The Master's Seminary Journal

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EDITORIAL

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A number of the articles in this issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* relate to the topic of canonicity. Others center on the person of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel. The point at which those two topics—Christ and canon—meet provides the foundation for a Protestant evangelical bibliology, where Scripture is rightly viewed as the supreme authority for faith and practice.

For a movement defined by the Reformation slogan *sola Scriptura*, confidence in the integrity of the biblical canon is of paramount importance. This is especially true in an age of best-selling skeptics and celebrated critics. Evangelical scholarship must be ready with solid answers for the earnest questions raised by both believers and unbelievers alike.

It is outside the scope of an editorial to engage with every line of inquiry that might be raised regarding canonicity. Space permits only one question to be addressed, and that in an admittedly brief fashion. The question is this: How can evangelicals be confident that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments comprise the entirety of the written Word of God?

The Roman Catholic Church, for example, claims that the apocryphal books of the intertestamental period ought to be regarded as part of Scripture. Heretical cult movements, like Mormonism, add their own writings to the Bible. Popular skeptics suggest that Roman emperors like Constantine are responsible for shaping the canon. So, what confidence can believers have in knowing that "all Scripture" (2 Tim. 3:16) consists of these 66 books and no more?

That question might be answered in a number of ways. In fact, seminary students spend weeks studying these issues over the course of multiple semesters. But in this article, the intent is to offer a simple answer that gets to the heart of the matter. It is this:

Evangelicals accept the 39 books of the Old Testament, because the Lord Jesus Christ *affirmed* the canon of the Old Testament. They similarly embrace the 27 books of the New Testament, because the Lord Jesus Christ *authorized* His apostles to write the New Testament.

At its core, the doctrine of canonicity is grounded in the lordship of Jesus Christ. Insofar as Christians believe in Him and submit to His authority, they will simultaneously believe in and submit to His Word (cf. John 10:27). Because Jesus affirmed the Old Testament canon, His followers affirm it with Him. Because He authorized His apostles to write the New Testament, His followers embrace it too.

The Roman Catholic Church did not determine the canon. Nor did false prophets like Joseph Smith, or emperors like Constantine. No, the biblical canon rests on the authority of Christ Himself.

The Old Testament Canon

Regarding the Old Testament, Jesus Christ affirmed the Jewish canon of His day—consisting of the same content that comprises the Protestant Old Testament canon. A study of the Gospels shows that, throughout His ministry, Jesus affirmed the Old Testament in its entirety (Matt. 5:17–18)—including its historical reliability (cf. Matt. 10:15; 19:3–5; 12:40; 24:38–39), prophetic accuracy (Matt. 26:54), sufficiency (Luke 16:31), unity (Luke 24:27, 44), inerrancy (Matt. 22:29; John 17:17), infallibility (John 10:35), and authority (Matt. 21:13, 16, 42). He affirmed the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets and all that was written in them; clearly viewing the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God (Matt. 15:16; Mark 7:13; Luke 3:2; 5:1; etc.).

The first-century Jews did not consider the apocryphal books to be canonical. Neither did Jesus. He never affirmed or cited the apocryphal books—and neither do any of the writers of the New Testament. (Some may wonder about Jude's reference to the Book of Enoch. But the Book of Enoch is not part of the Roman Catholic apocrypha. It was simply a well-known piece of Jewish literature at that time, which Jude cited for the purpose of an illustration, much like Paul did when he quoted pagan poets on Mars Hill in Acts 17.)

Many of the early church Fathers also did not regard the apocryphal books as being canonical. They considered them to be *edifying* for the church, but not *authoritative*. Even the fifth-century scholar Jerome (who translated the Latin *Vulgate*—which became the standard Roman Catholic version of the Middle Ages) acknowledged that the apocryphal books were not to be regarded as either authoritative or canonical.

In sum, then, the canon of the Old Testament is confirmed on the basis of the authoritative affirmation of the Lord Jesus. Conversely, the canonicity of the apocryphal books is rejected because those books lack that kind of affirmation from Christ.

The New Testament Canon

The same principle applies to the New Testament canon. Jesus not only affirmed the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, He also promised to give additional revelation to His church through His authorized representatives—namely, the apostles.

Christ made this point explicit in John 14–16. On the night before His death, Jesus said to His disciples:

These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (John 14:25–26).

That last line is essential for the doctrine of canonicity. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would help them remember all that He had said to them. The fulfillment of that promise is found in the four gospel accounts—where the things that Jesus did and said are perfectly recorded.

Two chapters later, in the same context, the Lord promised the apostles that He would give them additional revelation through the Holy Spirit:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak of His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you (John 16:12–15).

Where is that additional revelation found? It is found in the New Testament epistles and the book of Revelation, wherein the Spirit of Christ guided the apostles to provide the church with inspired truth.

The New Testament was pre-authenticated by Christ Himself, as He authorized the apostles to be His witnesses in the world (Matt. 28:18–19; Acts 1:8). As followers of Jesus, Christians embrace and submit to the New Testament writings because they were penned by Christ's authorized representatives, being inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Old Testament prophets (cf. 2 Pet. 3:19–21).

A book-by-book survey of the New Testament demonstrates that this criteria was met. The Gospels of Matthew and John were both written by apostles. The Gospel of Mark is a record of the memoirs of the apostle Peter, written by Mark under Peter's apostolic authority. The gospel of Luke (and the book of Acts) were the product of a careful investigation and eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:2), research that would have included apostolic sources. Moreover, as the companion of the apostle Paul, Luke wrote under Paul's apostolic oversight. (For instance, Paul affirmed Luke 10:7 as being part of the Scripture in 1 Tim. 5:18.)

The Pauline Epistles (Romans–Philemon) were all written by the Apostle Paul. The authorship of Hebrews is unknown, but many in church history believed it was written by Paul. If not penned by Paul himself, it was clearly written by someone closely associated with Paul's ministry—and therefore, by extension, under his apostolic authority.

The General epistles (the letters of James, Peter, and John) were written by apostles. Peter also acknowledged Paul's writings as being Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15–16. The epistle of Jude was written by the half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), who operated under the apostolic oversight of his brother James (cf. Jude 1). Finally, the book of Revelation was written by the apostle John.

Every book of the New Testament was written under apostolic authority—either by an apostle or someone closely linked to apostolic ministry. Consequently,

believers are right to submit to these books because they originate from Christ's authorized representatives. In submitting to them, Christians are submitting to the Lord Himself. Furthermore, because there are no longer any apostles of Jesus Christ in the church today, and there have not been since the foundation period of the first century (cf. Eph. 2:20), the canon is necessarily closed.

Why These 66 Books?

The fundamental reason these 66 books comprise the canon of the Old and New Testaments is simple. God inspired them and providentially preserved them (2 Tim. 3:16–17). They are His divine revelation. The Lord Jesus Christ confirmed that fact. He affirmed the Old Testament canon, and He authorized His apostles to produce the New Testament (cf. Heb. 1:1–2).

When believers pick up their copies of God's Word, they can have confidence that the Bible they are holding is indeed "all Scripture." That confidence is founded on nothing less than the authority of Christ Himself.

DO THE CANONICAL GOSPELS REFLECT GRECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY GENRE OR ARE THEY MODELED AFTER THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS?

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New Testament interpretation often has been the subject to historical-critical interpretive fads that have no basis in reality or substance throughout history. These fads generate from the liberal critical scholarship in academic circles, then infiltrate evangelical critical scholarship who then imitate their more liberal counterparts. Under the influence of evangelical critical scholars, many conservatives eventually are led to believe that such fads are "normative" when actually they are highly aberrant and designed to be destructive of the biblical text. Today, a fad known as "Greco-Roman biography," i.e., a form of historiography that is infiltrating conservative scholarship, is making inroads in interpreting the canonical Gospels. Its impact is the reduction of the gospel texts to mere fallible products that reflect standards of ancient historiography where events are fabricated, sayings are invented, or inaccuracies are latent in the text rather than being what they truly are: inerrant texts guided by the Holy Spirit of Truth (John 14:26:16:13; 1 John 4:4–6; Matt. 23:35).

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Introduction

Michael R. Licona, Professor of Theology, Houston Baptist University, has produced another volume in his efforts to apply the ancient historical genre of Greco-Roman biography to the text of the canonical Gospels as a means of explaining differences among the Gospels. The work is titled, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (Oxford, 2016).

Background to Licona's New Work: Classical Historiography and Its Greco-Roman *Bioi* Postulation

This work may be considered a follow-up to his volume titled, *The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographical Approach*, wherein he initially set forth his thesis that the key to understanding the gospel account is to consider the Gospels as influenced by ancient Greco-Roman biography. In this prior volume, Licona contended, echoing classicist Richard Burridge, that, "Although the Gospels do not possess all of the internal or external features of ancient biography, they do not differ from the genre to any greater degree than other [works belonging to the genre of biography]; in other words, they have at least as much in common with Graeco-Roman *[bioi]* as the *[bioi]* have with each other. Therefore, the Gospels must belong to the genre of *[bios]*."[1] This growing opinion among evangelical scholars that the Gospels are *bios* recently created a storm of controversy. Licona, in this work, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach,*[2] used *bios* as a means of de-historicizing parts of the gospel (i.e. Matt. 27:51–53 with the resurrection of the saints after Jesus crucifixion is non-literal genre or apocalyptic rather than an actual historical event). Licona argued, "*Bioi offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend.* Because *bios* was a flexible genre, *it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins.*"[3] He called this "poetical," a "legend," an "embellishment," and literary "special effects."[4]

Licona further suggested that the appearance of angels at Jesus' tomb after the resurrection is also legendary. He wrote: "*It can forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend*, as Wedderburn notes. We may also be reading poetic language or legend at certain points, such as Matthew's report of the raising of some dead saints at Jesus death (Matt. 27:51–54**) and the angel(s) at the tomb** (Mark 15:5–7; Matt 28:2–7; Luke 24:4–7; John 20:11–13"[5] (185–186, emphasis added). This extends the infiltration of legend beyond Matthew to all the other Gospels as well. What is more, Licona offers no clear hermeneutical way to determine from the text of Scripture what is legend and what is not. Calling a short unembellished gospel account with witnesses "weird," as Licona does,[6] is certainly not a very clear hermeneutical test, especially when the passage is directly associated with the resurrection of Christ (as Matthew 27 is). Many New Testament scholars think the bodily resurrection of Christ is weird

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[1] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 203. Licona's quote is inclusive of a comment of Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [1992], 250. See also: Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[2] Licona, *The Resurrection*.

[3] Ibid., 34.

[4] Ibid., 306, 548, 552, 553.

[5] Ibid., 185–86 (emphasis added).

[6] Ibid., 527.

too. The late Rudolf Bultmann, the dean of liberal New Testament scholars in the twentieth century, called the resurrection and all such miraculous events in the Gospels as "the mythical event of redemption"; "origin of the various themes can be easily traced in the contemporary mythology of Jewish apocalyptic"; "pre-scientific" "incredible," "senseless," "irrational"; "unintelligible"; and even "impossible" to the modern mind.[7] As a result, a roundtable discussion was formed by the Southern Bapists, of which Michael Licona is a member, for vetting of his views.[8]

An Apparent Syllogism for Licona's
The Resurrection of Jesus

A syllogism for Licona's work, *The Resurrection*, may be stated as follows:

> PREMISE ONE: Greco-Roman *Bioi* presents a mixture of history (facts) and legendary material that are hard to distinguish
>
> PREMISE TWO: The Gospels are an example of Greco-Roman *Bioi*
>
> CONCLUSION: The Gospels present a mixture of history (facts) and legendary material that are hard to distinguish.

Discernment of where history ends and legend or non-history, i.e. symbolism, begins is not really specified by Licona, indicating an acute thesis to this work, for he offered no clear hermeneutical principles beyond terms like "apocalyptic;" "weird," etc.[9] Licona makes such decisions a personal, subjective decision that lacks clear analysis.

Licona's work on the resurrection did exhibit many commendable items such as a strong stance on the historical basis for Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. One might be encouraged that in light of historical criticism's assault on the miraculous since Spinoza and the Enlightenment, Licona has maintained the historical, orthodox position of the church. However, similar to Robert Gundry before him in 1983, who used a midrashic (non-historical approach) to the infancy narratives in Matthew 1–3, Licona (2010) uses genre issues in historical criticism to negate portions of Scripture that have always been considered historical by orthodox Christianity from the earliest times. The same ideological thought process by which Licona was dismissive of the resurrection of the saints and the appearance of angels could

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[7] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (London: SPCK, 1953), 2–5.

[8] "A Roundtable Discussion with Michael Licona on The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach," *Southeastern Theological Review* 3/1 (Summer 2002), 71–98.

[9] For further analysis, see Norman L. Geisler, "Michael Licona Admits Contradiction in the Gospels." https://www.jashow.org/articles/bible/mike-licona-admits-contradiction-in-the-gospels/; idem., https://www.jashow.org/articles/bible/brief-comments-on-the-licona-dialogue/; idem., "On Licona Muddying the Waters of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics; idem. And William C. Roach, Methodological Unorthodoxy" in *The Jesus Quest: The Danger from Within* (Mailtand, FL: Xulon, 2014), 181–210.

well be applied to Jesus. He has stirred up much controversy that parallels that of the Gundry/ETS circumstance that resulted in the ICBI documents of 1978 and 1982. Being influenced by historical criticism, Licona has now firmly accepted a "scholarly consensus" that has emerged among critically-trained historical-critical scholars that the gospels are a form of ancient "*bios*."[10]

Influence of Talbert and Burridge

By way of further background to the reader of this review, Licona affirms much of the predecessors of Greco-Roman histioriographical postulation. The stimulus to these ideas may be traced in recent times to Charles H. Talbert, Distinguished Professor of Religion Emeritus, at Baylor University, who has taught there since 1996. Prior to this he taught at Wake Forest University from 1963 till his transfer to Baylor. Talbert received his Bachelor of Arts from Howard College (now Samford University), Master of Divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and doctorate from Vanderbilt University. He was mentored by Leander H. Keck (1928–) at Vanderbilt University. Talbert was also Professor of Religion at Wake Forest University, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina before transferring to Baylor. He served on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, and the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Talbert also served as President of the Catholic Biblical Association from 1999–2000 and delivered the presidential address at its sixty-third annual meeting on "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists." Talbert stimulated the view that the Gospels should be viewed as a genre of Greco-Roman *bioi*.

Talbert has written many works, but key to this discussion is his essay titled, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Society," where he asserted the certainty that the canonical Gospels were influenced by mythology of the era: "It would seem, therefore, that the early Christians were aware of the Mediterranean concept of the immortals and utilized it in one way or another in their proclamation of Jesus. During the first one hundred and twenty-five years of Christian history this mythology functioned initially as a significant Christological category and then as an apologetic tool."[11] In another work, "the Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," he purposed to identify the background for the early Christian picture of Jesus as a descending-ascending redeemer. He argued that although such a myth is also found in Gnosticism and in Greco-Roman paganism, it is the Hellenistic-Jewish myth of a many-named descending-ascending redeemer that is closest to the early Christian one.[12]

Perhaps more directly influential on Licona's thought and work, as well as approach, is that of Richard Burridge, a British classical scholar and Anglican priest who popularized the idea that the gospel genre reflects *bioi* as the genre of the canonical Gospels in the latter's work, *What Are the Gospels? A comparison with Graeco-*

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[10] Bock also accepted this basic genre classification, see Darrell L. Bock, "Precision and Accuracy: Making Distinctions in the Cultural Context," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 368.

[11] Charles H. Talbert, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94/3 (September 1975), 436.

[12] Charles H. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *New Testament Studies* 22/4 (July 1976), 418–40.

Roman Biography. Burridge is an Anglican priest and the Reverend Canon Professor at Dean of King's College London since 1994, and he received a personal Chair in Biblical Interpretation in 2008. After obtaining a first-class honors degree from the University of Oxford in classics, and training as a teacher at the University of Nottingham, his first post was as a classics teacher at Sevenoaks School. He then combined theological training for ordination with a doctorate on gospel genre (also from the University of Nottingham, 1989), and was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in 1986. After working as a curate in a parish in Bromley, Kent, Professor Burridge spent seven years as Lazenby Chaplain at the University of Exeter, where he also lectured in theology and classics. In 2013, Burridge was awarded the Ratzinger Prize for Theology by Pope Francis, in recognition of his work on the Gospels.

The Premise of *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*: Acceptance of Historical-Critical Ideologies, Especially Greco-Roman *Bioi* as the Explanation for Gospel Material Differences

The premise of Licona's newest work, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, is that to understand the kind and nature of historiography (writing of history) that is present in the canonical Gospels one must investigate and be familiar with Greco-Roman biographies of the times in which they were written, for the Gospels are directly linked to these types of ancient literature as a product of their times in which they were written. The publisher summarizes,

> Anyone who reads the Gospels carefully will notice that there are differences in the manner in which they report the same events. These differences have led many conservative Christians to resort to harmonization efforts that are often quite strained, sometimes to the point of absurdity. Many people have concluded the Gospels are hopelessly contradictory and therefore historically unreliable as accounts of Jesus. The majority of New Testament scholars now hold that most if not all of the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography and that this genre permitted some flexibility in the way in which historical events were narrated. However, few scholars have undertaken a robust discussion of how this plays out in Gospel pericopes (self-contained passages). *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* provides a fresh approach to the question by examining the works of Plutarch, a Greek essayist who lived in the first and second centuries CE. Michael R. Licona discovers three-dozen pericopes narrated two or more times in Plutarch's Lives, identifies differences between the accounts, and analyzes these differences in light of compositional devices identified by classical scholars as commonly employed by ancient authors. The book then applies the same approach to nineteen pericopes that are narrated in two or more Gospels, demonstrating that the major differences found there likely result from the same compositional devices employed by Plutarch.[13]

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[13] https://www.amazon.com/dp/0190264268/ref=rdr_ext_tmb introduction by Oxford on website as well as cover of book.

The key term in the above quote is "flexibility" and "compositional devices," for reading Licona's work makes the word "flexibility" cover a large range of assertions that many would find troubling. Importantly, Licona rejects classical forms of harmonization as "misguided," instead preferring to explain the canonical Gospels from the perspective of the historiography of ancient writers, especially Plutarch and his work *Lives*. The back flap of the book cover states:

> Showing both the strained harmonizations and the hasty dismissals of the Gospels as reliable accounts to be misguided, Licona invites readers to approach them in light of their biographical genre and in that way to gain a clearer understanding of why they differ.[14]

Dismissal of Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics

This rejection of classical grammatico-historical harmonization is very evident in Licona's work and such rejection is also reinforced in the Foreword when Craig Evans, Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins and Dean of the School of Christian Thought at Houston Baptist University, and colleague of Licona, starts an immediate negative tone in the Foreword of the book, words of criticism from "naïve conservatives who rely on simplistic harmonizations and pat answers that really do not do justice to the phenomena."[15] Apparently, evangelical critical scholars like Evans brands anyone who raises concerns regarding Licona's analogy of the Gospels to the phenomena of Greco-Roman biography as somehow lacking in scholarship in daring to disagree with Licona's approach, or for that matter, evangelical critical scholarship's growing assessment that the Gospels are patterned after the genre of Greco-Roman *bioi*. Furthermore, he wants the readers of the book to have an "open and teachable mind"[16] even though Evans's mind is clearly closed on the issue. Such pathetic name calling is also done by Licona when he remarks that he was "scolded on the Internet by ultra-conservative Christians" who disagreed with his approach. He also indicates that many evangelical critical scholars "who regard the Gospels as inspired and trustworthy, but are troubled by their apparent discrepancies, should be encouraged by Dr. Licona's careful, informed study."[17] One wonders about Evans's statement that appears contradictory that "inspired and trustworthy" Gospels cause some of these scholars to be "troubled by apparent discrepancies."[18] In response, the evidence shows that those who are confident in the Gospel's trustworthiness will be vastly more troubled by Licona's approach to resolving alleged discrepancies through the application of the genre of Greco-Roman *bioi* than any "apparent discrepancies" that one may find troubling.

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[14] https://www.amazon.com/dp/0190264268/ref=rdr_ext_tmb introduction by Oxford on website as well as cover of book.

[15] Greg Evans, "Foreword," in Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, x.

[16] Evans, "Foreword," x.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

The views of Licona also have a circle of support from other evangelical critical scholars. Licona writes that the following New Testament evangelical critical scholars have assisted him in the development of the book in the "Acknowledgements" section,

> I likewise wish to express my thanks to the following New Testament scholars for their part in this work: to Darrell Bock and Craig Keener for reviewing the entire manuscript except for chapter 5 and the conclusion; to Craig Blomberg and Darrell Bock for reading a paper I presented in 2015 at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, which became the basis for chapter 5, and for providing papers to it, which provided helpful ideas; to Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, Lynn Cohick, Gary Habermas, Randy Richards, and Dan Wallace for showing an interest in the thesis of this book while providing critical feedback to ideas they allowed me to run by them.[19]

Licona also mentions apologist "William Lane Craig . . . who encouraged me to push forward with this research . . . and to Craig Evans, Craig Keener . . . Dan Wallace, all of whom encouraged me to pursue truth no matter where it led when my observations made me uncomfortable."[20] The latter word "uncomfortable" used by Wallace would imply that even Licona had reservations about his own approach contained in the book as to its impact on gospel trustworthiness.

Licona's Approach Specified

Licona describes the purpose of his book, noting:

> This volume will pursue the identification of several techniques employed in the writing of ancient history and biography that can be gleaned from compositional textbooks and inferred from observations of the differences in how Plutarch reported the same events in nine of his *Lives*. We will also observe how the employment of these techniques by the evangelists would result in precisely the types of differences we often observe in the Gospels . . . . Its aim is rather to investigate *compositional devices* that are often inferred by classical scholars and by some New Testament scholars in order to see if the existence of those devices may be more firmly established and provide insights into many of the differences in the Gospels.[21]

He continues, "For our purposes, we only need to recognize that the New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography. Accordingly, we should not be surprised when the evangelists employ compositional devices similar to those

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[19] Ibid., xiii.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 3 (italics added).

used by ancient biographers. In fact, we should be surprised if they did not."[22] Furthermore,

> [A]ncient authors took fewer liberties when writing histories than when writing biographies. However, there are plenty of exceptions when even the more careful historians of that era engaged in writing history using the same liberties we observe in biographical writing. A history was meant to illustrate past events whereas a biography was meant to serve as a literary portrait of its main character. Accordingly, if an adopting or bending of details would serve to make an historical point or illuminate the qualities of the main character in a manner that rendered them clearer, the historian and the biographer were free to do so, since their accounts would be 'true enough'" and "Ancient historians and biographers varied in their commitment to historical accuracy."[23]

Licona imposes this idea upon the Gospels in his debate with Ehrman when he tweeted the following: "Tweet this! The Gospels paint literary portraits of Jesus that are 'true enough.' @MichaelLicona."[24] What is disturbing is the expression "true enough." This phrase is rather ambiguous and set forth without any real content by Licona. Furthermore, who is to decide what is "true enough" and when or where the Gospels are "true enough." To describe the Gospels as being "true enough" lends to the idea that apparently in places the Gospels are deficient in their information, perhaps falling short of common standard of truth.

Licona chose Plutarch's *Lives* because this work is alleged to be similar to the Gospels (especially the Synoptics Matthew, Mark and Luke) in that in its several biographies, they frequently cover the same ground, creating a number of parallels or "synoptic" accounts. One wonders about Licona's entirely arbitrary decision to find in Plutarch the Gospels' "standard" for accuracy of the Gospel accounts. After all, hundreds of ancient forms of Greco-Roman *bioi* have been survived to the present day, each one differing in historical accuracy and reportage. In the 1990s Darrell Bock touted the gospel records as comparable to the Greco-Roman Historical Tradition of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in his chapter on "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?"[25] Which one of these ancient authors is the standard? How are those standards chosen? Which evangelical critical scholar(s) decide or is such a decision arbitrarily based on the consensus of these evangelical scholars' hubris in deciding the standard for the canonical Gospels. What if some other ancient writer is chosen who has a different historical level of alleged accuracy? Such decisions to compare the Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* are subjective and fleeting, based on some nebulous form of consensus. In 1999, Daniel Wallace also has touted Thucydides as a standard for the Gospels, claiming,

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[22] Ibid., 5.

[23] Ibid., 6.

[24] http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/licona-major-statement/

[25] Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus Under: Fire Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. Eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 74–99 (note especially pp. 78–79).

Now, regarding ancient historiography: Commentators on Luke or Acts routinely note that Luke patterned his historiographical method after that of Thucydides. Thucydides has been called the greatest historian that ever lived" (Macauley). "Thucydides can be seen, even today, as a historian's historian." He learned from the master, Herodotus, and bettered him in his diligence and accuracy. Demosthenes, the great orator, copied out Thucydides' *History* eight times; Dio Cassius, Philistus, Arrian Procopius; Tacitus, and Sallust all emulated him. His translator offers this praise: . . .We are accustomed to admire among Thucydides' great qualities as historian, his impartiality, his trustworthiness, vivid description, sense of contrast, conciseness, epigrammatic sententiousness, reserve, pathos. . . . Historians sometimes criticise his attitude, but they all accept his statements of fact. Thucydides is by no means the typical historian; he reached the pinnacle of his discipline and became a model for historians to follow, though few attained the high mark that he epitomized.[26]

Licona, Bock, and Wallace all seem to think by "consensus" of critical scholarship as well as revealing how arbitrary these standards can change direction. The consensus is in contradictory flux as to which ancient Greco-Roman writer is the "standard" for the Gospels. All these proponents of Greco-Roman *bioi* as the standard for the Gospels actually relegate the Word of God, especially the canonical Gospels, to mere human standards of reportage. The gospel records promise that "the Spirit of truth" would bring all things to the apostolic writers' memory hardly finds this comparison adequate (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:4–6). This latter point reflects a greatly changing consensus among this group as to what inspiration and inerrancy mean. The definition and character of these vital doctrines is clearly undergoing radical modification by these evangelical critical scholars who would compare divinely inspired Gospels to mere human standards of historiography.

Another disturbing factor is that Plutarch is not always considered even to be an accurate historian. This is a matter of subjective judgment fraught with subjective analysis as to who would be the "consensus" for historical accuracy to form a basis to compare the Gospels. Who is to decide? Bart Ehrman insightfully noted the following in his debate with Licona that constitutes a devastating reply to advocates of the Gospels being compared to Plutarch or, for that matter, any form of Greco-Roman *bioi*:

Even if Matthew's account of Jesus were as good as Plutarch's of Romulus— that wouldn't make it reliable.—@BartEhrmam

I should point out that even if Matthew's account of Jesus were as good as Plutarch's account of Romulus, that would definitely not make it very reliable! Many of Plutarch's *Lives* are notoriously unreliable, historically. It's kind of

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[26] Daniel B. Wallace, "An Apologia for a Broad View of Ipsissima Vox," 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA (18 November 1999), 3. For the quote within Wallace declaring Thucydides as the "historian's historian" see Robert E. Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 187.

like saying that I must have been a good tennis player because I was at least as good as everyone else in my high school. But what if no one in my high school was any good in tennis? We can't say that Matthew must be reliable because he is at least as good as skilled Plutarch—which by the way, he is not, as any classicist will tell you—unless we know how reliable Plutarch is.[27]

Ehrman continues to highlight the difficulty of any comparison of the Gospels to standards of Greco-Roman *bioi*:

But does that mean that we can then conclude that these books [the Gospels] *are* accurate? That seems to be Mike's position—that if the Gospels are as accurate as Plutarch or Suetonius, then they can be seen as accurate. I think a lot of readers will think that this is somewhat skirting the real issue and changing the terms of our debate. Most readers, when they want to know if the Gospel accounts "tell it like it was" — that is, that the Gospels narrate events that actually happened in the way that they are described — they are not asking whether the Gospels are "as good as" some other books. They simply want to know: Did this event happen? And did it happen in the way the Gospels say it did? They do *not* want to know if Matthew's account of Jesus is about as good as Plutarch's account of Romulus. Most people don't know that Plutarch *wrote* a *Life of Romulus*. Why would they care if Matthew's Gospel is as good as a book they've never heard of? They want to know whether Matthew's account accurately describes what happened in Jesus's life.[28]

Once a comparison is made of the Gospels to any ancient Greco-Roman writer, that standard is immediately subject to marked speculation as to his or her reliability as well as the legitimacy of any comparison.

Licona's Operating Premise: A Syllogism

Licona anchors his hermeneutical assumptions for interpretation and understanding of the text of the Gospels in "differences in the manner in which they report the same events" in Greco-Roman biography, especially Plutarch's *Lives*.[29] An apparent syllogism for his thinking may be presented as follows:

PREMISE ONE: Ancient biography [e.g. Plutarch] is a mixture of truth, fact but also legend, creative [made-up] embellishment, historical accuracy and inaccu-racy, imprecision, confusion etc. etc.

PREMISE TWO: The Gospels are ancient biography [on the level of Plutarch's *Lives*]

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[27] http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/ehrman-detailed-response/

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 6–8.

Licona chose Plutarch's *Lives* because this work is assumed to be similar to the Gospels (especially the Synoptics Matthew, Mark and Luke) in that in its several biographies, they frequently cover the same ground, creating a number of parallels or "synoptic" accounts.

CONCLUSION: The canonical Gospels [e.g. like Plutarch] is a mixture of truth, legend, creative [made-up] embellishment, historical accuracy and inaccuracy, imprecision, and confusion, etc.

A couple of preliminary remarks here are important. Licona cannot claim inductive logic for his premise but he has *a priori* assumed that the Gospels are to be interpreted in the grid of Greco-Roman *bioi* and then the data derived in the Gospels comes from this already assumed premise. In other words, he sees with "Greco-Roman colored" glasses even prior to his study. While he presents his interpretation of the data in the Gospel, his *a priori* assumption drives him to see in the Gospels similarities to Greco-Roman *bioi*. He dismisses traditional harmonization of his selected passages in the Gospels as non-relevant.[30] Even more troubling in his comparison of the canonical Gospels is his admission that "liberties" were taken by ancient authors.

Second, the question of whether the Gospels are truly an instance of the genre of Greco-Roman biography is highly questionable. In spite of Licona's speculative approach, as will be seen, data can be demonstrated that would cast grave suspicion on this opening premise. His major support for this assumption is scholarly assumption. Willard Swartley, in his *Israel's Scripture Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels*, presents an excellent case for the Gospels as anchored to "common structures and themes rooted in Israel's stories about itself. Common to the synoptic stories are traditions about Israel's past that defined it throughout the centuries: Exodus and Sinai, Way/Conquest, Temple, and Kingship."[31] Strategically, Licona's fatal flaw is he has anchored his hermeneutical approach to the wrong pattern. Instead of Greco-Roman *bioi*, the Gospels, as will be seen in this review, stem from the theme of promise (prophecy in the OT) and fulfillment in Jesus in the New Testament.

Licona's Consensus Thinking Is Subjective and Fleeting

Another troubling aspect to Licona's thinking in both *The Resurrection* and *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels*? is his background philosophical approach for accepting the concept of Greco-Roman *bioi* in the Gospels. His acceptance of this thinking regarding the Gospels as *bioi* revolves around "consensus." "Today, a growing majority of scholars regard the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography."[32] In his previous work, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (2010), he has a predominance of similar

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[30] For instance, many of these data points in Licona may be resolved without any assumption of Greco-Roman Bio.

[31] Willard M. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels Story Shaping Story* (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 1994). Quote from back cover of the book.

[32] Ibid.

thinking that involves "The Role of a Consensus."[33] Although he appears aware of the danger of "consensus" noting that "a consensus can be reached due to shared biases, convictions, objectives and a lack of knowledge" and "while a scholarly consensus can have the positive impact of keeping creativity from going off the deep end, a fear of losing respect from a large segment of the academic community can be a hindrance to breakthroughs in knowledge,"[34] his own acceptance of Greco-Roman *bioi* appears largely driven by his own acceptance of the consensus of current scholarship rather than any objective evidence that the Gospels present the characteristics of *bioi*. He argues, "the consensus of scholarship has shifted significantly from the opinion held by the Jesus Seminar. This shift was initiated by Charles Talbert's work followed by the more comprehensive and influential work by Richard Burridge."[35]

> Consensus thinking is even in his mind about Jesus's miracle working:

> If the nearly universal consensus of scholars is correct that Jesus's earliest followers remembered him as a miracle-worker and exorcist, he very likely performed acts that led to these memories. Of course, that is not to say we can know those acts were divine miracles and exorcisms. Nor is it to say the events occurred precisely as described in the Gospels. It is to say that there are probably historical events that lay behind many of the stories of miracles and exorcisms we read in the Gospels. Even many of those holding that some of the stories have been substantially revised and embellished maintain that historical kernels lay behind them."[36]

Consensus exists in his mind regarding his own synoptic hypothesis that undergirds many of his conclusions: "a majority of scholars hold the Two-Document Hypothesis". . . . Most hold the *Two-Source Hypothesis*, or Two-Document Hypothesis, which states that Matthew and Luke used Mark as their primary source and supplemented Mark with at least one other source . . . I assume Markan priority in this study and that Matthew and Luke often use Mark as their source . . . . I often use Two-Source terminology."[37]

Why is "consensus" so disturbing? In the history of theological scholarship, the "consensus," especially among historical, critical scholarship has been vastly in error in the vast majority of its rise to dominance. Often the majority "consensus" is overturned in succeeding generations. Many times the consensus is swept away by another theological "consensus" that usurps its place. What happens when this consensus is replaced by another, and another?

Frankly, the Two-Source Hypothesis is fraught with difficulties that Licona apparently ignores or is unaware. No one in early church history ever stated that Mark

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[33] Licona, *The Resurrection*, 64.

[34] Ibid., 54.

[35] Ibid., 202.

[36] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 118.

[37] Ibid., 113, 118.

occurred first; it was the most neglected Gospel among church Fathers; its alleged "Q" document has never existed except in hypothetical postulation to save the hypothesis from rejection.[38] Strong evidence exists to show that modern synoptic theories arose from a low- or no-view of inspiration of the Gospels.[39] A significantly large portion of Licona's assertions regarding the comparisons of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke rest precariously on a tenuous proposal. As will be seen, if that proposal has no substance, then neither does Licona's attempts at linking the Synoptic Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* have substance. If this majority rule in his mind is wrong, especially in terms of Greco-Roman *bioi* and the Two-Source Hypothesis that stimulates his observations, then his entire work is cast into grave doubt. Moreover, one wonders if his conclusions are centered in his thinking habit of current "consensus" rather than in any objective analysis of data. A significant weakness that correlates with this is that he too readily dismisses other alternative theories as the motivation for Gospel composition, while marching on to see in the Gospels what he has already determined to be his pre-arranged conclusions.

According to Licona, the Gospels share the following characteristics with Greco-Roman *bioi*. He asserts that "The Gospels contain many of the characteristics of Greco-Roman biography."[40] He cites the following examples:

1. They are written in continuous prose narrative.
2. Stories, logia, anecdotes, and speeches are combined to form a narrative.
3. The life of the main character is not always covered in chronological sequence.
4. Attention is focused on a main character rather than on an era, event, or government as in a history.
5. Little to no attention is provided for psychological analyses of the main character.
6. We learn something of the main character's ancestry and then move rapidly along to the inauguration of his public life.
7. Ancient biographies were of the same general length, with shorter works being under 10,000 words, medium length between 10,000 and 25,000 words, and longer length over 25,000 words. Because a scroll would normally hold a maximum of 25,000 words, most biographies fell in the medium length category so they could be read in a single sitting.
8. 25 to 33 percent of the verbs are "dominated by the subject, while another 15 to 30 percent occur in sayings, speeches or quotations from the person."
9. Lives of philosophers and teachers are usually "arranged topically around collections of material to display their ideas and teachings."

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[38] For further information, see F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: A Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," *MSJ* Spring 1999 10/1 (Spring 1999), 53–86.

[39] For further information, see F. David Farnell "How Views of Inspiration Have Impacted Synoptic Problem Discussions," *MSJ* 13/1 (Spring 2002), 33–64.

[40] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 3.

10. The main subject's character is illuminated through his words and deeds as a model for readers either to emulate or to avoid.[41]

Several responses can be made to these assertions. First, these characteristics are so broad as to be meaningless or at least lacking in enough data to make any tight connection of the Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi*. They are so general that a large variety of historiography from various periods of time could be used to make an alleged link to Greco-Roman historiography. Second, these characteristics cited, especially 1–6, 8–10, fully describe the pattern of the Old Testament writings. For example, Genesis-Deuteronomy, Judges, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Daniel, Ruth, and others could be cited to contain "continuous prose narrative" (Genesis 1–11 as it covers the times from creation to Abraham; Exodus as it covers the time of Israel's foundation as a nation to its entrance into the Promised Land; Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy as they cover narrative of Israel's progression and failure), "stories, logia, anecdotes, speeches to form a narrative (Genesis 12–50 as it covers testimony to the Patriarchs stories, logia, anecdotes [Genesis 12, 15, 22; Joseph's descent and experience in Egypt and his conversations and adventures [Gen. 37–45]); Moses experience in Egypt [Ex. 1–2] at the burning Bush [Ex. 3], his conversation with God [Ex. 3–Deuteronomy]. Daniel would be a book whose life is "not always covered in chronological sequence [Daniel 1–6 vs. 7–12]; Ecclesiastes is focused on a main character, i.e. The Preacher, rather than on an era, event or government as in a history. Ezra and Malachi pay "little attention . . . "for psychological analysis of the main character" to name only a few in the OT. The life of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Solomon, Sampson, Gideon etc. "all exhibit something of the main character's ancestry and then move rapidly to the inauguration of his public life."

Furthermore, similar statistics could be generated in the characteristics of the Old Testament as to the percentage of "verbs" "dominated by the subject, while another similar percentage occurring in "sayings, speeches or quotations from another person" (Genesis-Deuteronomy with main characters; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, etc. all fit these characteristics. Lives of teachers or philosophers "arranged topically around collections of material to display their ideas and teachings" is readily seen in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Isaiah, Ezekiel).

Most of the books in the Old Testament "illuminate" the main subject's character, words, and deeds as a model for readers to emulate (Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel) as well as to avoid, with the Old Testament providing ample examples in their history books of the tragedy of main characters that failed to live a life of obedience and faith (1 Samuel has Saul; 1–2 Kings as well as 1–2 Chronicles) with, for example, Manasseh and many other lives of failed kings of both the Southern and Northern Kingdom. Furthermore, these characteristics are more on the nature of any historical or moral writing that draws lessons from the characters covered or the nature or purpose in the writing rather than being a unique characteristic especially of Greco-Roman biography.

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[41] Ibid., 3–4.

As to the length limitations of Greco-Roman biography, the physical nature of the materials used limited all forms of writing of that day rather than being special to Greco-Roman biography. Luke-Acts naturally would be divided because scrolls became unwieldly if too large simply because of the writing materials rather than uniqueness of the subject of the writing.

A second reason that Licona cites is that "no clear examples of biographies of Jewish sages" existed around the time of Jesus. He asserts that "there are no Rabbinic parallels to the Gospels."[42] One may respond simply that the abundance of connection of the Gospels to the examples in the Old Testament materials cited render the necessity of rabbinic parallels mute. Furthermore, Second Temple Judaism in its characteristics with the oral law that violated the Old Testament teachings ("teachings of the elders"—see Matt. 15:9) render any rabbinical teaching hardly an example that the New Testament should emulate. In the thinking of the Gospels, clearly Jesus is viewed as the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Their model would have been the Old Testament, therefore, rather than the corrupt state of rabbinics in terms of promise (Old Testament) and fulfillment (Messiah Jesus in the Gospels).

This promise and fulfillment theme dominates the New Testament Gospels. Licona readily admits that (1) Plutarch was wealthy: "born into a wealthy family in Chaeronea" and (2) because of that wealth was provided with the opportunity to study rhetoric and then "became a philosopher of the Academy founded by Plato."[43] One would hardly be able to speak of the writers of the Gospels in such a manner, nor were such educational opportunities available to the Jewish writers of Matthew, Mark and John.

The pattern of the many Old Testament writings would have been readily familiar in Acts when Peter and John appeared on trial before the Sanhedrin to answer for the healing of the lame man. In Acts 4:13, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus." Here the terms "uneducated" (ἀγράμματοί) and "untrained" (ἰδιῶται) would hardly raise any confidence in ideas that Galilean fishermen would have been skilled in the Greek art of literature or be able to compose the Gospels (i.e. John) in a similar form to Hellenistic works of the time period. The observation of "uneducated" would be suggestive of men who had little formal training in Jewish methods, let alone Greek literary style. For it strongly implies that the impression of Peter and John on the judging body was that their speech, as well as appearance, lacked any formal education familiar to this elite group, and that Peter and John were from the common Jewish class. Here is a rather insulting observation that the original apostles (i.e., John) were hardly from the upper class of Jewish society who composed the Gospels! While hardly unintelligent as individuals, a strong implication exists that these Jewish followers of Jesus demonstrated marked dissimilarity with the culture of the upper crust, for they had been blue collar hard laborers most of their life (e.g. Matt. 4:18–22; Luke 5:10) most likely with little time to enjoy Jewish, let alone, Greek literary culture. Jesus

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[42] Ibid., 4.

[43] Ibid., 15.

chose men to write the Gospels who were clearly without wealth, standing or means to appreciate the wider literary field or more refined literary nuances of Greco-Roman *bioi* (1 Cor. 1:18–31—"not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God"). Moreover, even with the more literary accounts of Luke–Acts, admittedly, the more educated of Luke's writings were firmly anchored to the Old Testament prophetic revelation and eyewitness accounts of Jews whose culture had little standing with the Roman world as a whole.[44]

Because "Greco-Roman was a broad and flexible genre" with its admitted "hybrid" form, makes any assertions of similarity or particular uniqueness quite precarious. In essence, the most natural motivation and pattern for the Gospels was not Greco-Roman *bioi* but the pattern found in the Old Testament writings. Licona's assertion that "[f]or our purposes, we only need to recognize that the New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography" is at the very least a hasty generalization as well as fraught with difficulties. Similarity does not prove origin. This writer has placed a graph[45] representing the connection of the Gospels to the Old Testament at the end of this article.

Another Fatal Flaw of the Greco-Roman *Bioi* Comparison

Licona, in analyzing Plutarch, states that the following "compositional devices" are seen in his writings. The following quote is lengthy but necessary to cite to demonstrate the weakness of Licona's position:

> [C]lassical scholars have recognized a number of compositional devices that are "practically universal in ancient historiography." Although not always identified by the same terms, the following are some of the compositional devices we will observe in Plutarch's *Lives*, at least the nine *Lives* we will be considering.
>
> 1. *Transferal*: When an author knowingly attributes words or deeds to a person that actually belonged to another person, the author has transferred the words or deeds.
> 2. *Displacement*: When an author knowingly uproots an event from its original context and transplants it in another, the author has displaced the event. Displacement has some similarities with telescoping, which is the presentation of an event as having occurred either earlier or more recently than it actually occurred. Plutarch displaces events and even occasionally informs us he has done so. In *Cat. Min.* 25.5, having told the story of Hortensius's request of Cato that he be allowed to marry Cato's wife, Marcia, Plutarch

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adds, "All this happened later, but as I had mentioned the women of Cato's family it seemed sensible to include it here."

3. *Conflation*: When an author combines elements from two or more events or people and narrates them as one, the author has conflated them. Accordingly, some displacement and/or transferal will always occur in the conflation of stories.

4. *Compression*: When an author knowingly portrays events over a shorter period of time than the actual time it took for those events to occur, the author has compressed the story. Spotlighting: When an author focuses attention on a person so that the person's involvement in a scene is clearly described, whereas mention of others who were likewise involved is neglected, the author has shined his literary spotlight on that person. Think of a theatrical performance. During an act in which several are simultaneously on the stage, the lights go out and a spotlight shines on a particular actor. Others are present but are unseen. In literary spotlighting, the author only mentions one of the people present but knows of the others.

5. *Simplification*: When an author adapts material by omitting or altering details that may complicate the overall narrative, the author has simplified the story.

6. *Expansion of Narrative Details*: A well-written biography would inform, teach, and be beautifully composed. If minor details were unknown, they could be invented to improve the narrative while maintaining historical verisimilitude. In many instances, the added details reflect plausible circumstances. This has been called "creative reconstruction" and "free composition."

7. *Paraphrasing*: Plutarch often paraphrased using many of the techniques described in the compositional textbooks. I had initially considered creating a synopsis of Plutarch's parallel pericopes that we will be examining in the next chapter, which would be arranged in a manner similar to Kurt Aland's *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. However, I decided against including a synopsis because Plutarch paraphrases so often; plus we do not observe in his *Lives* anything close to the near "copy and paste" method that is very often employed by Matthew and Luke.[46]

Based on this comparison, Licona then proceeds to describe the following phenomena to the Gospel writers because they are found in Plutarch: "New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography . . . we should not be surprised when the evangelist employ compositional devices similar to those used by ancient biographers."[47] However, as always, the proverb, the DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS of compositional devices, is very evident.

Because of this comparison to Plutarch and *Bioi* as a whole, Licona characterizes the Gospels as "true enough." In his debate with Ehrman online, he tweeted,

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[46] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 19–20.

[47] Ibid., 6.

Tweet this!
The Gospels paint literary portraits of Jesus that are "true enough."
@MichaelLicona[48]

One wonders how such statements square with John 14:26; 16:13 or 1 John 4:4–6 that the New Testament writers would be led to remember "all things" in Jesus's ministry, as well as the Holy Spirit teaching them "all things" as well as "reminding" them of "everything" Jesus taught. The promise of Spirit-energized minds does not match any description of the Gospels being on a level of "true enough." The same may be said when Licona characterizes Plutarch or Greco-Roman *bioi* as a whole in doing the following:

> The historical accuracy of ancient literature may be viewed in a manner similar to what we observe in movie theaters today. Some movies claim at the beginning to be "based on true events" while others claim to be "inspired by true events." The latter will involve more dramatic license than the former. Even in the former, however, we expect reenacted conversations to be redacted to varying degrees for clarity, dramatic impact, and artistic improvement.[49]

Licona, using Plutarch's *Lives* as the basis of his comparison of Gospel phenomena, asserts that "Plutarch was willing to sacrifice precise historical truth in order to provide greater illumination of his main character's moral qualities."[50] At another place, Licona describes Plutarch as having "made factual errors on occasion" and "less than perfect understanding of the Roman political system and faulty memory. While we should not make light of the errors, the importance of their presence should not be exaggerated."[51] Again, Plutarch "occasionally bends the facts to support the portrait he is painting—a portrait that is largely true although not always entirely so in the details. He does not bend to mislead his readers but rather to emphasize an important deeper truth about his main character that readers can now grasp more fully and emulate." Again, "he had no commitment to present the facts with photographic accuracy or legal precision; nor would his intended readers have expected that of him or of any biographer."[52] Again, Plutarch's commitment to the truth in his *Lives* is genuine but qualified.[53] "Plutarch takes liberties with his sources that would make us uncomfortable in modern biography, adding details or scenes in order to construct what must have happened, or to emphasize a quality that may not have been as matured in the main character as he portrays, or to improve the story for the delight of his readers. This mixture of history and conjecture presents a challenge for historians

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[48] http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/michael-licona-interview/

[49] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 6.

[50] Ibid., 16.

[51] Ibid., 17.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

who desire to get behind such 'improvements' to the *real* person or event."[54] He then concurs with other classicists on Plutarch when he notes,

> There are limits to the extent Plutarch would go to accomplish his biographical objective. Conjecture is present, but it is "never very extensive." While Plutarch felt free to invent an occasional scene, he did not invent entire episodes. He does not engage in lying by attributing to the subject of his Life behavior that would have been foreign to that person. He does not engage in deliberate false-hood. When compared to other biographers of his day, Plutarch is less con-cerned than some to preserve precise historical truth and more concerned than others. Pelling observes, 'On the whole Plutarch seems to belong with the more scrupulous group; and we can certainly see him operating in a similar way to the great historians who survive.'
> In sum, ancient biographers, including Plutarch, did not always write as we would today because their objectives of writing biography differed somewhat from the objectives of modern biography. They would sacrifice a degree of pre-cise historical truth in order to accomplish their objectives. Accordingly, mod-ern readers must be prepared to recalibrate their expectations when reading an-cient biography and history. There are similarities, but there are also important differences.[55]

In reply to Licona's description of Plutarch's characteristics as a biographer, it is *non-sequtur* to say if Plutarch did it, or Greco-Roman biographers as a whole, then evangelists would have employed such tactics. Plutarch could not claim inspiration. Of course, this is putting a hedge around the NT Gospels as many evangelical-critical scholars would reply. The patent truth is that such characteristics would relegate the Gospels to a very imperfect, faulty record of Jesus' life and sayings, unless of course, Licona is implying this already to the Gospel record.

But Licona does not stop with these characteristics, for he clearly states regard-ing these alleged "compositional devices" that, "literary conventions in place for re-porting speeches that were almost universally adopted by those writing history and biography. For the most part, the author did not provide a transcript of a speech but rather the gist of what was spoken on the occasion. If the content was unknown . . . license to creatively reconstruct what must have been said given the occasion and the person. Historians were expected to depict the spirit of the actual message or, at the very minimum, narrate a speech that was likely to have occurred on such an occasion with historical verisimilitude."[56] "Compositional devices that are practically univer-sal in ancient historiography." He relates the following regarding his purpose:

> Various biographers of the era in which Plutarch and the evangelists wrote var-ied in their commitment to accuracy. The sole objective of this research is to

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[54] Ibid., 18.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 18.

identify various compositional devices employed by Plutarch that resulted in differences in the pericopes he reported in two or more *Lives* and to examine the possibility that the evangelists employed similar devices. Accordingly, I am making no suggestion that the evangelists were more or less accurate than Plutarch.[57]

A Summary of Plutarch's Historiography
Characteristics in *Lives*

A "grocery list" of Plutarch's characteristics as a writer also reveal Licona's low view of the canonical Gospels as he describes Plutarch's writings, especially as listed in the summary sections of the pericopes he analyzed in Plutarch. The following are merely a small part of Licona's perception of the historiography of Plutarch and/or Greco-Roman *bioi* (the numbering reflected is the reviewer's and not Licona's) if Plutarch, or any Greco-Roman biographer of choice, is indeed the "standard" for the Gospels:

1. "displaced events"; "faulty memory"; "the gist" "bends the facts to support the portrait he is painting—a portrait that is largely true though not always entirely in the details."[58]
2. "transfer action and/or counsel from one person to the other"[59]
3. "narrative chronologies . . . that are in conflict"[60]
4. "Plutarch has numerical errors on two occasions"[61]
5. "Plutarch has displaced events, conflated them, transferred what one person said to another, and shined his literary spotlight on occasion"[62]
6. "redacted a statement in Caesar in a manner that is less favorable to its main character"[63]
7. "Plutarch inverts the order of events, displaces them, and transplants them in Pompey"[64]
8. "Plutarch transfers or inflects"[65]
9. "Numerical differences are present"; "How many did Caesar conquer?"[66]
10. "[E]rrs in the spelling of a name"[67]

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[57] Ibid., 25.

[58] Ibid., 17, 20, 44, 67.

[59] Ibid., 50.

[60] Ibid., 51.

[61] Ibid., 57.

[62] Ibid., 67.

[63] Ibid., 69.

[64] Ibid., 72.

[65] Ibid., 72.

[66] Ibid., 72–73.

[67] Ibid., 75.

11. "[O]mitting details in order to cast a different and slightly distorted picture pertaining to why Caesar fought Ptolemy"[68]
12. "[C]hanges a statement to a question (or vice versa)"[69]
13. "Plutarch portrays motivations differently and in a manner that favors the main character of a Life"[70]
14. "[D]isplaces an element of one event from its original context, whether known or unknown, and transplants it in another context to which it is conflicted"[71]
15. "[A]ncient historians and biographers may craft peripheral details in a narrative and connect events synthetically in order to produce a narrative that flows smoothly. This may especially be present when numerous details were unknown."[72] [i.e., concocted events]
16. "Plutarch may have transferred the action of one character to another in order to avoid confusion in Caesar"[73]
17. "[R]edacts elements of a story in order to support the portrait he is painting"[74]
18. "[N]umerical differences exist in Cicero, Brutus, and Antony" [two hundred vs. three hundred, so would be error.][75]
19. "[P]rovides differing reports" [that conflict with other reporting he has done].[76]
20. "transferal" one way reported in conflict with another way; "Brutus ordered Hortensius to execute Gaius, whereas in Ant. 22.4, Brutus does the deed"[77]
21. "In light of instructions for good literature writing by Lucian and Quintilian, we determined that historians were permitted to craft peripheral details and connect events synthetically in order to produce a narrative that flows smoothly. We deduced that this might have been practiced especially when numerous details were unknown, and we suspect that this may be the reason behind many of the differences that appear when Plutarch reports the same pericope in multiple *Lives*."[78]

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[68] Ibid., 77.

[69] Ibid., 83.

[70] Ibid., 83.

[71] Ibid., 91.

[72] Ibid., 91.

[73] Ibid., 98.

[74] Ibid., 98.

[75] Ibid., 104.

[76] Ibid., 104.

[77] Ibid., 108.

[78] Ibid., 90.

22. "On occasion, Plutarch errs. Only rarely do his accounts disagree on so many details that we are left puzzled and entirely unaware of what he was doing (e.g., pericope #23)."[79]

23. "The differences we observe almost always could have resulted from Plutarch's use of the compositional devices that have been noted by classical scholars for some time and who have contended that these were standard conventions for writing history and biography of that day and were practiced by virtually all. Moreover, these differences appear to occur only in the peripheral details. And we must consider the possibility that, in many instances, the differences result from Plutarch's recalling the story from memory rather than checking his source(s) and even what he had written earlier in another Life."[80]

With these observations in mind, we will now turn our attention to the Gospels in the New Testament and assess a number of pericopes that appear in two or more of them."[81] We will look for differences in how they report the same story and assess whether it seems likely that the authors were using compositional devices similar to those employed by Plutarch.[82]

Application of "Compositional Devices" Found in Plutarch's *Lives* to the Data of the Gospels

After identifying the canonical Gospels as having a similar historiography to Plutarch's *Lives* and identifying these "compositional devices" that he has discovered in this work, Licona then imposes this framework upon "parallel pericopes in the Canonical Gospels."[83] He analyzes what he alleges are "nineteen pericopes that appear on two or more occasions throughout the canonical Gospels" that, to his perspective, display "the same type of compositional devices described in the compositional textbooks and from the pericopes we [i.e., Licona] examined in Plutarch's *Lives*." Unsurprisingly, Licona's marked bias for his endeavor "finds" the same type of compositional devices in the Gospels that he has presumed were there. His analysis offers little in any objective basis for his conclusions, for he assumes what he is so confident in finding, i.e., he begs the question and assumes that these compositional devices are really there without objective analysis as to whether the Gospel writers actually did use these assumed devices.

One of the primary bases for his discovery of these compositional devices is his operation from the perspective of the Two-Source Hypothesis. If, however, as has been discussed, the Two-Source Hypothesis is dubious, then much of the substance of Licona's alleged similarities becomes highly suspect. None of these nineteen examples that Licona cites require or need to be explained at all by any of these alleged compositional devices that he has discovered in Plutarch. The distinct impression

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[79] Ibid., 110.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 110–11.

[82] Ibid., 111.

[83] Ibid., 112–84.

given in his book is that Licona is so overzealous to prove his thesis of the similarities of the phenomena of the canonical Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* like that found in Plutarch's *Lives* that he frankly discounts any other possible explanation. All of them are well capable of being explained by simple, as well as traditional views, of harmonization that Licona summarily dismisses.

Due to length limitation, only a few strategic examples need be cited that overturn Licona's case of "discovering" such Greco-Roman *bioi* devices. Regarding the Gospel of John, however, based in his synoptic approach of the Two-Source Hypothesis, Licona is dismissive of the historical substance of the Gospel of John as a whole. He asserts that "John often chose to sacrifice accuracy on the ground level of precise reporting, preferring to provide his readers with an accurate, higher-level view of the person and mission Jesus."[84] This is immediately in conflict with the orthodox position on John from the early nascent church that John as an eyewitness to Jesus gave accurate historical reportage of the events, nor would the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy statement endorse such a view when it asserted in Article XVIII, "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teachings or rejecting its claims to authorship." Furthermore, history is wedded to theology (Rom. 5:12–14). If the history is suspect, then any theological conclusions, no matter how "higher level," the view is, such "theology" cannot be true in any acceptable biblical sense.

A natural question to Licona's reasoning must be that if his assertion is true, then how does sacrificing accuracy on precise reporting produce accurately a higher level view of person? What is interesting is that Licona places a footnote reference for this last statement to Richard Burridge's discussion of the Gospel of John. Burridge characterized John's Gospel with the terms "The High-Flying Eagle" reflecting the idea of "divine symbol" whereby John gives deeper spiritual "truth" or "John brings in the vertical—Jesus is above and beyond all that."[85] It was Burridge, the popularizer of this "Greco-Roman" imposition on the Gospels, as well a British classicist in his undergraduate at Oxford, who treated the Gospels more like the substance of mythological stories than that of historical documents. He did so because he too read the Gospels through the eyes of a classical perspective from the influence of his undergraduate education. Burridge said this about John 18:38 as he labeled the substance of John's "high-flying" material as "myth."

Even today, with all our technology of cameras and recorders and verbatim transcripts, there is still debate among academics about the meaning of historical truth, and differences in media between docu-drama and documentary, fiction and faction. We must not transfer these modern concepts to the ancient texts without considering their understandings of truth and myth, lies and fiction. To modern minds, "myth" means something untrue, a "fairy-story"; in the ancient world, myth was the medium whereby profound truth, more true than mere facts could ever be, was com-

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[84] Ibid., 115.

[85] Richard A. Burridge, "The High-Flying Eagle—John's Jesus," in *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 133–64.

municated. Unfortunately, the debate between so-called "conservatives" and "liberals" about authenticity is often conducted in twentieth century terms. As one student asked me, "Why does John keep fabricating material about Jesus despite his expressed concern for the "'truth'"? However, the negative connotation of fabrication is modern."[86]

Licona operates from this basis of Burridge, for he alleges that John may well have made up or "created" the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate in John,

> The discussions between Jesus and Pilate are described in much greater detail in John (18:33–38; 19:8–11) than in the Synoptics. It could be suggested that much of the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus is a Johannine creation, since the Synoptic narratives do not suggest that anyone else was present to overhear the exchanges, much less any of Jesus's disciples. Of course, this suggestion can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed.[87]

One is left wondering whether the whole substance in John's record is imaginative creation since if one possibility is allowed, why not the whole?

This thinking then continues into his discussion of Luke, when Licona comments,

> [I]t is worth observing what Luke 23:3–4 says: "Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And Jesus answered, 'Yes.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no cause for guilt in this man.'" Luke's report seems implausible if read independently of John. Would the Roman governor respond in such a manner after Jesus had just affirmed himself as a king? Yet Pilate's response to Jesus's claim to be a king is entirely plausible if a dialogue had occurred between the two that was at least somewhat similar to what we read in John. Since John was probably written after Luke and is largely independent of Luke, both evangelists must have known a tradition such as we read in John. Whether John received detailed information from someone who had been present at Jesus's dialogue with Pilate or whether he knew a very basic gist of what was said and creatively reconstructed the dialogue with literary artistry is impossible to know.[88]

Complicating this professed bias that lies latent in Licona and others who advocate Greco-Roman *bioi*, is his need to support his thesis by postulating hypothetical documents behind the Gospels,

> "In many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if an evangelist has altered his source or is using another. We must also be open to the possibility that there were multiple recensions of the Gospels and that Luke used an earlier or later recension of Mark than one possessed by Matthew."[89]

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[86] Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, 169.

[87] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 116.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

He invents multiple recensions out of a hat to make his hypothesis work: subjectivity of sources!:

> In many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if an evangelist has altered his source or is using another. We must also be open to the possibility that there were multiple recensions of the Gospels and that Luke used an earlier or later recension of Mark than the one possessed by Matthew. Different recensions may have existed for a variety of reasons, such as multiple drafts or authorial redaction to accommodate a different recipient.[90]

Where is the autograph? What happened to these drafts? No textual evidence whatsoever. When his textual theory cannot explain phenomena in Gospels, he resorts to allowing hypothesis of multiple editions or drafts of gospels or authorial redaction to "accommodate" a different recipient.

He allows for the possibility that John may have used creative dialogue from basic "gist":

> It is also possible, perhaps probable, that some differences may carry the appearance of being in greater tension with one another than is actually the case because the Gospel narratives are not exhaustive. The discussions between Jesus and Pilate are described in much greater detail in John (18:33–38; 19:8–11) than in the Synoptics. It could be suggested that much of the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus is a Johannine creation, since the Synoptic narratives do not suggest that anyone else was present to overhear the exchanges, much less any of Jesus's disciples. Of course, this suggestion can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed. However, it is worth observing what Luke 23:3–4 says: "Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And Jesus answered, 'Yes.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no cause for guilt in this man.'" Luke's report seems implausible if read independently of John. Would the Roman governor respond in such a manner after Jesus had just affirmed himself as a king? Yet Pilate's response to Jesus's claim to be a king is entirely plausible if a dialogue had occurred between the two that was at least somewhat similar to what we read in John. Since John was probably written after Luke and is largely independent of Luke, both evangelists must have known a tradition such as we read in John. Whether John received detailed information from someone who had been present at Jesus's dialogue with Pilate or whether he knew a very basic gist of what was said and creatively reconstructed the dialogue with literary artistry is impossible to know.[91]

Complicating this treatment of the Gospels' historical material, Licona allows for displacing of pericope from its original context, redacting it, transplanting it placed where thought fitting or what he terms "cross pollination"—taking elements from one area and adding to another part of the Gospel:

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

> When a story with striking similarities appears in different contexts and con-
> tains differences, it is often difficult to discern whether (a) we are reading about
> two similar but different events and a few of the details from one have cross-
> pollinated to the other; (b) one of the evangelists displaced the pericope from
> its original context, redacted it, and transplanted it in another; (c) the pericope
> was free-floating outside of any context and each evangelist planted it where he
> thought fitting; or (d) we are reading a "stump speech" that Jesus gave on many
> occasions.[92]

He admits to conjecture, "much of what an ancient author did and why he did it will
remain in the realm of informed guesswork for modern historians . . . I am only sur-
mising some of their compositional techniques, given what we have learned from the
compositional textbooks, a few other sources, and the rare opportunities where we
can compare how an ancient author redacted the source we know he used."[93] Again,
one is left in grave doubt as to the historical nature of the only four accounts of Jesus's
life.

Licona also alleges that his approach maintains "largely neutral of partisan the-
ological and philosophical commitments."[94] Yet, his entire approach is replete with
philosophical elements that apparently Licona is ignorant of, especially since he ap-
proaches the issue through historical-critical ideologies that stem from a hostile, phil-
osophical takeover of the Gospel text.[95] He goes on to argue that, "I will rarely offer
comments pertaining to the historicity of an event or logion and/or its possible theo-
logical implications."[96] Yet, his whole proffering of "compositional devices" being
used in the Gospels like Plutarch's *Lives* brings massive doubt as well as suspicion
on the historical substance of the Gospel material. Licona admits he is in the camp
that "tend to view miracle reports appearing in the Gospel narratives with more con-
fidence in their historicity" and that "I have unashamedly chosen membership in the
later account." His method and approach, however, again contradicts such an associ-
ation.

His tepid affirmation of the possibility of miracles in the Gospels is reflected in
the following statement, being based once again in "consensus" thinking:

> If the nearly universal consensus of scholars is correct that Jesus's earliest fol-
> lowers remembered him as a miracle-worker and exorcist, he very likely per-
> formed acts that led to these memories. Of course, that is not to say we can
> know those acts were divine miracles and exorcisms. Nor is it to say the events
> occurred precisely as described in the Gospels. It is to say that there are proba-
> bly historical events that lay behind many of the stories of miracles and exor-
> cisms we read in the Gospels. Even many of those holding that some of the

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[92] Ibid., 117.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 118.

[95] See F. David Farnell, "Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism," *The Jesus Crisis*, 85–131; idem. "How Views of Inspiration Have Impacted Synoptic Problem Discussions."

[96] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 118.

stories have been substantially revised and embellished maintain that historical kernels lay behind them.[97]

He then hedges his proposal with the following caveat, "My proposed solutions are tentative."[98] However, even his "tentative" solutions to the Gospel phenomena have profoundly negative impact on the trustworthiness of the Gospels' records of Jesus lie.

Perhaps more strategically, every one of these nineteen pericopes cited by Licona that allegedly display "compositional devices" are well capable of being explained without presupposing any such creative devices. Simple harmonization explains every last one of them. The following examples are not exhaustive but merely representative of Licona's attempt at "compositional devices" as applied to the Gospels. One is encouraged to read Licona's work and determine whether any alleged "compositional devices" are needed, or, for that matter, are even valid.

Examples of Licona's Approach Solved
Through Simple Harmonization

The first example, #1 (#13–16, 18), is John the Baptist and Jesus at Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:2–11; Matt. 3:1–17; Luke 3:1–18, 21–22; John 1:19–34). Licona asserts that "[t]here are numerous differences within this pericope, and it will quickly become apparent that the evangelists employed many of the devices found in the compositional textbooks discussed in chapter 1."[99] Licona argues, "Whereas the Synoptic authors tell their readers that John the Baptist is the messenger of whom Isaiah spoke, John 1:23 narrates John the Baptist claiming he is the messenger of whom Isaiah spoke. All four Gospels give the same message while John offers it as the words of John the Baptist. Perhaps John transferred the message of Isaiah to the lips of John the Baptist. It is impossible to know. And there is no reason why John the Baptist could not have made such a claim about himself."[100] One is left wondering whether John actually said this or not as recorded in John, especially since John "answered them saying" in 1:25. The simple harmonization is that the Gospel writers and John both made this claim for John. No compositional device is needed.

Again, "Matthew 3:7 or Luke 3:7 changed the recipient being addressed." In Matthew 3:7 it is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees, while in Luke 3:7 it is addressed to the multitudes. No change creatively in recipients is needed. The natural explanation is that Matthew focused attention particularly on John's condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees, while Luke was aware that John's condemnation was, at times, more broad.

In the third example, #3—Man with Withered Hand (Mark 3:1–6; Matt. 12:9–14; Luke 6:6–11), Licona alleges, "It is possible that Matthew locates this event on a

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[97] Ibid. (underlining added).

[98] Ibid., 119.

[99] Ibid., 120.

[100] Ibid., 121.

different day than Luke."[101] While it is true that Luke uses "another [ἐτέρῳ σαββάτῳ] Sabbath" the other Gospels do not provide enough specificity to make any such conclusion that there is a conflict on which Sabbath this occurred. Both Matthew and Mark have no clear markers to supply such a dislocation or factual error. No such conclusion is necessary since the information supplied is in Matthew or Mark. The context of Matthew 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6; and Luke 6:1–11 gives primary focus on a series of Sabbath controversies (plucking grain and healing) rather than on identifying any specific Sabbath when such conflicts occurred.

Licona alleges that "Matthew converts Jesus's one-sided address to the Jewish leaders into a dialogue." No such creative conversion is necessary at all. Matthew focuses his attention on the style of rabbinic debate that actually took place between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees—question and counter-question, while Luke focuses more on Jesus' interaction, rather than on the Pharisees. No such conversion need to be postulated as taking place. Gundry noted this when he commented, "Jesus' following question becomes a counter question in the style of a rabbinic debate . . . Matthew . . . juxtaposes the counter question alongside the Pharisees' question."[102]

The dialogue can be simply harmonized as follows, reflecting this rabbinic style of questioning that actually, historically occurred—no creation needed of dialogue. Each gospel writer is giving a supplementary description from varying but not conflicting perspectives:

1. The Pharisees and their scribes institute a rabbinic questioning dialogue with Jesus, anticipating Jesus's action of about to heal the man with the withered hand: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him" (Matt. 12:9). Jesus has a habit of doing such things on the Sabbath and this irritates them (as seen in the previous pericope of Matt 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5 when He and His disciples violated the rabbinical rules of the Sabbath)

2. Jesus knows their thoughts against Him that they were trying to seek an occasion to accuse Him (Luke 6:7–8) and defiantly tells the man to come to Him and stand in Mark 3:3 and Luke 6:8.

3. Jesus then uses the rabbinical style and directs their question directly back onto them, saying "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11–12) and gives back their question again and repeats also "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm?" thus repeating their original question to Him (Matt. 12:12b) as also reflected in Mark 3:4 and Luke 6:9).

4. The Pharisees and scribes will not answer Jesus's same question in rabbinical style of back and forth that they had posed to Jesus; they remain silent (Mark 3:4). They expect Him to answer, but He wants them to answer their own question to highlight their inconsistency.

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[101] Ibid., 129.

[102] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*. 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 226.

5. Jesus then tells the man to stretch out his hand and heals him (Matt 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:10).

No creative "compositional" dialogue like Plutarch need be proffered. The whole conversation took place, with no Gospel writer making up conversations necessary.

Another example is Licona's take on the Gadarene demoniacs (Mark 5:1; Matt. 28–34; Luke 8:26–39). Licona notes, "Matthew may have used a different source or illustrated multiple demons through creating an additional person or conflated two stories."[103] Here Licona posits a compositional device where he believes that since Mark has one demon, while Matthew has two, that Matthew made up another demon creatively. The obvious replies to this are: (1) Licona is driven by his Two-Source theory. Since he believes Matthew used Mark and Mark has one demon, then Matthew has made up another for some purpose. However, if Markan priority is not true, and it is not, then Mark has merely left out one demon and focuses instead on the action of the leading character who was possessed, living among the tombs, i.e. there were two demons. It is merely a matter of perspective of each writer, with one supplying additional supplementary information that two demons existed in this story. Nothing need be made up. Yet, Licona asserts that "Furthermore, for reasons unknown to us, Matthew doubles up elsewhere when the other Gospels present one figure. A blind beggar in Mark 10:46–52 and Luke 18:35–43 becomes two beggars in Matt. 20:29–34.38 A donkey in Mark 11:1–11 // Luke 19:29–34 // John 12:12–15 becomes a donkey and her colt in Matt. 21:1–11."[104] The simple answer is that this is no mystery: there were two of each and Matthew includes that information. Since he assumes Markan priority one would guess that, for some reason, Mark only mentions one as a habit!

Carson's comment here is relevant, "The best explanation is that Matthew had independent knowledge of the second man. Mention of only one by the other Gospel writers is not problematic. Not only was one sufficient for the purposes at hand, but where one person is more remarkable or prominent, it is not uncommon for the Gospels to mention only that one."[105]

However, Licona does not stop there. He relates, "[t]here is another possible solution. Matthew is prone to abbreviate stories found in Mark . . . . Perhaps Matthew has doubled up the demoniac in order to compensate for not telling the story of Jesus healing another demoniac mentioned earlier in Mark 1:21–28."[106] One is left wondering whether the Gospels are able to convey any real substance of what actually happened when Licona allows for the possibility of stories being combined. Why did not Matthew tell the story in Mark 1:21–28? While ultimate reasons are unknown, the most patent answer is that Matthew was NOT using Mark, nor is he required to include any such story. The reasons for inclusion or exclusion of stories are left to the unknown thinking and/or purposes of an author that is immaterial to this discus-

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[103] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 132.

[104] Ibid., 132.

[105] D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 217.

[106] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 132.

sion nor can ultimately be determined. Another example of "compositional creativity" is Licona's take on Jarius's daughter in Mark 5:21–43; Matthew 9:18–26; Luke 8:40–56. He asserts that,

> In Mark 5:30, Jesus asked, "Who touched my garments?" In Luke 8:45 he asked, "Who touched me?" In Mark 5:39, Jesus said to those mourning, "Why the commotion and weeping? The child did not die but is sleeping." In Luke 8:52, he said, "Do not weep. For she did not die but is sleeping." Luke changed Jesus's question in Mark to a statement. In Matthew 9:24, he said, "Leave. For the girl did not die but is sleeping." Matthew likewise changed Jesus's question in Mark to a command.[107]

A simple harmonization may be offered as a reasonable explanation without any such creativity or change: both question and statement are natural. Jesus said both. In the situation of mourning, Jesus's interruption of the process and the crowd's focus on grief ("tumult"—Mark 5:38) may well have resulted in Jesus's catching their attention in this manner. The incredulity of the crowd in that they "laughed at him, knowing he was dead" (Luke 8:53) may well have required Jesus to both question them and make statements that are similar. They frankly didn't believe what he was saying. Furthermore, such speculation on Licona's part is being driven by his synoptic hypothesis of the priority of Mark and postulating that Mark is original so Matthew or Luke has changed it. If his synoptic hypothesis is wrong, so is his speculation ill-founded as to the others changing Mark's presentation into something else.

Licona also allows for the possibility of "doublets" that he defines as "[o]ne original tradition appears in two different settings within the same book as though occurring on separate occasions."[108] In the story of the two blind men—Mark 10:46–52—he proposes the possibility that this is a case of doublets:

> The most striking difference, however, pertains to the number of blind men in this pericope. There is one in Mark and Luke, whereas there are two in Matthew. Thus, Mark and Luke have the beggar cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on me," and Matthew has, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" As we observed in the preceding pericope, Matthew, who was given to abbreviating Mark, may have doubled up on the number of blind men in order to include another story from Mark 8:22–26 of Jesus healing the blind that Matthew will not otherwise mention."[109]

Licona believes in doublets as a possibility in another place,

> But Matthew 20:29–34 may have a doublet in 9:27–31. In that context, Jesus healed a leper (8:1–4), healed a paralyzed man (8:5–13), healed others and cast out demons (8:14–17), healed two demoniacs (8:28–34), healed another paralytic (9:1–8), raised a dead girl (9:18–26), healed two blind men (9:27–31), and

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[107] Ibid., 133–34.

[108] Ibid., 267.

[109] Ibid., 135.

healed a demoniac who was mute (9:32–34). John the Baptist was imprisoned and appeared to be in doubt about Jesus. So he sent a few of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?" (11:3). Jesus told them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame are walking, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, even the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (11:4–5). John the Baptist could thus be assured Jesus was the Messiah, since he was doing the very things expected of the Messiah (Isa. 61:1; 4Q521). Accordingly, Matthew may have included the doublet (although with variations) he would repeat later in 20:29–34 to provide an example of Jesus healing the blind as evidence for Jesus being the Messiah. If the healing of two blind men in Matt. 9 is a doublet, it could weaken the proposal that Matthew added another blind man to Bartimaeus in order to account for another story of Jesus healing the blind man mentioned in Mark but not covered in Matthew. But there was no need to do so if Matthew twice narrated this story of Jesus healing two blind men.[110]

Once again, such speculation depends on the validity of his speculative synoptic theory. Also, one wonders about his concept of the historical integrity of the Gospels in proposing that the writers would present an event as if it happened in this way and yet it did not by placing it in different contexts as if one event were two.

Licona also asserts an alleged chronological imprecision on Luke's part: "Luke shows a disinterest in chronological precision and inverts events as he does elsewhere (Matt. 4:5–11 // Luke 4:5–13; Matt. 12:41–42 // Luke 11:31–32; Matt. 27:50–51 // Luke 23:45– 46)."[111] He continues,

In Mark 10:46, Jesus had come to Jericho and was now leaving the city when the blind beggar cried out to him. In Matt. 20:29, he was also leaving Jericho. But in Luke 18:35, Jesus was approaching Jericho. Various solutions to this difference in Luke have been proposed. If Luke is using Mark as his primary source at this point, which he appears to be doing given the order of the preceding events, he may have preferred to narrate the event prior to Jesus entering Jericho and then include a story unique to Luke about a tax collector in that city named Zacchaeus. Of course, Luke could have narrated Jesus healing the blind beggar after the story of Zacchaeus in order to maintain chronological accuracy with Mark. However, as we have observed elsewhere, chronological precision does not appear to have been very important to ancient biographers, including Luke.[112]

In reply, it should be noted that (1) this again is based on Licona's use of Mark as the other synoptics' primary source; (2) Luke's prologue suggests an interest in chronol-

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[110] Ibid., 134.

[111] Ibid., 136.

[112] Ibid., 134–35.

ogy otherwise; 1:2–4—"it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught"; (3) while the Gospel writers did not have to write exacting chronology at times, depending on the purpose, it does not mean that they were careless either; (4) the differences in these accounts argue strongly for separate, eyewitness accounts and their differing perspectives that are most likely complementary rather than conflicting.

The story of the feeding of the five thousand and the events surrounding it also highlight Licona's thinking (Mark 6:31–56; Matt 14:13–36; Luke 9:10b–17; John 6:1–25). In one video, Licona said, "probably Mark is confused" regarding the chronology of the events.[113] After this event, Licona back-tracked and related that "we sometimes make statements that do not necessarily reflect our thinking precisely and that, given more time to think about our wording carefully, we'd say things differently. That is what you heard in that McLatchie interview with my comments related to Mark being confused. So, please go with what I wrote in the article as a more precise articulation of my view."[114]

Licona also faults the memory of the apostles regarding the events of the feeding. For him, in trying to reconcile the differences in the movements of Jesus and His disciples during the feeding of the multitudes, he argues "[either John slightly compresses or one or more of the evangelists artistically weave elements into their narrative that were not remembered in a precise manner."[115] He argues that in this account, "The largest difference concerns the location where Jesus fed the five thousand."[116] He continues,

> Harmonizing the accounts in order to reconcile the differing details pertaining to the location of the feeding is difficult. Luke places it at or very close to Bethsaida, whereas Mark places it anywhere but Bethsaida, since after the feeding Jesus tells his disciples to cross over to Bethsaida. Matthew, Mark, and John tell us they landed on the west side of the lake, and John tells us that is where they had intended to land. Accordingly, it will not work to harmonize the accounts by asserting the disciples intended to go to Bethsaida but were blown off course and landed in Capernaum.[117]

Yet, one wonders about Licona's view of inspiration when he can posit "confusion" on the part of the Gospel writers. Very reasonable harmonizations can solve any alleged confusion on the part of the four-fold account of the Gospels.[118]

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[113] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UPg-QpBxq8.

[114] http://freethinkingministries.com/inerrancy-debate/

[115] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 139.

[116] Ibid., 138.

[117] Ibid., 138–39.

[118] See http://defendinginerrancy.com/was-mark-confused/

Furthermore, even evangelical-critical scholar Stanley Porter seems to have no trouble harmonizing this account when he notes, "In conclusion, I argue that the apparent contradiction of Luke 18:35 with Mark 10:46 and Matt 20:29 is caused by a failure to appreciate the semantic range of Luke's use of ἐγγίζειν. This may be a verb of motion for Luke, but it seems much more likely that it is primarily a verb of location. Thus, Luke 18:35 should be rendered "when he was in the vicinity of Jericho."[119]

Evangelical-critical scholar, Gundry, also supports standard harmonization when he observes,

> Mark writes 'toward Bethsaida' after 'to the other side.' Bethsaida causes a difficulty in that the other side turns out to be Gennesaret, a plain south of Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, rather than Bethsaida, a town on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 6:53). Mark's text may imply that after the disciples set out from a deserted place on the western side and gone some distance toward Bethsaida, the storm blew them backward—'the wind was against them' (Mark 6:48)—so that after Jesus calmed the storm they finally landed at Gennesaret.[120]

One observation is necessary here: to posit the potentiality of "imprecise memory" or confusion on the part of the Gospel writers on Licona's part is highly dubious as to his assertions that he stands on the side of "confidence" in the Gospel accounts.

Another take on Licona's part for compositional device usage is found in the pericope on the question of who is greatest among the disciples (Mark 9:33–37; 10:13–16, 35–45; Matt. 18:1–6; 19:13–15; 20:20–28; Luke 9:46–48; 18:15–17; 22:24–30). Here Licona imposes a compositional device that asserts Matthew transfers [dialogue] by having the disciples initiate the discussion rather than Jesus: "Matthew transfers by having the disciples initiate the discussion rather than Jesus." In Mark 9:33–34, Jesus initiates a discussion of what they were discussing along the journey about who is greatest, while with Matthew 18:1–5 Jesus asks about "who is the greatest." From Licona's perspective, the Gospel writers apparently felt free to change the reportage of the dialogue from one person to another as a creative composition. Yet, Carson has an excellent harmonization of these two places without any need for a Greco-Roman compositional device,

> Mark 9:33–38 says that the disciples were disputing along the way, and when challenged they fell silent. Luke (9:46–48) says Jesus discerned their thoughts. It is not difficult or unnatural to support that Jesus detected their rivalry (Luke), challenged them, and thereby silenced them (Mark), and that they then blurted out their question (Matthew) or "alternatively Matthew uses this brief question to summarize what was on their mind."[121]

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[119] Stanley E. Porter, "In the Vicinity of Jericho": Luke 18:35 in the Light of its Synoptic Parallels," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992), 91–104 (quote from p. 104).

[120] Gundry, *Matthew*, 296.

[121] Carson, *Matthew*, 396.

Harmonizing this through simple logic, the following may have likely occurred,

1. Mark has disciples disputing along the way about greatness—Jesus asks them, "What were you discussing along the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.
2. Jesus detects rivalry in Luke 9:46—Jesus perceived the thought of their hearts.
3. In Matthew 18:1—the disciples finally ask Jesus the question. The silence lasts only for a while reflected in Mark 9:34, then they blurt out "Who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

The conclusion that naturally can be reached through simple harmonization is that no transference occurred. No need exists to postulate any compositional device, unless, as is in Licona's case, he is reading back into the Gospels what he must see in order to support his thesis.

Licona also allows for such a discussion of humility among the disciples to have been placed in areas of the Gospels where it did not actually occur. On this humility and greatest discussion, Licona argues, "we should expect that Jesus would have said it on many occasions . . . . It is unnecessary to suggest each evangelist redacted the tradition and placed it where he thought fitting, although such a solution is plausible and equally possible."[122] He allows for this possibility of displacement because of Mark 10:35–37, with the occurrences of this a week earlier than the dispute along the way over greatest with the dispute of James and John about greatness as well as in Luke 22:24–27 when Jesus countered the disciples' argument over greatness at the Last Supper. Licona argues that "[i]f Mark is Luke's source for this tradition, Luke's redaction of and displacement of the tradition to a different context gives us an idea of Luke's flexibility with the tradition."[123] Again, simple harmonization and common sense must come into the discussion. Due to the denseness of the disciples, such a dispute was experienced several times, not just one (e.g., Matt. 16:7; Mark 8:17–20).

In Licona's take on the cleansing of Temple, he allows for a compositional "displacement" whereby one cleansing becomes two, "John may have displaced the temple cleansing to the beginning of Jesus's ministry."[124] Yet, even Licona admits wording differences in the story of the cleansing: "Jesus's words to those he drove out differ slightly among the Synoptics and even more in John."[125]

Once again, Carson presents a very reasonable case for two temple cleansings: "The great majority of contemporary scholars believe there was only one cleansing of the temple and debate about whether the Synoptists or John put it at the right time in Jesus ministry. Although some argue that the event occurred early in Jesus' ministry (John), more side with the Synoptics in placing it late. Certainly, we have ample evidence that the evangelists arranged some material topically; yet there are, in this

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[122] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 141.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid., 145.

[125] Ibid., 144.

instance, numerous reasons for the possibility, indeed the likelihood, of two separate cleansings—something most commentators never seriously consider."[126] He then goes on to list the following very reasonable evidence for two:

1. Leon Morris (John, pp. 288ff) has shown the striking differences between the details John provides and those the Synoptics provide. If there was but one cleansing, some of these differences became surprising, if two cleansings, they became quite reasonable.

2. Those who hold that John's placing of the cleansing is topical usually assume that he does so to lead up to the saying, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19), part of his "replacement theme"—viz., that Jesus himself replaces much of the Jewish cultic milieu. But this view fails to provide any reason for shifting the temple's cleansing so as to make it an *early* theme in Jesus' ministry. Moreover, in this particular case the temple-replacement theme is reflected in the trial of Jesus in two of the Synoptics (Matt 26:61; Mark 14:58).

3. If the Synoptics fail to mention the earlier cleansing, this may go back to their omission of Jesus' entire early Judean ministry.

4. Some hold that if Jesus had inaugurated his ministry by cleansing the temple, the authorities would not have let him do it a second time. But two or three years have elapsed. The money changers and merchants, protected by the temple police, doubtless returned the day after the first cleansing. But it is doubtful that tight security would have been kept up for months and years. This second cleansing took a few dramatic minutes and could not have been prevented, and its prophetic symbolism spread throughout Jerusalem.

5. It is difficult to tell from the Gospels how much the cleansings(s) of the temple contributed to official action against Jesus, and to overstate the evidence is easy. . . . But a second cleansing as Passover drew near was far more likely to have led to the authorities' violent reaction than the first one.[127]

Licona also asserts that the Gospels present differing days of when the cleansing occurred, that is they conflict on the day it occurs: "The chronology of the events differs. All four Gospels narrate Jesus's triumphal entry on Sunday. In Mark, Jesus's temple cleansing occurs on the following day, Monday, while in Matthew and Luke, it appears to have occurred on Sunday. If Matthew and Luke have Sunday in mind, they or their source have probably compressed the story." This apparent discrepancy may be solved in noting that two trips on Jesus's part occurred to the temple in this time period—Mark makes these two clear, while Matthew and Luke compress. Even Licona must admit "It is grammatically possible to read Matthew (with Mark) as having Jesus cleanse the temple on Monday." A harmonization may be presented as follows,

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[126] Carson, *Matthew*, 441.

[127] Ibid.

Mark, however, used more detailed, chronological language. On the first day, Jesus went into Jerusalem and the temple (Mark 11:1–11), then later that day He and His apostles departed for Bethany. "Now the next day, when they had come out of Bethany" (11:12, emp. added), Jesus again went into Jerusalem and into the temple. Unlike His trip to the temple the previous day, this time Jesus entered the temple "to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple" (Mark 11:15–18). Thus, Jesus actually made two trips to the temple: once on the day of His triumphal entry (Mark 11:11), then again "the next day" to cleanse the temple (Mark 11:12,15–18). In this instance, Mark's account is more sequential, while Matthew's is more of a summary.[128]

And again,

Keep in mind that neither Matthew nor Mark was mistaken in his account. We often report events with the same variety. Sometimes we speak more chronologically, while at other times more generally. Consider the family that returns home to tell friends about a trip to Disney World. One family member may summarize everything they did while at Epcot, while another family member may speak more specifically about how they actually went to Epcot parts of two different days and were able to see all sorts of things. No one would be justified in alleging that either family member was mistaken. Likewise, Matthew and Mark's accounts are complementary—not contradictory.[129]

The end result of this sampling is that no example Licona provides of these compositional devices alleging paralleling Plutarch's *Lives* and the canonical Gospels are necessary, or even likely, conclusions.

Licona's Conclusions

Licona's "Conclusion"[130] section in his book is especially a must read for every Bible-believing person who is evaluating Licona's comparison of the Gospels with Plutarch's *Lives* and Greco-Roman biography. For the sake of summary, here are some quotes that should be listed from this section, that identifies alleged parallels between the Gospels and Greco-Roman *bioi* that he believes have been established by his work and others (the numbering is the reviewer's, not Licona).

(1) "BY THE BEGINNING of the twenty-first century, a paradigm shift had occurred. No longer viewing the Gospels as *sui generis* (i.e., of a unique genre), the majority of New Testament scholars had embraced the view of Richard Burridge and others before him that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography, as noted in our introduction. This genre permitted a degree of elasticity in how stories were reported."[131]

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[128] http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=2813

[129] Ibid.

[130] Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 197–202.

[131] Ibid., 197.

RESPONSE—The pattern of the Gospels is NOT Greco-Roman *bioi* but the Old Testament. The Old Testament pattern contained in its 36 books of promise and fulfillment fully explains the writings found in the Gospels.

(2) Very little to date has been written pertaining to how reading the Gospels in view of their biographical genre can shed light on the multitude of differences in their reports. We sought in chapters 1–2 to identify specific compositional devices employed in ancient biographical literature.[132]

RESPONSE—The canonical Gospels' usage of such devices has not been demonstrated by Licona. These compositional devices are easily explained by simple harmonization without any need for postulating of any such Greco-Roman compositional devices.

(3) We then turned our attention in chapter 3 to nine of Plutarch's *Lives*, which provide modern historians with a rare opportunity to examine how one author narrates the same story differently in different contexts. Like the Gospels, these *Lives* belong to Greco-Roman biography, were written in the same language, Greek, and were written within only a few decades of the Gospels. We identified thirty-six pericopes Plutarch narrates in two or more of the nine *Lives* and then observed that Plutarch compresses stories, conflates them, transfers what one character said to the lips of a different person, inverts the order of events, rounds numbers, simplifies, and displaces a story or an element of a story from its original context and then transplants it in a different one, occasionally using a synthetic chronology. The most common device we observed Plutarch using was literary spotlighting. Plutarch often adapts his narrative in accordance with the law of biographical relevance. He paraphrases logia and larger blocks of content. On most occasions, his paraphrasing appears to have no objective behind it other than to follow the literary conventions of his day. He occasionally crafts peripheral details in a creative reconstruction when they were unknown in order to move the narrative along smoothly or perhaps to assist him in making a point that was generally accurate pertaining to the situation though not technically precise. Still, even the crafted details are usually not far from the truth. Although Plutarch errs on occasion, the differences we observe almost always seem to result from Plutarch's use of the compositional devices that have been posited by classical scholars as being standard conventions for writing ancient history and biography.[133]

RESPONSE: Plutarch's *Lives* are the *wrong* paradigm for the Gospels, as is the whole of Greco-Roman *bioi*. Merely because Plutarch did these things is *non-sequitur* in asserting that the canonical Gospels did the same or similar literary devices. While Plutarch erred, the Gospels do not (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:4–6).

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[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 197–98.

(4) Despite the fact that the evangelists employ many of the same compositional devices that were taught in the compositional textbooks and others that were employed by Plutarch, the extent of editing by the evangelists is minimal by ancient standards . . . .

Our analysis of thirty-six pericopes that appear on two or more occasions in Plutarch's *Lives* supports the conclusions of classical scholars that the type of compositional devices we have identified were standard practice in writing biographical literature in that era. When this background knowledge is added to the fact that the Gospels share close affinity to Greco-Roman biography, the same genre in which Plutarch's *Lives* fit, and that a significant amount of the differences in the Gospels can be easily understood in light of this background knowledge, it becomes quite plausible that the evangelists were aware of and made use of many of the compositional devices we inferred from Plutarch's *Lives* as well as those prescribed in the compositional textbooks. Thus, the suspicions of many New Testament scholars that the evangelists used compositional devices similar to those we have identified in this book are correct. Accordingly, we now have some more clearly defined and assured ideas pertaining to how the flexibility of ancient biography impacts our understanding of the Gospels.[134]

RESPONSE: Licona has NOT proven his case whatsoever. He imposes his ideas upon the Gospels by merely refusing to perform simple harmonization, which harmonization provides ample evidence to dismiss any of his hypothetical "compositional devices."

Conclusion to Licona's Case for Plutarch's *Lives* and Greco-Roman Biography

Bart Ehrman perhaps sums up best any replies to Licona. In his debate with Licona, he offered some strategic points that cannot be refuted by Licona,

If an author's willing to change the details of one story—why not other stories?—@BartEhrman

Greco-Roman *bioi* is the "pandora's box" whereby evangelical critical scholars undermine the historical integrity of the Gospels.

Again, Ehrman recognized that Licona does not follow the orthodox understanding of the Gospels, as has been maintained through simple harmonization,

I would like to point out an interesting phenomenon, which I think is probably an empirical fact, that the only people who think the Gospels are absolutely accurate in every detail are Christian fundamentalists who are committed for theological reasons to thinking that the Bible cannot have any mistakes of any

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[134] Ibid., 199–200

kind whatsoever because the authors were inspired to write exactly what happened in every detail. <u>Mike is clearly not in that fundamentalist camp.</u>[135]

I agree with Bart Ehrman's evaluation of Licona! Ehrman was once part of the "fundamentalist" (term often used in a highly pejorative sense by evangelical critical scholars) camp and recognizes aberration from it when he sees it.

Investigating this new "fad" by evangelical-critical scholars of Greco-Roman *bioi* reminded this reviewer of Luke's statement in Acts 17:21, "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new." Evangelical-critical scholars have become the new "Athenians" and join their Society of Biblical Literature friends in assaulting the Gospels' historicity. Evangelical Theological Society should now join with the Society of Biblical Literature, for no real differences exist. While ETS claims they follow inerrancy, and even use ICBI as a guide, such facts are contradicted by practice. Furthermore, a basic seminary dissertation goal of "expressing something new or new discovery" in a dissertation seems to be at odds with the New Testament goal of holding fast to faithfulness to the Word as expressed in Titus 1:9, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict," as well as 2 Timothy 2:2— "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

MAJOR ELEMENTS COMMON TO OT/NT WRITING PATTERN CORRESPONDENCE	OLD TESTAMENT PATTERN FROM HISTORY, PROPHECY, and TYPOLOGY	NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF FULFILLMENT FROM OT HISTORY, PROPHECY, AND TYPOLOGY
Recording of Deeds and Words of God—Pattern of Jewish Memorization	Deuteronomy 6:4–6—SHEMA "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. Great Discourses of Moses (Pentateuch, e.g. Exod. 33:12–23; 35:1–20)	Luke 1:1–4–careful reporting of Jesus's Deeds and Words as the Son of God; Mark 1:1—"beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God" Matthew/Luke centers on Great Discourses of Jesus (e.g. 5–7 Sermon on the Mount) John centers on Great teachings of Jesus (e.g. John 17—Jesus' High Priestly Prayer)
Emphasis on Eyewitness Testimony to confirm matters	Deuteronomy 17:6–7; 19:15–20	Prologue of John 1:1–18; 1 John 1:1–3; Luke 1:1–4—"many who were eyewitnesses and servants of Word"; Acts 1:3—"many infallible proofs" John 12:41 cf. Isaiah 6—Isaiah saw His Glory

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[135] http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/ehrman-detailed-response/ [highlighting added]

Emphasis on Selective, not Exhaustive, History	Numbers 15–19—38 ½ years of history summarized (Num. 20:1–"Then" restarts historical details; Between Ezra 6:22 and Neh. 7:1 is the period of Esther (493–474 BC); 1–2 Samuel; 1–2 Kings; 1–2; Chronicles	John 21:25—"Many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written; Jesus infancy covered (Matt. 1–3; Luke 1–3); Mark starts out with Jesus's ministry as adult, John details start with John the Baptist Ministry
Emphasis on Great Men of Faith KEY PEOPLE IN SALVATION HISTORY	Abraham in Genesis 12–50 (and his family) progeny); Exodus–Modes; Ruth; Esther; 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	Jesus as Son of God—John 1:1–3 Jesus as Davidic King and Messiah (Luke 1:32; 18:38) who fulfills OT promise of a Davidic Heir (Acts 2:29–36)
Emphasis on Predictive Prophecy	Multitude of Predictions of Future King of Israel and His Kingdom; Deuteronomy 19: Isaiah 53	Jesus seen as Fulfilment of OT prophecies; Matthew—"In other that the words of Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled" Acts 6
Emphasis on Words of Old Testament Saints formed pattern for Words of Jesus in New Testament	Abraham, Moses Samuel, David, Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Major and Minor Prophets	Teaching and Preaching of Jesus (Sermon on Mount, Sending out of the Twelve and 70)
Covenants of Old and New Testament	Mosaic Covenant as Preparation for New (Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 36:25–27)	Fulfilment of New Covenant Predictions in Jesus (Luke 22:20)
Emphasis On and Importance of OT Genealogy	Old Testament Emphasis Genealogy from Adam (Gen. 11:27) through Abraham to David and his scions (Ezra)	Emphasis on Jesus's Genealogy as Promised King of Israel (Matthew 1; Luke 3)

EVANGELICAL VERSUS ISLAMIC CANONIZATION

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The 9/11 attacks by Muslims on New York and Washington, D.C posed a question about canonical authority in Islam. Since Islam is ultimately based on the Qur'ān, it is crucial to define and assess the concept of canonization in Islam. Canonization as a theological concept consists of the principles according to which something is originally established and subsequently recognized by adherents as foundational standard for faith and practice. In this essay, Islamic canonization is contrasted with Evangelical canonization. The principles implicit in Islamic recognition of the Qur'ān as canon are observed, followed by the principles in Evangelical recognition of the Bible as canon.

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Introduction

The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. have resulted in more focus on the theology and practice of Islam. Those who planned and participated in the attacks were Muslims who firmly believed that they were doing the will of Allah as acts of *jihad* ("struggle"). Many Muslims state that Islam is non-violent.[1] However, the hijackers, who intentionally perished in the attacks, believed that they were dying as martyrs in a *jihad* against those who opposed Allah and his Prophet, Muhammad. They and Osama bin Laden, their organizational leader, believed that they were bound to wage war against the unbelievers, especially since the

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[1] For examples of Islamic pacifist movements, like Sufism and the Ahmidiyya movement, see Kai Hafez, *Radicalism and Political Reform in the Islamic and Western Worlds* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a study (from a Muslim perspective) of Muslims who denounced the September 11, 2001 attacks, see Rasha A. Abdullah, "Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism in Post–9/11 Arabic Discussion Boards," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, no. 3 (April 2007): 1063–1081. For a Muslim analysis defending Islam as a peaceful religion, see Hayati Aydin, "Jihad in Islam," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 2, no. 2 (December 2012): 7–15.

infidels (non-Muslims) were corrupting the holy land of the Arabian peninsula.[2]

One question that the events of 9/11 posed to the non-Muslim world, and especially to Evangelicals, is what authority guided the beliefs and commanded the behavior that produced such horrific acts. At the root of these actions is the concept of canonicity in Islam. So, first, that must be addressed. However, beyond consideration of religious bases for violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, for evangelistic and missiological purposes, the Islamic concept of canonization must be compared to the concept of canonization in Evangelicalism.

The purpose of this essay is to contrast the Evangelical concept versus the Islamic concept of canonization. Incidental to this purpose is the contrast between the Evangelical canon and the Islamic canon, so this contrast will be specified only to the extent needed to contrast the two differing concepts of canonization.

Definition of Canonization

The term "canon" in theology refers to the foundational, authoritative standard(s) for faith and practice in a specific religion. Canonicity as a theological concept refers to the character of something that is canonical (fundamental and governing standard) based on principles according to which that something was made canonical, i.e., originally established and subsequently recognized by adherents as the foundational standard for faith and practice.[3] Canonization is the process of making something canonical through establishing it as canon and having it recognized as canon.

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[2] A principle observed since the days of Muhammad is that there be absolute uniformity of Islamic religion in the Arabian peninsula. Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 86–92. Friedmann (86) quotes an ancient tradition: "no two religions will exist together in the Arabian peninsula." For statements by Osama bin Laden in which he condemned the stationing of troops from the USA and other foreign nations in 1990 and 1991 as defiling Saudi Arabia, see Osama bin Laden's translated transcripts in Michael Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005).

[3] The English word, "canon," is a transliteration of the Greek noun, κανών, which referred literally to a "rod" or "bar" and came to be used metaphorically of a "rule" or "standard" by which things are measured (cf. Gal 6:16; Phil 3:16). It is related to the Hebrew word, קָנֶה (G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 230); Bauer, Walter, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker; trans. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 507–08. This word was not applied by Christians to the books they believed were inspired by God until Athanasius did so in his "Defence of the Nicene Definition" (c. A.D. 350–355) (*NPNF2*, 162, 5.18) and more officially in the 39th festal letter of A.D. 367 ("Letters of Athanasius," Letter 39, *NPNF2*, 552, 39.7), designating books that are not "in the Canon." For sample Evangelical definitions and expositions of canonization and canonicity, see the following: John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 119–27; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 54–72; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (repr., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 1: 134–47; F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (revised ed.; Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1963); *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures* (revised ed.; Greenville, SC: A Press, 1995); David G. Dunbar, "The Biblical Canon," *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 299–360; Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament*

For both Christianity and Islam, canonicity and canonization focus on the writings accepted by adherents as the foundational standard for belief and behavior. This study does not concern Evangelical and Islamic canons *per se*, but rather focuses on the principles that each of these religions asserts, explicitly or implicitly, as divinely establishing and divinely guiding and compelling adherents to recognize their respective holy writings as canon, since both of these religions claim to be founded on and standardized by scriptures.

Canonization in Islam

To evaluate Islam's concept of canonization, there must first be an awareness of what writings have canonical authority in Islam.

Qur'ān as Supreme Islamic Authority

The ultimate standard of authority in Islam is the *Qur'ān*, even though Muslims also appeal to the Tradition (*hadīth*), as a secondary source for faith and life. Both are claimed to be from Muhammad, who is asserted to be the ultimate prophet of Allah. The *Qur'ān* is said to be the actual words of Allah revealed to and through Muhammad, and the *hadīth* consists of reports of Muhammad's words and deeds as well as those of some early Muslims.[4] Arthur Jeffery notes that the *Qur'ān* is the true canon for Muslim beliefs and life, and the *hadīth* is only a "supplementary" authority and "no more lessens the unique authority of the *Qur'ān* as Scripture than does the fact that both Jews and Christians also use supplementary sources . . . lessens the Scriptural authority for them of the Old and New Testaments."[5] Assessing Islamic canonization means evaluating the principles inherent in recognizing the *Qur'ān* as uniquely divine revelation. The validity of the claim for any authority of the *hadīth* is dependent on the validity of the *Qur'ān* as canon.

Principles of Islamic Canonization

To properly consider Islam's concept of canonization, one must note the principles implicit in Islam's claim of canonical authority for its holy writings.

Books (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013).

[4] R. Marston Speight, "Hadith," *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (ed. John L. Esposito; 4 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2:83. Speight (p. 85) notes that *hadīth* are used to provide information about Muhammad's life, including his personality, family, and work. Because of this content, *hadīth* are used to interpret the *Qur'ān* and to show how the *Qur'ān* was applied to life, because of which application *hadīth* serve as a source of Islamic law (*sharī'ah*). See also Ignaz Goldhizer, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 37–43, 46–47.

[5] Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture* (New York: Russell F. Moore Co., 1952), 3. Jeffery is a past professor of Semitic languages at Columbia University.

Divine Transcendence Without Personal Communication

Islamic theology is founded on the principle of the monadic transcendence of Allah. And this transcendence admits little or no personal intimacy.[6] Indeed, lists of the attributes of Allah by Muslim proponents omit any mention of love.[7] So, the canonical authority of the *Qur'ān* is believed in Islam to be directly from Allah, since Allah revealed the *Qur'ān*. However, Allah did not give the *Qur'ān* directly, but through the angel Gabriel.[8]

Revelatory Process Without Human Language Original

Islam is ultimately founded on the *Qur'ān*, which is seen as having been directly revealed over 20 to 23 years to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel and through trances in which he heard a bell-like sound that reflected the original archetype. The title is the key to its mode of revelation. According to Ayoub, *Qur'ān*, means "recitation" and is based on Gabriel's first command to Muhammad–*iqra* ("Recite"). It is claimed that the *Qur'ān* is the timeless word of Allah and "unfettered by human sounds and letters" in its original archetype ("the Mother of the Book"). Yet, Muslims say it was then revealed in the form of verbal human words through Gabriel and, more importantly, as a non-verbal power sent into Muhammad's heart (26:194).[9] Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have been illiterate (96:1–5; 7:157), so he could not possibly have had any cognitive role in the act of revelation other than rote recitation.[10] So Allah's word was revealed from an eternal, atemporal, non-human

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[6] Arthur Jeffery, ed., *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion* (repr., New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 85. Jeffery (p. 85) says that in the *Qur'ān*, the moral attributes of Allah "are largely overshadowed by the attributes of transcendence."

[7] Kamil Y. Avdich, *Survey of Islamic Doctrine* (Cedar Rapids, IA: Unity Publishing Co., 1979), 3–4; Muhammad Abdul Rauf, *Islam Creed and Worship* (Washington, D.C.: The Islamic Center, 1974), 3–5, cited by Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 19–20.

[8] Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 78; Norman Anderson, "Islam," *The World's Religions* (ed., Norman Anderson; revised ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 94. For Evangelicals, Anderson's essay is still a good introduction to the history, beliefs, practices, and sects of Islam.

[9] All numerical references in this paper, unless otherwise specified, refer to passages in the *Qur'ān*. The translations generally used in this article are: *The Koran*, trans. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971) and *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, trans. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall; New York: New American Library, 1955).

[10] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Islam: Faith and Practice* (Markham, Ontario, Canada: The Open Press, 1983), 71–74, 78–79. Ayoub states the following concerning the dual modes and the eternal archetype behind the *Qur'ān*: "The *Qur'ān* was communicated to the Prophet Muhammad in two ways. It was taught him by the angel Gabriel in small portions: single verses, groups of verses and entire chapters or *surahs*, over a period of twenty to twenty-two years. Yet the *Qur'ān* is not only words that can be uttered, heard and recorded, it is also 'a glorious *qur'ān* preserved in the well-guarded tablet (85:22)', eternally preserved with Allah. In this form, the *Qur'ān* is the heavenly archetype of which the recited and written *Qur'ān* is only an earthly copy. The Prophet experienced this heavenly *Qur'ān*, as Gabriel did. At such times he fell into a trance-like state, shivering on a hot summer day or dripping with sweat on a cold winter day. Then he heard in his ears sounds like the ringing of a bell, sounds which transformed themselves in his consciousness into human words.

"The *Qur'ān* in this immaterial and timeless form was sent down onto Muhammad's heart 'on a blessed night', the 'night of determination (44:3 and 97:1).' The *Qur'ān* in its heavenly archetypal form is the source of Divine revelation throughout human history" (Ayoub, 78–79).

language archetype to Muhammad by two modes: (1) an inner, non-verbal power by which Muhammad heard a bell-like sound; (2) human words through an angel. This revelation involved no human author, but rather an illiterate human reciter. (In fact, the *Qur'ān* is claimed to have not been compiled in book form until after the death of Muhammad.[11]) Implicit in the assertion of Muhammad's illiteracy is the belief that these two revelatory modes with their exclusion of any human cognitive literary contribution (but rather was written through a divinely caused and controlled rote recitation) made the *Qur'ān* canonical—and it would not have been canonical if it were composed in any other way, because thereby the transcendence of Allah would have been compromised.

Prophetic Authority in Only One Man, Muhammad

Islam asserts that Muhammad is the latest and final prophet of Allah. He is said to be in the line of all the previous prophets of Allah, which include Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Some also list Adam as one of the chief prophets. However, Muhammad is viewed as unique among the prophets. All other prophets are said to have been sent "to a particular people, to a particular region of the world and for a certain, limited time." Yet, Muhammad was the only prophet "sent to the entire world and to all nations on the globe and for all time to come."[12] Muhammad is said to be "the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets" (33:40).

Muhammad is seen as the ultimate prophet, because he is believed to have received the ultimate and final revelation, the *Qur'ān*, directly from Allah through the angel Gabriel and the non-verbal sound like the sound of a bell. To Islam, this Book must be accepted by all and seen to abrogate all current forms of previous Books (e.g., the Torah, the Psalms, and the *Injil* (Gospel)), because all these are considered corruptions of their original text.[13] Islam's concept of canonicity is that the latest stage in Allah's historical process of revelation of "the Mother of the Book" is the canon for the world.

Abrogation of Earlier Qur'anic Verses by Later Revelation

As the latest revelation from Allah, the *Qur'ān* is seen as abrogating all previous revelation, including the Bible.[14] The principle of abrogation (*naskh*) also operates within the *Qur'ān* (87:6–7; 2:100, 106; 13:39; 16:98, 101, 103; 22:51). An im-

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Ayoub (72) notes that the *Qur'ān* is analogous to Christ in Christianity in that whereas in Christianity the Word became a human person, in Islam the Word became a book to be recited, written, and lived by. (Also see Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 178–79, for more on this analogy.) Ayoub was professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University, Philadelphia. His books are aimed at explaining Islam from a Muslim's point of view to Western and non-Arabic speaking Muslims. Ayoub provides a readable and helpful introduction to Islamic thought from a Muslim standpoint.

[11] Ayoub, *Islam*, 81–84; Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 47.

[12] Avdich, *Survey of Islamic Doctrine*, 9, citing *Qur'ān* 21:107.

[13] Ibid., 11.

[14] Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 83.

portant aspect of Qur'anic revelation is that it contains two major portions of recitation—the Mecca portion and the Medina portion.[15] These are not neatly divided from each other.[16] Rather, parts of each portion are interwoven with parts of the other. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a progression in Qur'anic revelation. The progression is said to have taken place totally in the life of Muhammad. And the later (Medina) portions are said to abrogate the conflicting portions of the earlier (Mecca) portions. So, in cases of conflicting passages, the Medina portions are ultimately canonical. Canonicity is established by the latest stage in the revelation of the *Qur'ān*.

Richard Bell notes that one kind of abrogation in the *Qur'ān* is when later deliverances are said to modify or annul earlier deliverances. According to Bell, 22:51ff. implies that there may be alterations of verses (*ayas*). Bell notes that this revision of verses is the explanation of most of the many instances of phenomena in the *Qur'ān* such as "abrupt changes of rhyme," unnatural changes of subject, repetitions, breaks in grammar, "abrupt changes" of pronouns, contradictory statements appearing next to each other, passages from earlier and later times appearing next to each other, and "late phrases" being used in verses from earlier times.[17]

However, Bell observes a more substantive kind of abrogation: the replacement of one assertion by a contradicting statement. An instance of abrogation is the change of a Mecca passage that had allowed for worship of the goddesses of Mecca. In 53:19–23 the last three verses are changed to derisively condemn the goddesses of Mecca. The Qur'anic explanation is that Satan deceived Muhammad and inserted this allowance for interceding with the goddesses as a test for the Prophet.[18]

Jeffery discusses how the doctrine of abrogation has occasioned a Qur'anic science known as "the Abrogators and the Abrogated" (*an-nasikh wa'l-mansukh*).[19] According to Jeffery,[20] Muslim theologian, Ibn Salama, in his treatise, *Kitab an-Nasikh wa'l-Mansukh*, says that there are three kinds of abrogation in the *Qur'ān*: 1) abrogation of both text and prescription; 2) abrogation of the text, but not the prescription; 3) abrogation of the prescription but not the text. Of the first kind, Ibn Salama cites examples of suras that used to be recited in the days of Muhammad but later were divinely removed from memory. As an example of this category, Abdullah Saeed specifies a text ruling that five clear breast-feedings renders a marriage unlawful. This text itself had abrogated a text ruling that ten clear breast-feedings renders a marriage unlawful. The abrogating text (called *al-rada*) is said to have been in the

[15] Ayoub, *Islam*, 75–76; Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 66–68; Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 81–83; Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 103, n. 6; 285; Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (repr., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963) 85, 98–99; Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 94–97, 193.

[16] N. J. Dawood, trans., *The Koran* (revised ed.; New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 10–11.

[17] Bell, *Introduction*, 85.

[18] Ibid. Cragg, *Minaret*, 103, n. 6; Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 193.

[19] Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 66.

[20] Ibid., 66–68.

Qur'ān during Muhammad's lifetime, but this text is no longer in the *Qur'ān*.[21] The second kind of Qur'anic abrogation (text but not prescription) is witnessed in the elimination of a text from the original *Qur'ān* concerning stoning as a punishment for adultery. Though the text was eliminated, the prescription remained.[22] The third kind of abrogation (prescription but not text) is found in the text of 63 suras, according to Jeffery.[23] In these cases the text has been maintained, but the prescription has not.[24] Jeffery notes the following examples of this kind of abrogation:

> The earlier practice of facing Jerusalem in prayer, mentioned in II, 143/138, was abrogated by the command in II, 144/139 ff. to turn toward the sacred mosque in Mecca; the earlier practice of fasting like the Jews in Muharram ten days of Ashura was abrogated by the command to fast the whole thirty days of Ramadan (II, 183/179 ff.); XLIII, 89, which orders that the polytheists be let alone, and VII, 199/198, which bids the Prophet turn away from the ignorant, are both said to be abrogated by the Verse of the Sword (II, 191/187), which orders their slaughter.[25]

Bell notes that this Qur'anic science has become especially important in Islamic Law in the effort to determine which ordinances in the *Qur'ān* had been abrogated. Bell notes that there have been differences in establishing rules by which to determine whether an ordinance has been abrogated. Of particular interest for the present is Bell's comment concerning the restrictions on the doctrine of abrogation: ". . . it applies only to commands, not to narratives or promises or threats; alterations

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[21] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 79, citing Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Bayrut: Dar al-Arabia, 1993), n.p.

[22] Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 80–81, quotes the *Sahih Muslim*, no. 4194, as stating that the original Qur'anic text requiring stoning for adultery was eliminated, but not the requirement: "'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas reported that 'Umar b. Khattab sat on the pulpit of God's Messenger [may peace be upon him] and said: Verily God sent Muhammad [may peace be upon him] with truth and He sent down the Book upon him, and the verse of stoning was included in what was sent down to him. We recited it, retained it in our memory and understood it. God's Messenger [may peace be upon him] prescribed the punishment of stoning to death [to the adulterer and adulteress] and, after him, we also prescribed the punishment of stoning. I am afraid that, with the lapse of time, the people [may forget it] and may say: 'We do not find the punishment of stoning in the Book of God' and thus go astray by abandoning this duty prescribed by God. Stoning is a duty laid down in God's Book for married men and women who commit adultery when proof is established, or if there is pregnancy, or a confession."

[23] Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 68.

[24] Saeed uses "the recitation" and the "wording" instead of "the text;" and "the ruling" instead of "the prescription" in his naming of these three categories of Qur'anic abrogation. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 79–82.

[25] Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 68, n. 2. Saheed adds another example: 33:50 allows Muhammad (not believers in general) to take wives from many categories (those whom he purchased; those he claimed out of prisoners of war; daughters of maternal uncles and aunts; any believing woman who dedicates herself to him). This passage was abrogated by 33:52, which forbade Muhammad from marrying any more women, except for any women he already possessed by his "right hand." Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 80.

of practice, such as the recommendation of patience in Mecca and fighting in Medinah, are not properly included under abrogation, but are rather instances of postponement of promulgation of the full law of Islam because of unsuitable circumstances."[26]

Humanly Controlled Transmission Without Any Corruption

An assertion of Islamic apologists is that the *Qur'ān* is the only scripture that has been perfectly preserved, its process of transmission is said to have been kept pure of variant readings by the fidelity of its authorized transmitters, who are assumed by Muslims to have made no mistakes in copying the *Qur'ān*.[27] Assurance of such a perfect transmission is claimed to be by the uninterrupted recorded *isnad* (the line of authoritative transmitters of the Tradition) going back to Muhammad. Implicit in this claim is the principle that only a text whose perfect preservation can be historically traced through authorized leaders has truly been made canonical by Allah and is to be recognized as canon.

Coerced Recognition of the Qur'ān as Canon

Implicit in the *Qur'ān*'s Medina portion with its call for the slaying of infidels is the principle that recognition of the *Qur'ān* as canon is to be coerced by Muslims. For example, the following passages enjoin Muslims to engage in *jihad* (struggle) for the spread of Islam, including fighting against and killing those who do not convert or pay tribute – even if they are taken prisoner in battle: 9:1–6; 47:4–12; 9:29; 3:195; 4:95; 5:34–36.[28]

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[26] Bell, *Introduction*, 98–99. Others (myself included) assert that the change to violence *is* a case of abrogation. As part of his overall appeal for more flexible reinterpretation of the *Qur'ān* to make it more relevant to the lives of Muslims in contemporary societies, Saeed notes that the principle of abrogation (*naskh*) occurs in Islam outside the *Qur'ān* through the *sunnah* (*hadīth*). [The word *sunnah* refers to the "normative behavior of the Prophet," but at times is used as equivalent of the word *hadīth*. (Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 157)] First, some early Muslim authorities held that *hadīth* may abrogate a Qur'anic ruling, if the *hadīth* is a *mutawātir* (a *hadīth* "transmitted from a large number of narrators" – not an *āhād hadīth*, a solitary *hadīth*). Other Muslim scholars have argued that no *hadīth* can replace a Qur'anic ruling/prescription, since the *Qur'ān* is superior to all *hadīth*. Second, a *hadīth* may be abrogated by the *Qur'ān*. Saeed notes that most Muslim scholars allow for this kind of abrogation, since "the *Qur'ān* is supreme and the sunnah is second to the *Qur'ān*." Third, a *hadīth* may abrogate another *hadīth*, provided that both *hadīth* are equal in status – e.g., the abrogating is not an *āhād hadīth* (a solitary *hadīth*) and the abrogated is not a *mutawātir hadīth* (a *hadīth* "transmitted from a large number of narrators"). Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 78–79. See Saeed's entire discussion on abrogation in his chapter 7: "Abrogation and Reinterpretation," 76–89.

[27] Susanne Haneef, *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), 18–19, cited by Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 105.

[28] Pickthall, *Koran*, 145–46: (9:5): "Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."

147–48: (9:29–30): "(29) Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by his messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low. (30) And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!"

361: (47:4–6): "(4) Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks

This principle of coerced recognition of the *Qur'ān* is also implicit in the coercive expansion of Islam in history and the violence threatened and perpetrated against Muslims who convert to other religions (apostates). Anderson's words are sobering:

> One more religious duty (other than the Five Pillars) deserves notice: the duty of Jihad or Holy War. It is incumbent in general on all Muslims who are adult, male and free, to answer any legally valid summons to war against the infidels; and he who dies in a Jihad is a martyr and assured of paradise. The Jihad, with the fanatical courage it evokes, has been by no means limited to the inception of Islam, and its possible relevance for the future can scarcely be ignored. . . . From the earliest times Muslims have divided the world into Dar al-Islam, where Islam reigns supreme, and Dar al-Harb (the Abode of War), where the rule of Islam should be extended, if necessary by war. Polytheists were given the option of conversion or death, while the People of the Book (Jews or Christians) were given the additional alternative of submission and tribute.[29]

In Islam, the *Qur'ān* has been established in time as canon by Allah partly through the command to coerce belief in its teachings. However, as Friedmann discusses, coercion has not been applied uniformly in the expansion of Islam outside the Arabian peninsula, but coercion has always been a possibility. In places where non-Muslims have been few and without influence, or in places where Muslim rulers have desired tribute money from non-Muslims, relative toleration has been practiced within the confines of enforced tribute and prohibition against proselytizing Muslims. However, there are also traditions in Islamic history that equate the legal status of all Muslim regions with the legal status of the Arabian peninsula, as Friedmann says, "extending the prohibition on the existence of non-Muslim religions beyond the boundaries of the Arabian peninsula and applying it to any Muslim town."[30]

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until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That (is the ordinance). And if Allah willed He could have punished them (without you) but (thus it is ordained) that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain. (5) He will guide them and improve their state, (6) And bring them unto the Garden which He hath made known to them."

[29] Anderson, "Islam," 121.

[30] Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, 92–93. See Friedmann's detailed discussions in his third chapter, "Is There No Compulsion in Religion?" (87–120), and his fourth chapter, "Apostasy" (121–59). James L. Payne compared countries in which Islam was "the dominant religion" with the other countries of the world and concluded based on statistical studies that "the religion and culture of Islam have a bias toward violence which would make it a natural breeding ground for terrorism." Payne noted that statistical studies showed that countries whose majority population is Muslim had military that is 50% larger per 1,000 population; were involved in twice the number of civil and international wars; comprised the large majority (13 out of 19) of nations with the worst problems of human slave trafficking; had the unusually "brutal punishments, including maiming and branding;" and had a greater incidence of "political murder" (e.g., assassinations and slayings of political opponents). Most germane to the issue of religious coercion was the greater denial of civil rights (e.g., right of association and right of free speech) in Muslim countries: "On a scale ranging from 1 (full respect for civil rights) to 7 (no respect for civil rights), Muslim countries drew an average score of 5.24, and non-Muslim countries a score of 2.96." (James L. Payne, *A History of Force: Exploring the Worldwide Movement Against Habits of Coercion, Bloodshed, and Mayhem* (Sandpoint, ID: Lytton Publishing Company, 2004), 154–57. The quote is on p. 156, citing Freedom

Canonization in Evangelicalism

Having looked at Islamic canonization, evaluation of that concept from an Evangelical standpoint must be preceded, first, by a reminder of what writings have canonical authority in Evangelicalism and then by a summary of pertinent principles of Evangelical canonization.

The Protestant Bible as Supreme Evangelical Authority

The ultimate written authority for Evangelicalism is the Protestant Bible – the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. Evangelicalism does not accept the Apocrypha as canonical writings.[31]

Principles of Evangelical Canonization

In contrasting Evangelical canonization to Islamic canonization, it is important to specify the principles involved in Evangelicalism's recognition of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as canon.

Divine Transcendence, Immanence, and Personal Intimacy
Evangelicalism claims that God is transcendent, but also omnipresent. He has ultimate control over everything and is personally, intimately involved in every aspect of His creation. So the Bible was made canon, because the sovereign God willed it to be canon – and because He was ever present and working with people to assure that it included all that He willed and only what He willed.[32]

The Divine-Human Book, Divinely Produced Through Many Human Authors
A second principle of the Evangelical concept of canonicity is that the Bible was produced ultimately by God—but through human authors. Evangelicalism asserts that the books of the Bible were all equally revealed by God. However, God worked in different modes and through many human authors to reveal His Word. Some portions of the Bible are transcriptions of God's words. Other portions were produced by humans through the internal moving by God in such a way that what was produced was what God intended, but written by humans and bearing the impress

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House, *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 2001–2002* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2002). The Freedom House study was based on data from 50 Muslim countries and 142 non-Muslim countries.

[31] It is not within the scope of this study to trace the history of canonical recognition in the ancient church. However, the only major theologian of the ancient church favoring the inclusion of apocryphal books in the OT was Augustine. Nevertheless, his list omits Baruch and includes 1 Esdras, which was not recognized by the Council of Trent. And Augustine stated that the Apocrypha had a "secondary canonicity" as compared to a "primary canonicity" for the Hebrew canon (*City of God*, 18.36). For a more complete discussion, see Harris, *Canonicity*, 178–89; Dunbar, "The Biblical Canon," 307–310; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 57–59.

[32] Harris, *Canonicity*, 127–28, 155, 191–92.

of their respective personalities and styles.[33] Each of these books reflects overarching theological themes that the respective human authors used to arrange their material – including the transcribed material. Evangelicalism holds that the canonical authority of the Bible was established by God through the wisest means of establishing and inviting recognition of canonical authority – through various modes of writing and various humans serving as authors, not mere transcribers, of the text.[34]

The Divine Authority of Jesus Christ

Ultimately, the Evangelical concept of the origination and recognition of canonicity rests on faith in the divine authority of Jesus Christ. As David Dunbar observes, the authority of Christ was the basis for the church accepting the canonicity of the OT and treasuring the writings of His apostles as expansions of the canon:

> The prominent place that Jesus and the early church gave to the Old Testament indicates that Christianity, from its inception, was a religion whose existence and self-identity were structured (in part) by a canon, a closed collection of uniquely authoritative writings. There was, thus, a canonical consciousness in the church from its very beginning. If this would not have led the church necessarily to *expect* an expansion of the canonical literature, it would surely have meant that such an expansion could not have seemed foreign or inappropriate. . . . The authority of Jesus for the early church was inseparable from the authority of the apostles. . . . The apostles were the official channels of revelation appointed by Christ Himself . . . . They were to speak for Him, and those who heard them heard Christ . . . . The uniqueness of the apostolic ministry ensured that the words of the apostles would be regarded as a precious deposit entrusted

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[33] See Warfield's explanation of the moment of inspiration as being preceded through all the ages of time by God's providential preparation of a human author, culminating in the actual moment of "superinduction" by the Holy Spirit (a "Divine operation" in which the Holy Spirit was "flowing confluently in with the providentially and graciously determined work of men"). Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 154–58. (See also Warfield's conclusion from 2 Pet 1:20f. that one mode of biblical revelation is "concursive operation": "The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defect they may manifest, but as working confluently in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as his instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach His aim." Warfield states that in this "concursive operation" the "total personality of the organ of revelation" is employed by the Holy Spirit. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 94–95.)

[34] For a more complete presentation of the Evangelical concept of the Bible as a divine-human book, see René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 35–42. Pache draws an analogy between the Bible and Jesus Christ as perfect God and perfect man. This analogy is limited in that Christ was deity, but the Scripture is not. Nevertheless, with this limitation in mind, the analogy is helpful. Both incarnation and inspiration originated with the divine will to reveal. Both used human agency for the revelation, without compromising the divine by error while fully including the human. Both produced entities that were divinely perfect and yet fully human. Also, see Warfield's discussion of this divine-human analogy: Warfield, "Biblical Idea of Inspiration," 162–63.

to the church and in need of careful preservation . . . ."[35]

Prophetic Authority G*iven by God to Many Authors Over Many Centuries*

According to Evangelical theology, canonicity is eternally established by the Triune God, but it was established in time through verbal revelation directly given to and through specially chosen persons (prophets and apostles). This factor of canonization is implicit in the historical insistence that any book recognized as canonical had to give evidence of having been written by someone with prophetic authority. Without prophetic authority manifested, a book was not canon.[36]

Progressive Revelation Without Deletion of Words

Evangelicalism's concept of canonical authority includes a principle of progressive revelation. This principle maintains that God gave His Word in historical stages, over many centuries, with each successive stage providing more information about Himself and His will. This principle recognizes that a later stage may have certain commands that make previous commands no longer applicable. However, the replacement does not occur in such a way that the essence and character of God as perfect truth, justice, and holiness is compromised or words removed. This principle also asserts that in a truly progressive revelation, the stages of progression are clearly delineated by contextual indicators. So, the Evangelical concept of canonization includes the principle that, in the case of conflicting commands, the later revelation is directly applicable. Yet, both stages of the revelation are seen as communicating the consistent morally perfect nature of God – and each successive stage as further detailing the revealed nature of God without removing any words.[37] All is canon for faith – and for practice that is not specified in the canon as only temporarily required.

Divinely Mediated Transmission Through Fallible Human Copyists

Evangelicalism believes that the Bible was inspired in its original autographs,[38] and that, among all of the MSS, none (many say "few") of the original readings have been lost in transmission,[39] even though not every MS has every original reading.

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[35] Dunbar, "Biblical Canon," 319–20.

[36] See Harris, *Canonicity*, 154–77, 248–59; Dunbar, "Biblical Canon," 301; Herman Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. H. De Jongste (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 13–41; Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, 95–96.

[37] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 164; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (3rd revised ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 101–04; MacArthur and Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 936; Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 214–15.

[38] For a cogent historical defense of the doctrine of the inspiration of the original autographs of the Bible, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

[39] An issue that exists in Evangelicalism is whether preservation of the original readings is marked by "essential purity" (allowing for some loss of the original readings, so long as the salvific message remained intact)– or perfect purity (not allowing any loss of the original readings). For the "essential purity," "free from serious error" view, see John H. Skilton, "The Transmission of the Scriptures," *The Infallible Word* (ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 139; Harris, *Canonicity*, 80; Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,"

Evangelicalism asserts that copies and translations of the Bible are authoritative only to the extent that they accurately reflect the original autographs. This principle acknowledges God's preservation of His Word through the years of transmission, yet holds that this transmission has not been a humanly controlled process, but rather a divinely controlled process through the hands of fallible humans. So the process has included some humans accurately preserving certain readings—while other humans accurately preserved other readings. And Evangelicalism asserts that no variant reading has ever corrupted any doctrine. So, the Evangelical principle of divinely mediated transmission affirms that the Bible has been divinely protected as canon and invites recognition of it as canon.[40]

Spiritually Induced Human Recognition of The Books of the Bible as Canon

A final relevant principle of the Evangelical concept of canonization is that its recognition aspect is dependent on internal divine spiritual inducement. Evangelicalism asserts that the Bible is recognized by each believer and by each generation of believers because of the illuminating and regenerating work of God in the human heart, leading people to recognize it as *their* canon. Evangelicalism specifically teaches that only by internal, divine illumination and inducement accomplished through the actual words of the Bible will anyone truly accept the Bible as canon. Acceptance of the Bible as canon is asserted to be an act of faith. So the temporal process of recognition of the canonicity of the books of the Bible was a spiritually dynamic process—not an assertion forcibly dictated by a human authority.[41]

Grace Theological Journal, 12.1 (1992) 22, 35, 41–47. A leading proponent of the "perfect purity" of preservation view is Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* (Amazon Digital Services, 2014). I agree with the "perfect purity" view, because I believe that God inspired every word of Scripture to be "profitable" for all ages (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 2:13).

[40] For articulations of Evangelical theories of NT textual transmission: Harris, *Canonicity*, 65–80; Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 112–36; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (2nd ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), ix–xl; Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* (Amazon Digital Services, 2014); Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform 2005* (Southborough, MA: Chilton book Publishing, 2005), i–xxiii; John W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (London: John Murray, 1883). Even though there are several theories of NT textual transmission held by various Evangelical textual critics (e.g., Westcott-Hort, Majority Text, Byzantine Text, Eclectic), all agree about the relative rarity of significant variants, and all agree that no doctrine is compromised by any variant. On this last point, see, for example, Skilton, "Transmission," 137–87.

[41] Since acceptance of the Bible as canon is dependent on one's acceptance of its divine inspiration, then acceptance of the Bible as canon is a matter of inner enlightenment and conviction. Bruce says, "We may well believe that those early Christians acted by a wisdom higher than their own in this matter, not only in what they accepted, but in what they rejected. Divine authority is by its very nature self-evidencing; and one of the profoundest doctrines recovered by the Reformers is the doctrine of the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, by which testimony is borne within the believer's heart to the divine character of Holy Scripture. This witness is not confined to the individual believer, but is also accessible to the believing community; and there is no better example of its operation than in the recognition by the members of the Early Church of the books which were given by inspiration of God to stand alongside the books of the Old

Evaluation

Having set forth some key principles of both the Islamic and the Evangelical concepts of canonization, it now remains to assess the Islamic concept versus the Evangelical. Since the Islamic concept rests ultimately on the trustworthiness of Muhammad as a prophet[42] and his purported revelation, the *Qur'ān*, and since Islam claims to supersede Christianity and the Bible, Muhammad and the *Qur'ān*, as well as their canonical recognition, must be the foci of a final assessment.

Evaluating Muhammad as a Prophet

If Muhammad was really the last and most authoritative of all the divinely appointed prophets, he must have passed five tests: definite divine call to be a prophet, fulfilled prophecy, miraculous attestation, moral integrity, and non-contradiction. Muslims claim that Muhammad had all of these characteristics. Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb demonstrate that Muhammad failed all five tests. Muhammad himself originally doubted his call, and the description of the call itself fits the description of ecstatic, occultic experiences. Supposed Qur'anic prophecies do not have the clarity or specificity of meaning that biblical prophecies have. The *Qur'ān* does not claim that Muhammad did any miracles; indeed, he refused to base his claim to be a divinely appointed prophet upon the performance of miracles. Stories about Muhammad's supposed miracles are in the *hadīth*, which do not have the authority of the *Qur'ān*. Finally, Muhammad was immoral. He sanctioned polygamy; contradicted his own written limit of four wives by having fifteen; advocated holy wars against unbelievers; committed piracy; sanctioned assassinations in retaliation for personal insults; broke promises; and killed the Jewish men of Medina and sold their women and children into slavery.[43] This last point (immorality) is especially important, because advocates of Islam have asserted that prophets have the characteristic of "impeccability" (*isma*). They are "naturally good and sagacious, such men as shun blameworthy actions and all things unclean. . . . Thus they seem to have an instinctive inclination to rise above things that are blameworthy, and even shrink from them as

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Covenant, the Bible of Christ and His apostles, and with them to make up the written Word of God" (Bruce, *Books and Parchments*, 113). The spiritually dynamic aspect of recognition of the canon is also articulated well by Kruger in his chapter, "My Sheep Hear My Voice: Canon as Self-Authenticating," in *Canon Revisited*, 88–121.

[42] This study does not intend to consider the controversy concerning whether Muhammad existed, but, for the sake of engaging Islamic canonicity, seeks to assess whether Muhammad as he is portrayed by Islam is worthy of the status as the most authoritative divinely inspired prophet. The controversy over the historical existence of Muhammad seems to have arisen in the 1970s and intensified in the early 21st century. Sources questioning the existence of Muhammad: Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003); Robert Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist?: An Inquiry Into Islam's Obscure Origins* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2014). Sources asserting the historicity of Muhammad: Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford University Press, 1983); Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[43] Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 154–76.

though such things were repugnant to their inborn discipline."[44] Based on Muhammad's failure to qualify as a prophet, any words from or through him cannot be canonical.

Evaluating the *Qur'ān* as Divine Revelation

The case for the canonicity of the *Qur'ān* fails not only because of the messenger, but also because of the contents themselves.

Muhammad's Illiteracy

Its having been given through a supposedly illiterate man does not prove the *Qur'ān*'s divine origin, since, if he indeed was illiterate, his scribes could have arranged his words – even changed them. And he may not have been illiterate, since the Arabic words, *al umni*, in 7:158, probably do not mean "can neither read nor write," but rather "Gentile" (as in 2:73; 3:19, 69; 7:157).[45]

Corrupted Transmission

Second, the *Qur'ān* has not been perfectly preserved.[46] The *Qur'ān* was compiled after Muhammad's death, according to Muhammad's contemporary follower, Zayd ibn Thabit, who said that originally scribes did not write Muhammad's statements in a book. Zayn claimed that he gathered the various statements from palm branches, stones, and bones. The text was not standardized until the reign of Uthman ibn Affan, the third Muslim Caliph (d. 656). Before that, there were several competing versions. Uthman decided to canonize the Madinan Codex and destroy all others. Today there are a thousand or more variant readings from only two early non-extant codices. In spite of the efforts of Uthman, today there are indeed differing versions with many variations in each sura. The Ibn Masud Codex of the *Qur'ān*, used by the Sunni sect, has many variations from the Uthmanic version. Jeffery takes more than 90 pages to demonstrate that the variations involve clauses and sentences. Finally, the Shi'ite sect claims that Uthman excised many verses that spoke of Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, whom they claim should have been Muhammad's immediate successor. Very early there were competing versions of the *Qur'ān*, evidence of which is the many variant readings. So the Islamic principle of canonicity asserting the necessity of pristine transmission negates the canonicity of the *Qur'ān*.

Contradiction by Abrogation

As noted above, the principle of abrogation is important in the *Qur'ān*. C. G.

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[44] Ibn Khaldun, *Mugaddima* (el-Mahdi edition; Cairo, 1930), 77–79, quoted by Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, 134–36.

[45] Pickthall, *Koran*, 133, n. 1.

[46] This material in this paragraph is summarized from Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 191–94. Important sources that they cite: John Gilchrist, *Jam'al-Qur'ān: The Codification of the Qur'ān Text* (Benoni, South Africa: Jesus to the Muslims, 1989); C. G. Pfander, *The Mizanu'l Haqq* (Balance of Truth), revised and enlarged by W. St. Clair Tisdall (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, 1986); W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970); Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān* (New York: AMS Press, 1975).

Pfander notes that Islamic tradition states that current verses on suckling are the result of annulment of original verses prohibiting suckling; and 24:2, which assigns 100 stripes as the punishment for adultery, replaced the original requirement for stoning as the punishment.[47] Furthermore, as noted earlier in this study, a revelation in Mecca allowing intercession to some idols was abrogated to become the current 53:21–23. Muhammad said that Satan had deceived him and inserted the previous verses into the revelation.[48] And then there was the abrogation of tolerance for other religions by the new requirement to coerce conversion (contrast 2:256 with 9:5, 29).

The principle of abrogation results in contradiction of Allah, because 10:64 says "there is no changing the words of Allah." And 6:34 says "There is none that can change the words of Allah." These verses are directly contradicted by 2:106: "Whatever previous commandment We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We reveal in this Quran one better or the like thereof."

As Gerhard Nehls points out, any claim that abrogation is simply the adaptation of divine truth to different people in different times is suspect, since the change took place in such a short span of years and within the prophetic career of one man. The changes do not concern what preceded Muhammad. Rather, the changes seem to be convenient corrections.[49] The very Islamic canonicity principle of abrogation results in Allah being a deity that contradicts his own decrees. So this canonicity principle itself disqualifies the *Qur'ān* from being canon.

Self-Contradiction in Facts

Geisler and Saleeb point out that "there are verses that the Qur'anic abrogations apparently forgot to redact." Some verses (7:54; 32:4) say that the world was created in 6 days. But 41:9–12 says that it was created in 8 days.[50] Divine canon cannot be self-contradictory.

Evaluating Recognition of the Canonicity of the *Qur'ān*

All too often in Islamic history, conversion to Islam has been coerced by force. And even today, non-Muslims and converts from Islam are persecuted in many Middle Eastern, African, and Asian nations. Admittedly, Christian-initiated coerced conversion and persecution of non-Christians and between competing sects in Christendom are evident in periods of history.[51] However, this behavior was not commanded

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[47] Pfander, *Mizanu'l Haqq*, 256, cited by Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 193.

[48] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 60–61, cited by Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 193.

[49] Gerhard Nehls, *Christians Ask Muslims* (SIM International Life Challenge, 1987), 11–14, cited by Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 197. For a summary of "convenient" revelations, see Anderson, "Islam," 98.

[50] Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 197.

[51] Some examples are Augustine of Hippo's advocacy that the state should forcibly compel heretics and schismatics to return to the Catholic Church; the destruction of paganism by force in Scandinavia; the burning and torturing of Jews, Muslims, and Protestants by the Roman Catholic Inquisition in France and Spain; the execution of the Unitarian Michael Servetus in the Geneva of Calvin's day; the burning of Protestants in England in the reign of Queen Mary ("Bloody Mary"); the persecution of Roman Catholic priests in Elizabethan England and Scotland. See the following: Augustine, *Epistula* 89.1–7; 93.1–3, 5;

by Christ and the Apostles. Quite the contrary (cf. Matt. 26:52). Islamic coercion is based on the explicit statements of the Medinah verses. Geisler and Saleeb have well noted that Islam's early expansion was through the use of the sword, but Christianity's early expansion was without using violence. The only use of the sword that Christianity experienced in its early years was persecution against it by the Roman government.[52] Early Christianity (before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire) grew by the spiritually regenerating power of the Gospel; Islam grew by intimidation. So there is an implicit canonization principle of coercion in Islam. However, recognition of canonicity in religion should be a spiritual matter. So coerced recognition is not genuine recognition. And if the *Qur'ān*'s canonicity depends on coercion, the *Qur'ān* is not divine canon.

Conclusion

When their respective concepts of canonization are compared, Islam is inferior to Evangelicalism. Islam's principle of prophetic authority is undermined by the life of Islam's prophet. Its principle of abrogation itself undermines the claim of Qur'anic canonicity by making Allah and his book self-contradicted. Its principle of revelatory process from heavenly archetype to human copyist without direct revelation in human language does not compel recognition of canonicity, because this was an ecstatic process in which the prophet as human was not encountered in such a way that he could assess the truthfulness of received revelation and cognitively author its writing. Also, in this process there was no confirmation and validation of the prophet by others with equal authority (as there was among the prophets and apostles of the Bible). Finally, Islam's principle of coercing recognition of canonicity does not result in true spiritual recognition.

Evangelicalism wins the contest of canonicities and canonizations. Its canonization is winsomely balanced, as it is sourced in the God who is transcendently sovereign and yet enters into intimate, even incarnate fellowship with people to reveal His Word. Evangelical canonicity includes the human in the process of revelation, in which God personally prepared and then moved upon the writers, so that they were personally engaged to author what He willed to be written—without violating or suppressing, but rather using their personalities. And this process involved many human authors over 1,500 years, resulting in recognition of the authority of the authors by each other and by the people of God. Evangelical canonization is built on the supreme

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173.10; 185.6; *Sermo* 112.8; *DCD* 5.24; 18.50; *Contra Litteras Petiliani* 2.92.211; 2.98.224; *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, 11.14; Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 193–220; Emilien Lamirande, *Church, State and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine* (The Saint Augustine Lecture Series, *Saint Augustine and the Augustinian Tradition*; ed. Robert P. Russell; Villanova University Press, 1975), 9–67; Juan Antonio Llorente, *A Critical History of the Inquisition of Spain* (1823; repr., Williamstown, MA: The John Lilburne Company, 1967; abridged and translated from French; first English edition originally published London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1823); Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 385–406, 457, 657–59; 759, 807–12; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 8 vols. (repr., Peabody, MA, 2002), 4:102–24; 5:515–33; 8:763–94; James H. Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1998), 4.

[52] Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 203.

engagement of people by God: the incarnation of God the Son as Jesus Christ, who, as the God-man, validated all the words of the biblical prophets and apostles by His redemptive words and work. Evangelical canonization includes non-contradictory progression in God's revelation of His Word, so, in this canonization, newly revealed truth never replaced the morality of the God of previous revelation, nor caused words to be deleted, even though at times it did replace economic arrangements. Finally, Evangelical canonicity is based on the true God, who sovereignly and spiritually produced the canon through men, and ever guides its recognition and transmission through believers by His grace of spiritual illumination and regenerating power in their hearts.

CHRONOLOGY OF EARLY ISLAM
(source: www.answeringislam.org)

c. 570   Birth of Muhammad to the tribe of Qureish. His father was Abdullah, who died before he was born. Mother died 6 years later. Raised by grandfather and uncle, Abu Talib, who at one stage of Muhammand's life protected him.

c. 592   According to traditions, he began travelling to Syria with trading caravans, and on one of these journeys met Bahira, a Syrian Christian monk.

595   Married Khadijah, a wealthy widow, who was Muhammad's employer.

610   While meditating in a cave on Mt. Hira near Mecca, Muhammad claimed that the angel Garbiel appeared to him to recite (*Qur'ān*).

615–16   Persecution from his own tribe of Qureish forced some of his followers to emigrate to the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. Muhammad and his "Companions" stayed in Meeca.

619   Death of Khadija, and of Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and protector. Muhammad's position now less secure in the tribe.

622   Escape to Medina from the hostile Meccans in response to an invitation from a group of Muslim converts ("Helpers") for him to come to resolve the conflicts between the different communities in Medina. This flight is known as the Hijra, and marks the beginning of Muslim calendar. Muslim dates are marked with A.H.

624   Muslims began raiding caravans from Mecca. During Battle of Badr Muslims (324 men) defeated Meccans (950 men).

624   Battle of Uhud - Muslims defeated by Meccans. Some Muslims dismayed with Muhammad.

627   Battle of Ahjab - Muslims repelled the Meccan attack on Medina.

628   Treaty of Hudaibiyah between Muhammad and Meccans, enabling him to return for pilgrimage the following year.

629   Muhammad and the Muslims returned to Mecca on 11 January with 10,000 men. Meccans submitted without fighting. Muhammad declared a general amnesty. All idols in the Ka'aba destroyed. Some traditions say that Muhammad did not destroy the images of Jesus and Mary in the Ka'aba. Muhammad returned to Medina. Beginning of mass movement of tribes embracing Islam.

631   Muhammad's last pilgrimage to Mecca.

632   Muhammad died in Medina.

632–34   1st Caliph, Abu Bakr: prevented many tribes from breaking away. Defeated Byzantine army in 634.

633   Battle of Yamana against Musailamah Al-Kazzab, who claimed to be a prophet. Several Companions who knew the *Qur'ān* by heart were killed. Abu Bakr was said to have instructed Zaid b. Thabit to prepare a single copy of the compete *Qur'ān*, who did so and demanded that there are two witnesses for each piece.

633–44   2nd Caliph, 'Umar: supposedly carried the collections of the surah of the Quran. Defeated Byzantine army at Battle of Yarmuk (636); captured Jerusalem, and gained control of Syria, Egypt and Persia. Expelled all Jews and Chrisitians from Arabia.

644–56   3rd Caliph, 'Uthman: appointed Zayd to collect the fragments of the written *Qur'ān* and established the official text of the *Qur'ān*. All other texts were ordered destroyed.

653   Campaign against Armenia and Azerbaidjan, and serious differences arose among the Muslims regarding the *Qur'ān*. It was said that Uthman instructed Zaid b. Thabit and three others to prepare a fresh copy. After this, several copies were sent throughout Muslim lands, and Uthman ordered all other copies destroyed.

656–61   4th Caliph, 'Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. At the death of Muhammad, a small party (*shi`ah*) sympathetic to `Ali wanted him to be the caliph, whom the Shi`ites claimed was given this authority by Muhammad. The majority voted instead for Abu Bakr.

660–750   Umayyad Dynasty ruled in Damascus. Golden Age of Islam. by 732. Islamic Empire stretched from Spain to Persia.

750–1228   Abassid Dynasty ruled in Baghdad.
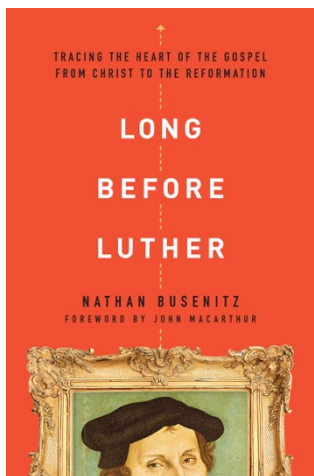
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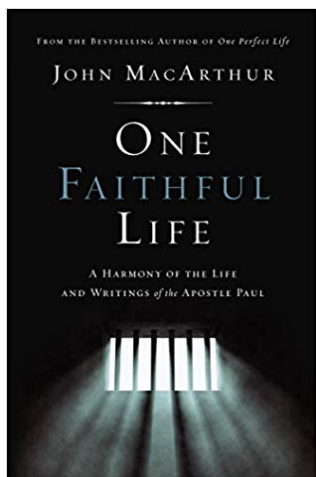
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IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION IN EXPOSITION: A COMPLEMENTARY RELATIONSHIP, PART 1: EXPOSITIONAL DEFINITIONS AND APPLICATIONAL CATEGORIES

Carl A. Hargrove
Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministries
The Master's Seminary

A significant concern for the expositor is navigating the relationship of interpretation and application. A part of the navigation is understanding the complement of the implications of a given text to the proper application. Teachers and expositors who want to make meaningful application of the passage or verse must bear in mind appropriate principles if they are to navigate from the ancient context to their contemporary audiences; if not, there will be misapplication on the one hand or not using the Scriptures to bear on the actions of listeners on the other.

* * * * *

Introduction

The relationship of hermeneutics, exegesis, and application has not always been the easiest to navigate for preachers and teachers. However, it is one of the most important roads to travel if one is to be effective in communicating the truth of the Word and equipping the church to fulfill its role in the world. There is friendly disagreement on defining application and its role in preaching.[1]

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[1] Hershael W. York, and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *SBJT* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 70–73. York and Blue analyze Charles Dennison and his resistance to applicational preaching. Charles G. Dennison, "Preaching and Application: A Review of the Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature by Sidney Greidanus," *Kerux* 4, (December 1989): 44–52. Dennison criticizes Sidney Greidanus' supposition that a gap exists between the ancient and contemporary, which the expositor must strive to bridge. Charles G. Dennison, "Some Thoughts on Preaching," *Kerux* 4, (December 1989): 3–9. Dennison asserts that stressing the need for application questions the relevance of the Word. Gary Findley, "Review of Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon by Bryan Chapell," ibid.11, (May 1996): 37–41. Findley disagrees with Chapell, Greidanus, and Stott. He categorizes them as espousing a "two-world cosmology" for applying the Scriptures to the present-day. Several blogs reflect a debate on how to understand implication

Although some believe that application is not legitimate, this represents a minority position, whereas most teachers, preachers, and scholars grapple with the role of application and how to legitimately determine and employ it for preaching purposes.[2] John Stott reminded expositors that they are to speak authoritatively and bridge the gap "between two worlds"[3] that God desires to meet. Bridging the "gap" assists listeners in appropriating the truth of the Word to their lives. There are not as many resources providing sound guidance on how to navigate this crucial path.

Expository preaching has been unduly criticized for its lack of application. At its core, expositional preaching provides the challenge to discover and expound the authors' (human and divine) intention and Scriptures' overall theme. Authorial intention is meant to support the overall theme of Scripture, which is God's glory demonstrated in man's redemption and sanctification through a personal knowledge of Him. There can be no conformity to the likeness of Christ without interpreting and implementing the message of Scripture to life. Therefore, preaching should include means for those exposed to its life-changing message to actualize the truth they hear.

Although some resources have developed since Kaiser's statement below, it still provides a sense of the need for a study on application in expository preaching. Kaiser stressed the need when he wrote,

> Nowhere in the total curriculum of theological studies has the student been more deserted and left to his own devices than in bridging the yawning chasm between understanding the content of Scripture as it was given in the past and proclaiming it with such relevance in the present as to produce faith, life, and bona fide works. Both ends of this bridge have at various times received detailed

and apply the text: Sean-du Toit, "Implication Vs. Application" accessed March 14, 2014, http://kiwimadepreaching.com/2009/12/sean-du-toit-implication-vs-application/. Doug Wolter, "Preach for Implication or Application" accessed Nov 1, 2014, http://life2getherblog.com/2010/02/19/preach-for-application-or-implication/. The Krow, "Implication Vs. Application" accessed June 12, 2013, http://thekrow.blogspot.com/2005/08/chpt-11-implication-vs-application.html. Richard J. Vincent, "Application Phobia: A Critical Evaluation of the Passion Driven Sermon" accessed June 12, 2013, http://www.theocentric.com/?p=203. John F. Bettler, "Application," in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed), 331–49. Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 159. Although I agree with Johnson on implication, I disagree that application is "too modernistic … humanistic."

[2] Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009). Daniel Overdorf, "Application without Heresy" accessed January 7, 2014, (http://christianstandard.com/2011/11/application-without-heresy/). Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 205–35. Elliot E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 213–64. J. Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 309–51. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013). Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach Old Testament Narrative Texts*. Mentor. (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009). This is a sampling of the teachers who seek answers to the proper employment of application in preaching.

[3] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137, 39, 50).

and even exhaustive treatments: (1) the historical, grammatical, cultural, and critical analysis of the text forms one end of the spectrum; and (2) the practical, devotional, homiletical, and pastoral theology (along with various techniques of delivery, organization, and persuasion) reflected in collections of sermonic outlines for all occasions forms the other.[4]

The validity of application is not a concern limited to the Bible scholar or vocational minister; it is of equal importance to the laymen because both want to be faithful in their instructional roles and make sure their respective audiences are experiencing the maximum from God's Word. Since the Scriptures are meant for "training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16–17) every preacher wants to know the proper parameters for applying its life changing lessons. Also, the expositor of Scripture should sense a great weight of responsibility because his role consistently calls for him to demand a response to its life-changing message. Yet, he must also remember that application without guidelines will lead to what David Estes considers "egalitarianism"[5] subjectivity. This belief that all interpretations must have equal standing is grounded in humanism and has no place in the objective interpretation determined by proper principles. A lack of recognition of interpretive guidelines will produce errant applications of the text with various levels of ensuing harm. No sincere preacher of Scripture would ever want his preaching to have such an effect. It is just the opposite—the hope of bringing about maturity and Christlikeness in the everyday lives of those under the Word's authoritative preaching.

Therefore, care must be taken to ensure that the Word's intention is represented in application. Haddon Robinson warned of the heretical conclusions that can stem from errant application.[6] Daniel Overdorf, who is an advocate of application in preaching, also recognizes the reservations and negligence of some when he provided the image of hikers approaching a bridge,

> Bible interpreters cross a bridge they label *application*. They anchor their study in the ancient world—evaluating historical and cultural contexts, analyzing biblical languages, and discerning the original authors' intentions. Then they cross the span of millennia to demonstrate the Bible's relevance to the contemporary world, explaining how the ancient, Spirit-inspired Scriptures should influence our perspectives and behaviors today. Some interpreters cross the application bridge with crippling trepidation, so fearful of leaving the ancient world that they arrive on the contemporary side sapped of power and focus, if they arrive at all. Others race recklessly across, disregarding biblical integrity along the way and, too often, falling into the ravine of application heresy. How can Bible

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[4] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 18.

[5] Daniel J. Estes, "Audience Analysis and Validity in Application," *BSac* 150, no. 598 (April 1993): 221.

[6] Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 306–11.

interpreters cross the application bridge in a manner that both maintains biblical integrity and demonstrates the Scriptures' piercing relevance for today?[7]

Overdorf raises a relevant question for the expositor. It is one that this article seeks to answer, while first legitimizing the question of whether or not there is a role for application in exposition. This bridge of application is one, as Overdorf has implied, that must be crossed with a cautious confidence.[8] Preaching must boldly speak to the needs of the congregation while establishing their confidence in properly interpreted passages that give the preacher an authority to speak to life concerns, issues, and joys.

Trusted Old Testament scholar J. Alec Motyer has provided faithful resources over the years, especially when studying Isaiah. His ability to navigate the theological and exegetical wealth of Isaiah demonstrates a refreshing skill and sincere passion for God's glory. It is no wonder that he too recognizes the church's need for preaching that includes "didactic and applicatory exposition."[9] Although some may see this as an unnecessary or impossible task, preaching should include both.[10]

Motyer explains the relationship of didactic and applicatory preaching like this:

'Didactic': the teaching content of the Word of God made plain, the Scriptures not treated as a word game either by the preacher or the hearers, but as vital truth to be grasped with clarity in the mind. Remember Jesus' question in Matthew 13: 51: 'Have you understood?' It is the test we must apply to our preaching. 'Applicatory': the Word of God brought home to the hearers as truth to be believed, a way of life to be followed, a rule to be obeyed, a promise to be embraced, a sin to be avoided, an example to be followed and a blessing to be enjoyed. Our aim should be to hold these three together, to achieve them in one move, to draw out the truth of the Word of God with such accuracy and clarity that, without further elaboration, it is plain to our hearers both what the chosen

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[7] Overdorf, "Application without Heresy"

[8] Part Two of this article will investigate the hermeneutics of expositional application by seeking to develop the principles which will help an expositor properly navigate from the ancient to the contemporary with cautious confidence. Every expositor must learn to pay the proper tolls before crossing this bridge. Haddon Robinson's concern over heresy in application occurs when expositors do not pay the proper toll before crossing the applicational bridge. Robinson calls for caution in crossing the "ladder of abstraction" that joins the biblical world with the current one. Robinson, "Heresy of Application," 308.

[9] J. Alec Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simple Preaching*, (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2013), 101.

[10] Dever and Gilbert labor to show the movement of exegesis to theology to application. Mark Dever, and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice*, 9Marks (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 91–93, 109–14 . Joel Breidenbaugh captures the relationship of doctrine and practice. In his dissertation, he pleads for the church to balance itself by striving for doctrinal preaching to overcome the growing ignorance in the pew. He argues for the merger of expository preaching (which by necessity includes application) with doctrinal preaching. Joel Randall Breidenbaugh, "Intergrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching: A Proposal and an Analysis for the Twenty-First Century" (Ph.D. Diss., The Southern Baptist Seminary, 2003).

Scripture means and what we must do about it. This does not preclude using summaries: 'Let us sum up what we have learned' or 'Let us ask how we should respond', but all such applications should be against the background of crystal clarity of exposition, so that such questions come as bonuses! We should aim so to state the truth that it actually needs no further application, even if helpfulness dictates that further application be offered.[11]

It is the goal of this article to provide convincing reasoning and examples that will enjoin others to recognize the role of application in exposition and demonstrate both application and implication in preaching.

DEFINING KEY TERMS
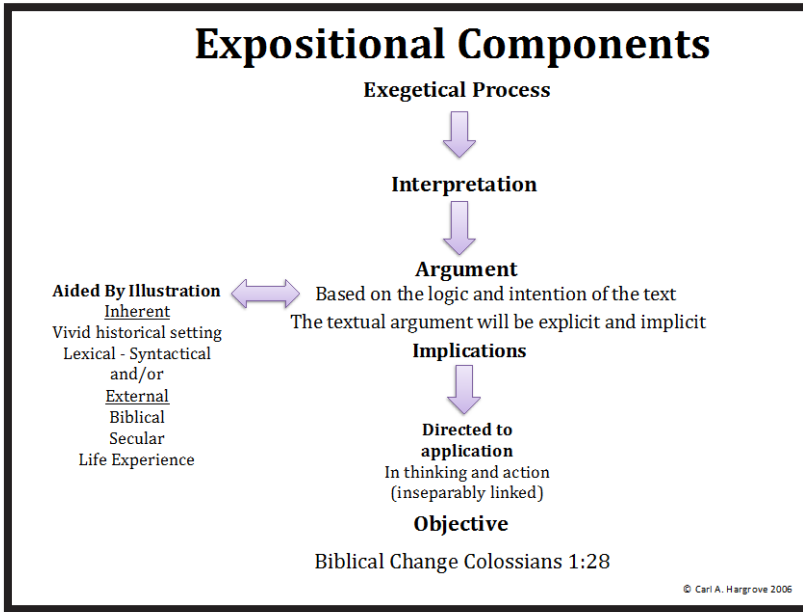
Exposition Defined

Because this article seeks to address the role of application in expository preaching, a definition of expository preaching is necessary. Expository preaching cannot be captured with one definition, but with several that help paint a picture of its essential nature.

A somewhat expansive definition of expository preaching is the particular explanation of God's message from Scripture that seeks to express, in context, the truth of a given passage, verse, phrase, or theme to an audience for their spiritual growth and God's glory. This is done by communicating the author's intention for the passage and applying it to the minds and individual lives of the audience. Genuine exposition includes logical arguments, passionate presentation, and ethical consistency.

This flowchart shows the expositional components expressed in the above definition and those held by other expositors:

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[11] Motyer, *Preaching?,* 102–03.

Figure 1: Expositional Components

Expositional Components

Exegetical Process

Interpretation

Argument
Based on the logic and intention of the text
The textual argument will be explicit and implicit

Aided By Illustration
Inherent
Vivid historical setting
Lexical - Syntactical
and/or
External
Biblical
Secular
Life Experience

Implications

Directed to application
In thinking and action
(inseparably linked)

Objective
Biblical Change Colossians 1:28

© Carl A. Hargrove 2006

It is especially important to note that application is always mental and practical (life actions). They are inextricably bound in genuine exposition of the Word. There can be no genuine application that is not first motivated and informed by the arguments of Scripture. Illustrations are used to make the argument of the expositor cogent and concrete. Exposition has its foundation in the argument of the text—the logical sequence that forms the reason and expectation for the truth presented. God's rationale presented in the text is consistent with His desire to convince men of their need for divine intervention (Isa. 1:18–20).

God presents arguments in Scripture because He has an expectation for men to conform their lives to its truth, and it is the expositor's job to strive in making the same argument God is making in Scripture. These arguments will be implicit and explicit—implicational truths and direct commands of the text. The distinction between implication and application will be addressed later in this article. The listeners' conformity to the message proclaimed is the ultimate goal of the argument. (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:11–13; 2 Tim. 4:1–5).

The Ephesians were informed that pastors and teachers would serve as the instructors and examples to stimulate their maturation in faith (Eph. 4:11). Timothy is given the sober charge to resist deviating from the proclamation of the truth despite the inevitable change in response to genuine preaching (2 Timothy 3). He is to maintain his calling because the consequences are eternal if he accedes to the future spiritual climate. This is true in the contemporary preaching environment like no other time before because of an increasing climate that seeks to discourage authoritative teaching based on the absolute conviction of the Word's sufficiency. Expositors are striving to bring men and women to completion (τέλειος), which occurs as the Lord

works in concert with the preaching and teaching of the Word to help believers mature in their walk of faith.

The following definitions of preaching affirm the six components of exposition offered and the scriptural model of teaching for spiritual growth. They also assert the role of application in preaching.

Haddon Robinson's Definition

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept or an extended portion of Scripture, arrived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applied to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to this hearers.[12]

At the core of Robinson's definition is more than a method but a philosophical conviction concerning preaching.[13] The question at hand for the expositor is whether he will "bend his thoughts to the Scriptures...or use the Scriptures to support [his] thought."[14] Exposition involves a submission of the will because the Scripture controls the expositor's line of reasoning, and as a result, his applications will find their source in the Scriptures. Source, in this case, is the principle that any application must be consistent with the particular argument of the passage or overall goal of Scripture. An example of this use: an expositor may challenge fathers to demonstrate compassion for their children while preaching Ephesians 6:4. In this instance, the source of the application is consistent with the biblical call for believers to emulate the compassion of God. It also expresses the point of passage to avoid exasperation and rear children in the faith through godly compassion.

There may be a temptation to use the Scriptures as a springboard for preconceived applications, but they must always surrender to the biblical intention of the passage. Imbedded in Robinson's definition is the call to make doctrinal preaching practical and the biblical duty expected of the passage must be preached doctrinally.[15] This balance in preaching provides the proper motivation for duties (doctrinal conviction) and the goal of doctrine to be practical (life responses). Also implied in the definition is illumination for the preacher in preparation and in the audience for understanding and response. Notice that Robinson said, the "Holy Spirit applies to the preacher," then through him to the hearers.

Applicational exposition involves the Spirit illuminating the mind of the expositor, and in turn, giving him insight into the text and the needed grace for preaching its implication and applications. Preaching should be understood as an event that brings the revelation of God to bear on the souls of the listeners. It is one in which

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[12] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 5.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 28.

God aids the preacher by illumining his mind in preparation and delivery. Evangelicals have held the position that illumination is a part of the hermeneutical process.[16] Exegetical skills are required but are they always supported by the Spirit's intervening in the mind of the exegete to properly understand the text and prepare a message that properly interprets the text. Therefore, it is logical that the Spirit, who helps in preparation, also assists in the delivery of the message and in the recipients.[17]

Merrill F. Unger's Definition

However, if a clear and unconfused definition is to be arrived at, the valid criterion, it would seem, is not the length of the portion treated, whether a single verse or a larger unit, but the *manner of treatment*. No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be expository preaching.[18]

Unger's definition includes authorial intent, redemptive classification, and contextualization. Expository preaching is obligated to explain the author's intention—providing the authority for the preacher. It includes the redemptive classification (the design of God to provide salvation and sanctification), and contextualization (identifying the relevance for the audience). It is Unger's statement of "applied to the present-day needs of the hearers" that clearly affirms the inclusion of application in expositional preaching.

James Braga's Definition

An expository sermon is the most effective form of pulpit address because, more than any other kind of preaching, it eventually produces a Bible-taught congregation. By expounding a passage of Scripture, a pastor fulfills the primary function of preaching, namely, to interpret biblical truth to men and women, something that cannot always be claimed for other types of sermons.

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[16] R. C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1980). John MacArthur, "The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 102–15. James B. De Young, "The Holy Spirit--the Divine Exegete: How Are We Able to Hear Him?," (paper presented at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Jackson, MI, November 22, 1996), 1–24, accessed January 7, 2015, http://jamesdeyoung.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/HolySpiritpaper.pdf. David J. McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination: An Alternative to the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue," *BSac* 154, no. 613 (Jan 97): 94–104. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 282–83.

[17] Carl A. Hargrove, "The Role of the Holy Spirit as Convictor and Supporter in Preaching" (Th.M. thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2006). My Th.M. thesis further develops the role of illumination in preaching.

[18] Merrill F. Unger, "Expository Preaching," *BSac* 111, no. 444 (Oct 1954): 332–33.

An expository sermon is one in which a more or less extended portion of Scripture is interpreted in relation to one theme or subject. The bulk of the material for the sermon is drawn directly from the passage, and the outline consists of a series of progressive ideas centered on that main idea.[19]

Braga's reference to *progressive ideas* captures the logical arguments needed for expository preaching. The progression of the passage and the homiletical argument must always move toward elucidating the "main idea" from the text. The contiguous lines of reasoning (in didactic texts) or plots (in narratives) form the basis for the application of the message.

John MacArthur's Definition

Commenting on Colossians 1:25 "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God," MacArthur extracts from Paul's charge several logical characteristics of expository preaching:

Expository preaching—expressing exactly the will of the glorious Sovereign—allows God to speak, not man. Expository preaching—retaining the thoughts of the Spirit—brings the preacher into direct and continual contact with the mind of the Holy Spirit who authored Scripture. Expository preaching frees the preacher to proclaim all the revelation of God, producing a ministry of wholeness and integrity. Expository preaching promotes biblical literacy, yielding rich knowledge of redemptive truths. Expository preaching carries ultimate divine authority, rendering the very voice of God. Expository preaching transforms the preacher, leading to transformed congregations.[20]

Embodied in MacArthur's definition are five keys components: 1) The authorial intent is noted in the Spirit's role as author. 2) The redemptive theme of Scripture is highlighted. 3) The authority of preaching is a divine source. 4) The ethos of preaching is driven by integrity. 5) The ecclesiastical goal of preaching is maturity.

D. M. Lloyd-Jones' Definition

But the big difference, I would say, between a lecture and a sermon is that a sermon does not start with a subject; a sermon should always be expository. In a sermon the theme or the doctrine is something that arises out of the text and its context, it is something which is illustrated by that text and context. So a sermon should not start with the subject as such; it should start with the Scripture which has in it a doctrine or a theme. That doctrine should then be dealt with in terms of this particular setting. SO WHAT IS A SERMON? I therefore

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[19] James Braga, *How to Prepare Bible Messages*, 35th Anniversary ed. (Portland: Multnomah, 2005), 61.

[20] MacArthur, "Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy," 15.

lay down this proposition that a sermon should always be expository. But, immediately, that leads me to say something which I regard as very important indeed in this whole matter. A sermon is not a running commentary on, or a mere exposition of, the meaning of a verse or a passage or a paragraph…. They think that it just means making a series of comments, or a running commentary, on a paragraph or a passage or a statement.[21]

Lloyd-Jones recognizes the thematic or big idea of a sermon. His comment that doctrine is "illustrated by the text or context" is another way of stating that implications arise from the text at hand. Lloyd-Jones acknowledged the role of application in the exposition of Scripture. He spoke strongly against preaching that was simply a running commentary as true exposition, but taught and practiced the application of the text as vital:

But as you have presented your message in this way it is important that you should have been applying what you have been saying as you go along. There are many ways of doing this. You can do so by asking questions and answering them, or in various other ways; but you must apply the message as you go along.[22]

Brian Chapell's Definition

An expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text. The expository sermon uses the features of the text and its context to explain what that portion of the Bible means.[23]

Chapell's definition is bound to a commitment to textual preaching. His statement, "to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship…" is yet another way to communicate the need for application in exposition. Notice that Chapell begins with the mental projection of preaching. Application is first directed to the thinking of the listeners, which will properly motivate them to respond properly to the injunctions of the text.

Sidney Greidanus' Definition

Expository preaching is "Bible-centered preaching." That is, it is handling the text "in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind

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[21] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 82.

[22] Ibid., 87.

[23] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 31.

of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers." Thus one might say that expository preaching is preaching biblically. But "expository preaching" is more than a mere synonym for biblical preaching; it describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely, the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages).[24]

Greidanus advocates preaching that is grounded in the text, aware of the cultural context, and applied to the present-day audience. The application of the text is shaped by the "over-all context of Scripture" which provides the basic parameters for its interpretation and application and will help discover the implication as well.

Ramesh Richard's Definition

Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.[25]

J.I. Packer's Definition

We shall find it better to define "expository" preaching in terms, not of the length of the text, but of the preacher's approach to it, and to say something like this: expository preaching is the preaching of the man who knows Holy Scripture to be the living Word of the living God, and who desires only that it should be free to speak its own message to sinful men and women; who therefore preaches from a text, and in preaching labors, as the Puritans would say, to "open" it, or, in Simeon's phrase, to "bring out of the text what is there"; whose whole aim in preaching is to show his hearers what the text is saying to them about God and about themselves, and to lead them into what Barth called "the strange new world within the Bible" in order that they may be met by him who is the Lord of that world.[26]

While taking exception to Andrew Blackwood's limitation on expository preaching,[27] Packer offers an amalgamating definition that is both sober and engaging. Its foundation is anchored to the confidence in the nature of Scripture, the ethos

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[24] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

[25] Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

[26] J. I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Oursleves," in *Preach the Word: Essays in Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 141.

[27] Andrew W. Blackwood, *Expository Preaching for Today: Case Studies of Bible Passages* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 13.

of the preacher, and the call to be bound by the text he studies. These commitments to proclaim the Word are done with pastoral concern.

The definitions provided all assume that exposition will include application in some measure. [28] Based on the personal definition offered and those of other recognized expositors, we may state that true expository preaching will include application.

The Categories of Application

Application is best defined by categories and should not be limited to what many consider application—a list of antidotal exercises for congregants to follow at the conclusion of a message. Application is a life response to the truth of the message preached or taught. These life responses may be specific, if the text lends itself to offering specifics or general responses that are broad in application. Puritan William Perkins was an advocate of biblical exposition and doctrinal application. His definition of application reflects his preaching philosophy:

> Application is the skill by which the doctrine which has been properly drawn from Scripture is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation. This is the biblical approach to exposition: "'I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,' says the Lord God. 'I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick'" (Ezek. 34:15, 16). "And on some have compassion, making a distinction, but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 22, 23).[29]

Perkins believed that applying the sufficient Word was consistent with his role as a shepherd—there is a relationship between a preacher's bibliology and understanding his role in the pulpit. His view of shepherding was grounded in a high view of preaching, the written text, and the call to ministry. [30] In the modern era, Karl Barth provided a probing contrast to Perkins. Barth struggled with the concept of application in preaching, mainly because of his false supposition that the preached word is superior to the written word. He exclaimed this view when he wrote, "real proclamation as this new event, in which the event of human language about God is not set aside, but rather exalted, is the Word of God."[31] He further explains, "this very fact of the language of God Himself becoming an event in the human word of the Bible

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[28] Part Two will demonstrate how application in some of the most respected preachers in history would advocate applicational preaching. The history line will consider preachers from the Puritans to present-day expositors, including those already referenced.

[29] William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 54.

[30] Ibid., 9–11, 48–54, 71–76, 109–25.

[31] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1955), 106.

is…what we mean when we call the Bible the Word of God."[32] Of course, the Word of God makes no such distinction; actually, it forcefully contradicts such a false dichotomy.[33] This false dichotomy would be influential in leading Barth to believe that the application of the Word by the preacher was not possible. He believed that in the personal Christ event a listener experienced the Word, which would allow God to apply the text to their life situation.[34] Barth's statement is not altogether false—the Spirit does apply life lessons to the listening heart in a manner that is individual and personal, and He also uses the preacher to communicate specific applications in the preaching event. However, this reality should not negate the reality that the Spirit is also using the preacher as an instrument to communicate truth to his audience. The Spirit's role as a convictor and conformer in the lives of listeners does not mean that a preacher's application undermines that role. It is best to understand them as complementary rather than contradictory or competing.

In attempting to discover the role of application, there is a need to categorize its uses in the sermon. This article proposes three general categories of applicational exposition: Imperatival, Exhortational, and Pastoral.

Figure 2: Application

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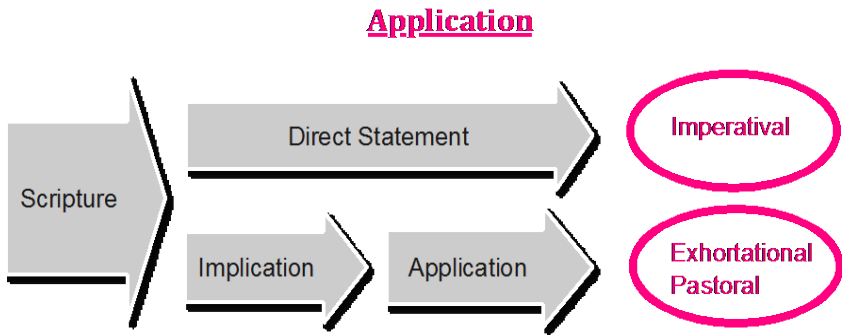
[32] Ibid., 123.

[33] Robert D. Preus, "The Power of God's Word" *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34, no. 8 (August 1963): 455. He offers four succinct examples of the unity of that which God speaks and writes: The words Jeremiah receives from God are dictated and read as "words of the Lord" (Jeremiah 36); that which John saw and heard he wrote (1 John 1:3,4– ὃ governs all the verbs in the passage); Paul Γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν (1 Cor 15:1); he desires for his message to be accepted in both written or if proclaimed verbally (2 Thess. 2:15).

[34] These criticisms of Barthianism are further developed in a class project. Note: Carl A. Hargrove, "The Spirit's Role and Criticisms of Barthianism," (class project: Th.M. Seminar on Bibliology: The Master's Seminary, Fall 2004). York and Blue concur with the conclusion of Barth's reluctance to accept application as a responsibility of the preacher in the preaching event. ("Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" 70).

Imperatival Applications

- You shall have no other gods (Exo 20:3); Seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33); And do not be confirmed to this world, but be transformed (Rom 12:1); Set your mind on the things above (Col 3:2); Put to death the members of your earthly body (Col 3:5); Flee immorality (1 Cor 6:18); Preach the word (1 Tim 4:2).

The first category of application is the most obvious and the easiest to define and agree. These are the explicit statements of Scripture that call for a specific response in either action or thinking. The New Testament contains approximately one thousand such applications and the Old Testament six hundred. This emphasis on response to divine truth makes it obvious that the intention of revelation is a call for mankind to obey the divine directives of God's Word. The application of the text is an explicit statement from the text itself. Although obvious, there are two steps that must be followed when preaching imperatives: [35] First, the hermeneutical question must be answered. Is the command functional? What is its authority over today's audience? Second, the teacher must make sure that the imperative is joined to the indicative that justifies the command. It is also important in applicational exposition that the indicatives are explained, if not, moralism occurs. The implications of the imperative are derived when considering the context of the imperative and asking questions such as, what objective does the command fulfill, what attribute of God is highlighted, and why is the command necessary?

Exhortational Applications

The exhortational nature of application is based on the relationship of implicational truth and response. This occurs when the expositor discovers the implication in his text and exhorts the audience appropriately, while following a logical process to arrive at the conclusion or application. Thomas calls for logic in preaching and likens it to the manner of New Testament apostolic preaching. He stresses the needs for logical patterns similar to the epistological manner:

> Consider how all the *therefore's* of the Epistle to the Romans hold together the various parts of the letter. Of course, a sermon is different from an Epistle: it cannot sustain such a chain of argument. Three or four links are ample, and a congregation's desire to look back after a sermon is over and see not only that they have passed from "one" to "three" but how they have made the journey.[36]

An exhortational application may vary in wording:

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[35] The process for making the best hermeneutical decision will be addressed in more detail in part two and seek to bring the principles of Applicational Expositional together in a manner that is useable for teaching and expository preaching.

[36] Geoffrey Thomas, "Powerful Preaching," in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1986), 376.

- It is, in view of these truths, I say to you the following.
- Having seen the examples of Christ, we are compelled to sacrifice for each other.
- In view of this confirmation of God's faithfulness, are you encouraged to trust Him, even when faced with tragedy?
- The recognition of God's holiness challenges you to denounce the temptations that have come to our community recently.
- Because we are a people called to walk worthy, I propose that we follow the pattern of Psalm 1 and avoid the counsel of ungodly counsel in the workplace.
- Since God is a God of beauty, doesn't it compel you to prioritize your daily lives so that you might have more time to appreciate His greatness on a more personal level?
- God has given us a great opportunity to show our concern for the lost by supporting global missions.
- Isn't it reasonable for younger men who are seeking to flee "youthful lust" to attach themselves to older men who can encourage his journey of faith?

Using rhetorical devices (questions, appeals, considerations, and admonitions) is an effective tool for applying the implications of biblical passages. These applications may be general or specific based on the intention of the text, the spiritual life of the church, and the immediate circumstances of the preaching event.

Pastoral Applications

The third category of application is pastoral. Pastoral application is used to contextualize, not the meaning of the text, but the application to the audience. An expositor may apply a text differently based on the situation, age, culture, and timing. This application remains under the umbrella of the principle derived from the explicit or implicit statement of the text to be taught. Holland understands this necessary distinction in exposition and speaks in pastoral terms when he encourages preachers to adjust to their personal flock or audience:

> These comments indicate the need for an expositor to have a working knowledge of his world and his people. In pastoral nomenclature, the more an expositor understands the sheep and their environment, the better he will know how to shepherd. This is best illustrated in how differently a preacher might exposit the same text to a group of children, teens, collegians, young married couples, senior saints, or a tribal church in Africa. Same text, same message, but different sermons relative to the preaching context...the message is never contextualized. It is merely our applications and illustrations that adjust to the listener's context.[37]
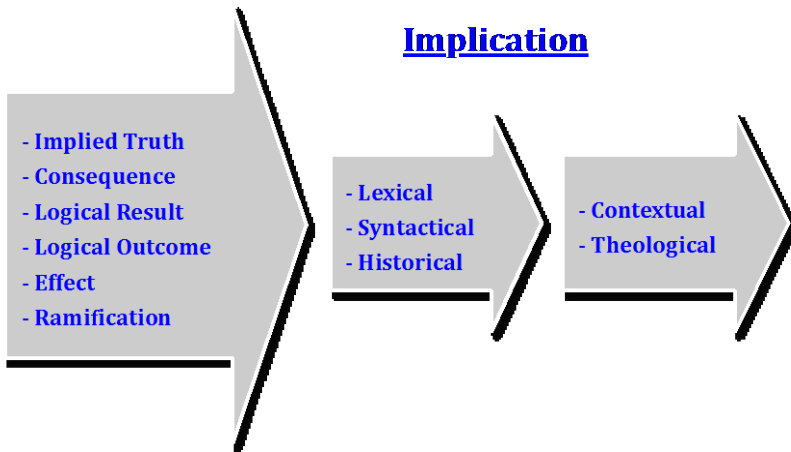
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[37] Richard Holland, "Expository Preaching: The Logical Response to a Robust Bibliology," *MSJ* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 34.

Expository preaching is one that recognizes the needs of the congregation without the congregation subtlety or overtly influencing the pulpit. This is a matter of shepherding in the preaching event—knowing his flock (1 Pet 5) and make appropriate applications of the text to address their particular challenges or spiritual needs. Pastoral application of a text would mean that, once the proper implication or command has been discovered, the expositor may apply the text in a broad or specific manner to address the congregational needs.

An example of pastoral application can be taken from Romans 8:28. This text has been crucial for the church through the ages and one laden with very strong implications and opportunities for application. If a pastor were aware of particular struggles in the congregation, it would be appropriate to apply the truth of God's all-controlling hand to the trials the congregation may be facing. It would be appropriate for pastors to apply the text to the hearts and minds of his audience in the local aftermath of Christians being killed for their faith or congregants losing loved ones and property in a natural disaster and not simply speak to the historical suffering during the letter's writing.

Expository preaching according to Geoffrey Thomas is not only logical but must be preached in an applicatory manner. In applicational preaching, the preacher recognizes the congregants' participation in the worship service as they are engaged in thinking, emotions, and challenged to pursue Christlike behavior.[38] Logical arguments in exposition that are built on the implications of the text and directed to application demonstrate the shepherd's heart for the welfare of the church.

Figure 3: Implication

Implication

- Implied Truth
- Consequence
- Logical Result
- Logical Outcome
- Effect
- Ramification

- Lexical
- Syntactical
- Historical

- Contextual
- Theological

Defining Implication

What is the basic definition of implication? Implications are statements or truths

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[38] Thomas, "Powerful Preaching," 380.

not explicitly communicated; yet they are logically recognized. Grasping the implications of a text will help amplify its connotations for the audience to whom it was written and the present-day readers. Implications are one of the greatest means to help bridge the time gap from the ancient text to present society because the truths of implications still have force even if the particular Testamental expectation is no longer in force. Hirsch was correct when he wrote, "to say that a particular meaning is implied by an utterance is not to insist that it is always 'unsaid' or 'secondary' but only that it is a component within a larger whole."[39] In preaching, implications are the basis for application. Although applications may be quite broad, implications are bound by its "etymological derivation."[40] The implications of the text are within, and expositors are to mine them and explicate them to their audiences. An important note on discovering and preaching implications is meaning will "retain its integrity and completeness even if all the implications have not been articulated."[41] This is important because it implies the primary goal of exegetically determining the meaning of the text and proving the legitimacy of the implications and application by the meaning.

Implications do carry nuances, some of which are illustrated in the following statements:

- The way he handled the text implies that he is committed to expositional preaching.
- God's expectation that we live holy communicates that He will supply the grace needed to achieve our calling to reflect His holiness.
- His commitment to preach faithfully for fifty years reflects an implicit trust in the Bible.
- Paul's admonition to the church at Thessalonica to "flee sexual immorality" implies a warranted concern.
- Although Peter does not mention Christ in 1 Peter 2:12, He is the implied subject.
- What is the implication of Job's prayer for his friends and the restoration of his fortunes in Job 42:10?
- There is a spiritual connection between deliverance from enemies and deliverance into God's presence in Psalm 27:1–4.
- Why does the statement of God's holiness (Rev 4:8) precede the unveiling of His wrath in subsequent chapters?
- The tendency of God's people to underappreciate the "benefits" of salvation should be explored (Ps. 103:2).
- The limitations of human freedom are evident in God's influence of national leaders (Prov. 21:1).
- Jesus' statement "follow me" (John 21:19) has multiple implications for disciples and commitment.

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[39] E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 61–62. Hirsch defines the implications as submeanings, which are a part of the large "array" of meaning.

[40] Ibid., 63.

[41] Ibid., 64.

- What disciplines are needed for developing in godliness as stated in 1 Timothy 4:7?

In certain contexts, implications carry the idea of ramification, consequence, or effect. In one sense, this is often the very heartbeat of biblical exposition—capturing and expounding the ramifications of a text for the benefit of the listener. Several statements act as examples of implication in this manner:

- It can be an exhausting exercise to discuss the implications of liberalism on minority communities.
- The negative implications of German higher criticism are evident in evangelicalism today.
- The young man was implicated in the crime because of his association with the suspects.
- The implications for rejecting the Messiah are far-reaching.
- What are the ramifications of being transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light?
- God's faithfulness to His covenant has great implication for Israel's future.
- A worthy series of study is the lasting effects of justification in the life of the believer.
- What are the implications of Jesus raising Himself from the dead?
- What are the consequences of a heart that constantly rejects the truth of the gospel?

With implications such as the last two, many doctrines are crystallized, and sermons gain clarity and depth as the expositor begins a process of mining the implicit truths that provide greater understanding of the passage and other theological concepts of the faith. The final examples, once studied, would answer questions about eternal punishment, election, divine justice, hamartiology, deity, Messianic prophecy, and the resurrection. The logical structures of the passage which are lexical, syntactical, and contextual, provide implicit truths that allow the expositor to communicate what is not always explicitly stated.

Implication may also be defined as both implicit statements and application of the message. Doing so is valid, because implication may mean a truth implied or a response inferred. Whereas application is a mental and practical response, implication indicates a possibility, expectation, or intention of the text.

When implications are taught, an instructor must have two goals in mind—a mental and practical response from the listeners. Mental responses: These include preaching that increases the listener's spiritual knowledge of the subject. In mental applications there may not be any specific response to the truths discovered. The main objective is a change in thinking concerning the truth exposited. A message proclaiming the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ is mainly calling for a mental response—a maturation of thinking and a greater awareness of Christ's sufficient work. It does not require a specific response—a duty or task. This is not to say that a specific response would be incorrect; however, in many cases, proposing a specific response

would undermine the goal of relishing the reality of the doctrine.

Another example would be a study involving the sovereignty of God. There is no possibility of emulation, but this does not mean that an expositor will not make an application. The application is an exhortation to a more mature trust in God's sovereign plan and may include certain responses, such as trusting in specific life challenges. If one were to apply sovereignty, unlike a call to love as Christ loved, it would entail life choices that reflect a belief that God controls all things.

Biblical examples of the mental responses an expositor would desire:

- A secure state of mind gained by understanding unconditional election (Eph.1:4)
- A greater awareness of the separation caused by sin (Eph. 2:1–3)
- A greater awareness of the love of God (Eph. 3:14–19)
- A greater assurance gained by considering God's eternality (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16)

When preaching, application exhorts and directs listeners to respond to the expectations of the passage. This is a natural element of expositional preaching, and it would be correct to say that preaching without highlighting implications is not genuine exposition. Considering implications is foundational to communication in general. It is not unique to exposition, but obviously needed in every area of communication, as both written and oral communications gain clarity when implications are understood and categorized. Implications can be discovered lexically, grammatically, contextually, theologically, and biblically. The following examples will further define implications, demonstrate their importance, and show their relationship to application.

Lexical Implications

Lexical implications include particular word nuances that help shape theological ideas, and statements about the subject, object, or situation. Many words provide a wealth of implicational truths and applications for the expositor. These words should be explored for their intrinsic value, which benefits the congregation.

Κηρύσσω. It is one of the broadest words in the New Testament for preaching and carries the idea of *a herald*. In heralding the message, the emphasis is not simply communicating the announcement but a focus on what is announced. Both Runia and Coenen agree that the importance of properly representing the message is stressed in Κηρύσσω.[42]

In this lexical example, the implication is clear: faithful ministers are not concerned with their voice being heard but with the voice of the person for whom they announce and the accuracy of the announcement. Applications: seek God's grace to be faithful to His message, don't be intimidated by the world and consider changing

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[42] Klaas Runia, "What Is Preaching According to the New Testament?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 150, no. 598 (1978): 8. L. Coenen, "Κηρύσσω," ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *NID-NTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 55–57 (Mark 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:9; Gal. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:4).

the message of the cross to accommodate the world, study to make sure you are grow-ing in doctrine, and assess the focus of your preaching.

חֶסֶד is one of the riches words in the Old Testament. It is translated various ways (lovingkindness NASB, steadfast love ESV, loyal love NET). The essential concept captured is covenant love. It depicts God and his intimate commitment to His people, and so often despite their sinfulness.[43] The implications are as vast as the scope of the word: the testimony of God's loyalty, the assurance because of His faith-fulness, the immanence of God, the security provided for the covenant people, the statement of God's concern, the reality of His mercy. Applications would mainly focus on trust in the Lord and seeking His forgiveness, and in certain contexts an exhortation to covenant fidelity in relationships.

Syntactical Implications

Chiasmic Use

The use of chiasm is a means of focus for the author; it is a point of a con-verging thought, and may even be considered the crux of the matter at hand in the present text.

> A[1]   *LORD Almighty*/'of hosts': the Lord in his personal omnipotence
>   B[1]   *God of Israel:* his chosen link with his people
>   C   *Enthroned between the cherubim:* sovereignty, personal presence, availability
>   B[2]   *God over all:* his sway over all the earth
> A[2]   *You have made heaven and earth:* omnipotence of government as Creator[44]

This chiasmic structure from Isaiah 37:15–16 is meant to draw the reader's at-tention to the One who can help in a personal manner during moments of great need. The present circumstances facing Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem are in need of sovereign intervention, and Hezekiah's prayer captures the reality of Yahweh's presence—He is the One "enthroned above the cheribum" yet in intimate covenant with His people. The implications for preaching: God is sovereign over all circum-stances, and His throne of exaltation is both transcendent and immanent. Application points: words of encouragement to those facing difficulties, trust the God who is both intimate and lofty, stop trying to fight the battles of life and rest in His sovereign plan, and presenting the question of priority in worship.

Prepositional Use

In Isaiah 52:14, the pronouncement that the Servant's physical appearance would be 'marred more than any man' (כֵּן־מִשְׁחַת מֵאִישׁ) captures the intensity of his physical suffering. The phrase is not comparing him to any other man but intends to

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[43] D. A. Baer, and R. P. Gordon, "חֶסֶד," in *NIDOTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:211–18.

[44] J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: In-terVarsity Press, 1993), 281.

communicate that the depth of his wounds were so much that his appearance was unlike that of a man.[45] This thought is especially captured by the preposition (מִן) joined to the clause. The force of the preposition emphasizes distance from the original state or place, i.e., He is far from being what is normally viewed as a man. The response of the viewers and their utter astonishment highlights the depth the suffering the Servant experienced. Implications for preaching: a heightened sense of the Savior's pain, His humility to experience such suffering, considerations on the Father's plan to allow this plan to unfold, despite being physically marred, He remained a perfect sacrifice, which speaks to His divine nature. There are many mental applications of awe, love, respect, and challenges to commitment in view of such an example.

The dative of association (τῷ Χριστῷ) in Colossians 3:1 has implications for the beleiver's relationship with Christ. This security stands in contrasts to the false attempts at gaining relationship to Christ espoused by deviant teachers at Colossae. Since Christians have a secure relationship to Christ based on His sufficient work, every attempt at self-effort is an affront to the accocomplished work on the cross (Col 2:10–15). The implications of association are clear theologically and have great import when exhorting congregants to live consistently in their new relationship, while depending on the resources commesurrate to the relationship—the new life in Christ provides all that is needed to exemplify the radical change wrought by salvation.

Historical and Contextual Implications

There are various situations where the historical setting and context carry implicational truths. Paul's resounding praise to start the letter of Ephesians, despite being under house arrest, speaks to his resolve and example as a model worthy to follow (Eph. 1:3–14; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). An application for the readers would be, "How can you follow Paul's example of contentment?" Notice that Paul does not allow his circumstances to inhibit his praise. There are various implications for the historical settings of the churches to whom the apostles wrote. This principle is also true for the setting in which the prophets and judges addressed Israel and the nations. Those contexts will often create inroads to application for contemporary audiences. Discovering these commonalties is what Chapell calls the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF).[46] There is a common experience, though divided by time with the contemporary audience. A sampling of these common experiences might be temptations to compromise, the impact of false leadership, criticism from the world, the temptations of worldly pleasures, the joy of a realized salvation, the empowering of the Spirit to make bold proclamation, and the benefit of a covenant relationship. All of these and

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[45] Ibid., 425. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Texts, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, ed. R.K. Harrison, vol. 3 *Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 337–38.

[46] Chapell's definition of the FCF: the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him.

more communicate the reality that man's need for the divine intervention of a gracious Savior is a constant.

Theological Implications

There are a number of implications derived from theological constructs. These implications are truths based on the theological supposition and responses dictated by them.

Literal six-day creation: The implications of this foundational understanding of Scripture and God's design are extensive. The overarching implication is no less than the veracity and authority of Scripture and the reality of God's creative power. These implications have import for every area of Christian experience, because without an absolute belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture there cannot be an authoritative proclamation of the Word.

Imago Deo: Man's connection to the Divine affords him certain expectations and privileges in creation. Of those privileges is the protection of life. It would be reasonable if not necessary when preaching the Imago Deo from the appropriate text to note the preciousness of life as an implication, and in turn speak against abortion as a contemporary application.

Biblical Inerrancy: MacArthur observes the implication of biblical inerrancy to expository preaching when he states,

> The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*....The mandate, then, is clear. Expository preaching is the declarative genre in which inerrancy finds its logical expression and the church has its life and power. Stated simply, inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching that preserves the purity of Scripture and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave us His Word.[47]

It would be appropriate to apply this implication by challenging the inerrantists to preach expositionally and never waver in their commitment in view of the devastating effects of abdicating this doctrine and practice.

Biblical Inspiration: B.B. Warfield recognized the implications of divine inspiration, starting with the use of the word itself. Inspire implies an influence not original to the object that results in "producing in its object movements and effects beyond its native, or at least its ordinary powers."[48] Commenting on John 10:35 (*Scripture cannot be broken*), Warfield states another implication of divine inspiration—the statement of Jesus is "the strongest possible assertion of the indefectible authority of Scripture."[49] Following Warfield's emphasis from the meaning and text, an expositor would be free to make an application stressing the total dependence on the Word, or challenge teachers to have total confidence in the Scriptures they teach and defend at

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[47] MacArthur, "Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy," 23–24.

[48] B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, ed. James Orr, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 3 (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915). 1475–76.

[49] Ibid., 1475.

all costs.

Original Sin: The pervasive effects of original sin in society and theology cannot be ignored. There are implications for evangelism and apologetics. The approach to sharing the gospel and even the need to share is affected—the understanding of original sin will influence an evidentialist or presuppositional approach. Preaching is not free from these implications either. The authority with which the expositor speaks and the theme of his message is affected based on his understanding of original sin. There will always be an "interrelationship"[50] between hamartiology and other doctrines. This relationship lets the expositor know that he must always preach within the parameters set by the construct of his theology—a theology that must be derived from diligent and honest exegesis. One of many applications would be stressing the need for God's grace to intervene because of man's inability to save himself (Eph. 2:1–5).

The Incarnation: Several implications of the incarnation are the humility of Christ (Phil. 2:1–11), the order of the Godhead, the Son's submission to the Father's will (John 10: 17, 18), and the total inability of man preventing self-redemption (Eph. 2:1–13; Gal. 4:4). Application: consider the example of Christ and emulate Him in humility and deference. This may include examples of deference in various areas of life.

There are thousands of implications in the doctrines of Scripture, and it is the preacher's responsibility to discover and explain them to the student/congregation. These implications are drawn from biblical texts. Again, the expositor is committed to discovering, considering, and expounding on the implication of a given verse or passage in his message because it is from them that he will find doctrine for preaching.

Biblical Examples

The book of beginnings demonstrates the implications of God's immanence and Noah's righteousness in Genesis 6:8, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." This statement communicates God's desire to discover a person with whom He might covenant and reveal Himself personally.

Second Chronicles 33:1–20 is the account of Manasseh's repentance. Grace is not mentioned in the passage, yet it should be predominate in explaining this passage regardless of the context for preaching. Manasseh's change from a doer of great evil to a reformer can only be attributed to God's gracious act to humble him (v.11) and then restore him (vv.12–13). Application: a call to repentance for those who believe it may be too late to repent, the hope that even the worst of people can be saved, confidence to share the gospel, a better understanding of how God may use suffering to bring someone to faith.

The saga of Job is replete with the implications of divine sovereignty in the life and health of each person. Job is a book that calls believers to better understand

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[50] Erickson remarks on the relationship of original sin to an understanding of nature, philosophy of ministry, soteriology, and anthropology. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 580–98.

God's freedom to order one's life, examples of how to counsel someone facing extreme heartache, and the lofty mental applications of God's providential dealings with men and His creative order.

Psalm 119:176 states, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments." This curious ending to the psalm depicting the sufficiency of Scripture in the life of the psalter implies that, because of lingering sin and despite a believer's desire for spiritual life, there is still a tendency to venture from the path of righteousness. The final clause communicates the psalmist's awareness of this propensity.

The implications of the blinding nature of sin in Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" In context, the issue is not focused on a lack of understanding sin's nature but the reality that sin has so darkened their minds and damaged their consciences that the moral standards they have taught and the prophets proclaimed are substituted for individual passions.[51]

Ironical statements in John's gospel offer many implications for exposition. One example is John 11:48–50 and the words of the Jewish leaders and Caiaphas:

> If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. [49] But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, [50] nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.

> 1. All men (nations) would believe in the gospel (Rev 3:10)
> 2. The Romans would take away their nation, not because they accepted Christ as king, but because of their rejection of His kingship
> 3. Caiaphas' intentions were evil (murder Jesus) while the divine plan was predetermined (Acts 3:11–26)

These examples are among the many thousands of implications found in Scripture. Implication and application are complements and a position that would seek to separate the two is not tenable.

Is "Implication Only" an Absolute

Among conservative expositors, there is some disagreement on defining implication and its role in exposition. Wayne McDill affirms the relationship between implication and application when he states, "Application presents the implications of biblical truth for the contemporary audience. It is a call for action, for putting the principles of Scripture to work in our lives. It deals with attitudes, behavior, speech, lifestyle, and personal identity. It appeals to conscience, to values, to conviction, to

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[51] J. Alec Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 72.

commitment to Christ."[52] If understood properly, they act as a necessary pair for exposition because they are the prerequisites to proper application. In a given text, there may be several implications which act as indicators to make exegetically honest applications. A teacher may take the position that proper exposition is concerned only with implication in preaching; however, this position is not defensible once scrutinized. Asking the questions that will help determine the implications of a text is an obvious phase in exposition. One cannot exposit without grappling with the implication of a text and communicating the truths to a given audience.

Over the years, I have been engaged in many conversations with students, peers, and colleagues concerning implications in preaching and application. There have been extremes in those conversations that stem from application viewed as the sure path to heresy that has no role in the expositor's preparation and delivery to those whose starting point is application, while exegesis is secondary. More recently are those who might say expositors are only concerned with implications and not applications.

The "implication only" position is generally based on a reaction to those whose preaching method reflects an exegesis as secondary priority in the pulpit. There is an empathy with this position, especially in view of the trends toward applicational messages with little to no exegetical grounding.[53] However, alarm based on cultural trends cannot be the determinate. The church has tended to operate on a pendulum, with points in history creating imbalance. Granted, there are many poor examples of application in pulpits, yet this does not invalidate the relationship of application to implication.

When an expositor exclaims an implication only position, it is expected that he would never make applications. The better statement would be that expositional preaching emphasizes implications that lead to appropriate applications and there are guidelines for determining both. These observations are often intuitive, particularly for the more experienced preacher. In the stages of textual observation, there are a number of implications an expositor may derive from the text. The guidelines for making these determinations will have nuances based on the genre of the passage.[54]

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[52] Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 127.

[53] Joel Osteen is one of the greatest proponents of this method, perhaps, even to an extreme. Osteen pastors one of the largest churches in America and is consistently a best-seller. His method does not fit any of the examples of exposition provided and supported in this project that properly demonstrate textual preaching with application. Osteen and men like him should not be used as models of application or as a reason why application is not a viable part of expositional preaching.

[54] General guidelines for determining appropriate applications will be addressed in part two of this article. For more in-depth consideration of the genre appropriate interpretation and application note: Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 158–278. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text*, 188–341. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Patterson, Richard D., *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011). 237–688. Daniel P. Jarms, "Tell of His Glorious Deeds: The Expository Preaching of Biblical Narratives" (Doctor of Ministry Project, The Master's Seminary, 2011). Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). 79–208. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to*

Relevance Not Relativism

The disclosure of God's truth is relevant.[55] The core of relativism is subjectivity and a lack of authority. Either explicitly or implicitly, every definition of expository preaching provided earlier communicates authority. The new homiletic is one that resists authority in the pulpit because at its core is a disagreement on the role and nature of Scripture and the authority of one called to teach the Scriptures. Although Craddock's assessment of the preaching of his today was correct and a precursor for today, his solution (inductive preaching, with listener authority) was yet another step in the New Homiletic and the decline of expository preaching. Doug Pagitt represents a contemporary example of the New Homiletic. He advocates "progressional dia-logue*"* and opposes "speaching" because it is a monologue and does not generate community.[56] Willhite is correct to say that relevance "points the way to application" and carries the sense of "significance, bearing, or pertinence."[57] Relevance is answer-ing the two most pertinent questions of the pew—does it matter in my life and are the claims legitimate? Relevance in preaching is the answer to both because truly biblical preaching is by nature relevant. [58] Applicational Exposition is relevant be-cause it brings the Scriptures to bear on the lives of those inclined to hear and those resisting its message—one audience receiving edification and the other further con-demnation (2 Cor 2:14–17).

Biblical exposition is not concerned with the "bottom line"[59] of the cultural de-mands for relevance. This is especially true since it reflects a worldview that is not consistent with the expectations of Scripture or the genuine need of man. Instead, the expositor is committed to "find the persuasive logic of the author" and communi-cating it in such a way that it will provide a "truth-trail" that matures the minds of the congregants so that they are prepared for everyday decision-making.[60]

Applicational exposition is committed to preaching relevant messages that pre-pare people for the answers to questions they are not yet asking. This is an important facet of true exposition. Many criticize the expositional model because they want

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Biblical Interpretation, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 181–345. McQuilken, *Under-standing and Applying the Bible*, 189–301.

[55] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text*, 158. Nester C. Rilloma, "The Divine Authority of Preaching and Applying the Word: Ellen G. White's Perspective in Relation to Evangelical Viewpoints," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16, no. 1–2 (2005). 185.

[56] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001). Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 11–13.

[57] Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 17.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Lee Eclow, "The Danger of Practical Preaching: Why People Need More Than the Bottom Line," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 317–19. Eclow states that there is a "practical fallacy" in many pews today. People believe that they will be satisfied if you simply give them the most practical application of text without any doctrinal substance.

[60] Ibid., 319.

their Monday morning questions answered; yet they must realize that the scheme of biblical preaching is the preparation for the issues and questions they presently face and will face in the future. It is no wonder that the Scripture is considered to be sufficient to "equip for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17) because it prepares the people of God for diverse ministry and life challenges. Klaas Runia was correct to say that sermons are focused both on the "text of the Bible and the situation of the hearers" as two interrelated parts that promote the inherent power of the Scripture and its intended impact on the listener.[61]

Summary

The use of application in exposition is an integral element of exposition. It is important that the application is bound to the exegetical discovery of the text at hand and directed to personal response. The role of implication to application is one of complement and leads to biblical applications in the life of the listeners. Exposition should always balance the didactic feature with the applicational—doctrinal teaching is the motivation for behavioral responses. Although there are some who do not believe that applicational exposition is viable, it is a minority position. The vast majority of expositors recognizes its role in exposition. It is important to note that the first source for effective preaching of any manner is the Word of God, which has a powerful spiritual effect on the mind of the listener

What makes preaching powerful is an implicit trust in the authenticity and nature of the Scriptures, faithfulness to the text, and a life that reflects the convictions. The implications of the text are multi-faceted and because of this, they will impact the various needs of a given congregation or group. Three categories of application were provided. However, this does not mean that application is limited to those categories. Imperatival, exhortational, and pastoral are the most obvious from Scripture and experience; preachers and teachers regardless of setting use them. The goal of applicational exposition is not to meet all the particular needs of an audience, but to properly interpret and apply the text based on the parameters of careful exegesis. The study of applicational exposition will continue in the next article.

[61] Runia, "What Is Preaching According to the New Testament?" 41.
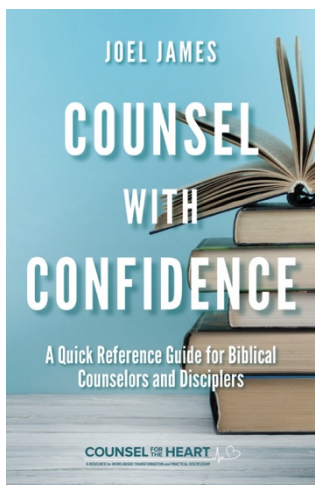
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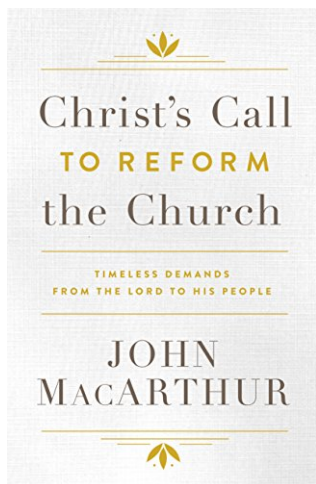
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HOW TO FIX A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

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There are few challenges as prevalent within the church as broken relationships. This article seeks to introduce the subject of facilitating reconciliation between believers within the church. While the primary audience is new and future pastors, it also is accessible to saints within the church. It offers a fourfold introduction to the subject on how to restore broken relationships within the church for consideration to peers and students—past, present, and future.

* * * * *

Introduction

An understanding of how to restore broken relationships is as relevant in the church today as it has been throughout church history. It is a subject that is likewise relevant to every person alive today, because it is a byproduct of our fallen human condition. Living as a sinner in a sin-cursed and fallen world will necessarily result in conflicts between people. These conflicts, if not resolved biblically—even between Christians within the household of faith—can end in broken relationships.

One of the main responsibilities of elders within the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11–13). This instruction should necessarily culminate, not only in an understanding of sound doctrine, but also in unity between the members of the body as they strive together as one man to glorify Christ in His church (Phil. 1:27–28). In fact, it was Jesus who announced to the disciples in the upper room that the world would be able to see that they were His disciples by the love they had for one another (John 13:34–35).

With this principle in mind, the following four lessons are offered to the next generation of preachers as a basis for instructing God's people on how to restore fractured relationships within the church. It is as essential that pastors and teachers understand how to counsel, preach, and teach in the areas of practical Christian life as it is theology and doctrine. So, this work is offered as a starting point or primer for addressing this subject to the current and future generations of God's servants.

Address Sin Biblically

That offenses will occur within the context of the church and in every Christian life is a given. The question is, when they do occur, what does God expect us to do? Who does He hold responsible to pursue reconciliation? There are two key passages that help us understand how to answer these questions. Together, they not only tell us how to address sin when offenses occur, they also make it clear who is responsible to pursue reconciliation to begin with.

When a Brother Sins Against You

The first text is in Matthew 18. This is a passage that most immediately think about from a corporate perspective because it addresses the process of church discipline. What is more, all too many people think church discipline applies only to the worst kinds of offenses. But, a close examination of the text reveals a very different perspective. Church discipline should be a process that Christians should be practicing on a regular basis throughout the whole of their Christian lives.

> Matthew 18:15: If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.[1]

There are several key points to be made from this text. The first is that it is the responsibility of the one who has been offended to pursue reconciliation. Human pride typically justifies relational separation from those who have offended them because they are the 'innocent' party. Many relationships (even Christian marriages) function on this basis. A wife may say, "He sinned against me, so I am going to remain apart from him relationally until he realizes what he has done and repents." A father may say, "My son has again disrespected my authority, so I am going to simply treat him as a stranger until he learns what it feels like." The prideful human heart justifies this kind of behavior since it was offended first. But Jesus puts the responsibility to pursue reconciliation on the one who was offended! If your brother sins, *you* go, and *you* show him his fault.

Secondly, the goal of church discipline is not to set a person straight. It is to secure reconciliation—i.e., the restoration of the relationship. Jesus says, 'if he listens to you, you have won your brother.' The goal is always to restore the broken relationship. If you work through the entirety of Matthew 18:15–18, you can see that the goal throughout is always reconciliation. You only put a person out if they continue to refuse to repent. And this only happens when others have become involved and can verify that it really is a sin issue and that the sinning brother refuses to repent from it.

Additionally, we see that the process starts with the offended individual going to the one who offended them personally, privately, and purposefully. The terms "go" and "show" are both imperatives. This confirms that Jesus fully expects the offended brother to be the instigator in facilitating reconciliation. The word "show" carries the

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from the NAU.

sense of reproof. In other words, if your brother sins against you, then it is your responsibility in the sight of God to seek to restore the relationship by helping your brother see what he has done that is offensive to God.

Finally, Jesus says, 'if he listens to you'—i.e., if he hears what you are saying, and you can reconcile over the matter—'you have won your brother.' You have managed to restore the broken relationship. This is how Jesus taught His disciples to fix a broken relationship. If your brother sins against you, then you have the responsibility to seek to restore the relationship. You go to him privately so that it is just the two of you working together to repair the break in fellowship. You go with the express purpose to restore it by addressing specifically the offense that was committed. If he listens, then you have fixed the break in your relationship and God is honored.

Now, it may well be that when you go to your brother it becomes apparent that it isn't really a sin issue, or that it was simply a misunderstanding, or even that it was something that your brother had no idea was a sin or that you found it offensive. In each of these cases, it is the fact that you kept it between the two of you that helps facilitate reconciliation. If you discuss the offense with others before pursuing your brother, then even after the reconciliation you have work to do to restore those you told, to your brother. You only involve others when you cannot reach reconciliation between the two of you. That process is detailed in Matthew 18:16–18. The one or two others that get involved at this point are to confirm that it is a sin, and the brother refuses to repent. Only then does the church get involved corporately. Finally, if he refuses to listen to the church, then you put him out of the church until he repents (see 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 7). Nevertheless, the goal throughout is always reconciliation and repairing the relationship that was broken by sin.

When You Sin Against a Brother

Having covered the biblical responsibility of the brother who was sinned against, it is time to address the other side of the equation. Jesus speaks directly in this case as well in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

> Matthew 5:21–22: "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Jesus' exposition of the Law here and again regarding the sin of adultery (Matt. 5:27–29) shows that God's standard goes beyond merely the committing of an act of transgression (like committing murder or the act of adultery) and includes even the verbal expression of disdain or the lustful act within the heart. Even firing off hateful words (5:22) is a sin worthy of eternal condemnation. We are all accountable to God, not just for sins we commit actively, but even for our thoughts and the very words we say. Speaking hatefully to another person is a violation of God's commandment

to 'not commit murder' in principle, because it harms a fellow bearer of God's image. Having made this principle clear, Jesus gives His listeners this instruction:

> Matthew 5:23–24: "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

The inferential ("therefore") ties this instruction to the point He just made regarding the sin of murder. Since you can be eternally condemned for your words as well as your actions, if you get to the altar and are ready to give your offering to God, but remember you have sinned against a brother, then stop your worship! First, go and be reconciled to your brother. Then you can come back and present your offering to God.

The point here is clear. If you sin against someone, even if it is just a hateful word, it is your responsibility to pursue reconciliation with him—even if he does not pursue you. God is not interested in receiving your gifts and offerings until you have obeyed Him by returning to your brother and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. This coincides with Peter's word to husbands in 1 Peter 3:7. He instructs husbands to treat their wives as fellow heirs of the grace of life (i.e., people just as important in God's sight as they are) lest their prayers be hindered. God is not interested in hearing the prayers of a husband who fails to treat his wife as an equal bearer of God's image. God is likewise not interested in receiving gifts and offerings from a person who (when they know they have sinned against someone) has not first gone in repentance and sought reconciliation with them.

Far too often, people get into the habit of searing their consciences when they knowingly offend others. Whether they justify their actions personally, circumstantially, or otherwise, they know they've sinned. But, even when they feel the pang of guilt, they push it aside or seek to cover it by some act of worship or good deed. But God demands repentance. This is the process necessary to facilitate restoration in a broken relationship. This is what must happen to secure unity within the home and the church.

The Bottom Line

No matter who you are, nor what your role in breaking a relationship is, it is your responsibility to pursue reconciliation. If your brother sins against you, you must honor God and go help him see his sin. If you suddenly realize or remember that you sinned against your brother, you need to make it an immediate priority to go and be reconciled to him. God is interested in no other act of worship from you until you have honored Him in repentance in this case. This shows just how important it is to God that His people (offended or offender) assume the responsibility personally to pursue reconciliation with each other when there is an offense.

Accept Responsibility Personally

A common practice in most people (including believers) is to shift the blame to others when they make mistakes or offend others. But this is far from original. We have all inherited this default behavior from our greatest grandfather, Adam. The Bible tells us that man rebelled against God and ate the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:1–6). When Adam and his wife realized what they had done, they made themselves loin coverings and hid themselves from God (Gen 3:7–8). When God showed up, He confronted the man in his sin and asked him directly, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:11). The man's answer at this point is reflective of each of us today:

Genesis 3:12: The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Rather than simply accept responsibility for his sin, he reflexively attempted to shift the blame to others. His initial target is the woman. This is obvious from the text. He says that she was the one who gave him the fruit. The implication is that if she had not done what she did, he would not have even begun to think about sinning like this. And, frankly, from a fallen human perspective, it is not difficult for us to identify with this charge to some extent. She was the initiator of the rebellion humanly speaking. She was the first to disobey God. She was, in fact, the one who provoked Adam to make the choice to obey or disobey initially. So, there is a measure of truth behind Adam's statement. But, even if she did initially entice him to act in disobedience to God, it is still on Adam to choose to obey or disobey.

However, Adam's ultimate accusation is leveled against God in this context. His statement was that it was the woman "You gave" me. Adam is not just blaming his wife. For that matter, he's not even chiefly blaming his wife. He is blaming God for his sin. This is all too often the principle at work in Christian homes and churches. There is a commitment to follow the fallen example of grandpa Adam and blame everyone and everything else for our shortcomings, mistakes, and even sins. We have all both seen and done this ourselves—from the husband who says, "I'm sorry dear for yelling at you. It's just that you've been so mean, self-centered, and disrespectful of me lately that I cracked" to the wife who states, "I'm sorry for biting your head off in front of your parents dear. It's just that you've been such a hateful, insensitive jerk of late that I couldn't take it anymore." It is part of fallen human nature to blame others for our own shortcomings, failures, and sins. But that is not what God expects of us. And frankly, if we don't accept responsibility in the sight of God and others for our sins, then there can be no forgiveness—either from God or others. Apart from forgiveness, there can be no restoration of broken relationships.

Accepting the responsibility for your sin involves three things: (1) Admission of guilt; (2) Expression of sorrow over the offense; and (3) Commitment to change. Admission of guilt means that we start by simply declaring that we sinned. There must be no caveats, excuses, or extenuating circumstances that reduce our accountability before God or men for our actions. We start by saying, "Dear, please forgive me for the way I spoke to you. It was hateful and mean. I was wrong and there is no

excuse for it." There needs to be a clear admission of guilt. There must be no effort to reduce personal accountability. Even in Adam's case where it was the woman who initially gave him the fruit—it was still his choice to act which resulted in sin.

There needs also be an expression of sorrow over the offense—i.e., "I truly am sorry that I hurt you and offended God." A real key here is that it must be godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow. It isn't an expression of sorrow over the circumstances that have followed or the consequences of my sin that I must now endure that grieves me. It is that what I did was an offense against God and it hurt you. That is foundational to true repentance.

Finally, it is in keeping with repentance that you understand (and can articulate) what you should have done instead. This is a key to progressive sanctification. Paul explains the put off/put on process of sanctification in Ephesians 4:17–24. His illustrations in vv. 25–32 show what the completed process looks like. Two, in particular, will be adequate for the purposes of this discussion. The first relates to stealing (4:28) and the second to speaking (4:29). Both illustrate God's expectations as they relate to the complete process of repentance.

> Ephesians 4:28: He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

There is in the Decalogue a specific commandment that says, "You shall not steal" (Exod. 20:15). But, this is an elementary instruction regarding God's law. Jesus said that the two chief commandments are to love God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to demonstrate this by loving your neighbor as you already love yourself (Matt. 22:36–40). So, God doesn't just expect us not to steal from each other. He likewise expects us to take care of each other. That is why Paul illustrates the complete process of repentance in the case of stealing as putting off being a taker and becoming a giver. Repentance for a thief would involve acknowledgement of the sin of stealing. It would include returning what was stolen and making restitution where appropriate. But it would also be accompanied by a commitment to change one's practices in life. He starts working to provide not only for himself, but also to the extent that he can give to those in need. For a believer, it is thinking through repentance at this level that facilitates spiritual growth and the ability to start overcoming sinful behaviors and practices.

> Ephesians 4:29: Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Again, we see that when it comes to the ungodly use of our mouths, the process of repentance is not simply to stop saying rotten, hateful, or ugly words. It is a complete change from using our mouths to tear others down, to using them to build others up. We don't simply speak our minds regardless of the impact it might have on others and count it as truthful speech. We speak what is beneficial for those who hear. We are therefore accountable to God, not just for what we say, but also for how we say

it. Accepting responsibility for our sins personally will include a pursuit of holiness on this level. This is what all believers need to be taught regarding the process of sanctification in order to grow spiritually and restore broken relationships.

Forgive Sin Continually

Now, in the same way that repentance is foundational to the offending side of the relational equation, forgiveness is essential from the offended party. True reconciliation cannot take place apart from a granting of forgiveness. The real challenge here is wonderfully illustrated by Peter's response to Jesus' teaching on this very subject.

In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus instructs His disciples on the entire process of reconciliation from start to finish. He makes it clear that throughout the process, the goal is always to win back your brother. However, Peter speaks in many ways for all of us when he asks, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). It is Peter's readiness to speak his mind that so endears him to me. He asks what we all want to ask after we have had to deal with someone who has offended us repeatedly—often in the very same way. How many times do we go through this process before we can write them off as not truly serious about repenting?

Peter no doubt expected to be commended for saying "seven times" perhaps thinking it was going above and beyond what could reasonably be expected. But Jesus' response is clear, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Matt. 18:22). In other words, there is no limit to how many times we are expected to forgive those who offend us. We are expected to keep working to restore our relationships with each other. This holds true whether we are the offending or the offended party in any conflict.

Now, this may seem like an unreasonable expectation. But the fact is, it is nothing more than the very grace God has extended to us in Christ. Perhaps Paul expressed it best when he summarized the relational put off/put on process by saying:

> Ephesians 4:31–32: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Paul instructs believers to put away all the angry feelings, resentments, hurts and offenses we have suffered from one another in the past. He calls for us to halt all hurtful speech and attitudes toward each other. Instead, we are to be kind to each other, tender-hearted (which speaks directly of compassionate feelings toward each other), and forgiving. That final call is what is most relevant to the current discussion. He tells us to forgive each other "as God in Christ has forgiven you." That final phrase should cause every believer to stand up and take note. Because God has forgiven us of everything in Christ, He has forgiven us for the sins we have knowingly committed, and quickly and fully repented of. He has forgiven us for the sins it took a while for us to see, but that we have in time come to understand as sins and repent from. He has also forgiven us of sins we have yet to see as sins or have real problems truly

repenting from. What is more, He keeps on forgiving us, all day, every day, all the way to glory! That is what seventy times seven looks like.

This call for true and complete forgiveness is a consistent teaching throughout the ministry of Jesus. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray by saying, "[Father]… forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). In other words, we are literally to ask our heavenly Father to forgive us of our offenses against Him in the same way we forgive those who offend us. It is questionable as to how many professing believers genuinely think through the implications of a statement like this in their daily practices. But, having taught this pattern for prayer to His disciples, Jesus concludes with this warning:

> Matthew 6:14–15: "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

In other words, our forgiveness from God is dependent upon whether we are willing to forgive offenses against us. Anyone who professes to be a Christian, and yet is unwilling to forgive offenses committed against them by men needs to seriously consider the validity of their profession of faith.

Now, this is not always an easy practice to implement. There are some offenses that are grievous and difficult to forgive. There are offenses that are recurrent and accompanied by what seems to be anything but a genuine manifestation of repentance. There may well be a need for the church to practice the latter stages of church discipline for patterns of sin that fail to show real repentance. There may be the need (for example) to put out a serial adulterer until actual repentance begins to be seen. But the general standing practice must be that we forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us. This needs to be taught and modeled constantly within the church.

Both elements in the Matthew 18 discipline process are essential to facilitating reconciliation. There must be a confronting of sin when it occurs when the offending brother does not repent on his own. Paul made this clear when he instructed the Corinthians regarding a young man who was committing gross immorality to "remove the wicked one from among you" (1 Cor. 5:1–13). However, he was just as clear in his second letter when he instructed them to forgive and restore him when he came back in repentance (2 Cor. 2:1–11). In fact, Paul confirms that even the confrontational points he wrote in 1 Corinthians were wrapped and undergirded by a readiness and desire to forgive them when they rightly responded to his biblical admonitions (2 Cor. 7:2–12). 1 Corinthians is largely a letter written by Paul confronting the church in its errors in a deliberate effort to facilitate reconciliation—not just with Paul personally, but also with Christ. That is what is required to fix broken relationships in the church. It takes a commitment to obey God by confronting sins by both parties, repenting of sins by those who commit them, and forgiving sins by those offended.

Love Sinners Persistently

There are so very many ways people offend each other every day. Some are not necessarily even sins—just differences of opinion, perspective, or preference. In fact, one key lesson that must be learned early in life and ministry is that every disagreement in life and ministry isn't necessarily opposition. There are often multiple ways to approach a challenge, accomplish an objective, or solve a problem. Learning to consider others as more important than ourselves and treat companions in ministry and life accordingly is a key to godly biblical relationships—both in the church and in the home.

Many relationships begin this way. Consider the couple that falls in love. They begin seeing only those characteristics of each other that they appreciate. They overlook offenses—many times with barely a second thought. Love, affection, consideration, and appreciation govern their view of each other. In time, these affections are tempered by familiarity, the accumulation of offenses, and an awareness of differences and annoyances. Now, the reality is that nothing has changed in the couple—except their devotion. They are still the same people. They are typically still behaving the same ways—though, possibly with less willingness to defer to each other's preferences. But the hyper commitment to the relationship has been corrected. Does this mean the relationship should be abandoned because the 'love' is gone? Or, does this mean that a biblical corrective is taking place and it is time to worship God (instead of this relationship) and love each other as God in Christ has loved us? Biblical Christian relationships confront sins in order to restore the relationship—both with God and the offended party. Biblical Christian relationships are characterized by repentance when confronted with sin—or, a willingness to consider the other person as more important than self where possible when it is not a sin issue. Why? Because Christianity is founded upon the principles of love and forgiveness.

It is not acceptable to live out a Christian life estranged from people that it is within your power to be reconciled to. It is likewise not acceptable to live estranged from people that are simply difficult for you to relate to. We are called to live at peace with all men and to unite together in the church as a family. This requires a commitment to value our relationships with each other (in the home and in the church). The basis for this is God's perfect love for us.

One final note is necessary before closing. That is to acknowledge as Scripture does that it is not always possible to restore every relationship. Paul says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). The very fact that Paul's instruction includes that opening caveat means that sometimes it will not be possible. There are times when people will intend evil toward us (Gen. 50:20). There will be times when it is not possible to live at peace with some people. This cannot continue within a church. The Matthew 18 process should facilitate either reconciliation or separation until reconciliation is possible. But for those outside the church, this kind of situation is possible. For these cases, the Bible is clear on the godly response to those who do evil to us—we are to love our enemies and repay evil with good (Matt. 5:43–48; Rom. 12:14–21; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 3:9). For pastors, perhaps the most useful reminder of our ministry of reconciliation is this:

2 Timothy 2:24–26: The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

When believers are caught in a pattern of sin, it is our responsibility to work toward reconciliation. We must seek that constantly, not to get problem people out of the church. We must rather work to see people with problems see their sin and repent. We must be agents of reconciliation who are patient even when we are the ones offended. This continues to be the case even if that offense comes as a result of working to facilitate reconciliation. And we must do this trusting that it will be God Himself who works repentance in the hearts of His people. We must love sinners even when they are sinning, and work toward reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness. If this seems like too high an expectation, then we need to remind ourselves that this is precisely the way God restored us to Himself through Christ (Rom. 5:8).

Conclusion

I am convinced that the importance of understanding and practicing this process of reconciliation within the church and in Christian homes cannot be overemphasized. The Christian life begins with this process of reconciliation between the sinner and God. The Bible is replete with both illustrations and instructions to follow it. The fallen condition of mankind—even for those granted a new heart and the indwelling Holy Spirit—necessarily means that we will sin against others, and they will sin against us. So, mastering the process of reconciliation with each other is an essential part of becoming a mature Christian. For this reason, personally mastering and then teaching this process to all within the church is an essential duty for pastors and teachers in every church.

VEILED IN FLESH THE GODHEAD SEE:
A STUDY OF THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST[1]

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A tragic lack of familiarity with the historical development of classical Christology has resulted in the acceptance of unbiblical views of Christ's self-emptying. The post-Enlightenment doctrine of Kenotic Theology continues to exert its influence on contemporary evangelical models of the kenosis, seen primarily in those who would have Christ's deity circumscribed by His humanity during His earthly ministry. Keeping moored to the text of Scripture and to Chalcedonian orthodoxy combats this error and shows Christ's kenosis to consist not in the shedding of His divine attributes or prerogatives but in the veiling of the rightful expression of His divine glory. The eternal Son emptied Himself not by the subtraction of divinity but by the addition of humanity, and, consistent with the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union, the incarnate Son acts in and through both divine and human natures at all times. A biblical understanding of these things leads to several significant implications for the Christian life.

* * * * *

Introduction

"The incarnation of the Son of God." For many long-time believers, that kind of theological shorthand has become so familiar that we cease to be amazed at the truth it describes. The eternal, preexistent Word—ever with God, ever God Himself—became flesh and tabernacled among sinners (John 1:1–14). It is rightly called the miracle of all miracles. The infinite, eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, almighty God made Himself nothing by taking on the nature of finite, temporal, dependent, mortal humanity—without shedding His divine nature (Phil. 2:5–8). The immutable God became what He was not while never ceasing to be what He was.

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[1] Portions of this article have been adapted and published as Mike Riccardi, "He Emptied Himself: The Kenosis," in *High King of Heaven*, ed. John MacArthur (Chicago: Moody Press, 2018), 107–17. Those portions are reprinted here with permission.

The Irish Reformer James Ussher rightly said that the incarnation is "the highest pitch of God's wisdom, goodness, power, and glory."[2] Pastor and author Mark Jones has written, "The incarnation is God's greatest wonder, one that no creature could ever have imagined. God himself could not perform a more difficult and glorious work. It has justly been called the miracle of all miracles."[3]

There is a peculiar glory to this greatest of God's miracles. Among all the works Almighty God has accomplished, the incarnation has a special luster of magnificence. The juxtaposition of the majesty of the infinite God with the humility of finite man, united in one magnificent Person, renders the glory of the incarnation more especially brilliant than all other of God's glorious works. Therefore, God's people must devote their minds to the study of this wonder. We must peer into this mystery with the hope of enflaming our hearts with the worship that God rightly deserves.

In studying the incarnation, we encounter the doctrine of the kenosis of Christ. That term derives from the verb κενόω, which Paul uses in Philippians 2:7 to speak of the humility of Christ in the incarnation. Rather than insisting on His own rights to continue in manifest divine power and authority, the eternal Son of God selflessly surrendered those rights by taking on a human nature in order to accomplish salvation for sinners. The doctrine of the incarnation entails the doctrine of the kenosis, and therefore it is worthy of our attention, study, and adoration.

But that is no easy task. The study of the incarnation and the kenosis of Christ confronts us with some of the loftiest ideas able to be conceived by the human mind: the metaphysics of defining a nature and a person, confessing the union of two distinct natures in one person without contradiction, and more. Many Christians deride such study and counsel others not to waste their time on what they view to be overly speculative and philosophical discussion.

However, our praise to Christ soars only as high as our understanding of His glorious person and work is rooted in the truth. The heights of our worship will never exceed the depths of our theology. Therefore, the genuine worshiper of Christ must always be a student of Christ. John Murray wrote of the incarnation and kenosis: "It is high and heavenly doctrine and for that reason of little appeal to dull minds and darkened hearts. It is the mystery that angels desire to look into. But it is also the delight of enlightened and humble souls; they love to explore the mysteries which bespeak the glories of their Redeemer."[4]

In this article, I aim to explore these mysteries which tell of the glories of our Redeemer in four parts. I first consider the church's formulation of Scripture's teaching concerning the full and true deity and the full and true humanity of the incarnate Son of God, especially as it was codified in the doctrine of the hypostatic union at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This gives a sense of our biblical and theological boundaries as we theologize concerning the person of Christ. Second, I observe the historical challenges to the church's formulation of Scripture's teaching, particularly

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[2] James Ussher, *Immanuel, or, The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: Susan Islip for Thomas Downes and George Badger, 1647; repr. Swansea, 1810), 2.

[3] Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 25.

[4] John Murray, "The Mystery of Godliness," in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 3:240.

in the form of the "kenotic theory" of Christology, an aberration of the biblical doctrine of the kenosis which, in an effort to preserve Christ's genuine humanity, fatally undermines both His humanity and His deity. Third, I offer a theological evaluation of the error of kenoticism. Fourth, I present the biblical kenosis by means of a brief exposition of Philippians 2:5–8. Considering all these things, I close with some practical application.

The Church's Formulation: A Review of Classical Christology

From the very beginning of the church, there was grave confusion regarding how to coherently hold all of the Bible's teaching together concerning the person of Christ. On the one hand, Scripture unmistakably testifies to the deity of Christ (cf. John 1:1–14; Phil. 2:5–11, as above). He is eternal (John 8:58), omniscient (John 2:25; 16:30), omnipotent (Matt. 8:8–13; 26–27; 14:15–21), the Creator (Col. 1:16), and the Sustainer of creation (Heb. 1:3). On the other, alongside these texts, Scripture clearly testifies to the humanity of Christ. He is the *man* Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5), born of a woman (Luke 2:7; Gal 4:4); He grew in wisdom and in stature (Luke 2:52); He was hungry (Matt. 4:2) and thirsty (John 19:28), He grew weary (John 4:6) and slept (Matt. 8:24), and He bled (John 19:34) and died (John 19:30). In the face of two sets of divinely-authoritative texts that seemed to be utterly contradictory, the task of the church was to do theology—to do justice to all of the biblical data by holding all of those texts together, and to formulate them into a coherent whole.

Christological Challenges

There were many who attempted that task and failed, and their doctrines are enshrined as the historic Christological heresies of the early church. The adoptionists denied that Christ was truly God. They taught that the merely-human Jesus was adopted by God at His baptism, where He was endowed with divine power but nevertheless remained man. The docetic Gnostics denied that Jesus was truly man. Their radical dualism—in which spirit was inherently good and physical matter was inherently evil—made it impossible for God to assume a true, physical human nature. Thus, they taught that Christ only appeared[5] human, but was not truly human. The Arians denied that Christ was fully God. He was God-like—of a similar substance with the Father but not of the same substance. The Apollinarians denied that Christ was fully man. They taught that the eternal Son assumed only a human body without a human soul. Instead, the divine nature of the Logos replaced what would have been a human soul in the man Christ Jesus.

In addition to denying the true and full deity or the true and full humanity of Christ, there were also heresies that wrongly described the relationship of Christ's

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[5] The name "Docetism" or "docetic" derives from the Greek word δοκέω, which means "to appear."

divine and human natures to one another.[6] The Nestorians conceived of the two natures of Christ as two personal subjects themselves, and so made Christ to be not one person with two natures, but two persons—something of a schizophrenic. The monophysites swung in the opposite direction and confused the two natures such that Christ was to have only one nature.[7] Some monophysites taught that the human nature was absorbed into the divine nature, so that Christ was a sort of "mostly divine" being. Later monophysites taught that the two natures were so mingled together as to form what is famously called a *tertium quid* ("a third thing")—neither divine nor human, thus making Christ neither truly God nor truly man.

Heresy	Error
Adoptionism	Denied true deity
Docetism	Denied true humanity
Arianism	Denied full deity
Apollinarianism	Denied full humanity
Nestorianism	Divided Christ's natures (two persons)
Monophysitism	Confused Christ's natures (*tertium quid*)

The Chalcedonian Definition

In October of 451, 520 bishops gathered in the town of Chalcedon to settle these various Christological disputes. And it was there that the church, following the teaching of Scripture, formulated the doctrine of the hypostatic union—that the incarnate Christ is one divine person who subsists in two distinct yet united natures, divine and human. The Chalcedonian Creed is the definition of orthodox Christology, and states:

"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [or rational] soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son,

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[6] When we speak of the relationship between Christ's "natures" and His "person," we need to understand what these fourth- and fifth-century Greek-speakers meant by these terms. Traditionally, Boethius' definition of a person is regarded as standard: "A person is an individual substance of a rational nature" (as cited in Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology [Wheaton: Crossway, 2017], 262n17). On that definition, the properties of personhood are individuality, substantiality, and rationality. A nature, on the other hand, consists of the attributes, characteristics, and capacities that make a thing what it is is a set of properties by which a person acts. The person is the agent while the nature is the "equipment" in and through which the person acts. Succinctly, the person is the *Who*, and the nature is the *What*. See the discussion in Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 262–65, 290–93, 425–29).

[7] The name "monophysite" comes from the Greek words for one (μόνος) and nature (φύσις).

Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."[8]

The brilliance of this confession cannot be overemphasized. Against the adoptionists who denied that Christ was truly God, and against the Arians who denied He was fully God, Chalcedon affirmed the Nicene Creed and stated explicitly that Christ was "truly God," "perfect in Godhead," "of the same nature as the Father," and that from eternity, since He was "begotten from the Father before the ages." Against the Docetists who denied that Christ was truly human, Chalcedon confessed that Jesus was "truly man" and "perfect in manhood," "consubstantial with us"—that is, sharing the very same nature that we do.

Against the Apollinarians who denied His full humanity by suggesting He took on only a human body apart from a human soul, Chalcedon explicitly asserted that Jesus was "truly man, of a rational soul and body," and "in all things like unto us, without sin." Now, it is plain from Scripture that Jesus possessed a human mind. If He had only possessed a divine mind, He could never be said to have grown in wisdom (Luke 2:52) or to have been ignorant of certain facts (Mark 13:32). More than that, if Jesus was to redeem humanity He had to possess a fully human nature, exactly as ours is in every way apart from sin. If He is anything but truly and fully man, He cannot represent man as Mediator between God and men. Therefore, just as our human nature consists of both a body and a rational soul or mind, and just as both our bodies and our souls have been corrupted by sin, both body and soul must be borne by our Substitute. The fourth-century Cappadocian church Father, Gregory of Nyssa, wrote,

"Now it was not the body merely, but the whole man, compacted of soul and body, that was lost: indeed, if we are to speak more exactly, the soul was lost sooner than the body. . . . He therefore Who came for this cause, that He might seek and save that which was lost, (that which the shepherd in the parable calls the sheep,) both finds that which is lost, and carries home on his shoulders the whole sheep, *not its skin only*, that he may make the man of God complete, united to the deity in body and in soul."[9]

In other words, it was not merely our skin that needed saving! Gregory of Nyssa's co-laborer, Gregory of Nazianzus, put it famously: "That which He has not assumed

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[8] Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: Volume 2: The Greek and Latin Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 62–63.

[9] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II.13 (*NPNF*, Second Series, vol. 5), emphasis added.

He has not healed." [10] And because both body and soul—both flesh and mind—needed healing, Christ took on a full human nature: a rational soul and body.

Against the Nestorians, Chalcedon affirmed that Christ's two natures are without division or separation, and which concur "in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son." This is plainly supported by Scripture. The Bible never presents Jesus as having a conversation with Himself. We never see a divine person addressing the human person in the same Man. Jesus addresses the Father, because they are two distinct persons (who nevertheless share the identical nature). Jesus speaks of Himself as "I" and the Father as "You" in His prayers (e.g., John 17:4), but we never see that kind of "I"–"Thou" relationship within the God-man. The divine Son does not take unto Himself a human *person*, but a human *nature*; He is but one person. And yet against the monophysites, Chalcedon confessed that though Christ is one person He does not subsist in one nature, but was to be acknowledged "in two natures without confusion or change," and that the distinction of the natures is not undermined by virtue of their union in the single Person, and that the properties of each nature are preserved and not comingled. In a single paragraph, Chalcedon decimated all contemporary enemies of biblical Christology. It is a brilliant confession of theology, precisely because it is so thoroughly biblical.

<center>Implications of Chalcedon for the Kenosis</center>

There are several implications of the Chalcedonian Definition that bear directly on our discussion. First, when the Creed affirms that Christ in the incarnation is not divided into two persons, but is one and the same Son, it is affirming that the subject of the incarnation was the *person* of the divine Son, and that He remains that single person throughout His incarnation. The incarnation is not the Son's divine nature transmuting into a human nature; nor is it that the person of the Son assumed a human person along with a human nature. Instead, the *person* of the Son, who had always subsisted in the *divine* nature, now, without ceasing to subsist in that divine nature, began subsisting in a *human* nature as well. The person of that human nature—the subject which acted in and through Christ's human nature—was the same person who had acted in and through the divine nature from all eternity: God the Son.

Secondly, when, against the Apollinarians, the Creed affirms that Christ possessed a rational soul as well as a body, it attributes that rational soul to human nature, not to personhood in general. The person of the Son does not replace the human soul. This means that the faculty of reason (i.e., the mind, intelligence, consciousness, will) is a property of a nature, not of a person. Therefore, as non-intuitive as it may be for us to say it, Christ had both a divine mind and a human mind, both a divine consciousness and a human consciousness, both a divine will and a human will. [11] Donald Fairbairn offers a helpful explanation:

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[10] Gregory of Nazianzen, *First Letter to Cledonius* [*Epistle 101*], as cited in Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 160.

[11] The great Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, writes, "In teaching, therefore, that Christ was truly man and truly God, the Scriptures teach that He had a finite intelligence and will, and also an infinite

"Because the same person, whom we now call Jesus Christ, was both divine and human, he was able to live on two levels at the same time. He continued to live on the divine level as he had done from all eternity—sharing fellowship with the Father, maintaining the universe (see Col. 1:17) and whatever else God does. But now he began to live on a human level at the same time—being conceived and born as a baby, growing up in Nazareth, learning Scripture as any other Jewish boy would, becoming hungry, thirsty and tired, and even dying."[12]

In the incarnation, the one person of the divine Son is fully and truly God and fully and truly human. He subsists in two distinct natures: divine and human. And the properties of both the divine and human natures are not amended, lost, or mixed together, but are preserved in their integrity by virtue of their union in one and the same Son. The person of the Son acts in and through both of those distinct natures at the very same time.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that Scripture predicates of the one person, Christ, attributes of deity *and* attributes humanity, because this single person possesses both a complete divine nature and a complete human nature. This is the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, or the communication of properties. That is, the properties of each nature are communicated to the person of Christ; whatever can be said of either nature can be said of the whole person.[13] So when Scripture affirms seemingly contradictory realities concerning the incarnate Christ—that He is eternal God, yet born in time; Creator, yet possessor of a created body; sustaining the universe while being sustained by Mary; omniscient God, yet ignorant and increasing in wisdom; omnipotent Lord, yet exhausted and sleeping—it is affirming nothing other than the hypostatic union, that Christ is one person subsisting in two distinct yet inseparable natures. He is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, Creator, and Sustainer according to His deity, and yet temporal, ignorant, weak, created, and sustained according to His humanity. We ought to bow in wonder before the wisdom of the divine mind that conceives such a peculiarly glorious miracle as the incarnation.

The Historical Challenges: The Rise of Kenotic Christology

The church's formulation of Scripture's teaching concerning the hypostatic union is codified in the Chalcedonian Creed. In all our theologizing about the person of

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intelligence. In Him, therefore, as the church has ever maintained, there were and are two wills, two *energeiai* or operations. His human intellect increased, his divine intelligence was, and is, infinite" (*Systematic Theology*, 2:389–90).

[12] Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 140.

[13] For example, that is how we can make sense of statements like Acts 20:28, which speaks of God purchasing the church with His own blood. By virtue of His deity God has no blood, for He is spirit (John 4:24). But because the person of Jesus possesses a fully human nature, He has blood. And because the person of Jesus possesses a fully divine nature, He is rightly called God. Therefore, it is proper for Paul to speak of the blood of Jesus as the blood of God. It must be noted, however, that the properties of one nature cannot be properly predicated of the other nature. Christ's deity is never humanized, nor is His humanity divinized; each nature retains its own distinct properties. But because the two natures are united in one person, whatever can be predicated of either nature can be predicated of the person as a whole.

Christ, therefore, we must take care above all things to preserve the genuineness of both divine and human natures subsisting in the single person of God the Son incarnate.

However, some have argued that the implications of Chalcedonian orthodoxy do not do justice to the genuineness of Christ's human nature. With the so-called "Enlightenment" of the mid-19th century, the visible church began to be dominated by rationalism. In such a climate, it became increasingly difficult for people to accept that Christ could be able to "live on two levels," as Fairbairn said, having both a divine consciousness and a human consciousness simultaneously while remaining one person. Besides this, it was objected that since we do not have access to a divine consciousness or to divine attributes; Jesus could not have had such access without ceasing to be genuinely human.

As a result, these thinkers emphasized texts which speak of Jesus' ignorance or weakness, and, seizing upon Paul's statement that "He emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7), they concluded that in the incarnation Jesus emptied Himself of at least some of His divine attributes in order to become truly human. Wayne Grudem summarizes,

> "It just seemed too incredible for modern rational and 'scientific' people to believe that Jesus Christ could be truly human and fully, absolutely God at the same time. The kenosis theory began to sound more and more like an acceptable way to say that (in some sense) Jesus was God, but a kind of God who had for a time given up some of his Godlike qualities, those that were most difficult for people to accept in the modern world."[14]

There were various strains of this teaching.[15] Kenoticism began in 19th-century Lutheranism in Germany. Gottfried Thomasius introduced a distinction between what he called the "relative" attributes of God (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) and the "essential" attributes of God (e.g., truth, holiness, love). Thomasius argued that these latter attributes were essential to being God, but that the relative attributes were not. One could still be God without being omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Thus, Jesus did not lay aside all of His divine attributes (and so He was still God), but He did relinquish some of them.

J. H. Ebrard maintained that Christ did not divest Himself of any of His attributes, but in His incarnation He basically reduced Himself to a human soul. Therefore, He did possess His divine attributes—even omniscience, omnipotence, etc.—but in a scaled-down form, such that they could be expressed only in a way that was consistent with the limitations of time and humanity. Others said Christ possessed His attributes but was not conscious of them, since He limited Himself to a purely human consciousness. W. F. Gess went further than all the rest and said that in becoming a human person and metamorphosing into a human soul, the Son surrendered all of His

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[14] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 551–52.

[15] A thorough survey of the history of kenotic theology is available in A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* (T&T Clark, 1900). A helpful summary may also be found in Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 356–64, to whose work I am indebted for this section.

divine attributes. He exercised no divine power except by the Spirit, entirely relinquished His eternal self-consciousness as the Son, and only gradually regained His divine consciousness through the normal course of human development.

A bit later, kenotic Christology began to catch on in Britain, especially as it seemed to some to be a middle way between classical Christology and Higher Criticism. Charles Gore hoped to reconcile Jesus' deity with the fact that He believed Moses wrote all five books of the Pentateuch and that Isaiah wrote all of Isaiah, conclusions that were entirely out of step with the "scholarship" of the Higher Critics. Therefore, by arguing that Christ laid aside His omniscience, Gore could argue that the God-Man was wrong about matters of history, science, and inerrancy, and yet that He was still God. Men like P. T. Forsyth, Hugh Ross Mackintosh, and Vincent Taylor argued that Christ did not actually surrender His divine attributes in the incarnation, but simply rendered them potential instead of actual. While some thought that Christ never actualized these attributes, others taught that He did so occasionally.

All of these variations were aiming at one key theological principle: in order to be genuinely human, the Son had to live entirely within the limitations of finite human nature, and to exercise the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence would be incompatible with a truly human experience.[16]

Such thinking continues even today. A version of kenoticism has been seeping into contemporary evangelical circles. Contrary to the doctrine outlined above (what Stephen Wellum calls *Ontological* Kenoticism[17]), evangelicals recognize that the Son cannot surrender any divine attributes without ceasing to be God. Instead, they believe that, while Christ possesses these attributes, He does not exercise them, or He uses them only rarely. He exercises His personhood through His human nature, and not at all (or rarely) through His divine nature. Wellum calls this teaching *Functional* Kenoticism[18], and it is embraced, to varying degrees and with various nuances, by men such as the biblical scholar Gerald Hawthorne, philosophers William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, and theologians Millard Erickson and Bruce Ware.[19]

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[16] Thus they denied the essential tenet of orthodox Christology called the *extra Calvinisticum*. Unfortunately named, since it was not original with Calvin but was shared by the classical tradition, this teaches that God the Son is fully united to, but never fully contained within, the human nature. The infinite cannot be comprehended by the finite (*finitum non capax infiniti*), and so the infinite, divine essence is not circumscribed within the bounds of Jesus' human nature. For more on this doctrine, especially in the theology of John Calvin, see E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

[17] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 374–80.

[18] Ibid., 380–93.

[19] See Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003); J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 597–614; Millard Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013). Once again, I am indebted to the research of Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 380–93.

Because each of the above theologians nuance and distinguish their particular view from the others, a brief summary of kenoticism—whether ontological or functional—is necessarily reductionistic. For the sake of a simple summary, however, we may look to Berkhof:

"The Kenoticists take ["the Word became flesh"] to mean that the Logos literally became, that is, was changed into a man by reducing (depotentiating) Himself, either wholly or in part, to the dimensions of a man, and then increased in wisdom and power until at last He again became God. . . . It aimed at maintaining the reality and integrity of the manhood of Christ, and to throw into strong relief the greatness of His humiliation in that He, being rich, for our sakes became poor. It involves, however, a pantheistic obliteration of the line of demarcation between God and man."[20]

The Theological Evaluation

There are several reasons why the doctrine of kenotic Christology is neither theologically sound nor biblically faithful.

Kenoticism Undermines the Deity of Christ

First, kenoticism undermines the deity of Christ, chiefly by disregarding the implications of divine simplicity. Now, divine simplicity does not mean that God is simple to understand. Rather, to say God is a simple being is to say that God's being is not compounded; God is not made up of parts. It is not as if when you add together love, holiness, truth, omniscience, and the rest of God's attributes, at the end of the recipe you get God. No, God's attributes are identical to His essence. He is what He has. God is not just loving; He *is* love (1 John 4:8). He is not just holy; He *is* holiness (1 John 1:5). If the Triune God were to be deprived of even one of His attributes, He would no longer be God.

For example, the God of the Bible is holy, but if holiness no longer characterized the essence of God, He would not be the God that Scripture reveals. God is omnipotent, but if He were not all-powerful, He would not be Yahweh of hosts, who asks Abraham, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). God is omniscient, but if He were not all-knowing, He would not be the God who searches all hearts, understands every intent of man's thoughts (1 Chron. 28:9), and who knows when we sit, when we rise, and even what we will say before we say it (Ps. 139:1–4). God's attributes are identical to His essence. They are not just what God is like; they are who God is.[21]

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[20] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 310.

[21] For an excellent, accessible defense of the doctrine of divine simplicity, see James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017). For a fuller treatment, see James Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), and Stephen J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

This means that kenoticism is fundamentally fatal to the deity of Christ. Divine simplicity puts the lie to the idea that any of God's attributes are relative and not essential to His being. All of God's attributes are essential to Him, and the eternal Son possesses the full, undivided divine essence from all eternity. If, at His incarnation, the Son surrendered even one of His divine attributes, He would have ceased to subsist in the divine nature, and thus ceased to be God at all. God cannot be less than the totality of divine attributes without being less than God. For Jesus to be God, He must continue to fully subsist in the divine nature, and therefore must possess all the divine attributes.

To the objection that some divine attributes could be possessed in potentiality, we respond that a potential attribute is not an attribute. There can be no such thing as a potentially omniscient being; you are either omniscient or not. David Wells compellingly argues that to posit that Christ's divine attributes are only potential is to posit that Christ's deity is necessarily passive and not active. And "in practice," he says, "a necessary passivity is an operating impotence."[22] There is simply no way to maintain that Christ remains God while ceasing to fully possess and actively subsist in each of His divine attributes.

Kenoticism Undermines Trinitarianism

An attack on the deity of Christ necessarily leads, then, to an attack on orthodox Trinitarianism itself. If Jesus does not actively subsist in each of His divine attributes, He can no longer be said to subsist in the full essence of God. Wells goes on to say, "In practice, this meant that during the incarnate period, the divine circuitry was broken, the second person was on a leave of absence from Godhead, and the Trinity was at best reduced to a 'binity.'"[23] Indeed, both the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds confess that the Son is ὁμοούσιος —consubstantial, of the same substance—with the Father and the Spirit. If the Father and the Spirit retain all the divine attributes as they have done from eternity, and the Son is deprived of those attributes (even temporarily), the three Persons of the Trinity simply cannot be said to be of the *same* substance. Kenotic Christology cannot be consistently squared with Nicene Trinitarianism. In fact, it is more at home with the semi-Arianism that the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople fought so vigorously to destroy.

Kenoticism Undermines the Continuity between the Preexistent and Incarnate Christ

Third, by holding that Christ surrendered His divine consciousness at the incarnation, kenoticism undermines the personal continuity between the Preexistent Son and the Incarnate Christ. Macleod observes,

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[22] David Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 1984), 139.

[23] Ibid.

"Up to the moment of his enfleshment, according to this theory, the Son was omniscient. At that fateful moment, however, his knowledge suddenly contracts: from infinity to that of a first-century Jew. That represents a degree of amnesia to which there can be no parallel. He forgot virtually everything he knew. . . . After an eternity of divine self-awareness he would suddenly not know who he was. Indeed, considering the importance of memory to personal identity, he would not even *be* who he was."[24]

Besides this, a loss of divine consciousness does not square with the biblical data. Scripture never portrays Christ as being ignorant of His deity, or as regaining His divine consciousness little by little. Quite the opposite is the case. He is conscious of His pre-incarnate glory (John 17:5), lays claim to the covenant name of Yahweh (John 8:58), and testifies to His unity with the Father (John 10:30). Such statements are not limited to His maturity when He might have been said to have already "regained His divine consciousness." No, at twelve years old, Jesus, conscious of His divine Sonship, calls God "*My* Father," demonstrating an awareness that He was the only begotten of the Father, and therefore *the* Son of God in a way that was not true of others (Luke 2:41–50).[25]

The eternal Son of God who existed for all eternity in the glory and majesty of the Trinity, is, as Chalcedon said, "one and the same Son" as the incarnate Christ who took on flesh and dwelt among us. And He Himself was always conscious of that fact. Though He may have grown in understanding with respect to His human nature, He was always conscious of it with respect to His divine nature.

Kenoticism Undermines the Distinction between Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation

Fourth, kenoticism undermines the necessary distinction between the incarnate Christ in His state of humiliation and the incarnate Christ in the state of His exaltation. It cannot be disputed that the incarnation is permanent; Paul says of the Christ who is presently at the right hand of the Father in heaven that "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells [present tense] bodily" (Col. 2:9). However, the kenotic argument is that omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and divine consciousness are all incompatible with genuine humanity. Jesus had to surrender these in order to become truly human. But given that Christ remains incarnate even in His state of exaltation, it must be asked: Is He still functioning under the limitations of His kenosis? Is He now, at this present moment, less than omniscient, still ignorant of the hour of His return? Is He less than omnipresent, not "with [us] always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20)? Is He less than omnipotent, not exalted "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named" (Eph. 1:21)? Clearly, such a position cannot be reconciled with Scripture. Christ remains

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[24] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 210, emphasis original.

[25] See William Hendriksen, *Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 185; Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994) 271.

incarnate at the same time that He is no longer in the state of humiliation that marked His kenosis.

It must further be asked, then: Is the exalted Christ somehow not genuinely human? Kenoticism cannot escape this dilemma, as Wellum puts it: "If it was necessary for the Son to give up certain divine attributes (or not to exercise them) in order to become incarnate because divinity was inconsistent with a truly human life, then the exalted Son either still lacks these attributes (or does not exercise them) or he is no longer truly human."[26] Yet Scripture is clear that He does exercise them, and that, as our Mediator who ever lives to make intercession for us, He is truly human. This means that true and genuine humanity is not incompatible with the exercise of divine attributes. The fundamental premise of kenoticism fails.

Kenoticism is Irreconcilable with Chalcedonian Christology

Fifth, though it claims to be in line with Chalcedonian orthodoxy, kenotic Christology is irreconcilable with it. Chalcedon declared that the person of the Son, who subsisted eternally in the divine nature, took to Himself a human nature. His kenosis was not a subtraction of aspects of His divine nature, but the addition of a human nature, which human nature consisted of a real human body and a rational human soul, or a human mind. This means that the faculties of "mind" and "will" are properties of nature, and since Christ had both a divine nature and a human nature, Christ possesses both a divine mind and a human mind, a divine will and a human will, a divine consciousness and a human consciousness. He is therefore able, as Fairbairn said, to "live on two levels at the same time"—the divine and the human—without becoming two persons.

Kenoticism rejects this outright. Forsyth wrote, "There could not be two wills, or two consciousnesses, in the same personality, by any psychological possibility now credible. We could not have in the same person both knowledge and ignorance of the same thing."[27] But that is nothing more than the rejection of the possibility of there being two natures in one person. It is an *a priori* rejection of Chalcedon's doctrine that the properties of each of Christ's two natures are preserved and concurring in the one Person.

Though Forsyth wrote several hundred years after Calvin, the Genevan Reformer had seen this error in his own day. He diagnosed it as follows: "There is nothing which furious and frantic spirits cannot throw into confusion. They fasten on the attributes of humanity to destroy his divinity . . . . But what else is this than to contend that Christ is . . . not God because he is man?"[28] Those holding to classical Christology have always thus recognized kenoticism as a species of the monophysitism Chalcedon sought to overthrow. Herman Bavinck gave the following assessment:

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[26] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 417.

[27] P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 319.

[28] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.14.4.

"Related to this Monophysitism, in modern times, is the kenosis doctrine. . . . Now whether, as was done in the past, one lets the human nature change into the divine, or, as is done today, one lets the divine nature empty itself down to the level of the human, or lets the two natures merge in whole or in part into a third, mixed something—always, in pantheistic fashion, the boundary between God and humanity is erased and the idea of the 'God-man' is falsified."[29]

Macleod offers a similar evaluation:

"The language of kenoticism is monophysitic. . . . An authentic human life is possible on such terms only at the expense of the divine: if he was man, he could not have been God. From this point of view, the price paid for an authentic humanity was too high. Christ had the human property of ignorance, but not the divine property of omniscience. How, then, can we speak, with Chalcedon, of 'one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man' or profess that each nature, the divine as well as the human retained its own distinctive properties even in the hypostatic union? An incomplete godhead is as incompatible with Chalcedon as an incomplete manhood."[30]

Ironically, and sadly, kenoticism ends up denying both the deity and the humanity of Christ. Christ cannot be truly God, because He has relinquished several of the divine attributes and thus no longer fully possesses the undivided divine essence. Neither can Christ be truly man, because He does not possess a human mind, will, or consciousness. Kenotic Christology, then, entails heresy on multiple fronts, and is irreconcilable with historic Christian orthodoxy.

Kenoticism is Incompatible with the Biblical Presentation of Christ

While it is immensely important to defer to the historic creeds, Scripture alone is our sole, infallible authority for these matters. Thus, the most important criticism of kenotic Christology is that it is incompatible with the biblical presentation of the incarnate Christ. The New Testament portrays the truly and fully human Christ as truly and fully divine, conscious of and acting in accordance with His deity, actively exercising the attributes of God, and receiving the worship that belongs to God alone.

Scripture Calls Jesus "God"
In the first place, the New Testament clearly teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. He is called God explicitly in John 1:1 and 18, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8, and 2 Peter 1:1. Scripture also speaks of His Godhood in His humiliation. Speaking of the time of Christ's earthly sojourn, Paul says, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19, ESV). He later clarifies that Christ remains

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[29] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:303.

[30] Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 209–10.

incarnate during His heavenly exaltation, stating that in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells (presently) bodily (Col. 2:9). Matthew 1:23 declares that Mary's Son would be called "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." Without any qualification, God is said to dwell with man in the person of the incarnate Christ, for the incarnate Christ is Himself God. We may add to these passages all those which speak of Christ as the *Son* of God (Mark 1:1; Luke 1:35; 22:70; John 5:25; 20:31), or the only-begotten Son of God (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:19), indicating that He shares the very same nature as God the Father, even during the time of His humiliation.

Jesus Is Conscious of His Deity

Secondly, Scripture presents Jesus as conscious of His deity. There are several instances in Jesus' life where He asserted His equality and oneness with God the Father, in response to which the Jews attempted to stone Him for blasphemy. When He explains that He works on the Sabbath because His Father does also, the Jews understand the implication: "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because He . . . was calling God His own Father, *making Himself equal with God*" (John 5:17–18). When He asserts His pre-existence of Abraham and identifies Himself as the I AM, the Jews picked up stones to kill Him, because He was identifying Himself as God (John 8:58–59). When He asserts, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) even the Pharisees understood that this was not merely an affirmation of unity of purpose or communion with the Father, but a claim of metaphysical and ontological equality with God.[31] For this reason they attempt to stone Him once again: "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:33). Jesus knew exactly who He was: God the Son incarnate.

Jesus Exercises Divine Prerogatives

Third, Scripture records Jesus exercising the divine prerogatives that kenoticism claims were incompatible with His humanity. He is the Lord of salvation in the same manner as the Father: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes" (John 5:21; cf. 11:25). He heals the paralytic by announcing, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you," and the Pharisees once again accuse Him of blasphemy, thinking to themselves, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" Jesus does not correct them, but only affirms that the Son of Man rightly exercises the divine prerogative to forgive sins (Luke 5:18–26). Only God can forgive sins, and the incarnate Christ forgives sins.

Jesus is not only the Lord of salvation but also the Lord of revelation. He delivers revelation to God's people, not as the prophets who spoke from the derived authority of God and declared, "Thus saith the Lord." No, Jesus proclaims revelation from His own authority, declaring, "*I* say to you" (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44).

Further, Jesus speaks of possessing a unique sovereignty that can only be a mark of divinity. In Matthew 11:27, He declares that all things have been handed over to Him by His Father, and that no one knows the Father except those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. In John 10:17–18, He speaks of a power no other human being

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[31] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 394–95.

has ever had: the power not only to lay His life down, but also the power to take it up again. These are claims to deity.

Finally, Jesus also exercised the prerogative to receive worship. Not even angels permitted men to worship them, but they exhorted men to worship God alone (Rev 19:10). However, Jesus receives the worship of Thomas, who confesses Him to be "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Jesus Exercises Divine Attributes

Perhaps most importantly, Scripture unmistakably presents Christ as exercising the very divine attributes that kenoticism claims He had to have laid aside. First, Scripture ascribes the divine attribute of omnipresence to the incarnate Christ. Though He is presently exalted in heaven, it is precisely because He exists in glorified humanity as well as eternal deity that He can promise the disciples that He will always be with them (Matt 28:20).

Scripture also portrays the incarnate Christ as omniscient. When the Pharisees grumble because Jesus claimed the authority to forgive sins, they do not voice their concern to Jesus; He reads their minds. The parallel in Mark 2:6 says the scribes were "reasoning in their hearts," and Luke 5:22 says Jesus was "aware of their reasonings." Similarly, Jesus not only recognizes Nathanael without ever having met him, but He also knows His character—an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Nathanael responds appropriately, by confessing, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (John 1:47–49). The display of omniscience convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Divine Son of David that the prophets promised. Evidence for Jesus' omniscience can be multiplied (e.g., John 4:18; 11:14).

On this point, however, kenoticists object that supernatural knowledge does not necessarily imply omniscience. Instead, they reason that Jesus was a man entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Spirit could have revealed these things to Jesus just like any other prophet. But Jesus' knowledge is more extensive even than what the prophets knew by revelation from God. No prophet could claim knowledge of the identity of the elect and non-elect, but Scripture tells us that "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe" (John 6:64). He knew all men, and what was in man (John 2:25). And when he began to speak plainly of His heavenly origin, the disciples explicitly ascribed omniscience to Him: "Now we know that You know all things" (John 16:30), the same confession Peter makes after the resurrection (John 21:17). These statements indicate something greater than the knowledge of prophets gained by revelation. This is the knowledge of the omniscient God Himself.

But what about Mark 13:32? Is not the comment that Jesus does not know the day or hour of His return an explicit repudiation of omniscience? Put frankly, not if we understand the hypostatic union! If Christ possesses both a fully divine and a fully human nature, able to live on two levels of consciousness at the same time, then, as Calvin said, "There would be no impropriety in saying that Christ, who knew all things, was ignorant of something *in respect of his perception as a man*."[32] Gregory

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[32] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.1, emphasis added.

of Nazianzus wrote of this text, "We are to understand the ignorance in the most reverent sense, by attributing it to the manhood, and not to the Godhead."[33] We ought to say that the person of Christ did know the hour of His return according to His divine nature; otherwise He could not be God. But the one and the same Son did not know the hour of His return according to His human nature. He always had access to His divine consciousness, but He never exploited that privilege for Himself. He only accessed that knowledge when it was in accordance with the mission His Father had given Him.

In addition to omnipresence and omniscience, Jesus also exercised omnipotence during His earthly sojourn. In the first place, kenoticism has never been able to adequately answer how the Son, if bereft of His divine power, went on performing the cosmic function of sustaining the universe, which Colossians 1:16–17 and Hebrews 1:3 explicitly describe as His work. Scripture gives no indication that the Son ceased this work when He became incarnate. The kenoticists answer that He had to have temporarily ceased this work, and that He delegated this work to the Father and the Spirit until His kenosis was finished. But such a conception crosses the line into Trinitarian heresy once again, this time running afoul of the pro-Nicene maxim that the external works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). That is to say, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are inseparable in their essence, so also are they inseparable in their work. In any divine act all three Persons of the Trinity are involved and act together. To deny this is to introduce into the Trinity the very kind of rift that the Nicene Fathers battled against the Arians. The reality is: as Jesus was being sustained by the nutrients from Mary's body according to His human nature, He was in the very same moment sustaining not only Mary herself but the galaxies according to His divine nature.

Besides these cosmic functions, Jesus exercised His divine omnipotence as He performed various miracles that testified to His deity. He turned water into wine (John 2:1–11), fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (Matt. 14:15–21), calmed the stormy waters with a word (Matt. 8:26–27), and raised the dead (John 11:43–44). Kenoticists object that He performed these miracles not by His own divine power as God the Son—for that would not be consistent with His humanity—but only by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit worked through Moses and Elijah to perform miracles.

The problem with that interpretation, however, is that Scripture explicitly presents these miracles as manifesting the unique glory of the Son, and as the ground upon which one ought to believe that He is the divine Messiah. The apostle John speaks of beholding in Jesus "glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14), the *unique* glory of the one and only Son to be begotten of the Father from eternity. Shortly after that, when Jesus turned the water into wine, John comments, "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). In other words, the unique glory of the only begotten Son was put on display through Christ's miracles, and it was that very glory that was the ground of their faith in Him—not as merely another Spirit-filled prophet, but as the divine Messiah, whose name would be called Mighty God

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[33] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fourth Theological Oration*, 15.

(Isa. 9:6). Jesus Himself views His miracles as warrant for believing in His divinity: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37–38). It must be noted that the Son does not call these the works of the Spirit as might be accomplished in any other human prophet.[34] Instead, He calls them "the works of My Father," and cites them as evidence of the mutual indwelling of the Father and Son—something that can be said only of divine Persons (cf. John 14:10–11). Thus, Calvin says, "How clearly and transparently does this appear in his miracles! I admit that similar and equal miracles were performed by the prophets and apostles; but there is this very essential difference, that they dispensed the gifts of God as his ministers, whereas he exerted his own inherent might."[35] And Macleod concludes,

> "It was from such evidence, pointing clearly to the conclusion that Jesus saw himself as divine, acted as one who was divine, portrayed himself as divine and was seen as divine, that the church derived its belief in the deity of Christ. That belief is essential to the life and worship of the church and fatal to the Kenotic Theory. Whatever the lowliness into which Christ stooped by his incarnation it was not such as to prevent his disciples from seeing his glory."[36]

Indeed, from seeing His glory as of the only begotten from the Father.

The Biblical Kenosis

Having observed the failure of Kenotic Theology to explain the kenosis of Christ in fidelity to Scripture and in accordance with sound doctrine, we must ask: What then is the kenosis of Christ? Three observations from Paul's comments in Philippians 2:5–8 provide the answer to that question.

The Glory of the Eternal Son (v. 6a)

First, we must apprehend the glory of the eternal Son. Paul writes, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who, existing in the form of God . . ." (author's translation). While most translations translate "existing" in the past tense, Paul uses a present participle to express ongoing, continuous action. Before He took on human flesh, the Eternal Son was eternally existing in the form of God.

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[34] This is not to deny that Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit in His earthly mission (e.g., Matt. 12:28). He was the Man of the Spirit *par excellence*, full of the Spirit without measure. Rather, it is to say that the God-man who acts according to His human nature by virtue of His being filled with the Holy Spirit without measure is the same God-man who acts according to His divine nature by virtue of His authority and power as eternal Son. Orthodoxy affirms both propositions, whereas functional kenoticism affirms only the former and denies the latter.

[35] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.13.

[36] Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 210–11.

Now, "form" does not mean that Jesus only seemed to be like God. The Greek term μορφή does not connote merely the outward appearance of something, as we think of in English. The word is notoriously difficult to translate. One scholar writes, "'Form' is an inadequate rendering of μορφή, but our language affords no better word."[37] Rather than a single, one-to-one word equivalent, we have to explain what the term means. In the next verse, it describes the genuine humanity that Christ assumed to Himself in the incarnation. Christ took the μορφή δούλου, the form of a slave. He did not merely appear human or merely have the external features of humanity; that is the very docetic heresy the rejection of which the apostle John makes the test of orthodoxy (1 John 4:2–3). Instead, the μορφή δούλου refers to the fact that Christ was fully and truly human—that He possesses a genuine human nature. In the same way, then, the μορφή θεοῦ refers to the fact that Christ was fully and truly God—that He possesses the genuine divine nature.

Yet μορφή is not just a synonym for οὐσία or φύσις, the other words that refer to one's substance, essence, or nature. μορφή is used nowhere else in the New Testament (except in the long ending of Mark, the authenticity of which is disputed), but in the Septuagint it speaks clearly of one's appearance.[38] Besides this, a cognate form of μορφή is used to describe Jesus' transfiguration: He was μετεμορφώθη—changed in μορφή (Matt. 17:2). But Christ's immutable divine essence was not changed at the transfiguration. Rather, the outward expression of the glory of Christ's divine nature had been veiled, and for a moment He was removing the veil and once again letting His glory shine forth.

Taking that all together, we ought to conclude that μορφή refers to the outward manifestation that corresponds to the inward essence—to the external form that represents what is intrinsic and essential.[39] It is "a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it."[40] In other words, μορφή is not the essence, but no one can appear or exist in view of others in the form of God, manifesting all the perfections of God, unless that person is in fact God.[41] Christ was existing in the μορφή of God precisely because in His very essence and His being He *is* God from all eternity.

The context of Philippians 2 makes that clear. In verse 6, Paul says that Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. "Equality" is rendered from the Greek word ἴσος, from which we get the word *isomers*, which describe chemical compounds that have the same number of the same elements but have different structural formulas. They are distinct compounds, but on a chemical level, they are equal to each other. To switch from chemistry to geometry, an *isosceles* triangle is a triangle that has two equal sides. Jesus is ἴσα θεῷ, equal to God. When one considers such statements as Isaiah 46:9, in which God says, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me," the conclusion is inescapable. If (a) no one

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[37] Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 57.

[38] Judges 8:18; Job 4:16; Isaiah 44:13; Daniel 3:19, LXX.

[39] Homer A. Kent, Jr., "Philippians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 11:123, 126.

[40] J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 417.

[41] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:386.

can be equal to God but God Himself, and (b) Christ is equal to God, then (c) Christ Himself must be fully God. "The form of God" refers to the dignity of the Son's essence, while "equality with God" refers to the dignity of the Son's station, or position.

If μορφή refers to the outward manifestation of the inner essence and nature, what is the outward manifestation of the inner essence and nature of God? Answer: glory. Throughout the Old Testament, when God's presence is represented as dwelling with His people, there is always a manifestation of that *shekinah* glory—the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, the bright light that filled the Tabernacle and the Temple. But the Son is the very radiance of the glory of God (Heb. 1:3), the image of God in whose face the glory of God shines in fullness (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). He is the exalted Lord seated on the throne of heaven, the train of whose robe fills the heavenly temple, of whom the angels declare, "The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:1–8; cf. John 12:37–41). Before the world was, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us was eternally existing in the very nature, essence, and glory of God.

The Humility of the Eternal Son (vv. 6b–7)

Having beheld the glory of the eternal Son, we may also observe from this passage what we might call the humility of the eternal Son. "Christ Jesus, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6–7).

Even though Christ existed eternally in the very nature of God, equal with the Father, ruling creation in majesty and receiving the worship of the saints and angels in heaven, He did not regard that equality as something to be grasped. He did not regard the dignity of His station something to cling to or to take selfish advantage of and use to further His own ends.[42] Rather, He humbly accepted the mission of His incarnation, in which He would renounce the glories of Heaven for a time, take on the nature of a human being, and veil the splendor and majesty of His deity behind the form of a slave. Though He had every right to continue in unlimited manifest power and authority, to radiate the very essence and glory of deity, to receive nothing but the most exalted worship of the host of heaven—immune from poverty, pain, and humiliation—He did not selfishly count those blessings to be slavishly held on to, but sacrificed them to become man and accomplish salvation for sinners. He "emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7).

But of what did Christ empty Himself? The kenoticists have answered, "He emptied Himself of His deity," or "of His 'relative' divine attributes," or "of His divine consciousness," or "of His divine prerogatives." Yet we have observed why those answers fall short of biblical fidelity and theological soundness. Of what, then, did the divine Son empty Himself? Even asking the question demonstrates a misunderstanding of the language. Though κενόω literally means "to empty," everywhere

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[42] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, in the New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 209.

it is used in Scripture it is used in a figurative sense.[43] According to New Testament usage, κενόω doesn't mean "to pour out," as if Jesus was pouring His deity, attributes, or prerogatives out of Himself. If that were Paul's intent he would have used ἐκχέω, which he employs elsewhere to speak of pouring something out of something else.[44] But everywhere κενόω appears in Scripture, it means "to make void," "to nullify," "to make of no effect." Paul uses it that way in Romans 4:14, where he says, "For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void (κεκένωται) and the promise is nullified." Yet no one thinks to ask, "Of what has faith been made empty?" The idea is that faith would be nullified—it would come to naught—if righteousness could come by the Law.[45]

The text teaches, then, not that Christ emptied Himself of something, but that He emptied *Himself*. He nullified Himself; He made Himself of no effect. The Son Himself is the object of this emptying. He did not empty the form of God, nor the divine attributes, nor His divine prerogatives, but Himself. The King James Version captures this well by translating verse 7 thus: "[He] made himself of no reputation." The NIV's rendering is also helpful: "[He] made himself nothing." Then, the very next phrase explains the manner in which the Son made Himself nothing: "[He] emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men." Christ made Himself of no effect by taking on human nature in His incarnation. He nullified Himself not by subtracting from His deity, but by adding His humanity. This is an emptying by addition! John Murray writes,

> "It is sometimes thought that, when the Son of God became man and humbled himself, he thereby ceased to be what he was and in some way divested himself of the attributes and prerogatives of deity, that he changed the form of God for the form of man. He became poor, it is said, by emptying himself of divine properties, became poor by subtraction, by divestiture, by depotentiation. The Scripture does not support any such notion. . . . Even in his incarnate state, in him dwelt all the fullness of Godhood (Col 2:9). When the Son of man became poor, it was not by giving up his Godhood nor any of the attributes and prerogatives inseparable from Godhood. When he became man, he did not cease to be rich in his divine being, relations, and possession. He did not become poor by ceasing to be what he was, but he became poor by becoming what he was not. He became poor by addition, not by subtraction."[46]

Christ remained what He was, even when He became what He was not. He did not exchange His deity for His humanity. Nor did He become a human *person*. As a

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[43] Romans 4:14; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:15; 2 Corinthians 9:3.

[44] E.g., Romans 5:5; Titus 3:6.

[45] Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 105.

[46] John Murray, "The Riches and the Poverty of Jesus Christ," in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 3:230–31.

divine person, He assumed a human *nature*.[47] The divine, second Person of the Trinity, who was eternally existing in the form of God, nullified Himself by taking the form of a slave and being born in the likeness of man. In the majesty of Heaven, to look on Him would have been to look on the epitome of all beauty. But being found in appearance as a man (Phil. 2:8), He had "no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men . . . and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isa. 53:2–3). The rich became poor (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). The worshiped became the despised. The blessed One became the man of sorrows. The Master became the slave. As John Calvin wrote: "Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of godhead, but he kept it *concealed* for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by *concealing* it."[48] Bavinck adds, "He laid aside the divine majesty and glory . . . in which he existed before the incarnation, or rather *concealed* it behind the form of a servant in which he went about on earth."[49]

We ought then to understand that a significant aspect of the kenosis was a *krypsis*—that is, a concealment or a veiling of the glory that is the external manifestation of His nature.[50] Christ fully possessed His divine nature, attributes, and prerogatives, but for the sake of becoming truly human, He did not always fully express the glories of His majesty. When He is tempted by Satan in the wilderness to exercise His divine omnipotence to turn the stones into bread or to throw Himself from the top of the temple and manifest His divine glory by being rescued by angels, He refuses (Matt. 4:1–11). When Jesus is betrayed in Gethsemane, He is the divine Son who has twelve legions of angels at His disposal (Matt. 26:53), but He refuses to dispatch them to His service. Whenever any exercise of His divine power or any manifestation of His divine glory would have functioned to benefit only Himself, or to ease the limitations of a truly human existence, and would not be for the benefit of those He came to serve in accordance with His messianic mission, He refused to exercise those prerogatives.

However, there certainly were times when He did exercise His divine power and did manifest His unique divine glory, such as when He turned water into wine, rebuked the waves, read minds, and raised the dead. In these instances, it was essential to the divine Son's ministry to display the glory of the only begotten Son of God. When the mission He received from His Father required Him to suffer hunger in the midst of His temptation in order that the obedience imputed to His people would be the obedience of a man, Jesus willingly refused to insist upon His right to be free from hunger (Matt. 4:3–4). But when that same divine mission required Him to display His glory in order to prove His divinity and work faith in the hearts of the elect, Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:11).

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[47] The proper definitions of and distinctions between *person* and *nature* are essential to orthodox Christology. See footnote 6.

[48] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of the Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, Calvin's Commentaries, 500th anniversary edition, trans. and ed. by John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 56–57, emphasis added.

[49] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:432.

[50] See Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 370.

Such was the humility of the eternal Son. He eternally existed in the perfect blessedness of heavenly communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. From the foundation of creation, He enjoyed the unfettered worship of the hosts of heaven. Even if His divine mission sent Him to be born into the lap of luxury rather than in the humble stable, for the eternal Son of God to experience just a single pang of hunger would have been an infinite condescension. Free from all weakness, infirmity, decay, and sorrow, the eternal Son contemplated the riches of His pre-incarnate glory, and humbly chose to become poor (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9)—to veil His glory by taking on human nature and the weakness of human flesh in order that He might live and die as the slave of all.

The Humility of the Incarnate Christ (v. 8)

And yet the Son's humility did not stop at taking on a human nature. We go on to observe the humility of the incarnate Christ: "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

The divine Son became not just a man, but an obedient man. From all eternity, the Son was equal to the Father in glory, majesty, and authority. In His incarnation, however, He began to relate to the Father in terms of authority and submission (e.g., John 5:30; 6:38). The Master had become the slave. The Lord who rightfully issues commands subjected Himself to obeying commands.

And that is not all. He was not only obedient, but obedient to the point of death. The Author of Life humbly submitted to death. The One without sin humbly submitted to sin's curse. The One who has life within Himself (John 1:4; 5:26)—who gives life to whomever He wishes (John 5:21)—humbly released His grip on His own human life in submission to the Father and in love for those whom His Father has given Him. Here is humility shining like the sun in its full strength. We rightly sing, "Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, My God, shouldst die for me?"

And yet there are greater depths to plumb before the humiliation of the Son of God reaches rock bottom. He was not just man, not just obedient, and not just obedient unto death. The holy Son of God, the Lord of glory, "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The horrors of the cross scarcely need describing. One commentator said, "The cross displayed the lowest depths of human depravity and cruelty. It exhibited the most brutal form of sadistic torture and execution ever invented by malicious human minds."[51] In crucifixion, metal spikes were driven through the victim's wrists and feet, and he was left to hang naked and exposed, sometimes for days. Because the body would be pulled down by gravity, the weight of a victim's own body would press against his lungs, and the hyperextension of the lungs and chest muscles made it difficult to breathe. Victims would gasp for air by pulling themselves up, but when they would do that the wounds in their wrists and feet would tear at the stakes that pierced them, and the flesh of their backs—usually torn open from flogging—would grate against the jagged wood. Eventually, when he could no longer summon the strength to pull himself up to

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[51] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 157

breathe, the victim of a crucifixion would die from suffocation under the weight of his own body. This was the most sadistically cruel, excruciatingly painful, and loathsomely degrading death that a man could die. And on Golgotha 2,000 years ago, the Son of God died this death. God on a cross.

Even at that point, though, His mission was not complete. The shame and pain of the cross was not the lowest depth to which the Son of God submitted Himself. Deuteronomy 21:23 taught that anyone hanged on a tree is accursed of God, and Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 3:13: "For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" Worse than the pain, the torture, and the shame, crucifixion also brought with it a divine curse. This is rock bottom. This is the Highest of the high gone to the lowest of the low. Here is the eternal Son cursed by God the Father. He never deserved to know His Father's wrath, but only ever His delight and approbation. Yet on Calvary, He was cut off from the apple of His eye, the joy of His heart. What bewilderment must the Son of God have experienced when for the first time in all of eternity He felt His Father's displeasure. What must it have been to utter that harrowing cry: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

This was the purpose for the kenosis. Man had sinned against God, and so *man* was required to make atonement for sin, but he was absolutely powerless to do so. Only God can atone for sin, and yet only man's sacrifice would be accepted on behalf of man. So, in the marvelous wisdom of God, God became man to reconcile man to God:

> "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. . . . Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:14–15, 17).

Lessons from the Kenosis

What practical lessons may we take away from our study of the kenosis of Christ? First, we must trust in this divine-human Mediator who became man in order to bear man's curse. The incarnation and the kenosis of Christ mean nothing to you if you are not a beneficiary of the salvation for which He became incarnate. Your first order of business is to admit your sin before an infinitely holy God, confess your own inability to satisfy the demands of His righteousness, look outside of yourself to this glorious Savior who has accomplished all that is necessary for salvation, and trust in Him to avail with God on your behalf.

Second, have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5). It is interesting to note that Paul's primary point for writing Philippians 2:5–11 is not to discourse on the fine points of high Christology. Those theological truths are there in the text, and they are glorious. But Paul employs them as an illustration and example of the humility in which the church must walk. You are to "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more

important than yourselves; not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3–4). If Christ could come from the glories of heaven itself, all the way down to the abject degradation of the cross, surely we, mere creatures of the dust, can surrender our rights for the sake of maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4:3). In the midst of a conflict with a brother or sister in Christ—or with a spouse or family member—though we might be right, and though we might be entitled to deference and respect and recognition, we can think on the only One who ever had a right to assert His rights and refused, and regard one another as more important than ourselves, giving preference to one another in honor (cf. Rom. 12:10) for the sake of unity. The kenosis is a call to imitate the humility of Christ.

Third, apprehend the inextricable link between the loftiest of theology and the most practical elements of Christian living. The most mundane, applicable matters of Christianity—such as personal humility and corporate unity (Phil. 2:3–4)—are wedded to the deepest and most difficult doctrines for the mind to conceive (Phil. 2:5–8). So many professing Christians say things like, "I don't want to hear about doctrinal debates and theological controversies. I want practical teaching. I want a Christianity that shows me how to live right where I am." In the light of Philippians 2, however, such thinking is pure foolishness. There is no such dichotomy between theology and practice! Theology is the very soil out of which practice grows. Christian living is inescapably rooted in theology. John Murray said it well: "The most transcendent of mysteries of our holy faith are the fountain springs of the most common and practical Christian duties. The streams of Christian liberality [2 Cor. 8:7] are fed from the ocean of the mysteries of God [2 Cor. 8:9]. If we evacuate thought and interest and faith of the mystery of godliness we lose not only the fountain of faith but we dry up the streams of practical grace."[52]

Finally, the kenosis teaches us to worship our Triune God. Worship the God whose mind is so vast, whose wisdom is so unsearchable, that the truths we struggle and strain so mightily to understand do not make God break an intellectual sweat. They are elementary to Him, and yet wonderful for us. We ought to express our worship to God as Charnock did when he wrote,

> "What a wonder that two natures infinitely distant should be more intimately united than anything in the world . . . that the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity; that a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man; [the incarnation astonishes] men upon earth, and angels in heaven."[53]

May it never cease to astonish us. May it be a cause of perpetual worship of God the Son incarnate, through the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

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[52] Murray, "The Riches and the Poverty of Jesus Christ," 3:235.

[53] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* in *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 2:150.
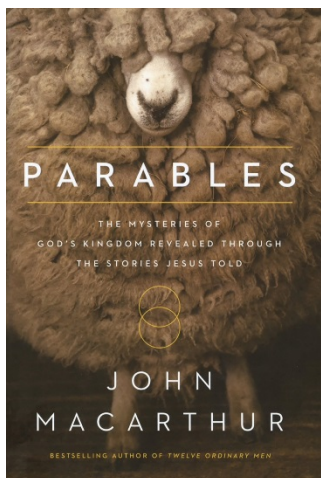
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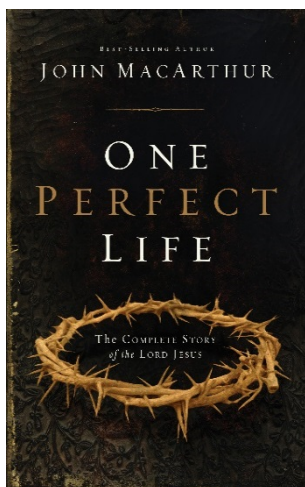
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POLISHING BRASS ON A SINKING SHIP: TOWARD A TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHURCH AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

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Dispensational premillennialists have long been charged with cultural retreat, yet despite the rhetorical extremes of some dispensationalists, dispensational premillennialism does not necessitate withdrawal from cultural engagement; rather, it actually provides a theological basis for equipping Christians as they are active in society. By surveying dispensational thought concerning the kingdom, the church, and the church's role in society, this article demonstrates that dispensationalists view the church's exclusive mission as one of discipling Christians to live sanctified lives in whatever cultural sphere to which God has called them. This is the extent of the church's so-called "responsibility" toward culture, and anything more than this threatens to sideline the church's central mission.

* * * * *

Dispensational premillennialists have long been charged with cultural retreat, characterized by J. Vernon McGee's infamous question to his radio audience, "Do you polish brass on a sinking ship?"[1]

This article will show that, despite the rhetorical extremes of some dispensationalists, dispensational premillennialism does not necessitate withdrawal from cultural engagement; rather, it actually provides a theological basis for equipping Christians as they are active in society. After exploring the underlying rationale for common portrayals of traditional dispensationalism as culturally impotent and briefly summarizing the alternative evangelical philosophy of cultural transformationalism, the article will present a traditional dispensational philosophy of the church and cultural engagement along four lines.

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[1] Cited in Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), 100.

First, it will explore dispensationalism's understanding of the biblical distinction between the universal sovereign rule of God over all things by means of human institutions and the future localized rule of Messiah on earth. This provides the framework for assessing the extent to which cultural pursuits in this age relate to the kingdom of God.

Second, it will argue that traditional dispensationalism's notable contribution to the subject of cultural engagement lies precisely in its ecclesiology. Traditional dispensationalism distinguishes between unique roles in culture for both the church as an institution and individual Christians, which differs from the Neo-Calvinist missional philosophy that has come to dominate evangelicalism. The church's role is specifically to disciple Christians, who then live out their Christianity in the cultural spheres to which God has called them. Thus, churches have a role in cultural engagement that is related to, yet distinct from and more narrow than, the role of individual Christians. Further, it will show that philosophy of cultural engagement falls more properly within discussions of personal sanctification than in missiology or eschatology.

Third, the article will suggest that dispensationalism's idea of "restraint" (2 Thess. 2:6–7) is a better category for understanding Christianity's affect upon culture than "redemption."

Fourth, it will show that dispensationalism's emphasis upon the physical aspects of the future millennial kingdom strongly implies that current cultural pursuits are valuable. This leads to a decidedly optimistic perspective of cultural pursuits for individual Christians since whatever in this world is worthwhile will endure into the kingdom.

Therefore, a traditional dispensationalist philosophy of cultural engagement resembles something like Reformed Two Kingdom theology and provides a very practical framework for preventing churches from losing their biblical mission while at the same time discipling Christians to actively engage in cultural endeavors.

Portrayals of Dispensationalists as Culturally Impotent

Dispensationalism has often been criticized as culturally impotent since the early days of its development. These came from liberal social gospel advocates to be sure,[2] but they came from theological conservatives as well. For example, an 1879 *Lutheran Quarterly* article claimed that premillennialists who deny "that Christ is enthroned, or that his kingdom is established, or that his church, with the Holy Spirit's energy, is to convert the world, and asserting that the world will wax worse and worse until the second advent" have "such a gloomy view of things, and give such little encouragement for hearty labor."[3] A later 1882 article suggested that an "evil fruit" of premillennialism was that "it takes away the very highest incentives to

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[2] "[Pessimistic belief in supernatural forces of cultural evil] will be confined to narrow circles, mostly of premillennialists" (Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922], 86).

[3] C. A. Briggs, "Origin and History of Premillennialism," *The Lutheran Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (April 1879): 241, 244–45.

labor for the conversion of the world."[4] Likewise, in 1958,[5] Lefferts A. Loetscher wrote, "By its heightened supernaturalism, dispensationalism deliberately widened the gulf between Christianity and its environment, thus at once protecting its own faith and reducing the possibility of effective Christian influence on thought and society,"[6] and N. C. Kraus asserted that dispensationalism was open "to the charge of escapism and obscurantism."[7] In 1972, David O. Moberg claimed that premillennialism "played a part in the Great Reversal that made evangelicals become aloof from active social involvement,"[8] and in 1979, Timothy Weber argued that [premillennialism] "broke the spirit of social concern which had played such a prominent role in early evangelicalism."[9]

Complaints about the impact of dispensationalism on cultural engagement reached a climax with the rise of New Evangelicalism in the 1940s and 1950s. New Evangelicals tied their criticism of fundamentalist's lack of attention to social matters directly to fundamentalism's dispensationalism.[10] As Marsden notes, "Although the millenarian movement and the anti-modernist movement were by no means co-extensive, dispensationalism was nevertheless the most distinctive intellectual product of emerging fundamentalism and is the best indicator of one side of its basic assumptions."[11] This was at the core of Carl F. H. Henry's complaint in his 1947 *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* that fundamentalists lacked a necessary concern for social action, which he suggested resulted from dispensationalism's belief

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[4] J. I. Miller and A. M. Staunton, "Practical Objections to Chiliasm," *The Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (April 1882): 161.

[5] Much fewer examples can be found in the early twentieth-century, likely due to the world wars, when the premillennialists predictions "came true."

[6] Lefferts A. Loetscher, "Foreword," in *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development*, by C. Norman Kraus (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 7.

[7] C. N. Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 136.

[8] David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 37. This volume was originally published in 1972 with the title *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: Lippincott).

[9] Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 183.

[10] Russell Moore traces this development favorably in *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004). For examples of fundamentalist evaluation of this point, see Preston Mayes, "Fundamentalism and Social Involvement," *MBTJ* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 29–64; Mark A. Snoeberger, "Where's the Love?: Understanding the Marginalization of Dispensational Theology" (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2012); Larry Oats, "Dispensationalism: A Basis for Ecclesiastical Separation," *MBTJ* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 72–103; Mark A. Snoeberger, "A Tale of Two Kingdoms: The Struggle for the Spirituality of the Church and the Genius of the Dispensational System," *DBSJ* 19 (2014): 53–71; Mark Sidwell, "Fundamentalism and Cultural Engagement: The Historical Context" (Unpublished paper presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, 2015).

[11] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 44. Interestingly, as Marsden notes, the fundamentalism of the early twentieth-century included some who desired to "preserve Christian civilization" or transform culture; yet by the mid-twentieth century dispensational premillennialism, along with its accompanying views regarding cultural engagement, largely dominated fundamentalism. See also Oats, "Dispensationalism: A Basis for Ecclesiastical Separation."

that the church in this age should be concerned "only with 'calling out' believers."[12] Henry indicated a similar sentiment later in his 1957 *Christian Personal Ethics*, in which he argued that dispensational theology "evaporates the present-day relevance of much of the ethics of Jesus."[13] He claimed that a so-called "postponement theory" of the kingdom of God that saw its coming as only future prevented fundamentalism from recognizing the church's responsibility toward society. Rather, Henry advocated for an "already/not yet" realized eschatology that rejected both postmillennial social gospel and premillennial social disengagement in affirming that "the kingdom is here, and that it is not here."[14]

Harold Ockenga similarly explained that New Evangelicalism differs from Fundamentalism "in its willingness to handle the social problems which the Fundamentalists evaded. . . . There need be no disagreement between the personal gospel and the social gospel."[15] He complained that dispensational fundamentalism "believed that conditions would grow worse and worse so that until Christ came again, the only effective application of the gospel could be to the individual."[16] Richard Quebedeaux later described fundamentalism "with its dispensational pessimism about the human situation" as having "nothing to offer" culture.[17] Even D. A. Carson describes the "fundamentalist option" as one that "tended to withdraw from serious engagement with the broader culture,"[18] and Andy Crouch characterizes the fundamentalist posture as "condemning culture."[19]

Ironically, the emergence of progressive dispensationalism came partially as a result of similar embarrassment over what figures such as Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising considered to be traditional dispensationalism's lack of social engagement. Blaising and Bock argue that the church does have a responsibility to engage culture since "the church is a manifestation of the future kingdom."[20] This understanding "gives the church a basis for an evangelical participation in the political and social affairs of this world"[21] that, in their view, it would not otherwise have.

Similar criticisms have appeared more recently. In 1997, Joel Carpenter described fundamentalism's "premillennialist, futurist, dispensational theology" as an

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[12] Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Originally published in 1947; reprinted (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 52.

[13] Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 550–51.

[14] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

[15] Harold J. Ockenga, "Press Reslease on 'The New Evangelicalism,'" in *Be Ye Holy: The Call to Christian Separation*, by Fred Moritz (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 117–18.

[16] Harold J. Ockenga, "From Fundamentalism, Through New Evangelicalism, to Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 43.

[17] Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 25.

[18] D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 209.

[19] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 84–85.

[20] Darrell L. Bock and Craig Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), 286.

[21] Ibid., 290.

"alarmist, conspiratorial, and alienated outlook."[22] Likewise, in his 2007 monograph, *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel, and the Church*, Stephen Sizer summarizes the general sentiment of dispensationalism and culture:

> Sadly, the mistaken idea of a secret rapture has generated a lot of bad theology. It is probably the reason why many Christians don't seem to care about climate change or about preserving diminishing supplies of natural resources. They are similarly not worried about the national debt, nuclear war, or world poverty, because they hope to be raptured to heaven and avoid suffering the consequences of the coming global holocaust.[23]

Theological Foundation of Cultural Transformationalism

In contrast to what many evangelicals considered the "Christ Against Culture"[24] posture of traditional dispensationalists, the dominant perspective that has emerged and even come to be described by Russell Moore as "evangelical consensus" is cultural transformationalism, often described as Neo-Kuyperianism or Neo-Calvinism.[25] Although this perspective has characterized different traditions and has taken a variety of forms, several key underlying theological ideas remain consistent. As Moore notes, "Evangelical theology has emerged with a near consensus on the relationship between the kingdom and the church, along with remarkably similar concepts of how the church should relate to the world in the present age."[26]

First cultural transformationalism is rooted in at least some form of "already/not yet" inaugurated eschatology. As Moore points out, this does not mean that all evangelicals agree on every aspect of eschatology but that most evangelicals at least believe that the church "maintains some continuity with Israel as the people of God," is "a new stage in the progress of redemption, brought about by the eschatological nature of the coming of Christ," is "an initial manifestation of the kingdom," and is "the focal point in the present age of the inaugurated reign of Christ as Davidic Messiah."[27] As noted above, new evangelicals found "already/not yet" eschatology to be the necessary basis for early justification of their philosophy of cultural engagement.

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[22] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 249.

[23] Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel, and the Church* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 136–37.

[24] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1975). While the taxonomy H. Richard Niebuhr presented in *Christ and Culture* is considerably limited in these discussions, his basic language and categories nonetheless remain helpful.

[25] Popular defenses of the transformationalist philosophy include Cornelius J. Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005); Michael Goheen and Craig G. Bartholemew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[26] Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 131.

[27] Ibid., 147.

Important to note here is that Moore demonstrates that these beliefs are held by most evangelical covenantalists *and* progressive dispensationalists alike.

Second, evangelical transformationalism is based in the idea that God intends to redeem, not just elect individuals, but all creation, at least in part during the present age. "The Christian message," Henry argued, "aims at a re-created society."[28] Moore notes,

> Just as Henry called for an "already/not yet" model of the kingdom of God that could transcend biblically the reductionistic debates that hinder the neo-evangelical hope for an engaged evangelical movement, he also led the way in calling for a full-orbed doctrine of salvation that concentrated the Christian focus on a world-and-life view that embraced all of life.[29]

Transformationalism's philosophy of culture engagement is centered in soteriology, and thus language of cultural "redemption" is at its heart.

Third, transformationalism derives from the belief that God's mission and the church's mission are one and the same. Moore explains, "If the kingdom is to be understood as having a present reality, and that reality is essentially soteriological, then the kingdom agenda of evangelical theology must focus on the biblical fulcrum of these eschatological, salvific blessings: the church."[30] The so-called *missio Dei*, the idea that God is a sending God who desires to redeem all creation, is the basis for understanding the church's mission in transformationalist thinking. In essence, the Great Commission is simply a continuation for the present age of what they call the "cultural mandate" of Genesis 1:28.[31] This is often framed in language of "Creation-Fall-Redemption," a description of both God's mission in history and the church's mission in culture. Christ is presently ruling all things as King, they argue, and it is part of the mission of the church to extend that rule into all spheres of society. They love to quote Abraham Kuyper's well-known statement, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"[32] in support of their view. Transformationalist Albert Wolters[33] argues, "Mankind, as God's representatives on earth, carry on where God left off."[34] He claims that the church's cultural production will climax one day in "a new heaven and a new earth" that will maintain an "essential continuity with our experience now."[35]

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[28] Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

[29] Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 102.

[30] Ibid., 129.

[31] See Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 84.

[32] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 488. Emphasis original.

[33] Moore quotes Wolters approvingly in *The Kingdom of Christ*, 244n. 214.

[34] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 41.

[35] Ibid., 48.

As such, cultural transformationalism insists that "the church *qua* church must engage the social and political structures because the church must counter the flawed assumptions of the world."[36] Because evangelical transformationalists believe the church to be an initial manifestation of the kingdom, they see a distinctive social mandate as inherent in the church's mission. Furthermore, transformationalists tend to minimize any distinction between the mission of the church as a gathered, organized institution and individual Christians in society.

A Traditional Dispensational Philosophy of
the Church and Cultural Engagement

Having presented a brief survey of criticism of traditional dispensationalists as culturally disengaged and a description of the alternative transformationalist perspective, I will now sketch an approach to cultural engagement that is rooted in core ideas at the heart of traditional dispensationalism. I use the term "traditional" dispensationalism here deliberately, to distinguish this set of beliefs from those of progressive dispensationalism, for reasons apparent above.

The only traditional dispensationalist to my knowledge that has offered a fully robust philosophy of cultural engagement tied directly to dispensational tenets is Charles Ryrie. Ryrie delivered a series of lectures on social ethics at Grace Theological Seminary in 1976, which were published in *BibSac* the following year.[37] Ryrie expanded upon these lectures in his 1982 book, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility*,[38] later republished in 2008 as *The Christian and Social Responsibility*.[39] However, both Alva J. McClain and Michael J. Vlach also explicitly address the issue in their respective treatises on the kingdom of God.[40] Furthermore, Rolland McCune responds to the New Evangelical transformationalist perspective from within his traditional dispensational framework in *Promise Unfulfilled*,[41] and he articulates several key principles for a dispensational philosophy of culture in his three volume *Systematic Theology*.[42] Finally, Mark Snoeberger has recently treated the

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[36] Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 139.

[37] Charles Ryrie, "Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part I: Theological Perspectives on Social Ethics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 533 (January 1977): 33–44; Charles Ryrie, "Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part II: Old Testament Perspectives on Social Ethics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 534 (April 1977): 114–22; Charles Ryrie, "Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part III: Christ's Teachings on Social Ethics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 535 (July 1977): 215–27; Charles Ryrie, "Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part IV: Apostolic Perspectives on Social Ethics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 536 (October 1977): 314–28.

[38] Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago: Moody, 1982).

[39] Charles Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008).

[40] Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IL: BMH Books, 1959); Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017).

[41] Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2004).

[42] Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God and Angels* (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009); Rolland

matter from several different perspectives,[43] suggesting that a philosophy for cultural engagement that avoids both the extremes of cultural withdrawal and cultural trans-formationalism "has as its greatest potentiality for biblical development the fertile soil of traditional dispensational thought."[44] It is from these and others who share core beliefs that I will draw in summarizing the implications of traditional dispensational thought on philosophy of cultural engagement.

Two Kingdoms

First, traditional dispensationalist belief that "kingdom" language in Scripture takes two distinct forms within God's plan in history impacts a dispensation theology of culture.[45] There is one clear sense in which the Bible refers to a kingdom that is eternal (e.g., Ps. 145:13) and universal in scope (e.g., Ps. 103:19). On the other hand, there is another clear sense in which the Bible describes a kingdom that is entirely future (e.g., Dan. 2:44) and localized (e.g., Isa. 24:23). This reveals what McClain calls "two kingdoms" over which God rules and accomplishes his purposes on earth.[46] The first is the "universal kingdom," God's sovereign superintendence over all things, including creation and human institutions, cultures, and societies, which God governs through "natural law."[47] The second is the "mediatorial kingdom," "God's rule on the earth through man who acts as God's representative."[48] While these two kingdoms are to be distinguished, McClain insists "in thinking of them as *two aspects* or phases of the one rule of our sovereign God."[49] Thus, dispensationalists agree with Kuyper's claim that the Son of God rules over all; where they would

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McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 2: The Doctrines of Man, Sin, Christ, and the Holy Spirit* (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, Mich.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

[43] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Noetic Sin, Neutrality, and Contextualization: How Culture Receives the Gospel," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 345–78; Mark A. Snoeberger, "D. A. Carson's Christ and Culture Revisited: A Reflection and a Response," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 13 (2008): 93–107; Mark A. Snoeberger, "History, Ecclesiology, and Mission, Or, Are We Missing Some Options Here?" (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2010), http://www.dbts.edu/pdf/macp/2010/Snoeberger,%20History%20Ecclesiology%20and%20Mission.pdf; Snoeberger, "Where's the Love?"; Snoeberger, "A Tale of Two Kingdoms."

[44] Snoeberger, "History, Ecclesiology, and Mission," 10–11.

[45] Although some older dispensationalists attempted to explain this distinction between two kingdoms as one with clear lexical delineation (i.e. "kingdom of God" vs. "kingdom of Heaven"), most recent dispensationalists argue this theologically and see no absolute distinction between terms used in Scripture. See R. Bruce Compton, "The 'Kingdom of Heaven/God' and the Church: A Case Study in Hermeneutics and Theology" (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2010).

[46] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 21.

[47] Ibid., 26.

[48] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 55.

[49] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 21. Emphasis original.

differ is that the Son rules all things in his role as Creator and Sovereign, not yet in his role as Redeemer.[50]

Traditional dispensationalists recognize that God's first expression of the relationship between humans and creation was in the dominion mandate[51] of Genesis 1:26–28 in which, as Vlach notes, man, as an image-bearer of God, "is now positioned and equipped to rule and subdue the earth on God's behalf,"[52] a role McClain asserts "was regal in character."[53] "This mandate," explains McCune, "underwrites true science, technology, and the necessity to develop a God-glorifying culture; in other words, this action of *subduing* denotes a conscious effort to discover the secrets and treasures of creation for the enrichment of humans to the glory of God."[54] Importantly for the present discussion, this rule was given to all humanity. As McCune explains, "The pre-fall 'dominion mandate' of Genesis 1:28 . . . is given to all men as human beings, not only to men as believers or covenant keepers; i.e. *all* people are to 'subdue' the earth for the benefit of mankind to the glory of God."[55] Responsibilities given to Adam and Eve in conjunction with this rule over the earth also included abstaining from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Theoretically, had Adam and Eve obeyed this mandate they would have been confirmed in holiness and mankind would have continued to perfectly rule the natural world as mediators of God's universal rule. However, Adam's disobedience brought a curse upon humankind and all creation. This curse did not end the universal rule of God over all things as Creator, but with regard to the mediatorial kingdom, it "introduced into the stream of human history a hiatus which to the present hour has not at any time been wholly remedied"[56]; indeed, "the storyline after the fall of man in Genesis 3 will be the process by which God restores man to the kingdom mandate of Genesis 1:26–28."[57] Furthermore, atonement and redemption were now necessary as a condition in the perfect kingdom on earth. The protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 is God's redemptive promise that one day a seed of the woman would emerge from his confrontation with the serpent victorious, thus qualifying him as the perfect mediator between God and man, earning him the right to rule as Adam had failed to do and providing the necessary atonement for entrance into the kingdom.[58]

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[50] McClain explicitly asserts that God's rule over the universal kingdom is through the Son (ibid., 31–34). Interestingly, John Calvin articulated this in the same way dispensationalists do, arguing that the Son of God's rule existed as a dual mediatorship in which he ruled all things in his role as Creator and exercised spiritual rule over the church in his role as Redeemer (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], 1.13.7; 2.12.6).

[51] Dispensationalists call this the "domination mandate" (McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 42–44; McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 2*, 33), "kingdom mandate" (Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 63), or sometimes "creation mandate" (ibid., 458).

[52] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 60.

[53] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 42.

[54] McCune, *A Systematic Theology: Volume 2*, 33–34. Emphasis original.

[55] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 261.

[56] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 43.

[57] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 63.

[58] See ibid., 546.

Yet because there remained no perfect mediator to rule the natural world on God's behalf, both mankind and nature quickly fell away from God's purposes. Therefore, God judged the earth and then established a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and indeed "every living creature" (Gen 9:1–11), that repeated many of the same language as the dominion mandate but added additional measures that would "preserve the stability of nature."[59] This covenant offers no new redemptive revelation with respect to the mediatorial kingdom; rather, it is in this covenant that God created an earthly institution as a "form of control upon the lawless impulses of men": human government. [60] Again, this responsibility to govern the world and its people is given, not specifically to God's redeemed people as such, but rather to mankind in general. Therefore, as McClain notes, this earthly institution consists of "human rulers who, whether they acknowledge [God] or not, are nevertheless 'ordained by God' as 'ministers' of his."[61]

Having established human government through which God would providentially rule his universal kingdom, God formed his mediatorial kingdom on earth within the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Moses was its first mediator, and in this role he both "represented Jehovah toward the people" and "represented the people of Israel toward God."[62] This kingdom united spiritual qualifications with moral and civil, which "produced effects which extended into numerous other realms," such as were outlined in the Law of Moses.[63] As McCune explains, "In ancient Israel the civil and religious arenas were combined in the theocratic polity, in effect a *union* of church and state. The Law governed every aspect of the people's lives including the social sphere."[64] Israel's mediators continued through the judges and kings of Israel, but since no mediator was able to perfectly fulfill his God given responsibilities, "the mediatorial kingdom of Israel was officially terminated by the departure of the Shekinah-Glory" from the Temple, recorded in Ezekiel 11.[65]

Christ's first coming never brings with it the same union of the civil and spiritual that existed in Israel's mediatorial kingdom, although His incarnation, life, and death both qualified Him as the perfect mediator of God's mediatorial kingdom and accomplished the means of redeeming a people who would comprise the citizenship of that kingdom. Vlach insists, "Jesus' assumption of the Davidic throne on earth is still future (see Matt 19:28; 25:31), yet his authority to rule as Messiah is granted to him. The authority to rule will culminate in a kingdom reign."[66] Although Christ has

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[59] Ibid., 72.

[60] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 46.

[61] Ibid., 47.

[62] Ibid., 57–58.

[63] Ibid., 68.

[64] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

[65] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 126. Cf. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 194–96. See also J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 162.

[66] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 398.

accomplished redemption for His people, the restoration of all things—including creation and culture—will not take place until the coming of his kingdom. In other words, since the mediatorial kingdom will not again be established on earth until after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the union of socio-cultural spheres and the redemptive sphere will not take place until the millennial kingdom. Vlach summarizes the future union of the two kingdoms well: "When the ultimate Mediator, Jesus, successfully reigns over the earth, the mediatorial kingdom will be brought into conformity with God's universal kingdom (see 1 Cor 15:24, 28). And God's will on earth will be done as it is in heaven (see Matt 6:10)."[67]

Thus, the first important tenet of traditional dispensationalism that impacts its philosophy of cultural engagement is recognition that God works differently in sovereignly ruling over all things through natural law and human institutions on the one hand, and in His intention to establish his mediatorial kingdom on earth. No union between the two will exist until Jesus comes again.

The Spiritual Nature of the Church

Second, traditional dispensationalism's understanding of the New Testament church's relationship to these two kingdoms is essential to its philosophy of cultural engagement. Traditional dispensationalism explicitly emphasizes what is sometimes called the spirituality of the church.[68] This doctrine teaches that the church as an institution is related only to the redemptive sphere of God's rule and therefore must directly engage only in purely spiritual matters and not in political or social issues, which are the responsibility of other secular institutions. "The church's primary responsibility in this age," argues Vlach, "is gospel proclamation and making disciples. . . . the church's mission is not cultural or societal transformation."[69] Important to this doctrine is distinguishing between the church as institution and individual Christians in society.[70] McCune insists, "No social program is given in Scripture for the institutional church in relation to civil society in general."[71] Individual Christians, however, as members of the universal kingdom of God, participate in various societal institutions. Cultural matters, as part of the universal kingdom of God, have been designated by God as falling under the superintendence of earthly institutions such as government and family, of which individual Christians are participants, rather than the church as an institution.

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[67] Ibid., 56.

[68] For an explanation of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church and a brief historical survey of its practice, particularly within dispensationalism, see Snoeberger, "A Tale of Two Kingdoms." Moore explicitly rejects this application of the spirituality of the church (Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 167–68).

[69] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 541.

[70] Ironically, Abraham Kuyper argued this very sort of distinction by differentiating between the church as institution (which is limited to specific ecclesiastical matters) and the church as organism (which encompasses all of life for the Christian and extends to any sphere in which he finds himself) (Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 194–99).

[71] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 259.

While certainly in no way unique to traditional dispensationalism, as Mark Snoeberger suggests, the spirituality of the church was at the heart of early dispensationalism. In fact, Snoeberger convincingly argues that "the eschatological notions of premillennialism and pretribulationism are *implications* of the dispensational system and not the *cause*. The historical *cause* for the birth of dispensationalism was strict subscription to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church."[72] Early dispensationalists were attempting to "recover a more modest goal of ecclesiology in the face of a church obsessed with cultural activism."[73]

McClain articulates the problem with losing this doctrine as a result of equating the kingdom and the church:

> The identification of the kingdom with the church has led historically to ecclesiastical policies and programs which . . . have been far removed from the original simplicity of the New Testament *ekklesia*. . . . Thus the church loses its "pilgrim" character and the sharp edge of its divinely commissioned "witness" is blunted. It becomes an *ekklesia* which is not only in the world, but also *of* the world.[74]

Instead, Ryrie argues that "the commission to the church is to preach [the] good news and to teach the Word," not to "effect worldwide justice."[75]

Consequently, traditional dispensationalism also denies that God's mission and the church's mission are the same. According to dispensationalists, God's mission is to bring Himself glory through creation, the judgment of sin, and the redemption of his elect, culminating in His "rule of loving sovereignty and fellowship with human beings in his image and dwelling with them forever."[76] The church takes part in this mission through making disciples, but this role is but one smaller part of God's larger agenda. Some dispensationalists even affirm God's desire to restore all creation. For example, Vlach insists that "God does not abandon his creation—he will restore it."[77] Nevertheless, God will accomplish this with the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth; the church has no direct responsibility to redeem anything.[78]

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[72] Snoeberger, "A Tale of Two Kingdoms," 65. Emphasis original.

[73] Snoeberger, "Where's the Love?," 2.

[74] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 438–39. Emphasis original.

[75] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 19.

[76] McCune, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1*, 137.

[77] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 14. Ryrie notably disagrees with this perspective, insisting that "holistic redemption can easily lead to placing unbalanced, if not wrong, priorities on political action, social agendas, and improving the structures of society." Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Rev Exp (Moody Publishers, 1995), 176.

[78] A possible exception is found in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5—"redeeming the time," but this command does not appear relevant to the present discussion.

Discipling Dual Citizens

Third, although the spirituality of the church means that the church does not have a direct role in external cultural affairs, traditional dispensationalists do highlight a secondary role directly tied to the church's mission of making disciples. While the church *as* church has no social responsibility outside of itself, this does not mean that Christians must refrain from involvement in cultural spheres. According to McCune, "a church saint lives in two separate spheres, the church and the state,"[79] and as such, individual Christians are "dual citizens" who can and should engage in politics, arts, education, law enforcement, science, and other cultural activities. However, "this is in their capacity as citizens of earth," not as "the church."[80] This is why Ryrie's treatment of the subject discusses specifically *the Christian* and social responsibility, not *the church* and social responsibility.

Yet an individual Christian's role in society is not connected directly in any direct way to God's plan to establish his mediatorial kingdom on earth and restore all things. Further, when a Christian acts in society, it is not out of a motivation to fulfill the "cultural mandate"; as Vlach argues, only "the 'Son of Man,' and 'Last Adam' (see 1 Cor 15:45) can fulfill the kingdom mandate originally tasked to Adam. He can represent man and do for mankind what mankind on his own cannot do,"[81] and this will occur in the future kingdom "after his present session at the right hand of the Father."[82]

Rather, from a dispensational perspective, Christians should consider their lives in general society on the basis of the following biblical principles: First, the Bible commands Christians to live holy lives (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:15). Ryrie calls this the "top of the list" when considering an agenda for Christians and social responsibility.[83] Second, the Bible gives specific commands regarding how Christians should live in their various human vocations such as husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, and employees (Eph. 5:15–6:9; Col. 3:18–4:6). Third, all Christians have some responsibilities toward society, such as submitting to governmental authority (Rom. 13:1–7) and rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's (Matt. 22:21). Fourth, Christians should consider how their beliefs and relationship with God necessarily affect other aspects of human life in society. Vlach summarizes, "Although such [societal] matters are not the church's emphasis in this age, Christians are called to apply their Christian worldview to every aspect of the environment. Thus, Christians can be involved in all aspects of culture including music, the arts, architecture, agriculture, politics, education, sports, etc. for the glory of God."[84] Fifth, Ryrie emphasizes the *imago Dei* and "oneness or solidarity" of humanity as a basis for which Christians do

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[79] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

[80] Ibid., 260.

[81] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 546–47.

[82] Ibid., 458. Vlach also affirms that when Jesus fulfills the dominion mandate in the kingdom, he will also "empower those who belong to him to do so" as he shares his rule with them.

[83] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 93.

[84] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 541.

good in society.[85] He reminds believers that, despite the fact that the church's "social" responsibility is primarily inward, Christians are nevertheless commanded in the New Testament to "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10), and this is a motivation for any social action in which individual Christians take part.[86] Sixth, part of the motivation given in Scripture for Christians living good lives in the world is witness. This is behind Christ's description of his followers as "the light of the world." He admonishes them, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16).

Yet this is also why the church's task of making disciples does have a secondary role in cultural engagement; the church should instruct believers in what it means to live Christianly in their various spheres. Part of what it means to fulfill the Great Commission is to teach Christians how to live out the implications of their relationship with God and how to obey the Great Commandment through being holy, active citizens in the society for the good of their fellow man. Dispensationalists also stress the church's responsibility to care for its own, even materially. McCune suggests, "The New Testament teaches the benevolence of the local church to its own members; it does not portray the church as the God-appointed watchdog over the social welfare of the world at large."[87] Similarly, Ryrie insists that "the church's social responsibilities are primarily directed toward the body."[88] Further, the church should also speak to relevant moral issues under attack in society as part of discipling Christians to know how they should live in that society. However, churches may not speak beyond Scripture, may not require of their people what Scripture does not require, should motivate Christian views of education, the arts, politics, or social matters in terms of sanctification rather than redemption or eschatology, and should not in any official capacity meddle in civic affairs. Instead of motivating Christians to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their roles within the universal Kingdom of God in soteriological or eschatological terms like "cultural redemption," "cultural transformation," or "kingdom work," dispensationalists teach that Christian social responsibility is rooted in their sanctification.

Restraint

Fourth, the ministry of the Holy Spirit during the Church Age is key to a dispensational philosophy of cultural engagement. Dispensationalists consider the period between Pentecost and the rapture as "a time of special ministry by the Holy Spirit."[89] While the Holy Spirit is active in all ages through the miracle of regeneration, He is active in the world through the church in a manner unique to the church age, a key argument in defense of a pretribulation rapture. This unique ministry of

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[85] Ryrie, "Perspectives, Part I," 39.

[86] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 38.

[87] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 261.

[88] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 37.

[89] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 375.

the Holy Spirit will commence again once Christ is physically present on earth during the millennial kingdom.[90]

On this understanding of the Holy Spirit's unique work through the church from Pentecost to the rapture of the church, rather than categorizing the church's role in society as one of "redemption," a traditional dispensational perspective would see such a role as one of "restraint" through the indwelling ministry of Holy Spirit in the church (2 Thess. 2:6–7).[91] This also relates to Christ's description of His followers as "the salt of the earth," those who, through living in "peace with one another" can serve to preserve righteousness in the world (Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:50). Ryrie observes, "To be salt in this world means to give life, preserving influence, stability, and holiness to this world."[92] With this perspective, the church will no doubt have influence on broader culture to one degree or another. But as McCune notes, "The church influences the state through the regenerated lives of the saints acting as individual Christian citizens in civil society and not as people ecclesially structured in a corporate body."[93] Rather than this being a particular political strategy or set of cultural programs, this kind of restraint or preservation is accomplished by churches discipling believers to live Spirit-controlled lives and Christians submitting to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in every aspect of life and simply living as separated Christians in society. In this way, Christians are salt and light, helping through example and act to restrain human depravity in the surrounding culture. They are participating as citizens in the human institutions created by God in Genesis 9 for the purpose of ordering the natural world and providing restraints upon human sinfulness, not accomplishing "redemptive kingdom work." As McCune notes,

> Whatever beneficial cultural impact an individual Christian may have is a by-product of his sanctification and implementation of Christian principles in his social milieu. Christians do not have biblical warrant to bring into the organized church programs and schemes of sociopolitical involvement in the name of "service."[94]

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[90] "On the basis of Christ's finished work, the Spirit's ministry becomes possible, not only in the age of Christ's absence, but also during his bodily presence in the coming age of the kingdom" (ibid., 376).

[91] For dispensationalist interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, see Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1991), 99–102; Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 324–25; John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 231; McCune, *A Systematic Theology: Volume 2*, 298.

[92] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 49.

[93] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

[94] Ibid., 260.

The Physical Nature of the Future Millennial Kingdom

Finally, traditional dispensationalists teach that, although the millennial kingdom is entirely future, it will be an earthly, physical kingdom. This implies that physical, cultural activities matter and is why, as McClain explains, "There was a social element in our Lord's message of the kingdom."[95] Furthermore, since there is continuity between this present age and the future millennial kingdom, "Life here and now, in spite of the tragedy of sin, is nevertheless something worth-while; and therefore all efforts to make it better are also worth-while. All the true values of human life will be preserved and carried over into the coming kingdom; nothing worth-while will be lost."[96] Vlach agrees: "Man was created to interact with his environment, including culture. He will continue to do so in the kingdom of God in a holistic manner. This involves international harmony, tranquility in the animal kingdom, planting of vineyards, and the building of houses."[97] This is because it is God's intention to restore not just individuals, but all creation. "This restoration of all creation," according to Vlach, "includes the planet, animal kingdom, agriculture, architecture, and all God-honoring cultural pursuits (Isa. 11; 65:17–25)."[98] He explains that "not only does Jesus' death atone for the sins of God's image-bearers, it is the basis for the reconciliation of all things in his kingdom."[99]

Yet what an entirely "not yet" understanding of the kingdom does insist is that, while cultural pursuits are valuable, motivation for such is never founded upon desire to "redeem culture" or anticipation of large-scale cultural transformation. McCune explains, "The church is not the kingdom and cannot participate in any social proposals attributable to the kingdom, and for this reason there can be no tenable sociopolitical kingdom advancement by the church in the present age."[100] Ryrie agrees when he insists that "promoting kingdom righteousness in the present time is not the mandate of the church, though progressives make it so."[101] He warns that "people get sidetracked when they attempt to impose kingdom ethics on the world today without the physical presence of the King."[102] Instead, the church's responsibility is discipleship: "The changing of individuals, not institutions, is primary," insists Ryrie.[103]

Furthermore, even if God intends to restore all things, this is not happening during the present age, and the church has no role in such restoration. Instead, traditional dispensationalists make much of the fact that the NT promises this age will continue to grow, in the words of John Walvoord, "increasingly wicked as the age

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[95] McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 289.

[96] Ibid., 531.

[97] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 16.

[98] Ibid., 536.

[99] Ibid., 446.

[100] McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 264.

[101] Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 176.

[102] Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility*, 16.

[103] Ibid., 93.

progresses" (2 Tim. 3:13), and thus although cultural pursuits are worthy, "the pre-millennial view . . . presents no commands to improve society as a whole."[104] Yet, this pessimism about the trajectory of the world's systems in this age is balanced with an optimism in the power of the gospel to change lives and the reality of Christ's coming again to set up His kingdom on the earth. Only He can accomplish societal transformation.

Conclusion

What the foregoing has demonstrated is that traditional dispensationalism's core theological commitments provide a basis for a rather robust philosophy of cultural engagement, which could be summarized as follows:

1. God has established two kingdoms. The first is His sovereign rule over all things by means of natural law and mediated through human institutions that He has ordained. The second is a future kingdom on earth wherein He will rule His people by means of His Word and mediated through the physical presence of His Son, the man Christ Jesus.
2. Christians are citizens of both of these kingdoms. As citizens of the universal kingdom, they should live holy lives, demonstrate kindness toward all people, and apply what it means to be a Christian in whatever cultural sphere God has called them. As citizens of the future kingdom, Christians should proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, working toward gathering more into that citizenship.
3. The church has a unique and focused spiritual mission of making disciples, which includes equipping them to live Christianly in their roles as citizens of this world. But the church should not directly involve itself formally in social, cultural, or political affairs and should not frame any discussion of cultural engagement in eschatological or soteriological terms.

In short, evangelical criticism of dispensationalists as hostile toward a biblical mandate of cultural engagement is a classic example of begging the question. Dispensationalists have not denied any role for Christians in society; the issue is that dispensationalists did not articulate Christianity and culture in the way New Evangelicals assumed was the correct posture. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* was a philosophy of cultural engagement in search of an eschatology; only later did George Ladd[105] and others develop such an "already/not yet" realized eschatology that fueled the New Evangelical strategy and has come to characterize Neo-Kuyperianism and what Russell Moore calls "a kingdom consensus" of modern evangelicalism.[106] As Joel Carpenter rightly observes, Ladd's *The Gospel of the Kingdom* was a deliberate

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[104] John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 134.

[105] George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London: Paternoster Press, 1959).

[106] Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 25.

attempt to "replace dispensationalism with an evangelical view of the kingdom of God and the end-times that was . . . more able to sustain evangelical social engagement."[107] The cart of social engagement came before the horse of "already/not yet" eschatology.

Further, I present this article, not only in vindication of traditional dispensationalism, but out of a conviction that this perspective concerning the church and cultural engagement is most faithful to Scripture in that it protects the unique mission of the church to make disciples and avoids triumphalistic "kingdom" motivation so characteristic of evangelical discussions of Christianity and culture today. Expanding the Great Commission to include more than simply making disciples almost always results in failure to fulfill the mission Christ gave to his church. Furthermore, most permutations of evangelical desire to "transform culture" are little more than claims that cultural forms are mostly neutral and adaptation of the world's cultural forms, resulting in worldliness. As Andy Crouch has astutely observed, "The rise of interest in cultural transformation has been accompanied by a rise in cultural transformation of a different sort—the transformation of the church into the culture's image."[108]

The philosophy of cultural engagement stemming from traditional dispensationalism is more similar to Reformed Two Kingdom Theology[109] than Neo-Kuyperian Transformationalism. However, since Two Kingdom Theology also assumes an inaugurated eschatology and equates the kingdom of God with the church, I would suggest that a traditional dispensational philosophy of cultural engagement is what I described in *By the Waters of Babylon* as a "Sanctificationist" view of Christianity and culture, that is, a philosophy of culture firmly planted in the doctrine of sanctification rather than the kingdom and in the church's mission to make disciples rather than redeeming the world.[110] In other words, a traditional dispensational philosophy of culture does not understand a church's role toward culture to be in terms of cultural redemption, the *missio Dei*, "work for the kingdom," the "cultural mandate," or any missiological or eschatological motivation. Rather, dispensationalists view the church's exclusive mission as one of discipling Christians to live sanctified lives in whatever cultural sphere to which God has called them. This is the extent of the church's so-called "responsibility" toward culture, and anything more than this threatens to sideline the church's central mission.

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[107] Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*, 195.

[108] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 189.

[109] For a thorough treatment of this philosophy, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009).

[110] Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2015), 115–16.

HOW WOULD PAUL ENGAGE TODAY'S SECULARIZING SOCIETY?: AN EXEGETICAL REVISITING OF ACTS 17

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Proponents across the spectrum of contextualization theory often appeal to Paul's strategic evangelization through Macedonia into Athens in Acts 17 to either support or decry the theological presuppositions at the root of popular Christian dialogue theories. It is therefore opportune to exegetically revisit this locus classicus *to understand the guiding parameters and practices of Paul, especially for missionaries who daily combat the overwhelming forces of secularism and religious pluralism. The exegetical analysis of Acts 17 provides crucial, unmistakable conclusions about Paul's methods of interreligious dialogue and cultural engagement in the foreign context. The theological and practical constraints of Christian dialogue which emerge from the study should embolden the missionary in the task of propositional evangelism—that is, proclaiming the distinctly Christian gospel to a religiously ambivalent culture.*

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Global Dialogue and the Relevance of Scripture

Missionaries to the Majority World work on the cutting edge of innovation and creativity to combat the overwhelming hostility to the lordship of Jesus Christ found in religious pluralism and in secularism.[1] As frontline contextualizers, missionaries

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[1] Secularism, rising in part from the vast array of globalizing worldview options, promotes the atheistic value of separating religious faith and human reason so that the input and influence in the growth of society and individuals comes from the well of human experience rather than from a transcendent, supernatural source. For general social theory proposals as to the effects of globalization on the secular mindset, see Brian S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Martin, *The Future of Christianity: Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization*, (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2010).

daily wrestle with a debate that has endured nearly two millennia over the controlling authority for evangelistic engagement with differing sources of truth.[2]

At least two questions relate to the ever-present debate over Christian dialogue method in the secularizing world: If secularism drains the religious and spiritual character of a culture, then how should the missionary attempt to make theological inroads? Is searching for spiritual commonalities in a foreign secular context a strategy that the apostles would condone?

Scripture presents straightforward guidelines for combatting the complexities of the ever-increasing secularization of newly globalizing societies across the world. Broad biblical and theological parameters for evangelistic contextualization emerge in the canon of Scripture through a wide range of strategic approaches and case studies.[3]

Perhaps no missionary has met the challenges of contextualization from the basis of Scripture more directly and more consistently than the apostle Paul throughout his foreign travels. Proponents across the spectrum of contextualization theory often appeal to Paul's strategic evangelization through Macedonia into Athens in Acts 17

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[2] Tertullian (ca. 155–ca. 240 AD) warned of the contaminating influence of Hellenistic philosophy on the tenets of Christianity, asserting that enmeshing conflicting founts of knowledge ultimately risks the syncretizing of Christian and pagan worldviews into a "mottled Christianity." He famously asked, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?" Tertullian, "Prescription against Heretics," in *Greek and Roman Philosophy After Aristotle*, trans. Jason L. Saunders (Simon & Schuster, 1966), 344. More recently, Miroslav Volf's proposal for greater reconciliation concerning Christian-Muslim relations highlights how interfaith dialogue might lead to theological pluralism (See Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* [San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011]; see critique by Collin Hansen, "Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?," online editorial [June 28, 2011], accessed March 22, 2018, http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god; also see analysis in Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62–65. Contrast with Jason Medearis's unqualified support of Volf's methodology (in comments to Georges Houssney, "Analysis of Paul's Acts 17," article [April 4, 2011], accessed March 22, 2018, www.biblicalmissiology.org/2011/04/04/analysis-of-pauls-acts-17/).

[3] In the Old Testament one need only look to Abraham, for example, to see how the message of grace-enabled, justifying faith in Yahweh extends from one culture-bound family to all peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:5–6; 22:17–18). The message of salvation is necessarily transcultural and contextual. Peters broadly identifies the "universality" of the OT missionary mandate in George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 21–25. The OT saint is the one who, regardless of culture, repented of sin and sought the one true God (Isa. 55:6–7) as revealed to Abraham's offspring Israel, Yahweh's holy nation (Exod. 19:6). Because of the atoning sacrifice of Israel's Messiah for sinners (Isa. 53:4–11; cf. Mark 10:45), salvation reaches beyond the borders of Israel into many nations through the work of missionaries presently and in the millennium (Isa. 52:7, 15; cf. Rom. 10:15). Of interest for further study on biblical contextualization approaches are the NT intercultural exchanges of Jesus with the Greeks (John 12:20–50), with the Syrophoenecian woman (Matt. 15:21–28), and with Samaritans (John 4:4–43); Philip's intercultural exchange with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:25–39); Peter's exchange with Cornelius the Italian God-fearer (Acts 10:1–11:18), the contextualization guidelines established by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–21), his evangelization at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47), the implications of his cultural hypocrisy in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–21), and his contribution to the doctrines of bibliology which inform contextualization (1 Pet. 1:24–2:3; 2 Pet. 1:16–21); John's intercultural exchange among the mixed congregations of Asia Minor (1–3 John) who were later addressed directly by Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:1–3:22); Paul's understanding of the spiritual limitations to a culturally rooted gospel comprehension (1 Cor. 1:17–2:16), and the cultural motivations for messianic believers to perform non-salvific Temple vows and sacrifices (Acts 21:15–29).

to either support or decry the theological presuppositions found at the root of popular Christian dialogue theories.

This article revisits the apostle Paul's evangelistic activities in Acts 17 with a fresh exegetical analysis in order to provide essential insights for developing an evangelical dialogue method suitable to a secularizing society. Analyzing the original text with a straightforward hermeneutic provides crucial, unmistakable conclusions about Paul's methods of interreligious dialogue and cultural engagement in the foreign context. The theological and practical constraints of Christian dialogue which emerge from the study should embolden the missionary in the task of proclaiming the distinctly Christian gospel to a religiously ambivalent culture.

But first it is opportune to present some of the key theological presuppositions which undergird the work of the conservative contextualizer who aims to follow the path of Paul in the activity of dialogue.

Presuppositions and Definitions

Conservative evangelicals need to speak with biblical clarity when they determine to engage growing societal paradigms such as secularization. The task of constructing a biblically faithful contextualization model in a secularizing society must operate from a high view of Scripture, one which both allows and expects the text to set the priorities and boundaries of the missionary task.[4] Contextualization is therefore necessarily and fundamentally an exegetically harnessed and doctrinally bound work. Thus, the Christian who appeals to the sufficiency of Scripture in missionary endeavors must ascertain the biblical parameters for responding to false theological claims and do so in a relevant way that avoids inappropriately hybridizing true and false beliefs at every level.[5]

Likewise, the conservative missionary must retain a low view of man, not in terms of one's affection or esteem for the target audience but with regard to the spiritual reality upon which to build the gospel message. It must be remembered that nonbelievers from the most diverse contexts and belief systems do not hold entirely distinct or isolated worldviews,[6] because at the base of each lies the objective fact

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[4] In comparison with the this-worldly tolerance of many or no faiths today, a high view of Scripture is exceedingly high. The Bible holds the ultimate authority for defining truth; it demands absolute belief in the reality it proclaims and punishes all disbelief and disobedience with an eternal judgment proclaimed by God Himself. Such a high view of Scripture therefore has the highest desire—the transformation of individual children of wrath into children of God who will effect change in their generation's wayward cultures and societies.

[5] For a recent approach to biblical contextualization through exegetical and cultural lenses within a framework of biblical theology, see Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015). Wu rightly understands the importance of biblical interpretation as the groundwork of contextualization, not just communication strategies, yet one must read with caution his proposal for the development of key biblical themes and his downplaying of penal substitutionary atonement in view of N.T. Wright's justification concept.

[6] As cognitive beings with a deliberative will, each person holds a distinct understanding of life in all its components and cohesion, yet demonstrates some conceptual commonalities as to beliefs about divinity and the Absolute, the purpose of humanity on the plane of existence, human problems and solu-

that the individuals in their people groups and ideological communities are universally marred by the noetic effects of sin and live in a common hostility to the gospel of God. The contextualizer with a high view of Scripture and low view of man understands that the evangelist and theologian have but one unifying task to fulfill in myriad contexts: the clear proclamation of the gospel and the exegetically mined teaching of biblical doctrine.

At the outset, then, two common terms—contextualization and propositionalism—deserve high-view definitions essential to properly engage the secular worldview. The conservative process of contextualization focuses on the articulation and appropriation of the content of biblical truth (the gospel and theology) to spiritually blind, unregenerate sinners in a social or cultural context not innate to the ambassador for Christ, such that biblical orthodoxy becomes reproducible in myriad contexts.[7] Propositionalism is the activity of delivering biblically rooted verbal assertions of communicable spiritual-theological truth to target populations; biblically sound doctrine determines its truth values because transcendent truth is based on knowledge coming directly from God and revealed to mankind.[8]

The study now puts the conservative contextualizer's high view of Scripture to the test by examining the apostle Paul's dialogue method throughout Macedonia and Greece.

Paul's Dialogue Method in Macedonia and Greece

Throughout his travels, no matter the context or audience, Paul's ministry was marked by the propositional proclamation of the gospel. During his second missionary journey, Paul and his companions proclaimed the gospel extensively in the religiously pluralistic land of Macedonia on the mainland north of Greece (Acts 17:1–

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tions, community, and the afterlife. For discussion of worldview, see John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 50–52; David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xv, 4, esp. 260–67; James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 42–52.

[7] See the conservative definitions in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 143; Scott A. Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 36. Flemming underlines the importance of moving past the act of cross-cultural communication into the " 'life world' of the audience" with a message framed within the target context (see Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005], 19–20). Tennent keenly develops an alternative to the much abused term "contextualization," namely "translatability," which refers to the articulation and appropriation of the gospel such that it is reproducible and faithful in myriad contexts. See Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2010), 85–86, 325.

[8] See John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 524–27, who relates metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical truth to the nature of God as authoritatively portrayed in Scripture, thus demanding proclamation and response. Propositional preaching flows from God's "written, propositional self-revelation" in Scripture (MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 130, 133–34).

14)[9] before descending to Athens (17:15–34). When he felt he could no longer endure the great opposition to the gospel in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1),[10] Paul left for Athens alone (Acts 17:13–15).

The propositional nature of Paul's evangelistic activity in the synagogues and in the marketplaces of Macedonia and Greece is nuanced around the concept of dialogue (διαλέγομαι, beginning in Acts 17:2). The verb indicates verbal interchange, discussion, and argumentation, often in a question-and-answer format.[11] The dialectic form of inquiry practiced by Greek scholars, in which conclusions were elicited by discussion and debate, would have marked Paul's speeches and lectures.[12] The

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[9] The extended territory of Macedonia was the first part of Europe to receive the gospel directly from Paul. It would become an important locus of subsequent missionary work for the apostle and his companions, and serves as a first look into cultural engagement and dialogue in a foreign, pluralistic society. Paul passed through and ministered in Philippi on multiple occasions, often with great strain and opposition (Acts 16:12; 20:1–6; cf. 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5). Paul initially received a vision concerning the need for help in Macedonia and so he went preaching the Word of God (Acts 16:9–10).

[10] Paul made it a matter of course to enter a city and begin witnessing about the Christ in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In the Thessalonian synagogue Paul and his missionary companions engaged in discussion about Jesus Christ on three consecutive Sabbaths (17:1–2). In Berea they immediately did the same (17:10). Beyond Macedonia, in Athens, before arriving in the Areopagus, he witnessed to Jews and Greek God-fearers in the synagogue, and to a general pagan audience in the marketplace (ἀγορά), which was the center of social life and local commerce (cf. 16:19; 17:5). In Corinth, after finding the Jews Aquila and Priscilla, his main interactions were in the synagogue on the Sabbath (18:4), though doubtless he used his leather-working trade as an opportunity to testify of Christ in the interim (18:3, 5). Paul's missionary efforts in Corinth appear to have been specific to the teaching of the Word of God in the synagogue, though increasing Jewish hostility shifted Paul's focus toward the Greek proselytes (18:4–11).

[11] Luke's use of διαλέγομαι commences in Acts 17, the section of Acts dealing most heavily with Macedonian and Greek evangelization (16:9–18:18). The term, along with other verbs in the immediate context, gives a well-rounded idea of what Paul's method of communication involved, including some or all of the following: reasoning (17:2, 17; 18:4; 19:8–9); conversing, talking (17:18; 20:9, 11); proclaiming, speaking boldly, preaching (17:3, 18–19; 19:8); persuading (17:4; 18:4; 19:8); delivering a message or speech (20:7); explaining (17:3); offering proof or evidence (17:3). See Walter Bauer, "διαλέγομαι," in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker and F. Wilbur Gingrich, trans. William F. Arndt, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 232, hereafter, *BDAG*. So Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 504–5. For grammatical discussion on the verb with the dative as "intercourse between persons," a gospel-focused argument and counter-argument rather than a reductive "speech," see Dieter Werner Kemmler, *Faith and Human Reason: A Study of Paul's Method of Preaching As Illustrated by 1–2 Thessalonians and Acts 17, 2–4*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 22–32, with conclusion from 35–36. F. F. Bruce notes the inextricable link between preaching and defense, in which "the *kerygma*... must in some way be *apologia*." This is highlighted by the Thessalonian conversions in which those consumed by their idols needed to overcome the stumbling block of the cross in order to turn away from them toward the true and living God. See Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 21.

[12] The Classical Greek understanding of διαλέγομαι adds nuance to Paul's evangelistic method. The active form of διαλέγω referred to "picking out, gleaning, separating, selecting, examining or scrutinizing," in agricultural contexts or concerning the handling of documents. The middle deponent applied this concept to discourse, referring to the holding of conversation, discussing a question, arriving at formal definitions, arguing on a topic, and reasoning, which was a practice of the logicians (οἱ διαλεγόμενοι). See Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 400, hereafter, *LSJ*.

semantic range for διαλέγομαι suggests that Paul's method of religious dialogue varied contextually and was met with varied audience responses,[13] but in all cases persuaded for the truth.

Paul appears not to have offered any culturally minded pre-evangelism in the Athenian *agora* but rather proclaimed Jesus Christ and His resurrection (17:18). He brought the distinctively Christian doctrines to bear with conviction and consistency.[14] There is no indication that the public found common ground with Paul's gospel but rather that they understood him to bring "strange things" (17:20) to their ears that required new investigation.[15]

Paul's strange new teachings solicited three main reactions in Athens: mockery, hesitation, and genuine conversion.[16] Prior to the council meeting, Paul conversed with and preached to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the *agora*. His dialogue method produced at least two sure results (17:18): first, they derided him as a σπερμολόγος, a scavenger who took scraps from the philosophers in an unsystematic fashion, especially in the context of bodily resurrection;[17] second, they desired for a larger audience to be exposed to potentially new foreign deities (δαιμονίων).[18]

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[13] In Philippi, Lydia the proselyte listened and responded in faith along with her household (16:13–15), as later did the Philippian jailer and his household after a miracle and the direct preaching of the gospel (16:29–34). Crowds of citizens along with the city officials opposed the message with great violence (16:19–24, 39). In Thessalonica, some Jews, many Gentile God-fearers, and several women obeyed the gospel (17:4), but jealousy seized the Jews (17:5) who stirred up the citizens and city officials (17: 6–8). The Thessalonian mob followed Paul to Berea to incite the people against the Word of God (17:13), though by that time many prominent Bereans had judiciously investigated Paul's teaching by testing it against Scripture; they thus "received the Word with great eagerness" (17:11–12).

[14] So Derek Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 501. Paul's dialogue approach achieved in the marketplace the public attention that the gospel deserves among all men everywhere. However, though the ensuing presentation to the larger Athenian council would appear to be a positive result of this attention-grabbing dialogue, it came on the heels of the negative name-calling and public mockery of the gospel by the crowds Paul engaged.

[15] William Ramsay traces the nature of the intellectual curiosity among the learned Athenians and finds the Areopagus to have been rooted in nationalism and prideful disdain of outside perspectives—Paul was brought to the Areopagus out of "dislike and with malice" rather than from the neutral ground of novel interest. William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 246. For his extended and very useful research on the features and functions of the Areopagus, see pp. 243–48.

[16] The idea of mockery in Acts 17:32 comes from χλευάζω, and is used in Acts 2:13 when the crowds sneered at the apostles as if they were inebriated. See "χλευάζω," *BDAG*, 1085. Hesitation, on the other hand, does not mean total disinterest, but the desire to delay shows unwillingness to accept the testimony of Jesus Christ. Ultimately this skepticism was a mild form of the unbelief expressed outwardly by the scoffers, and in the end Paul gave them no second chance to hear the gospel, but promptly left Athens (18:1). The verb κολλάω in Classical Greek speaks of close attachment by gluing or fixing in cement, but here pictures faithful discipleship. One of the council members, Dionysius, as well as a woman named Damaris, believed the message and joined Paul as authentic disciples. See "κολλάω," *LSJ*, 972; "κολλάω," *BDAG*, 556.

[17] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 367.

[18] See "δαιμονίων," *BDAG*, 210. Likely the audience understood Paul to be introducing two deities: Jesus plus an unknown name sounding like "resurrection" (ἀνάστασις), perhaps a new female deity called "Anastasia." Polhill finds it ironic that the audience heard the monotheistic gospel of Paul and confusedly believed him to be a polytheist. See Polhill, *Acts*, 367. The gaining of an audience for the presentation of

Paul's engagement in the *agora* warranted an informal presentation of his message to the Areopagus, the historic Athenian council which met on Mars Hill overlooking the marketplace (17:19–20).[19] The Areopagus was a conglomerate of many clashing worldviews from a nuanced spectrum of pluralistic, philosophical schools of thought (17:19–21).[20] Paul was brought to the council to proclaim his new teachings to many listeners from widely varying systems of thought and, as the narrative shows, he only had one attempt to share the gospel and direct it to the highly diversified crowd. It is striking that Paul proposes to correct the faulty viewpoints of all participants with one singular proclamation of the gospel.

Paul defines his Areopagus speech using the verb καταγγέλλω (17:23). The term refers to the public activity of proclaiming or announcing divine revelation, as done previously by the Old Testament prophets and in Paul's day by all ministers of the gospel.[21] The term focuses on the absolute nature of the propositional truth which

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new deities was not altogether positive in the eyes of the Areopagus. Witherington (Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 515) recognizes a level of danger to one labeled "σπερμολόγος" which exceeds any public derision. Scholars find a parallel between the accusation against Paul and that of Socrates himself, centuries earlier, who was accused by Meletus of introducing foreign deities unsanctioned by the state to Athenian youth (as well as being charged in a confused and prejudicial way as an "atheist"). On these charges Socrates was condemned to death by the Areopagus, despite his significant contributions to Hellenistic philosophy. See Plato, *Apology* 24a–27a, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), Perseus Digital Library, accessed March 22, 2018, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3 Atext%3A1999.01.0170%3Atext%3DApol.%3Asection%3D24a. See Xenophon's critique of Meletus' charges and defense of Socrates as "a man who is truly religious and deserves to be thought so," in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1–20, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 4, ed. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), Perseus Digital Library, accessed March 22, 2018, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Xen.%20Mem.

[19] Trials may still have been held by the Areopagite court on Mars Hill, though it is likely that the council by the time of Paul chiefly conducted political, educational, philosophical ventures, and religious matters for the "independent" city of Athens. Paul was quickly regarded as a person of interest to the Areopagus. His general tone does not seem to be a legal defense but rather an intellectual discourse with the council. The fact that some believed and became disciples further suggests that Paul spoke freely and on equal ground with his audience, informally rather than at a judicial hearing. See Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Areopagus," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 1:167–68.

[20] So Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 73; also Paul Copan, and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas—Paul's Mars Hill Experience for our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 82. Doubtless Luke's record that "all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there" (17:21) included not only the Epicureans and Stoics, but likely the Skeptics, the Aristotelian Peripatetic School, Cynics adhering to teachings of 3rd century Diogenes, the Middle Platonists of the Academy, and at least one woman named Damaris (17:34). For a brief treatment of first-century philosophical schools that would likely have constituted the Areopagus council, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 348–50; 387–90. Furthermore, perhaps the κατὰ πάντα of Paul's introductory remark (17:22) regards the many differences represented as the totality of Athenian religion, not just the ubiquity of their worship to idols.

[21] Καταγγέλλω in 17:23 delineates the formal proclamation of the propositional truth concerning the person of God, as understood to be the public prophetic activity of OT prophets (cf. Acts 3:24), as well as the mandate of NT ministers of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:14). The term describes other specific announcements of the Word of God by Paul: Acts 13:5; 15:36; 16:14; 17:13. The term has no New Testament usage outside of Acts and the Pauline epistles, with 11 occurrences in Acts and 7 in Paul, also including Acts 4:2; 13:38; 16:17, 21; Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1; 11:26; Phil 1:17; Col. 1:28. See "καταγγέλλω," *BDAG*, 515;

must be communicated. Because the activities of διαλέγομαι which mark Paul's ministry till now in Macedonia and Athens include direct proclamation, the use of καταγγέλλω before the crowd fits commensurately, though the focus may shift from interactive speech to forceful declaration.[22] No less of a preaching emphasis ought to be expected of the apostle before the Areopagus, as he was considered by the *agora* audience to be a "preacher" or "proclaimer" (καταγγελεύς in 17:18).[23]

Paul's Univocal Proclamation in the Areopagus

There is little debate that Luke's account of Paul's speech provides a practical model of cultural and religious dialogue for application in non-Western contexts.[24] Yet, few agree about what his strategy actually was, or what elements constitute the *sine qua non* for engaging the globalized, secularizing world today.[25] Two principal

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U. Becker and D. Müller, "Proclamation, Preach, Kerygma," ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 45.

[22] A concise overview of the main theological tenets of the Areopagus speech (17:22–31) show that Paul's message is unmistakably propositional. In 17:23–30 Paul proclaims that the Christian God is the knowable Creator (v. 24), ruler and possessor of the cosmos (v. 24), giver of life and resources (v. 25), providential determiner of all earthly affairs (v. 26), and revealer of personal relationship, which one may successfully seek and find (vv. 27–28). Consequent to presenting a correct doctrine of God, Paul denounces pagan idolatry as a logical fallacy (v. 29) which can no longer be overlooked (v. 30), from which the hearers in Athens and everywhere must repent (v. 30) or face judgment by the resurrected Christ (v. 31). The purpose of revealing the God of the Bible is to reach the sermon's conclusion regarding the death and resurrection of the divinely appointed man of whom he previously spoke in the synagogue and in the marketplace. To arrive at a proper understanding of Jesus, this "strange new deity," Paul begins with God as the Creator. On this foundation, Paul speaks concerning God's divine retribution against idolatrous man. The authority of divine Christian revelation in Paul's dialogue method was Paul's ultimate starting point, and he engaged theological ignorance in order to eliminate it. Paul was anthropologically sensitive in the Areopagus only insofar as he was sensitive to the theological and spiritual underpinnings of their sin. Paul's observation of the learned men's ignorance bookends his proclamation of the risen Christ, whose death and resurrection is the driving theme of the message. Ignorance will no longer be tolerated by the one true God, but repentance will be granted to those everywhere who believe in Christ.

[23] "καταγγελεύς," *BDAG*, 515.

[24] Readers from varied perspectives on the interplay between philosophy and Scripture in interfaith dialogue find the actual content of Paul's speech didactic for dialogue method today. Presuppositional apologist Greg Bahnsen, who wagers for Old Testament Scripture as the only basis for Paul's dialogue, agrees that the passage leaves believers with "a pattern to follow with respect to both our message *and* method today. Thus, it is highly instructive for contemporary apologists to study the way the apostles, like Paul, reasoned and supported their message of hope." Greg L. Bahnsen and Robert R. Booth, eds., *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 1996), 236–37 (emphasis in original). Modern Christian philosophers Copan and Litwak are more apt to look for cultural ideas and illustrations which may make the gospel relevant to non-believers, heartily agree (see Copan and Litwak, *Marketplace of Ideas*, 161), as do those who attempt to expound the biblical worldview philosophically without the direct use of Scripture (see Clint Heacock, "Text and Culture: Bringing the Biblical Worldview to Bear on the World; A Biblical-Theological Study of Acts 17.16–34" [ThM thesis, Western Seminary, 2003], 3–4).

[25] The speech has received criticism, being considered a mistaken endeavor not to repeat. Some of the charges of error on Paul's part include the following: his speech generated only a small number of converts (17:34); he offered only a one-time dialogue though the council directly asked for him to deliver his message again (17:32); he did not return to the council, to the marketplace or to the synagogue, but appears to have immediately left Athens, never to have returned to the city (18:1). Further, it is wagered

questions arise as to how the speech serves as a pattern or model for contemporary evangelical practice. The first question may be asked in two parts: to what degree does Paul engage with the Athenian religious worldviews and culture in order to *prepare for* and to *aid* the proclamation of the gospel? Second, to what degree does Paul's speech involve Old Testament Scripture and Greek philosophy, and can a contextualization framework be determined for the gospel according to Paul in Athens? Both questions will receive extended treatment.

Pre-Evangelistic Cultural Appraisal

A winsome attitude and cultural engagement mark the apostle Paul's initial interaction with the members of the Areopagus for the purpose of facilitating his biblical proclamation. In Acts 17:22–23, Paul speaks in a dignified and respectful manner—though spiritually superior to these learned councilmen, he is not arrogant among them.[26] He nevertheless opens his speech with two subtle but pointed attacks on Athenian religious pluralism. He first recognizes their religiosity and then he acknowledges their theological ignorance. First, Paul carefully examined (ἀναθεωρέω) the displays of Athenian religiosity around him. Calling the Areopagus participants "religious" does not imply agreement with their pagan polytheism.[27]

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that Paul may have employed philosophical reasoning which was not strongly evangelistic, garnering disappointing results which caused him to leave the city prematurely. It has been posited that Paul's successive work in Corinth marked a decisive shift to a more intently Scripture-based method to the Jews. On these highly circumstantial speculations, see treatments in Copan and Litwak, *Marketplace of Ideas*, 20; William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 251–53.

The apostle's apparent lack of success in Athens has caused some to doubt that Luke's recording of the speech was accurate to Paul's words, that it was perhaps theologically slanted in a direction Paul did not take it, or that what he said was wholly different. See Vielhauer's argument against the Areopagus speaker being Paul, in Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck, Martyn Keck, James Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 37. Kistemaker summarizes the problem of narrative doubt which is generalized to the whole of the apostolic speeches in Acts; he skillfully concludes that the speeches in Acts appear to be objective recordings of the words of the actual apostles. See Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Speeches in Acts," *Criswell Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (1990): 31–41. Bock finds the speeches to be accurate, unadulterated snapshots of the earliest gospel proclamations in history. See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 22.

[26] Witherington recognizes a *captatio benevolentiae* in Paul's opening address, which would have established both rapport and credibility with the council (Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 518; so Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 75). Witherington considers Paul here to engage in "pre-evangelism," but this seems too light an idea in view of the compelling call to repentance by the conclusion of the speech (17:30). Craig Keener draws deeply from Greek rhetoricians to support the more developed idea of a complimentary *exordium* in v. 22, which would secure the esteem of the cultured council while permitting a range of strong statements, including insults and accusations, though Keener does not suggest that Paul spoke in an uncouth manner. See Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Volume 3: 15:1–23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2626–29. Bahnsen comments: "Ridicule, anger, sarcasm, and name-calling are inappropriate weapons of apologetical defense. A Spirit-filled apologist will evidence the fruits of the Spirit in his approach to others." Bahnsen and Booth, *Always Ready*, 251.

[27] Calling the body "religious" translates poorly. The plural of δεισιδαίμων may refer to devout religiosity in a positive sense, or negatively as an excess of piety and superstition. The term is vague enough to concede that Paul is simply stating a known fact of their very real fear of the gods,

While this opening remark might not be a direct compliment, neither does it appear to be a clear rebuke.[28]

Second, Paul's scrutiny of the ubiquitous idols around the city achieved for him an important point of contact with the religious culture, pointing out by their altar to "an unknown God" the irony of claiming much religious knowledge yet ignorance as to the totality of their deities.[29] To this end, Paul implicitly indicts the Athenians for knowing enough about their deities to place importance on the worship of them, despite having no comprehension of how to worship them.[30]

"δεισιδαίμων," *BDAG*, 216. Keener appears to overreach with his *exordium* motif on v. 22 when he avers, similarly to Stanley Porter: "Paul shares with his audience at least a common commitment to honor deity. Athens was known for its diligence in serving the gods. The most praiseworthy aspect of Athenian behavior… was their unwillingness to act without seeking divine guidance in every situation… A good orator should praise what was esteemed among a given people, hence Athenian things among Athenians and so forth." Keener, *Acts 15:1–23:35*, 2628; so Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 120, 124.

[28] Paul's remark about the religiosity of the Athenians may have been more positive than negative, though sarcasm is possible. See "δεισιδαίμων," *LSJ*, 375, for a positive assessment. Contrarily, Ramsay comments that given the heights of university study and elite culture in the Areopagus, "it would be an insult to address the philosophic inquirers in the language of vv. 22–23…. Paul's speech is an exceedingly skillful one, if addressed to a popular audience; but to philosophers it would be unskillful and unsuitable." See Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 245. Bahnsen also finds Paul's remark here to be negative. He appeals to Acts 25:19, finding Festus' use of the root term δεισιδαιμονία to be negative, given that the context is somewhat of a "mild reproach" of Judaism for its belief system (Bahnsen and Booth, *Always Ready*, 254). However, Festus' use of δεισιδαιμονία does not appear satirical, as the tenor of passage is that of outside reporting rather than of opinions, much like Josephus' use of the term in the context of the Athenians in *Against Apion* 2,130. See treatment in "δεισιδαίμων," *BDAG*, 216; Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1955), 355. Beyond a surface reading of, however, Witherington has expanded the discussion of δεισιδαιμονία in 25:19 to indicate the probability that Festus did not offer neutral, outside reporting, but rather delivered self-aggrandizing rhetoric in the face of the Jewishness of Agrippa and Bernice, calling Judaism a superstitious religion in a less overtly offensive way than using the term *superstitio*, though with an intentionally negative connotation. See Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 729–30.

[29] There is speculation as to whether the altar's inscription would have referred to many possible unknown gods in the plural rather than one unknown god as Paul states. Moreover, Witherington raises the possibility that "the word 'unknown' could of course be a term used by a foreigner of a god that simply had a name unknown to him or her, or it could be an expression of doubt about the true name of a god…." In this sense, the term "unknown" may not have referenced an actual inscribed altar but a deity unknown to Paul. For discussion, see Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 523.

Nevertheless, the Athenians appeared eager to hear testimony of yet another god or gods (cf. 17:19–20). The altar in reference may have been one of several which bore the same inscription, or others which spoke of the totality of the gods yet undiscovered by man. There may have been an original Athenian practice letting loose a flock of sheep, or just one black and one white sheep, and offering them up in sacrifice at the spot where they lay down, supposedly "to the god concerned." For helpful treatments of this open question, see Polhill, *Acts*, 371–72, and Bruce, *Commentary*, 355–56.

[30] So, Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 523. Bahnsen considers it "the basic schizophrenia in unbelieving thought" that the Areopagus was both aware of God in the most foundational sense of believing in His existence and desire to be worshiped, and at the same time unaware of His Person. Paul accuses them at their own altar for false worship committed even when there was no sense in it, concluding along the lines of Rom 1:18–19 that the Athenians, like all men, must agree that "what is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." See Bahnsen and Booth, *Always Ready*, 256. Munck comments forcefully: "God was unknown only because the Athenians had not wanted to know him. So Paul was not introducing foreign gods, but God who was both known, as this altar shows, and yet unknown." Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible, rev. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann

Both the vaguely respectful tone with which Paul addresses the religiosity of the council and the example of the altar serve as important aspects of cultural engagement with the polytheistic Athenian society. Paul engaged with their monument for the purpose of widening the door to the proclamation of the personal, monotheistic God, a deity wholly unlike any god known or unknown to the people, who has revealed Himself beyond any doubt.[31]

Cultural Exchange and Christian Distinctives

At the heart of the debate over Paul's dialogue method, scholars ask whether the apostle presented Christian distinctives to the Areopagus from an epistemological base reliant upon Jewish revelation, or from one built upon common ground shared with Hellenistic thought.[32] At the center of the speech, Paul quotes the ancient Greek poets axiomatically in order to reveal the Christian God. While the Athenians would likely not have recognized a quotation from Jewish Scripture, they would have recognized and welcomed artful quotations from their philosophers.[33]

In 17:28 Paul states: "For in Him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'"[34] The Christian

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(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 171. Witherington concludes on the propositional priority of the apostle in the Athenian context: "This is why in Acts 17:23 Paul insists he must proclaim the truth about this God's nature and activities to his audience. Without such proclamation they would not really know it." Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 523.

[31] Flemming distances himself from more extreme claims that the Athenians were unknowing believers who worshiped the true God in sincerity, though ignorantly. However, Flemming is somewhat incautious when he states: "[Paul] recognizes there is something genuine in their religious aspirations and felt needs, and he uses them as steppingstones for communicating the gospel." Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 76 and 76n58.

[32] Polhill offers an extensive bibliography from across the spectrum of these two options, but ultimately concludes that "the gist of the speech is, however, thoroughly rooted in Old Testament thought throughout." He recognizes nevertheless a "ring of Greek philosophy." Polhill, 369–70, 369n75.

[33] The first phrase "In Him we live and move and have our being" may derive specifically from the poet Epimenides of Crete, though either of two sources may be in view, suggesting that the phrase is more of a traditional Greek triadic construction than a specific quotation. Polhill traces the scholarship concerning this phrase to either of two sources: Epimenides' *Hymn to Zeus*, 4, where Minos praises his father Zeus, or from another work, *Bacchae*. See Polhill, 375–76. The first phrase may more likely be drawn from biblical sources rather than from Greek poetry, making the first phrase directly Pauline and the second line a direct poetic reference. The first phrase "In Him we live and move and have our being" may derive specifically from the poet Epimenides of Crete, though either of two sources may be in view, Epimenides' *Hymn to Zeus*, 4, where Minos praises his father Zeus, or from another work, *Bacchae*. Finding more than one source in Epimenides suggests that the phrase is more of a traditional Greek triadic construction than a specific quotation. Polhill traces the scholarship concerning this phrase to either of the two sources, in Polhill, 375–76. Rothschild concludes that Paul may have employed a Greek narrative element known as προσωποποιΐα (speech-in-character), implicitly personifying Epimenides. By taking on his words he may have circumvented the need to cite him directly. See Clare K. Rothschild, *Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 67.

[34] Rothschild also makes the strong case that only "For we also are His offspring" is a direct quote from Greek poetry since there appears to be no direct contextual link between the first phrase and the ensuing statement "as even some of your own poets have said." See Rothschild, *Paul in Athens*, 71–73. The second quotation, "For we also are His offspring," appears to have been borrowed from Aratus' *Phaenomena*, a Cilician like Paul. See text in Douglas Kidd, *Aratus: Phaenomena* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

God is the Creator, the necessary cause of all life and activity, rather than Zeus to whom the praise was attributed in the original poem. Paul's use of Greek poetry was therefore far from Greek in concept. The second phrase, often translated "For we also are His children," recalls the providence of God to both create and relate to mankind as a Father from whom all life is generated.[35] In no way does Paul substantiate the original meaning of the quotations, as the fatherly deities in view are irreconcilably different. His contextualization would have failed if by his intimation the hearers concluded that he was proving the personal fatherhood of Zeus.[36]

The method of engagement with cultural forms must therefore be commensurate with the message delivered, not in contradiction to it.[37] Paul's quoting of Greek literature in support of his gospel is thus an example of cultural engagement that both profits the Christian message, impairs the pagan intent of the literature, and indicts the prevalent worldview.[38]

University Press, 2004), 166. Lightfoot prefers Cleanthes, *Hymn* 5 for the citation. See Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Acts of the Apostles*: *A Newly Discovered Commentary*, ed. Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 233.

[35] Stott helps delineate the idea of God as Father of all men through creation from God as Father of men in Christ through sovereign adoption and grace. See John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World—The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 286–87. That Paul does not have Zeus in mind here poses a different interpretation than expected by the council, no less the Stoics. The philosophical parties understood their poet to conclude with the older mythologies that if all life flows from Zeus, then man could be considered his children, making him the father of all life. See Kidd, *Aratus*, 166.

[36] The work of contextualization requires discernment so that it does not compromise the biblical concepts. To this point, 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 addresses the general conduct and behavior of the preacher among a target audience, and also addresses the mode of presentation. In verse 21 Paul speaks of his philosophy of contextualization among the Greeks: "To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law." To "become all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22) within the confines of the gospel therefore points to the accommodation of personal preference, lifestyle, and communication method in order to approach the target audience so that the evangelist may "by all means save some." So D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers:* 40th Anniversary Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 146–47.

[37] Lloyd Jones contends: "What always amazes me about these people who were so concerned with modern methods is their pathetic psychological ignorance; they do not seem to know human nature. The fact is that the world expects us to be different; and this idea that you can win the world by showing that after all you are very similar to it, with scarcely any difference at all, or but a very slight one, is basically wrong not only theologically but even psychologically" Ibid., 149. He goes on to emphasize the limits of such elasticity of method: "No one has ever been 'reasoned' into the Kingdom of God; it is impossible. It has never happened; it never will happen. We are all one in sin—'The whole world lieth guilty before God.' We are all in the same spiritual condition." Ibid., 151–52.

[38] For discussion on reasons Paul may have developed biblical arguments from philosophical constructs, see Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 77–79. NB, however, similarities between OT and Greek poetry which serve as "apologetic bridges" do not necessarily legitimize the two sources as conversations "partners" (p. 77). Flemming's earlier use of "steppingstones" seems more fitting to his understanding that Paul uses common themes "not simply to stake out common ground, but in order to transform their worldview" (p. 79).

The pagan listeners are indicted by the fact that they could only find a lesser father in the imaginary Zeus rather than the Christian God who is the ultimate Father. Paul uses Greek cultural material to substantiate the natural revelation which leads all men, like the philosophers, to "grope" (17:27) after their genealogical source. Nevertheless, using pagan spirituality as a springboard to the message of Christ does not elevate pagan sources as authoritative voices of the gospel. Paul's religious dialogue through reason

Some scholars alternatively claim that Paul did not rely upon Scripture to formulate his argument, but such a view denies the biblical theology of his statements.[39] Though Paul does not overtly use scriptural quotations his propositions are nevertheless entirely biblical.[40] The distinctions in the Christian message leave little room for an overlap of meaning with Hellenistic philosophy, and no similarities with pagan theology is observable from the speech itself.[41] The passage does not record whether Paul directly addressed their worldviews in an attempt to correct a Platonic or gnostic

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alone should cause the Greek thinkers to "grope for" the first cause and "find Him" (17:27). Though the audience had not been exposed to Old Testament Scripture, the true God "is not far from each one of us" (17:27), and through natural revelation, such as understood by the poets, no one may plead ignorance but all stand accountable before God for proper worship. For a helpful exposition and evaluation of Paul's cultural bridge-building in 17:28, see Richard Bargas, "Humility in Defending the Faith" (sermon, The Master's Seminary Chapel, Sun Valley, CA, October 29, 2015, accessed March 22, 2018, https://www.tms.edu/ chapel/humility-in-defending-the-faith/).

[39] So Bargas, "Humility in Defending the Faith." Contrarily, Lake and Cadbury find Paul's speech to be secular in nature, which would explain the omission of OT quotations. See Bahnsen and Booth, *Always Ready*, 263, for comment based on Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part 1, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson, and Kirsopp Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1932), 208–9. The biblical theology brought to bear over this "strange new deity" nevertheless divided the theological waters—either God is all, or the all is God. Until the Athenians encounter the monotheistic God, their delineations of God may remain both universally material and transcendently spiritual. Only through the revelation of Scripture will God be understood as He is. So Kenneth Franklin Warren, *Acts 17:16–34 and Contemporary Pantheism: A Comparative Study* (MABS thesis, Portland, OR: Multnomah School of the Bible, 1986), 10; John Hunt, *Pantheism and Christianity* (London: W. Isbister, 1884), 1.

[40] The 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament records several Old Testament references to substantiate Paul's propositional statements throughout the speech. These verses include: v. 24: cf. Isaiah 42:5, Exodus 20:11; v. 25: cf. Isaiah 57:15; v. 26: cf. Genesis 1:27–28 (man), Deuteronmy 32:8, Ps 74:17 (boundaries), Genesis 1:14 ("appointed times"); v. 29: Genesis 1:27 (image?), Deuteronomy 4:28 (idolatry), Isaiah 40:18–26, and 44:9–20 (God not like idol). Eberhard Nestle et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece: Greek-English New Testament*. 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), 374–75. F. F. Bruce concurs: "His exposition in defense of this message are founded on the biblical revelation of God…. Unlike some later apologists who follow in his steps, Paul does not cease to be fundamentally biblical in his approach to the Greeks...." Bruce, *Defense*, 48.

[41] So concludes Richard Gibson specifically in relation to the Stoic presence in the Areopagus. See Richard J. Gibson, "Paul and the Evangelization of the Stoics," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 323. Stoicism, for example, derived from fundamentally different epistemological bases, knowing of no fully personal God but only of an immanent god whose *logos* is shared incarnationally by all creatures. An impersonal God could not beget the personal *logos* by human incarnation. Stoic pantheism also necessarily rejected the concept of a Creator God who formed a finite universe with the purpose of fulfilling His personal divine will. Furthermore, though Stoicism recognized humanity as hopelessly void of moral direction, a call for better ethics did not require legitimate change in conscience or conduct as proof of a viable system. Stoic pantheism also taught the dissolution of the soul into the greater immortal Whole, rather than the concept of individual bodily resurrection to an eternal existence. Finally, a great difference may be noted in the overall affections and motivations garnered by belief in Christianity versus Stoicism. The Hellenistic philosophy denied human emotion in day-to-day existence through the conscious practice of apathy, whereas the Christian is rooted in joy and hope through the God who is "love." Christian love requires a social ethic to match, such that love for others was not an obligation due to the brotherhood of humanity implicit to pantheism, but rather a devotional response to God who loves the believer through personal union with Christ. The Christian message is therefore entirely distinct from the tenets of Hellenistic philosophy. For further discussion, see Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 368–69.

Demiurge concept, or to disprove polytheism as a whole.[42] Rather, the passage, as authored by the Holy Spirit through Luke, brings the God of the Jewish Scriptures quickly into focus. The divide between Christianity and Hellenistic worldviews is great: the Epicureans cannot know God, the Stoics cannot delineate God, and the Skeptics cannot agree on God. Thus the force of Paul's singular argument to the panoply of religions in the Areopagus is not a system of proofs and rebuttals, but the clear announcement of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture.[43]

Nor is the speech a theological corrective on God and man alone. The christological material of 17:31 is not to be viewed as an appendix to Paul's speech, but rather the arrival point.[44] Paul's proclamation does not fit Greek dialectical ap-

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[42] Neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism are directly addressed, though if Luke's account is a summary of the speech rather than the complete message, some interaction may have been likely, especially given the nuances of Paul's dialogue method elsewhere in Macedonia and Greece. Keener notes the possibility that philosophic interplay occurred: "It does not seem legitimate to argue from silence that it opposes particular philosophic ideas simply because it does not mention them." See Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 3:15:1–23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2639. Porter reasons from the quick flow of argument in v. 24, as well as the abrupt ending of the speech, that what is recorded is a summary. See Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 120, 124. So Thomas, *Acts*, 509.

[43] It must also be noted that a common use of language between Paul and his multifaceted audience in no way suggests that the apostle and the philosophers share common concepts. Thomas concurs that common language does not equal a common basis of thought. See Thomas, *Acts*, 501. Regarding Stoicism, Kee and Young find that Paul "reflected heavily from his knowledge of Stoic philosophy, using Stoic terms and metaphors to assist his new Gentile converts in their understanding of the revealed word of God." Howard Kee and Franklin W. Young, *Understanding The New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 208. Flemming finds that the mention of the Epicureans and Stoics is essential to the development of Paul's speech because it appears to apologetically address Stoicism to a great degree. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 73. Dibelius posits that Acts 17:22–31 is a "Hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God." Martin Dibelius, *The Book of Acts: Form, Style, and Theology* (1956; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 115; so Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," 34–36. But this might be an overstatement. That the New Testament writers, including Paul, at various points used such terms as *logos*, "virtue," "Spirit," and "conscience," does not prove the direct employment of an apologetic hook specific to a religion or philosophy. Furthermore, it is doubtful that Paul would have been able to address all the nuanced philosophies present in the Areopagus in one singular discourse. Rather, the broad brush strokes of Paul's theology in this speech are sufficient to demolish any philosophy which urges the contrary. Witherington concludes: "Against [Stoicism and Epicureanism] the speech affirms resurrection, future judgment, and a teleological character to human history." Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 535.

[44] Beginning with God and arriving at Christ is in line with Paul's more restricted salvation-history elsewhere, such as in his epistle to the Romans. The gospel in Romans opens in a similar fashion, revealing both God the Creator and man the creation who is condemned for false worship, suffering under divine wrath for denying the Creator the worship due Him (Rom 1:18–32). Johannes Munck comments, "[The sermon's] doctrine is a reworking of thoughts in Romans transformed into missionary impulse." Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 173.

Paul delivers in Athens the Jewish doctrine of God with the specifically Christian doctrine of the Son of Man as mediator of judgment (17:30–31). As Paul in Athens is the same as the Paul in the epistles, his message is one and the same—the person of God, the judgment of God, and repentance to God. Hans Conzelmann presents the non-evangelical position that Paul focuses on world history rather than salvation-history to teach that all men are in God by nature. According to Conzelmann, Paul is not so interested in arriving at the crux of the gospel in Jesus Christ, as he is on presenting an existential counterbalance to the

proaches which allow for round-table discussion with many voices. Rather, his message of the gospel comes as a command (παραγγέλλω, 17:30), an entreaty which correspondingly results in either unbelief or conversion.

In summary, there is no indication that Paul's dialogue method was anything less than biblical when it came to presenting the doctrine of God and in his brief outline of Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. The fact that the apostle does not quote specific Judeo-Christian Scriptures does not undermine the exegetical reasoning thus far, that Paul presented the Christian gospel from a directly scriptural, not philosophical base.

Selected Exegesis

It remains necessary to identify key elements of Paul's speech that provide insights into Paul's dialogue method in the face of the highly developed Greek philosophies present in the Areopagus. The exegetical analysis of the remaining content will be presented verse by verse (vv. 24–34).

Verse 24 witnesses to the natural revelation of the monotheistic God as Creator of all life. It is contended that Paul's argument employs Hellenistic language and thinking common to Jewish writers.[45] Yet, Paul's revelation of ὁ θεός is in conflict with the Athenian worldviews present in the Areopagus, making any attempt at employing sensible Hellenistic formulations moot. To the Epicureans, ὁ θεός does not intersect the material world, to the Stoics, ὁ θεός is identical to it, but Paul's ὁ θεός both precedes and supersedes the world, sovereignly making and possessing everything in it.[46] This deity emerges differently than Zeus, and Paul knows it—feigning ignorance of Zeus as ὁ θεός would be a fool's errand in Zeus-centric Athens, but ignorance of a still higher God is Paul's ultimate point here.[47]

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skewed Athenian view of God and man. Paul operates from a Hellenistic point of view in defending Christianity. In response, asserting the truth of the Father without linking Him to the Son differs from the Pauline understanding of all men being in God only through Christ. Paul's focus on God as Creator is therefore necessarily broad for his biblically ignorant audience so that he can arrive at the proper conclusion that man must be reconciled to God through the man Jesus Christ. See Hans Conzelmann, "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck, Martyn Keck, James Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 217. For discussion, see Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," 35–38; and Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 96–102.

[45] Keener cites the apocryphal Book of Wisdom of Solomon 13:1–9 as an example of how ancient Jewish writers often employed Hellenistic language in their apologetic. Under this framework, in the Areopagus Paul discusses the nature of deity (vv. 24–26), God's transcendence (vv. 24–25), and God's immanence (vv. 27–28) within a proper epistemology (vv. 27–29). See Keener, *Acts*, 2636n3348.

[46] So Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232.

[47] A reference to Isaiah 42:5 appears to be in Paul's mind as he lays out the natural revelation of the supreme God. Isaiah 42:5 proclaims "Thus says God the LORD, / Who created the heavens and stretched them out, / Who spread out the earth and its offspring, / Who gives breath to the people on it / And spirit to those who walk in it" (NASB). Keener contends that the Stoics would not have been able to claim such ignorance in the face of natural revelation, because they understood the works of Zeus to reveal his character. Keener cites Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.6.23–24; Heraclitus, *Ep.* 4; See Keener, *Acts*, 2621nn3200–1, and 2637n3360. Keener notes that polytheistic Greeks might also find these truths to be present in their own writings, such that a supreme ὁ θεός could be said to rule over the cosmos as "Lord of heaven and earth." Keener cites Horace, *Odes* 1.12, 13–18; 3.45–48; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.2. See Keener, *Acts*,

Furthermore, in verse 24, the expression οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ("made with hands") may have been common language among Stoics but it was not exclusive to them.[48] That certain pagan writings might use similar language as biblical witnesses does not dissuade the apostle from revealing naturally observable facts of God as an indictment on those who suppress the truth.

In verses 25 and 26 the character of Old Testament Scripture appears strongly. Isaiah 57:15 might have been the referent from which Paul drew the theological statement προσδεόμενός τινος ("as though He needed anything"). Regardless, there is no paucity of verses to assert the immensity and transcendence of the likewise immanent God.[49] The socially tolerant Athenians may have appreciated Paul's use of ἐξ ἑνός ("from... nation," v. 26) as a globally conscious statement related to God,[50] though these expressions find no Greek corollaries, while many biblical allusions seem present in Paul's mind.[51]

According to verse 27, the purpose for creating the human race and for assigning them their seasons and boundaries as people groups (17:26) is so that man might

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2637. Further study is needed to relate the Stoic concept of immanence and the way in which natural revelation was understood to have manifested Zeus' character qualities, if at all.

[48] Stephen the first martyr used a similar phrase likely in Paul's presence (Acts 7:48–49, citing Isa. 66:1). So Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232. While the audience at large may have recognized the use of this phrase in their own poetry, the Stoics and Epicureans would have responded to this language in dialogue fashion in turn if given the opportunity. Keener believes the responses of Cynics and Epicureans would have affirmed this very fact Paul mentions, while inconsistent Stoics would have moved away from Zeno's teaching that temples were unworthy of the gods, themselves sacrificing in temples. See Keener, *Acts*, 2639.

[49] Cf. Isaiah 42:5 (continuing the thought of Acts 17:24), Acts 7:48–49 (also in continuation of Acts 17:24); 1 Kings 8:27 and Isaiah 66:1 (God's immense transcendence); Psalm 50:12–13 (the Lord has no material or physical needs). In *Nestle-Aland*, 374. Lightfoot nevertheless suggests that προσδεόμενός τινος might have been a philosophical construct common to Athenian Stoics and Epicureans which Paul expressly used for his audience. Much discussion on the requirement of temple sacrifice came from the various schools. Epicureans who believed in the mysterious transcendence of God may have appreciated the first part of the phrase, while the Stoics might have preferred the second half because of their polytheistic understanding of the *logos* who flows through all living beings. Lightfoot cites Stoics Plutarch, *Mor.* 1052E; and Seneca, *Ep.* 95; and Epicurean Lucretius ii. 648; vi. 54 (see Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232). For primary sources and discussion on the role of the temple in first-century Athenian thought, see Keener, *Acts*, 2641–44.

[50] So Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232. For debate on the gender of ἑνός in Stoic teaching on the generation of gods and the material world, see discussion in Keener, *Acts*, 2645.

[51] Attempts to correlate these phrases with Greek thought and historic writings fail for ἐξ ἑνός as well as for the participle of ὁρίζω ("having determined"). See discussion in Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232–33. However, as to biblical corollaries, see Genesis 1:27–28 (on man); Genesis 1:14 (on seasons and times); Deuteronomy 32:8–9 (on the division of man and borders); Psalm 74:17 (on boundaries and seasons); Daniel 2:36–45 (the ordering of kingdoms). An allusion to Adam might be in this verse, where historical epochs of time are in view for the development of Adam's race. See discussion in Keener, *Acts*, 2645–46. Noah may also be in view, bringing another intertextual link to the Noahic covenant's promise of fixed seasons and hours (Gen. 8:22), though the focus on humanity from 17:25–27 would favor Adam as the ἑνός. Keener, *Acts*, 2648.

ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν ("seek God").[52] The Old Testament evidences the possibility of exposure to the one true God through natural revelation.[53] Through natural revelation God is no foreign deity, yet the crude fact that man must grope for God (ψηλαφάω) speaks to the frustration facing Athens' learned thinkers: seeking God does not lead to finding God.[54]

Also, in verse 27, although Paul employs the personal pronoun ἡμῶν to identify himself with his audience as those who receive the benefits of this now-revealed God, there is no spiritual similarity between Paul and the Athenians, for they have not yet drawn near to God in truth, and therefore have not found Him. Paul shares no common spiritual convictions or with his audience.

In verse 28, Paul concludes from the poetic assertion that the practice of idolatry contradicts logic.[55] Since all men are generated by the sovereign design of the supreme God, not only can He not be conceived of in purely human terms but he cannot be anthropomorphically idealized in metal or stone. Men are God's craftsmanship rather than vice versa.[56]

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[52] So Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 233; Keener, *Acts*, 2651.

[53] The Nestle-Aland margin on 17:27 offers a compelling list of OT passages: Deuteronomy 4:29 (on seeking and finding the Lord with heart and soul commitment; cf. Jer. 29:13); Isaiah 55:6 (there is a time to seek and find the Lord); Jeremiah 23:23 (He is a God who is near rather than far off). Psalm 145:18 requires such searching to be done "in truth" in order to experience His nearness. In the New Testament, Romans 1–3 emphasize that the natural man may use the natural means of the conscience to find the naturally revealed God, but such natural revelation will ultimately lead to judgment if it does not point to faith in the special revelation of Jesus Christ. Porter finds strong thematic parallels between the natural theology of the Areopagus speech and Romans 1–3. Paul emphasizes in three Romans passages (Rom. 1:18–32; 2:14–15; 3:25) that revelation will result in final condemnation for the person who rejects the natural knowledge of God and whose conduct is not commensurate with the law written on the heart, of which the conscience bears witness and the thoughts accuse of failing to live according to the standards of this naturally-revealed God. A common pattern of assessing the general revelation by which man is accountable and fit for judgment is the presentation of the Creator God and His creation who attempts to reach him through inadequate means. When man ultimately denies the knowledge God has made available to him, the time of patience will end and sure judgment will ensue. See Porter, *Paul in Acts*, 148n84. Dibelius does not agree with the irony inherent in Paul's use of ψηλαφάω ("groping"), and therefore finds the concept of knowledge through natural revelation contradictory in Paul's speech and Romans 1:23–25. For discussion, see Debelius, *The Book of Acts*, 116–17.

[54] Keener, 2652. The term ψηλαφάω refers crudely to the spiritual reality of blindness, visual impairment by the darkness such that the God who is light cannot be perceived. The construction of Paul's phrase εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν ("if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him") adds depth to the problem of searching for God through the human means of intellect and religion, for "the protasis of a fourth-class conditional is used, with the optative, the most condition-laden Greek mood form." See Porter, *Paul in Acts*, 148. Perhaps the Epicureans, at least, would have already understood the struggle posed by one's ignorance of God. Lucretius may have comprehended the limitations of darkness on the soul: "O wretched minds of men! / O blinded hearts! / In how great perils, in what darks of life / Are spent the human years, however brief! / O not to see that nature for herself." Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. William Ellery Leonard (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1916), 2.54.

[55] So Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World*, 287.

[56] So David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 500. The Nestle-Aland Greek text is also helpful in identifying passages which may have constituted this point of Paul's theology proper: Genesis 1:27 (God's image is manifested in the image of man and woman); Deuteronomy 4:28 (idolatry predicted of those disobedient to special revelation); Exodus 20:4 (also or better, vv. 3–5, as idolatry was prohibited by God who was alone to be worshiped); Isaiah 40:18–26 (the supremely Holy

In verse 29, Paul confronts the idolatry that greatly disturbed his spirit, again using the personal pronoun ἡμῶν to insert himself as one among the group who must draw rational theological conclusions based on the developing argument.

Additionally, in verse 29, some commentators have found his *hapax* use of the substantive "Divine Nature" (τὸ θεῖον) reminiscent of Greek language and thought in a way that would seem to present a "soft monotheism,"[57] a Hellenistic term that may lead to "a compromise between the polytheistic mythology and some higher divine principle."[58] Yet, given that up till now his argument has greatly contradicted the Athenian positions on God, it hardly seems fitting that Paul here would entertain ambiguity in order to garner more intentional listening by his audience. Rather, it appears that using τὸ θεῖον for the Christian God served as a corrective for the pagan concept of τὸ θεῖον.[59]

According to verse 30, the Athenians, having now been exposed to Paul's theology proper, no longer remain in the times of ignorance that once characterized their empty pagan worship but are now subject to divine judgment for the willful denial of the truth. Thus, God Himself proclaims the urgency of repentance.[60] Even if points of commonality or potential agreement between the Greek and Christian belief systems could be established to some degree on linguistic or conceptual grounds, only the spiritual act of repentance can overcome the irreparable divide between the belief systems.[61]

Verse 31 brings Paul's speech to a forceful end[62] by collocating the objective judgment of God upon unrepentant sinners through the appointed "Man" who died

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God is not equal to idols fashioned of Him or other deities with gold or silver), and 44:9–20 (idolatry is empty, blinding, abominable and absurd).

[57] So Keener, *Acts*, 2666. The term τὸ θεῖον is hapax in Paul, otherwise occurring only in 2 Peter 1:3–4 and in Romans 1:20, in a different form.

[58] In Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 234.

[59] Cornelius R. Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered: Volume 3* (Patterson, NJ: The Colt Press, 1958), 109–10.

[60] In Greek thinking "to repent" (μετανοέω) might have only meant a change of mind or conversion to a different philosophical concept, but Paul's use of the term demanded a change in affections, worldview, and identity to that which he has unambiguously defined as Christian. "μετανοέω," *LSJ*, 1115; so Keener, *Acts*, 2667. The term used for "proclaim" changes from verse 23 (καταγγέλλω) to verse 30 (παραγγέλλω)—a move from apostolic authority to divine action. The term appears more forceful both because it delineates an action of the personal God of Scripture, and because the term itself denotes a command rather than an invitation. In the Synoptic Gospels παραγγέλλω refers exclusively to the commands of Jesus (cf. Matt. 15:35; Mark 8:6; Luke 5:14; 8:9, 56; 9:21) or his teachings (cf. Matt. 10:5; Mark 6:8; Acts 1:4). The apostles understood that the call to repentance was commanded (παραγγέλλω) directly by Christ (Acts 10:42). See W. Mundle, "Παραγγέλλω," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 340–41.

[61] So Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 501.

[62] There is debate whether Paul attempted to stave off the unpalatable portion of the gospel until the end of his speech, namely concerning repentance and belief in the resurrection of Jesus, but the research does not bring clarity to the position. Studies in rhetoric surmise that the most controversial of arguments were typically reserved for the end of a speech so that favor might have been sufficiently built up by that point so that the speaker could bring the argument to a persuasive close. See Keener, *Acts*, 2667; Polhill, *Acts*, 377–78. Yet, in such a case Paul would have lost any possible favor gained with his audience up to that point by speaking of judgment, resurrection, and calling for repentance and belief in these highly

and was resurrected in bodily form. Like repentance, neither divine judgment nor physical resurrection were Greek concepts,[63] yet Paul appears not to have gone to any lengths to provide defensible evidence as to the event of Jesus being raised from the dead.[64]

Additionally, it must not be suggested that the omission of the name of God's appointed man served to soft pedal the truth of Jesus Christ to Paul's mixed audience. The absence of the name of Jesus here may signify Paul's desire to focus on the fact that a human mediator for God would bring divine judgment, which would be an unthinkable position for a mortal according to Greek worldviews.[65]

Verses 32–34 record the narrative *denouement*, suggesting that the speech, though summarized,[66] delivered a complete gospel message with instruction on the resurrection of Christ. The fact of some conversions in the midst of the sneering and skepticism indicates that a full evangelization was given which effected a full conversion, though there is significant debate whether Paul reached his intended conclusion or was interrupted.[67]

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controversial foreign matters. Nevertheless, Porter is careful to note that the summary statements of Paul's speeches in Acts are too brief for proper rhetorical analysis. See Porter, *Paul in Acts*, 124–25.

[63] Paul's understanding of divine judgment seems directly rooted, if not in part quoted from Psalm 9:8; 96:13 and 98:9. Not even the relatively unassuming phrase πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ("having furnished proof to all men") would have been understood in Greek terms. Lightfoot finds this to be a common phrase in Classical Greek, but acknowledges that Paul's use of πίστις here would not be understood by the Athenians in the higher sense of "faith." See Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 234. The proof of this coming judgment by Jesus is the resurrection of Jesus. See Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, 113.

[64] Bahnsen suggests that while questions as to the veracity of the resurrection claim may likely have been raised, no evidentiary apologetical response is offered. He comments, "Instead, Paul laid the presuppositional groundwork for accepting the authoritative word from God, which was the source and context of the good news about Christ's resurrection." Bahnsen and Booth, *Always Ready*, 251. First Thessalonians 1:9–10 records how earlier in his Macedonian ministry, those who heard the gospel and believed understood that they needed to turn away from their idols and turn toward the living and true God to serve Him only, wholeheartedly believing that His Son would one day come to rescue them from divine retribution. Paul seems to have brought to Athens the same controversial Judeo-Christian elements of his previous gospel proclamation in Thessalonica. Polhill, *Acts*, 377.

[65] References to the appointed man include: Daniel 7:13–14; Matthew 25:31; Mark 13:26; 14:62; John 5:27). For discussion see Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 502–3. Furthermore, it is not uncommon in Acts that a speech may be heavily focused on God the Father before resolving the christological problem. For example, Stephen in Acts 7 uses the term θεός seventeen times, making θεός the focus of his gospel of Jesus. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds., *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 58–59n45.

[66] It is not unreasonable that many more nuanced discussions occurred between Paul and the Areopagites in the singular event, though Luke recorded the main lines of argumentation in Paul's words. For more on the relationship between Paul's content and Luke's possible summary, see Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 418–19.

[67] Porter believes that the resurrection discussion was the main point of contention in the Greek mind, much more than the idea of life after death in some form, and for this reason they interrupted his speech and would not let him continue. He contends for an interruption in so far as "the balance of the speech is completely wrong, with the only distinctly Christian part, mention of the resurrection, coming at the very end of v. 31." Porter, *Paul in Acts*, 124. Certainly, Paul's discussion of resurrection would repel philosophers and common listeners alike in a way which may have halted further declarations: the Epicureans rejected immortality and the Stoics never got beyond the concept of an impersonal, unconscious being, and all hearers would have been repulsed by the notion of a bodily resurrection. Peterson highlights

In summary, the exegetical data suggests that even though the apostle does not quote specific Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Paul was nothing less than biblical in his presentation of the doctrine of God and in his brief outline of Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. Paul presented the Christian gospel from a directly scriptural, not philosophical base, and rejection, hesitation, and belief ensued as they would with any gospel message in the New Testament.

Paul did not appeal to Greek philosophical concepts in order to narrow the ideological gap between Christianity and Greco-Roman pluralism. For Paul, points of contact between conflicting worldviews were not the endgame. Indeed, there emerge no significant points where the prominent Hellenistic and Christian worldviews fundamentally agreed. Dialogue in the Areopagus, as throughout Athens and Macedonia, skillfully and purposefully led toward the declaration of God's command for repentance and belief in the offensive and absurd gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather than bridge between worldviews, God calls for the radical abandonment of any false theological idea.

Summary and Implications

The apostle Paul's discourse of Acts 17:24–31, which completes the narrative of his evangelistic efforts from Macedonia to Athens, is the quintessential contextualization study emerging from the New Testament. His evangelization of the spiritually confused foreign field of his day demonstrates the biblically appropriate limits to the relationship between disparate worldviews in presenting an understandable gospel in a foreign context.

The modern reader will therefore find in the Areopagus speech a pattern of dialogue and cultural engagement that is striking for its simplicity rather than for its keen strategizing. Interestingly, though Paul's audience represented a wide spectrum of worldviews, he does not appear to have attempted to address each belief system in a specialized, sensitive way. Rather, he engaged in a generally respectful manner to the culture at specific points of his gospel message. The winsomeness with which he gained an elite audience nevertheless did not usurp his desire to preach the offenses of the gospel, namely bodily resurrection and the divine command to repent or face

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a perceived time gap between 17:32–34 such that the elect hearers must have had an opportunity to dialogue further with Paul away from the council in order to understand the full message of Jesus and believe. See Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 504. However, Paul was brought to the Areopagus to testify to resurrection (cf. 17:19–20), and doubtless he did so through a message of divine sacrifice made by crucifixion. That Luke's record does not include discussion of the death of Christ does not mean it was excluded, for it would be logically incongruous to omit talk of the death of Christ and yet explain His resurrection. The succession of events do not require elapsed time if the gospel message was in itself complete through the exposition of natural revelation and the special revelation of God's appointed Man. See Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World*, 289; Lightfoot, *Acts of the Apostles*, 235. Dibelius finds that Paul reached his intended ending and then left. Not only is there no mention of an interruption and premature ending, but Luke appears to prefer to save public disagreements to the end of speeches, heightening the opposition to the gospel message. Dibelius finds support primarily in Acts 10:44; 22:22; 26:24. He contends that the speech would have been more completely christological than what is presented here, but any missing elements from the standpoint of the reader were not originally lacking in Paul's address. See Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 114.

judgment. In the Areopagus Paul preached an uncompromising gospel with the expectation that the message itself would indict his audience generally and cause some of them to become regenerated disciples of Christ.

Paul's speech reinforces the fact that the Christian faith shares no salvific truths with false worldviews but is entirely unique and superior. Simply put, all spiritual commonalities between the missionary and the target audience begin and end with the shared reality of the guilt of sin indicted by natural theology. All worldviews, whether pluralistic or secular, can and must be reached with the straightforward gospel of revelation, repentance, and restoration that Paul preached out of the Christian Scriptures.

Reasoning from the Scriptures is therefore the right starting point for any evangelistic context. All attempts at cultural engagement should approach a dialogue that traces the gospel message in concept and language. One's regard for the modern audience's sensibilities must always take second place to the accurate, bold proclamation of Christian doctrine with a Christological, soteriological focus. Pauline dialogue today must not work to conform disparate faiths but to demolish all speculations which are raised up loftily against the knowledge of God through the truth of Scripture (2 Cor. 10:2–6).

The contemporary contextualization debate today concerns the quality and degree to which the biblical gospel may be found relevant in other cultures. Contextualization studies which look to make the gospel more relevant and more easily adoptable by sinners may unwittingly strip the gospel of its transcendent and offensive truths. Yet, eternal biblical truths are in no way foreign to any culture or generation, as the message of the crucified Christ is both the power and wisdom of God to those called to salvation. The gospel message is in itself a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks who are not among God's elect (1 Cor. 1:23–24).

Catering to culture in a way which removes the offensive gospel elements that Paul preached is not only unbiblical but a slippery slope toward presenting a hopeless Christianity that a secularizing society already finds irrelevant. Once the competing influences of culture and non-Christian worldviews are given pride of place in making a reasoned defense for the hope within the believer (1 Pet. 3:25), then the superficial acceptance of what remains in the "gospel" may indeed be no gospel at all. Likewise, the contextualizer would be no true gospel worker.

Perhaps it would be a wise check for the missionary to conduct some self-assessment: At the outset of a dialectical engagement with a conflicting worldview, are the emotions stirred the way they were for Paul when arriving in Athens (Acts 17:16)? The apostle's spirit was so provoked within him that he felt anger, grief, and gut-level disagreement[68] to the point that he was compelled to immediately preach the truth of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Are our evangelistic goals and methods saturated by our tears, and do they drive us to the urgent proclamation of the unique and superior propositions of the gospel?

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[68] "Παροξύνω," *BDAG*, 780. Cf. Acts 15:39; LXX: Deuteronomy 9:18; Psalm 106:29; Isaiah 65:3; Hosea 8:5.
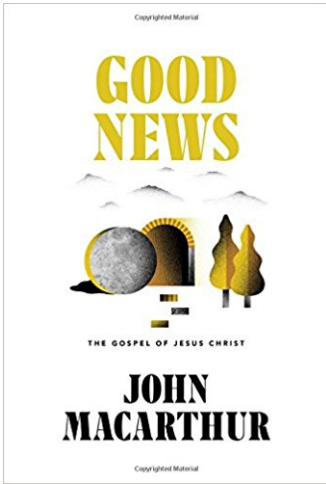
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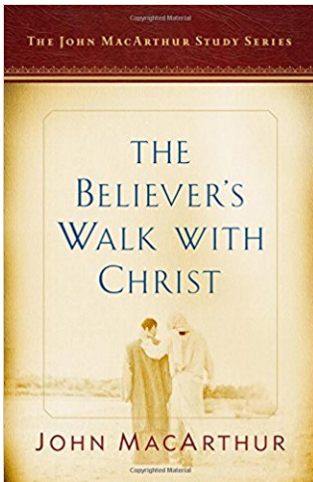
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REVIEWS

Greg Harris. *The Face and the Glory: Lessons on the Visible and Invisible God and His Glory*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2019. 180 pp. $14.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Kevin D. Zuber, Associate Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary.

It has been said that the whole purpose and focus of the Christian life can be summed up as communion with God and worship of God. After all, what is the believer's salvation for? "To know and glorify God." Heaven will be heaven because, at last, the believer in Jesus Christ will have unhindered communion with God and unfettered worship of God.

It has further been said that communion with God and worship of God is made up of equal parts of attraction and reticence. The believer, the child of God, is inexorably drawn to God, longing for communion with the God of grace and mercy (cf. Ps. 42:1–2; 63:1). At the same time the knowledge of God—the awesome One, all-powerful, all-holy Sovereign One—causes one to draw back in fear, as did the nation at Sinai (cf. Exod. 20:18–21) or to cry out in woeful confession as did the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6:5). Keeping the balance of attraction and reticence is not easy. Focusing on the reasons for the attraction and mitigating the reasons for the reticence can result in a superficial communion and trite worship. The reverse can lead to a grudging, resentful relationship with God—or worse, rebellion and unbelief.

How can a believer in Jesus Christ know and experience the presence of God—*The Face*—while he or she perceives and enjoys the majesty and utter holiness of God—*The Glory*? Dr. Greg Harris has written a book that answers that question: *The Face and the Glory: Lessons on the Visible and Invisible God and His Glory*. Readers who have enjoyed and profited from Dr. Harris' previous "Glory books"—as he himself calls them—(*The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God, The Darkness and the Glory: His Cup and the Glory from Gethsemane to the Ascension*, *The Stone and the Glory Lessons on the Temple Presence and the Glory of God,* and *The Stone and the Glory of Israel: An Invitation for the Jewish People to Meet Their Messiah*) will find the same clear and compelling writing in this fifth "Glory book."

The premise of *The Face and the Glory* concerns an enigma—"the one enigma in the Bible that generates perhaps the most debate" namely, "on whether God can

ever be seen." *(Chapter 1, 3) There are well-known verses in Scripture that indicate God cannot be seen—and Dr. Harris comments on several (e.g. Exod. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12). However, many others "show that God *can* be seen"—and those are noted as well (e.g. appearances in Genesis [16:1–6; 18:1–8; 32:24–30] and elsewhere [Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; cf. Heb. 11:27]). This enigma, however, does not necessarily lead (as it does for liberal theologians) to the conclusion that there are contradictions in the Bible. Rather, for "the lovers of God and His Word [such] enigmas are wonderful" because if properly studied and carefully considered they "lead to a better understanding of the attributes and activities of God" and lead one to see "amazing and worship evoking truths about Jesus the Messiah." (Chapter 1, 8)

The next nine chapters sketch out different dimensions and perspectives on this biblical enigma. Each chapter is evocatively titled and traces a different set of texts with the different nuances of those texts that surround the enigma. These studies are not so much to resolve the enigma but to demonstrate the richness of knowledge and experience one can gain through an investigation of the enigma.

For instance, in Chapter 2—The Face, Dr. Harris traces the theme of "God's face" (i.e. His presence) which is real—comforting and compelling—for the people of Israel. At the foot of Sinai (cf. Exodus 19, 20) the people experienced the exhilaration of "the very special presence of God" (Chapter 2, 12) but also experienced the "fear and trembling" of being near His awesome holiness. This, and other experiences of the Divine presence (The Face) (e.g. the communal meal of the elders and the LORD in Exod. 24:9–10) while wonderful, did not prevent the elders, Nadab and Abihu (cf. Lev. 10:1–3), indeed the nation (cf. the incident with the Golden Calf in Exodus 32) from sin and forfeiting the blessings of living before The Face.

One of the blessings of The Face is living with The Peace—the title of Chapter 3. Here Dr. Harris demonstrates his ability to draw practical lessons from his searching examination of the texts and themes that surround the enigma. Clearly, one of the sublime blessings of knowing God and enjoying Him is peace. This is a propositional truth of God's Word, but also a living reality for the believer (Chapter 3, 24) (see Rom. 5:1–2). However, "peace with God" does not mean "no discipline from God" (Chapter 3, 25) (Heb. 12:7). This peace is positionally present, but must be accessed, enjoyed, employed, and lived—and this is accomplished by living obediently and confidently in His presence. Again, the experience of the nation of Israel illustrates these truths (cf. Chapter 3, 28ff). But even though they failed, God pronounced a benediction of peace: Numbers 6:22–27. That benediction highlights that the source of the peace He intended for them: "The LORD lift up His countenance (His Face!) on you, and give you peace." (Chapter 3, 38).

Chapter 4—The Name—surveys the significance of the Name of the LORD— how it is divinely revealed and how it is uniquely associated with His presence (Face) in the Temple (Chapter 4, 43). Dr. Harris intriguingly argues that the Jewish restriction of not pronouncing the covenant keeping name of God—ostensibly an act of reverence—diminished the experience of His blessing for the people. When He revealed His Name it was intended by the LORD to remind them of His covenant promises and His blessing—as in the blessing of Numbers 6:24–27, which repeats the name LORD to highlight the association of that name and His blessing (Chapter 4, 50).

Dr. Harris does not write in a technical style, but this does not mean the reader can skim the surface of his text. His careful exploration of the pertinent themes and texts of Scripture requires and repays equally careful reading. Even in his analysis of well-known themes—such as his overview of the theme of The Son in Chapter 5—he brings out insights that will deepen the reader's appreciation of The Son of David, the Messiah. His survey exposition of Luke 9 and Mark 10 in Chapter 6—tracing the Lord Jesus' final path to Jerusalem and a not-so-incidental encounter with the blind beggar named Bartimaeus" (Mark 10:46–48)—shows the Lord Jesus as the One brings sinners "into the joyous eternal Glory of the God-head face-to-face." (Chapter 6, 80).

Chapter 7—The Hiding, returns to the text of blessing in Numbers 6:22–27 which is juxtaposed to texts that describe the LORD "hiding His face" (cf. Deut. 31:17–18; Mic. 3:1–4). Here is the enigma starkly drawn once again. This time the resolution is mapped out through the salvation-historical narratives and prophecies of the Old Testament, up to and including the revealing of the Nation's Messiah—a resolution that anticipates the ultimate resolution of reign of the Messiah (cf. Ezek. 20:34–40) (Chapter 7, 99).

At the heart of, and resolution of, the enigma is Jesus Christ. In Chapter 8—The Consideration, Dr. Harris points the reader to His coming reign from texts in Zechariah (Chapter 8, 100–02), His incarnate relationship with His Father (John 5) (Chapter 8, 103–5), the Spirit anointing at His baptism and Spirit initiated temptation (Chapter 8, 106–13), and His so-called "Last Supper" (Chapter 8, 114ff). Woven into this discussion of the Last Supper, Dr. Harris draws out deeply significant insights related to the Lord's conflict with Satan. It was Satan who motivated Judas (cf. John 13:2) and Dr. Harris reminds his readers this conflict is as old as the book of Job (Chapter 8, 115–18). This conflict would not end at the Last Supper—as Jesus' warning to Peter indicated (cf. Luke 22:31–32)—and it would not end short of the cross.

In Chapter 9—The Eyes, Dr. Harris provides further compelling insights into the conflict between the Lord and Satan through the Lord's experiences of Gethsemane and His arrest.

Finally, in Chapter 10 the reader is reminded of The Glory—which was seen first in the light of creation (Chapter 10, 132). That Glory will be what illumines the Millennial Kingdom (Chapter 10, 137). That Glory is manifestly revealed in "the Lamb of God"—Jesus Christ our Lord (see Chapter 10, 143).

This summary of themes does not come close to doing justice to the richness and breadth of detail and insight that Dr. Harris offers to the readers of *The Face and the Glory*. It is a work that could only be written by someone with wide familiarity with the contents of Scripture, a deep grasp of the web of Scripture's nuances, and a unique ability to express them.

One further comment: all who have read Dr. Harris' other "Glory books" know that his writing is not theoretical but comes from genuine personal experience of that of which he writes. This volume is no different and gives ample evidence that the author is personally familiar with *The Face and the Glory*. I heartily recommend this book and pray that those who read it will savor the lessons and insights and know the blessings of *The Face and the Glory*.

Note: I have cited the book by chapter number and page number in the pre-publication pdf review version I was provided.

Jongkind, Dirk, Peter J. Williams, Peter M. Head, Patrick James, Dayton C. Benner, James R. Covington, and Andrew Zulker. *The Greek New Testament Reader's Edition.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 694 pp. $49.99.

Reviewed by Brian Biedebach, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry, The Master's Seminary.

One of the many things I learned from my Greek professor when I was in seminary was that a goal for his students was not to make us *fluent* in Koine Greek, but rather simply to help us to become *literate.* He didn't expect that we would be speaking Greek, but rather his hope was that we would be able to read it so that we could better understand the Greek NT in order to prepare excellent expository sermons.

There is something to be said about *reading* the NT in its original language. Reading God's Word helps us to grow in our understanding and ultimately in our worship of Him. Since reading God's Word in its original language can bring greater clarity and depth of understanding to a follower of Christ, it is a worthwhile endeavor to learn to read the original languages.

Unfortunately, even after several semesters of Greek grammar and exegetical courses in seminary, many of the best Greek students are still not completely *literate* in NT Greek. As some scholars have noted, even if one retained all of the vocabulary words from his Greek grammar book, he would still only "know 79.92% of the words found in the Greek NT. In other words, the student will recognize 4 out of every 5 words" (Goodrich, Richard J., and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 8). This weakness can paralyze a seminary graduate from ever being able to read the NT. Thus, he often relies heavily on computer software or interlinear Bibles. While those tools can be tremendously helpful, they also allow for mental atrophy to set in rather than strengthen his ability to read Greek.

In order to help fill the desire of seminary graduates to be more literate with a tool that will help them grow in their reading proficiency, publishers have produced "*reader's*" of the Greek NT. These editions include reading aids such as English, footnote glossaries that translate Greek words which are used less than 30 times in the NT. The idea is to help the reader who can read only 4 out of every 5 words by translating the 5th word for him. Therefore, the student can read full Bible verses, paragraphs, chapters, even books without having to stop and look for another tool. The idea is that the more the student reads without pausing, the stronger he will be.

The latest attempt to fill this need is Crossway's beautifully bound *Greek New Testament Reader's Edition*, published in 2018. In 2017, Crossway published a new translation of *The Greek NT* produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge under the oversight of Dirk Jongkind, Peter Williams, Peter Head, Patrick James, and others. Very little information about this new translation is given in Crossway's *Reader's Edition.*

Perhaps the biggest drawback of Crossway's R*eader* is that it contains a newer version of *The Greek NT* that is unfamiliar to most Greek students.

If one wants to learn more about this 2017 version, he will be hard pressed to find it in the Crossway *Reader's Edition.* The student can find some of this information in Crossway's *Greek NT,* (Jongkind, Dirk, et al., *The Greek New Testament* [Tyndale House, Cambridge, 2017], 505–06). In this non-reader's edition, one can learn that the Cambridge version began as a revision of the Greek translation of the NT text by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813–1875) which likely indirectly influenced the later editions of Nestle-Aland. The revisors of this Cambridge edition then insisted that the "text be attested in two or more Greek manuscripts, at least one being from the fifth century or earlier" (Jongkind, Dirk, et al., *The Greek New Testament* [Tyndale House, Cambridge, 2017], 506). The non-reader's edition also attempts to explain why the publisher decided to publish the NT books in an order that differs from that found in the English NT. In Crossway's *Reader's Edition* the four gospels are placed first, followed by Acts. However, after Acts comes James, Peter's epistles, John's epistles, Jude, followed by Paul's thirteen epistles. The last two books are Hebrews and Revelation, in that order. For those not familiar with that order, they will be dependent on Crossway's Table of Contents and this also will be a drawback for some.

The craftsmanship of Crossway's *Reader's Edition* seems to be excellent. Though it is large (it is about the size of many English Bibles that contain both the OT and the NT–6.5 wide by 9.5 inches high and more than 1.5 inches thick), the paper quality is great, the ink is dark and clear, and it is packed with great features. The reader is expected to know the approximately 500 most frequently used vocabulary words in biblical Greek. But if he is rusty in his vocabulary, there is a glossary of most of those words, in the back of the book. All other words that the reader would need to know in order to read the Greek NT are included (with glossary definitions and full parsing of nouns, pronouns, adverbs, verbs, articles, and adjectives) in easy-to-read footnotes at the bottom of each page. Most pages have the bottom ¼ to ½ reserved for these footnotes. I applaud them, especially for the clarity and readability of these very helpful footnotes.

Crossway is not the first to produce a *Greek NT Reader's Edition.* There are several fine ones that have been published in recent years. In 2004, Zondervan produced *A Reader's Greek New Testament* that was based on the "eclectic text that underpins the New International Version" (Goodrich, Richard J., and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 9). This Zondervan work was the first time that the Greek text, compiled by Edward Goodrick and John Kohlenberger III, was printed and it was admittedly not the standard text. One of the appealing features of the Zondervan reader is that it translated all words used 30 times or fewer in the New Testament and yet the book is still thin and easy to handle. The height and width are approximately 6.5 x 9.5 inches and the book itself is just more than ½ an inch thick. Zondervan's *Reader* saved space by not parsing the words and by listing the footnotes in paragraph form, rather than giving each word its own line.

In 2014, the German Bible Society produced *The UBSGNT Reader's Edition* (Newman, Barclay M., and Florian Voss. *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition with Textual Notes* [German Bible Society, Germany, 2014]). Many

prefer the UBS (United Bible Societies) edition because it is a standard text and was first published in 1966. The UBS is nearly identical to the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (first published in 1898 and now in its 28th edition, also known as NA28). The Nestle-Aland Greek NT is aimed more for scholars, especially if they are interested in a display of textual variations. The UBS is more popular for pastors because it is geared for students and theologians who desire to understand their modern Bible translation better. In the Preface to the *UBS Reader's Edition* it says that "the theory behind this tool is that provision of just the amount of information necessary for the reading task will aid the reader in developing naturalness in the skill of reading – including vocabulary building, mastery of syntax, and familiarity with grammar" (Newman and Voss, *The UBS Greek Testament: A Reader's Edition with Textual Notes,* 8).

As much as the format and quality of Crossway's *Reader*'s *Edition* should be praised, if a student or pastor were trying to decide between purchasing Crossway's 2018 *Greek New Testament Reader's Edition* or *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition with Textual Notes* (2015), I would recommend the latter. Besides the fact that the UBS is a text used more widely, The *UBS Reader's Edition* has many of the same features as the Crossway *reader* and in many cases, the UBS offers more. While the Crossway *Reader's Edition* has a footnoted glossary (with extensive parsing), the *UBS Reader's Edition* has a similar feature referred to as a "running Greek-English dictionary" (with verb parsing). The Crossway *Reader's Edition* has a 12–page glossary in the back of the book but the *UBS Reader's Edition* has a much more extensive truncated dictionary (24 pages), also including words that are used 30 times or more in the Greek NT. While the UBS truncated dictionary is no substitute for a good lexicon, it has much more information than the Crossway glossary. The *UBS Reader's Edition* also references Old Testament quotes, has English subheadings above many paragraphs, has a larger font, and has a more extensive textual apparatus.

For those who are interested in textual variations, the Crossway *Reader's Edition* would be something you might enjoy comparing with other texts because it is, after all, a new version. Ironically, however, most who would be interested in textual variations would probably be proficient enough in Greek that they would not need a *Reader's Edition* but would prefer to have *The* (non-reader's) *Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House*, *Cambridge* which has a more detailed textual apparatus than the Crossway's *Reader's Edition*.

For those pastors and former Greek students who, from time to time, become frustrated when they dust off their old Greek NT and find that they stumble through passages only recognizing 80% (or less) of the words in the text, I do recommend a *Reader's Edition*. I am grateful that Crossway invested in a *Reader's Edition* that is obviously designed to encourage and improve your reading ability of the Greek NT. Like the *UBS Reader's Edition,* Crossway's *Reader's Edition* is another outstanding resource, that is sure to help many believers understand and apply God's Word better.

James Montgomery Boice. *The Life of Moses*: *God's First Deliverer of Israel*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018. 456 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by Iosif J. Zhakevich, Associate Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

In his *De Vita Mosis*, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (1st c. AD) begins his account of Moses' life with the following words: "I hope to bring the story of this greatest and most perfect of men to the knowledge of such as deserve not to remain in ignorance of it" (*De Vita Mosis* 1.I.1). James Montgomery Boice also endeavors to deliver and exposit the life and significance of Moses as recorded in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. Due to its focus on the character Moses, this book is not a verse-by-verse exposition of the Torah, but a big-picture presentation of the life of Moses, the events related to Moses' life, and God's work achieved through Moses.

After devoting the first two chapters to brief remarks on the authorship and inspiration of Scripture, the relationship of the Exodus event to God's covenant with Abraham, the date of the Exodus (at 1445 B.C.; p. 23), and a short section on the social context of Egypt, Boice begins chapter three with the birth of Moses and explicates Moses' life until the very death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34.

The overall benefit of this book is its expositional nature, which makes the major part of the Torah accessible to the reader. More specifically, two points of commendation relate to the expositional insight and the devotional application Boice brings to the reader. At the same time, a point of criticism is in order with respect to Boice's oversight of arguably important details within various portions of Scripture that leave the reader wondering about the meaning of those details in their respective contexts.

First, throughout the biography, Boice provides helpful insights that bring to life the oftentimes difficult passages of the Torah. In his discussion on Leviticus 15, for example—the purity laws about bodily discharge—Boice applies the Levitical laws to the narrative of the woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years (Mark 5; cf. Matt 9) and illuminates both portions of Scripture. After linking Lev 15 and Mark 5, Boice explains that the woman with the ailment must have been "scared to death" when Jesus exclaimed "Who touched me?" Boice expounds: "She had broken the law—and he was a rabbi, a teacher of the law. He was going to condemn her, an unclean woman, for touching him. This explains her fear, and, at the same time, it explains her faith" (234). In this manner, Boice shows how an ancient law had real effect on a real person in history, and how Jesus responded to the situation.

Second, in addition to the expositional insight, Boice's discussion also makes the text relevant and devotional for all people at all times in all contexts. The narrative of the twelve spies in Numbers 13–14, for example, may leave the reader wondering how a text about exploring the Promised Land with the intent of conquering it applies to life today. But after going through this narrative and explaining the significance of the report of the spies, Boice explains that the real issue was not the presence of the threat of the giants in the land, but the absence of faith on the part of the ten spies (Caleb and Joshua excluded). Boice includes a line that captures this effectively:

"The majority had great giants but a little God. Caleb had a great God and little giants" (313). He promptly moves to an application of this passage, articulating the following: "You can't overcome your problems, but God can" (314). This type of straightforward and simple explanation and application of the biblical text characterizes this biography.

Finally, in contrast to the commendations above, a critique that can be applied to various parts of this book is the omission of certain significant points that should have been explicated from the narrative or that relate to the text more broadly. As an example of this, admittedly, rare situation, three remarks of criticism may be noted specifically with respect to the description of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34, where such a shortcoming is particularly noticeable. First, while Deuteronomy 34 implicitly reflects on Moses as a leader, a deliverer, and a prophet (see vv. 10–12), the overall assessment of Moses at the end of his life is that he was "the servant of the LORD" (v. 5). This is not a point to be overlooked, inasmuch as the greatest man from the people of Israel at that time is designated as a servant. Yet, though Boice does call Moses "the servant of the LORD," he does not explain the significance of this designation, and he does not explain the honor this title bestows upon Moses (p. 416, and see p. 3). Second, Deuteronomy 34:5–6 arguably state that God Himself buried Moses. The unique nature of such a situation alone deserves some explanation, along with the implications of this act of God; but this is not addressed in the work. Related to this, moreover, a discussion on the statement "no one knows the place of his burial to this day" (v. 6) is also lacking, and yet befitting. Finally, on a compositional level, specifically as regards Deuteronomy 34, the reader would have appreciated to hear Boice's reflections on the authorship of this portion of Scripture, beyond the general perspective that Moses is the author of the Torah as a whole (see pp. 7, 405). Is Moses to be considered the author of the description of his own death? If so, how does the reader understand this process? If not, then who was the author of this passage and how does the reader reckon this with the perspective that the Torah overall is attributed to Moses? Even for those who firmly believe in the Mosaic authorship of the end of Deuteronomy, brief remarks on this well-known question would serve the readers well (note his brief remarks on JEPD on p. 78, n. 5).

All in all, despite the critical remarks, Boice is commended for achieving a major accomplishment by making such a massive body of information contained in Exodus through Deuteronomy accessible to all levels of readership—the pastor, the scholar, and the layperson. Indeed, he does this in two respects—he provides both the intellectual understanding of the text and the practical application of the text to present-day life. As for the scholar-pastor who seeks to explain the Pentateuch to his congregation, with a particular focus on the role of Moses in this portion of Scripture, this biography is a useful resource.

Greg Harris. *The Bible Expositor's Handbook: New Testament*. Digital edition. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017. 406 pp (paper) $19.99.

Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament. The Master's Seminary.

As guide extraordinaire Greg Harris completes the reader's tour of the Bible with *The Bible Expositor's Handbook: New Testament* (B&H Academic, 2018). He directs our attention to the most significant theological themes and provides a superb running commentary resolving interpretive issues. Along the way he identifies the hazards one might encounter, the exegetical pitfalls to avoid. Taking a journey like this through the Bible might be thought to fill one's head with knowledge without filling the heart with praise to the Author of Scripture. However, anyone who started the journey through Harris' *The Bible Expositor's Handbook: Old Testament* (B&H Academic, 2016) knows that he purposefully establishes such praise as his goal from start to finish. The author does more than provide a few precious jewels or gold nuggets out of Scripture. He focuses on the connections between all those jewels and nuggets. In other words, he connects the dots to capture Scripture's metanarrative relating texts of Scripture to the Messiah as well as to God's redemptive and kingdom programs for Israel and all mankind.

Harris brought the first volume to a close emphasizing how the prophetic revelation's significance comes to a climax with the person and work of the Messiah in the New Testament. God's covenant promises had yet to be fulfilled and could not be fulfilled apart from the life and work of the Messiah. This second volume opens with "We've Been Expecting You" (10–39) a chapter systematically reviewing the Old Testament volume and concluding with the transitional question, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" (26–28). Each chapter concludes with "Deeper Walk Study Questions" (e.g., 38–39, 54–55) providing Bible study leaders with suggested review and discussion questions.

Chapter 2 ("The Gospel According to Isaiah," 40–55) not only walks the reader through an overview of the book of Isaiah, but discusses the New Testament writers' use of Isaiah's prophecies. Chapter 3 connects Isaiah's prophecies with Christ's use of parables ("Why Do You Speak to Them in Parables?," 56–73). An examination of the hinge chapter of Matthew 16 comprises Chapter 4 ("Five Theological Bombshells from Matthew 16," 75–84). Harris then provides some insight regarding a major theme to all biblical revelation in Chapter 5 ("The Glory of God Changes Everything," 86–102). He reveals seven biblical presuppositions by which to frame one's study of the New Testament (87–93) and outlines "The Biblical Trail to Mark 10:35–41" (93–99).

Psalm 118 with its crucial role in New Testament Messianic hope comes around the next turn in the trail (Chapter 6, "This Is the Day That the Lord Has Made," 104–23). At a key trailside overlook, Harris stops to reset the biblical path for the traveler (Chapter 7, "The Wager and Why the Darkness Was over the Cross," 124–65) with an overview of what he taught in his book *The Darkness and the Glory* (Kress Christian Publications, 2008). As the tour continues, readers have opportunity to view the doctrinal beauty of the biblical phrase "in Christ Jesus" (Chapter 8, "In Christ Alone," 166–80).

New Testament teaching concerning the Messiah cannot ignore the divine mandate to announce His advent, His work, and His message. Therefore, Harris' next guidepost initiates a broad walk through Paul's epistle to the Romans (Chapter 9, "And How Shall They Hear without a Preacher?," 181–221). This chapter includes a special tour of Romans 9–11 (186–203). Its "Deeper Walk Study Questions" include some discussion questions related to Jewish evangelism (220–21). Chapter 10 ("The Word of God or the Word of Man?," 222–43) surveys the relationship of Messiah to written revelation and examines six truths from 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (229–38). Then, just like rafting down the Grand Canyon, when the adventurer thinks he or she has seen all there is to see, the river changes direction quickly to expose a new biblical wonder, an eschatological vantage point (Chapter 11, "Seven Astounding Doctrinal Truths from 2 Thessalonians 2," 244–78). The chapter walks through "Day of the Lord" biblical passages (245–54) and obtains the guide's experienced perspective on the occasion for the Spirit of God's leading Paul to pen 2 Thessalonians (255–68).

Chapter 12, "A Biblical Theology of the Ages of God" (279–91) takes a close look at eight biblical doctrines concerning the ages of God (279–88). Leaving the river behind and taking to a trail up a side canyon, the path rises higher and enters a natural amphitheater to contemplate the epistle to the Hebrews (Chapter 13, "Twelve Things Most People Do Not Know about the Book of Hebrews," 293–320). Leaving the amphitheater and entering another side canyon, our guide takes the reader on "A Broad Theological Walk through the Book of Revelation" (Chapter 14, 321–64). This trail draws the reader into an examination of two key events announced by the Book of Revelation: "Will the Antichrist Actually Rise from the Dead? And, Why Satan Must Be Released" (Chapter 15, 365–406). Harris lays out clear argumentation for a premillennial dispensational interpretation.

Like historical and geological markers along a well-established hiking path, Harris stops at key points to allow readers to get a more in-depth view of what they are seeing and learning. For example, in the coverage of New Testament writers' use of Isaiah's prophecies Harris inserts a "Crucial" note regarding how and why liberal scholars mistreat the biblical text (45–46). A little further along the tour the author provides a "Consider" information box looking at how Orthodox Jews often stumble at Messianic prophecies (47–48). On down the path, while discussing Christ's use of parables, another marker encourages the reader to "Remember" (59) how the Old Testament reveals multiple persons of the Godhead. Then a "Key" appears in the text instructing the reader regarding the debate over the authorship of Isaiah (67).

Just as some historical sites and museums provide a self-guiding electronic audio player and earphones, so Harris alerts readers to electronic resources (both written, audio, and video) for additional information and study (e.g., 94, 204, 222, 321). These resources preserve the personality and personal touch of our guide. Harris reveals both his love of teaching students and of pastoring a congregation. Throughout the handbook readers will experience the care and compassion of their guide and intuitively understand that he is interceding with the Father on their behalf as they read, study, and apply biblical truth to their lives. Recommend this resource to every Christian—it will richly reward their time within its pages and along its trails.

My short review and endorsement on Amazon when this volume first came out in its digital edition was as follows: "*The Bible Expositor's Handbook: New Testament* takes the reader on a tour of the New Testament with Greg Harris as guide extraordinaire. Each step along the way, our guide directs our attention to the most significant theological themes and provides sound commentary to resolve interpretive issues. He also points out the hazards that can be encountered on our journey through the New Testament text—the exegetical pitfalls to avoid. When combined with the Old Testament volume of this *Handbook*, the student of Scripture possesses the best expositor's theological guidebook available today." As the reader can tell, my view above has expanded upon my initial examination and evaluation with the same enthusiastic recommendation.
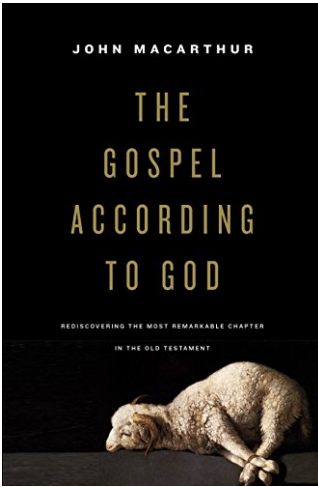
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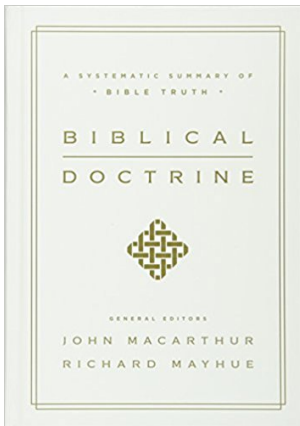
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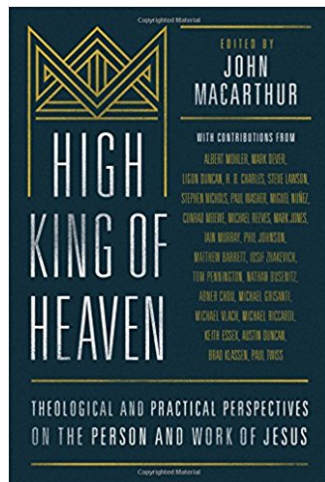
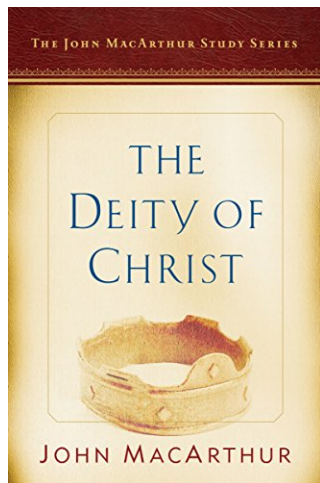## The Deity of Christ
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