibid., 80-81.

³⁴Ibid., 94.

³⁵Ibid., 102.

³⁶Phil. 3:10, emphasis added.

large extent, on their respective collective memories.”³⁷ In response to malignant varieties of memory, churches “can help deconstruct myths, stereotypes and prejudices that impede the appreciation and respect of others in their irreducible otherness.”³⁸

It is not merely stereotypes that require deconstruction, however. As Christoph Schwöbel reminds, social and political structures make implicit (and sometimes explicit) soteriological claims that instrumentalize human needs. He writes, “perhaps one of the most important things Christians have to contribute to political discourse and practice is the demythologization of politics.”³⁹ Such demythologization enhances possibilities for reconciliation in the same way that a broad pneumatological understanding of witness makes it possible to resist Constantinian and market narratives—by directing focus towards the margins.

Participating in God’s Mission of Reconciliation models this by taking the challenge presented by apparently xenophobic passages of scripture seriously before asserting the countervailing weight of God’s concern for the vulnerable and the New Testament pattern of inclusivity. As such, it explores boundary-crossing as a central facet of God’s mission. On one level, this involves a recollection and redeployment of the memory of being strangers in Egypt⁴⁰ or an imaginative projection into the neighborly other.⁴¹ On another level, it involves the expectation of ongoing transformation through which those who have been marginalized become witnesses to God’s acts.⁴²

This suggests a third doubling in which *love of God* begins with participating in and testifying to God’s activity in “membering” the dis-membered, and *love of neighbor* begins with re-membering oneself as other.

³⁷Faith and Order Commission, *Participating in God’s Mission of Reconciliation*, Faith and Order Paper No. 201 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2006), §77-78.

³⁸*Ibid.*, §85.

³⁹Christoph Schwöbel, “The Theology of Reconciliation” in *Healing of Memories in Europe: A Study of Reconciliation Between Churches, Cultures and Religion*, ed. Dieter Brandes (Leipzig: EVA; Cluj-Napoca: Accent Publishing House, 2007), 37.

⁴⁰*Participating in God’s Mission of Reconciliation*, §98.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, §101.

⁴²*Ibid.*, §100..

Conclusion

These themes may be drawn together by exploring how these dynamics relate to the wider arguments of narrative theology and in what sense they are ecclesial. Holland's typology helps to situate these narratives without finally resolving their location. In their resonance with Ricoeur, they tend toward the *intertextual*, but as explicitly biblical categories they tend toward the *intratextual*. Narratives of testimony, witness, and reconciliation do not provide an escape from questions of revelation in general, or authority in particular, but give priority to existential expressions of authority rather than textual or ministerial forms.⁴³ While these categories may in the end take neither the postliberal project nor the range of Ricoeur's thought seriously enough, they do point a way toward practical expressions of the mission of God.

The doubling effect described within each type of narrative reinforces connections between the faith of the individual believer and the whole people of God. Testimony is expressed by an individual, but in the context of the community which cultivated that particular approach to ordering one's life and thus is public in a particular way. Witness is a collective embodiment of faith (public in a different and perhaps broader sense) that resists incursions from or co-option by other public narratives through grounding in the internal witness of the Spirit. Reconciliation makes space for alterity within such publics by deploying the instruments of memory and imagination to make others visible and by asserting the need for coherence between the action of God towards humans and humans towards each other. The dynamic interaction between all three not only serve a mutually corrective function, but establish points of contact between newer ecclesiological forms and ecumenical discourse.

⁴³See R. M. Keelan Downton, *Authority in the Church: An Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutic Boundaries and Their Implications for Inter-church Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

THE NEED FOR A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF JOHN WESLEY'S SERMONS

by

Laurence W. Wood

In the article “The State of Wesley Studies in North America: A Theological Journey,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 44.2 (Fall, 2009): 7-38, Kenneth Collins worries that my research on John Fletcher blurs the distinction between John Wesley and John Fletcher.¹ He is unhappy with the critique of his work in my recent article, “The Origin and Development of Wesley’s Theology of Holiness and Attempts to Make It Consistent,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 43.2 (Fall, 2008): 33-55. His essay is in part a response to that critique. I encourage the reader to reread my earlier essay in the light of Collins’ critique. John Fletcher once said debate can be constructive when it is managed properly. In this spirit of mutual respect, I would like to show that Fletcher had a different interpretation of those passages which Collins uses against Fletcher.

Collins says that the pentecostal paradigm is a “failed one.” Yet, in a recent book he admitted that Wesley defined Christian perfection on occasions as “filled with the Spirit.”² Wesley noted approvingly in his biography that Fletcher’s “favourite subject” was being “filled with the Spirit,”³

¹All references to Kenneth Collins are to this article—unless otherwise noted.

²Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 137-138.

³Benson, *The Life of The Rev. John William de la Flechere*, 11th edition (London: J. Mason, 1838), 186.

but Collins says that Fletcher's theology of pentecost is "an impossibility in Wesley's theology." In his celebrated debate with Count Zinzendorf, Wesley argued that the disciples were already "justified" before pentecost, but on the day of pentecost he said they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" and made "more holy."⁴ Wesley derived this pentecostal paradigm from Christian David at Herrnut in 1738, and it was passed on to John Fletcher, who further developed it.

Wesley and Fletcher were not a mirror image of each other, including a difference of nuance on the pentecostal paradigm. Wesley rarely used the phrase "baptism with the Holy Spirit" in his published writings. When he did, he conceptually defined it in terms of holiness. For example, he said "the baptism with the Holy Ghost" means to let "the love of God inflame your heart, and consume all your vile affections!" and that the Spirit "inspires all holiness; that by his inspiration men attain perfect love."⁵

A difference between them can be seen in Wesley's sermon "The General Spread of the Gospel" and a sermon preached by Fletcher's widow, Mary Fletcher, on "The Four Anchors." Mary Fletcher often met Wesley at designated locations where Wesley preached and she "exhorted." A likely scenario is that Wesley would preach on the theme found in *The General Spread of the Gospel* (1783) in which he proclaimed the coming of a "grand Pentecost" when the whole world would be entirely sanctified and have "the mind that was in Christ" (christological focus). Wesley noted that pentecost was the fulfillment of Moses' expectation (Dt. 30:3-6). Wesley explained that the Israelites would be restored and their hearts would be circumcised and they would be empowered to love God perfectly.⁶

Following Wesley's sermon, Mary Fletcher would "exhort," urging her hearers to expect a "personal pentecost" (a pneumatological focus) in anticipation of that future millennium: "And will he approve lazy dull seekers of that spiritual Canaan [of perfect love], that *baptism of the Spirit*, to which every believer is expressly called? We often talk of the

⁴*John Wesley, A Library of Protestant Thought*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 367ff.

⁵A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part II," in John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater. 11:253-54.

⁶Outler, *Sermons* (Bicentennial edition), 2:498-99, "The General Spread of the Gospel."

time when *righteousness is to overspread the earth*, but this millennium must overspread our own hearts, if we would see the face of God with joy. For the very end of our creation is, that we may become *the habitation of God through the Spirit*.”⁷

This first woman preacher in Methodism focused (like her husband) on the means of appropriating perfecting grace through a personal pentecost, whereas Wesley's focus was on the end-result of “having the mind of Christ” that was made possible by the descent of the Spirit on the day of pentecost. Is this difference a real contradiction, or is it a matter of nuancing differently the same truth?

Collins often quotes isolated parts of Wesley's writings while ignoring their contexts and dates. Fletcher rightly noticed (with Wesley's approval)⁸ that Wesley's standard sermons assumed the “highest definition” of a Christian, but Collins assumes Wesley intended the “lowest definition,” leading him to think that Wesley equated being a Christian with justifying faith, instead of seeing that Wesley often conflated justifying faith with full sanctifying faith. Not until after 1763 in his sermon “Sin in Believers” did Wesley consistently arrange the order of salvation.⁹ In “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765) Wesley articulated his mature *via salutis*. The purpose of Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations in his *Essay on Truth* was to allow for a development in faith that had not been consistently developed in Wesley's early standard sermons.

Operating with a minimalist definition of a Christian, Collins misunderstands Wesley's sermon “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption” (1746) as proving that Wesley did not link “the Spirit of adoption” with full sanctifying grace. Collins says that Wesley linked “the Spirit of Adoption . . . to the new birth,” but the “new birth” does not appear in this sermon. Nor does the word “justification,” although “perfection” does and so does “perfect love.” Wesley identified “receiving the Spirit of

⁷Henry Moore, *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1738), 398.

⁸*The First Part of An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism*, second edition (Bristol: Printed by W. Pine, 1774), vii. This second edition was abridged and published by Wesley. Wesley's approval is indicated by his insertion of an asterisk in front of the paragraph. Cited hereafter as *Equal Check* (Wesley's special edition).

⁹*Wesley's Standard Sermons*, ed. Edward H. Sugden (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 2:148.

Adoption” with “being free from sin,”¹⁰ participating in the “glorious liberty of the sons of God,”¹¹ “the peace of God, filling and ruling his heart,”¹² having received “the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit,” and fulfilling the command: “Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”¹³ This is why Benson and Fletcher interpreted this sermon as equating “receiving the Spirit of Adoption” with perfection in 1770. Wesley had said one does not have the proper Christian faith “unless the Spirit of Adoption abide in his heart,” and Fletcher well knew that Wesley defined full sanctification as “the abiding witness of the Spirit” as distinct from the “intermittent” witness of justifying faith, as explained in *A Plain Account*.¹⁴

This sermon thus does not distinguish between justification and perfect love, and it does not distinguish between the “Spirit of Adoption abiding” and the intermittent witness of the Spirit in justifying faith. The inflation of the meaning of the Spirit of Adoption thus produced the well-known confusion between Wesley and Benson/Fletcher in 1770. But in 1774 Wesley admitted in his special edition of *The Equal Check* that he had operated with the maximal meaning of a Christian. Interestingly, in Wesley’s special edition of *Essay on Truth*, Fletcher defined the “Spirit of Adoption” as a reference to “the fulness of the Christian dispensation,” which “perfects believers in one,”¹⁵ and the “full assurance of faith” with Wesley’s approving asterisk.¹⁶ Wesley also affirmed Fletcher’s use of “the Spirit of Adoption” in his sermon “On Faith” (1788) for the maximal meaning of being a Christian.¹⁷ It is thus not surprising that “the Spirit of Adoption” became a common term for Christian perfection in early American Methodism. Whether right or wrong, Fletcher explicitly said to Lady Huntingdon that Wesley equated “perfection” with “the Spirit of

¹⁰Outler, *Sermons*, 1:262, “Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption.”

¹¹Outler, *Sermons*, 1:262, “Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption.”

¹²Outler, *Sermons*, 1:263, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption.”

¹³Outler *Sermons*, 1:266, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption.”

¹⁴Cf. Wesley, *Works* (Jackson edition), 11:380, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”

¹⁵*Equal Check* (Wesley’s special edition), 151-52.

¹⁶*Equal Check* (Wesley’s special edition), 165.

¹⁷Outler, *Sermons* 3:493, “On Faith.”

Adoption.”¹⁸ Collins thus fails to see the complexity of this issue, assuming only a minimalist definition.

Collins cites Wesley's *Explanatory Notes* to argue that Wesley did not equate pentecost with Christian perfection (Acts 1:5), but he fails to note that Wesley linked sanctification with the pentecostal event for the Ephesians (Acts 19). Fletcher also quoted from *The Explanatory Notes* to show that Wesley interpreted the Ephesians' pentecost (19:1-2) with “[full] sanctifying grace.”¹⁹ Collins does not mention that the *Explanatory Notes* were written in 1757, when Wesley was still inconsistent in making the distinction between justifying faith and full sanctifying grace. So Fletcher showed that Wesley had in mind the highest definition of faith—full sanctifying faith—when he wrote about pentecost in the *Explanatory Notes*.

Collins uses the sermon “Salvation by Faith” (1738) to argue that Wesley believed the disciples did not have saving faith until pentecost. He maintains that “Wesley distinguishes saving faith *in the Christian sense* from that of the apostles” prior to pentecost. He does not mention that Wesley equated “justification” with entire sanctification in this sermon. Wesley affirmed that “justification” entails “a salvation from sin,” being freed from “original and actual” sin and from “any sinful desire.”²⁰ These early standard sermons, where Wesley conflated justifying and full sanctifying grace, is why Wilbur Tillett called for a pluralistic attitude in doctrine for Methodists today because of these inconsistencies in Wesley himself.²¹

In further proving his point from “Salvation by Faith,” Collins moves to another source (without informing the reader) to make the point that Wesley said “the Apostles themselves had not the proper Christian faith till *after* the day of Pentecost.” This other source is a conversation that Wesley had with a select group of clergymen to discuss the meaning of assurance. They concluded together that assurance is essential to justifying faith and that the disciples did not have the proper Christian faith

¹⁸A letter published for the first time in Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor, Successor* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 182-183,

¹⁹Fletcher, “New Birth,” published for the first time in *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998):54.

²⁰Outler, *Sermons*, “Salvation by Faith,” 1:124.

²¹ Wilbur F. Tillett, *Personal Salvation* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1902), 407.

until pentecost because they did not have assurance. This conversation took place on June 16, 1747, but Collins does not mention that Wesley rejected this position just one month later in a letter (July 31, 1747) to his brother Charles: “But I cannot allow that justifying faith is such an assurance, or necessarily connected therewith. . . . If justifying faith necessarily implies such an explicit sense of pardon, then every one who has it not . . . is under the wrath and under the curse of God. But this is a supposition contrary to Scripture as well as to experience.”²²

Collins’ interpretation is unsuccessful because he does not provide a contextual interpretation. He superimposes a definition of “Christian” that is derived from Wesley’s mature thinking. It is as if he takes Wesley’s later sermon on “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765) and uses it to interpret Wesley’s first standard sermon, “Salvation by Faith” (1738). They both have the same biblical text (Eph. 2:8), but there is a significant difference between them. Fletcher’s *Essay on Truth* was written in large part to bring consistency to Wesley’s equivocal use of assurance, justification, and perfection in the standard sermons.

Fletcher also had a different interpretation of the quotation that Collins cites from *Salvation by Faith* against Fletcher: “The faith through which we are saved, in that sense of the word which will hereafter be explained, is not barely that which the Apostles themselves had while Christ was yet upon earth.” Fletcher used this specific quotation to show that Wesley implied a distinction between “initial Christianity” (“the faith the apostles had while our Lord was upon earth”) and “*faith in Christ* glorified.” Fletcher then cited from Wesley’s sermon “Christian Perfection” to show: “The doctrine of Christian perfection is entirely founded on the privileges of the Christian dispensation in its fulness: privileges these, which far exceeds those of the Jewish economy, and the baptism of John.”²³ Fletcher thus understood Wesley to be describing the difference between the minimalist faith of the apostles before pentecost and the maximalist faith of the apostles after pentecost.

Collins worries that Fletcher emptied the new birth of its true meaning, but just the reverse is true. He recognized that pious Gentiles, sincere Jews, and the earthly disciples of Jesus had a measure of justify-

²²*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 2:108-109. Cf. John Whitehead’s discussion of this issue, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (Auburn: Alden, Beardsley, 1852), 417f.

²³*Equal Check* (Wesley’s special edition), 169.

ing/sanctifying grace and that it was degrading to them to place them in a damnable state.²⁴ Wesley (and Fletcher) rejected the Moravian tendency to turn “babes in Christ” into second-class citizens.

Collins cites a partial statement from Wesley in “Some Remarks on Mr. Hill’s ‘Review of All the Doctrines Taught by Mr. John Wesley,’” leaving the impression that Wesley wanted to make sure that others did not confuse his thinking with Fletcher: “This may prove that Mr. Wesley contradicts Mr. Fletcher, but it can never prove that he contradicts himself.” Here is the rest of the quotation that Collins omits: “But, indeed, both Mr. F[letcher] and Mr. W[esley] absolutely deny natural free-will. We both steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet we both believe that every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace.”

Notice that Wesley says “we both steadily assert” and “we both believe.” This reference to “we” and “us” is typical in Wesley’s references to Fletcher. In his biography of Fletcher, Wesley wrote: “We were of one heart and one soul. We had no secrets between us for many years; we did not purposely hide anything from each other.”²⁵ Fletcher’s writings often included the phrase, “Mr. Wesley and I.” It was Fletcher’s practice in his manuscripts to strike through “~~Mr. Wesley and I,~~” leaving Wesley as the editor the option to allow only Fletcher’s reference to himself to stand alone. Wesley’s practice, however, was to restore his own name so that it would read, “Mr. Wesley and I.”²⁶

Collins cites Acts 10:4 to show that Wesley said Cornelius was “*in the Christian sense*” an “*unbeliever*” because he did not have “faith in Christ.” Collins again is interpreting the early Wesley from the standpoint of the mature Wesley. As Fletcher has shown, Wesley was assuming the highest meaning of the word Christian. Here is also what Wesley said about Cornelius in Acts 10:35: “According to the best light he has, to do all things well; is accepted of him—through Christ, though he knows him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not. Nevertheless the addition of these is an unspeakable blessing.” In a letter

²⁴*Equal Check* (Wesley’s special edition), 170-71.

²⁵Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 11:276-277, “A Short Account of the Rev. John Fletcher.”

²⁶Cf. L. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism* (Lanham, Md, 2002), 75-79.

to his brother Charles (as noted above), Wesley explicitly said that Cornelius had “justifying faith,”²⁷ although he was not a Christian according to its highest definition.

Collins thinks that Fletcher did not enjoy a significant role in defining perfection for Methodists. This is an astonishing remark. Wesley’s own words show that Wesley believed that Fletcher writings on “pardon” and “holiness . . . has so illustrated and confirmed [Methodist teaching], as I think scarcely any one has done before since the Apostles.”²⁸ Using Peter’s description of Jesus in Acts 2:24, Wesley says of Fletcher that God “raised him up” to develop the doctrine of dispensations.²⁹

Collins thinks that I used an argument from silence to say that Wesley approved Fletcher’s use of the baptism with the Spirit in his *Last Check*. However, Wesley explicitly said that there was no difference between them as a result of Fletcher accepting Wesley’s correction to his manuscript (*The Last Check*). As I also noted, Fletcher reported that Wesley agreed with him about the “baptism of the Spirit.” I should think that Fletcher knew more accurately about what Wesley communicated to him than we do today. Further, Collins cannot find a word of criticism directed at Fletcher’s theology based on his published writings, which of course Wesley corrected and published.

Collins also believes that Wesley included nothing by Fletcher in a list of recommended readings. This is contradicted by the existence of numerous letters to his preachers and others, as was documented in my essay in 1999.³⁰ Collins believes that in 1772 Wesley “edited out of *The Principles of a Methodist* every suggestion that ‘the indwelling of the Spirit’ comes not at justification but at a subsequent event of Christian perfection.” This claim is mistaken because the 1772 edition specifically included the interpretation of “the indwelling of the Spirit” in one instance.³¹ Collins surely knows that this 1772 edition was a printer’s nightmare. Frank Baker has shown that Wesley never followed any of these 1772 texts in his subsequent editions because of its careless omis-

²⁷Telford, *Letters*, 2:108-109.

²⁸Telford, *Letters*, 6:79-80. Letter to Mrs. Bennis (May 2, 1774).

²⁹Telford, *Letters*, 6:136-137. Letter to Elizabeth Ritchie (January 17, 1775).

³⁰Wood, “Historiographical Criticisms of Randy Maddox’s Response,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 34.2 (Fall, 1999): 133.

³¹*The Works of John Wesley, The Methodist Societies*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:60, “The Principles of a Methodist.”

sions and mistakes, and all the omitted references to “the indwelling of the Spirit” as coming after justification were later reinstated by Wesley.³²

I suggest there is a great need among Wesley scholars today to explore Fletcher's interpretation of Wesley, which might provide some additional insight for understanding the complexity of Wesley's theology.

³²Cf. Wood, “Historiographical Criticisms of Randy Maddox's Response,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 34.2 (Fall, 1999): 123-125.

BOOK REVIEWS

Cowan, Steven and James Spiegel. *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2009. 476 pages. ISBN: 9780805447705.

Reviewed by Joel W. Cade, Ph.D. candidate, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

The problem any Christian introduction to philosophy faces is the need to adequately define the term “Christian.” Cowan and Spiegel define Christianity in conformity with the operating parameters of contemporary analytic philosophy which seeks clarity and argumentation through the employment of modern formal logic [cf. Frege, Russell] and linguistic analysis. Cowan and Spiegel define Christianity as a “theistic worldview” (7). The difference between this worldview and others, such as atheism or existentialism, is that the “Christian theistic worldview” is true (44). Christianity is “a *knowledge tradition* – meaning that Christians have historically claimed that our faith is objectively true and that its major doctrines can be known” (51). This knowledge tradition is mediated through the Bible. “To say that what the Bible teaches is true means that the propositions asserted by the biblical authors match the way things really are” (44). Philosophy, primarily employed as analysis, serves to define and clarify the “Christian theistic worldview.”

The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction is an introduction to analytic philosophy from the perspective of a “theistic Christian worldview” (7). Its purpose is to introduce Christians to philosophy as a means of (1) confirming the “Christian theistic worldview” and (2) better understanding the Christian faith (9-10). The book is topically arranged, covering epistemology, ontology, ethics, and aesthetics (treated as a subset of

ethics). The main issues raised within the text are approached in reference to the objectively true propositions raised in Scripture. For example, when dealing with skepticism, the authors appeal to the authority of the Bible. "So the Bible teaches us that knowledge is possible, even knowledge of important religious matters. The skeptical challenge calls into question this vital Christian belief" (52). The resolution to skepticism takes on this biblical flavor: "If Christians know such propositions as 'God exists,' 'Jesus rose of the dead,' and 'The Bible is divine revelation,' then any strong form of skepticism that would rule out such religious knowledge must be false" (97). The philosophical positions advocated or ruled out are based on a literalist and propositional interpretation of the Bible.

With this last point, the major difficulty of the authors' approach becomes apparent. In spite of their expressed claim that philosophy is the "handmaid to theology" in the sense that, when done responsibly, philosophy is especially helpful to the study of God," (11) their text blurs the line between "philosophy as handmaid to theology" and "philosophy as the Lord of theology." The authors use a typically analytical approach to define Christianity. Christianity is a theistic worldview comprised of Biblically revealed true propositions that merely need clarified through formal logic. Their definition of the Christian God follows suit. God is the "creator who is eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent" (7). The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is raised only once in the text for the purpose of rhetorically inquiring into its coherence.

Is the tail wagging the dog? Cowan and Spiegel's neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is not even mentioned in a sixty-two page chapter analyzing the concept of God, suggests that it is analytic philosophy that defines Christianity and not the Christian faith guiding philosophical analysis. It is the philosophical tradition that has led the way in describing God as "eternal, immutable, omnipotent" etc. The Christian tradition has repeatedly clarified the belief in God as trinity. Why, then, is there a lacuna regarding the trinity when discussing the nature of God? Because the Trinity defies conceptual analysis, which St. Augustine argues is the whole point of the doctrine, analytic philosophy has a very difficult time dealing with it. A lacuna is expected if philosophy is driving the analysis instead of Christian theology.

Wesleyans, in particular, will find this approach problematic. By defining God in terms consistent with 18th-century theism, the authors'

confession of faith differs significantly from John Wesley, who stated that “the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion” (“On the Trinity” 1872). A belief in the Trinity is absolutely vital to Wesley’s emphasis upon the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Wesley rhetorically asks, “what shall the whole grace of the Spirit do, when, being given at length to believers, it shall make us like unto God, and perfect us through the will of the Father?” (“On the Holy Spirit,” 1872). For Wesley, it is the Spirit that brings us preventing grace, justification, initial sanctification, and entire sanctification. Yet, Cowan and Spiegel’s theism leaves little room for the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Some would object that this is an introduction to philosophy and not an introduction to theology. I concede that this text does an excellent job of introducing analytic philosophy. Its humor-filled approach, combined with a form of Christianity that will ring familiar with the introduction to philosophy student make it extremely accessible and useful as an introductory philosophy text. However, the expressed purpose of the text was to give the student the philosophical tools to confirm and understand their “Christian theistic worldview.” The text continually critiques philosophical positions in light of this worldview. To engage the text at the level of its interpretation of the Christian faith is to do justice to its unique contribution to the world of introductory texts. The *Love of Wisdom* is a *Christian* introduction to philosophy.

Defining the term “Christian” is the most difficult task a Christian introduction to philosophy must undertake. The need to do justice to both philosophy and Christianity makes the task nearly impossible. Cowan and Spiegel do justice to the complexities of the philosophical task. Their straightforward and sometimes humorous analyses of the questions that define philosophy make this introductory text stand out in the crowd. However, their excellence on the philosophical side is matched by their problems on the theological side. Their definition of Christianity is overtly influenced by their philosophical concerns. Using the Bible as a source of true propositions places their approach uncomfortably close to Biblicism. And the lacuna of God as triune is a major oversight.

If used as a philosophical text, the book is an excellent introduction to philosophy. However, caution must be exercised, particularly in a Wesleyan context, in reference to its theological agenda.

Keller, Catherine. *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008. 208 pages. ISBN-13: 9780800662769.

Reviewed by John Culp, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California.

Catherine Keller develops creative theological response to contemporary culture by drawing on process theology, postmodern thinkers such as Deleuze, Wesleyan understandings, and biblical resources. Process theology provides the concepts of relationality and divine persuasiveness. Wesleyan theology provides the concepts of human agency and responsibility. While Marjorie Suchocki, Thomas Jay Oord, and Micheal Lodahl have noticed and used compatibilities between process and Wesleyan theology, Keller draws upon the postmodern category of *mystery* for the resource to restructure process and Wesleyan theologies so that they can respond both to demands for absolutes and the response of relativism to absolute claims.

Through mystery, Keller challenges every claim to theological finality even that of process theology. Mystery involves more than an inability to describe something in some or all ways. Mystery acknowledges the strangeness of saying something about mystery. Keller identifies mystery with the ambiguity of Scripture and claims that her theology is more scriptural than orthodox process theology. The novelty of Keller's interpretations of biblical materials may hinder some in recognizing the influence of biblical concepts as the fourth influence on her theology. She draws for support on Scriptural accounts of creation, the role of the Spirit in human knowledge, Job as a response to evil, and the parables of Jesus as manifestations of God's incarnation.

Keller uses a traditional theological structure by dealing first with methodology and then focusing on topics such as truth, creation, divine power and love, incarnation, and eschatology. But she significantly modifies the content of theology. This modification begins by understanding theology as a process of open-ended interactivity rather than the articulation of truth claims about God. Process as a metaphor for theology avoids the polarization that characterizes the current conflict between absolute claims to truth and relativism with its destructive results. Competing claims to absolute truth lead to polarization that paralyzes faith. Relativism dissolves the meaningfulness of this world in its attempt to avoid absolutism. Theology as a process, rather than as a system, recognizes mystery and offers an alternative to absolutism and relativism. Theology

seeks to discern divinity in process. This discernment is open-ended with many goals, but proceeds purposefully by means of propositions without being captured by propositions.

After establishing her methodology of open-ended interactivity in order to recognize mystery without destroying it, Keller turns to seven themes containing theological tensions to illustrate a variety of manifestations of her positive alternative to absolutes and relativism. She begins by considering truth as interaction and doing rather than as description of states of affairs. Truth requires faithfulness to each other and trust in each other. Christians contribute to the tension of exclusivism or relativism by failing to demonstrate critical fidelity.

Avoiding a linear development, Keller next considers creation by seeking a positive understanding that will deal with the contemporary debates about creation. Understanding creation as ongoing rather than simply as either an absolute origin or a non-scientific description of origins facilitates the transformation of reality. As a process, creation involves self-organizing complexity that saves by not wasting rather than by destroying violence through violence. Keller bases this view on the interpretation of Genesis 1 that describes an ordering of chaos in which the ordered world emerges from the mysterious rather than as creation from nothing.

The sign of divine power provides her third theme. Keller understands the biblical concept of God's power as an open engagement in the covenantal relationship. This relationship allows for persuasion to work from God to humans and from humans to God. God empowers through the energy of influence that is never unilateral, no matter how great God's power may be in relation to human power. Keller consciously links the biblical picture of God's care for the sparrow with Wesley in opposition to Calvin's concept of an all-determining deity. Complete divine control denies the biblical concepts of divine love and human sin. The destruction of human freedom demonstrates a lack of love for humans, and the loss of human responsibility makes sin meaningless.

In order to avoid the trivialization of love and the potential destructiveness of the influence of love, Keller describes love as a resolute urging. In humans, this love process changes power into actions of care, of justice, of celebration, of poetry and mystery. We individually and collectively discern God's purposes in love through supportive structures such as community, society, liturgy, and theology. In her fifth theme, Keller

develops the implications of love. Love in conjunction with relationality keeps justice itself in process as a disciplined com/passion. Fairness and equality without love do not compose justice. The sixth theme focuses on the reception of humans in God by dealing with the incarnation. The incarnation of the divine logos in Jesus opens up a new intimacy with the infinite that invites self-surpassing communal embodiments of the divine rather than being the resolution of the tension between the already and the not yet. Keller bases her understanding of the incarnation upon Jesus' teaching in the parables that simultaneously conceal what is revealed and reveal what is concealed. Her discussion of the parable of the leaven recognizes Wesley's insight that God does not continue to act in a person's life if the person does not respond to God because grace is not a unilateral force.

All of this theological development culminates in her understanding of eschatology and the end as signifying purpose not termination. The purpose is a commonwealth of becoming in which the hope of the possible future lets us take the next step toward realizing the abilities to bring about love, truth, and justice. Keller acknowledges the importance of reconciliation with alternative conservative and radical theologies. What needs to be loved in radical theologies is the sense of transcendence and mystery. What needs to be loved in the conservation of rich traditions is the passion for truth, commitment to the good, the will to a responsible life, and celebratory worship. Keller recognizes the risk of absolutizing her own theology.

In evaluation, Keller utilizes a post-modern style of word play that draws on the variety of meanings and even tensions within terms. Her discussion of "com/passion" and her reversal of the phrase "the power of love is exchanged for the love of power" illustrate this style. Some readers may find this style puzzling, but it does avoid talking prosaically about mystery. Keller is concerned enough for meaning that she does not indulge in word play for the sake of word play.

Keller will challenge readers accustomed to literal or traditional understandings of theological and biblical materials. These challenges become most apparent in her understanding of theology as a process of mystery rather than revelation, and in her discussion of creation and incarnation. Understanding creation as continuing is traditional, but her basis for continuing creation rejects the traditional view that God created from nothing. Likewise, she affirms the uniqueness of Jesus as the incar-

nation of God, but this uniqueness consists in the completeness of Jesus' realization of God's purpose. Jesus' complete fulfillment is not a new revelation that is better than all previous revelations, but is a demonstration and call to a new intimacy with the divine. Keller's challenges make possible deeper understandings. By appealing to mystery, she undercuts both claims to absolute theological truth and total relativism and shows a way to avoid those destructive extremes.

By utilizing the possible meaning of Genesis 1 and other Old Testament accounts as creation from chaos rather than from nothing, she rejects a concept of God as determining all of reality in a way that creation from nothing cannot. Rejecting divine determination both acknowledges human responsibility for actions and calls humans to contribute to God's ongoing creative efforts. Her understanding of Jesus as showing a new type of intimacy with the divine describes the incarnation without using easily misunderstood metaphysical terminology. This intimate relationship, available to all, is a demanding relationship. This demanding view of human relationship to God resonates with those conceptions of holiness that understand holiness as becoming more closely aligned with God's purposes. Keller's understandings of creation and incarnation support a deeply Wesleyan understanding of human existence in relation to God.

Even though Keller's concepts may provide deep support for important Wesleyan perspectives, several questions remain. One important issue is the knowledge of divine purposes through the knowledge of divine action. Keller makes it clear that divine action as love does not make or determine events but resolutely urges certain divine purposes to be considered in human decisions. The complexity of identifying divine action among indeterminacy, chance, natural law and human freedom leads to mystery. While a certain reservation about claiming to know fully divine purposes and actions helps avoid mistaking our purposes for God's purposes, the difficulty of identifying divine actions makes recognizing and supporting divine actions difficult. Being unable to recognize divine actions is a different problem than the criticism that process theology limits God to influence rather than causation.

Keller has responded to the criticism by talking about divine love as creative and resolute. But having sufficient awareness of divine action to be able to cooperate with the divine purposes appears to be hidden in mystery. Knowing at least to some degree the divine purposes becomes

especially important in responding to evil. This raises a second question. Keller clearly rejects any understanding of the creation or the chaos from which creation organizes as being evil. God responds to evil by showing that evil is not the only possibility. Keller talks about current empowerment of possibility rather than an after-the-event destruction of evil. This empowerment deals with the future impact of evil events rather than redeeming the evil that occurred. The irredeemable nature of the event of evil does recognize the irrevocable loss involved in evil, but the traditional understanding of God's response to evil calls in a variety of ways for the overcoming of the evil that has occurred, not just avoiding the future impacts of evil.

Keller in her short, enjoyable book stimulates theological reflection by drawing upon contemporary theological thinking. Her bringing together of process, postmodern, and Wesleyan traditions is unique in the current context. Additionally, she provides questions at the end of the book for further discussion about each chapter. These questions and the additional resources that she lists help the reader understand more fully what she has written. They lead the reader to reflect critically about what she said, and pull the reader into discussion with others as part of the possible implementation of her insights.

F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth. *The Holy Spirit*. Guides to Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. 150 pages. ISBN: 9780802824646.

Reviewed by Kenneth M. Loyer, Ph.D. candidate, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.

This introductory study provides an overview of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that addresses aspects of the doctrine's biblical basis, its historical development, and recent pneumatological trends. Shults and Hollingsworth pay special attention to the themes of philosophical interpretation and spiritual transformation, and trace the influence of crucial philosophical and spiritual-experiential issues on pneumatology. The result is a text that will be of considerable value to teachers (at undergraduate as well as graduate institutions), students, and other interested readers. Although this work is not distinctly Wesleyan in orientation, those in the Wesleyan tradition should find it worthwhile, even if perhaps not fully satisfying.

The introduction outlines the biblical basis of pneumatology and describes the relation between interpretation and transformation that serves as a "leitmotif" throughout the study (9). With their explanation of pneumatology as "the attempt to interpret the transforming experience of [the] Spirit" to whom the Scriptures bear witness, the authors emphasize from the start the Holy Spirit as a living, life-giving presence (2). In that sense, they are concerned with the interpretation of transformation. They also set out to explore the transformation of interpretation through an explanation of how some of the basic philosophical problems, including notions of matter, personhood, and force, have shaped and continue to shape pneumatological discourse.

In part one, the authors identify central themes in the historical development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. While remaining attentive to the pneumatological insights gleaned throughout Christian history, they describe their task in largely constructive terms: "to try to understand the legacy that has been left to us by a variety of Christian theologians—scholastics, mystics, cynics, and enthusiasts—so that we can carry on that legacy in our own contexts" (17). They pursue this task in two chapters, the first of which encompasses patristic, medieval, and reformation interpretations. These are vast and complex eras, not easily covered in sweeping summaries, but Shults and Hollingsworth succeed in highlighting

salient figures, issues, and turning points as they move fluidly from one period to the next. They give a particularly fine introduction to the *filioque* controversy that outlines relevant hermeneutical, soteriological, and philosophical considerations as well as recent ecumenical proposals.

The second chapter deals with early and late modern interpretations. The authors provide concise introductions to such varied topics as Protestant scholasticism and pietism, modern liberalism and fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, the ecumenical movement, feminist and liberation theology, and other twentieth-century reconstructions, while managing to link them together in an instructive account of pneumatology in modern Christian thought. The concluding discussion of the future of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit connects various themes presented throughout the first two chapters and places them in conversation with recent conceptual shifts in ways of thinking about matter, person, and force, thus identifying new directions in transforming pneumatology.

Part one presents what is, on the whole, an informative survey of pneumatology in the history of Christian theology and on the contemporary scene. Nevertheless, several critical comments are in order. One relatively minor problem is introduced by the authors' anachronistic use of the phrase "Hebrew Bible" with reference to Gregory of Nazianzus ("According to Gregory the Hebrew Bible revealed the Father and the Son . . ." [28]). Overall their historical accounts are accurate and refreshingly lucid, but in this case Shults and Hollingsworth allow contemporary concerns undue influence on their discussion of the history of pneumatology. A more substantial limitation is found in the section on Pentecostalism. The writers explain the ecstatic experiences of the Spirit in Pentecostalism by virtue of "the movement's roots in the religion of the African Diaspora" (70), but fail to mention that much of the theological basis for Pentecostalism is derived from the Wesleyan tradition. This point is especially well established in *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* by Donald Dayton, which is a text that Shults and Hollingsworth strangely overlook.

Designed to assist readers in exploring in more detail aspects of pneumatology presented in part one, part two contains an annotated bibliography of English-language resources on the Holy Spirit. Spanning the ages, the list includes sources from early Christianity to the present. It is, by and large, an impressive list that identifies important resources for further study. While the authors mention a handful of secondary writings

about Wesley, for the annotated bibliography not to include a single primary source by Wesley is an unfortunate omission, particularly because Wesley's sermons are a veritable pneumatological gold mine.

An index is included to help readers locate particular topics or authors of interest. It is generally reliable, but the page numbers listed in the index as referring to Randy Maddox (62, 128-39) misleadingly suggest that Wesleyan interests are given a more prominent place in the text than is actually found to be the case. In reality, Maddox is mentioned but twice, on two different pages (62, 129), along with a few references to Outler and several other interpreters of Wesley.

Also significant for those sympathetic to Wesley is the placement of Wesley under the heading of pietism, which they define in rather broad terms as the attempt to balance the rationalistic approach of scholasticism with greater attention to "the formation of religious affections and spiritual practices" (57). The other exemplar mentioned under this heading is Jonathan Edwards, who is an apt choice in his own right. The brief treatment of these two figures, however, is a bit uneven. Whereas Shults and Hollingsworth quote directly from Edwards numerous times, in their discussion of Wesley they limit themselves to citing only secondary sources (with the exception of Wesley's well-known reference to his heart being "strangely warmed," although in this case the primary source—Wesley's journal—goes unnamed). As a result, the engagement with Wesley on his own terms is minimal compared with Edwards (and so many of the other figures mentioned throughout the work). Moreover, the discussion of pietism could be strengthened with at least a passing reference to Charles Wesley, whose hymns have served as vital resources for the promotion of the "practical divinity" that characterizes Methodism and other pietistic movements across the centuries.

Positively, the authors note the centrality of the Holy Spirit in Wesley's understanding of the Christian life, including the close relationship of pneumatology and ethics throughout his writings, with references to key secondary sources like Maddox's *Responsible Grace* and Outler's article on "Spirit and spirituality" in Wesley. Shults and Hollingsworth also observe that "Wesley's pneumatology emphasizes the personhood of the Spirit more than many other Western approaches" (62), and that some scholars have detected parallels between the characteristically Eastern theme of uncreated grace and Wesley's understanding of God's restoring grace. Since the personhood of the Spirit and pneumatology in ecumeni-

cal perspective are recurring themes in this study, the reader is left with the impression that Wesley is worth reading even if the authors stop short of mentioning any of his own works.

While one can argue that Shults and Hollingsworth understate the role of the Wesleyan tradition in the development of pneumatology—particularly insofar as it has provided theological roots for Pentecostalism, overall the authors have made an excellent contribution to the growing body of literature on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Their survey is clear and accessible, and the annotated bibliography directs readers to a number of sources for further study. On both counts, the work constitutes a useful introduction to this vital doctrine in Christian faith and life.

McKnight, Scot. *A Community Called Atonement*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007. 177 pages. ISBN: 9780687645541.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Associate Pastor, Calvary Community Church, Johnson City, NY.

Scot McKnight is a significant participant in the Emergent Church conversation. *A Community Called Atonement*, which conspicuously lacks an academic subtitle, is McKnight's addition to this conversation and Abingdon Press' initial publication of the Living Theology series. McKnight seeks to fulfill the desire of series editor Tony Jones to "talk about the best theology around. . . , [being] approachable for many people" (ix).

McKnight begins with a metaphor: just as golf is a game requiring numerous clubs for different shots, so does the "atonement game" require us to "understand the value of each club" (xiii). In other words, he uses the metaphor to depict the roles of atonement's numerous biblical images that "play out the fulsomeness of the redemptive work of God" (xiii). McKnight also asks whether there is a "bag" to hold all the images. Over four sections, McKnight explores the images, answers this question, and unpacks its implications.

In section one, McKnight addresses the question of whether or not atonement is working (being lived out) through a Lukan reading of God's Kingdom. The creation of a community that lives out God's redemptive work is necessary to thinking about atonement. This community thinking centers first on the Trinity, and moves to outline the restoration of humanity in four directions: toward God, self, others, and the cosmos (21). This combines both objective and subjective elements: "Atonement spools from the (objective) act of what God does for us into (the subjective) fresh and ongoing acts by God's people" (28). Atonement reconciles reconcilers to commission.

In section two, McKnight defends the appropriateness of metaphors in atonement. "The effect of seeing metaphor as *possibility* is that metaphors are not in need of decoding or unpacking but of indwelling" (37). While metaphors form ways of life, their natural limits encourage humility and enable one to see the multiplicity of sin and the expanse of atonement. McKnight points out that, while truth is in God, all human thoughts are limited. We must stay in conversation when working out the implications and meaning of God's work (49). This means that every image of atonement must be considered and used appropriately. It also

means that the entirety of Jesus' life—incarnation, crucifixion (in part considered as penal substitution), resurrection, and Pentecost—informs atonement theology.

McKnight then unpacks Passover, justification, and recapitulation as atonement stories in section three. Having developed these atonement images/stories, he answers his initial question by suggesting that the bag labeled “identification for incorporation” (107) carries all the atonement clubs: Jesus fully identifies with humanity and incorporates humanity in his death for liberation from sin. This means that Jesus died with, for, and instead of humanity (107). Jesus takes our death so that his life becomes ours. This full-orbed statement of Jesus' death leads McKnight to consider how recapitulation, *Christus Victor*/ransom, satisfaction, and penal substitution can all fit into this description.

Finally, McKnight unpacks living atonement as fellowship, justice, and mission, being shaped by the Word and in the church's practices of baptism, Eucharist, and prayer. Here several implications emerge for Wesleyan theology. “The central question of missional praxis is this: ‘How can we help?’ ” (118). Wesley's heritage of social action and equipping of his followers resonates with McKnight's desire to see atonement lived out in reconciliation. Moreover, McKnight's entire discussion is couched in a community's ability to live with and among one another. With the diversification and employment of small groups in increasing numbers of local churches, and with Willow Creek Community Church's change of philosophy, moving small group ministry to neighborhoods, McKnight's short but informative application of 1 Peter fleshes out a contemporary theology of Wesley's bands. Such groups develop in ways concerned not only with each other's personal spirituality but also with the benefit of the community where they are located.

Three qualities emerge from McKnight's work. First, its conversational structure and style, while neither unconsidered nor naïve, encourage more voices rather than offering a final word on atonement. Second, it is gracious and non-polemic in tone. Even McKnight's interlocutors will find him amiable. Third, McKnight's work is an excellent introduction to an emerging church doctrine of atonement, having taken numerous biblical and historical resources of the Christian faith and applied them in an emerging church context. Those who are less sympathetic to the emerging church movement will benefit from this work, while those anxious to jettison significant theological traditions from their doctrine of atonement will find an emergent ally who does not agree.

I would like to continue the conversation by raising questions in light of John Milbank's unpacking of Colossians 1:24, particularly the issue of Paul suffering what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. How might this develop a living atonement? How does McKnight believe the suffering of Jesus translates into our context? How does one think about atonement in this regard? Also, how would McKnight consider the ascension as an atoning moment? How could this event play a role in a praxis of atonement, especially in light of a world with political sensitivities?

As the initial installment of the Living Theology series, *A Community Called Atonement* has succeeded in making sound (and emergent) theology contextual to many people. It is appropriate as a supplementary text for an undergraduate atonement theology course and as a primer for pastors preaching about atonement. For Wesleyans, it may serve well as a text for small communities to discuss and consider, especially to be spurred on for atonement living.

Oord, Thomas Jay. *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation: Wesleyan Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009. 244 pages. ISBN: 1606082876.

Reviewed by Wm. Andrew Schwartz, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, ID.

One of the areas of serious scholarship growing rapidly in recent years has been the relationship between religion and science. While this field is currently gaining popularity, the topic itself is far from new. *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation*, edited by Thomas Jay Oord, is a unique collection of ten essays that attempt to (1) locate properly John Wesley's view of natural philosophy in its eighteenth-century context and (2) use Wesley's view as the basis for a Wesleyan position regarding the contemporary debates between science and theology. This book exhibits groundbreaking research concerning John Wesley and Wesleyan engagements with science and theology.

This is an impressive compilation of well-written essays, all of which (except one) were originally presented at the forty-third Wesleyan Theological Society meeting at Duke Divinity School (March, 2008). The text is divided into 10 chapters (each essay is its own chapter), with two overarching themes: (1) John Wesley's theological engagement with science; and (2) a contemporary Wesleyan approach to science and theology.

The first four chapters specifically address issues pertaining to John Wesley and his interaction with the science of his day. These essays—three written by Randy L. Maddox, John W. Haas, Jr., and Laura Bartels Felleman, with a fourth essay co-authored by Marc Otto and Michael Lodahl—were originally written as independent contributions, but their compilation within this book presents an insightful foray into John Wesley's engagement with science. In general, these essays contend that traditional scholarship regarding John Wesley's view of science is misleading.

As Randy Maddox notes, “. . . a common evidence cited by critics to show that Wesley was anti-science was his hesitance about endorsing Newton” (11). However, recent surveys of eighteenth-century science indicate that “a number of Newton's professional peers shared this hesitance” (11). Therefore, just as Newton's scientific contemporaries should not be accused of being anti-science because they were skeptical of Newton's groundbreaking work, neither should Wesley. These essays offer sophisticated arguments and evidence to suggest that John Wesley was

anything but completely opposed to science. On the contrary, Wesley embraced scientific discovery and sought to integrate science and theology as a means to better understand both. As Haas points out, Wesley was not opposed to science; rather, “his enemies were deism, atheism, materialism, and intellectual pride” (43).

Chapters five and six can be considered as transition essays. Jürgen Moltmann’s contribution is derived from his keynote address delivered at the joint Wesleyan Theological Society and Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting on science and theology at Duke University in March, 2008. The essay by Moltmann deals more generally with methodological issues pertaining to science and theology, and does not directly address John Wesley. While outlining the methodology necessary for integrating natural science with a hermeneutic of nature, Moltmann articulates the difference between being a “society of knowing” and a “society of understanding” (107). Subsequently, Moltmann plays out the differences between knowledge and meaning, as well as the implications thereof pertaining to the integration of science and theology. Chapter six by Timothy Crutcher works to unify the methodology presented by Moltmann and the overarching theme of John Wesley.

The last four chapters offer Wesleyan approaches to specific contemporary issues of science and theology. Contributions by Robert D. Branson, Rebecca J. Fliestra, W. Christopher Stewart, and a co-authored essay by Sara DeBoard Marion and Warren S. Brown offer Wesleyan attempts to integrate contemporary science and contemporary theology. These essays reflect the general position that a failure to integrate science and theology would result in both a deficient view of science and an untenable view of theology. As noted in Thomas Jay Oord’s introduction, “The view that science can provide indubitable evidence for sure and certain statements about the world is now largely discredited” (x). Since the science of Wesley’s day was overshadowed by Newton’s mathematical approach to cosmology, the majority of Wesley’s interaction with science was at the point of creation (11). Therefore, in keeping with Wesley, the bulk of the last four chapters explore issues related to creation as it pertains to science and theology. However, creation is not an isolated topic, so contemporary issues regarding neuroscience, emergence theory, evolution, and intelligent design are also addressed.

As a collection of essays originally presented at a conference, these contributions were not written with their compilation in mind. Therefore,

there is overlap and repetition. Some items of overlap include discussion regarding the difference between natural science and natural philosophy, discussion about Wesley's *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, issues pertaining to Wesley's doctrine of creation, Wesley's reaction to Isaac Newton, etc. While much of this repetition would be inappropriate in a book by a single author, a degree of overlap is to be expected with a collection of essays. Furthermore, the redundancy of several arguments helps to drive home the united front and core message of the book, namely that John Wesley was not anti-science, and that Wesleyans should (like Wesley) properly engage the science of today.

In short, *Divine Grace and Emerging Creation* is a great foray into the topic of Wesleyan views of science and theology. Though it is far from comprehensive, this compilation of essays from select Wesleyan scholars, and from Jürgen Moltmann, makes this book a great resource for any person seeking to engage science and theology in a Wesleyan way.

Oden, Thomas C. *The Good Works Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 360 pages. ISBN 978-0-8028-4031-8.

Reviewed by Daryll Gordon Stanton, Academic Advisor and Senior Lecturer in Education and Religion Departments, Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya.

Five years after the 2002 publication of *The Justification Reader*, Thomas C. Oden produced *The Good Works Reader* as the second volume in his “Reader Series.” This set discusses two important themes in light of classic Christian texts: “justification by faith alone” and “good works.” In *The Justification Reader* Oden examined the classic Christian teaching of salvation by grace through faith. Now in *The Good Works Reader*, he probes both the faith that becomes active in love and the grace by which faith lives. “These are inseparable. . . . Good works are born in grace, and live breathing the air of grace” (xxi).

Herein, Oden describes a pillar of Wesleyan theology using the Scriptures as interpreted by numerous ancient Christian thinkers. Many of these are well-known figures, such as Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, Basil the Great, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Eusebius, Gregory the Great, Irenaeus, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, Origen of Alexandria, Polycarp, and Tertullian. Among these, Augustine and Chrysostom are identified as the most influential voices on the relation of saving faith to good works (5). Still others, though lesser-known, add their classical Christian voices to the discussion.

Clearly, Oden’s aim in *The Good Works Reader* is not theoretical insight alone but a very practical application of the grace-filled life of Wesleyan-oriented Christians. He insists, “The heart of the Gospel is God’s good work for us.” Thus, proper understanding of the Gospel elicits its compassionate action of Christians. Furthermore, congregations which hold passive views of human responsibility are not growing (3).

What Oden provides is very timely for the wider church. As he observes, the body of believers from numerous Christian traditions is poised to relearn from the classical scriptural interpreters of the earliest Christian centuries. “Stunning” spiritual resources from classic Christianity are made available for our application. It is also apparent that contemporary Christians seeking moorings for living out their Christian walk can find much help in *The Good Works Reader*. The book will be of special interest to nurses and other health care-givers. This can also be said of

those involved in social ethics, psychotherapy, philanthropy, compassionate ministries, relief and advocacy (xxii).

In the introduction Oden explains the “balanced selectivity” employed to provide the ancient Christian writers’ model for integrating biblical, historical, theological, and ethical inquiry (23). Thereafter, the main portion of the *Reader* is divided into seven parts. The first five parts set forth good works in relation to those considered “most in need,” including the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the imprisoned, the persecuted, and the child who may be considered “the least of these.” The final two parts discuss the good works of the rich and the good works of those justified by grace through faith “apart from Merit” (26).

Part One presents the overarching need to serve the poor, the widow and the fatherless. Here Oden reveals the pattern in the Christian life for caring for the poor as “seen in the way Jesus Himself, being poor, identified with the poor, giving them not only food but hope” (27). Augustine interprets Matthew 5:7 in this way: “Blessed are the compassionate, for God will have compassion for them.” Jerome uses Leviticus 19:15 as a reference to warn against showing partiality. Each individual is to be judged by the merits of his or her case. “While the poor are much beloved of God, they are not simplistically preferred so as to be invited to manipulate divine fairness to their own benefit” (30). Oden suggests a prioritizing of services according to needs.

Part Two looks at food and hospitality as good works of saving faith expressed in the words, “You relieved my suffering.” This implies that Christians must feed the physically hungry, but we must also offer “The Bread of Life” to those who are spiritually hungry. Our saving faith finds expression in quenching thirst, offering hospitality to strangers and nursing the sick.

Part Three presents good works related to reaching out for the outcast. The good news has always been inclusive. It speaks of God’s whole good work for the whole world, for all classes, for all races, for all generations, for all societies, for all languages. Oden portrays Jesus as being “counter-cultural” in his treatment of the outcasts, so Christians must follow Jesus’ example, touching those who are considered untouchable and caring for the handicapped by enabling the disabled, becoming the eyes to the blind, and loosening the tongues of the speechless.

Part Four examines our response to those who face the coercive acts of imprisonment and political persecution. Christians are required to

attend actively to and care for those who are imprisoned, especially those who are inappropriately in prison because they are followers of Jesus Christ. This may require us to ransom unjustly bound fellow believers. However, those who find themselves unjustly persecuted or imprisoned are to remain faithful, remembering that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, as indicated in Romans 8:35-39. In fact, the ancient church took great comfort in such texts (240). The acceptable response of Christians is to “bless” rather than “hate” their persecutors.

Part Five observes the implications of “the least of these.” The lowliness of the “child” is offered as an illustration. Christians are to pattern themselves after Jesus, who identified himself with the “least,” voluntarily becoming a little child, powerless, dependent, obedient to his parents and to the law, suffering, hungering, sweating, thirsting, facing human limitations, even unto death. Christian love requires us to reach out through works of mercy and with a gentle touch to the smallest, the least, the lowliest of persons, those least able to protect themselves (288). We are also reminded that God works through human limitations, and Christians must learn empathy with those who suffer.

Finally in Parts Six and Seven, Oden discusses our faith’s response through acts of “philanthropy,” with an emphasis on “deeds” being needed, not merely “words.” Philanthropy means “love of humanity.” The biblical term often used is “almsgiving” and involves economic provision for the less fortunate in society. God calls each of us to rightly use each of the gifts we receive from him. Through Christian philanthropy, Christians allow God’s mercy to flow through them directly to those in need. Then, “The gift of God grows through our passing it along to another” (301). Words are not sufficient. In fact, “It is best to let your good works remain unheralded. . . . We are instructed to let our works remain anonymous, and be hidden by us so as to be revealed in due time by God. Faith working in love allows God to bring a good work to light in God’s own way and time” (353).

Olson, Mark K., ed. *The John Wesley Reader on Christian Perfection*. Fenwick, MI: Truth in Heart, 2008. 326 pages. ISBN: 13:978-1932370904.

Reviewed by Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, Huntington University, Huntington, IN.

Mark Olson, an ordained Nazarene minister, intends this book as the third of a projected five-volume *John Wesley Christian Perfection Library* which will “present a comprehensive study of John Wesley’s teachings on Christian holiness.” He has previously released an annotated edition of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Truth in Heart, 2005) and a narrative study of Wesley’s theology of holiness throughout his life (*John Wesley’s Theology of Perfection: Developments in Doctrine & Theological System*: Truth in Heart, 2007). Although this book stands well on its own, it also serves as a reader to accompany the narrative study. Future books in the series will bring Wesley’s theology into dialogue with contemporary theological conversations.

Olson intends his book to contribute constructively to these current discussions, especially within historically holiness denominations. He argues in his introduction, “The need to communicate the scripture truth of heart holiness is arguably greater now than ever before. Yet many holiness organizations are stymied in their ability to present a cogent message of holiness today.” Can Wesley speak to this difficulty? Olson’s answer is “yes.”

When Wesley wrote *A Plain Account*, he argued that his views on the subject were largely consistent: “This is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.” However, Olson’s volume shows that the “train of writings” actually presents definite changes in Wesley’s perfection doctrine over time.

Olson proceeds chronologically through Wesley’s writings, dividing them into five periods: early (1725-1738), Aldersgate (1738), two middle periods (1738-1755 and 1756-1767) and late (1768-1791). In each case, he reprints major sermons (among them “The Circumcision of the Heart,” “Salvation by Faith,” “On Sin in Believers,” “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” “On the Wedding Garment”) along with other excerpts—mainly from letters and journal entries, but also from several prefaces and the *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. Olson gives each excerpt a short introduction focusing on

theological context, and each period in Wesley's development is prefaced with study questions (e.g., the middle period opens with such questions as: Why begin this section with a study of Wesley's struggles? How did his struggles contribute to further development in the doctrine of Christian perfection? and How is sin defined in this period? What distinctions does Wesley make in his understanding of sin? What has changed from the prior periods?)

Olson argues that Wesley's "mature" theology embraced perfection as a distinct second work of grace, though not invariably an instantaneous work. He also contends that Wesley was in later life careful to define perfection as compatible with involuntary transgressions—especially in the heat of the Bell-Maxfield controversy of the 1760s. Such perfection did not "exclude ignorance, and error, and a thousand other infirmities" (as Wesley says in his sermon "On Perfection"), but was "the complying with that kind command, 'My son, give me thy heart.'" While later theologians have re-visioned, updated, and problematized this explanation, there is some value in encountering it again here in Wesley's own words—and in more depth than in the *Plain Account*.

The most useful part of this work, however, is the way in which Olson lets us watch Wesley's evolution. He begins with Wesley's early concern for *ars moriendi* (dying well) which drove him to seek perfect confidence and trust at the moment of death. He then moves through the radical collapse of perfection into conversion which followed on Aldersgate, to Wesley's understanding that the new birth had not brought everything he desired, and from there to some of Wesley's idealized definitions of deliverance from the sinful nature. This idealism was later tempered by Wesley's personal travels on the *via salutis*, as well as the testimonies of others and the experience with Bell and Maxfield.

Rather than force on this evidence the coherent trajectory which Wesley himself gave it in the *Plain Account*, Olson allows us to see Wesley chasing various rabbit trails before arriving at his mature view. The final sections show him explaining that view exegetically and pastorally—and yes, further refining it. Olson's work is not the first to compile Wesley's views on Christian perfection. It was a common practice among early holiness leaders, as seen by J. A. Wood's popular *Christian Perfection, as Taught By John Wesley* (McDonald and Gill, 1885, reprinted in the 1920s by the Christian Witness Co. and more recently by Schmul) as well as Daniel Whedon's *Entire Sanctification: John Wesley's*

View (Eaton and Mains, 1880). Olson allows us to see a messier Wesley than most, however, and at their best Olson's questions and notes ask us to consider Wesley as a conversation partner rather than an oracle.

True, there is much more that I would have liked to see in this book—starting, most practically, with an index. While the book is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive, and a better idea of what, and how much, was omitted would have been helpful (not to mention *why*). While the notes help with theological contextualization, they could be more historically robust (although perhaps the companion volume is the place to look for this). Furthermore, the work does not situate Wesley in the broader Christian context, nor does it deal with how Wesley situated himself in relation to that tradition. We see him undergoing many of the experiences which led him to revise his views, but what was he reading (and excerpting) at the time? How was he connecting this doctrine to the early church as well as to Scripture? And, granting Wesley's inveterate plagiarism, are some of Wesley's words actually those of his fathers in the faith instead? It would be easy to come away from this book with the idea that Wesley invented, rather than synthesized and popularized, a longstanding theological tradition emphasizing growth in grace and imparted righteousness after justification.

With those caveats, the book is a good introduction to Wesley's thoughts on the subject—worth recommending to students and accessible to laypeople. You may not want to end the conversation about heart holiness here, but it provides a good place to start.

Alexander, Estrelda and Amos Yong, eds. *Philip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick/Wipf and Stock, 2009. 251 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1556358326.

Reviewed by Maxine E. Walker, Professor of Literature and Director, Wesleyan Center for 21st-Century Studies, Emerita, Point Loma University, San Diego, CA.

Spirit-empowered women in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition identify themselves with Philip's four virgin daughters who prophesied in the book of Acts (21:8-9). Regardless of this biblical precedence, Pentecostal women throughout the history of this movement since the mid-nineteenth century have struggled to gain affirmation within and appointment to ecclesial positions. To encourage academic scholars from a variety of disciplines to critically explore the biblical, historical, theological, sociological, ethical, and ecclesial dimensions of women preachers in the Pentecostal movement serves as the foundation for this collection of essays. Twelve scholars in this contribution to the Princeton Theological Monograph Series describe and prescribe ways to think about the historical perspectives and biblical/theological perspectives that highlight the abiding exclusion of women from higher levels of church decision making. In turn, the essays encourage a deeper conversation on realizing the authentic legacy of Philip's daughters.

In Part One, essayists note the ministry of women who came directly from holiness affiliations, a particularly helpful connection since early Pentecostals left the Baptist church over holiness, the doctrine of sanctification. Women preachers in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, as did Pentecostal women preachers, attributed their call to preach directly to sanctification and the baptism of the Spirit; women from both aspects of the holiness movement were involved in the Azusa Street phase of the Pentecostal revival. Throughout this first section, historians note the tensions between women claiming their biblical authority for preaching and the cultural interpretations of those sources. For example, Lucile Walker and Mary Graves, among others, strongly influenced the Church of God to deal with boundaries and restrictions placed on their ministry so that, by 1990, the General Assembly changed the title "lady minister" to "licensed minister." Gender-specific language was dropped; in subsequent years, women won the right to vote in the General Assembly and a woman's ministerial rank was changed from "licensed" to "ordained minister."

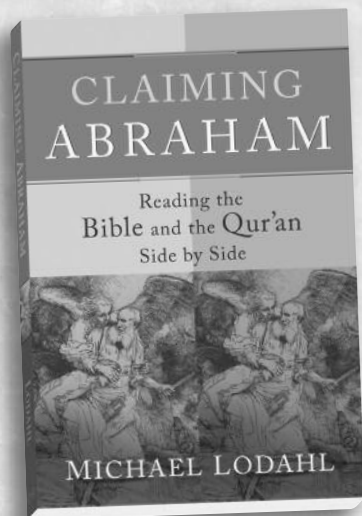
The contemporary search for marginalized “voices” in the Pentecostal movement utilizes methods of oral histories and interviews to hear concerns that younger COG women who are denied the bishopric rank and other leadership posts may not be willing to remain in the Pentecostal Movement, even if or in spite of God being their “chief employer.” Other writers offer valuable insights into the social ministries organized and led by African-American Pentecostal women, even as ordination was denied, thus suggesting a need for a wider definition of “spiritual leadership.” Also “heard” are Pentecostal Latinas who have been largely ignored in scholarship on Catholic and mainline Protestant women from feminists and liberationist perspectives. The most intriguing essay in Part One is by anthropologist Deidre Helen Crumbley who analyzes two spiritual church contexts. Not only does she cogently outline what it means to be a faith community identified as a “spiritual church,” but also uses this outline to compare and contrast women’s roles in a Nigerian indigenous church and those in an African American sanctified church. Gender, religion, and power become contested cultural practices that both include and exclude women.

Part Two takes up the promise of prophecy on all who are baptized in the Holy Spirit as it shaped the Pentecostal movement both historically and as it unfolded in highly patriarchal nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century societies. Both women and men in the early years of the movement saw themselves as anointed prophets, but as the ranks of ordination were established, women were relegated to prophesying, evangelism, and church planters; now the call by such theologians as Cheryl Bridges is to develop a trinitarian understanding for a “new relatedness” that will validate women in wider ministerial positions. Quite intriguing is Pamela Holmes’s work with critical theory and feminist scholars who ground Pentecostalism in ideas and practices that “hold emancipatory potential for women’s lived realities with an ecologically and environmentally sustainable framework.”

For those somewhat unacquainted with the Pentecostal movement either theologically or culturally, these essays provide useful direction for understanding women’s struggles to fulfill their vocational calling as they were sanctified and experienced what they termed “a third work of grace.” Both in each essays’ footnotes and in the Select Bibliography, momentous works are noted that complement and undergird the need for this collection as well as additional work on Pentecostal women and a

faith community that searches for ecclesial pragmatism and spiritual egalitarianism. These studies also complement the growing number of scholarly works and bold pronouncements on women and ordination. As this review is being written, a lecture series is underway at Kenyon College that features Fr. Roy Bourgeois who publicly rejected his church's teaching on sacred ordination. Undoubtedly, women in Alexander and Yong's essay collection would agree with Fr. Roy's letter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican: "Women in our Church are telling us that God is calling them to the priesthood. Who are we as men to say to women, 'Our call is valid, but yours is not.' Who are we to tamper with God's call?"

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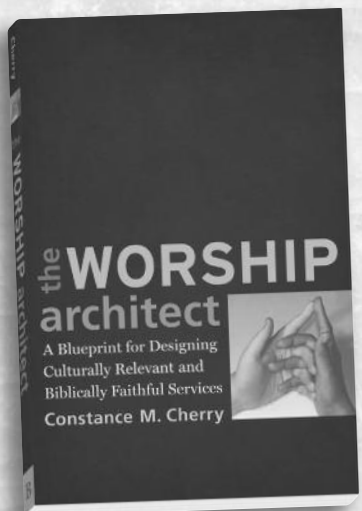
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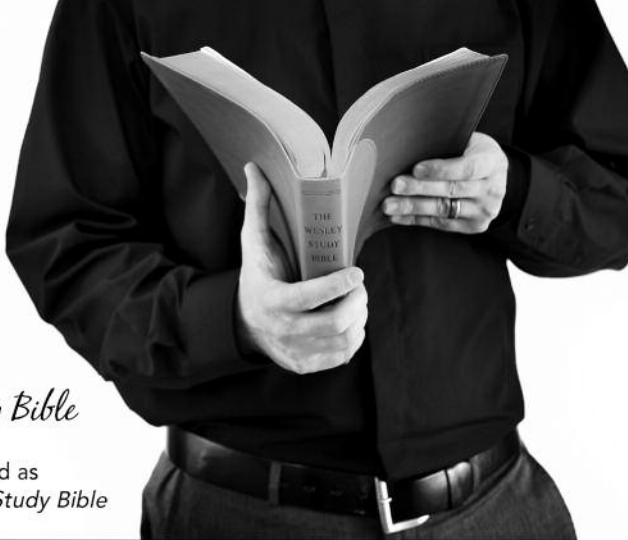
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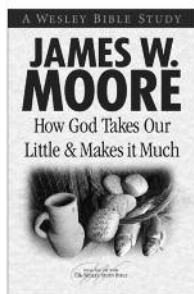
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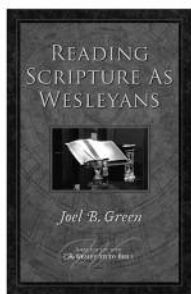


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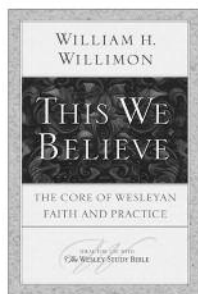


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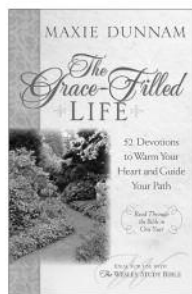


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