

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL



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RICHARD C. BARCELLOS

A Methodology for Janus Parallelism
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The Eternal God of a Vanishing Creation:
Recovering the Doctrine of Divine Timelessness
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Toward the Worship of God as *Actus Purus*
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F. DAVID FARNELL

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EDITORIAL

Dr. Sam Horn
President of The Master’s University and Seminary

* * * * *

Whenever there is a transition in institutional leadership—especially within the office of the president of a conservative evangelical seminary—a question naturally arises regarding transitions in fidelity. The history of academic institutions, and of seminaries in particular, has proven this to be a reasonable concern. Thus, with this passing of the baton, I am committed to the reaffirmation of our doctrinal convictions in order to maintain doctrinal fidelity and to guard the theological integrity of The Master’s Seminary. One of the goals of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* (hereafter *TMSJ*) is to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to the same doctrinal truths that have marked this institution since its inception. You can expect from *TMSJ* what you have always expected: faithful scholarship for the edification of the church.

Historically, *TMSJ* has been written for laymen. In essence, *TMSJ* acted as a precursor for what is today *The Master’s Seminary Blog*, and yet as blogs have inundated the internet, pastors and laymen have more blog articles than they can read. This popular-level trend in Christian literature has created a vacancy in the intellectual sphere. Pastors and church members need faithful academic resources. The church waits for the scholarship of men and women who fear and tremble before the Word of God, and then speak truth into issues thus far saturated with liberal scholarship. This is the new direction for *TMSJ* as we strive to serve pastor-theologians charged to lead, feed, and guard their local churches, as well as the godly laymen who are called to support and serve alongside them in the work of the ministry.

Without question, the mind of the pastor must be multi-disciplined. He must be versed in New Testament, Old Testament, linguistics, biblical languages, systematic theology, historical theology, and biblical theology, to name several. His calling requires him to weave these disciplines together each week in his study. The Master’s Seminary exists to serve and benefit the church, and to do that well, we must serve in ways that equip the pastor to better exposit the Word and to guard the truth entrusted to him. This will be the goal of every issue of *TMSJ*. This issue addresses a variety of theological disciplines with articles we believe will serve our readers in a number of important ways.

In the field of biblical theology, Richard C. Barcellos (Ph.D.) writes on the scholar Geerhardus Vos—the Reformed theologian who entered the field of biblical theology after it had been dominated by “the literal/critical biblical-theological enterprise” for a century. Despite cultural trends, Vos assumed the chair of biblical theology at Princeton. Through a hermeneutic grounded not only in how Scripture is formed, but in what it says and how it says it, Vos would one day be considered “an all-time master in the field of Biblical Theology.” We have much to learn not only from his research, but from his desire to let the Word speak where the world has dominated.

In the field of linguistics, Nathan LeMaster (Ph.D. candidate) seeks to establish a methodology for identifying Janus Parallelism, the masterful Hebrew literary device used to intentionally exploit a single word with two meanings. While much has been written on this subject, little work has been done to demonstrate a consistent method for identifying this ancient linguistic tool. The purpose is to better understand the mind of the Hebrew writers of the Old Testament, so as to better understand the authorial intention of Scripture.

In the field of theology, Peter Sammons (Ph.D.), Alan Quiñones (Ph.D. candidate), and Kevin Zuber (Ph.D.) write on a variety of issues. Sammons enters the current debate over the foundational doctrine of classical theism: Divine timelessness. Quiñones explores the claim, first articulated by Aristotle, that God is Actus Purus—eternally all that He can be. And Zuber seeks to understand the perspective of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the critical issue of unity and ecumenism within the church.

In the field of biblical languages, Peter J. Goeman (Ph.D.) analyzes Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to address one of the most debated issues in Old Testament scholarship—the phrase “as one lies with a female.” Pushed by cultural shifts, biblical scholarship rages over this issue, and Goeman intervenes with biblical precision and fidelity.

In the field of hermeneutics, Gregg L. Frazer (Ph.D.) explores the hermeneutics of the American Revolution. He examines how the political climate of the time resulted in various interpretations of Scripture by analyzing the sermons of two preachers: a loyalist and a patriot.

In the field of New Testament historiography, F. David Farnell (Ph.D.) explores postmodern influence on the interpretation of the Gospels, reminding readers of the power and simplicity of the natural meaning of Scripture.

I am humbled by the institutional legacy that has been entrusted to me. At The Master’s Seminary, I am surrounded by some of the most thoughtful men in evangelicalism. My prayer is that the church would grow to love the Lord with all its mind, and that this journal would be a step, no matter how small, in that direction.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Sam Horn
President, The Master’s University and Seminary
Fall 2020

AN ANALYSIS OF GEERHARDUS VOS’ NATURE AND METHOD OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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* * * * *

When Geerhardus Vos stood to give his inaugural address for the “new chair” of biblical theology at the College of New Jersey in 1894 (now Princeton University), the field of study had been dominated by “the liberal/critical biblical-theological enterprise” for over one-hundred years. He was a Reformed-orthodox theologian entering a field of “perverse influences.” This paper traces the thought of Vos historically, beginning with his inaugural address (1894) and concluding with his last published work (1948). The focus of this paper is the nature and method of biblical theology as presented by Vos. This historical study discovers a harmony of thought—a hermeneutic grounded not only in how Scripture is formed, but in what it says and how it says it. He views revelation as pre-redemptive, redemptive, historical, organic, progressive, Christocentric, epochal-covenantal, and multiform. Vos would one day be considered “an all-time master in the field of Biblical Theology.” Whether or not readers agree with his methodology and/or doctrinal formulations, his work merits our attention, respect, and appreciation.

* * * * *

J. I. Packer identified Geerhardus Vos as “an all-time master in the field of Biblical Theology.”¹ The significance of Vos’ writings should be recognized, whether or not one agrees with his methodology and/or doctrinal formulations. Some argue that his method was a novel paradigm shift in the history and development of Reformed theological interpretation. Others argue (and, in my opinion, rightly so) that though he uses new terms and phrases, the concepts embodied in those terms and phrases can be traced back to (at least) the post-Reformation era of the seventeenth

¹ John Owen, *Biblical Theology or The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth in Six Books* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), xi.

century.² In this article, readers will be introduced to a sliver of Vos' writings, concentrating on the nature and method of biblical theology. Our approach is historical, analyzing the thought of Vos, while not seeking to ground his thinking in Scripture. Readers interested in his biblical justification for his method are encouraged to read his writings.

We will examine one of Geerhardus Vos' earliest lectures on biblical theology (1894), a magazine article (1902), and his last published book (while living) (1948). Material will be gathered from these sources to provide a working knowledge of Vos' understanding of biblical theology. *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* contains his 1894 lecture entitled, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline."³ His 1902 magazine article, "The Nature and Aims of Biblical Theology," was reprinted in *Kerux* in 1999.⁴ And finally, Vos' famous *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*⁵ contains a thorough explanation of what Vos intended by the phrase "biblical theology" in 1948, a year before his death. These samples will reveal the development of Vos' thought on this matter from his early years at Princeton to his final days. We will examine each in historical order and then draw some brief, concluding observations.

"The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline"

This lecture was delivered on May 8, 1894 as Vos' inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.⁶ He was 32 years of age and beginning his teaching career at Princeton. Vos spoke as a representative of Reformed-orthodox theology on an issue that had been dominated by "the liberal/critical biblical-theological enterprise"⁷ for over one-hundred years.

Introduction

In the introductory section of this lecture, Vos laid out his reasons for addressing this subject. The primary reason was because biblical theology was "a new chair"⁸ at Princeton, with Vos as its first occupant. He believed it to be his responsibility to present this material. Vos said, "I consider it my duty to introduce to you this branch

² See Richard C. Barcellos, *The Family Tree of Reformed Biblical Theology: Geerhardus Vos and John Owen—Their Methods of and Contributions to the Articulation of Redemptive History* (Owensboro, KY: RBAP, 2010), from which this article is taken.

³ Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 3–24, referenced as *RHBI*.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, "The Nature and Aims of Biblical Theology," *Kerux* 14, no. 1 (May 1999): 3–8. This article is reprinted from *The Union Seminary Magazine* 13, no. 3 (February–March 1902): 194–99. It will be referenced as "Nature and Aims."

⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), referenced as *BTV*.

⁶ Vos, *RHBI*, 3.

⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., "What is Biblical Theology? Reflections on the Inaugural Address of Geerhardus Vos," *Kerux*, 2, no. 1 (May 1987): 34.

⁸ Vos, *RHBI*, 3.

of theological science, and to describe, in general terms at least, its nature and the manner in which I hope to teach it.”⁹ But there was a second reason. He continued:

This is all the more necessary because of the wide divergence of opinion in various quarters concerning the standing of the newest accession to the circle of sacred studies. Some have lauded her to the skies as the ideal of scientific theology, in such extravagant terms as to reflect seriously upon the character of her sisters of greater age and longer standing. Others look upon the new-comer with suspicion, or even openly dispute her right to a place in the theological family. We certainly owe it to her and to ourselves to form a well-grounded and intelligent judgment on the question. I hope that what I shall say will in some degree shed light on the points at issue, and enable you to judge impartially and in accordance with the facts of the case.¹⁰

Vos set out, then, to introduce to his Princeton colleagues his method of biblical theology in the acknowledged context of its abuse at the hand of the liberal/critical enterprise and wide-spread suspicion concerning its place as a legitimate theological discipline.

Before Vos defined what he meant by biblical theology, he offered a definition “of what Theology is in general.”¹¹ He defined theology as “knowledge concerning God.”¹² He then argued that theology was a science unto itself. It was unique and to be distinguished from all other sciences. This is so, said Vos, not only because of the object of theology—God—but also because of its “altogether unique relation to this object, for which no strict analogy can be found elsewhere.”¹³ He said:

In all the other sciences man is the one who of himself takes the first step in approaching the objective world, in subjecting it to his scrutiny, in compelling it to submit to his experiments—in a word, man is the one who proceeds actively to make nature reveal her facts and her laws. In Theology this relation between the subject and object is reversed. Here it is God who takes the first step to approach man for the purpose of disclosing His nature, nay, who creates man in order that He may have a finite mind able to receive the knowledge of His infinite perfections. In Theology the object, far from being passive, by the act of creation first posits the subject over against itself, and then as the living God proceeds to impart to this subject that to which of itself it would have no access. For “the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.” Strictly speaking, therefore, we should say that not God in and of Himself, but God in so far as He has revealed Himself, is the object of theology.¹⁴

⁹ Vos, *RHBI*, 3–4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Vos follows a similar pattern over 40 years later in his *Biblical Theology*, as will be seen below.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

Vos grounded theology in revelation. God is the revealer. Man is the passive recipient of this revelation. God is the object of theology's quest, but only in so far as He has revealed Himself: "Theology presupposes an active self-disclosure of God."¹⁵

Vos then discussed how man's sinful condition and God's will to be known brings about "that new self-disclosure of God which we call supernatural revelation."¹⁶ Though man in sin retains some knowledge of God, in order to possess "all pure and adequate information in divine things," "the objective self-manifestation of God as the Redeemer" is necessary and brings into being "a new order of things."¹⁷ Redemptive revelation comes as the objective, self-disclosure of God as Redeemer and is subsequently deposited in the Holy Scriptures so that "the human mind is enabled to obtain that new knowledge"¹⁸ by the new birth and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Assuming other sub-branches of exegetical theology (the origin of Scripture, its canonization, the Hebrew and Greek languages of the Old and New Testaments, and the exegesis of its content) brings Vos to his definition of biblical theology.

Definition of Biblical Theology

The first evidence of a definition of biblical theology occurred relatively early in the lecture:

In general, then, *Biblical Theology is that part of Exegetical Theology which deals with the revelation of God.* It makes use of all the results that have been obtained by all the preceding studies in this department. Still, we must endeavor to determine more precisely in what sense this general definition is to be understood. For it might be said of Systematic Theology, nay of the whole of Theology, with equal truth, that it deals with supernatural revelation. *The specific character of Biblical Theology lies in this, that it discusses both the form and contents of revelation from the point of view of the revealing activity of God Himself.* In other words, *it deals with revelation in the active sense, as an act of God, and tries to understand and trace and describe this act, so far as this is possible to man and does not elude our finite observation. In Biblical Theology both the form and contents of revelation are considered as parts and products of a divine work.*¹⁹

This seminal definition has several features. First, biblical theology is a branch of exegetical theology. It is not an island, nor is it the end of all theological formulation. Second, biblical theology deals with the revelation of God. It is not a history of religion. It is not subjective. It deals with God's objective revelation of himself in the

¹⁵ Dennison, "What Is Biblical Theology?," 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7. Emphases added.

Holy Scriptures alone. Third, biblical theology builds on the results of the other preceding aspects of exegetical theology. It is the culmination of exegetical theology, though, as stated above, not the end of all theology. Fourth, and most instructively for our purposes, biblical theology deals with both the *form* (i.e., how Scripture is put together) and *content* (i.e., what Scripture asserts) of the Word of God.

Prior to transitioning into a discussion of the history of biblical theology and its current state, Vos added this definition: "Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than *the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity*."²⁰ How he came to this definition can be seen in the characteristic features of supernatural revelation discussed by Vos.

Vos commented upon his initial definition as he added "feature[s] characteristic of supernatural revelation."²¹ As Vos said, this approach is based on "what the study of Biblical Theology itself has taught us."²² The characteristic features of supernatural revelation, as we shall see, form the regulating principles for Vos' methodology. These features will become evident, especially in Vos' exposition of the history of special revelation in his classic work *Biblical Theology*, which will be analyzed shortly. Vos saw these features of supernatural revelation as biblically derived principles for the proper exhibition of the historical unfolding of redemption in both the Old and New Testaments. Commenting on this, he said:

Here, as in other cases, the organism of a science can be conceived and described only by anticipating its results. The following statements [i.e., features characteristic of supernatural revelation], accordingly, are not to be considered in the light of an *a priori* construction, but simply formulate what the study of Biblical Theology itself has taught us.²³

The features delineated below become programmatic for Vos and his biblical-theological methodology.

Vos' subsequent outline is sometimes difficult to follow. After the introductory comments discussed above, Vos presented "the features of God's revealing work."²⁴ He did so under the following headings with some overlap: its (1) historical progress, (2) organic development, (3) covenantal-expansiveness, (4) Christ-centeredness, and (5) multiformity of teaching. Some of these features seem to grow out of the previous ones. Assuming this developmental structure, Vos' lecture emulated one of the characteristics of its subject matter: organic development. Each feature prepared for that which followed, and each subsequent feature further developed its antecedents.

The first feature he offered is the *historical progress* of supernatural revelation.²⁵ Vos says, "The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages, proceeding in a sequence of revealing words and acts, appearing in a long perspective of time. The

²⁰ Dennison, "What Is Biblical Theology?," 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* Cf. *ibid.*, 37–38, for a brief discussion of this.

truth comes in the form of growing truth, not truth at rest.”²⁶ He states two reasons for the historical progress of revelation: its (1) nature and (2) practical intent.

Concerning the former, Vos meant that revelation is connected to God’s wider work of redeeming the entire universe. He said, “It constitutes a part of that great process of the new creation.”²⁷ He then concluded:

As soon as we realize that revelation is at almost every point interwoven with and conditioned by the redeeming activity of God in its wider sense, and together with the latter connected with the natural development of the present world, its historic character becomes perfectly intelligible and ceases to cause surprise.²⁸

Vos then distinguished between what he referred to as the “two stages” of God’s redeeming process: the objective, redemptive acts of God in history (i.e., *historia salutis*²⁹) and the subjective application of redemption to individual sinners (i.e., *ordo salutis*³⁰).

Concerning the practical intent of revelation, he argued that God intended the knowledge of redemptive revelation “to enter the actual life of man, to be worked out by him in all its practical bearings.”³¹

Adding nuance to his definition of biblical theology, Vos said “that it is that part of Exegetical Theology which deals with the revelation of God in its historic continuity.”³² This provides a second characteristic feature of revelation—its *organic development*. Describing what he meant, Vos said:

When, nevertheless, Biblical Theology also undertakes to show how the truth has been gradually set forth in greater fullness and clearness, these two facts can be reconciled in no other way than by assuming that the advance in revelation resembles the organic process, through which out of the perfect germ the perfect plant and flower and fruit are successively produced.³³

He described the material increase of revelation as “an internal expansion, an organic unfolding from within.”³⁴ This organic concept displays itself as the elements of truth grow out of each other, with each preceding epoch preparing the way for the next. Each epoch “was prepared for by what preceded, and being in turn preparatory

²⁶ Vos, *RHBI*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Latin for the history of salvation (i.e., salvation history/redemptive history/redemption accomplished). This is objective and outside of man’s personal experience.

³⁰ Latin for the order of the application of salvation (i.e., redemption applied). This is subjective and becomes the experience of all the elect in space and time.

³¹ Vos, *RHBI*, 10.

³² *Ibid.* See Dennison, “What Is Biblical Theology?,” 37–38, for a brief discussion of this.

³³ Vos, *RHBI*, 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

for what follows.”³⁵ “So dispensation grows out of dispensation, and the newest is but the fully expanded flower of the oldest.”³⁶ Lawrence Semel commented:

Redemptive history moves through stages. Each one is not merely a return to a former state of affairs, but rather, incorporating what has preceded, each stage moves on to a higher stage, one never seen or realized before, until the final stage is attained.³⁷

This led Vos to state that since the basic needs of man are fundamentally the same,

it follows that the heart of divine truth, that by which men live, must have been present from the outset, and that each subsequent increase consisted in the unfolding of what was germinally contained in the beginning of revelation. The Gospel of Paradise is such a germ in which the Gospel of Paul is potentially present; and the Gospel of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, are all expansions of this original message of salvation, each pointing forward to the next stage of growth, and bringing the Gospel idea one step nearer to its full realization.³⁸

Though Vos did not here identify “the Gospel of Paradise” with Genesis 3:15, it is no stretch of the imagination to conclude that this was his intention.³⁹

A third characteristic feature of revelation emerged:

In this Gospel of Paradise we already discern the essential features of a covenant-relation, though the formal notion of covenant does not attach to it. And in the covenant-promises given to Abraham these very features reappear, assume greater distinctiveness, and are seen to grow together, to crystallize, as it were, into a formal covenant. From this time onward the expansive character of the covenant-idea shows itself.⁴⁰

Redemptive revelation, therefore, is *covenantally-expansive*, according to Vos.

³⁵ Vos, *RHBI*, 11. Cf., Thomas Dehany Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), 44, for strikingly similar words. Since this is the only book referenced in Vos' lecture to this point, we may safely assume that Vos has relied, at least in part, on Bernard for some of his thoughts. Vos referenced another book late in his discussion but for a different purpose than his reference to Bernard. Further investigation needs to be conducted in order to determine just how dependent Vos was on Bernard. For a detailed analysis of Bernard's book see Richard C. Barcellos, “*The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, by T. D. Bernard—A Review Article (Part I),” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 4, no. 1: 7–26; and “*The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, by T. D. Bernard—A Review Article (Part II),” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 4, no. 2: 33–60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁷ Lawrence Semel, “Geerhardus Vos and Eschatology,” *Kerux*, 10, no. 2 (Sept. 1995): 34.

³⁸ Vos, *RHBI*, 11.

³⁹ Cf. Vos, *BTV*, 41–44, esp. 43–44, for an explicit reference to Genesis 3:15 in a similar context of discussion.

⁴⁰ Vos, *RHBI*, 11.

Three years prior to the delivery of this lecture, Vos had given his now famous lecture “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology.”⁴¹ In it he acknowledged not only the centrality of the covenant concept in historic Reformed theology, but he agreed with and expounded upon it. Much of that lecture (pp. 242–67) aimed to prove that and how the doctrine of the covenant answers all the exigencies involved with man’s relationship to God. For instance, Vos said:

God does not exist because of man, but man because of God. This is what is written at the entrance of the temple of Reformed theology. When this principle is applied to man and his relationship to God, it immediately divides into three parts: 1. All of man’s work has to rest on an antecedent work of God; 2. In all of his works man has to show forth God’s image and be a means for the revelation of God’s virtues; 3. The latter should not occur unconsciously or passively, but the revelation of God’s virtues must proceed by way of understanding and will and by way of the conscious life, and actively come to external expression. We hope to show how this threefold demand has been reckoned with precisely in the doctrine of the covenant. Let us now in succession take a look at (1) the covenant of works, (2) the covenant of redemption, and (3) the covenant of grace.⁴²

Beginning his discussion of the covenant of grace, Vos said:

If the work of salvation has a covenantal form at its roots, then the rest of its unfolding is bound to correspond to it and proceed in a covenantal way. The covenant of redemption does not stand by itself, but is the basis of the economy of salvation⁴³

We will see in subsequent discussions the importance of the concept of covenant to Vos’ theology.⁴⁴ But we must not miss the fact that it was present in his seminal lecture on biblical theology. What appears to be a passing comment on the concept of covenant in this seminal lecture is pregnant with implications for Vos’ biblical-theological methodology.

Though *Christ-centeredness* does not appear in Vos’ lecture as a separate heading, the language he used warrants its inclusion in a list of the features of supernatural revelation. While discussing the organic character of revelation, Vos said:

Hence from the beginning all redeeming acts of God aim at the creation and introduction of this new organic principle, which is none other than Christ. All Old Testament redemption is but the saving activity of God working toward the realization of this goal, the great supernatural prelude to the

⁴¹ Vos, *RHBI*, 234–67. This was delivered in 1891 in Grand Rapids as the rectoral address at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁴ This refers to subsequent discussions in the dissertation from which this article is extracted.

Incarnation and the Atonement. And Christ having appeared as the head of the new humanity and having accomplished His atoning work, the further renewal of the kosmos is effected through an organic extension of His power in ever widening circles.⁴⁵

He then discussed how Messianic revelation accelerates as redemptive history unfolds. The human nature of Christ, for instance, “is successively designated as the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Judah, the seed of David.”⁴⁶ He called this “the various stages in the gradual concentration of Messianic prophecy.”⁴⁷ He saw all of the various lines of revelation finding their terminus in Christ as He is revealed in the New Testament. He said most eloquently:

All the separate lines along which through the ages revelation was carried, have converged and met at a single point. The seed of the woman and the Angel of Jehovah are become one in the Incarnate Word. And as Christ is glorified once for all, so from the crowning glory and perfection of His revelation in the New Testament nothing can be taken away; nor can anything be added thereunto.⁴⁸

Dennison agreed with the Christocentric thrust of Vos' methodology:

Word and deed coalesce in the display of the new order advanced by God for sinful man. The heart of this new order is Christ. From beginning to end, from creation to new creation, the principle by which God makes all things new is the person and work of his Son. Christ Jesus is the central meaning of all revelation—word and deed. He is the one of whom the law and the prophets bear witness. The Christological meaning and structure of revelation is the goal toward which every interpreter of the Word of God must direct his efforts. Christ Jesus in his fullness—by way of anticipation (Old Testament), by way of accomplishment (New Testament), by way of consummation (parousia). Vos heartily endorsed the dictum of Augustine:

The New Testament is in the Old concealed;
The Old Testament is by the New revealed.⁴⁹

Commenting on the claim that “Vos's method guarantees that our preaching will be theocentric and Christocentric,”⁵⁰ Dennison said:

our preaching must be Christocentric for we live on the nether side of the fall, east of Eden. Christ Jesus is our Daysman—our sole redeemer. Our only way to the Father is by him. All Scripture bears witness to him (cpr.

⁴⁵ Vos, *RHBI*, 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁹ Dennison, “What Is Biblical Theology?,” 38.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

Lk. 24:44). Ever since Genesis 3:15, there has been a Christological dimension to the Word of God because ever since Genesis 3:15 God has graciously inaugurated a new order for fallen man—the order of redemption through his Son.⁵¹

A fifth characteristic feature of revelation is its *multiformity of teaching*. In noting this element, Vos was referring to the various genres and writers employed by God to communicate to man. He said:

we witness a striking multiformity of teaching employed ... all along the historic stem of revelation, branches are seen to shoot forth, frequently more than one at a time, each of which helps to realize the complete idea of the truth for its own part and after its own peculiar manner. The legal, the prophetic, the poetic elements in the Old Testament are clearly-distinct types of revelation, and in the New Testament we have something corresponding to these in the Gospels, the Epistles, the Apocalypse. Further, within the limits of these great divisions there are numerous minor variations, closely associated with the peculiarities of individual character. Isaiah and Jeremiah are distinct, and so are John and Paul. And this differentiation rather increases than decreases with the progress of sacred history. It is greater in the New Testament than in the Old. The laying of the historic basis for Israel's covenant-life has been recorded by one author, Moses; the historic basis of the New Testament dispensation we know from the fourfold version of the Gospels. The remainder of the New Testament writings are in the form of letters, in which naturally the personal element predominates. The more fully the light shone upon the realization of the whole counsel of God and discloses its wide extent, the more necessary it became to expound it in all its bearings, to view it at different angles, thus to bring out what Paul calls the *much-variegated*, the manifold, wisdom of God.⁵²

This element of Scripture underscores its humanness. However, even though there is a human element to Scripture seen in its variety of genres and authors, it was God who shaped the individuals for His purpose of revealing Himself as Redeemer.

“The Nature and Aims of Biblical Theology”

Introduction

In the opening paragraph of this 1902 magazine article, Vos acknowledged the relative novelty of biblical theology. He mentioned two extremes:

⁵¹ Dennison, “What Is Biblical Theology?,” 37. Cf., James T. Dennison, Jr., “Vos on the Sabbath: A Close Reading,” *Kerux* 16, no. 1 (May 2001): 66, where Dennison says, “We are reminded once more of the central agenda in Vos’s writings—Jesus Christ.”

⁵² Vos, *RHBI*, 13–14. Cf., Dennison, “What Is Biblical Theology?,” 39.

Many look upon the new-comer with suspicion, while others run into the opposite extreme of paying her such exclusive honor and attention as to treat her older sisters with unmerited coldness and neglect.⁵³

Vos then sought to justify the entrance of biblical theology into the theological arena. His claim was that “the great subject of supernatural revelation in its historic aspect”⁵⁴ has received “scant notice.”⁵⁵ Vos argued that anyone who believes in supernatural revelation will see the need for “what Biblical theology sets out to do.”⁵⁶ What does biblical theology set out to do? According to Vos, biblical theology sets out “to ascertain its [i.e., the supernatural self-disclosure of God] laws, to observe its methods, to trace the mutual adjustment of its various stages, to watch the ripening of its purposes—in a word, to investigate its philosophy, so far as this is possible to the human mind.”⁵⁷ Thus, the task of biblical theology is to identify the laws, methods, adjustments, purposes, and philosophy of God’s self-disclosure as presented in Holy Scripture.

Systematic theology, according to Vos, views God’s “revelation as a finished product, to be logically apprehended and systematized.”⁵⁸ While biblical theology, on the other hand, handles revelation “as a process of divine activity in history.”⁵⁹

Sacred history deals with the redemptive realities created by the supernatural activity of God. Biblical theology deals with the redemptive knowledge communicated in order to interpret these realities.⁶⁰

What biblical theology seeks to uncover is the redemptive knowledge communicated in sacred history that interprets the redemptive acts and words of God. Sacred history records “the redemptive realities created by the supernatural activity of God.”⁶¹ Biblical theology seeks to interpret those redemptive realities with revealed redemptive knowledge.

The General Features of God’s Revealing Work

Vos articulated “the general features of God’s revealing work”⁶² in an attempt “to obtain a more definite conception of Biblical theology.”⁶³ The first feature is the

⁵³ Vos, “Nature and Aims,” 3. This 1902 statement by Vos reveals his early and keen awareness of excess in two directions—suspicion and neglect of biblical theology due to its relative novelty and “excessive honor and attention” to the point of “coldness and neglect” of other theological disciplines. This balanced perspective was maintained by Vos throughout his career and still serves as a warning. The various disciplines of the theological encyclopedia must never be viewed in competition with each other. Each plays its unique part in the grand symphony of theology.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

historic progress of God's revealing work. "The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages."⁶⁴ Though it is conceivable that God could have communicated at once all that He desired, He did not. This may be due in part to man's finitude, but Vos argued that it is due more to the fact that "revelation is not an isolated act of God."⁶⁵ Revelation exists because redemption exists. Redemption involves "the formation of the new world ... and this new world does not come into being suddenly and all at once, but is realized in a long historical process."⁶⁶ Revelation interprets the redemptive acts of God, which span many centuries culminating in the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Christ. When objective, redemptive activity is complete, then and only then is supernatural revelation complete. Revelation does not follow the subjective application of redemption. "Revelation is designed to prepare, to accompany, and to interpret the great objective acts of God, such as the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection."⁶⁷ When God's objective-redemptive acts in history ceased, then revelation ceased.

Vos argued as well that God's self-revelation as historical progress has a practical aspect. Revelation is interwoven "with the historic life of the chosen race ... to secure for it a practical form in all its parts."⁶⁸ Vos understood this principle of practicality to find "its clearest expression in the idea of covenant as the form of God's self-revelation to Israel. The covenant is an all-comprehensive communion of life, in which every self-disclosure is made subservient to a practical end."⁶⁹

While further discussing historic progress, Vos gave a second feature of God's revealing work: *organic development*. He acknowledged material increase in knowledge throughout redemptive history, but was careful to qualify. He said:

This increase nowhere shows the features of external accretion, but appears throughout as an organic unfolding from within. The elements of truth are seen to grow out of each other. The gospel of paradise is a germ in which the gospel of Paul is potentially present. Dispensation grows out of dispensation, and the newest is but the fully expanded flower of the oldest.⁷⁰

As a result of this organic character, Vos understood a third feature of God's revealing work: *ever-increasing multiformity*. He saw both the various genres within Scripture and their individual authors as elements of this multiformity.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Vos, "Nature and Aims," 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Conclusion

At this point in the article, Vos paused and gave this definition of biblical theology: "Biblical theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity."⁷²

One of the reasons for the suspicion cast upon biblical theology in Vos' day was the application of the evolutionary theory to the Bible. This bore its ugly fruit in the history of religious school primarily in Germany. Vos briefly, and quite forcefully, dealt with this issue. He acknowledged that evolutionary philosophy "has affected the treatment of Biblical theology more than that of any other discipline."⁷³ This is due to the principle of historic progress, which both evolution and biblical theology (according to Vos' understanding of the task) share. However, Vos clarified that the analogy between the two is only formal. Vos explained:

The development sketched in the Bible is totally different from the naturalistic evolution, by the help of which present-day philosophy seeks to explain the history of the universe. Nevertheless, the formal similarity has not unnaturally aroused suspicion against Biblical theology as such, all the more so since, as a matter of fact, many modern theologians have applied this naturalistic principle to the explanation of the growth of Biblical truth. ... Our modern Biblical theologians professedly deal, not with the progress of supernatural revelation, in which they do no longer believe, but with the development of subjective religion in Biblical times, and devote their labors to the discovery and reproduction of a number of diminutive doctrinal systems, often contradictory among themselves, which they profess to find in the Bible. ... All this, however, while deeply deplorable, and imposing upon every student of Biblical theology as increased responsibility, lest by his own attitude he should give countenance to this fatal tendency, has nothing to do with the nature of the science itself. It represents a perversion and corruption of it, which should not be allowed to prejudice us against its cultivation in a proper Biblical spirit. If the objective character of revelation, its infallibility, the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures as containing its record be firmly upheld, there is no danger that anti-Christian principles will creep in to exercise their destructive influence upon the minds of our students.⁷⁴

Vos was well acquainted with the abuse that biblical theology was enduring, and he was quick to confront it. He was clear and strong in his opposition to the history of religions school and its evolutionary presuppositions. He readily affirmed the objective character of revelation and the infallibility and plenary inspiration of Scripture as presuppositional safeguards for biblical theology.

⁷² Vos, "Nature and Aims," 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

Vos continued the article with the practical results of the cultivation of biblical theology. *First*, it reveals to its students “the organic structure of revealed truth.”⁷⁵ This has the benefit of displaying the “relative importance of the single aspects and elements of truth.”⁷⁶ This keeps students of Scripture from “that one-sidedness in the appreciation of truth, which is the source of all heresy.”⁷⁷ Biblical theology helps students understand the doctrines of the Bible in their proper proportion and relation to the vital, organic unfolding of the whole. *Second*, by placing the old truths in their historical settings, biblical theology “imparts new life and freshness”⁷⁸ to them. This will guard against “a too abstract presentation”⁷⁹ of truth. *Third*, biblical theology reiterates the necessity of correct knowledge for spiritual growth. *Fourth*, “Biblical theology meets the charge that the fundamental doctrines of our faith rest on an arbitrary exposition of isolated proof-texts.”⁸⁰ He argued that the system whose “doctrines grow organically on the stem of revelation, and are interwoven with its whole structure” will stand. It is of interest to note that Vos’ doctrinal/confessional system was that of the Westminster Standards. *Fifth*, “the highest practical aim of Biblical theology is that it grants us a new vision of the glory of God.”⁸¹ He closed this section with these soul-stirring words:

As eternal, he lives above the sphere of history. He is the Being, and not the becoming one. But, since for our salvation he has condescended to work and speak in the form of time, and thus to make his work and his speech partake of the peculiar glory that belongs to all organic growth, we must also seek to know him as the One that is, that was, and that is to come, in order that our theology may adequately perform its function of glorifying God in every mode of his self-revelation to us.⁸²

Vos closed with a brief excursus on the use of the phrase biblical theology. He acknowledged that this phrase is liable to objection as it seemingly posits itself against the other theological disciplines by the use of the adjective “biblical.” He suggested that employing the name *History of Special Revelation* could obviate any supposed difficulties.

“The Nature and Method of Biblical Theology”

Biblical Theology was published in 1948. In the preface, he credits his son, Johannes G. Vos, for editing the material for publication.⁸³ The material had “previously been issued at various theological institutions in mimeographed form.”⁸⁴

⁷⁵ Vos, “Nature and Aims,” 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Vos, *BTV*, vi.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* For readers who have not read Vos, I recommend the first 40 pages of his *BT*, which will give you an overview of his method.

Working Definition of Biblical Theology and Its Implications

In the Preface and Introduction, Vos provides readers with a working definition of biblical theology. In the Preface, he writes:

Biblical Theology deals with the material [of the Bible] from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon.⁸⁵

There are three aspects to this definition of biblical theology worth noting. *First*, biblical theology deals with the Bible from the historical standpoint. It understands the Bible as history and deals with it according to its own redemptive-historical timeline. *Second*, biblical theology seeks to exhibit the organic growth and development of the truths of special revelation. This, of course, assumes that the Bible is one book, fully interrelated in its various revelational epochs. *Third*, biblical theology begins in the Garden of Eden and ends with the closed canon of the New Testament. Biblical theology, then, seeks to disclose the progressive, organic revelation contained in the Old and New Testaments.

The Use of the Phrase Biblical Theology

Vos also discusses the use of the phrase biblical theology. He says:

The term 'Biblical Theology' is really unsatisfactory because of its liability to misconstruction. All truly Christian Theology must be Biblical Theology—for apart from General Revelation the Scriptures constitute the sole material with which the science of Theology can deal. A more suitable name would be 'History of Special Revelation', which precisely describes the subject matter of this discipline. Names, however, become fixed by long usage, and the term 'Biblical Theology', in spite of its ambiguity, can hardly be abandoned now.⁸⁶

What is biblical theology according to Vos? In brief, it is the 'History of Special Revelation.' It is the unfolding drama of God's self-disclosure to man from Genesis to Revelation. Though it begins with pre-redemptive special revelation in Eden, it ends with the redemptive special revelation of the closing words of the New Testament.

⁸⁵ Vos, *BTV*, vi.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

Theology and the Necessity of Revelation

In the Introduction, Vos begins with a definition of theology. He defines theology as “the science concerning God.”⁸⁷ Vos then argues for the necessity of revelation. He makes a distinction between impersonal objects and personal, spiritual beings. Vos says, “Only in so far as such a being chooses to open up itself can we come to know it. ... Such a life we can know only through revelation.”⁸⁸ He asserts, therefore, that God must reveal himself if we are to know him. “The inward hidden content of God’s mind can become the possession of man only through a voluntary disclosure on God’s part. God must come to us before we can go to Him.”⁸⁹ He also argues that God must create in order for Him to be known outside of Himself.

In all scientific study we exist alongside of the objects which we investigate. But in Theology the relation is reversed. Originally God alone existed. He was known to Himself alone, and had first to call into being a creature before any extraneous knowledge with regard to Him became possible. Creation therefore was the first step in the production of extra-divine knowledge.⁹⁰

Finally, he argues from the fall into sin to the necessity of special revelation:

Still a further reason for the necessity of revelation preceding all satisfactory acquaintance with God is drawn from the abnormal state in which man exists through sin. Sin has deranged the original relation between God and man. It has produced a separation where previously perfect communion prevailed. From the nature of the case every step towards rectifying this abnormality must spring from God’s sovereign initiative. This particular aspect, therefore, of the indispensableness of revelation stands or falls with the recognition of the fact of sin.⁹¹

Vos assumes the historicity of Adam and the fall into sin. The fall destroys man’s ability to commune with God. He sees the presence of sin in man and its noetic effects as a further reason for the need of revelation.

Main Features of the Divine Activity of Revelation

After a brief discussion of the division of theology, Vos defines biblical theology: “Biblical Theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God in the Bible.”⁹² What follows is a four-page explanation, but not of the definition itself. Vos articulates the main features of the divine activity of revelation. We will list Vos’ headings and give brief comment under each. It is of interest to note that these features are in basic agreement with “the

⁸⁷ Vos, *BTV*, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

features of God's revealing work"⁹³ previously discussed in his Princeton lecture of 1894.

The first feature is *the historic progressiveness of the revelation-process*. Vos observes that revelation "unfolded itself in a long series of successive acts."⁹⁴ Though revelation could have been completed "in one exhaustive act,"⁹⁵ it was not. Vos explains:

Revelation does not stand alone by itself, but is (so far as Special Revelation is concerned) inseparably attached to another activity of God, which we call *Redemption*. Now redemption could not be otherwise than historically successive, because it addresses itself to the generations of mankind coming into existence in the course of history. Revelation is the interpretation of redemption: it must, therefore, unfold itself in installments as redemption does. And yet it is also obvious that the two processes are not entirely co-extensive, for revelation comes to a close at a point where redemption still continues.⁹⁶

In the final sentence, Vos speaks of the necessary distinction between redemption *accomplished*, or the objective acts of God done outside of the human person, and redemption *applied*, or the subjective acts of God which enter into the human subject. The former acts are revealed in the Bible alone; the latter enter the human subject by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The former include "the incarnation, the atonement, [and] the resurrection of Christ."⁹⁷ The latter include "regeneration, justification, conversion, sanctification, [and] glorification."⁹⁸ The former take center stage in the *historia salutis*; the latter take center stage in the souls of men and are what constitute the elements of the *ordo salutis*. When objective redemption was accomplished, revelation soon came to a close. However, subjective redemption will continue until the last day and into the eternal state (i.e., glorification).

The second feature is *the embodiment of divine revelation in history*. Here Vos says that "revelation ... becomes incarnate in history."⁹⁹ He is speaking especially of the death and resurrection of Christ. He distinguishes between what he calls *act-revelation* and *word-revelation*. *Act-revelation* refers to "the great outstanding acts of redemption."¹⁰⁰ *Word-revelation* refers to the subsequent divine interpretation of *act-revelation*. Vos explains:

In such cases redemption and revelation coincide. Two points, however, should be remembered in this connection: first, that these two-sided acts did not take place primarily for the purpose of revelation; their revelatory

⁹³ Vos, *RHBI*, 7.

⁹⁴ Vos, *BTV*, 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

character is secondary; primarily they possess a purpose that transcends revelation, having a God-ward reference in their effect, and only in dependence on this a man-ward reference for instruction. In the second place, such act-revelations are never entirely left to speak for themselves; they are preceded and followed by word-revelation. The usual order is: first word, then the fact, then again the interpretive word. The Old Testament brings the predictive preparatory word, the Gospels record the redemptive-revelatory fact, the Epistles supply the subsequent final interpretation.¹⁰¹

The third feature is *the organic nature of the historic process of divine revelation*. Vos says that “the organic nature of the progression of revelation explains several things.”¹⁰² It explains how revelation, though diverse, can yet be perfect. It is an organic and interconnected growing organism. What may be but in seed-form at the beginning becomes mature as redemptive history unfolds and develops. Vos says, “The organic progress is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree.”¹⁰³

The organic nature of the historic process argues that, even in the earliest days of redemptive history, the knowledge necessary to salvation was present. Vos again says: “The feature in question explains further how the soteric sufficiency of the truth could belong to it in its first state of emergence: in the seed-form the minimum of indispensable knowledge was already present.”¹⁰⁴

The organic nature of the historic process “explains how revelation could be so closely determined in its onward movement by the onward movement of redemption.”¹⁰⁵ Since redemption is organically progressive, revelation is as well. And they proceed together, accordingly. Since redemption “does not proceed with uniform motion,”¹⁰⁶ neither does revelation. As redemption “is ‘epochal’ in its onward stride,”¹⁰⁷ so is revelation. Vos says, “We can observe that where great epoch-making redemptive acts accumulate, there the movement of revelation is correspondingly accelerated and its volume increased.”¹⁰⁸ This can be seen nowhere more clearly than the coming, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ are the apex of God’s redemptive acts. Corresponding to these events, the Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles, and the book of Revelation were all written within several decades of each other. As noted above, word-revelation closely follows act-revelation. Divine, revelatory interpretation follows Divine, revelatory action.

The organic nature of the historic process, finally, explains the “increasing multiformity”¹⁰⁹ of revelation. Because revelation is organic and unfolds over time in a range of historical contexts, it takes on the character of multiformity. Various

¹⁰¹ Vos, *BTV*, 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

literary genres are used in this process to fit various historical situations. Vos says, "There is more of this multiformity observable in the New Testament than in the Old, more in the period of the prophets than in the time of Moses."¹¹⁰ Various authors are used in this process as well. What keeps this revelation from reflecting the character of its organs, i.e., fallible and weak men? God! He is active in the world he made. He fashions men beforehand to be His instruments of revelation, and He preserves by His Spirit the integrity of their writings.

The fourth feature is *the practical adaptability of divine revelation*. Vos says it was given that it might be "practically interwoven with the inner experience of life."¹¹¹

Guiding Principles in Opposition to Critical/Rationalistic Biblical Theology

Vos also discusses what he calls "Guiding Principles." He offers these in opposition to what he calls the "perverse influences" of the critical methods of the "rationalistic brand of Biblical Theology" first advocated by J. P. Gabler in the eighteenth century.

The first guiding principle is "the recognition of the infallible character of revelation as essential to every legitimate theological use made of this term."¹¹² He bases the infallibility of revelation upon the fact that God is personal:

If God be personal and conscious, then the inference is inevitable that in every mode of self-disclosure He will make a faultless expression of His nature and purpose. He will communicate His thought to the world with the stamp of divinity on it. If this were otherwise, then the reason would have to be sought in His being in some way tied up in the limitations and relativities of the world, the medium of expression obstructing His intercourse with the world. Obviously the background of such a view is not Theism but pantheism.¹¹³

The second guiding principle is that "Biblical Theology must likewise recognize the objectivity of the groundwork of revelation."¹¹⁴ Here Vos is arguing that revelation (i.e., "real communication from God to man"¹¹⁵) comes from outside of man. Either it was spoken by God (i.e., "dictation") or the Holy Spirit worked inwardly "upon the depths of human sub-consciousness causing certain God-intended thoughts to well up therefrom."¹¹⁶ This is a unique work of the Spirit upon and within the human authors of Scripture, and not to be understood in an existential sense.

¹¹⁰ Vos, *BTV*, 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The third guiding principle is that “Biblical Theology is deeply concerned with the question of inspiration.”¹¹⁷ Vos is quick to poke at the history of religions school of biblical theology. He argues that if the object of study is none other than the beliefs and practices of men in the past without concern for the factuality of their beliefs and practices on a higher level than merely “a reliable record,” then “a Biblical theology thus conceived ought to classify itself with Historical Theology, not with Exegetical Theology.”¹¹⁸ Instead of this critical approach to biblical theology, Vos asserts:

Our conception of the discipline, on the other hand, considers its subject matter from the point of view of revelation from God. Hence the factor of inspiration needs to be reckoned with as one of the elements rendering the things studied ‘truth’ guaranteed to us as such by the authority of God.¹¹⁹

Vos adds that what he means by inspiration involves plenary inspiration. He forcefully denies partial inspiration: “The conception of partial inspiration is a modern figment having no support in what the Bible teaches about its own make-up.”¹²⁰ He argues that either inspiration is absolute, comprehensive, and plenary, or “nothing at all.”¹²¹ Inspiration is not to be confined to “verbal disclosure, but embraces facts.”¹²²

Methodological Approach

In the Introduction to *Biblical Theology*, Vos briefly discusses the method of biblical theology. What he means by method is how to “divide the course of revelation.”¹²³ He argues that it should be divided into time periods, because God used the principle of periodicity in the unfolding of revelation. He then adds:

From this it follows that the periods should not be determined at random, or according to subjective preference, but in strict agreement with the lines of cleavage drawn by revelation itself. The Bible is, as it were, conscious of its own organism; it feels, what we cannot always say of ourselves, its own anatomy. *The principle of successive Berith-makings (Covenant-makings), as marking the introduction of new periods, plays a large role in this, and should be carefully heeded.*¹²⁴

Vos says, “Our dogmatic constructions of truth based on the finished product of revelation, must not be imported into the minds of the original recipients of

¹¹⁷ Vos, *BTV*, 12

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* Emphases added. Cf. Semel, “Geerhardus Vos and Eschatology,” 28–30, for a brief discussion of the centrality of covenant in Vos, and Vos’ discussion of *diatheke* in Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 27–45.

revelation.”¹²⁵ He adds that we should seek to “enter into their outlook and get the perspective of the elements of the truth as presented to them.”¹²⁶

Vos argues against discussing each book separately due to the fact that “this leads to unnecessary repetition, because there is so much that all have in common.”¹²⁷ Instead, he advocates we “apply the collective treatment in the earlier stages of revelation, where the truth is not as yet much differentiated, and then to individualize in the later periods where greater diversity is reached.”¹²⁸

Conclusion

The three Vos sources surveyed in this article are in basic harmony. Vos viewed the task of biblical theology as describing the history of special revelation according to the laws of revelation. He understood revelation to be pre-redemptive, redemptive, historical, organic, progressive, Christocentric, epochal-covenantal, and multiform.

What is to be gleaned from this study? *First*, it is apparent that Vos’ hermeneutic was, in part, grounded in how Scripture is formed, as well as what Scripture says and how it says it. For Vos, the high-level observation which distinguishes between pre-redemptive, special revelation and redemptive, special revelation is foundational to a proper understanding of redemptive history. Prior to the fall into sin and, thus, without need of redemption, God revealed things to Adam beyond nature. Once the fall into sin occurs, special revelation introduces a new world of thought—God’s plan to redeem man and the cosmos. *Second*, because Scripture is organic (due ultimately to its Divine author), the redemptive thread of Scripture and the pre-redemptive thread (brief as it is) are not utterly antithetical to each other. Instead, the redemptive thread seeks to undo what Adam did and do what Adam failed to do. Paul’s Adam/Christ typology seems to vindicate such an approach (see Rom 5:12ff.). If this is the case (and I believe it to be), the reason we have a Bible in the first place is due to the Divine plan of redemption. Holy Scripture exists to reveal what God has done in order to redeem man and the cosmos. In God’s revelation of His plan of redemption, He both acts (e.g., curse, revelation of the Seed of the woman, calling of Abraham and Israel, the exodus, the theocracy, the era of the prophets) and records and interprets His own acts (i.e., Holy Scripture). God’s redemptive plan terminates, however, not in the language of promise but in the era and language of fulfillment (i.e., the sufferings and glory of our Lord and its recording and explanation in the New Testament). This is why Paul can say the following:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:4–6, NASB 1995)

¹²⁵ Vos, *BTV*, 16

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Vos closes this section with the practical uses of biblical theology.

A METHODOLOGY FOR JANUS PARALLELISM

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The Greek god of beginnings and endings had two faces, one looking to the future and the other to the past. This god was known by the name Janus. Thus, the masterful Hebrew literary device used to intentionally exploit a single word with two meanings—one meaning pointing to what has come before, and the other meaning to what has come after—was deemed Janus Parallelism. The conclusions one draws about Janus Parallelism impact a proper understanding of authorial intention and the semantic connections which existed in the mind of the Hebrew writer. The purpose of this article is to establish an initial methodology for identifying Janus Parallelism, as well as to expound the implications of Janus Parallelism for biblical studies. The pertinent question for this study is, how can one affirm that the biblical author purposefully exploited both meanings? While recent scholarship has been insightful on this issue, the danger of presuming upon the intention of the biblical author remains. This article argues that the first step in identifying Janus Parallelism is to prove a case of polysemy or homonymy (not ambiguity) within the Janus word. The second step is to demonstrate previously established semantic connections between both meanings of the Janus word and the immediate context. This initial methodology for determining Janus Parallelism will help to prove the intention of the biblical author, rather than allowing imagination of possible meanings to overshadow sound exegesis.

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Introduction

Janus Parallelism is a masterful literary device that has been used by numerous Biblical Hebrew writers. The term Janus Parallelism hints to the peculiarity of this literary device. Within Greek mythology, the god beginnings and endings is named Janus, who has two faces which look to the past and to the future. So also, Janus Parallelism is the purposeful exploitation of a single word with two meanings, one

meaning pointing to what has come before and one meaning pointing to what comes after. Several examples will shortly be examined.

The study of Janus Parallelism has ramifications beyond the study of literary devices. The conclusions one draws about Janus Parallelism impact a proper understanding of authorial intention as well as the semantic connections which exist in the mind of the Hebrew writer. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a clear methodology for identifying Janus Parallelism, an endeavor which has yet to be completed within Hebrew scholarship. The purpose of this article is to establish a methodology for identifying Janus Parallelism as well as expound on the implications of Janus Parallelism in biblical studies. This will be accomplished by first examining what scholarship has concluded up to this point, and then by solidifying a proper methodology.

Defining Janus Parallelism

The term Janus Parallelism was coined by Cyrus Gordon in his 1978 article “New Directions.”¹ Within this article, he explains that Janus Parallelism “hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings: one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning what follows.”² He uses Song of Songs 2:12 to illustrate his point.

הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ עֵת הַזְּמִיר הַגִּיעַ וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרֶצְנוּ

“The blossoms appear in the land. The time of זמיר has come, and the sound of the turtledove is heard in our land.”

Within this verse, זמיר can be understood in two ways. The first, being “pruning,” would refer back to the blossoms appearing, and the second, “song,” would refer forward to the turtledove being heard. The lexeme זמיר can be used for both meanings. For instance, זמר is used for “(two) months of pruning in the Gezer Calendar (ירחו (זמר).³ In addition, זמיר is often used as “song,” such as in Job 35:10 with זמרות בלילה, “Songs in the night.” Many additional scholars have made use of this definition, making arguments from texts throughout the Old Testament.

¹ Cyrus Gordon, “New Directions,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15, no. ½ (1978): 59–66.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

³ Ludwig Köhler et al., eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1:273.

Scholarship on Janus Parallelism

While Cyrus Gordon was the first to coin the term Janus Parallelism, he was not the first to notice its usage.⁴ In 1933, David Yellin discerned a particularly interesting usage in Job 7:6–7.⁵

יָמַי קָלוּ מִנִּיר־אֲרָג לֹאֲקִלוּ בְּאַפְסֵי תְקוּהָ
זָכַר בִּירֵחוֹם תִּנִּי לֹא־תָשׁוּב עֵינַי לִרְאוֹת טוֹב

“My days pass more swiftly than a weaver’s shuttle; they come to an end without תְּקוּהָ.

Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see anything good.”

According to the argument of Yellin, Job 7:6–7 uses תְּקוּהָ as both “thread” and “hope.” “Thread” refers back to the weaver’s shuttle.⁶ “Hope” refers forward to Job’s failing hope, in particular, the statement that his eye will never again see anything good. תְּקוּהָ can clearly refer to both “thread/cord” and “hope.” An example of its meaning as “thread” would be Joshua 2:18 in which תְּקוּהָ is in construct state with חוֹט often understood as “thread.”⁷ In addition, in Joshua 2:18 תְּקוּהָ is modified by שְׁנֵי

⁴ While David Yellin identifies an early example of Janus Parallelism, some scholars have pointed back to identification of Janus Parallelism by medieval commentators, Rashi in particular. Herb Bassler notes:

I wonder if Rashi’s comments on Ezek. 20:37 disclose an intuitive grasp of “Janus Parallelism.” ... The scepter is the symbol of the king’s authority and his laws—so Rashi reads as if 37a and 37b are parallel—by making you kneel beneath the scepter you are now my subject and bound by my laws. So Rashi’s first comments read מְסַרְתָּ as obligation (the extended meaning of fetter). ... Rashi’s wording suggests he sees the preposition בְּ, prefixed to מְסַרְתָּ as carrying a meaning often associated with the preposition לְ (i.e. לְמוֹסְרִי), namely identifying obligations as the object of one’s loyalty. In his comments to 37a Rashi paraphrases the entire verse. But then Rashi reads the verse anew: 37b does not mirror back 37a but moves the action ahead: I will bring you [to full redemption] by means of the covenant that I have already delivered to you.

Bassler goes on to show that Rashi made use of this reading to argue against the idea of a new covenant in Ezekiel, rather opting for a renewed old covenant. Bassler states, “For Rashi, מְסַרְתָּ looks backward in the verse to the ‘scepter of authority’ (שֵׁבֶט) and forward to the ‘eternal covenant’ already in hand.” See Herb Bassler, “Did Rashi Notice a Janus Parallelism in Ezek. 20:37?,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 8, no. 14 (2008): 3–4. This is an example of how an argument for Janus Parallelism can directly affect the interpretation of the text, with important theological consequences. Therefore, it is all the more important to ensure a proper methodology for Janus Parallelism.

⁵ This is pointed out by Scott Noegel. *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 29. Noegel also mentions that Yellin “was anticipated by Ibn Ezra.” See especially D. Yellin, “משנה ההוראה בתנ”ך,” *Tarbiz* 5 (1933): 13.

⁶ A weaver’s shuttle was a piece of wood that housed the weaving material and would pass through the warp of the weave to create the weft. This weaver’s shuttle could be used by one person or passed/thrown between two people for a wider loom. See Robert Alden, “אָרָג,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 490.

⁷ HALOT, 1:297. Notice especially the use of חוֹט in the story of Samson and Delilah. Judg. 16:12 — תַּחַק דָּלִילָה עִבְתֵּימָם הַדְּשִׁים וְתֹאסְרֵהוּ אֵלֶיהָ כְּבָשָׁם וְתֹאמַר אֵלֶיהָ כִּלְשֵׁתִים עָלֶיךָ שְׂמֵשׁוּן וְהֶאֱרַב יָשֵׁב בְּתַדְרִי וַיִּנְתְּמָם מֵעַל זִרְעֹתַי כְּחוֹט — “Delilah took new web threads (ropes), and tied him up with them and shouted, ‘Samson, the Philistines are here!’ But while the men in ambush were waiting in her room, he snapped them off his arms כְּחוֹט (like a

and paired with the verb קשר (“to tie”).⁸ The use of תקוה for “hope” is well established.

Both Yellin and Gordon argue that the biblical author conveyed both meanings in the text. Gordon explains that when faced with the decision of multiple meanings within a single lexical use, scholars, and especially translators, have historically chosen between one or the other meaning.⁹ In contrast, he argues that this “misses the point.”¹⁰ According to his argument, the Jobian author purposefully exploited both meanings to stitch the two ideas together.

Walter Herzberg, a PhD student of Gordon, made use of Janus Parallelism in his PhD dissertation “Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible.” Within this New York University dissertation, Herzberg referenced multiple occurrences of Janus Parallelism.¹¹ The primary argument of Herzberg’s work concerns translation methods, in which only one meaning is chosen when the Hebrew author intended a multiplicity of meanings.¹² He gives four examples of Janus Parallelism within his dissertation, one key example being Ruth 1:21.

אני מלאה הלקתי וניקם השיבני יהוה למה תקראנה לי נעמי ויהוה ענה כי ושהי הרע לי

“I went away full, but YHWH has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since YHWH בִּי עָנָה, and the Almighty has afflicted me.”

Herzberg argues that the author intended two meanings with ענה. The first meaning is “answer,” used numerous times throughout the Old Testament. The second meaning is “afflict,” which is also used frequently, as in the case of Gen. 15:13 in which God says that Abram’s offspring will be “foreigners in a land which does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and עָנָה 400 years.” The argument from Ruth 1:21 is that Naomi intends both meanings. Not only has YHWH answered her, but the answer was her affliction and current destitution. For this reason, she asks to be called Mara “bitterness.”

Duane Christensen, in a 1986 article, makes use of both Herzberg and Gordon’s work to argue for Janus Parallelism in Gen. 6:3.¹³

thread).” חוט most prototypically carries the idea of a thread rather than a rope. Examples of this are its contrast to עֲבָתִים in Judg. 16:12 as well as its use for a sandal strap in Gen. 14:23. Eccl. 4:12 uses חוט in the example of a strand of three cords (חוט) not being easy to break. An additional usage of חוט is found in 1 Kgs. 7:15 and Jer. 52:21. These two occurrences are set within the context of measuring, often translated as “circumference.”

⁸ טָוִי is often translated as “crimson.” However, a caveat must be included here with the understanding that colors are notoriously difficult to translate. Whether this is red or crimson or some other color is difficult to pin down. In any case, the fact that it is an adjective within the color spectrum establishes the point.

⁹ He references Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1961), 6–7. It is also clear that translators must choose one over the other. The NASB 1977 translates as “the time of pruning.” The HCSB takes זמיר as “the time of singing.”

¹⁰ Gordon, “New Directions,” 59.

¹¹ Walter Herzberg, “Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” Ph.D. diss. (New York University, 1979).

¹² Herzberg sees multiplicity of meanings not only with Janus Parallelism but also with “convergence of Hebrew roots differentiated in Ugaritic; polarized roots; sexual *double entendre*; and allusion.” *Ibid.*, i.

¹³ Duane Christensen, “Janus Parallelism in Gen. 6:3,” *Hebrew Studies*, 27, no. 1 (1986): 20–24.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא יִדְוֹן רוּחִי בְּאָדָם לְעֹלָם בְּשָׂגָם הוּא בָּשָׂר וְהָיוּ יָמָיו מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה

“And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, בְּשָׂגָם they are flesh. Their days will be 120 years.’”

Christensen points to בְּשָׂגָם as meaning both “in that” and also “because of their going astray.” This is different than an example such as Song 2:12 in which the multiplicity of meaning is bound up in a single root (i.e. זמר). In this instance, Christensen argues that the Hebrew author has made use of two etymologically and morphologically disconnected words to create the Janus Parallelism.

The methodology which Christensen uses to make his case is of importance. Emphasis is placed upon the prosody of the text.¹⁴ It is worth quoting Christensen at length to understand his methodology for determining Janus Parallelism in this passage:

It is in terms of the number of accentual-stress units that the two lines differ; for here the first line has three and the latter four such units. It is only when the term בְּשָׂגָם is taken as the conclusion of the first statement that the internal balance of four accentual-stress units in each half of the verse is achieved. This may explain the alternate textual tradition found in a number of Hebrew manuscripts which read בְּשָׂגָם. The qamats here has been interpreted as the third person plural suffix on the infinitive construct of the root שגג, “to go astray, commit sin.” It is also possible to see it as a pausal lengthening of the vowel if the athnach were to be placed here rather than under the term בָּשָׂר. The above prosodic analysis does suggest that the major stress in this verse should be precisely on the final syllable of בְּשָׂגָם. But of greater interest is the *double-entendre* that immediately becomes apparent.

Though Cassuto rejects the pointing בְּשָׂגָם on the basis of his interpretation of the passage, he does remark that such a reading would have the meaning “through their erring,” from the root שגג, “go astray, err.” With the major pause after the term in question, the reader would hear this initial meaning. But the following phrase quickly alters that impression, changing the term to the equivalent of בְּאִשֶׁר גַּם “in as much as.” The term בְּשָׂגָם thus functions within a “pivot pattern,” both metrically, in mora-count, and semantically—A striking example of Janus Parallelism.¹⁵

¹⁴ Christensen points to several articles which he authored that explain the process of mora-counting. Mora-counting is similar to syllable counting, with the intention of determining the parallel structure. Christensen states, “The method provides a useful tool for measuring the relative length of poetic lines in the biblical text.” He goes on to state, “Though the Janus Parallelism noted here in Gen. 6:3 stands quite independent of the so-called mora-theory, it is certainly reinforced by it.” (See Christensen, “Janus Parallelism in Gen. 6:3,” 20–21). Christensen’s articles include: “Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33,” *Bib* 65 (1984): 382–89; “Zephaniah 2:4–15: A Theological Basis for Josiah’s Political Expansion,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 669–682; “The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 217–231; “Prose and Poetry in the Bible: The Narrative Poetics of Deuteronomy 1:9–18,” *ZAW* 97 (1985): 179–189; and “The *Numeruswechsel* in Deuteronomy 12,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1985).

¹⁵ Christensen, “Janus Parallelism in Gen. 6:3,” 21.

Christensen deals extensively with the prosody of the text; however, the only semantic argument is that it is possible to read both שגג and באשר גם into the text. At this point, the question is raised as to how one can form a conclusion concerning the intention of the biblical author. How can one affirm that the biblical author purposefully exploited both meanings? This question reveals itself with each new discovery of a possible instance of Janus Parallelism.

Gary Rendsburg has also taken up the mantle of Janus Parallelism studies. He points to Gen. 49:26a:

בְּרַכַּת אָבִיךָ גְּבֹרָה עַל־בְּרַכַּת הוֹרֵי עַד־תַּמָּוֶת גְּבֻעַת עוֹלָם

“The blessings of your father are greater than the blessings of עד הורי and the bounty of the eternal hills.”

Rendsburg states, “In this tristich, עד הורי is to be translated both ‘my progenitors of old’ (when pointed עד הורי as in the MT) and ‘mountains of old’ (when pointed הורי). Its familial connotation resumes אביך in the first stich and its topographic connotation anticipates גבעת in the third stich.”¹⁶

More recently, Michael Carasik has argued for Janus Parallelism in Job 1:20. He points out that Job performs four actions after hearing of the destruction that came upon him: he tears his garment, shaves his head, falls to the ground, and prostrates himself. The third of these actions, Carasik takes as both reminiscent of mourning and as pointing forward to the act of worship.¹⁷

The most prolific scholar in the area of Janus Parallelism is Scott Noegel. Though a few scholars have argued for Janus Parallelism in several locations, Noegel has studied the literary device most comprehensively to date.¹⁸ Janus Parallelism occurs throughout the Old Testament; however, Noegel argues that it is especially used in the book of Job. In addition to extra-Jobian examples, Scott Noegel argues for 49 occurrences within the book of Job that have not been dealt with before his

¹⁶ G. Rendsburg, “Janus Parallelism in Gen. 49:26,” *JBL* 99, (1980), 291.

¹⁷ See Michael Carasik, “Janus Parallelism in Job 1:20,” in *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 66 (2016): 149–154. He states on page 150: “The first two are recognized as demonstrative of mourning, while the second combine to form an act of worship. (Indeed, the final verb in the sentence is generally translated directly as ‘he worshiped.’) The expression ‘he fell on his face’ presents so little difficulty for understanding that commentators commonly ignore both the phrase and the action entirely. Those who remark on it do so to point out that the verse shifts here from mourning rituals to acceptance of what has happened. What Job says in v. 21, immediately following, makes clear that his prostration is indeed an act of religious submission, not one in which he is attempting to conceal his reaction from God, as when Abraham falls on his face in Gen. 17:17. Yet the reader of the book of Job could be pardoned for assuming that falling to the ground was not the beginning of an act of worship—a complete emotional reversal from the symbolically self-destructive acts that preceded it—but a further act of mourning.”

¹⁸ Additional arguments for Janus Parallelism not mentioned previously in this article include David Toshio Tsumura, “Polysemy and Parallelism in Hab. 1:8–9,” in *ZAW*, vol. 120 (2008): 194–203; David Toshio Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. 3:4,” in *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 63 (2013): 113–116; and John Kselman, “Janus Parallelism in Psalm 75:2,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 121 (2002): 531–532. In addition, Scott Noegel mentions several scholars who have argued for instances of Janus Parallelism. He summarizes scholarship in his book *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 29–38. He has also given extra-biblical examples (see pgs. 17–18). He points to work done on Nah. 1:8; Jonah 3:7–8; Song 7:5–6; 7:12; Ps. 116:9–11; Gen. 15:1; 1 Kgs. 12:7; Isa. 9:3; 27:12; 52:2; Ezek. 21:26; Amos 1:3–4; and Prov. 8:29–30.

book, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*.¹⁹ David Yellin's example of Job 7:6–7 is a strong argument for the use of Janus Parallelism by the author of Job. The masterful literary device is employed throughout the book. However, while Noegel provides excellent insight and research on these occurrences within Job, the methodology still requires specification. The danger is that the biblical scholar would presume upon the intention of the biblical author and read into the text that which was not originally intended. While many of these aforementioned examples of Janus Parallelism demonstrate insight into the text, a clear methodology for identifying Janus Parallelism is still necessary.

A Methodology for Janus Parallelism

Over the last forty years, several scholars have argued for Janus Parallelism in numerous texts throughout the Old Testament. These arguments make use of prosody, particularly found in tristiches of Hebrew poetry. At the prosodic center of a tristich, a word is found with multiple possible meanings that reflects what is seen in the first and third stiches. Not only is this a literary device within biblical Hebrew, but it is also attested in several Ancient Near Eastern cultures, leading one to conclude that this was a valid literary device used by several Old Testament writers.

However, parameters must be placed upon this study. At the center of any argument for Janus Parallelism is a supposition of authorial intention. In a strong case such as Song 2:12, one can reasonably conclude that the biblical author intended both meanings. But not all cases of Janus Parallelism are as clear. An example of this can be the heretofore unexamined case of Lam. 2:1:

איכה יעיב באפו | אדני את-בת-ציון השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל ולא זכר הדם-רגליו
בְּיָוֶם אָפוֹ

“How the Lord has overshadowed Daughter Zion in His anger; He has thrown down from heaven to earth the תפארת of Israel; He has abandoned His footstool in the day of His anger.”

תפארת ישראל lies at the center, as established by the use of the athnach. תפארת can mean “radiance,” referring back to “Daughter Zion.” תפארת can also mean “pride,” referring forward to God’s humbling of Israel by abandoning them. The meaning “radiance” is clearly seen in several other passages, such as Esth. 1:4 in which Ahasuerus displays the splendor of his kingdom. The second meaning “pride” can be seen in Isa. 10:12 in which the Lord promises to punish the king of Assyria for “his arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes.” Does this then constitute Janus Parallelism? Can one now conclude that the author intended both meanings? If these are the only parameters for Janus Parallelism, then the frequency of Janus Parallelism increases exponentially. Indeed, word flexibility allows for multiplicity of meaning in any word in all languages. A fundamental component of language is the ability of words to adapt and change their semantic range based on contextual requirements.

¹⁹ Scott Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). See especially p. 25.

Therefore, a more targeted approach is required to identify Janus Parallelism and to prohibit imagination from presuming upon authorial intention.

The First Rule—Ambiguity, Polysemy, and Homonymy

The first step in identifying Janus Parallelism is to identify what the relationship is between the multiple meanings. To accomplish this, one must first understand the relationship between multiple meanings in any given word. The principle of semantic flexibility governs all languages. This universal trait of language allows words to flex and morph to accommodate usage. Most words in any given language have more than one meaning. In fact, it proves difficult to find words that only have one meaning. One is able to find monosemic (i.e. only one meaning) words in specific disciplines, such as silicosis within pulmonology. A more general example would be the English word “lucrative,” which only applies to a money-making context. However, the more frequent a word is, the more likely it is to have multiple meanings. For example, a simple word like “book” might first appear to have only one meaning. However, the verb “book him!” would demonstrate an additional meaning apart from the nominal idea. Janus Parallelism is based upon words that have multiple meanings, these meanings being purposefully exploited. However, multiple meanings within words can be categorized in three ways: homonymy, polysemy, and ambiguity. Janus Parallelism can only make use of polysemy and homonymy.

Homonymy, polysemy, and ambiguity each refer to different types of relationships between word meanings. First, homonymy refers to a coincidental occurrence within language wherein two words with two separate meanings take on the same orthographic and/or auricular form over time. An example of this can be seen in the English word “ear.” “Ear,” as in an “ear of corn,” comes from the Middle English /ere/. This was passed down from Old English /æhher/, from the German /ahre/, from Old Norse /ax/, from Gothic /ah/, and ultimately from Latin /acus/, meaning “husk.” The word “ear,” referring to hearing, comes from Old English /ĕare/; cognate with Old Norse /eyra/, German /ohr/, Gothic /auso/, Latin /auris/.²⁰ Etymologically, ear (of corn) and ear (of hearing) are homonyms. The meanings developed independently and have remained independent in the mind of the English speaker. Even though these word meanings are unrelated, they are still able to be used in a pun. A simple joke will demonstrate the issue:

Question: Why don’t you tell secrets on the farm?

Answer: Because even the corn has ears.

This corny joke highlights the fact that homonyms can be used within literary devices, especially within puns. Within homonyms, the two meanings are unrelated. This contrasts with polysemy.

While homonyms are coincidental occurrences within language, polysemy is deliberate. This article will not develop a full explanation for polysemy, since this

²⁰ See Oxford English Dictionary (2020), “Ear.” Available at https://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=ear&_searchBtn=Search. Accessed 22 July 2020.

would require an additional foray into linguistic studies.²¹ However, at the heart of polysemy studies is the argument that additional meanings of words are metaphorically extended to accommodate language use. An example will prove helpful. The linguist Alan Cruse demonstrates how a secondary meaning of a word can cement itself into a language.

Historical processes of semantic change are of course intimately linked to synchronic processes of meaning extension. One possible scenario might run as follows.

- (i) Word W has established literal sense S¹.
- (ii) Some creative person uses W in new figurative sense S² (according to the rules of synchronic extension).
- (iii) S² 'catches on,' and becomes established (i.e. laid down as an entry in the mental lexicons of members of the speech community), so that W becomes polysemous between S¹ and S². S¹ is still perceived as literal, and S² as figurative.
- (iv) S¹ begins to become obsolescent. S² begins to be perceived as literal, and S¹ as figurative.

²¹ The concept of polysemy is intricately tied to Cognitive Linguistics. For further study on Cognitive Linguistics note especially the work which opened the door to Cognitive Linguistics, *Metaphors We Live By*. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). The 1980 book, *Metaphors We Live By*, introduced metaphor theory as a dominant factor in language use. This book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson has proven to be transformative in the field of linguistics. Beforehand, metaphor was viewed only as substituting one expression for another, one being the literal expression and one the non-literal. However, in the cognitive model, metaphor is an impetus for meaning extension because of its connection to cognitive functions. Lakoff argues for the "conceptual metaphor" which is understood as an essential component of human cognition. Alan Cruse explains, "Metaphor is not purely linguistic but is conceptual in nature. They are a means whereby ever more abstract and intangible areas of experience can be conceptualized in terms of the familiar and concrete." See Alan Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 242. In addition, Ronald Langacker's work *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) is a foundational work in this area. Cognitive Linguistics helps to explain polysemy in two ways: its place in mental categorization and its impetus in metaphor/metonymy. Also, of primary importance is a proper understanding of how polysemy relates to prototype studies. Prototype Theory has become a central facet of Cognitive Linguistics. It was developed by the psychologist Eleanor Rosch alongside others in the 1970s (see especially Linda Coleman and Paul Kay, "Prototype Semantics: The English word *lie*," *Language* 57, no. 1 (1981): 26-44).

Prototype Theory determines mental categories based on similarity to a prototype at the category center (this contrasts with the classical method of categorization which relies on necessary and sufficient features). Prototype theory posits that mental categories are created based on resemblance to a prototype at the center of the category. In addition to a prototype at the center of a category, individual lexemes have prototypical meanings. For example, based on the work of Linda Coleman and Paul Kay, one can see that the prototypical use of LIE contains three properties: (1) the statement is false, (2) the speaker believes the statement to be false, and (3) in uttering the statement, the speaker intends to deceive the listener. An example of polysemy would be "Fabrication," which was metaphorically created and adopted into the DECEPTION category to emphasize the speaker's creation of the lie. It is a polysemous use of the verb "fabricate" meaning "to build."

Polysemy, in the argument of Prototype Theory, occurs in the confines of diversification within a conceptual category. It is within this diversification that words flex to accommodate usage and emphasis. Each category member upholds a particular role within the category. This is based on how developed or under-developed the mental category is. Therefore, the relationship of category members to each other is of central importance to how Prototype Theory understands polysemy.

(v) S^1 is lost, at which point meaning of W has changed from S^1 to S^2 .

This can be illustrated with English *expire*. First, before there were such things as tickets and licenses with limited periods of validity, this just meant “die.” Then, it was metaphorically extended to mean “come to the end of a period of validity,” which existed as a clear figurative use alongside the literal use. Nowadays the “die” sense is quite uncommon ... there is no doubt that the default reading has changed.²²

This is an example of a complete shift from meaning S^1 to S^2 with polysemy occurring medially. In this manner, metaphor can create a case of polysemy over time under the right conditions. Polysemy is one of the most important functions of language, allowing for the language use to adapt language for unique situations and contexts.

It is important to note concerning both polysemy and homonymy that a decision must be made between the two possible meanings. For instance, if one were to say, “I am going to the bank,” the listener would need to make a choice between either the meaning “bank” (of a river) and “bank” (financial institution). Likewise, in the statement, “It expired last night,” the listener would need to decide as to whether “expire” meant “to die” or “to lapse” or even “to breathe.” The language user will purposefully make clear which is intended through contextual clues (i.e. “I am going to the bank to deposit the money”). Janus Parallelism is an example of the language user purposefully intending both meanings. This literary device steps outside the bounds of normal language use and plays upon the expectations of the listener/reader.

In contrast to homonymy and polysemy, the choice between meanings is not required in the case of ambiguity. Again, an example will prove helpful. In the English sentence, “The dog jumped over the fence again,” the word “fence” is ambiguous. While the speaker might be referring to an electric fence, or a split-rail fence, or a chicken-wire fence, the distinction is not necessary. This might be within the context of a dog who is an escape artist or a show-jumping dog, but a decision is not required in the mind of the listener between these possible meanings of “fence.” In this manner, ambiguity, though an important part of everyday language use, is distinct from polysemy and homonymy.

The fascination caused by Janus Parallelism is that it forces the reader to accept two meanings which one would normally need to choose between. Janus Parallelism contrasts with normal language use wherein the listener/reader makes decisions between homonymy and polysemy intuitively, oftentimes without even noticing a decision has been made. Therefore, an intentional feature of Janus Parallelism is that the word being exploited must have either homonymous or polysemous meanings. The language user cannot play upon simple ambiguity, which would not normally force the listener/reader to decide between meanings.

At this point, an important caveat must be made. There is a misunderstanding of Janus Parallelism and polysemy as being synonymous. For example, Scott Noegel specifies, “I will employ both terms [polysemous parallelism and Janus Parallelism] interchangeably.”²³ He refers to polysemy often throughout his book on Janus

²² Cruse, *Meaning in Language*, 260.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

Parallelism. He also defines what he means by “polysemy” in his entry in the *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, “Polysemy is the capacity for a sign, word, phrase, or sentence to bear multiple meanings in a single context.”²⁴ Based on this definition, all word play which incorporates multiple meanings is to be considered polysemous. Noegel gives the Janus Parallelism example of כָּבֵר in Job 9:30–31 in which the phrase can be taken as either “with lye” or “in a pit.”²⁵ Noegel argues for a polysemous understanding of כָּבֵר. However, it still has not been proven that כָּבֵר “pit” and כָּבֵר “lye/soap” are polysemous.²⁶ They might, in fact, be homonymous and unrelated in meaning. To assume polysemy over homonymy is to make assumptions on the semantic connections in the mind of the Hebrew writers.²⁷ This must be avoided until a case for polysemy can be proven. However, what can be clarified at this point is that Janus Parallelism makes use of either homonymy or polysemy, not ambiguity.

The Second Rule—Contextual Clues

Not only must Janus Parallelism be a case of homonymy or polysemy, but contextual clues must also be evident. This can be difficult to determine, since the Hebrew writer depended upon the reader being a native Hebrew speaker to induce the full weight of Janus Parallelism.²⁸ However, the Hebrew writer will make use of explicit contextual clues to force the reader to accept both meanings. The Hebrew

²⁴ Scott Noegel, “Polysemy,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Boston: Brill, 2013): 3:178. Noegel does go on to say, “Despite more than a century of scholarly attention, the study of polysemy in the Hebrew Bible remains in its infancy.”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. It is clearly stated by Noegel that these derive from multiple roots (“pit” from כָּבֵר and “lye” from כָּבֵר).

²⁷ When employing the term “polysemy,” we are making a claim about the mental categorization of the Hebrew writer(s). With the example of תְּקוּהָה in Job 7:6–7, to label the meanings of “thread” and “hope” as polysemous, would be to claim that “thread” and “hope” are governed in the Hebrew mind by the same mental category. An argument would need to be made that “thread” was utilized metaphorically to mean “hope” to the point that the language users inextricably linked the meanings. Mental categorization and semantic relationships determine much of how we view the world. These relationships are created through circumstance, cultural influence, and other factors. Unlocking the mystery of these relationships is the key to understanding the worldview of the Hebrew writers. However, determining mental categories based on language use is a daunting task. The work accomplished by Cyrus Gordon, Walter Herzberg, Scott Noegel and others is helpful in identifying the literary feature of Janus Parallelism. Examples such as Job 7:6–7 and Song of Songs 2:12 demonstrate that Janus Parallelism was employed by several biblical writers. However, caution must be exerted when making a case for polysemy. Janus Parallelism might contain two polysemous meanings, but this is not a certainty. To equate Janus Parallelism to polysemy is to make incorrect assumptions on the mental categorization and semantic relationships within the mind of the Hebrew writer.

²⁸ While biblical Hebrew scholars can have an extraordinary command of Hebrew, scholars will not be able to grasp all of the cultural implications and semantic connections of the words. This is an important limitation to recognize. Biblical Hebrew scholars are not able to ask questions of a native biblical Hebrew speaker. This limits the ability to comprehend the social, cultural, and historical effects upon the language. Language operates according to specific rules that are learned through language context and culture. One might be able to study the grammar of a language, but the less one knows about the cultural influences upon the language, the less one can understand the metaphor/metonymy which is at the heart of the language. For further understanding concerning how metaphor, metonymy, and polysemy compel language see: Ravin and Leacock, *Polysemy: Theoretical and Computational Approaches*, 16.

writer is purposefully working against the impulse of the reader to immediately decide between the two meanings. Therefore, the contextual clues for Janus Parallelism must be clearly seen. This is evidenced in the connection between the meanings of the polysemous or homonymous word and what comes before and after that word.

The example of Job 7:6–7 will prove helpful. Within Job 7:6–7, תְּקוּהָה is used because it conjures up, for the Hebrew reader, the ideas of both “hope” and “thread.” Whether these are polysemous or homonymous is not important. Naturally, the reader would be forced to choose between one or the other meaning (i.e. thereby ruling out a case of simple ambiguity). The Hebrew author works against this impulse by placing key metaphors in the surrounding text. Not only is the picture of אֶרֶג (a weaver’s shuttle) used, but also the verb כָּלָה “to come to an end.” This verb can be applied both literally to the weaver’s shuttle and also metaphorically to Job’s days (and thus to his hope). תְּקוּהָה is closer to the idea of the thread used in a weaver’s shuttle than, for example, the Hebrew word for rope, עֵבֶת. In addition, Job paints the picture of his eyes never looking upon anything good for the remainder of his days. This reminds the reader of the phrase בְּאַפְסֵי תְקוּהָה, which has just come before. The context also paints the picture of Job’s life being like a breath, an idea that is also seen in Job 11:20:

וַיִּעֲנֵי רְשָׁעִים תְּכַלֵּינָה וְגִגּוֹס אֶבֶד מִנְהֵם וְתִקְוֹתָם מִפֶּחַד־גִּפְשׁ:

“But the sight of the wicked will fail, their way of escape will be cut off; their only hope is their last breath.”

Not only are the ideas of hopelessness and life as a breath connected throughout the Old Testament, this idea is used several times by the author of Job himself. When arguing a case for Janus Parallelism, the biblical scholar must be careful not to see semantic connections where there are none. The tendency to impose the semantic connections in the biblical scholar’s native language onto the text must be resisted.

The argument for Janus Parallelism in Gen. 15:1 demonstrates the point. The argument is that מָגֵן “shield” refers back to Abram not being afraid, and מָגֵן “bestow” refers forward to Abram’s reward.²⁹ The first step would be to establish that the biblical authors made use of both of these meanings. The evidence weakens the further one steps away from Genesis (i.e. the meaning is only used in Malachi, or even the meaning is only attested in a cognate root of another ANE language). Secondly, one must establish that these metaphorical connections have precedent. Simply because an English speaker perceives a possible metaphorical connection between bestowing and rewarding does not mean that these two words (שָׂכַר and מָגֵן) would have elicited a similar mental connection in the mind of the Hebrew reader.³⁰

²⁹ See Noegel, *Janus Parallelism*, 13.

³⁰ For example, one might take the English word “solution.” While an English speaker can clearly see the connection between the verb “solve” and a math “solution,” the connection of the verb “solve” and a liquid “solution” is not perceived even though historically these were connected. Semantic connections are created and disposed of over time. Importing English connections onto the understanding of the Hebrew text allows many exegetical errors to creep in.

Therefore, the biblical context must be the rule to demonstrate semantic connections to which the Hebrew writer is appealing.

The First Caveat—Meaning Innovation

Not only are the first two rules important, but two additional caveats are in order, to help guide understanding of Janus Parallelism. The first caveat is that Janus Parallelism does not seek to create new meanings. This principle has been widely acknowledged by those who have written on Janus Parallelism; therefore, this article will not belabor the point. Janus Parallelism, in contrast to metaphor and metonymy, has no ability to create new meaning. As briefly stated above, metaphor allows for semantic extension of words to accommodate language needs.³¹ For example, the English word “fabrication,” literally meaning something manufactured, was metaphorically extended to include the idea of an untruthful statement. In addition, metonymy is another tool that language users employ to create meaning extension. Metonymy utilizes a well-understood or prominent aspect of a concept or item to refer to the item.³² Together, these two tools form the basis for the creation of new

³¹ Metaphor, according to Lakoff, applies a “source domain” onto a “target domain.” An example would be MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN (See G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 276). The source domain is VERTICALITY and the target domain is QUANTITY. In this way, the spatial concept of up and down is applied to a higher or lower quantity. This would yield phrases such as, “The crime rate keeps *rising*. The number of books published each year keeps going *up*. That stock has *fallen* again.” One conceptual category that is concrete is applied to another conceptual category to make sense of what is happening. New relationships are established, which demonstrates itself in the language.

However, Lakoff’s view of conceptual metaphors is not without its criticism. Several scholars have argued that Lakoff’s view does not go far enough in accounting for emergence of new meaning after the source domain is applied to the target domain. The sentence, “This surgeon is a butcher,” will demonstrate the issue. The source domain (surgeon, operation, patient, scalpel) is applied to the target domain (butcher, meat market, animal, cleaver). However, the source domain to target domain does not account for new information taken out of the blend of the two concepts (see Joseph Grady, Todd Oakley, and Seana Coulson, “Blending and Metaphor.” <http://marktuner.org/blendaphor.html>. Accessed 23/07/20). The new information would include a conceptual link between butchery and incompetence. This is certainly not true in the BUTCHER domain as it stands by itself. This further understanding of metaphors and their use in language is referred to as “Conceptual Blending.” It was outlined in Fauconnier and Turner’s book, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). The centrality of metaphor within Cognitive Linguistics has caused a great deal of debate over what exactly constitutes metaphor. This has spilled over into Biblical Studies as well. However, the use of metaphor to extend the semantic range of words is a main tenet of Cognitive Linguistics.

³² Alan Cruse separates metaphor and metonymy in this way: Metaphor involves the use of one domain as an analogical model to structure our conception of another domain; in other words, the process crucially involves two distinct conceptual domains. Metonymy, on the other hand, relies on an actual, literal association between two components within a single domain.” (See Cruse, *Meaning in Language*, 256. By “domain,” Cruse is referring not to a mental category, but to a context of language use). In this way, metonymy utilizes literal elements, characteristics, or aspects to refer to the whole entity. Cruse gives the example of, “The ham sandwich wants his coffee now,” in the situation of a waiter in a café. Because the domain included the customer ordering a ham sandwich, the waiter refers to the person in this metonymical manner. In contrast, a metaphor makes use of two separate domains that have commonality such as the ANGER AS BOILING WATER metaphor. There are various components within a single domain that allow for metonymy. These components are known as “referring functions.” (See Geoffrey Nunberg’s PhD Dissertation for New York University [1978] entitled, “The Pragmatics of Reference,” in which he coins this phrase. See also John Taylor, “Category Extension by Metonymy and Metaphor” in

meanings within language. Furthermore, a high frequency of use will cement these new meanings into common use.³³ In contrast to metaphor and metonymy, the

Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast, Rene Dirven and Ralf Porings, eds. (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002): 324.) Several “referring functions” can be exploited in language use. For example, a referring function can link the PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCED as in the case of, “The Picasso on the wall is worth a great deal of money.” Another example would be CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED such as, “The kettle is boiling.” (See Cruse, *Meaning in Language*, 257). A well-known use of metonymy is synecdoche in which “reference to the whole is made by reference to a salient part.” (See John Taylor, “Category Extension by Metonymy and Metaphor,” 324.) A distinction must be made between meronymy and synecdoche. Meronymy expresses a literal relationship between the whole entity and its parts. For example, “finger” would be a meronym of “hand.” It falls under linear polysemy because one category is clearly a subordinate. However, synecdoche is quite similar, but it is used as a figure of speech. A well-known example is “we need new faces around here.” In this example, “faces” is indeed a literal meronym of “people,” but synecdoche is utilizing “faces” in a non-literal way to refer to people. Synecdoche points to a part of the entity that is prominent or characteristic and utilizes it as a figure of speech.

Finally, for insight into the rules that govern metonymy, see Geoffrey Nunberg, “Transfers of Meaning,” *Journal of Semantics* 12, no. 2 (1995): 109. Nunberg uses the term “predicate transfer,” which he describes as “An operation that takes names of properties into new names that denote properties to which they functionally correspond.” According to Nunberg, for predicate transfer to occur, the two properties used metonymically must correspond in a particular situation and the properties must be noteworthy (i.e. bearing immediate conversational relevance and “having an abiding interest beyond the immediate conversational purposes”). In the PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT example, not just any producer can be substituted for his or her product. Picasso can be substituted for a particular painting that Picasso created. This is due to the noteworthy nature of Picasso’s work. However, an unacceptable example can be seen with, “I sat on John,” with “John” being the carpenter who fashioned a new rocking chair. “John for rocking chair” does not meet the qualifications of being noteworthy since it does not have “abiding interest beyond the immediate conversational purposes.” In addition, both metaphor and metonymy can play a part within a single meaning extension. In fact, it can be difficult at times to distinguish their involvement in semantic extension. Panther and Thornburg give an example of the interaction between metaphor and metonymy:

Metonymy and metaphor interact in complex ways. For example, Lakoff ... postulates metonymies such as BODY HEAT FOR ANGER and INTERNAL PRESSURE FOR ANGER that motivate utterances like *Don't get hot under the collar* and *When I found out, I almost burst a blood vessel*, respectively. These expressions exemplify the more general metonymy SYMPTOM FOR CAUSE, which itself is a subcase of the high-level metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE. (See Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda Thornburg, “Metonymy” in *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, Geeraerts, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 243.)

The complex nature of the interaction of metaphor and metonymy is due to their centrality in cognition and language use. Metaphor and metonymy are based on foundational principles of similarity and contiguity which undergird the formation of relationships, comparisons, and even diversification within mental categories.

³³ An important aspect to integrate into a proper understanding of categorization is the effect of usage and frequency. The effect of frequency upon categorization has come to the fore in linguistics only in the last several decades. An early proponent of frequency-based linguistic study was Joan Bybee at the University of New Mexico. Her work on frequency, which began in 1975, initially was based in historical linguistics. She explains that the integration of frequency study into grammatical, phonological, and semantic study had been largely ignored for most of the 20th century. She explains,

The other major theoretical factor working against an interest in frequency of use in language is the distinction, traditionally traced back to Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), between the knowledge that speakers have of the signs and structures of their language and the way language is used by actual speakers communicating with one another. American structuralists, including those of the generativist tradition, accept this distinction and assert furthermore that the only worthwhile object of study is the underlying knowledge of language. See Joan Bybee, *Frequency of Use and the Organization of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

literary device of Janus Parallelism only plays upon pre-existing word meanings. Therefore, the biblical scholar should not transplant the metaphorical picture created by Janus Parallelism into other passages. For example, the biblical scholar cannot assume a semantic connection between תְּקוּהָ “hope” and תְּקוּהָ “thread” in all other uses of תְּקוּהָ in Job solely based on the Janus Parallelism in Job 7:6–7. Just because a picture is drawn between the two in Job 7:6–7 does not mean that the biblical scholar should also read the meanings of “thread and “hope” into תְּקוּהָ in Job 4:6.³⁴ Eliphaz is not depicting Job holding onto his hope like someone holding onto a rope. The metaphorical connection of Janus Parallelism cannot be supplanted onto other texts.

The Second Caveat—Prosody Implications

The second caveat concerns prosody. Janus Parallelism has been seen most prominently in poetry, specifically within poetic tristich. However, examples do occur outside of the poetic genre, such as the case of Ruth 1:21. While a tristich is the expected pattern, should Janus Parallelism be limited to this pattern? Indeed, an important question must be asked at this point. Can the use of Janus Parallelism be found in a large context, such as within an entire pericope? Not only can individual words be polysemous, but also larger language chunks? This article will not be able to answer this question, but hopefully this will be an area of study within Janus Parallelism in the future. Therefore, this second caveat is less of a caveat and more of an appeal for further investigation.

Conclusion

Janus Parallelism has proven itself to be a fascinating literary feature within biblical Hebrew. It has even been observed in other Ancient Near Eastern languages and cultures, as demonstrated by the work of Scott Noegel. To date, a clear methodology has not been devised for identifying Janus Parallelism. This article has sought to create an initial methodology, which will most certainly require additional modification and specification as the study of Janus Parallelism progresses. However, in order to prohibit imagination from presuming upon authorial intention, a foundational methodology is required. This article argues that Janus Parallelism is a literary feature which makes use of polysemous or homonymous word meanings, rather than ambiguous word meanings. Therefore, the first step in identifying Janus Parallelism is to prove a case of polysemy or homonymy within the Janus word.³⁵

See also Betty Phillips, “Lexical Diffusion, Lexical Frequency, and Lexical Analysis” in *Frequency and the Emergence of Linguistic Structure*, Paul Hopper and Joan Bybee, eds. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2001), 123–126. See also Betty Phillips, “Word Frequency and the Actuation of Sound Change,” *Language* 60 (1984): 320–342. Phillips, much like Bybee, began utilizing frequency studies in the area of phonology and later expanded into other linguistic fields.

³⁴ הֲלֹא יִרְאֶתְךָ כְּסִלְתְּךָ אִתְּךָ וְתָם דְּרָגִידְךָ? —“Isn’t your piety your confidence; and the integrity of your life [your thread]?”

³⁵ While it can be difficult to prove whether a word is polysemous or homonymous, it is much more straightforward to demonstrate that a word is polysemous/homonymous vs. ambiguous. While this article does not address the methodology for distinguishing between polysemy/homonymy and ambiguity, it is

The second step is to provide the contextual data which demonstrates the author's intentional use of Janus Parallelism. Apart from purposeful literary and poetic features such as Janus Parallelism, clear communication requires that the author distinguish for the reader which meaning is intended. When the author desires to exploit multiple meanings within a word, the contextual clues must be more apparent for accepting both meanings than the natural inclination to choose one meaning over another. Therefore, it is imperative to demonstrate previously established semantic connections between both meanings of the Janus word and the immediate context. For example, in the case of Job 7:6–7 it is imperative to establish the meaning of תקרה “thread” as conceptually connected to the picture of אָרֶג “a weaver’s shuttle” (i.e. תקרה is more similar to a weaver’s thread than, for example, a builder’s rope). In addition, תקרה “hope,” or rather having no hope (אֶפְסֵס תְּקוּהָ), must also be conceptually connected to someone’s life being like a breath.³⁶ The conceptual ties between both meanings of the Janus word and its context must outweigh the natural inclination to select one meaning.

The implications of this methodology upon Janus Parallelism help to prove the intention of the biblical author, rather than allowing imagination of what possible meanings could be intended to rule over sound exegesis. Now that an initial methodology has been determined, it will be necessary to apply Janus Parallelism studies to several areas. First, this must be referenced by translators. The initial work of Gordon, Herzberg, and others was an argument against choosing one meaning over another within translation. The question is whether this is avoidable at all. Is there a proper way to convey Janus Parallelism within translations? Secondly, a study must be conducted on the possible effects of Janus Parallelism outside of its usual use in poetry. Can the intention of Janus Parallelism be seen in other areas, such as discourse analysis? This article suggests these areas for further study as well as a continued re-examination of the methodology as Janus Parallelism studies progress.

important to note that several tests exist for distinguishing polysemy/homonymy and ambiguity. For further study into the separation between ambiguity and polysemy, note Anna Zaliziak, “The Phenomenon of Polysemy and Ways to Describe It,” in *The Cognitive Basis of Polysemy*, Marina Rakova, Gergely Petho, and Csilla Rakosi, eds. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007), 93–118. Within a language fragment such as biblical Hebrew, distinguishing between polysemy and ambiguity proves difficult, but certainly not impossible. As always, the key is context, based on the principle that the author, apart from literary devices such as Janus Parallelism, will contextually distinguish which meaning is intended when the word is polysemous or homonymous, thereby purposefully avoiding confusion.

³⁶ For evidence, one does not even have to step outside of Job, as the case of Job 11:20 demonstrates.

THE ETERNAL GOD OF A VANISHING CREATION: RECOVERING THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE TIMELESSNESS

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The doctrine of the timelessness of God has long baffled laymen and theologians alike. This article will address the current debate over the timelessness of God, providing a definition of time and uncovering the Scriptural foundations for this doctrine in the process. This article will also trace the development of this critical doctrine throughout church history. God's timelessness is of no small consequence, because to tamper with this single doctrine is to send an eroding ripple effect through all the other attributes of God. The church must remember, regain, and rejoice over this forgotten doctrine in order to preserve the integrity of Christian theology.

* * * * *

Introduction

The eternity of God, according to Charles Hodge, is the reality that “with [God] there is no distinction between the present, past, and future, but all things are equally and always present to Him. With Him duration is an eternal now.”¹ Stephen Charnock believed that eternity is “contrary to time, and therefore a permanent and immutable state ... a perfect possession of life without any variation. ... It doth as much outrun

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:385. Similarly, Joel Beeke says, “Eternity means there is no beginning; there is no end, and no temporal succession in God. ... Eternity is perpetual duration, without beginning or end, but time has both beginning and an end. That which begins necessarily has a succession of parts.” Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 62. James E. Dolezal says, “The basic claim of the classical doctrine of eternity is that God does not experience successive states of being and thus has no future and no past.” *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 81. For an extended discussion see: Edmund Runggaldier, “Divine Eternity as Timeless Perfection,” *European Journal for Philosophy and Religion* 8 (Summer 2016): 169–82. Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

time, as it went before the beginning of it: time supposeth something before it; but there can be nothing before eternity.”²

These definitions capture the notion that God has neither beginning nor end, which is to say that He has illimitable life. Hodge and Charnock also explain that there is no temporal succession in God, which is referred to as the timelessness of God.³ The implication of illimitable life is that God has complete possession of life, all in a single moment. This removes the possibility of His succession through time. Human life, on the other hand, is bound by the succession of time. Mark Jones writes,

To illustrate the idea of the eternal present, think of watching a baseball game. We watch a live game in a succession of moments. We do not infallibly know each detail of the game before it happens. We wait for the game to unfold before our eyes. In other words, the ninth inning comes after the first eight innings. But God does not watch baseball games the way we do. God sees every event in the game at once. He sees the ninth inning at the same time as he sees the first inning. Yet God does not conflate the ninth inning with the first inning. Now extrapolate that to world history: God can infallibly predict future events because he sees the future as he sees the past.⁴

In contrast, consider human life. Infants are entirely dependent, bereft of the ability to communicate, coordinate movement, or reason. When infancy becomes adolescence, the baby grows into a child, with an increasing ability to communicate, move, and think. Since infancy, this child has undergone a physical and cognitive transformation, almost beyond recognition. As the child matures, he begins to organize his simple and limited experiences into wisdom. Humanity is proof that no man or woman has complete possession of the entirety of life in a moment. Every creature experiences life in a succession of moments: the past slipping away and the future ever just beyond the fingertips. All mankind is given is the “present.”

However, outside of time there can be an eternal present that is indistinguishable from past and future. God’s life does not degenerate or increase. It is complete all at once—an indefinite and persisting “now.” Eternality, then, is more than God’s everlasting nature in time. That God is eternal and timeless is indeed a higher perfection than if God were merely everlasting.

² Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1864; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:175. Furthermore, he says, “God is not in His essence this day what He was not before, or will be the next day and year what He is not now. All His perfections are most perfect in Him every moment; before all ages, after all ages. As He hath His whole essence undivided in every place, as well as in an immense space; so He hath all His being in one moment of time, as well as in infinite intervals of time. ... He is what He always was, and He is what He always will be.” *Ibid.*, 1:178.

³ Geerhardus Vos explains, “The attribute of God whereby He is exalted above all limitations of time and all succession of time, and in a single indivisible present possesses the content of his life perfectly (and as such is the cause of time).” *Theology Proper*, vol. 1 *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 10.

⁴ Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 53.

In contemplating God's eternity, we must be careful not to assume that God's life and existence are similar to ours.⁵ This makes discussions on eternity all the more difficult, as it is tempting to superimpose our experiences onto God in order to make Him easier to understand. This introduces the modern debate.

Modern Debate

While there are several theories of Divine eternity that deserve our critical attention, this study focuses on evangelicals who have modified the traditional view of eternity in their interactions with Open Theist critics. In many instances, criticism is not raised against God's eternity *per se*, but instead against His timelessness. While timelessness is an inseparable component of God's eternity, it is only fair to acknowledge that there is no self-proclaimed Christian (Open Theist or otherwise) who denies the duration of God's everlasting nature.

Thus, the modern debate may be summarized in the following confession: For God to have true relationships, He must exist in the world in a give-and-take, relational manner. And in order for Him to enjoy true mutual relations, He must be able to undergo successions in His life. This is the belief of theistic mutualists. And it is most often espoused in three particular perspectives: Everlasting-Temporal God, Timeless-turned-Temporal God, and Timeless-and-Temporal God.⁶

Everlasting-Temporal God

The first perspective is that of an Everlasting-Temporal God.⁷ The majority of philosophers reason that God is temporal, yet everlasting. By this, they mean that God never began to exist and will never cease to exist, yet still experiences temporal succession. God relates to time much like man does. His thoughts and actions are situated in time. For example, God experienced the Great Depression of 1929, and He also experienced the 2011 World Series. But He did not experience them at the same time; just as man had to wait 82 years between the events, so did God. He has existed in each past moment as it occurred, and He will exist in each future moment as it occurs. His actions are likewise temporal.

One of the chief proponents of this view is Nicholas Wolterstorff. He proposed that there is no biblical warrant for the belief that God is eternal. He contends that those who do hold to the eternity of God inherited and adapted this doctrine from Greek philosophy (e.g. Plato, *Timaeus*) rather than the Bible. Wolterstorff's argument is centered on God's relationship to time with a special emphasis upon the crucifixion. He argues that God is not eternal, but that He is everlasting. For many, to contend with such a claim seems to be nothing more than a quibble over words.

⁵ Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 79. Dolezal writes, "While the doctrine of divine eternity is commonly confessed, it is undoubtedly among the most difficult theological claims to understand."

⁶ These designations are observed by Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 89–95.

⁷ W. Kneale, "Time and Eternity," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960–61), 87–108; A. N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," in *Time and Tense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); J. R. Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (North Yorkshire, UK: Methuen Co., 1973); R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); and J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

But words matter. By this claim, Wolterstorff is arguing that God is not eternal, but that He is endlessly temporal. In other words, God does not stand outside of time, but He endlessly stands within it, experiencing each and every moment as time crawls forward.

His logical argument is as follows: First, the Bible clearly shows a God who changes (consequently, he argues, any hermeneutic that denies these changes is invalid). Second, any being who changes is a temporal being. Third, “eternal” is a totalizing characteristic, so to be both temporal and eternal is an impossibility. In conclusion, because God *appears* to act in time, God is not eternal. Wolterstorff writes,

What I shall argue is that if we are to accept this picture of God as acting for the renewal of human life, we must conceive of him as everlasting rather than eternal. God the Redeemer cannot be a God eternal. This is so because God the Redeemer is a God who changes. And any being which changes is a being among whose states there is temporal succession. Of course, there is an important sense in which God as presented in the Scriptures is changeless: he is steadfast in his redeeming intent and ever faithful to his children. Yet, ontologically, God cannot be a redeeming God without there being changeful variation among his states.⁸

In other words, the biblical text suggests a succession of time in God’s actions. Wolterstorff provides examples: God calling Abraham to leave Chaldea, instructing Moses to return to Egypt, and sending Jesus into the world. These events give the impression that God’s actions occur in time. And if God acts in time, then He cannot be timeless.⁹

Timeless-Turned-Temporal God

Other advocates of Divine temporality argue that God is timeless, but entered into time in order to have a personal relationship with His creation. William Lane Craig is a well-known proponent of this view. He says, “But in virtue of His creating a temporal world, God comes into relation with the world the moment it springs into being. Thus even if it is not the case that God is temporal prior to His creation, He nonetheless undergoes an extrinsic change at the moment of creation which draws Him into time in virtue of his real relation to the world.”¹⁰ He believes that the Bible

⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God Everlasting,” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (1975; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77–78.

⁹ Another example he provides is God’s knowledge of time. He says God “knows what is happening in our history, what has happened, and what will happen. Hence, some of God’s actions are themselves temporal events.” *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰ William Lane Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, 131–32. This view has been argued against by Brian Leftow. Leftow claims that if God is temporal, He is so essentially. Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 273. Now suppose according to this view God comes to exist in time. Time had a beginning yet God did not have a beginning, so there is a bit of a conundrum. How can these three statements be reconciled? Time came into existence at the moment of creation (Gen 1:1), then God existed before creation, alone without the universe.

presents instances in which God existed before time, and other instances in which He relates to His temporal creation. Therefore, he concludes, God must have been timeless, but now is temporal.¹¹

Timeless-and-Temporal

The third position is the most pervasive in modern evangelicalism. Scholars such as John Frame, Bruce Ware, John Feinberg, and Scott Oliphint represent this position.¹² This view affirms that God is unchanging in His supernatural (atemporal) existence. However, like the previous two views, this view affirms that in order for God to maintain genuine relationships, He must enter time. Adherents of this position wish to maintain an aspect in which God remains timeless, and therefore changeless. Therefore, they reason that He is both timeless and temporal. In this scenario, God has two modes of existence: one timeless and one temporal. For example, Frame explains,

Obviously, God is unchangeable in his atemporal or supratemporal existence. But when God enters into time, as a theophany, incarnate Son, or merely as present in time, he looks at his creation from within and shares the perspectives of his creatures. As God is with me on Monday, he views the events of Sunday as in the past, and the events of Tuesday (which, to be sure, he has foreordained) as future. He continues to be with me as Monday turns into Tuesday. So he views the passing of time as we do, as a process.¹³

He goes on to explain, “As an agent in history, God himself changes. On Monday, he wants something to happen, and on Tuesday, something else. He is grieved one day, pleased the next.”¹⁴ Thus for Frame, and other proponents of this perspective, there are two modes of existence in God: one atemporal and one temporal.¹⁵

He must be changeless before creation; otherwise, time would exist. And yet this state, strictly speaking, cannot exist before creation in a temporal sense, since time had a beginning. Now the conclusion that God entered into time is nonsense. For such a view necessitates that there are two phases of God's life—a timeless phase and a temporal phase. They affirm that the timeless phase existed earlier than the temporal phase. This fallacy cannot support itself because for there to be a period of God's existence that stands before another, then He would be everlastingly temporal and never truly timeless.

¹¹ Craig, “Timeless and Omnitemporality,” 131–32.

¹² Interestingly enough, K. Scott Oliphint says, “God freely determined to take on attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, without creation.” Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 110. And what might some of these “non-essential” characteristics be? Well, Oliphint explains temporality as one such characteristic, saying God “takes on temporal properties without in any way ceasing to be essentially eternal” (188).

¹³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 376.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* “The difference between God's atemporal and historical existence begins not with the creation of man, but with creation itself.” Here Frame expresses not only both modes of existence, but the moment when God enters into time as being at creation. So he at least concedes that time is created and not co-eternal with God.

In one respect, God, ‘in His atemporal existence,’ is unchangeable. Yet, with the creation of time, He enters into time in a temporal existence, and by it He changes along with creation. For Frame, these two modes are never at odds. This is one of the reasons Frame advocates “soft immutability.”

Frame admits the ostensible similarities between his views and those of process theologians. He says, “My approach bears a superficial resemblance to process theology, which also recognizes two modes of existence in God, transcendent and immanent, sometimes called the ‘primordial and consequent natures of God.’”¹⁶ While Frame attempts to distance himself from process theology (with, admittedly, real and significant differences), the similarities are nevertheless unavoidable. Even Open Theist John Sanders recognizes them:

Some evangelical Calvinists (e.g., Bruce Ware and John Frame) who affirm meticulous providence claim to be classical theists while rejecting Divine timelessness or strong immutability or strong impassibility. Though these Calvinists may be closer to classical theism than freewill theists, it does not seem justifiable to call such modifications classical theism any more than it is justifiable to claim that Anglicanism is Roman Catholicism.¹⁷

To be sure, similarities with Open Theism could be found in each of the temporal views of God outlined above. While there is not conformity among these scholars in how far they take their positions, they still share a similar presupposition—namely, that in order for God to engage in meaningful relationships (in any mutual way), He must be temporal (at least to some degree).¹⁸ Now, before considering the criticisms raised by these positions, it is important to discuss the nature of time itself, with particular attention being given to what Scripture says about God and time.

Defining Time

What is time? This deceptively simple noun has been and remains the battleground for understanding Divine timelessness. Most simply, time is that which is measured by clocks. It orders events, creating an understandable sequence of relationships—one after another after another. And time can specify the duration of an event. Primarily, time is used to measure when events occur, and the change that occurs between those events.

The classical theist’s understanding of Divine timelessness has been defined as follows: “God is above and beyond time. Again, God has no past, present, or

¹⁶ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 572.

¹⁷ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 331, note 91.

¹⁸ K. Scott Oliphint says this, “The fact that God interacts at all with creation presupposes his covenantal character. Once he determines to relate himself to us, that relation entails that he take on properties that he otherwise would not have had. He limits himself while remaining the infinite God. The fact that he is Creator means that he is now related to something ad extra to which he was not related before.” *God with Us*, 110.

future.”¹⁹ Given this assertion, it is necessary to distinguish between how both the Creator and His creatures relate to time. It is dangerous and all too common to conflate the two realities, and thus conclude that God's existence mirrors that of His creation. Paul Helm explains these two perspectives,

From the Creator's standpoint his creation is a timeless whole including as it does, the incarnation. However, from the standpoint of an intelligent creature the universe may be thought to be coeternal with God, for there may be no time when the universe is not. For such a creature the universe unfolds as a temporal sequence and because such an agent is in time, he is able to represent the universe as having a past, a present, and a future.²⁰

The purpose of this article is not to understand better the human perspective on time. Most would agree that humans experience the world temporally. Rather, this article focuses on whether or not God relates to time in the same manner. Concerning the philosophy of time itself, there are two schools of thought: the A-theory and the B-theory of time. These theories will be what we turn our attention to next.

A vs. B Theories of Time: Briefly Explained

Concerning the philosophical understanding of time, J. M. E. McTaggart has identified two opposing theories of time—namely, the A-theory and the B-theory.²¹ Understanding these two theories is vital for grasping God's relationship to time.

According to McTaggart, the A-theory teaches an actual temporal progression that makes an ontological distinction between the past, the present, and the future: A (past), B (present), and C (future). The present (and often the past) is affirmed as real, but the future is not yet real. Reality is based on what has been or is being experienced. Thus, the future is *yet* to be real. There exists an objective “now” which has ontological significance of its own.

The B-theory, on the other hand, understands time as the expression of relationships between various points on the timeline. Concerning time, there are no privileged, absolute perspectives; there is no objective “now.” Therefore, the “now” or “present” is defined based on its relationship to events, not simply based on temporal order. A-theory is generally associated with temporalists (those who deny Divine Timelessness), and B-theory is generally associated with atemporalists (those who affirm Divine Timelessness).

Experiential Space/Time and Metaphysical Space/Time

In this debate, it is necessary to distinguish between experiential time and metaphysical time. Experiential time is the “time” in which temporal and finite

¹⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: God and Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2004), 2:93.

²⁰ Paul Helm, “Divine Timeless Eternity,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, 55.

²¹ J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927). For a more thorough discussion on this, see: Marshall Wicks, “Is It Time to Change? Open Theism and the Divine Timelessness Debate,” *TMSJ* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 46–49.

creatures experience existence. Metaphysical time, however, is not something temporal finite creatures can experience, but something they can explain with reference to God. While an A-theory of time is intuitive to our psychological experience, it is nonetheless an uncertain, imprecise, and subjective explanation of experiential time. Albert Einstein's Relativity Theory has shown this to be true.²²

Einstein's Theory of Relativity sought to examine time through observable measurements.²³ Subsequent scientific experiments and observations of high speeds and intense gravity fields have only helped to confirm Einstein's theories that measurements of time by progression and temporal simultaneity are relative to the observer.²⁴ These ever-active principles of time measurement mean that experiencing the passing of time varies based on gravity and speed, which has been visually observed in extreme circumstances. Therefore, the rate of measurement of time is relative, not static. There is no such thing as an absolute temporal reference frame.

The measurement of time between two individuals can be dramatically different. This is known as "time dilation." For example, a person on an airplane breaking the sound barrier is traveling at a different rate relative to a person on a couch. This suggests that no two events happen in absolute simultaneity. Two events can appear to be simultaneous for one observer, and not simultaneous for another observer, yet both are equally true.²⁵ Such scientific observations radically alter one's perception of time and undermine naïve confidence in appeals to the subjective experience of time for metaphysical claims (upon which the A-theory is dependent).

As scientists have discovered the intricate interactions between space and time, they have begun to realize that the two are not separate entities. This discovery has led to the concept of four-dimensional space-time.²⁶ This newfound understanding of the relationship between space and time has scientifically demonstrated the traditional Christian understanding that time is an aspect of creation. Therefore, since time is a created entity, it must either be transcended by its Creator, or it must be pre-existent with Him. Because space and time are parallel dimensions, we can conclude that God's transcendent relationship to space must also be true for His relationship to time. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that time-space itself is co-equal with God. If time-space were co-equal with God, then there would be no validity to the creation account, or even to God Himself. In that case, "god" would be indistinguishable from space-time. Therefore, God is either co-equal with time-space, or time-space is created.

²² Specifically, it was Einstein's theory of special relativity that dealt with the non-absoluteness of time with respect to non-accelerating observers, the general theory just generalized it to include acceleration and gravity. So, really it was the special theory of relativity that changed the discussion on time. And the explanatory power of these theories has been proven through experimentation by physicists subsequent to Einstein. To see how the two theories impacted the wider culture see: Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

²³ Einstein was seeking to explain how space and time were "linked" for objects moving at the same consistent speed on the same line. However, for observers moving at different speeds and trajectories, time could not be said to be moving at the same speed for both of them.

²⁴ Douglas C. Giancoli, *Physics for Scientists and Engineers*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 916–48.

²⁵ Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson (New York: Crown Publishers, 1931), 30–33.

²⁶ Giancoli, *Physics for Scientists and Engineers*, 932.

God's Relationship to Space and Time

Since the A-theory explains experiential time in an insufficient manner, the B-theory must be examined to see if it can more adequately explain experiential time, as well as metaphysical time, with respect to God. The temporal order of events in the B-theory of time is as a set: (A, B, C, ...). A is the earliest event (or events) within this order, B the next, and so on. A causes B, B causes C, and so forth. For example, the boy hits a ball (A), the ball hits a window (B), the window breaks (C). The series of events is measured and distinguished based on each other, and none of those events take place simultaneously.

The B-theory asserts that the entire set (A, B, C, ...) is eternally, or timelessly, created. Therefore, God stands in an independent relationship to the set and its events. Accordingly, metaphysical time (time in relation to God) does not have a tensed distinction of the "present/now." The set (A, B, C, ...) itself is not past/simultaneous-present/future, because there is no other event to which the creation of the temporal order could stand in relationship to Him. The created order (A, B, C, ...), then, does not stand in temporal comparison to God, yet the events A, B, and C do stand in relation to each other in a measurable and temporal way, which is why events can be spoken of as occurring "in" time. They are earlier/simultaneous/later with respect to each other (experiential time/temporal), but not to God (metaphysical time/atemporal).

The A-theory suggests that God is necessarily "in" time, even from His own vantage point. The B-theory, on the other hand, holds that God remains "outside" of time. For B-theorists, not one moment in history is to be regarded as the "present" over the other moments of history, even though some occur earlier than others in relation to one another. Rather, all moments are in the same position with respect to God.

Since "time" is a created entity, no temporal event can be said to occur "before" creation. As there is no earlier event than creation, the creation of "time" occurs in eternity. Eternity should not be understood as existing within the temporal dimension. Creation is metaphysically dependent on the eternal decree of God. Therefore, God does not decree "in" time, but rather "with or concerning" time. He eternally, or timelessly, decrees. For example, event A at time t1, B at t2, etc. Therefore, the whole temporal order is timeless according to God's will of decree, though the events in this order are temporal because of their temporal relations to one another.

Scriptural Foundations

It is essential to determine whether or not the exegetical evidence of Scripture supports the claims of the B-theory of time. However, simply examining relevant passages is not an appropriate way to begin such a study. At the hermeneutical level, there is a fundamental difference between A-theorists and B-theorists.²⁷ The question

²⁷ The two primary debates are at the level of understanding the difference in the weight of didactic and narrative texts and the use of accommodation by God through means of anthropomorphisms. Helm explains, "At the heart of the theological differences between the Christian eternalist and temporalist is a

is this: does God accommodate His written revelation to the level of man's understanding? One's view of accommodation influences how one interprets the didactic and narrative texts of Scripture. Therefore, examining accommodation is foundational in establishing a proper exegetical methodology, especially as it concerns texts dealing with theology proper.

Theologians espousing the A-theory explain their exegetical method as "rescuing" biblical meaning from the confines of Greek philosophy. This approach often leads to an overly literal interpretation of texts concerning the ontological nature of God (which classical theists deem anthropomorphic). A-theorists often do so while asserting that the classical theists ascribe too much to accommodation as a result of their Greek philosophical influence.

Regarding "accommodation" passages, temporalists follow Nicholas Wolterstorff's principle, which is to "affirm as literally true Scripture's representation of God unless one has good reason not to do so."²⁸ This is in contrast to the eternalist view of Scripture as intrinsic accommodation to finite creatures. John Calvin best represents the B-theorist's understanding of accommodation. He did not believe it was a "fall-back strategy" for "difficult" passages, but an essential part of God's self-revelation.²⁹ Ultimately, the question of accommodation is how an infinite being relates to finite creatures. Paul Helm's explanation for Divine dialogue represents the position of classical theists:

On the eternalist view, in revealing his will God must accommodate himself to human spatiotemporal conditions by the use of sensory, figurative, anthropomorphic language about himself, particularly by using the language of change. So at the heart of the idea of divine accommodation is a logical point: it is a logically necessary condition of God's dialogue with his creatures that the divine dialogue partner must recognize that such creatures must act and react in time. If dialogue is to be real and not make-believe, then God cannot represent himself to such creatures by only revealing one immutable thing, for then dialogue, real dialogue, would be impossible.³⁰

Both the A-theorist and the B-theorist perspectives of time assume, at some level, accommodation. The question is: who, or what, determines when, or if, accommodation is occurring in Scripture? Or is accommodation always taking place, just to varying degrees? Because both groups have different hermeneutical presuppositions concerning accommodation, there are four elements which influence both hermeneutical presuppositions. These four elements are: (1) the historical

different estimate of what constitutes such a good reason as not to take some scriptural representation of God literally." Paul Helm, "Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff," in *God and Time: Four Views*, 215.

²⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Unqualified Divine Temporality," in *God and Time: Four Views*, 188. Also see: Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God and Time," *Philosophia Christi* 2, no. 1 (2000): 5–10.

²⁹ Wicks, "Is It Time to Change?," 51.

³⁰ Paul Helm, "Response to Critics," in *God and Time: Four Views*, 79. For more on this, see Paul Helm's other articles: "The Problem of Dialogue," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, eds. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 207–19 and a shorter treatment in "Divine Timeless Eternity," *Philosophia Christi* no. 2 (2000): 21–27.

influence, (2) the intensity of accommodation, (3) the role of genre, and (4) the weight of didactic passages.

First, the history of the church sides overwhelmingly with the eternalist understanding of accommodation. Those who wish to argue that the entire history of the church has had a false understanding of accommodation must do more than merely assert it. They must prove it. The consistent and pervasive affirmation of the eternalist understanding of accommodation in Christian history, which in turn has led to an understanding of Divine timelessness, is inescapable. This will be the focus of the latter portion of this study. However, the burden of proof rests with the A-theorists to prove that the overwhelming testimony of the church has been consistently in error.

Secondly, because of their hermeneutical presuppositions concerning accommodation, temporalists have an arbitrary delineation for when they do or do not understand expressions as accommodation. They likewise cannot account for varying degrees of accommodation. For them, accommodation is either occurring, or it is not. However, the eternalist understands that accommodation is necessary for an infinite God to reveal Himself to finite creatures; therefore, all revelation is accommodation.

The eternalist understands accommodation to always be taking place. But there is room for degrees of intensity, or levels, of accommodation. Did God literally need to be “refreshed” after creation (Exod 31:17)? According to Wolterstorff’s rule, the temporalist should understand this as literal. However, when temporalists do not interpret this, and other similar passages, as literal, they are doing so based on an arbitrary logic, which is precisely what they accuse eternalists of doing. Just as the temporalist has to make an arbitrary decision about “accommodation” in God’s resting, they must make similar decisions when the biblical authors say that God “forgets,” “remembers,” or “changes His mind,” that is, unless they are willing to understand all of these as literal occurrences.

Third, the temporalist often fails to consider the genre distinctions of Scripture when assessing accommodation. Passages containing Divine dialogue take place in narrative portions of Scripture (which are rife with anthropomorphic language). As narratives, these conversations unfold sequentially. Temporalists conclude, then, that since God is presented as participating in time-bound dialogue, He must therefore be “in” time. The temporalist ascribes metaphysical and ontological teachings to God’s essence based on verses that were never intended to support such positions. When recounting dialogue, the biblical authors were not using twenty-first century language. When Scripture is speaking of God’s essence and recounting God’s interaction with His creation “in” time, genre should be taken into account. We must be careful not to suppose God’s interactions “in” time demand that He be contained, or metaphysically defined, by it.³¹

Fourth, as a result of this hermeneutical misunderstanding of genre, temporalists tend to grant more authority to narrative passages than didactic passages for

³¹ William Lane Craig, “Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, 222. He writes, “I think it naïve to take Scripture’s representation of God as literally true unless one has good reason not to. By ‘good reason not to’ Nick apparently means, judged by his method, some teaching in Scripture to the opposite effect Nick concludes that we should take the temporal descriptions of God literally. But this hermeneutic is insensitive to the genre(s) of Scripture” (222).

establishing theology proper and God's metaphysical relationship to time. However, it seems only fitting that didactic passages be given greater weight in metaphysics than more impressionistic narrative passages.³² Eternalists understand that Divine action "in" time is consistent with a timeless God. But God's actions "in" time do not define God's essence, nor were they intended to do so.

In regard to theologically understanding God's relationship to time, one's approach to relevant texts must be based on a proper hermeneutic that analyzes the full context. As James Barr explains, "A valid biblical theology can be built only upon the *statements* of the Bible, and not on the *words* of the Bible."³³ A lexical study of time is an incomplete approach. The teaching of the text and its meaning should determine one's metaphysical understanding of God's essence.

Scripture: Accommodation Regarding Eternality and Temporality

As we turn our attention to the teaching of Scripture regarding God's relationship to time, the insufficiency of lexical studies is apparent. For example, even the usage of the terms for "eternal," in both Old and New Testaments, lacks the precision and consistency one might anticipate. The word "eternal" means without beginning or end. Nevertheless, Scripture uses this term for many things that have a beginning and end. For example: eternal mountains (Gen 49:26; Deut 33:15); eternal life (John 10:28; Titus 1:2); eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17); and eternal heavenly home (2 Cor 5:1). All of these had a beginning. There was a beginning to the mountains of the earth, the eternal life of the believer, and the heavenly dwelling place Christians will inhabit forever. Even the earth had a beginning (Gen 1:1) and yet is said to be eternal (Ps 104:5). So a study of the term "eternal" does not provide as much clarity as we might hope.

Why is this? These passages are examples of accommodation. What is true of each of these realities is that they have a temporal beginning and proceed through a succession of moments, either to end long into the future (like the mountains or the earth), or never to end, such as souls or angels.³⁴ Hence, the biblical writers often used the term "eternal" in a comparative manner.

The biblical authors also use the term "eternal" to emphasize that an event has always been in the mind of God—within His eternal will. However, every event that has ever transpired has eternally been in the mind of God. Nevertheless, Scripture speaks of the eternal covenant (Gen 17:7, 8), eternal promises (Num 10:8; 15:5; 18:8, 11, 19, 23), and even God's eternal dwelling place (1 Kings 8:13; 9:3; Ps 132:14).

It should be noted that the A-theory demands these texts be interpreted literally. There is no room for accommodation in the A-theory. But not only does Scripture ascribe "eternal" language to temporal things, it also ascribes "temporal" language to God in ways that even the A-theorists would not interpret literally. That temporal

³² Wicks, "Is It Time to Change?," 51–52.

³³ James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 2nd rev. ed., Studies in Biblical Theology (First Series) 33 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1969), 154.

³⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, III.10.2. Gill, Body of Divinity, 45. Thomas Aquinas called this "aeviternal" when something is characterized by eternity when it is not eternal. *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1912; repr. Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press, 2006), Ia.10.5.

language, being used non-literally of God, can be seen when God is called the “Ancient of Days” (Dan 7:9, 22), or when He is said to have “unending years” (Ps 102:27). If these passages were understood literally, as the A-theorists insist, we would end up with a god whom we believe simply to be very old. This would leave us with a god who is not God. The writers of Scripture expect more of us as readers. As Brakel said,

Even when years or days, or past and present times are attributed to God, and He is called the Ancient of Days and other similar expressions, such is merely done from man's standpoint. The reason for this is that we, insignificant human beings incapable of thinking and speaking about eternity in a fitting manner, may by way of comparison—which in reality is a very unequal comparison—comprehend as much of eternity as is needful for us to know. Nevertheless, in doing so we must fully divorce God from the concept of time.³⁵

It is natural to wonder why Scripture accommodates in the way that it does. Why do the biblical authors use eternal language for temporal things, and temporal language to describe eternal matters? Because man is fixed in time. Without temporal language, it would be difficult to understand the enduring nature of God. Therefore, Scripture stoops down to explain God's existence to us in a way that is commensurate with our experience.

Historical Argument

Now it seems the temporalist refuses to accept accommodation in certain situations regarding God's work in time. In the estimation of the atemporalist, these refusals to accept accommodation are very subjective. So the question naturally follows, how should we understand the Bible on this matter? How should the modern interpreter examine his personal interpretation so as not to create a new version of God in the process? While not an infallible rule, a safe guide in this matter is to consider what the history of the church has taught concerning the matter.

The church has historically affirmed, taught, and defended the timelessness of God. Granted, some of the articulation regarding timelessness is more philosophical and theoretical than scriptural in nature, but that is no reason for the church to avoid understanding God's relation to time. While the debate may trend more philosophical than most Christians prefer, the issue is no less important. The debate is over the very essence of God. Thus, throughout her history, the church has searched into these matters and has concluded that God is timeless.³⁶ The following is a brief survey of that search.

³⁵ Wilhelmus A. Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Volume 1: God, Man, and Christ*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), 1:92. It is not within the scope of the paper to venture into God's eternal acts and how that intersects with a temporal world. However, for a vital summary of this matter, in particular how “God's eternal act produces a temporal effect” see: Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 100–102.

³⁶ The A-theorist, anti-classical theist, Clark Pinnock similarly observed this; “No one should criticize the Fathers for trying to integrate current philosophical beliefs and biblical insights. If the God of

First and Second Centuries

The early church was filled with affirmations of the timelessness of God. Living and ministering during the time of the apostles, Ignatius of Antioch (estimated to have lived between A.D. 35–50 and A.D. 98–107) was a defender of Divine timelessness. In connection to several comments dating before the creeds of Christendom, there was a common teaching that Christ was waiting in heaven “till his enemies are put under his feet.”³⁷ To this Ignatius added, “Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible.”³⁸ Ignatius’s declaration that Christ was “above all time” was a declaration of God’s timeless existence. While God may be and act “in” time, He is in no way constrained by it, hence Ignatius’s statement that He is “above all time.”

Another early-church proponent of the timelessness of God was Athenagoras the Athenian (c. A.D. 133–190). Athenagoras declared himself to be an Athenian, a philosopher, and a Christian.³⁹ He wrote, “We are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal.”⁴⁰ The eternity of God, as previously defined, is God’s independent self-existence as He was before time. Since God cannot be measured by time and because He is infinite, He is said to be eternal. In Athenagoras’ time, the claim that God was terrestrial or contingent was considered atheistic in nature. “Eternal” is, therefore, a synonym for timeless.

This same position regarding the eternity of God is seen in Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165). In his address to the Greeks, Justin Martyr reasoned that the Greek philosophers owed much of their understanding to Moses and the “ancient Christian teachers.” When Scripture says of God, “I am the first,” and, “there is no other,” Martyr explained, “But either of the expressions seems to apply to the ever-existent God. For He is the only one who eternally exists, and has no generation.”⁴¹

God’s sovereign control of future events—His ability to decree and predict—is another element of the timelessness of God. He speaks of future events as certain even though, in experiential time, they have yet to occur. He can do so because His interaction with time is entirely different than ours. Tatian (A.D. 120–180) wrote, “I was led to put faith in . . . the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centered in one Being.”⁴²

the universe and of truth is one, theologians should try to integrate all of the truth that they know from any quarter.” Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 106.

³⁷ Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:12.

³⁸ Ignatius, “Epistle to Polycarp: Shorter and Longer Versions,” *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1999), 1:94.

³⁹ Athenagoras the Athenian, “A Plea for the Christians,” in *ANF*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 2:131. Here Athenagoras is defending the teaching of the philosophical pursuit of the question of God’s location and affirms that God is everywhere, that is, God is unconstrained by any time or place.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:133.

⁴¹ Justin Martyr, “Justin’s Hortatory Address to the Greeks,” in *ANF* (1999), 1:282.

⁴² Tatian, “Tatian’s Address to the Greeks,” in *ANF* (1999), 2:77.

One of the clearest statements on Divine timelessness from the first century is from Theophilus of Antioch (A.D. 120–183). He wrote:

This is the attribute of God, the Highest and Almighty, and the living God; not only to be everywhere present, but also to see all things and to hear all things. He is by no means to be confined in a place. For if he were, then the place containing Him would be greater than He; for that which contains is greater than that which is contained. For God is not contained, but is Himself the place of all.⁴³

The argumentation (as seen here) of the early church assumes that if God is constrained by time, then time must become greater than Him. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–215) explained God's existence as being in eternity. He also expressed God's existence and interaction with time as fundamentally different than that of finite creation when he wrote, "Eternity, for instance, presents in an instant the future, the present, and also the past of time."⁴⁴ God's existence is described by eternity because He cannot be contained by time. Clement wrote, "Such an one is persuaded that God is ever beside him, and does not supposed that He is confined in certain limited places."⁴⁵ Perhaps the best description of God's timelessness by Clement is as follows: "God is not in darkness or in place, but He is above both space and time, and qualities of objects. Wherefore neither is He at any time in a particular point, either as containing or as contained, either by limitation or by section. ... Though heaven be called His throne, not even thus is He contained."⁴⁶ Clement understood that time is in fact a place—a plane of existence that is different than God's essential existence. God is "above both space and time," and is not even contained by heaven itself, though it is His very resting place.

Another early teacher of timelessness was Irenaeus of Lyons (A.D. 130–202). Philip Schaff calls Irenaeus "the most important witness of the doctrinal status of the Catholic Church at the close of the second century."⁴⁷ Irenaeus affirmed the transcendence and uniqueness of God. The reason God, in order to express Himself, must accommodate to human understanding is because He is so unique. "Now what has been made is a different thing from him who makes it. The breath, then, is temporal, but the Spirit eternal."⁴⁸ In the classical theistic understanding of God's timelessness, two doctrines are often connected: (1) Divine simplicity (God is not comprised of many parts), and (2) Divine immutability (God is incapable of change). Concerning the first, Irenaeus wrote, "He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself."⁴⁹ This establishes God's transcendence and the need for men to understand God on His own terms, not imagining Him to be a man while seeking to understand who He is in and of Himself.

⁴³ Theophilus, "Theophilus to Autolyus," in *ANF* (1999), 2.95.

⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," in *ANF* (1999), 2.313.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.533.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.348.

⁴⁷ Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 2:13.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1956), 1:538.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:374.

“In this respect God differs from man, that God indeed makes, but man is made; and truly, He who makes is always the same.”⁵⁰

Therefore, if God is immutable, as the Creator of time He cannot become dependent upon nor constrained by time, as that would entail change in Him. In his pivotal work, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus declared that, “God alone, who is Lord of all, is without beginning and without end, being truly and forever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being.”⁵¹ This directly impacts how Irenaeus understood God’s relation to time. “They are ignorant what the expression means, that heaven is [His] throne and earth [His] footstool. For they do not know what God is, but they imagine that He sits after the fashion of a man, and is contained within bounds, but does not contain.”⁵² God cannot be contained by anything in creation, which would include time itself.

Therefore, after the testimonies of Ignatius of Antioch, Athenagoras the Athenian, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus of Lyons, it is reasonable to conclude that the doctrine of Divine timelessness was pervasive in the first and second centuries church.

Third Century

Like the second century, the third century church was convinced of and invested in Divine timelessness. Tertullian (A.D. 160–220) succinctly explained God’s eternal existence and his definition of “eternity” when he wrote, “Eternity has not time. It is itself all time.”⁵³ The church fathers consistently referred to God’s existence as eternal in order to distinguish Him from temporal creatures. God’s existence cannot be measured by time, because time is a creation of His hands. In Tertullian’s famous response to Marcion, he argues that Christians must assert those attributes in the Creator which are called into question—namely, His goodness, foreknowledge, and power. Similarly, timelessness has come into question in modern times. Tertullian affirmed the eternity of God when he said:

This rule is required by the nature of the One-only God, who is One-only in no other way than as the sole God; and in other way sole, than as having nothing else (co-existent) with Him. So also, He will be first, because all things are after Him; and all things are after Him, because all things are by Him; and all things are by Him, because they are of nothing.⁵⁴

Tertullian believed that nothing was co-eternal with God. This means that time itself was created, not co-existent with God.

Origen was another third-century proponent of timelessness (A.D. 182–254). He grappled with the incarnation and God’s interaction with time. He made clear that when the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate, He was not completely

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *ANF* (1956), 1:474.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:411.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:465.

⁵³ Tertullian, “Five Books Against Marcion,” in *ANF* (1956), 3:276.

⁵⁴ Tertullian, “Against Hermogenes,” in *ANF* (1956), 3:487.

contained by what He took on. He neither lost nor changed His existence when He became a man. Origen wrote:

The God of the universe may, through His own power, descend with Jesus into the life of men. The Word that was in the beginning with God (who is also very God) may come to us. However, He does not give up His place or vacate His own seat, in doing so. It is not that one place becomes empty of Him. Or that another place did not formerly contain Him is not filled.⁵⁵

Therefore, when entering into time, God does not remove Himself from His timeless existence, nor trap Himself in the confines of time. Origen also wrestled with the concept of man's glorification after the consummation of the ages. He writes, "And we do not ask the question, 'How shall we go to God?'" as though we thought that God existed in some place. God is of too excellent a nature for any place: He holds all things in His power, and is Himself not confined by anything whatsoever."⁵⁶ Although Origen embraced a number of unorthodox teachings, he did not appear to deny the classical attributes of God. Likewise, in regard to the doctrine of timelessness, Origen seems to have followed the uniform teaching of the church prior to him.

Another example of third century teaching on timelessness is from Mark Minucius Felix (A.D. 150–270). Felix expressed that God can simultaneously be "in" time and "in" eternity (outside of time). So while God is upholding, containing, directing, and moving time itself, He is not losing His eternal existence. Felix explains:

For from where is God afar off, when all things heavenly and earthly, and which are beyond this province of the universe, are known to God, are full of God? Everywhere He is not only very near to us, but He is infused into us. Therefore once more look upon the sun: it is fixed fast in the heaven, yet it is diffused over all lands equally; present everywhere, it is associated and mingled with all things; its brightness is never violated. How much more is God.⁵⁷

Not only is God omnipresent in time, but He neither loses nor leaves His eternal essence to become constrained by a temporal existence.

Many more issues related to timelessness are expressed in the third century. Origen explained God's relation to time in that He is not changed upon entering time nor contained within it when He does. Second, Mark Minucius Felix explained how God's omnipresence in time does not change His essence as eternal (timelessness). In other words, God can simultaneously be inside and outside of time.

⁵⁵ Origen, "Origen Against Celsus," in *ANF* (1956), 4:449.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:625.

⁵⁷ Mark Minucius Felix, "The Octavius of Minucius Felix," in *ANF* (1956), 4:193.

Fourth Century

The doctrine of timelessness was no less prominent in the fourth century. The church fathers of the fourth century not only affirmed the immutability, simplicity, and eternity of God and equated these doctrines with God's timelessness, but they also taught in detail on God's timelessness. Concerning the timelessness of the Godhead—and Jesus Christ in particular—Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 313–386) said:

Two fathers He hath: one, David, according to the flesh, and one, God, His Father in a divine manner. As the Son of David, He is subject to time, and to handling and to genealogical descent: but as Son according to the Godhead, He is subject to neither time nor place, nor to genealogical descent: for His generation who shall declare God is a Spirit. ... The Son Himself says of the Father, the Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee. Now this today is not recent, but eternal: a timeless today, before all ages.⁵⁸

The previous examples explained how the creation of time in no way changes the eternal existence of God, that time does not contain Him in any way, and the nature of His interactions with time. But it was Cyril of Jerusalem who assembled all these teachings and ascribed to God the attribute of “timeless.” Even though the timeless existence of God was understood in the first three centuries of the church, in the fourth century the various threads concerning God's essence were at last woven together in the term “timeless.”

Another example of the attribute of God's timelessness is seen in Hilary of Poitiers (A.D. 315–367). He explains:

His nature forbids us to say that He ever began to be, for His birth lies beyond the beginning of time. But while we confess Him existent before all ages, we do not hesitate to pronounce Him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning. But while we confess Him existent before all ages, we do not hesitate to pronounce Him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning.⁵⁹

Hilary wrote a significant amount on the timelessness of God. He even used John 1:1 to elaborate on the doctrine of timelessness. Concerning John 1:1, he writes, “For His was has no limit of time and no commencement; the uncreated Word was in the beginning.”⁶⁰ Likewise, the transcendence of God makes equating or expressing God's essence and existence by comparing Him to time improper. Regarding the timeless existence of the Trinity, Hilary wrote, “He, the Author of all things, must have an immeasurable existence. For time is a cognizable and divisible measure of

⁵⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, “The Catechetical Lectures,” *NPNF2*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford (1894; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2004), 7:65.

⁵⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity,” *NPNF2*, 9:175.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9:56.

extension, not in space, but in duration. All things are from Him, without exception; time then itself is His creature.”⁶¹

The church fathers of the first three centuries of the church taught and believed in Divine timelessness. They explained God's inability to be constrained by time and His eternal nature. Nevertheless, they were not as explicit as the fourth century fathers. In the fourth century, the previous teachings concerning God were harmonized and articulated as Divine timelessness.

Fifth Century

There is not another theologian—in his time nor perhaps since—whose name holds more weight than Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430). John Frame tells of a joke in Augustine's day that asked, “What was God doing before he created the world?” The response: He was “preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries.”⁶² However, like the previous church fathers, Augustine did not regard timelessness as a mystery. He understood that to believe God to be temporal was a serious philosophical problem. Augustine thus continued to expose the logical problem of positing time as co-eternal with God. For him, it was pure ignorance to think of God as having to wait the passage of time in order to create.⁶³ Therefore, Augustine attributed to God the characteristic of timelessness. God was doing nothing “before” creation, because there was no such thing as time before creation.⁶⁴ Because God is timeless, one cannot say that He waited an infinite amount of time to create. God's existence is not measurable by time, nor what has been called eternity. This view has been defended by atemporalist theologians ever since.

Augustine helped with the defining characteristics of the atemporalist (the B-theory) understanding of God when he wrote, “The distinguishing mark between time and eternity is that the former does not exist without some movement and change, while in the latter there is no change at all.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, he explained, “The world was made not in time but together with time. For what is made in time is made after

⁶¹ Hilary, “On the Trinity,” 9:57.

⁶² Augustine, “Confessions,” *NPNF1*, 1:167; also Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 391.

⁶³ Modern philosophers believe that time is itself pre-existent, and therefore God is infinite, because His existence is in time. However, this is a philosophical impossibility. If time were pre-existent, the present time could never have been reached for God to create. This is known as the Kalaam argument. See William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), particularly Chapter 1. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 389–91, concurs, citing the Kalaam argument that an actual infinite is impossible, because it is not possible to have an infinite number of events occur, so we would never reach the present. A natural conclusion from this is that God cannot be actually (temporally) infinite, but must be timeless. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that God is eternal or timeless rather than infinitely temporal.

Even if it were possible to assume, for the sake of argument, that God has always existed in time, a logical impossibility still presents itself. Brian Leftow shows the illogic of a temporal God's choosing to wait any amount of time to create when He exists unchanging by Himself. Brian Leftow, “Why Didn't God Create the World Sooner?” *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 157–72. The strength of this argument is clearly seen in Wolterstorff's weak response. In Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Response to Critics,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, 238, Wolterstorff does not give much attention to this argument. In general, Temporalists cannot provide a persuasive argument for why God would delay creating.

⁶⁴ Augustine, “Confessions,” 1:167.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:165.

one period of time and before another, namely, after a past and before a future time. But, there could have been no past time, since there was nothing created by whose movements and change time could be measured.”⁶⁶

Augustine also taught that time was created, and that God preceded time in timeless eternity. He wrote, “Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else wouldest not Thou precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity Thou precedest all times past, and survives all future times. ... It is silly for them to excogitate a past time during which God was unoccupied, for the simple reason that there was no such thing as time before the universe was made.”⁶⁷ He adds, “And no times are co-eternal with Thee.”⁶⁸

Middle Ages

One of the most influential teachers in the Middle Ages was St. Anselm (1033–1109).⁶⁹ Anselm defended and presented timelessness from a different perspective than the early church fathers. Feinberg explains that Anselm, in *Proslogium*, argued from Divine perfection to atemporality, asserting that Divine timelessness is a necessary perfection for a perfect being, because being eternal is greater than being temporal.⁷⁰ Anselm understood eternity as timelessness, as did the early church fathers, but rather than arguing from immutability, he argued from perfection. Anselm described the perfection of God’s timelessness when he wrote:

Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be to-morrow; but yesterday and to-day and to-morrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday nor to-day nor to-morrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and to-day and to-morrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee. For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all.⁷¹

Anselm and other atemporalists believed that temporality was inferior to eternity. Though this may be denied by temporalists, it is important to examine the claim. First, if it is not true that timelessness is a greater perfection than temporality, then the creation of time would have been necessary, not free. Second, if God remains timeless, it is reasonable to see how He can control all time, because He is outside of it. Consequently, the greater is able to control the lesser. Hence, Anselm was quick to call timelessness a Divine perfection.

⁶⁶ Augustine, “Confessions,” 1:165.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:168. For a summary on Augustine’s defense of timelessness see: Norman L. Geisler, *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), Chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Augustine, “Confessions,” 1:168.

⁶⁹ For more on Anselm’s views, see St. Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York, NY: Harper Torchbook, 1970), 152–99.

⁷⁰ Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 382–83.

⁷¹ Anselm, *Proslogium*, XIX, in *Proslogium; Monologium; an Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, Philosophical Classics, Religion of Science Library No. 54, (1903; repr., La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1951), 25.

Anselm's second line of argument was from simplicity to timelessness. This argument can be read in detail in his *Monologium*.⁷² The doctrine of simplicity teaches that God is not made up of parts. As humans are comprised of parts, they are defined by and dependent upon the relationship of these parts. If a man's legs are not working, his movement is hindered. If a man's mind is not working, his reason is hindered. The examples of humanity's dependence on the operation of parts is endless. God, on the contrary, is simple. He is simple in that He is neither defined by, nor dependent upon, parts. Therefore, God cannot be defined nor dependent on the "parts" of time. Thus, in Anselm's words, God can be said to be "with" space and time, but not "in" space and time.⁷³ This distinction is critical, because it is an expression of God's perfect existence. To say that God exists "in" time would be to constrain Him. Rather, God exists "with" time, so that His existence is unconstrained, and yet, He can freely interact with time without undergoing change.

The most influential Christian thinker in the Middle Ages, some would consider of all time, was Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–1274).⁷⁴ Aquinas was perhaps the first theologian to see each of the three major doctrines used in the previous 1200 years of the church—simplicity, immutability, and eternity—as being interconnected, best expressed in, and necessitating the timelessness of God.⁷⁵ Because God is not made up of parts (simplicity), He is therefore incapable of change (immutability). If time is defined by change, then God must likewise be eternal (timeless). Aquinas wrote:

We have shown already that the notion of eternity derives from unchangeableness in the same way that the notion of time derives from change. Eternity therefore principally belongs to God, who is utterly unchangeable. Not only that, but God is his own eternity, whereas other things, not being their own existence, are not their own duration. God, however, is his own invariable existence, and so is identical with his own eternity just as he is with his own nature.⁷⁶

For Aquinas, these attributes are clear, logical, and essential to understanding who God is. To deny timelessness would be to deny God's immutability, simplicity, and eternity.⁷⁷

⁷² See *ibid.*, 66–85, for his detailed discussion, possibly the most rigorous and extensive discussion of the classic authors on simplicity and timelessness.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁴ For a more detailed examination of Aquinas' writings which pertain to Divine Timelessness, see: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Latin-English edition (Scotts Valley, CA: Nova Antiqua, 2008), 1:1–100.

⁷⁵ Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 383–84.

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 89. Also cited in Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 384.

⁷⁷ Not all modern evangelicals would agree with the traditional definition of immutability. Feinberg creates a new form of immutability and calls it "soft immutability;" he limits immutability to God's, "being, attributes, purposes, will, and ethical norms," *No One Like Him*, 404. This highly contested issue is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that Feinberg's revised definition of immutability assumes a temporal God as its foundation. The only way God can experience relational and knowledge change is if He is temporal.

Within the Middle Ages, the most well-known theologians were forthright proponents of timelessness. Calvin and the Magisterial Reformers likewise stood upon this classical tradition.⁷⁸ Indeed, no major Christian teacher up to, and through, the Reformation deviated from the centrality of the timelessness of God.

Practical Implications

Is there any practical consequence to such a debate? Is this mere ivory-tower speculation? There are immense practical applications—most importantly the eternal (unending) states of heaven and hell. Christians are said to have eternal life. John 5:24 says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life.” In the future, those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him alone for their salvation will inherit eternal life. But what exactly is meant by eternal? Mark 10:30 says, “But that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.” Eternal life is a reflection of the eternal will of God for His elect—accomplished by Christ in the temporal realm, producing ongoing results for believers. When Christians are granted eternal life, it does not mean they pre-existed in an eternal way as the Son did. Rather, man has an immortal (or eternal) life that has a beginning, but no end.⁷⁹

The eternal timelessness of God, on the other hand, which promises heaven, also issues threats of hell. Jesus promised exactly that in Matthew 25:46, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” It is no coincidence that Scripture tells of an eternal God, and also of an eternal hell. An offense against a temporal being merits a temporal consequence. If you steal from someone, your offense against that temporal being is a temporal offense, resulting in a temporal consequence (e.g. fine or jail time). But an offense against a timeless, eternal God is of far greater consequence. All of your sins offend Him eternally, and therefore, require a consequence commensurate with that offense—an eternal consequence. This explains why hell contains eternal fire (Matt 25:41; Jude 7) reserved for those who offend Him forever (Jude 13), why their punishment is never quenched (Mark 9:48), and why they will be tortured day and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10). Hell is a place of eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9).

Thomas Goodwin wrote that every “wretched soul in hell ... finds that it shall not outlive that misery, nor yet can it find one space or moment of time of freedom and intermission, having forever to do with him who is the living God.”⁸⁰ Because eternal hell is an expression of the eternal nature of God’s holy justice, it is all the more necessary for believers to warn unbelievers of the eternal consequences of their rejection of the Savior. Those who consider God a temporal being must find reason for the eternity of His judgment; they must answer why His judgments go on forever. Why would unbelievers not merely receive a temporal punishment?

⁷⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), Book 1.

⁷⁹ This is known as aeviternity. Eternity is an existence that has no beginning or end. Time, as we know, has a beginning and an end. However, aeviternity has a beginning but no end. This is the kind of existence that spiritual beings dwell in other than God, such as angels.

⁸⁰ Thomas Goodwin, *Two Discourses* (London: J. D. for Jonathan Robinson, 1963), 195.

There are, as well, more practical benefits for believers. The eternal nature of God and the eternal consequences of sin should promote deeper forgiveness in temporal creatures. All offenses against us are mere temporal offenses. If God can forgive us of eternal offenses, then certainly we can forgive temporal offenses here on earth. This is why we are told to forgive others, because God is the one who judges the living and the dead.

Considering the criticisms regarding timelessness (creation, God's relationships and actions, and the incarnation), it is essential to remember that the eternity of God belongs to His incommunicable attributes. This explains why understanding the timelessness of God proves so difficult, because we cannot experientially grasp timelessness. Nevertheless, we can understand it conceptually. It is fitting and necessary that we talk and think about God with precision and care. Whether God is working in time as the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, as the incarnation, or in future judgment, we must insist that God, in His very being, is not changed by these temporal activities.

Conclusion

It has been my intention to demonstrate the exegetical basis and historical milieu for the doctrine of timelessness. When evangelicals undermine timelessness, they do not do so in a vacuum. They do so against the results of consistent scriptural exegesis, the overwhelming affirmation of church history, and, with great consequence, the very character of God.

The debate over the timelessness of God is not an inconsequential quarrel over academic minutiae. Tampering with this one attribute triggers an eroding effect that ripples through the other attributes of God. Evangelicals who deny timelessness must account for the implications their denial has upon immutability, simplicity, and eternity. If you diminish, redefine, or alter any of the doctrines of God, you have created an altogether different god. Bavinck wrote, "One who says 'time' says motion, change, measurability, computability, limitation, finiteness, creature."⁸¹ If we manufacture and serve a temporal god—a god whom we have made subject to his own creation—we serve a creature of our own imagination, not the historic God of the Christian faith.

⁸¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:163.

TOWARD THE WORSHIP OF GOD AS *ACTUS PURUS*

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God is Actus Purus, which is to say that He is eternally all that He can be. Potentiality is a trait of creatures, not God. The concept of Actus Purus was first articulated by Aristotle in his argument for the unmoved mover, and through its history, the church has considered this notion a valid articulation of the absolute perfection and preeminence of God over all things. This paper, then, explores the exegetical footing of Actus Purus. It also will seek to understand its implications for systematic theology. Careful exegesis will demonstrate that the doctrine of pure actuality is deducible from Scripture by good and necessary consequence. It is an instrument that helps to sound the unbounded perfection of God and arrive at a more settled understanding of His meticulous sovereignty. In short, pure actuality conveys that life cannot but belong to God, because He decrees, wills, knows, and does everything entirely from Himself.

* * * * *

Introduction

There is an unfathomable chasm between God and creation. The soul can therefore only rise toward God by first supporting itself on the created order, where the Divine perfections are stamped.¹ Christian theology, on the other hand, faces a monumental challenge in seeking to articulate the fundamental perfection and primacy of God over His creatures. After all, He is the eternal and infinite Creator of a temporal and finite world. More than that, He is Being, from whom all existence is derived; Sustainer, through whom all things are upheld; and End, to whom all things are (Rom 11:36). In other words, God moves and changes all things without being moved or changed by anything. He is always active, always in repose; He seeks

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford World Classics (New York: Oxford, 2008), V.i. (I), 72. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 1:30.2. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 2:130. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (1629; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 83.

without ever losing; He gathers to Himself though He has no need; “in Him are the constant causes of inconstant things.”²

One way in which theologians have expressed this notion is in the term *actus purus*, or pure actuality. Succinctly, this designation refers to God “as the fully actualized being, the only being not in potency.”³ This simply means that “[God is] absolutely perfect and the eternally perfect fulfillment of himself.”⁴ Unlike creatures, who have passive potential awaiting actualization, God is eternally all that He can be. Gisbertus Voetius stated, “If there were potency in God, there would exist in him something imperfect or perfectible for which an act would be perfective, through which perfective act some higher perfection would encroach upon God.”⁵ Potentiality, then, is a trait of creatureliness. If God had any passive qualities, He would not be perfect. Instead, He would be mutable.⁶ And a mutable God would be no God at all (Ps 102:26–27; Rom 1:23; Jas 1:17). Therefore, God is *actus purus*.

The concept of God as absolute actuality was first conceived by Aristotle in his famous argument for an eternal unmoved mover.⁷ Scholasticism, accordingly, grafted it into its theological olive tree.⁸ And even through the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, Christian thinkers considered the notion a valid strategy in the quest of the redeemed mind to express the absolute perfection and preeminence of God over all things.⁹

The objective of this study, then, is to explore whether the doctrine of pure actuality stands on firm exegetical footing, and to ascertain its implications for systematic theology. To that end, I will begin by examining three key texts that have been historically moored to the doctrines of aseity and immutability, both of which are corollaries of pure actuality (Exod 3:13–14; Acts 17:28; and Rom 11:36). In the second section, I will define and examine the doctrine of pure actuality in light of the exegetical conclusions at hand. Finally, in the third section, having thus established a biblical warrant for the doctrine, I will demonstrate its impact upon two divine attributes (namely immutability and eternity), and the doctrine of predestination, as a way to illustrate its relevance for the discipline of systematic theology.

² Augustine, *Confessions*, I.iv.(4), I.vi.(9), 5, 7.

³ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 24.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gisbertus Voetius, “God’s Single, Absolutely Simple Essence,” in *The Confessional Presbyterian* no. 15 (2019), 13.

⁶ Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 84. Voetius thus called passive potency “the root of mutability” (Voetius, “God’s Single, Absolutely Simple Essence,” 14).

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Z.XII.6–10; cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 46. He explains that Aristotle was by no means arguing for the God of Scripture. Though for Aristotle the unmoved mover stands alone as being first, he is not necessarily alone as unmoved mover (divinity). Discussions on the role of Aristotelian philosophy in Christian theology lie beyond the scope of this study. My aim instead is to take the concept of pure actuality as it has been passed down to and by the church, and examine it according to its own merits.

⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:156–57.

⁹ As Muller points out, “the underlying assumptions governing the doctrine of God during the eras of the Reformation and Protestant orthodoxy are very little different from those governing the discussion during the Middle Ages” (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *The Essence and Attributes of God* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 3:97).

Careful exegesis will demonstrate that the doctrine of pure actuality is no mere philosophical speculation.¹⁰ Rather, it is an instrument that helps us sound the unbounded perfection of God and arrive at a more settled understanding of His meticulous sovereignty. In short, pure actuality conveys that life cannot but belong to God, because He decrees, wills, knows, works, and does everything entirely from Himself.¹¹ As the positive counterpart of the doctrine of Divine simplicity, pure actuality is necessary for the constitution of “a baseline, a controlling grammar for all our thoughts and beliefs about God,” without which we would run the risk of worshipping “that which is not the unsurpassable and most absolute being.”¹² Whether God is *actus purus*, then, is a matter of worship, a matter of faith, and thus a matter of utmost importance.

Establishing an Exegetical Foundation

Admittedly, theologians and philosophers of the past often thought that reason is able to demonstrate conclusively that God is *actus purus*. After all, if He is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, then potentiality is antithetical to His nature. That is because potentiality would suggest the presence of something perfectible in God.¹³ On the other hand, pure actuality can be discovered via the doctrine of the Trinity. In the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit, God's knowing, willing, and loving are presented in Scripture as fully in act, independent of any outside influence, and eternally immutable.¹⁴ God's absolute actuality,

¹⁰ This was a common charge brought against Reformed theologians by both Socinian and Remonstrant writers. Simon Episcopius, a leading Arminian at the Synod of Dort, wrote:

You have to drench your mind with the whole metaphysics, before you understand what composition is, and then, ‘Is there composition from existence and essence?’, and ‘What is it?’, and ‘Is there composition from act and potency?’, ‘What is that?’ ... Thus the Remonstrants leave these decisions to their academic teachers and to all those for whom it is permitted to wrestle in this dry dust and slay themselves. (Simon Episcopius, *Apologia pro confessione sive Declaratione sententiae eorum, qui in Foederato Belgio vocantur Remonstrantes, super praecipuis articulis religionis Christianae* (1629), 41–42, cited in Voetius, “God's Single, Absolutely Simple Essence,” 18.)

Voetius goes on to respond (*ibid.*, 20),

We deny that the teaching is materially and in itself philosophical, even though one could say that it is formally such, insofar as one presents simplicity and vindicates it from the opponents' pseudo-philosophical tricks by using philosophical or scholastic terms. One could also raise the same objection against the teaching about all God's attributes, even those that the Socinians and Remonstrants themselves propose; and likewise the teaching on the Trinity, teaching on the person and natures of Christ against Eutychus and Nestorius—in fact, even almost all of theology.

The question, therefore, is not whether one employs metaphysical principles in order to draw theological conclusions. That is inevitable. Rather, the question is whether one's metaphysical principles drive exegesis, or whether one's exegesis shapes his metaphysics. Cf. J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Geanies House, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2016), 231.

¹¹ Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 2: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 2:232.

¹² James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 58.

¹³ Voetius, “God's Single, Absolutely Simple Essence,” 13–14.

¹⁴ Cf. Steven J. Duby, “Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity,” in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Lincoln, NE: The Davenant Press, 2018), 92; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:308. Bavinck writes that eternal generation demonstrates that God

therefore, lies at the bosom of the bosom of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity.

Beyond this, a number of individual passages so strongly suggest that God is utterly pre-eminent over creation, that they are well worth erecting as scriptural pillars to uphold the doctrine of pure actuality: these are Exodus 3:13–14; Acts 17:28; and Romans 11:36. These texts have been traditionally considered to be prooftexts for the doctrines of divine aseity and immutability. As this study will show, however, both aseity and immutability result from the fact that God is pure act. The exegesis of Exodus 3:13–14; Acts 17:28; and Romans 11:36 will therefore serve as the standard by which to demonstrate the doctrine’s validity.

Exodus 3:13–14

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֶּה אֲנִי בְּאֵל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמַרְוּ לִי מִה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה אֶמַר אֲלֵהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Along with scenes such as the floating axe head (2 Kings 6:6) and the Jewish youths unscathed by the fire (Dan 3), the episode of the burning bush has stamped itself upon the pages of history as further demonstration that though some things work necessarily (as water wets the skin and fire gives off heat), yet both their action and their existence are entirely dependent upon God’s influence.¹⁵ If He should remove it, they would cease to act or exist. In other words, the lordship of God extends down to the molecular level.

To be sure, it was a “marvelous sight” (v. 3) to see a bush aflame without being consumed; and a terrifying sound to hear the voice of God call out from the midst of it (vv. 4, 6). Nevertheless, receiving the Divine commission to deliver Israel horrified Moses even more. The prospect of returning to the government that had sought to kill him (2:15) and the slaves who had once rejected him (2:14) seemed dismaying.

Perhaps feigning humility and inadequacy, Moses began to raise objections. Though educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians (2:10), he claimed unfitness to

is a plenitude of life, for He is by nature generative (*γεννητικῆς*) and fruitful (*καρποποιος*), knowing, loving, and willing eternally without the need for creation. It should be noted, moreover, that the generation of the Son does not consist in an ontological movement on the part of the Son from a state of potency to a state of perfect actuality. That would be true if one were to suggest that the Second Person was begotten by a single act and then released from His ‘genesis.’ Nevertheless, the generation of the Son is at once always complete and eternally ongoing; i.e., it is an eternal generation (cf. John 1:18; Heb 1:5). *Ibid.*, 2:310.

¹⁵ Cf. John Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 10:24; cited in Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42.

present himself in Pharaoh's court (3:11). God answered by promising to be with him, and offering him a sign that could only be received by faith: he and the people would worship at the mountain of God (v. 12). In other words, the sign from heaven would be the success of the mission.¹⁶

This statement was only a prelude to what God was about to reveal to Moses concerning the eternal and omnipotent character of His nature. Nevertheless, Moses responded with another objection. This time he focused on the people to which he would go (v. 13). Moses would say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and he anticipated their response: "What is His name?"

The question does not necessarily suggest that the Israelites were ignorant of the name Yahweh. Moses does not utilize the interrogative מִי ("who"), which only requires identity, but מַה ("what"), which calls for an explanation of the object's essence.¹⁷ Ever since the time of Enosh, people had been calling upon that Divine name (Gen 4:26). In the book of Genesis the name Yahweh appears approximately 150 times, and some proper names of Israelites predating this occasion had it embedded upon them—e.g., Abijah and Ahijah (1 Chr 2:24–25).¹⁸ In verse 15, moreover, Moses is instructed to go to his brethren in the name of Yahweh, implying that this was no obscure name, but one that they already knew as the name of the God of their fathers. Therefore, the Israelites' question would have been one of essence, as when Jacob—and years later Manoah—asked about the angel's name (Gen 32:29; Judg 13:17).

This is consistent with the OT notion of name, which was often used to describe a person's existence, character, or reputation (cf. Deut 7:24; 9:14; 1 Sam 24:21; 25:25).¹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch wrote, "'What is His name?' presupposed that the name expressed the nature and operations of God, and that God would manifest in deeds the nature expressed in His name."²⁰ In other words, to borrow Abigail's words concerning her worthless husband Nabal, "as his name is, so is he" (1 Sam 25:25). James Murphy thus aptly paraphrased Moses' question: "What is the principle of thy being or movement of thy will which is now to display itself to thy people?"²¹

The Divine answer to Moses, אֲנִי אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה ("I AM WHO I AM"), is so theologically and metaphysically fecund that some have referred to it as the cradle of

¹⁶ Phillip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 93–94.

¹⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, "שָׁמַיִם," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 volumes, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:934; cf. "מִי," in Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 551; "מַה," Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 451; "מַה," Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 552.

¹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:143; cf. "יהוה," Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1295; "יהוה," Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 217; "יהוה," Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 522.

¹⁹ Kaiser, "שָׁמַיִם," *TWOT*, 2:934.

²⁰ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "The Pentateuch," in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. Rev. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:442.

²¹ James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (New York: I. K. Funk & Co., 1881), 30.

all Christian metaphysics.²² Though Elohim speaks to God's might, and Shaddai to His omnipotence, Yahweh is derived from His essence or existence.²³ The stringing of two Qal imperfect first person singular forms of the verb "to be" denotes ever-present, uninterrupted activity—a phrase suggesting that God's active existence can only ultimately be described by the present tense.²⁴ Thus, Andrew Willet argued that אֲנִי אֵלֹהִים ("I AM") signified "all the difference of time, both past, present, and to come; as this name is expounded, which was, which is, and which is to come, Rev. 1.8."²⁵ Similarly, the ancient Rabbis believed that Yahweh was saying here, "I that have been, and I the same now, and I the same from time to come."²⁶ Therefore, the phrase means that God is, as John Owen put it, "eternal ... always the same, and so never what he was not ever."²⁷ He thus declared Himself to Moses a necessary being, existing of Himself, independent of any others,²⁸ "a verb, not a noun."²⁹

To be sure, I AM WHO I AM is not a name in itself, but the explanation of the name Yahweh, as v. 15 suggests: "God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial name to all generations.'"³⁰ From that moment on, that name was to symbolize God's perfect covenant faithfulness to Israel, which was grounded upon the unchangeable nature of His essence. The extended passage of time since His dealings with the patriarchs had validated His claims to immutability, as faithfulness can only be demonstrated through long periods of time.³¹

This helps answer the objection that Exodus 6:2 implies that the name Yahweh was not disclosed until this point in history.³² As shown above, the Hebrews surely

²² Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 30. To be sure, there is not a name that belongs properly to God. That is because, in the words of Francis Turretin (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1993], 1:183–84), He is, "both a being singular in the highest sense, and in his own nature distinct from everything whatsoever." He is therefore, in that sense, utterly nameless—hence the rebuking of both Jacob and Manoah after asking about His name. That said, Scripture still assigns Him various names, because God accommodates Himself to us, and our knowledge begins from a name. Cf. also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:104–105.

²³ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:184; cf. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 84; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:140.

²⁴ John I. Durham, "Exodus," *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 39.

²⁵ Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Exodum* (London, 1608), 32, cited in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:233.

²⁶ Cited in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:234.

²⁷ John Owen, *Works*, 12:71.

²⁸ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:184.

²⁹ Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 236.

³⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:143; T. Desmond Alexander, "Exodus," *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 89.

³¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:143–44.

³² For instance, Mark Smith writes, "The divine self-identification acknowledges both the equation of this deity with 'the God of the fathers' and the fact that the proper name of the deity had not been revealed before" ("Exodus: Volume 3," *New Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011], 95). However, cf. responses by Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 98–102; Thomas Joseph White, "Exodus," *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 57–58. Kaiser sees the Niphal reflexive verbs, coupled with the implied *Beth essentiae*, as key to the correct rendering of this text: "I manifested myself in the character of [*Beth Essentiae*] El shaddai but in the character [*Beth Essentiae* implied] Yahweh, I did not make myself known to them." Kaiser, "אֵלֹהִים," *TWOT*, 2:934.

knew the word. What they did not know, at least experientially, was the meaning of it. After all, the divine promises concerning the multiplication of seed, the exodus, the promised land, etc. were not fulfilled during the lifetime of the patriarchs.³³ But now that time had vindicated God's claim to changelessness, He had come to tell His people, "I am who I am, YHWH, the unchangingly faithful One, the God of the fathers, your God even now and forever."³⁴

The Dutch theologian Petrus van Mastricht noticed in this response both a rebuke to the curiosity of the Israelites—who would be inquiring about God's essence and essential name (which, being spiritual and infinite is imperceptible to creatures)—as well as a graceful answer to Moses. In other words, He was saying, "You want my name, that it might somehow represent my essence? It is 'Being.'"³⁵ And by Being, Christian theology means that all perfections found in creatures must be attributed to God in an absolute sense, thus leading us to think of Him as "absolute reality, the sum total of all being, the purest and simplest actuality."³⁶ So, Exodus 3:14 establishes that in God there is no real distinction between His attributes and His essence, for they are identical with one another. For God to be faithful is for God to be. He cannot, on the other hand, receive new features of being, because He never transitions from a state of passive potential to perfect actuality. Augustine thus rightly prayed, "In you it is not one thing to be and another to live: the supreme degree of being and the supreme degree of life are one and the same thing."³⁷ All this is intimated by the name I AM (אֲנִי־אֵלֶּהּ).

Acts 17:28

Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἔσμεν

For in Him we live and move and have our being

This profound saying came from the lips of the apostle Paul as he reasoned with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens about the coming judgment and the need for faith in the resurrected Christ. In this famous sermon at Mars Hill, Paul had opposed the Greeks' false distinction between the Supreme Being and a Demiurge who had fashioned the material world (v. 24a).³⁸ Moreover, he had rejected their assumption that God dwells in man-made temples (24b), and that He is thus "served by human hands" (v. 25a). After all, God is the One who "gives to all *people* life and breath and all things" (v. 25b). Paul was thus alluding to the perfection, pre-eminence, and independence of God. He cannot lose anything, for if He did, He would no longer be perfect. Conversely, He cannot gain anything, for if He could, that would imply a need for something outside of Himself to reach full actualization. Perfection, after all, admits no degrees.

³³ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:185.

³⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:143–44.

³⁵ Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:74–75.

³⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:121.

³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.vi. (10), 8.

³⁸ Everett F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 285.

Further, Paul opposed the notion that the Greeks had sprung from the soil of Attica, and were thus distinct from all the nations of the earth (v. 26).³⁹ He alluded to God's common grace in providing the nations with "appointed times" for emergence and development (cf. Dan 2:36–45), as well as areas to occupy—all under the wise guidance of His Divine providence.⁴⁰ As Joseph Fitzmyer observed, "The historic limitations set upon humanity, the times and places where they dwell, are all the object of divine determination."⁴¹ Similarly, Joseph A. Addison wrote that in verse 26, "Paul claims for the Most High the right to govern, and indeed the actual control of the vicissitudes of nations, whether temporal or local, as a part of his great providential plan or purpose."⁴² In other words, God rules over creation in a meticulous fashion.

The reason for this gracious grant to the nations (of land and epochs) is recorded in v. 27: "That they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him." Here was a lively portrayal of the wretched condition of the Gentiles, who had been "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel," and were thus "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). There was no special revelation to save them, only general revelation to render them without excuse. Paul did not lay out the reasons for their suppression of the truths that general revelation communicates day in and day out, though he developed the thought in Romans 1:18–21.

Paul thus illustrated the validity of his point with two quotations from heathen poets (v. 28). The words of the first quotation, ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν ("For in Him we live and move and have our being"), came from a poem attributed to Epimenides the Cretan.⁴³ For the eminent theologian R. C. Sproul, this was "the most profound sentence found anywhere in sacred Scripture," since it answers the three greatest questions of all philosophical endeavor—namely the questions of life, motion, and being.⁴⁴

As Paul explained, not only is God the source of life, but He is also the ultimate cause behind every creaturely motion. By motion, Paul was not referring merely to acceleration, speed, or movement from one physical location to another, but—as the ancient Greeks understood it—to change.⁴⁵ Moreover, the apostle grounded our creaturely (and therefore derived and dependent) being upon God, apart from whom

³⁹ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 357–58; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 634.

⁴⁰ Cf. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts*, 286; Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 344.

⁴¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 609.

⁴² Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vol. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 618.

⁴³ Quoted by Paul. Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 359; Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, 345; I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Nottingham: IVP Academic, 2008), 305–6.

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever;
For in thee we live and move and have our being.

The fourth line of the preserved quatrain also includes the phrase cited in Titus 1:12. There is some ambiguity as to the true author behind the words.

⁴⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 314–17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

we would not exist. According to Paul, then, there is a concurrence of God to every creaturely action.

Admittedly, the natural mind is often tempted to deny this truth in order to absolve God of the guilt of sin. However, as Stephen Charnock pointed out, to make the actions of creatures independent of God is to turn creatures into sovereign beings.⁴⁶ He thus proposed a helpful solution: “We cannot imagine the concurrence of God to the good actions of men since the fall, without granting a concurrence of God to evil actions; because there is no action so purely good but hath a mixture of evil in it” (cf. Eccl 7:20).⁴⁷ In other words, even from the pious works of earthly creatures one finds that God concurs to every action under the sun, including the evil. Even the saints’ best works, after all, are polluted with sin. As nothing can exist without Him, then, so nothing can operate independently from Him.⁴⁸

But how does God remain untainted by sin? Charnock calls attention to the important distinction between “the substance of an act” and “the sinfulness of that act.” No act in regard to its substance is evil—that is, God’s law forbids no corporeal action considered in itself. Instead, the morality of an action is rooted not in its substance, but in its object, circumstances, and the constitution of mind in the one performing the act.⁴⁹ For instance, to form words by the motion of one’s tongue is in itself a good thing.⁵⁰ However, to form words to curse God is evil—not due to the movement of the tongue, but due to the disposition of the mind.⁵¹ “The action,” then, “is not the sinfulness, nor the sinfulness the action ... sinfulness is a deformity that cleaves to an action.”⁵² The tumor is not the brain, nor the brain the tumor. The tumor attaches itself to the brain to cause it harm, but it is of an altogether different substance. This makes moral evil merely parasitic on what is good—that is, the goodness of the being of a person.⁵³

This simple distinction allows one to draw a number of important affirmations. For one, we affirm that God directs every action of the creature, whether good or evil (as this passage teaches), without implying in any way that He has a hand in sin. Moreover, we affirm that God cannot acquire any new states of being from His creatures, for His creatures are subordinate to Him with regard to life, movement,

⁴⁶ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:157.

⁴⁷ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:157. The English theologian Theophilus Gale (1628–1678) made a similar argument in his *The Court of the Gentiles*, 4 parts, *Part IV of Reformed Philisophie* (London: for John Hill at the Black Lyon in Fleet-street, and Samuel Tidmarsh at the King’s-Head in Cornhill, 1678). Gale drew a distinction between *modally* sinful actions and *intrinsically* sinful actions. Modally sinful actions are the good actions of pious people, which are unintentionally mixed with sin and evil. Intrinsically evil actions, on the other hand, are those that are intended for evil, so that they are in themselves irreparably evil. Cf. Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 130.

⁴⁸ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:156.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:157.

⁵⁰ Similarly, Gale explained that the body is morally indifferent until utilized to further the wicked intentions of the mind. Cf. Gale, *Court of the Gentiles*, IV.iii.5. Cited in Helm, *Human Nature*, 128.

⁵¹ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:157–58. Summarizing Gale’s similar explanation, Helm writes, “Taking up a knife and stabbing is not in itself an evil act, but it becomes evil when employed in an attack upon a neighbor” (*Human Nature*, 130).

⁵² Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:158.

⁵³ Helm, *Human Nature*, 128; cf. Gale, *Court of the Gentiles*, IV.iii.5.

and existence. Therefore, whatever actions creatures undertake are always preceded by a Divine action. “We love,” writes the apostle, “because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Succinctly, Acts 17:28 demonstrates that God is always active in His being, moving all things without being moved by anything.

Romans 11:36

ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα
αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Having seen the reality of Israel’s future salvation, and thus the vindication of God’s perfect righteousness, beginning in v. 33 of Romans 11 Paul sounds a hymn exalting the inscrutable nature of God’s ways, as well as His aseity and meticulous sovereignty.⁵⁴ The three-strophe doxology includes three rhetorical questions implying three negative answers. The positive counterparts to each question allude to God’s preeminence and independence.⁵⁵ “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (v. 34a) testifies both to the incalculable depth of His knowledge and the paltriness of human understanding. “Who became His counselor?” (v. 34b) suggests that God alone, independent of any human erudition, “devised the plan of which providence is the execution.”⁵⁶ And, “Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?” (v. 35) reminds us that God is in no way indebted to the creature. As Paul had made clear throughout his book, man is depraved and corrupt; but even if he were perfect, “he could [still] bring nothing to God by which to procure His favour, because as soon as man begins his existence, he is already by the very law of creation so bound to his Maker that he has nothing of his own.”⁵⁷ Before this all-Sovereign One, then, the only appropriate response of the creature is to bend its knees in reverence and adoration.

In the following sentence, Paul sums up the purpose of all creaturely existence: ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα (“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things”).⁵⁸ In other words, as Lloyd-Jones put it, “It is all of God

⁵⁴ Douglas Moo writes, “This expression of praise falls into three strophes: v. 33, containing three exclamations about God’s wise plan; vv. 34–35, featuring three rhetorical questions that emphasize human inability to understand God’s ways; and v. 36, containing a declaration about the ultimacy of God that calls forth a final doxology.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 740.

⁵⁵ John Murray, “The Epistle to the Romans,” 2 vols in 1, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:107.

⁵⁶ Murray, *Romans*, 2:107.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 261.

⁵⁸ The direct allusion to the Trinity that some have found here—ἐξ αὐτοῦ referring to the Father, δι’ αὐτοῦ to the Son, and εἰς αὐτὸν to the Spirit—lacks support (though there may be an indirect hint to it). Nowhere else in Scripture is the Spirit singled out as the Divine Person to whom are all things. These ascriptions are rather predicated of God as the Godhead. On the other hand, τὰ πάντα (“all things”) does

— in thought, in concept, in execution.”⁵⁹ A. W. Pink, on the other hand, pointed out that the first clause signified that “His will is the origin of all existence;” the second, that “He is the Creator and Controller of all;” and the third, that “all things promote His glory in their final end.”⁶⁰ Whatever happens in creation, then, happens according to the Divine will (that is, the will of decree). Consequently, we must affirm that no created thing can precede the will of God—which is the Divine essence. According to Paul’s assertion, then, we are to understand God’s will as the final cause of “all things.”⁶¹

A key objection to this notion is that even the reason of the will’s operation is a cause.⁶² If one were to remove that cause in order to establish the fact that God’s will is uncaused, that would seem to suggest that God acts irrationally. The solution lies, however, in that God wills everything by a simple and eternal act. The end and the means are thus joined together so that the willing of an end cannot be said to be the cause of the willing of the means to achieve that end. In other words, as the Scholastics would put it, God does not will this because He wills that. Rather, He wills this to be because of that.⁶³ Therefore, God determines and executes His plans without any decrease in His liveliness and dynamism.

The only appropriate response to such marvelous truths is to give glory to God. And Paul does that precisely: αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν (“to Him be the glory forever. Amen”), thereby unveiling the purpose of Romans: that God may be glorified.⁶⁴ Concerning this last sentence, Calvin stressed the need to heed its context, as Paul’s emphasis must not be lost on the reader. God is here claiming for Himself absolute authority, and declaring that “nothing beyond His glory is to be sought in the state of mankind and of the whole world.”⁶⁵ Because He is both the Source of life and the Sustainer of life, He is consequently the End of life.

Defining God as *Actus Purus*

The term “actuality” is used to describe “that which is real, existent, perfect or complete action or operation.”⁶⁶ The term “Potency,” on the other hand, “refers to the possible, to essence (as distinct from existence), to the imperfect and the

not seem to refer merely to everything concerning salvation, but to all reality in both the physical and the spiritual realms. Cf. Murray, *Romans*, 2:107. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 429.

⁵⁹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 11 To God’s Glory* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005), 288.

⁶⁰ A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 108.

⁶¹ So Turretin writes, “As the will of God is the cause of all things, so it can have no cause of itself. It is as certain that there can be no cause of the will of God out of himself, as it is that nothing can be prior to him. For if his will has a cause, there is something which preceded it.” Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:231.

⁶² The argument is found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Ia.19.5, 106–107.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Another way to phrase this would be to say, “God wills this on account of that, but not on account of that, wills this.” Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:231.

⁶⁴ Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Romans,” 2nd edition, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 620.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Epistles*, 261.

⁶⁶ Muller, *Dictionary*, 20.

incomplete, and therefore to the faculty that can perform an action or operation.”⁶⁷ Actuality cannot therefore be defined apart from potentiality, unless God, who is *actus purus*, be the subject.

Perhaps the most well-known explanation of pure actuality comes from the pen of Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁸ In his famous five ways for proving God’s existence, Thomas established that whatever is in motion needs to have been actualized by something prior to it, because only that which is in act can cause other things to reach actualization. Though passive potency is often chronologically prior to actuality, then, properly speaking, actuality precedes potency. Now to be sure, nothing can move or actualize itself. To say that a thing can be both mover and moved, in the same respect and in the same way, would involve a plain contradiction.⁶⁹ Therefore, without a first mover who is Himself unmoved, there would be no subsequent movers. This first mover is thus from Himself. He is pure act without mixture of any potency. He is being through essence,⁷⁰ the underived Creator of all things, the absolutely first being, whom we call God.

With this in mind, theologians throughout history have concluded that God is, in the words of Owen, “always actually in being, existence, and intent operation.”⁷¹ That is to say, in Him there is no real distinction between a faculty and its operation. Conversely, a creature endowed with operative faculties, like intellect and will, is in a sense *in actu* simply by being what it is, regardless of whether its faculties are in operation; this is the condition of primary actualization (*in actu primo*).⁷² On the other hand, “The condition of the being in the actual exercise of its faculties is the condition of secondary actualization” (*actu secundo*).⁷³ In God, however, this distinction is not real, but merely formal or rational.

Therefore, because the Scripture is—to borrow the words of Herman Bavinck—“anthropomorphic through and through,”⁷⁴ it distinguishes between the Divine will, knowledge, or love, and the exercise of these faculties. It is important to keep in mind, however, that since God is *actus purus*, His will is nothing but Him willing, His knowledge nothing but Him knowing, His love nothing but Him loving, and His life nothing but Him living. Therefore, He is in the most proper sense of the term, “the living God” (Deut 5:26; Ps 42:2; Isa 37:17; Dan 4:34; Matt 16:16; Acts 14:15); “the fountain of life” (Ps 36:9; cf. John 5:26); “the fountain of living waters” (Jer 2:13; cf. John 4:10).

⁶⁷ Muller, *Dictionary*, 20.

⁶⁸ *ST*, Ia.2.3, p. 13. Cf. Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:83–84; Voetius, “God’s Single, Absolutely Simple Essence,” 13–14.

⁶⁹ As an example, Thomas writes that what is actually hot cannot also be potentially hot, though it may be in fact potentially cold. This means that it is impossible that a thing could be both mover and moved in the same respect and in the same way or, i.e., that it should move itself (*ST*, Ia.2.3, 13).

⁷⁰ Cf. Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:84.

⁷¹ Owen, *Works*, 12:71.

⁷² Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 150.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:95.

Contemporary critics, nonetheless, say that if God is truly an unmoved mover, He can only be “rigid dead substance,” wholly inactive and immobile.⁷⁵ As James Dolezal explains, however, “the very opposite is the case. The God of classical theism is not unmoved because He lacks actuality and dynamism, but because He is *pure* unbounded act and dynamism and thus cannot be moved to some additional state of actuality, power, or liveliness.”⁷⁶ Similarly, Muller writes, “Immutability does not indicate inactivity or unrelatedness, but the fulfillment of being.”⁷⁷ God is therefore, as Charnock put it, “nothing but vigor and act.”⁷⁸ Life is in Him “originally, radically, therefore eternally,” and He has by His nature “that life which others have by his grant” (cf. 1 Tim 6:16).⁷⁹

Summary from Textual Analysis

The argument for pure actuality is nothing more than the argument for God as the only One who truly possesses life, the One who does all things entirely from Himself. Reason confirms this since God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, and potentiality implies imperfection. But more importantly, our study of Exodus 3:14; Acts 17:28; and Romans 11:36 demonstrates that the doctrine of pure actuality stands on a robust exegetical foundation. In other words, pure actuality is deducible from Scripture by good and necessary consequence.

Exodus 3:14 stresses the fact that God is eternal and immutable in His essence, and that while creatures have derived being, He is Being *par excellence* whose essence and existence differ not from one another, but are perfectly identical. Thus, for God to be holy, or faithful, or righteous, is for God to be. Acts 17:28, on the other hand, shows that God is not only the source of every creature's life, but in His perfection He is also the One who actively sustains all things and providentially moves all things without being polluted by sin. Lastly, Romans 11:36 also points to the perfect sovereignty and primacy of God. He is ever active in the world, bringing all things to their intended end for the glory of His own name.

⁷⁵ Isaak A. Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 137; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2009), II/1, 492–94.

⁷⁶ James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 17n13. Emphasis in the original. Dolezal is responding to the charge of mutualistic theists who, along with process theists and open theists, argue that in order for God to have “real relationships” with His people, He must somehow be mutable. For instance, Bruce Ware writes that God “may *literally change* in emotional disposition and *become angry* over increasing moral evil and flagrant disobedience, or he may show mercy in relation to repentance or urgent prayer. And, this may occur in historical interaction with his human creation even though he knows, from eternity past, precisely what would occur and what his response would be” (*God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000], 92. Emphasis added.). As this study would suggest, Ware has failed to recognize the absolute actuality of God; therefore, he denies His absolute immutability: “Scripture does not lead us to think of God as unchangeable in every respect (absolute immutability)” (73). Cf. Dolezal's *All That Is in God* for refutation of Ware's views.

⁷⁷ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 24.

⁷⁸ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:289.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The Implications of the Doctrine of Pure Actuality

Having noted the exegetical validity of pure actuality, it would only be proper to illustrate its impact upon the formulation of other doctrines. God's absolute actuality is in fact pertinent both to theology proper and to soteriology. Therefore, in this section, I will demonstrate how some recent theological discussions on eternity and immutability can be resolved merely by the assumption that God cannot but always be all that He is, namely, a pure act of life. On the other hand, some brief comments regarding the doctrine of predestination will help demonstrate its relevance to soteriology.

Divine Immutability

In his *Treatise of Divinity*, the puritan lay theologian Edward Leigh systematized the five ways in which a reasonable creature may be changed:

1. In respect of existence, if it exist sometimes and sometimes not.
2. In respect of place, if it be moved from one place to another.
3. In respect of accidents, if it be changed in quantity or quality.
4. In respect of the knowledge of the understanding, as if it now think that to be true, which before it judged to be false.
5. In respect of the purpose of will, if it now decree to do something, which before it decreed not to do.⁸⁰

Christians throughout history have affirmed that God cannot be changed in any of these ways. Augustine, for one, saw immutability as a necessary corollary of God's self-existence as revealed in Exodus 3:14. He wrote, "That which is said to 'be,' and not only said to be, but truly 'is,' is changeless: it abides forever, it knows no change, no element of decay, it neither advances, for it is perfect, nor goes back, for it is eternal."⁸¹ Elsewhere he argued that if God were not immutable, He would not be God.⁸² In fact, he even described his enmity against God prior to conversion in terms of his rejection of Divine immutability: "Yet I preferred to think you mutable rather than hold that I was not what you are."⁸³

However, it is not uncommon for contemporary theologians to reject immutability as traditionally defined in the church. For example, T. F. Torrance asserted, "God is always Father, not always Creator."⁸⁴ He explained, "While God was always Father and was Father independently of what he has created, as Creator he acted in a way that he had not done before, in bringing about absolutely new events—this means that the creation of the world out of nothing is something new even for God. God was always Father, but he *became* Creator."⁸⁵ Thus, for Torrance

⁸⁰ Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1646), II.v, 44–45. Cited in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:315.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle General of St. John*, in *Augustine: Later Works*, vol. 8, trans. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 289.

⁸² Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, 2:6.

⁸³ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.xiv.(26), 68.

⁸⁴ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 207–9, 241.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

(according to the aforementioned list by Leigh), God has changed by acquiring a new quality, a state of being as Creator. In this regard, God has thus undergone a transition from inactive potency to act. He has moved from “potential Creator” to “actual Creator.”

If God is to be seen as eternally and immutably in act, as this paper has shown, Torrance's idea must be rejected. Instead, believers ought to start from the premise that God cannot but have always been Creator. This is not to say, however, that creation is as immutable and eternal as God. For that reason, the distinction is made between the effective principle in creation (*principium agenda*), which is the divine essence itself, and the produced effect (*effectum productum*), namely creation.⁸⁶

There is a change in the *effectum productum*, as creation moves from nonexistence to existence, but there is no change in the *principium agenda*, God, since He eternally and unchangingly wills to produce creation by a simple act.⁸⁷ The change in this case is not in God, but outside of Him.⁸⁸ Muller thus writes, “The *potentia Dei* does not by its operation add anything to God, but only brings about new relations *ad extra* as it operates to actualize the finite order.”⁸⁹ In other words, God wills changes without any changes in His design.⁹⁰ As Turretin said, “It is one thing to grant a cause on the part of the act of willing, another on the part of the thing willed.”⁹¹ Scripture can thus refer to the Lord Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8; KJV). While everything about, around, and outside of God changes, then, He remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

Divine Eternality

Pure actuality also helps shed light into recent discussions about God's eternity. Some contemporary writers have rejected the classical atemporalist view on the basis that, to use Garrett J. DeWeese's words, “it cannot make sense of God's causal activity in the actual temporal order.”⁹² Hence, Jurgen Moltmann writes, “Without a pre-existing timeline on which to place the beginning of creation, creation would have been co-eternal with God and would have appeared to be a necessary counterpart to God.”⁹³ Hoping to do away with a view of Divine eternity that would

⁸⁶ Muller, *Dictionary*, 148.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Bavinck provides the following helpful summary: “The light remains the same even though it breaks up into different colors (Augustine). Fire does not change whether it warms us, illumines us, or consumes us (Moises Maimonides). And grain remains grain even though, depending on the stage in which it comes to us, we call it seed, or food, or fruit (Basil)” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:158).

⁸⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:317.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, l.iv. (4), 5.

⁹¹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:231. Cited in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:317.

⁹² Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 159.

⁹³ Jurgen Moltmann, *God and Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margareth Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 83–86, 116–17.

result in the positing of an eternal creation, Moltmann thus opts for a view of God whereby He undergoes successions in His life.⁹⁴

However, the undergoing of succession entails the kind of motion that God as the unmoved mover cannot undergo, as that would involve a transition from inactive potency to actuality. Turretin explained, “He is not always the same from whom almost every moment something anteriorly is removed and by whom posteriorly something is added. . . . The succession and flow of the parts of duration (which exist successively) necessarily involve a certain species of motion (which cannot be applied to God).”⁹⁵ In other words, if God were to undergo successions in His life, He would be ever-changing.

To combat that idea, theologians draw a distinction between the actuality of God, and the “egressions” or “breaking forths” of that actuality to bring diverse effects at various times.⁹⁶ This is what Augustine referred to when he pointed out that the Father’s speech at Jesus’ baptism was determined from eternity by God’s will, but “made temporal” in the time-space continuum.⁹⁷ God is therefore like an architect who from eternity holds a blueprint of the form of what He intends to build, and then affects His work over time. In these egressions, God is not transitioning from passive potency to actuality, but is rather directing His essence to the execution of His *ad extra* works.⁹⁸ Once more, the change is outside, about, and around God, but not in Him. While God is pure actuality, His creation stands, in relation to Him, *in potentia*. This makes creation entirely dependent upon God to reach actualization.

The Doctrine of Predestination

As it is widely known, the doctrine of predestination stands as one of the chief tenets of the Reformed faith. One of its principal articles, moreover, is the belief that one ought to look no further than God’s will as the ultimate cause for either the election or the reprobation of men;⁹⁹ for, as Paul wrote, “He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires” (Rom 9:18).¹⁰⁰ This is precisely the point against which Arminianism reacts so strongly.

⁹⁴ DeWeese also rejects the classical atemporalist position, opting for a “relatively timeless” or “omnitemporal” view of God. This allows him both to reject and endorse some of the arguments for timelessness. A direct critique of his position is beyond the scope of this paper. Cf. “Atemporal, Sempiternal, or Omnitemporal: God’s Temporal Mode of Being,” in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 49–61.

⁹⁵ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:202.

⁹⁶ Steven J. Duby, “Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity,” 96.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *The Confessions, Book XI*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 1997), XI.6.8–8.10, 289–93.

⁹⁸ Duby, “Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity,” 96.

⁹⁹ Peter Sammons, “The Decree of Reprobation and Man’s Responsibility: The Role of God’s Use of Secondary Causality,” Ph.D. diss. (The Master’s Seminary, 2017), 118.

¹⁰⁰ In this regard, Calvin famously stated, “Therefore, if we cannot assign any reason for His bestowing mercy on His people, but just that it so pleases Him, neither can we have any reason for His reprobating others but His will. When God is said to visit mercy or harden whom He will, men are reminded that they are not to see for any cause beyond His will.” John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the*

In their first article of *affirmation*, the followers of Jacob Arminius sought to redefine the doctrine of predestination as indicating that God has eternally determined to save “those who ... shall believe on his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith ... and on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath.”¹⁰¹ In other words, something outside of God—namely man’s faith, obedience, and perseverance, or else his incorrigibility and unbelief—moves Him either to elect or reprobate men.

Pink thus explained, “Perverters of this truth [predestination] invariably seek to find some cause *outside* God’s own will, which *moves* Him to bestow salvation on sinners.”¹⁰² In doing so, they undermine the perfection and all-sufficiency of God, for they make Him liable to change, and to have His own counsels “disturbed,” in the words of van Mastricht, “subjugated to a master, as it were.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, because of God’s pure actuality, nothing in creation can be greater or prior to His will, which is always in act and never in potency. After all, whatever is *in potentia* is also caused, and therefore dependent upon its cause to reach actualization.

The will of God cannot thus be said to be dependent upon any external causes, whether instrumental, impulsive, or final.¹⁰⁴ This is why Jonathan Edwards wrote that our language concerning God’s decree is ultimately improper, though no “more improper than all our other ways of speaking about God.”¹⁰⁵ The doctrine of predestination, nevertheless, must be defined under the assumption that all the decrees of God are harmonious.¹⁰⁶ And, as this study has shown, they are harmonious precisely because they entail one simple and eternal act, which is identical with the divine essence.

Conclusion

In closing, this paper has demonstrated that the concept of pure actuality is not a fruitless mental exercise, nor a mere philosophical speculation. Rather, pure actuality is deducible from Scripture by good and necessary consequence. It helps the church understand and articulate the perfection and primacy of God over creation. To say that God is *actus purus* is to say that, properly speaking, life belongs to Him alone. It is to suggest that He is always on the move, and no event in human history has been, is, or ever will be outside of His absolute control.

Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 2:947.

¹⁰¹ Gerald Lewis Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation 1526–1701* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1994), 453–54.

¹⁰² A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 58. Emphasis in the original. To be sure, Pink also grounded the decree of reprobation upon God’s will. He writes, “[God] fits the non-elect unto destruction by His fore-ordaining decrees. Should it be asked *why* God does this, the answer must be, To promote his own glory.” *Ibid.*, 96–97.

¹⁰³ Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:462.

¹⁰⁴ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:468–69; T. Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.19.5, 106–107.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “Concerning the Divine Decrees in General, and Election in Particular,” in *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 2:527.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Granted, this Divine action is not always perceptible to creatures. The psalmist thus cried, “Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord?” (Ps 44:23). The book of Habakkuk, however, reminds us that God is always at work, regardless of whether we can perceive His hand.¹⁰⁷ That is because He is *actus purus*.

The doctrine of pure actuality, therefore, helps clarify many theological issues. It furnishes the theologian with an indispensable tool for his arduous labor in the Lord’s vineyard; namely, the conceptual framework to presuppose that whatever else God might be, He is self-sufficient, sovereign, from Himself, and the absolutely first being. On the other hand, it is precisely because God is pure act that the joys of heaven will always wax but never wane, that the saints’ bliss in heaven will remain fervent forever without ever abating. Charnock summarized this truth so beautifully that it would only be fitting to quote him at large in closing:

When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore, the sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance; he will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full, as at the first communication of himself in glory to the creature. God, therefore, as sitting upon his throne of grace, and acting according to his covenant, is like a jasper-stone, which is of a green color, a color always vigorous and flourishing; a pure act of life, sparkling new and fresh rays of life and light to the creature, flourishing with a perpetual spring, and contenting the most capacious desire; forming your interest, pleasure, and satisfaction; with an infinite variety, without any change or succession; he will have variety to increase delights, and eternity to perpetuate them; this will be the fruit of the enjoyment of an infinite and eternal God; he is not a cistern, but a fountain, wherein water is always living, and never putrefies.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Duby, “Divine Action and the Meaning of Eternity,” 91.

¹⁰⁸ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:299.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones on “Unity”

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This article is the second in a two-part series that surveys several messages from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in an attempt to better understand his perspective on “unity.” In this second article, particular attention is paid to the message delivered at the meeting of the National Assembly of Evangelicals in October 1966—a message that marked a turning point in twentieth-century British evangelicalism. Two other messages on unity after 1966 are also examined. This examination will demonstrate that Lloyd-Jones’ message on unity in 1966 was consistent with his stance on unity before and after 1966. The article concludes with suggestions as to how Lloyd-Jones’ teaching on unity has application for twenty-first century evangelicalism.

* * * * *

In the middle years of the twentieth century, Christians, pastors, and churches who identified as evangelical were faced with (at least) three challenges. The first was international communism and its western response. This issue resulted in a decades-long dispute known as the “Cold War.” The second was the waning influence of mainline churches and liberal Christianity, and the concurrent gradual rise in popularity of evangelicalism. The third challenge was the ecumenical movement. In the early years of the twentieth century, this movement had nascent beginnings in gatherings such as the International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910,¹ but gained momentum and notoriety in the founding of the World Council of Churches (1948) and the Roman Catholic councils of Vatican II (1962–1965). In the United Kingdom in the 1960s, the rhetoric of ecumenical unity was prominent and pervasive.²

¹ See Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910 (Studies in the History of Christian Missions (SHCM))* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

² “The 1960s was the high-water mark in ecumenical optimism, which had been gathering pace since the end of the Second World War. The older denominations invested considerable energy in the search for visible unity.” “The Church of England was on the verge of reuniting with the Methodists, separated since the Evangelical Revival, and was also making friendly overtures to the Church of Rome, separated since

Martyn Lloyd-Jones saw two potential fates for ecumenism: it could either result in advancement or disaster for evangelicalism and its unity. Its success was dependent upon the response of evangelicals. All the rhetoric in ecumenism for “unity,” on the one hand, might awaken evangelicals to the need for evangelical unity.³ On the other hand, such rhetoric might seduce evangelicals into false unity. The former response would solidify evangelicalism, strengthen churches, and encourage the proclamation of the gospel. The latter would weaken churches and obscure the gospel.⁴ For Lloyd-Jones, the “unity” of ecumenism was based on the depletion of doctrinal content and the obscuration of doctrinal boundaries. This is quite the opposite of the “unity” taught in the New Testament.⁵ In 1966, Lloyd-Jones sought to promote biblical unity.

The Address of October 18, 1966

In 1965, the First National Assembly of Evangelicals “had set up a commission ‘to study radically the various attitudes of evangelicals to the ecumenical movement, denominationalism and a possible future United Church’” (i.e., a United Evangelical Church).⁶ That commission made its report to the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals in October 1966. Lloyd-Jones was invited to share his views.⁷ His address is printed in *Knowing the Times*.⁸

Lloyd-Jones began his address with simplicity and clarity: “My subject is church unity.”⁹ He explained the need to consider unity because of the demand of “the present time” and the teaching of the New Testament concerning “the question of the unity of the church.”¹⁰ He further limited his subject to the matter of “evangelical unity.”¹¹

Lloyd-Jones observed that unity had come to the forefront because of the “arising and arrival among us of what is known as the ecumenical movement.”¹² He

the Reformation. Meanwhile, Presbyterians and Congregationalists were building a United Reformed Church.” Justin Taylor, “50 Years Ago Today: The Split Between Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones,” *TGC Blog*, October 18, 2016, accessed July 20, 2020, Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” <https://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/50-years-ago-today-the-split-between-john-stott-and-martyn-lloyd-jones/>.

³ See Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “The Basis of Christian Unity,” in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 118–63.

⁴ Indeed, a critic of Lloyd-Jones notes, “If ecumenism had drawn together most of the talents and leaders of the twentieth-century church it certainly held no attraction for Lloyd-Jones. On the contrary, by the mid-1960s he felt ... strongly that the World Council of Churches was a ‘menace to the true meaning of the gospel.’” John Brencher, *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), 83.

⁵ See part one of this article.

⁶ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 246–257, 246n2. See also, Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966–2001* (Bletchly, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007), 39.

⁷ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” 246.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 246–257.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 248.

noted that this movement “began in 1910,” but since the inauguration of the World Council of Churches in 1948, “has become an urgent problem for evangelicals.”¹³ Lloyd-Jones was convinced that this development was a problem, and one that the church had not encountered since the time of the Reformation. The leaders of ecumenism argued that the divisions of the church (presumably the result of the Reformation) were “a scandal,” and that the church’s weakness and ineffectiveness were the result of such divisions.¹⁴ He asserted that the denominational leaders of the day were prepared to “throw everything into the melting pot,” to “give and take” (presumably on denominational and doctrinal distinctives), and to “make new arrangements and accommodations with others.” The end would be the promotion of “one great world church.”¹⁵ Several leaders were even prepared to reconsider Protestantism’s relationship with Rome.¹⁶

Lloyd-Jones reminded his evangelical audience that the Evangelical Alliance came into being in 1846 in response to the movement of John Henry Newman to Rome¹⁷ and the rising threat of higher criticism.¹⁸ He noted that the evangelical response was to form “alliances, movements and societies.” In short, these former evangelicals “felt that they should meet together, strengthen one another and encourage one another in the faith.”¹⁹ However, those movements never addressed the pressing issue of “church unity,” nor the doctrine of the church.²⁰

In Lloyd-Jones’ view, the arrival of ecumenism required a far different response. Lloyd-Jones called evangelical Christians to consider quite seriously the matter of church unity. Sadly, however, evangelicals “have been less interested in the question of church unity than anyone else.” He bluntly surmised, “Everybody seems to be talking about church unity except evangelicals.”²¹ Their silence on unity was because they had been “confused and divided” over the matter. Furthermore, the evangelical attitude “to the question of church union [presumably as evangelicals] is always a negative one.”²² The reason for this negative attitude is “that evangelicals are more concerned to maintain the integrity of their different denominations than anybody else in those denominations.”²³ [Too often, evangelicals seemed to exhibit a greater loyalty to their denomination than to their biblically-grounded evangelical

¹³ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” 248.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁷ John Henry Newman was a noted Anglican vicar who dramatically converted to Roman Catholicism in 1843. He was vicar at St. Mary’s, Oxford and “his contributions to *Tracts for the Times* (London, 1834–41) played a significant role in the formation of the Anglo-Catholic theology of the Oxford Movement.” P. N. Hillyer, “Newman, John Henry (1801–90),” in Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell and T. A. Noble, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology Historical and Systematic* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 616. Newman’s spiritual autobiography is John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1980, 2005).

¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” 248.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 249–50.

convictions.]²⁴ The denominations were often in effect “a kind of paper church;”²⁵ that is, they appealed to a confession or set of articles (e.g. Anglican Church’s Thirty-Nine Articles) as the grounds for their unity. [Mere assent to a document like *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is not the basis of true unity, especially when many who do so have widely different views on its meaning and, at the same time, hold to views inimical to the confession.]

Lloyd-Jones lamented the division of evangelicals. They were spread around as an evangelical element (“an evangelical wing”) in the various denominations.²⁶ In these denominations there were those “who hold views on the sacraments which we [evangelicals] would regard as entirely wrong” in addition to “views on the Bible” and “views on the very being of God” “which we [evangelicals] deplore.”²⁷ [Evangelicals should not pledge loyalty to denominations before biblically-grounded evangelical convictions.]

Lloyd-Jones called evangelicals to begin to discuss the matter of church unity by returning to the New Testament. The basis of unity must be doctrine, not fellowship (cf. Acts 2:42).²⁸ Lloyd-Jones then listed the doctrines upon which evangelicals should build their unity: “the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God,” the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and “His atoning, sacrificial and substitutionary death.”²⁹ He argued that church unity is a fellowship of “*living people*” who are already one [i.e. already unified] “in their views, in their faith, in their ideas.”³⁰

At this point, Lloyd-Jones anticipated an objection—the matter of schism. For him, schism was a grave matter, even a sin, and it was one he charged evangelicals with having committed. He defined schism as “division among people who are agreed about the essentials and the centralities, but who separate over secondary and less important matters.”³¹ By this definition, the Protestant Reformers were not guilty of schism in their departure from the Roman Catholic church, as they had separated not over secondary matters, but over the apostasy of Rome. He asserted, “But to leave a church which has become apostate is not schism. That is one’s Christian duty and nothing less.”³² [Thus, for an evangelical to remain in a denomination that has become apostate is to fail to do one’s Christian duty. To leave such a denomination is not schism.] Furthermore, those who do not hold to evangelical doctrines cannot be guilty of schism, for “they are not agreed about the doctrine. They do not accept the doctrine.”³³ For any group or association where there is no agreement “about the essentials and the centralities” of doctrine, the charge of schism is moot. After all, “If you do not believe a certain irreducible minimum, you cannot be a Christian and you are not in the church.”³⁴ Thus, to leave such an association is not schism.

²⁴ As in part one of this article, the comments in brackets [] are either the author’s analysis of Lloyd-Jones’ comments or are key summaries in Lloyd-Jones’ own words.

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” 251.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 251–52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252–53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 253–54.

So in what ways are evangelicals guilty of schism? They are guilty in that evangelicals “do agree about these essentials of the faith, and yet [they] are divided from one another.”³⁵ Lloyd-Jones argued that evangelicals were divided amongst various denominations, and the divisions were over “secondary and less important matters.”

He concluded with an appeal to evangelical unity that would allow evangelicals to come together not occasionally, but always. Evangelicals who were divided denominationally should not continue to be guilty of schism, but instead should practice true unity. He called this “evangelical ecumenicity.”³⁶

The Reaction and Fallout

It is not within the parameters or purposes of this article to analyze completely the reaction and fallout of this address. That has been done by others, both critically³⁷ and sympathetically.³⁸ It can be fairly summarized that Lloyd-Jones’ views on unity were not adopted.

Lloyd-Jones on Unity post-October 1966

In the years following 1966, Lloyd-Jones had an association with the British Evangelical Council (BEC). Between 1967 and 1979, he delivered the closing addresses at the BEC conferences eight times. Hywel R. Jones notes that between 1967 and 1979, Lloyd-Jones “was openly and firmly committed to the BEC,” and during those years “he became its chief protagonist.”³⁹ In several of those addresses, he revisited the matter of unity. These addresses were published.⁴⁰ Two of those addresses will be examined below.

What Is the Church?⁴¹

Lloyd-Jones gave this address on November 13, 1968 at the BEC conference in Liverpool. The previous evening, another speaker dealt with the question, “What is a Christian?” Using this as a transition to his address, Lloyd-Jones observed that there “is very little disagreement amongst evangelical people as to ‘What is a Christian?’ but unfortunately” the same could not be said for the question, “What is the church?”

³⁵ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical Unity: An Appeal,” 254.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁷ Brencher, *Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*, 92–106.

³⁸ Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 513–67; see also, Hywel R. Jones, “The Doctor and the British Evangelical Council,” in Hywel R. Jones, ed., *Unity in Truth: Addresses Given by Dr D Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the Meetings Held under the Auspices of the British Evangelical Council* (Darlington, Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 1991), 8–9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ Hywel Jones argues that Lloyd-Jones’s address to the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966 was “a forerunner of the BEC addresses.” *Ibid.*, 16–19. A number of the themes of the 1966 address to National Assembly of Evangelicals are reiterated in these BEC addresses.

⁴¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “What Is the Church?,” in *Unity in Truth*, 45–46.

Lloyd-Jones believed evangelicals needed to stop and consider what the church is. The first reason why this was so important was “the very fact and existence of the ecumenical movement.”⁴² This movement “to unite churches, and eventually unite all the churches,” was progressing rapidly and evangelicals were “dallying, and considering and talking.”⁴³

Another issue was the matter of cooperative evangelism. Lloyd-Jones noted that evangelicals were constantly being told that they needed to work together “and evangelize together in particular, and not be bothered about these discussions about the nature of the church and our different views.”⁴⁴ The problem for Lloyd-Jones with this mindset was that those “different views” included “different views” about “the evangel” itself—the gospel. The evangelical church needed clarity on the doctrine of the church so that the gospel might be clarified.

Lloyd-Jones argued that this question—*what is the church?*—was “the greatest cause of division amongst evangelicals at the present time.” For Lloyd-Jones, this was all the more reason for this question to be considered. The failure to deal with this question had caused “terrible confusion among evangelicals.”⁴⁵

The “ultimate and greatest reason to consider this doctrine is the fact that it is given such great prominence in the New Testament teaching.”⁴⁶

[Lloyd-Jones’ interest in the nature of the church is directly connected to his interest in unity, for if one is confused about the nature of the church, one will inevitably be confused about the nature of its unity.]

As Lloyd-Jones began to address “the essence of the doctrine” of the church, he first cautioned that it is misguided to approach the question “what is the church?” from the present (“where we are”), or even from church history. The place to begin is the New Testament itself.⁴⁷ And in the New Testament—and the book of the Acts of the Apostles in particular—the church is “*a gathering of people*,” not “something written on paper” and not a denomination.⁴⁸ The issue with defining the church by a confessional or denominational label is that “most people who are in these various churches at the present moment generally do not believe the confession of faith of the denomination to which they belong.” In fact, in many instances the people and even the leaders “not only do not believe the confessions of the founders of these bodies, but are active and bitter opponents of them.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, even among those who adhere to the confession, there is “no guarantee that they are Christians. You can get people who are perfectly orthodox and yet completely dead. You can get dead orthodoxy.”⁵⁰ Thus, the church must be defined as “a collection of living people, persons, and not merely ancient declarations.”⁵¹

⁴² Lloyd-Jones, “What Is the Church?,” 46.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 49–50.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 50–51. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 53.

Having established that the true church is a collection of people, Lloyd-Jones moved to the main body of his address to answer the question, “What then are these people?” More specifically, “What is it that differentiates the church as a gathering of people from every other kind of gathering?”⁵² What makes them unique?

Lloyd-Jones presented his answer in four major headings. His first heading states that this collection of people is “separated from the world.”⁵³ The biblical expressions of this (e.g. “strangers and pilgrims”) make clear that Christians are citizens of heaven, and that political and national affiliations are secondary.⁵⁴ [The church is a gathering of people who do not make the distinctions of the world (national, political, ethnic, or even familial; cf. Matt 10:34) a cause of division among them. “All are one in Christ Jesus, and all are saved by the same faith, and all are equally the children of God.”⁵⁵]

The uniqueness of the church is also seen in the unity of the church. This unity is before their unity in doctrine and cannot be limited to mere fellowship. The biblical metaphors for the church—a body, bride, and building—all assume this unity.⁵⁶ (In an aside, Lloyd-Jones argued that the church is not a place of debate, discussion, or dialogue: “You can only become a member of a church after the discussion is over.”⁵⁷)

The next heading is that the “unity” of the church—the people gathered—is a unity that is based on “a shared, a common experience.”⁵⁸ The experience Lloyd-Jones describes is “conversion”—the “conviction of sin” and repentance. Preeminently, the church is united in its experience of regeneration: “above and beyond everything else, *they had been born again*.”⁵⁹ This regeneration gives man a new mind, a new life, and a new nature. He is a different and entirely new “creation.” “This is the church. Not an institution, not a mere gathering of people as such, but these special people who, because they have all undergone the same experience of regeneration, share the same life; it is in them.”⁶⁰

This then is the basis of church unity and “is what makes schism such a terrible sin,” because it is a “dividing of Christ ... dividing a body.”⁶¹

The next unique feature of the gathering of people who are the church is the common life they share, and this “shows itself in this: *they have a love of the same doctrine always*.”⁶² This “love of the same doctrine” always precedes fellowship (cf. Acts 2:42). [True unity in the church is a unity of life; and unity of life is expressed with a unity of doctrine.] A “man who is born again is a man who wants teaching.”⁶³ The life of the church is also expressed in fellowship, prayer together, and worship

⁵² Lloyd-Jones, “What Is the Church?,” 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53–54. Here Lloyd-Jones cites 2 Corinthians 5 where Paul asserts, “Henceforth know I no man after the flesh.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57–58. Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 60. Emphasis in the original.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

(being “filled with gladness” and “praising God”).⁶⁴ The church also has “*a great concern for the glory of God*” and “*a great concern for others*.”⁶⁵

[In sum, the unity of the church is not found in external association to a confession or a denomination, but in the common experience of all who have been regenerated by the Spirit and who live a life characterized by a mutual love of doctrine. Any attempt to create an external unity that downplays or disregards doctrine is not the unity described in the New Testament.]

Wrong Divisions and True Unity⁶⁶

On November 4, 1970, Lloyd-Jones addressed the BEC at Bethesda Chapel, Sunderland.⁶⁷ His topic was, yet again, unity. In the introduction to the printed message, Hywel Jones notes, “His main burden was that those who belonged to the BEC should not allow differences over matters that were not essential to the gospel to divide them.”⁶⁸

Lloyd-Jones began his message by acknowledging the confusion of the age: “We are living in a day which is characterized above everything else, it seems to me, by confusion.”⁶⁹ However, this confusion is not just characteristic of the world in general, but also, to some extent, of the church.⁷⁰ What is needed to correct this confusion is “a united evangelical message. It is the only hope for mankind. It is the only hope for the world and, in general, it is the only hope for the church.”⁷¹ [In a time of confusion in the world and in the church, the evangelical message—the “scriptural view of the way of salvation”⁷²—is what is most needed.]

Lloyd-Jones then turned to the issue at hand: the lack of evangelical unity. He used the church of Corinth as an example. They were Christians, to be sure, “but they were confused.” This confusion showed itself “in the form of divisions, parties, schisms.”⁷³ Lloyd-Jones identified the source of these divisions as a misunderstanding of the nature of the church. As a result, the Corinthians “were standing [for] and dividing on the wrong things.”⁷⁴

In something of an aside, Lloyd-Jones drew a parallel to the current situation among evangelicals. He then asked the questions he intended to address in this message: “What is the difference between schism and biblical separation?” “Put in a practical manner, the question is, ‘What are the things on which we should not take a stand? And ‘What are the things on which we should take a stand?’ Or “‘What are the things that are not essential to our position?’ And on the other hand ‘What are the things that are essential to our position?’”⁷⁵ The Corinthians struggled to distinguish

⁶⁴ Lloyd-Jones, “What Is the Church?,” 61–63.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 63. Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Wrong Divisions and True Unity,” in *Unity in Truth*, 102–22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 103–04

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

between that which is *not* essential, and therefore *not* a ground for separation, and that which *is* essential, and therefore a valid ground for separation.

Lloyd-Jones then listed the wrong reasons for the divisions in the church at Corinth. The Corinthians were divided over *carnal matters*.⁷⁶ They were dividing over personalities,⁷⁷ secular legal disputes, and carnal behavior at the love feasts.⁷⁸ Furthermore, they were divided over *intellectualism*,⁷⁹ that is, “the more intelligent people, the more enlightened people” understood that eating meat offered to idols was not a problem because the idols were nothing more than lifeless figures, but the conscience of others was still burdened over such activity.⁸⁰ Lloyd-Jones compared this attitude to those in the church who were “interested in doctrine and the importance of intellectual apprehension and understanding who tend to despise those less capable in that respect.”⁸¹ Hence there are divisions “based on the amount of intellect [Christians] happen to have” rather than unity “upon their common experience of regeneration.”⁸² [Christians should not divide over “intellectual differences,” but should unite in their shared experience of regeneration. This would be especially true for those whose adherence to a secular ideology leads them to scold fellow Christians for failing to accept that ideology.]

Lloyd-Jones posits another cause of division among the Corinthians—a *false spirituality*.⁸³ This was evident in the apostle’s teaching in 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14. They considered themselves to be superior Christians because of their spiritual gifts and “tended to despise those who had lesser gifts.”⁸⁴

In sum, the Corinthians “had forgotten that the church was the body of Christ and they were all particular members of it. They were guilty of schism.”⁸⁵ [Division over *carnal matters*, *intellectualism*, or *false spirituality* should be seen as schism.]

Lloyd-Jones then turned his attention to the “things on which we must stand.” These are the matters that are essential and “over which we must be prepared to separate.”⁸⁶ What followed was an overview of 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 in which Lloyd-Jones reviewed the essential doctrines of what he earlier referred to as “the evangelical message.” First, evangelicals stand on “the Scriptures.” “We take our entire stand on the Scriptures, not on tradition in any shape or form,”⁸⁷ and not on any philosophy. [Evangelical unity must be on the basis of the Scriptures and not any man-made philosophy or ideology.] This entails holding to the Scriptural doctrines of the Bible as a *revelation* from God, the Bible as inspired by God, and thus the

⁷⁶ Lloyd-Jones, “Wrong Divisions and True Unity,” 106. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 105–06.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 108–09. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

Bible as authoritative.⁸⁸ Evangelicals must hold that this is true for “the whole of Scripture.”⁸⁹

Second, evangelicals must stand on the biblical doctrine of “the Fall.”⁹⁰ Men need to be saved because of the fall of Adam. Lloyd-Jones asserted, “We have no message for the modern world if we do not preach this: Adam, historicity, creation and Fall, ‘according to the Scriptures.’”⁹¹ Along with this, he affirmed, thirdly, evangelicals must stand on “God’s plan of redemption.”⁹² [Any teaching that does not trace the world’s problems ultimately to the Fall in Adam, will be sub-biblical and likely imagine a solution to the world’s problems that does not ultimately rest in Christ (Cf. Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:22).]

The fourth doctrine on which evangelicals must stand is “the person of the Lord,” which he asserted as “our great central truth.”⁹³ The saving gospel has this central truth: Christ died for our sins. To affirm that truth evangelicals must affirm: “the resurrection was a physical and historical event,” and that his death was a “substitutionary atonement.”⁹⁴

Lloyd-Jones brought this summary of the evangelical message to a close with this application: “Those are the things on which you must stand, and which you must never compromise. Consequently, they are the things on which you separate from all who do not accept them.” And he reinforced that admonition by citing the proverb, “Evil communications corrupt good manners.”⁹⁵

He concluded the message with an admonition to his fellow evangelicals to avoid the divisions that characterized the Corinthians and to stand “unflinchingly, without the slightest suspicion of accommodation or modification” on the matters that are essential.⁹⁶

Conclusion

In the estimate of this writer, Lloyd-Jones’ views on “unity” were and remain true, because they are based on the teaching of Scripture. Evangelicals would profit from a reconsideration of Lloyd-Jones’ views on “unity,” especially in this time when evangelicals are increasingly drawn to secular and political ideologies that are promoted as the basis for a substitute (false) unity. In Lloyd-Jones’ day, the substitute (false) unity that was promoted was ecumenism. Today, it might reasonably be argued that the substitute (false) unity that is currently being promoted is ideologically based and inimical to true unity as Lloyd-Jones articulated it. In any case, the unity that a biblically-faithful evangelicalism needs is the unity consistently promoted by Martyn Lloyd-Jones before, on, and after October 18, 1966. It is a unity

⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones, “Wrong Divisions and True Unity,” 111–12. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 115–16.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120–22.

that puts secondary matters and denominational distinctives aside, and comes together around the core doctrines of Scripture and the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Recent Scholarship and the Quest to Understand Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13¹

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This article analyzes Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. One of the most debated parts of these prohibitions is the phrase “as one lies with a female” (מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה). Although many modern scholars have attempted to explain this phrase as a technical phrase referring to incest or specific homosexual behavior, this phrase should be understood as a general reference to sexual activity. Thus, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 should be read as general prohibitions against sex between homosexual partners.

* * * * *

Introduction

In the last thirty years, the United States has undergone a moral revolution. This revolution has exponentially accelerated in recent years, during which time there has been an increasing acceptance of erotic liberty. Any form of sexual expression has been accepted. What was once considered taboo is now promoted as a positive expression of sexuality.

This ethical revolution has been marked by an overwhelming acceptance and celebration of the homosexual lifestyle. This moral revolution, which would have been unimaginable in the past, has now attained mainstream acceptance. Although the battle for cultural acceptance and approval is all but over in the eyes of society, the same battle now rages within evangelicalism. The question has now come to the church—is homosexuality a valid lifestyle for those who claim the name of Christ?

The past two decades have seen a significant amount of material published on this issue.² As such, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have become the subject of much

¹ This article is an adaptation of the second chapter from my dissertation, Peter J. Goeman, “The Law and Homosexuality: Should Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Influence the Church’s Understanding of Homosexuality?” Ph.D. diss. (The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, 2017).

² In defense of homosexuality as a valid biblical alternative, see Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014);

debate. Although some attempt to downplay the application of these Levitical prohibitions because of their placement in the Old Testament,³ the primary means of dismissing these prohibitions is to argue at an academic level for a non-traditional understanding of these texts. Therefore, it is the goal of this article to provide an interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, while also interacting with recent scholarship on these prohibitions.⁴

Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Mind* (Canton, MI: David Crumm Media, 2014); Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation* (Canton, MI: David Crumm Media, 2014); Michael B. Regele, *Science, Scripture, and Same-Sex Love* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014); James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); K. Renato Lings, *Love Lost in Translation: Homosexuality and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2013); Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (New York: Jericho Books, 2012); Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

In defense of the traditional view, see S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015); Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says About Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Crossway, 2015); Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Ed Shaw, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding with Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2014); Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet, *Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014); Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Biblical and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); Mark Christopher, *Same-Sex Marriage: Is It Really the Same?* (Constantia, RSA: Voice of Hope, 2007); D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What's Wrong with Same-Sex Marriage?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); James White and Jeff Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible's Message about Homosexuality* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2002); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Neil Whitehead and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1999); Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

³ For example, see Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 91. Boswell writes, "It would simply not have occurred to most early Christians to invoke the authority of the old law to justify the morality of the new: *the Levitical regulations had no hold on Christians and are manifestly irrelevant in explaining Christian hostility to gay sexuality*" (emphasis added). Similarly, Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 273. Brownson writes, "It is simply inadequate, from a Christian perspective, to attempt to build an ethic based on the prohibitions of Leviticus alone. This is important material to reflect on, but *it cannot stand at the center of a responsible Christian moral position on committed gay or lesbian relationships*" (emphasis added).

⁴ In a previous article in *TMSJ*, Grisanti surveyed the Old Testament's teaching on homosexuality. As part of that article, Grisanti surveyed the various positions on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, but could not

Structure of Leviticus 18–20

Leviticus 18–20 is routinely viewed as a special unit within Leviticus 17–27 due to its similar subject matter.⁵ The phrase, “I am the LORD your God” occurs almost fifty times within these three chapters, making clear that the purpose of these chapters is to direct Israel to live in light of this reality.⁶ Leviticus 18 and 20 are similar in content, guiding and directing Israelite life through lists of prohibitions. Leviticus 19, on the other hand, is largely positive in the injunctions given. The way these three chapters are coordinated highlights the importance of Leviticus 19 to Israelite life.⁷

Leviticus 18:1–5 begins the section as a general introduction, warning the Israelites not to follow the practices of the Canaanites and Egyptians. Israel is to be distinct and not to imitate the pagan practices of the surrounding nations.⁸ Leviticus 18:6–18 addresses sexual prohibitions which are incestuous by nature. Leviticus 18:19–23 forbids other Canaanite customs (all except v. 21 are sexual in nature). Concluding the chapter, Leviticus 18:24–30 warns Israel of the consequences of following in the ways of the surrounding pagans. Thus, the outline of Leviticus 18 is as follows:⁹

- I. Introduction and Exhortation to Israel (vv. 1–5)
- II. Prohibitions of Incestuous Unions (vv. 6–18)
- III. Prohibitions of Other Canaanite Customs (vv. 19–23)
- IV. Warning and Consequences (vv. 24–30)

In contrast to the previous chapter, Leviticus 19 positively emphasizes what Israel is to be known for. Several commentators have noted that the Ten Commandments seem to be embodied in Leviticus 19 (both in direct reference as well as in principle).¹⁰ Although a thorough discussion of Leviticus 19 is beyond the scope of this article, it is necessary to mention the significance that the structure of

go into detail about the arguments. Cf. Michael A. Grisanti, “Homosexuality—An Abomination or Purely Irrelevant? Evaluating LGBT Claims in Light of the Old Testament (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:22; 20:13),” *TMSJ* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 125–32. This article picks up where Grisanti left off and discusses some of the viewpoints in detail.

⁵ Johnson M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 59.

⁶ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 239.

⁷ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 208. “Chapters 18 and 20 are written in parallel so as to frame chapter 19, both dealing with prohibitions against various sexual offences and idolatry. By contrast, chapter 19 offers positive rules and is unified by the Decalogue, with all ten commandments being either alluded to or quoted. This central chapter may be summarized by its own centre, the admonition to ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ in 19:18.”

⁸ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 240.

⁹ Adapted from Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 249.

¹⁰ Morales, *Mountain of the Lord*, 208; Rooker, *Leviticus*, 251–52; Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 124.

Leviticus 18 and 20 places upon Leviticus 19. The structure reveals how crucial this chapter is to Israelite conduct.

Leviticus 20 recapitulates much of the same material from Leviticus 18. However, there are several significant differences between the chapters. The primary difference is that Leviticus 18 is formulated in an apodictic nature (“Do not,” “You shall”), whereas Leviticus 20 is formulated casuistically as case law (“If someone/a man/a woman . . .”).¹¹ Furthermore, whereas Leviticus 18 does not mention penalties for infractions, Leviticus 20 is filled with the penalties for transgression. These observations point to the likelihood that the chapters, though similar in content, are different in purpose. Leviticus 18 likely targets the individual Israelite as a potential transgressor and warns him of the dangers of acting like those from the pagan nations. On the other hand, Leviticus 20 seems to target the Israelites as a community, thus making them accountable for ensuring that penalties are enacted against law breakers.¹²

With the foregoing thoughts in mind, a simple outline of Leviticus 20 would be as follows:¹³

- I. Call to Avoid Pagan Practices (vv. 1–8)
- II. Call to Protect the Family (vv. 9–21)
- III. Call to Be Holy in the Land (vv. 22–27)

Having discussed the purpose and structure of Leviticus, we will now turn to examine the specific prohibitions found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Leviticus 18:22

In our current culture, Leviticus 18 has vaulted from the hidden recesses of the Bible to being one of the most well-known chapters in the Old Testament because of the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22. Radner writes, “Leviticus 18 has gained a certain amount of contemporary interest—perhaps beyond any other text in the book—due to its single notation of homosexual sex as ‘an abomination’ (18:22). This verse has become a battleground in the controversy over sexuality.”¹⁴

Leviticus 18:22 states: “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (וְאִת־זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכַּב־אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה הִוא).¹⁵ Although seemingly straightforward, much of this prohibition has been embroiled in controversy due to recent reinterpretations.

Although English changes the word order, in Hebrew the actual prohibition “you shall not lie” (לֹא תִשְׁכַּב) comes after the object “with a male” (וְאִת־זָכָר). This construction seems to put emphasis on the identity of the object (i.e., the maleness of the object). This emphasis likely is confirmed by the word “male” (זָכָר) rather than the normal word for “man” (אִישׁ). The word זָכָר is used 82 times in the Hebrew

¹¹ Levine, *Leviticus*, 135.

¹² Rooker, *Leviticus*, 265. This would account for the difference in imperatival structures as well as the stress of the death penalty in Leviticus 20. We will revisit this in the discussion on Leviticus 20:13.

¹³ Adapted from *ibid.*, 266.

¹⁴ Ephraim Radner, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 186.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are given from the NASB.

Bible as a designation to stress the maleness of an individual or an animal over against a female.¹⁶ The LXX supports this technical depiction of maleness by using the translation ἄρσενος, the Greek word corresponding to the Hebrew designation for male.¹⁷ Thus, the prohibition is concerned specifically with the lying down with a male.

The specific prohibition reads, “You shall not lie” (לֹא תִשְׁכַּב). The Hebrew term שכב is the standard word for lying down, which can communicate lying down as a result of sickness, rest, or sexual activity.¹⁸ The context clearly indicates that sexual activity is in view. The use of לֹא with the imperfect signals a more emphatic prohibition than the jussive with אַל.¹⁹ Since this prohibition is masculine singular, another male is the immediate target of this prohibition. Thus, the apparent point of the prohibition is that a male must never engage in sexual activity with another male. The verse states that this sexual activity is an abomination.²⁰

If that were all the verse read, there would likely be little room for debate. However, the construct phrase מְשַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה (“as one lies with a woman”) functions to modify the prohibition לֹא תִשְׁכַּב (“you shall not lie”). Exactly how this construct phrase modifies the verb has been the subject of much debate. This phrase has received significant scholarly attention in recent years. Therefore, we must examine it in detail in order to determine how this phrase contributes to our understanding of this prohibition.

Traditional Interpretation of מְשַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה

A survey of major English Bible translations gives the following translations of Leviticus 18:22:

¹⁶ This is further demonstrated by observing the coupling together of זָכָר and נְקֵמָה in fifteen occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:27; 5:2; 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16; Lev 3:1, 6; 12:7; 15:33; 27:5, 6, 7; Num 5:3; Deut 4:16).

¹⁷ In other words, the sexual identity is being stressed with this specific language.

¹⁸ For more, see the following discussion on the term מְשַׁכְּבֵי.

¹⁹ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) §107o (hereafter, *GKC*). “Thus לֹא with the imperfect is especially used in enforcing the divine commands, e.g. thou shalt not steal Ex 20:15; cf. verses 3, 4, 5, 7, 10 ff.” Cf. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006) §113m (hereafter, Joüon). The fact that verses 19–23 all use לֹא with the imperfect signals their similarity and appropriate grouping.

Importantly, Waltke and O'Connor state, “[The volitional use of the non-perfect] approximates the imperative mood and is, in fact, frequently found in conjunction with an imperative form. The force with which the speaker is able to make the imposition depends on the social distance between speaker and addressee. If an inferior addresses a superior the obligation takes the force of a request, but if the communication proceeds from a superior to an inferior it has the force of a command. ... *These forms emphasize the will of the speaker, whereas the non-perfectives to be treated here emphasize the action enjoined or forbidden*” (*IBHS* §31.5a.). Thus, in this context, the prohibition is emphasizing the action that is forbidden. Waltke and O'Connor go on to say that the non-perfective with the לֹא is common in legislative contexts.

²⁰ For more on the significance of the term “abomination” (תועבה), see Goeman, “The Law and Homosexuality,” 124–31.

Table 1: English translations of Lev. 18:22

ESV	You shall not lie with a male <i>as with a woman</i> ; it is an abomination.
NASB95	You shall not lie with a male <i>as one lies with a female</i> ; it is an abomination.
NIV84	Do not lie with a man <i>as one lies with a woman</i> ; that is detestable.
NRSV	You shall not lie with a male <i>as with a woman</i> ; it is an abomination.
HCSB	You are not to sleep with a man <i>as with a woman</i> ; it is detestable.
NET	You must not have sexual intercourse with a male <i>as one has sexual intercourse with a woman</i> ; it is a detestable act.
KJV	Thou shalt not lie with mankind, <i>as with womankind</i> : it is abomination.
NLT	Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man <i>as with a woman</i> . It is a detestable sin. ²¹

As is evident from the various English translations listed, the predominant understanding of the phrase *מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה* has been of sexual intercourse that transpires between two men as if one of the men was a woman. It is unfortunate that defenses of this traditional translation have been “few and far between.”²²

To be fair, only recently has this traditional interpretation been challenged, thus necessitating a defense. Previous to this challenge, scholars apparently felt no need to perform a thorough analysis of this construct phrase. In recent years, however, there has been an influx of contention about this phrase, and scholarly work has been put forward to advance alternative understandings of this phrase.

Recent Scholarly Interpretations of *מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה*

Saul Olyan (1994)

Probably the most referenced study of this phrase came out in 1994 when Saul Olyan wrote an article which investigated this phrase in detail.²³ In his article, Olyan takes the position that this phrase refers to specific homosexual behavior²⁴ by a male Israelite with another male Israelite.²⁵ In his article Olyan argues that the application of this law *only* extends to specific homosexual behavior, and not to other sexual acts.

²¹ All italics mine.

²² Bruce Wells, “The Grammar and Meaning of the Leviticus Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered” (presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, November 2014), 2. Cf. Saul M. Olyan, “‘And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” *JHS* 5 (1994): 184. Olyan writes, “Virtually without exception the difficult ‘lying down of a woman’ is rendered ‘as with a woman’ or something similar.”

²³ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 179–206.

²⁴ Many scholars believe this phrase refers to anal penetration. Hereafter, it will be referred to as “specific homosexual behavior.”

²⁵ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 204.

To support this thesis, Olyan discusses the use of a similar construct phrase (משכב זכר) which is used in Numbers 31:17–18, 35, and Judges 21:11–12. These passages are listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Uses of משכב זכר

<p>Numbers 31:17–18</p>	<p>Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman <i>who has known man intimately</i>. But all the girls <i>who have not known man intimately</i>, spare for yourselves.</p>	<p>ועתה הרגו כל־זכר בטף וכל־אשה ידעת איש למשכב זכר: הָרָגוּ וְכָל־הַטַּף בְּנִשְׁיָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ הַחַיִּי לָכֶם מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר</p>
<p>Numbers 31:35</p>	<p>and of human beings, of the women <i>who had not known man intimately</i>, all the persons were 32,000.</p>	<p>וּנְפֹשׁ אָדָם מִן־הַנְּשִׁיִּים כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר נְפֹשׁ שְׁגָרִים וְשִׁלְשִׁים אָלֶף</p>
<p>Judges 21:11–12</p>	<p>“This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman <i>who has lain with a man</i>.” And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man <i>by lying with him</i>; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.²⁶</p>	<p>וְזֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־זָכָר וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת מִשְׁכַּב־זָכָר תַּחֲרִימוּ וַיִּמְצְאוּ מִיּוֹשְׁבֵי יַבֶּשׁ גִּלְעָד אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת נַעֲרָה כְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעָה אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר וַיָּבִיאוּ אוֹתָם אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה שִׁלֹּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן</p>

These passages focus on a similar phrase (משכב זכר), the main difference being that משכב is in the singular and not the plural in these passages (משכבין). Olyan notes that in Judges 21:12, a virgin is defined as one who has not known a man “with respect to the lying down of a male,”²⁷ while the non-virgin mentioned in verse 11 knows the “lying down of a male.”²⁸ Likewise, Numbers 31 uses this phrase to distinguish between virgins and non-virgins. Olyan summarizes,

The idiom *miškab zākār*, literally “the lying down of a male,” must mean specifically male vaginal penetration in these contexts: the experience of *miškab zākār* defines a nonvirgin over against a virgin, who lacks such experience specifically. The expression “to know the lying down of a male” seems to mean the same thing as the more commonplace idiom “to know a man”; texts such as Judg. 21:12 and Num. 31:17 use two equivalent expressions to make the same point, where either alone would be sufficient, as Judg. 21:11 and Num. 31:18, 35 indicate.²⁹

²⁶ All italics mine.

²⁷ Olyan’s translation of זכר משכב.

²⁸ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 184.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Olyan next addresses whether the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* (Lev 18:22) is equivalent to the phrase *מִשְׁכֵּב זָכָר*. Although recognizing the difficulties—such as why *אִשָּׁה* is used instead of *נְקֵבָה* (which would be the expected counterpart to *זָכָר*)—he concludes that if *מִשְׁכֵּב זָכָר* means “male vaginal penetration,” then the corresponding phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* should mean “the act or condition of a woman’s being penetrated.”³⁰

Anal receptivity is compared by implication to vaginal receptivity through the use of the idiom *miškēbê ’iššā*, but the laws make clear that vaginal receptivity has no acceptable analogue among men: Lev 18:22 and 20:13 imply that a male must experience (“lie”) “the lying down of a woman” with women only. Receptivity is bounded on the basis of biological sex; it is constructed as appropriate exclusively to females; it is gendered as feminine.³¹

Olyan asserts that it is likely the “insertive partner” rather than the “receptive partner” who is the target of the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22.³² However, Olyan also notes that the law in Leviticus 20:13 seems to target both parties (the “insertive” and “receptive”).³³ Thus, he concludes that there must have been redaction involved which changed the law in Leviticus 20:13 from its original form, which originally would have read the same as Leviticus 18:22.³⁴

David Tabb Stewart (2000)

Six years after Olyan’s seminal study, David Tabb Stewart finished his dissertation in 2000, in which he dealt at length with this phrase.³⁵ Although appreciative of Olyan’s work, Stewart’s main disagreement with Olyan’s study is the lack of consideration for the difference between the plural (*מִשְׁכְּבֵי*) found in the Levitical passages and the singular (*מִשְׁכֵּב*) found in Numbers 31 and Judges 21. Stewart claims this difference is shown most significantly by considering Genesis 49:4.³⁶

Genesis 49:4 uses a similar phrase to the Levitical passages, “Because you went up to your father’s bed” (*כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ*). The phrase “father’s bed” (*מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ*) refers to Reuben’s sexual sin with his father’s concubine in Genesis 35:22. Stewart sees this verse as problematic to Olyan’s understanding. According to Olyan’s interpretation, what Reuben would have experienced is described as *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ*, which would be the “vaginal receptivity” of a man (his father). However, that is

³⁰ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 185.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

³² *Ibid.*, 186.

³³ Olyan notes that the reason for these prohibitions in their “initial form” was either (1) to condemn a man who caused the feminization of his partner, or perhaps (2) due to the active partner not conforming to his own social class in his choice of a sexual partner. See *ibid.*, 204.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 186–87. The idea of redaction will be further discussed in the section on Leviticus 20:13.

³⁵ David Tabb Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws: Text and Intertext of the Biblical Holiness Code and Hittite Law” Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 66–95. This work also appears in an abbreviated form in David Tabb Stewart, “Leviticus,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest et al. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 77–104.

³⁶ Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws,” 72.

problematic since Reuben has intercourse with a female in Genesis 35. Commenting on this passage, Stewart notes, “Reuben’s incest with his stepmother is put in terms of the men, as if it were incest between son and father.”³⁷ Stewart concludes that this phrase in Genesis 49:4 (מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיר) demonstrates the plural מִשְׁכְּבֵי can refer to either illicit male-female relations, or to illicit male-male relations.³⁸

By comparing the plural use of מִשְׁכְּבֵי in Genesis 49:4 and Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 with Numbers 31 and Judges 21 (singular use of מִשְׁכָּב), Stewart proposes that the plural use takes on a technical meaning of illicit sex, specifically with reference to incest.³⁹ This viewpoint also tries to take into consideration the context of the first part of Leviticus 18, which often speaks of incest with female relatives in terms of the male (e.g., exposing your father’s nakedness by lying with your mother, Lev 18:7). Thus, given the context of incest, and the technical use of the plural מִשְׁכְּבֵי, it would make sense that male-male incest is the target of the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22.

Just as the plural construct מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיר [Gen 49:4] speaks of incest, so also מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה [Lev 18:22; 20:13] speaks of incest. The former speaks of incest with a female relative in terms of a male relative; the latter speaks of incest with male kin in terms of female kin. What female kin? Kin of all the same degrees of relation already spoken of in Lev 18:7–18.⁴⁰

*Jerome T. Walsh (2001)*⁴¹

Following closely on the heels of Stewart’s work in 2000, Jerome T. Walsh published an article in 2001, “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who is Doing What to Whom?”⁴² Walsh’s work was published so closely to Stewart’s that he does not interact with it. However, Walsh positively affirms Olyan’s contributions to the discussion of the Levitical prohibitions.⁴³

Like Olyan, Walsh argues that to understand the phrase מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה, one must understand the correlative phrase מִשְׁכָּב זָכָר in Numbers 31:17–18 (cf. v. 35) and Judges 21:11–12. Thus, the phrase מִשְׁכָּב זָכָר to Olyan and Walsh clearly refers to vaginal penetration, and the correlating phrase מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה refers to the act of being penetrated like a woman.

³⁷ Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws,” 72–73.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 73–74; Stewart, “Leviticus,” 97.

⁴⁰ Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws,” 74.

⁴¹ It should be noted that in 2017, a new article was published on this issue: George M. Hollenback, “Who Is Doing What to Whom Revisited: Another Look at Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 3 (2017): 529–537. Hollenback took Walsh’s conclusions and attempted to validate them by analyzing the surrounding prohibitions in Leviticus. Although an interesting contribution, since Hollenback’s article assumes Walsh’s arguments to be true, and since he does not directly contribute to our understanding of the Hebrew phrase מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה, we will not address his arguments in this article.

⁴² Jerome T. Walsh, “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 201–209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 201. “First, he [Olyan] demonstrated by a convincing philological analysis that the laws refer specifically to male–male anal intercourse, not to male–male sexual contact in general. Second, he showed that the redaction history of this legislation is essential to its interpretation.”

A significant area in which Olyan and Walsh differ is with regard to the target of the prohibition. Whereas Olyan argues that the “insertive partner” was the original recipient of the Levitical prohibitions and Leviticus 22:13 was redacted to include both parties, Walsh argues that it is the “receptive partner” who was the original target of the prohibitions.⁴⁴

As evidence for this, Walsh uses a multi-step argument. First, since the phrase זָכַר מִשְׁכַּב refers to the activity of vaginal penetration (Num 31 and Judg 21), then the phrase מִשְׁכַּב אִשָּׁה must refer to the act of being passively penetrated.⁴⁵ Second, since the Levitical texts utilize a cognate accusative construction (“lie ... the lying down of a woman,” תִּשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה), then the one being addressed by the imperative must also be the one who lies down as a woman.⁴⁶ In other words, the cognate accusative, according to Walsh, shows that Leviticus 18:22 is forbidding a man from actively presenting himself in a passive way to another male.

Having significantly modified Olyan’s conclusion, Walsh argues that Israel’s cultural understanding of sexuality is “fully consonant with what we know of other contemporary Mediterranean societies in which an honor/shame dynamic was central to social and sexual behavior.”⁴⁷ The central issue for Walsh is that since the free Israelite is the target of the Levitical prohibitions, it is an issue of social status. A free male citizen is not to be shamed by taking on the female role of passivity in the sexual encounter.⁴⁸

K. Renato Lings (2009)

In 2009, K. Renato Lings wrote an article on this issue in the journal *Theology and Sexuality*.⁴⁹ In Lings’ article, he argues that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 pose significant challenges to the English translator, so much so that Lings claims that the difficulties of these verses render it nearly “untranslatable.”⁵⁰ Despite these

⁴⁴ Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 205–6. With regard to the redactional edits proposed by Olyan, Walsh posits that, contra Olyan, the prohibition is expanded to include the active partner by a later hand. “In the original law, a free adult male citizen who took the receptive role in an act of male–male anal intercourse would have been condemned as transgressing the boundary between male and female, just as he would have been in Greece, Rome, and, apparently, Assyria. Such a law alone would not have made Israelite practice noticeably different from that of other cultures in the Mediterranean basin or the ancient Near East. But by extending the condemnation to include the active party, the redactor of H strives to differentiate between Israelite practice and that of “Egypt” and “Canaan” and “the nation that was before you” (18:3, 24–28), and thereby to protect the holiness of Israel from the תוּעֵבָה of confusion with other nations” (208). A similar understanding is put forward by Theodore W. Jennings, *Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 208.

⁴⁵ Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 204.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 205. Walsh states that “this [cognate accusative] construction regularly describes an action performed by the subject, not the subject’s experience of someone else’s action.” In support of this understanding, Walsh points to 2 Sam 4:5b where a non-sexual reference of this cognate accusative is used (וְהָיָה שֹׁכֵב אֶת מִשְׁכַּב הַדָּהָרִים). Walsh also points to Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* §10.2.1f.

⁴⁷ Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 206.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 207–8.

⁴⁹ K. Renato Lings, “The ‘Lyings’ of a Woman: Male–Male Incest in Leviticus 18.22?” *TS* 15, no. 2 (2009): 231–50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 232. Contrast this statement with Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 321. “The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity.”

difficulties, Lings writes in an attempt to verify and supplement Stewart's work from 2000.⁵¹

Lings states that although most English versions share a similar rendering of *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה*, one should be skeptical of its common translation.⁵² He uniquely argues, against the traditional translation, that to translate the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* with a comparative preposition in English is inaccurate. In his argument, Lings notes that the Hebrew prepositions *כִּ* (as) and *עִם* (with) are both missing from the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה*. Thus, according to Lings, the absence of these prepositions in Hebrew renders as faulty the English translation “as one lies with a woman.” For Lings, because this rendition includes *both* of those prepositions within the translation of *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה*, it is an inadvisable translation.⁵³

Similar to Stewart, Lings emphasizes Genesis 49:4 as a potential key to unlocking the meaning of *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה*. Lings argues that it is likely significant that there are two references to the “bed” on which Reuben’s transgression took place.⁵⁴ For Lings, the singular use of *צוּעֵי* refers to the place of iniquity, and the *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אֶרֶץ* refers to the “illicit nature of Reuben’s relationship with Bilhah.”⁵⁵

Lings includes his argument by applying his observations from Genesis 49:4 and drawing from the incestuous context of Leviticus 18. Therefore, drawing heavily upon Stewart, Lings concludes the context of incest a more appropriate translation of the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* should contextually be limited to the incestuous relationships put forward in Leviticus 18.⁵⁶

Bruce Wells (2014)

In 2014, Bruce Wells presented a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature conference entitled, “The Grammar and Meaning of the Leviticus Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered.”⁵⁷ In his extensive treatment of the issue, Wells contests the standard translation of *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* (“as one lies with a woman”) and proposes that this phrase specifically forbids “sexual relations between married men, though certain other males may be included in the prohibition as well.”⁵⁸

Although appreciative of prior scholarship on the passage, namely that of Olyan and Stewart, Wells purports that both scholars ultimately fall short in their treatment of *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה*. Wells argues that Olyan does not take Genesis 49:4 into proper consideration, while Stewart likewise fails to consider an important parallel in the

⁵¹ Lings, “‘Lyings’ of a Woman,” 233.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 240. “One way of interpreting Gen 49:4 could be that the singular *yātsūa’* refers to the physical location where the sexual act took place, while the plural *miškevē* perhaps focuses on the arguably illicit nature of Reuben’s relationship with Bilhah.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 246. For a full response to Lings’ article, see David Casas, “The Clarity of the ‘Lyings of a Woman’: Homosexuality in Levitical Law” (presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Lithonia, GA, 2015), 1–22.

⁵⁷ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 1–23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

Qumran text 1QSa.⁵⁹ The passage from 1QSa⁶⁰ is an important part of the discussion, and although Olyan notes the passage in a footnote, he also does not adequately discuss it. To his credit, Wells spends considerable time on this text. 1QSa 1.8–10 reads as follows:⁶¹

Table 3: Text and translation of 1QSa 1.8–10

<p>At the age of twenty years, he will transfer to those enrolled, to enter the lot amongst his family and join the holy community. He shall not approach a woman to know her <i>through carnal intercourse</i> until he is fully twenty years old, when he knows good [11] and evil.⁶²</p>	<p>וב[ן] עשרים שנה יעבר[ו] [על] הפקודים לבוא בגורל בתוך משפ[ח]תו ליחד בעד[ת] קודש. ולוא י[קר]ב אל אשה לדעתה למשכב זכר כיאם לפי מילוואת לו עש[ר]י[ם] שנה בדעתו [טוב]</p>
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Wells argues that this text cannot fit with Olyan or Stewart’s interpretations.⁶³ Within Olyan’s interpretation, this text would refer to a young man experiencing vaginal penetration, which is entirely acontextual.⁶⁴ Likewise, contra Stewart, in this context the plural למשכב is used, and it is clear that incest is not in view. Thus, the plural term cannot be a technical term for incestuous relations.

Although differing significantly from Olyan and Stewart in regard to the above, Wells does agree that the term משכב must refer to illicit sexual activity. Citing Genesis 49:4, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, and 1QSa 1.10 as evidence, Wells observes the following: “First, each instance refers to a sexual act that is clearly illicit. Second, in each case, the masculine plural form of *miškab* is in construct to a noun that represents the opposite gender of the person being slept with.”⁶⁵

In contrast to Olyan, Wells argues that the singular occurrences of משכב should not factor into the discussion of how to translate the phrase משכב אשה, and thus does not discuss them in detail. Wells explains:

All occurrences of singular construct forms of *miškab* that are used in the context of sexual activity are in construct to a noun that has the same gender as the person being slept with (Num 31:17, 18, 35; Judg 21:11, 12). They come in the texts of

⁵⁹ Olyan briefly mentioned this text but did not pursue it, stating, “The use of this idiom at Qumran at the end of the first millennium is at odds with its use in Num 31 and Judg 21; here, it refers not to what a woman experiences in intercourse with a man but to what a man experiences with a woman.” Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 185n14.

⁶⁰ The 1QSa scroll is referred to as the “Community Rule” and was one of the first scrolls discovered in 1947 by Bedouin shepherds. The script can be dated to 100–75 B.C., thus pushing the initial composition of the *Rule* to the second century B.C. For more information, see J. Murphy-O’Connor, “Community, Rule of the (1QS),” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1110–12.

⁶¹ Transcription and translation provided by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1 (New York: Brill, 1999), 101.

⁶² Italics mine.

⁶³ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 12.

⁶⁴ It is clear from the context that the woman is supposed to experience sexual relations.

⁶⁵ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 12.

Numbers 31 and Judges 21 and identify virgins as those who have not known the bed of a male, a very intelligible euphemism for sexual intercourse. All of this, to my mind, makes the use of the masculine plural form distinctly different from that of the singular. It does not seem that the two uses should be combined into one semantic category.⁶⁶

The most unique contribution given by Wells is in relation to the technicality of the term *מִשְׁכָּבִי*. Wells argues that the use of *מִשְׁכָּבִי* identifies the “sexual domain” or guardianship of the following absolute noun.⁶⁷ For example, in Genesis 49:4, Reuben transgressed the sexual domain (*מִשְׁכָּבִי*) of his father (*אָבִיךָ*) by having sex with his father’s concubine. Only Jacob was to have sexual privileges with his concubine. Thus, in the words of Wells, “Reuben’s transgression, therefore, lay in the act of crossing over into his father’s sexual domain and lying with a woman who belonged to that domain.”⁶⁸

This understanding of *מִשְׁכָּבִי* is then imported into the Levitical prohibitions by Wells. Since the phrase *מִשְׁכָּבִי אִשָּׁה* (Lev 18:22; 20:13) has *אִשָּׁה* as the absolute noun, according to Wells, it is a woman whose rights would be violated by a male-male sexual relationship.⁶⁹ Thus, the Levitical prohibitions are specifically targeting males who are “off limits” because of their marital relationship to a woman. At its core then, according to Wells, this prohibition is intended to prohibit male-male sexual activity by men who are married to women since the men are in the sexual domain of their wives.

Wells does note the generic use of male (*זָכָר*) and hypothesizes that this term must argue for the expansion of this prohibition beyond married men to include incest. His reasoning is based on the context of Leviticus 18 and the forbidden relationships given there.⁷⁰ Although leaving open the possibility of certain homosexual relationships within Israel’s community, Wells notes that, “most of the men within the community of the laws’ addressee would be removed from being possible sexual partners for him.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 12–13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13–15. Esp. 14: “What I propose is that *miškēbē* (the masculine plural construct form of *miškab*) is an abstract plural that communicates the notion of someone’s lying-down area or zone. We might even say that it stands for an individual’s sexual domain.” Wells goes on to note that the sexual domain is either one of “ownership” (e.g., the husband’s conjugal rights) or of “guardianship” (e.g., the father’s protection of his daughter until she is given to her husband).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

A Contextual Analysis of מִשְׁכָּבִי אִשָּׁה

Having examined some of the recent scholarship on מִשְׁכָּבִי אִשָּׁה, this paper will now turn to an analysis and response.⁷² The writings of Olyan, Stewart, and Wells are most pertinent to this discussion and merit the greatest response.⁷³

At the outset, I agree that Wells accurately reveals some of the flaws in Olyan and Stewart's work. Namely, (1) that Olyan does not discuss Genesis 49:4 and gives inadequate attention to IQSa 1.10, and (2) that Stewart completely ignores IQSa 1.10. Indeed, if IQSa 1.10 is properly accounted for, the proposal that מִשְׁכָּבִי is a technical term referring to incest cannot stand. Additionally, IQSa 1.10 negates Wells' statement that all uses of מִשְׁכָּבִי are illicit.

When examining the context of IQSa 1.10, the implication seems to be that after reaching the age of twenty years old, the young man can then have sexual relations with a woman (presumably in marriage according to the community rules).⁷⁴ The context demands that illicit sexual activity is not in view, but a completely legitimate sexual relationship in which this young man could participate after the age of twenty. Thus, it seems inaccurate to argue that מִשְׁכָּבִי refers only to illicit sexual activity.

Although the context seems to indicate legitimate sexual activity, Stewart, Lings, and Wells all argue that מִשְׁכָּבִי is a term for illicit sexual activity. In addition, they all also argue that מִשְׁכָּבִי is in some sense a technical term.⁷⁵ Stewart and Lings argue the word is used as a technical term for incest. Wells, on the other hand, argues that it is a technical term identifying the sexual domain or guardianship of the absolute noun which is in the construct phrase. The view that the plural noun מִשְׁכָּבִי always refers to incest is incompatible with the evidence found in IQSa 1.10, where incest is clearly not in view.⁷⁶

On the other hand, Wells' argument also appears inconsistent. As noted previously, according to Wells, the term מִשְׁכָּבִי is used in a way that always communicates illicit sex; but, at the same time, he argues that it is a technical term for one who has the right of sexual domain over an individual. It seems evident that the term cannot simultaneously refer to illicit sexual activity as well as function as a technical term referring to sexual domain (which need not be illicit). These categories

⁷² Due to page limitations, it is not possible to respond to the details of each author's argument in full. Thus, I will limit my response to addressing the most significant points of discussion and detailed analysis.

⁷³ As noted above, there are more scholars who discuss this issue. However, these three have the most important contributions to make and will thus be addressed in more detail. Others have made notable contributions to peripheral issues that reach beyond the scope of this article. One such example is Daniel Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews in 'The History of Sexuality'?" *JHS* 5, no. 3 (January 1995): 333–55.

⁷⁴ The English translation provided above notes this point, "He shall not approach a woman to know her through carnal intercourse *until he is fully twenty years old*" (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1569. Similarly, Milgrom believes the plural is a technical term, and writes that the plural is "always found in the context of illicit carnal relations" (cf. Gen 49:4; Lev 18:22; 20:13).

⁷⁶ It is worth noting at this point that although there is a significant difference in time from the writing of Leviticus (ca. ~1400 B.C.) and IQSa (pre-100 B.C.), there does not appear to be a significant difference in the usage of מִשְׁכָּבִי between biblical literature and the Qumran literature. See David J. A. Clines, ed., "מִשְׁכָּבִי," in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 5:526–27. Further evidence for the non-technical nature of the term will be given in the discussion of Genesis 49:4.

given by Wells seem to be mutually exclusive (especially in IQSa 1.10 where the context seems to defy both categories of illicit sex and sexual domain).

There are other reasons to doubt the technical nuance of מְשֻׁבְּבֵי as proposed by Wells. One significant reason is that the definition of the category does not match the evidence. For example, with regard to sexual dominion, Wells argues for two separate categories. On the one hand is sexual domain (e.g., the right of a husband/wife for sole sexual possession of their spouse). On the other hand, Wells argues for another category of sexual dominion—that of guardianship (a father's protection of his daughter, etc.). The latter category is proposed by Wells in an effort to make sense of IQSa 1.10. This text speaks about a woman who is unmarried (a virgin), and so she does not have anyone to whom she owes sexual fidelity. Wells explains this passage by a new category of guardianship that focuses on parental guardianship as a temporary substitute until she is under the domain of a husband.

Methodologically, it seems improper to expand the meaning of a technical term to include multiple categorical distinctions when the evidence does not clearly support even one distinction, let alone two different categories. Further, with regard to the text itself, the category of sexual guardianship seems unnecessary in IQSa since the passage can be explained with the traditional understanding of sexual euphemism. Therefore, Wells' proposition that מְשֻׁבְּבֵי is a technical term of sexual domain appears not only to be unnecessary, but also forced onto passages with simpler explanations.

Another significant reason to refrain from labeling מְשֻׁבְּבֵי as a technical term is its non-technical use in another Qumran document, 4Q184 f1:5–6.⁷⁷

Table 4: Text and translation of 4Q184 f1:5–6

<p>Her veils are shadows of the twilight and her adornments diseases of the pit. Her beds {her couches}⁷⁸ are couches of the pit, [...] [6] (are) deep ditches. Her lodgings are <i>couches of darkness</i> and in the heart of the night[t] are her tents.⁷⁹</p>	<p>מכסיה אפלות נשף ועדיה נגיעי שהת. ערשיה {יצועיה} יצועי שאול מעמקי בור. מלונותיה משכבי חושך ובאישיני ליל[ה] ממשלותיה.</p>
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The context of this passage is a discussion of the wicked woman. Although her exact identity is a matter of debate,⁸⁰ she is clearly depicted as an evil seductress who seduces in order to destroy. The phrase, “Her lodgings are couches of darkness” (מלונותיה משכבי חושך) is relevant to this discussion. It is impossible to see the plural משכבי being used as a technical term in the way Wells describes. Wells argues that משכבי is an abstract plural which is a technical term describing the sexual domain of the word which is the absolute noun following the construct. However, we have here

⁷⁷ Transcription and translation provided by Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 1:376–77. For a history of poetic analysis of this document, see Eigbert J. Tigchelaar, “The Poetry of the Wiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184),” *Revue de Qumran* 23, no. 3 (2012): 621–33.

⁷⁸ The portion of the text marked out by { } indicates legible text that has been corrected by the manuscript copyist.

⁷⁹ Italics mine.

⁸⁰ Scott C. Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs 7 and 4Q184,” *Vetus Testamentus* 53, no. 1 (January 2003): 68–80.

in 4Q184 an example which appears in construct with the absolute noun “darkness” (חושך). We would be hard pressed to say that darkness is the one who is supposed to have sexual privileges (or guardianship) with the young man addressed.

Additionally, the noun “couches/beds” (משכבי) is used as a predicate nominative of “her lodgings” (מלונותיה), thus equating the ideas of lodgings and places she lays down. This grammatical concept demonstrates again that the technicality of the term is nonexistent in this context. It is also notable that the narrator of 4Q184 uses two other terms for bedding/couches in the earlier line, “her beds” (ערשיה) and “couches” (יצועי), both of which are plural. The use of these terms in the same context argues for a contextual use of משכבי in line with the normal metaphoric use of “a place of lying down,” rather than some technical term indicative of sexual domain. Based on the foregoing argument, it seems best to reject the idea that מְשַׁכְּבִי is a technical term and broaden the search for a better understanding of the term.

Another issue on which I disagree with Wells is his belief that the singular uses of מְשַׁכְּבִי are unhelpful to this discussion. He believes they are unhelpful because they are in construct with a noun that has the same gender as the person being slept with (Num 31:17–18, 35; Judg 21:11–12), thus showing a slight difference.⁸¹ However, methodologically, it seems far better to seek an explanation that accounts for all the evidence present in similar contexts of sexual activity. In fact, if one meaning can fit both the singular and plural uses, then there is no need to attempt an alternative, technical meaning of מְשַׁכְּבִי. Therefore, this article now moves to examine these passages in question to determine if they can contribute to our understanding of the Levitical prohibitions.

Numbers 31:17–18 (cf. v. 35) and Judges 21:12 provide examples of the singular use of מְשַׁכְּבִי in construct phrases that appear similar to the plural usage that has already been discussed.

⁸¹ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 12.

Table 5: Text and translation of Num 31:17–18 and Judg 21:11–12

<p>Numbers 31:17–18 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man <i>intimately</i>. But all the girls who have not known man <i>intimately</i>, spare for yourselves.</p>	<p>וְעַתָּה הֲרִגוּ כָּל־זָכָר בְּטָף וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדְעַת אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הָרְגוּ: וְכָל־הַטּוֹף בַּנְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הִקְיֹוּ לָקֵם:</p>
<p>Judges 21:11–12 This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has <i>lain with a man</i>. And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man <i>by lying with him</i>; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.⁸²</p>	<p>זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־ זָכָר וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדְעַת מִשְׁכַּב־ זָכָר: מִתְחַרְמֵי זָכָר וַיִּמְצְאוּ מִיּוֹשְׁבֵי יַבִּישׁ גִּלְעָד אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת נַעֲרָה בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעָה אִישׁ וַיָּבִיאוּ אוֹתָם לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה שִׁלֹּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:</p>

In Numbers 31:17–18 (cf. v. 35), the context is Israel’s vengeance on Midian for their part in leading Israel astray from God at Baal Peor (Num 25). Since a significant component of Israel’s transgression in Numbers 25 involved the women from Midian seducing and leading the Israelite men astray, Moses commanded the people to put to death any woman who had known man.⁸³

Judges 21:11–12, on the other hand, occurs after Israel had almost completely wiped out the tribe of Benjamin. Since Jabesh-gilead had not helped in the fight against Benjamin, the other tribes wiped out Jabesh-gilead except for 400 virgins who had not known man. These women were taken and given to Benjamin to help repopulate the tribe.

Interestingly, both passages utilize the phrase *מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר* twice. In each passage it occurs once with the preposition *לְ*, and once without. Further, in each passage the women are described once by a participle (*יָדְעַת*) which functions attributively to set off a relative clause,⁸⁴ and then by a relative pronoun (*אֲשֶׁר*) which functions to set off another relative clause.⁸⁵ Thus syntactically, each occurrence of *מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר* is in a relative clause. Further, the phrase *מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר* is used as the object of *יָדַע* in Numbers 31:18 and Judges 21:11 in ways that parallel the use of *אִישׁ* as the object (Num 31:17; Judg 21:12). Therefore, upon close examination, the differences in these clauses indicate no noticeable difference between the use of the preposition *לְ* and the use without. Since the phrases *מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר* and *לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר* appear to function in a parallel syntactical manner, our hypothesis must allow for that similarity in function.

⁸² All italics mine.

⁸³ R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers* (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 498.

⁸⁴ Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student’s Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew* (Quakertown, PA: Stylus Publishing, 2002) §2.2.5a.

⁸⁵ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Syntax* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) §5.2.13a (hereafter, AC).

In light of the ל preposition, the two main grammatical options for these phrases are either a focus on location or a manner of action. Olyan believes that the ל preposition in these passages should be translated, “with respect to,” indicating the manner in which the action is carried out.⁸⁶ This seems to be the best choice, putting the emphasis on the manner of action rather than on a location.⁸⁷

Olyan contends that these passages show that vaginal penetration is the specific kind of action described in these verses. However, that is likely too specific for these passages. The noun מִשְׁכַּב is etymologically related to the verb שָׁכַב, which can communicate the simple act of lying down, but it also can communicate sexual intercourse.⁸⁸ With reference to sexual activity, שָׁכַב appears to be a general term for sexual activity and is used to reference sexual activity between a man and a woman (Gen 19:32, 33, 35; 30:16; 34:2; 35:22; Deut 22:22, 29; 1 Sam 2:22; 2 Sam 11:4; 12:24; 13:14, etc.), between a man and a man (Lev 18:22; 20:13), or between anyone⁸⁹ and an animal (Exod 22:18[19]; cf. Lev 18:23). Some, like Stewart, have argued that שָׁכַב is the Hebrew term for illicit sexual unions.⁹⁰ Although many of the contexts are illicit, not all of them are (cf. Gen 30:15, 16; 2 Sam 11:11). Although the emphasis of שָׁכַב may involve less intimacy than נָדַע, it is nevertheless a typical term for sexual encounters. Given all the ways this term is used, it seems too specific to say that שָׁכַב is describing the penetrative act in particular.

Additionally, the Hebrew language may already have had a metaphor for the act of insertion. The Old Testament consistently uses the phrase, “He went in to [her]” (אָלַּ + נִיבֵּא) to describe this activity of sexual union (Gen 16:4; 29:23, 30; 30:4; 38:2, 9, 18; Judg 16:1; Ruth 4:13; 2 Sam 12:24; 16:22; 17:25; 1 Chr 2:21; 7:23; Ezek 23:44).⁹¹ Thus, to force שָׁכַב or its cognate מִשְׁכַּב into a meaning that deals strictly with penetration seems unwise. Rather, in contexts of sexual activity, it is best to allow שָׁכַב and מִשְׁכַּב to communicate general sexual activity.⁹² Therefore, having examined the contribution of the singular phrase, we move now to compare the plural occurrences of מִשְׁכַּבֵּי with observations we have gleaned from Numbers 31 and Judges 21.

⁸⁶ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 184. Cf. *GKC* §119u; Joüon §133d; AC §4.1.10j.

⁸⁷ There are significant problems in trying to have the phrase זָכַר מִשְׁכַּב refer to location. For example, in Judg 21:11 the translation, “Any woman who knows the bed [location] of a male” (my translation) seems to flow well, but the location “bed” must be understood as a metaphor for sex (i.e., a metaphor of manner of action) anyway. Additionally, the next verse (v. 12) says, “[a virgin] who has not known a man at the bed of a male” (my translation). This becomes a rather redundant use of a metaphoric expression of the bed as a place of sexual activity. It seems much simpler to see both phrases (with and without the preposition) as focusing on the act of lying as the manner of action involved.

⁸⁸ “שָׁכַב,” *HALOT*, 1486–87.

⁸⁹ Exod 22:18 uses a masculine participle (כֹּל־שֹׁכֵב), but it occurs in an apodictic section of laws which has impact on the whole community of Israelites, not just the males. For example, if a woman were to steal (cf. Exod 22:1–4) she would not be exempt from that legislation.

⁹⁰ Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws,” 72–73; Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׁכַב,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 921–22.

⁹¹ In 2 Samuel 12:24 there may be a distinction made between “going in” to Bathsheba (וַיָּבֵא אֶלֶיהָ) and lying with her (וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ). But, given that the context is David comforting Bathsheba and the birth of her child, it is perhaps more likely that both are general references to sexual activity.

⁹² Wells also adds that on the basis of Gen 49:4 the plural מִשְׁכַּבֵּי cannot be thought of as “vaginal receptivity” since it refers to Reuben’s father in that passage. See Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 9–10. See following comments on Gen 49.

Some scholars, like Wells, ignore the singular uses of מִשְׁכָּב because, unlike the uses of מִשְׁכָּבִי, the singular construct occurs with nouns that are the same gender as the person being slept with.⁹³ However, this seems to be selectivity for the sake of convenience rather than a fair consideration of the evidence. Therefore, in an effort to account for all the evidence, we move to examine the use of the plural.

The question that must be answered is whether or not there is a distinction between the singular and plural of מִשְׁכָּב.⁹⁴ As a noun, מִשְׁכָּב appears mostly in the singular with the meaning of bed, but it can also mean lying down for the purpose of sleep, because of sickness, or for sex.⁹⁵ Hebrew nouns will often use plural forms for reasons that do not translate well into English. For example, abstract nouns frequently appear in the plural, perhaps to emphasize quality or state.⁹⁶ Hebrew will also often use plurals to communicate a singular idea that may include conditions, habitual behavior, or honorific titles.⁹⁷ That being said, given that the plural מִשְׁכָּבִי occurs in similar contexts to the singular, it is difficult to see a significant distinction.

According to Joüon-Muraoka, when a noun has both a masculine and feminine plural ending (as is the case with מִשְׁכָּב), one is often used frequently, and the other is reserved “for special or poetic usages.”⁹⁸ If we look at the usages of מִשְׁכָּבִי that we have access to, we note that each occurrence is either in poetry (Gen 49:4, 4Q184) or in legal literature (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1QSa 1.10). It may be that these contexts provide a background for why the plural masculine form is used. However, the plural feminine form appears in poetic contexts as well (Isa 57:2; Hos 7:14; Micah 2:1; Ps 149:5), so it seems unwise to press for special exegetical distinction.⁹⁹ Overall, it seems best to conclude that there is no appreciable difference in meaning between

⁹³ Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 12. The plural phrase in Gen 49:4; Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1QSa 1.10 occurs with opposite gender of person being slept with.

⁹⁴ Interestingly, this word appears in the plural both as a feminine וְ (Isa 57:2; Hos 7:14; Micah 2:1; Ps 149:5) as well as a plural construct form וְ (Gen 49:4; Lev 18:22; 20:13). One might be tempted to say that the Hebrew word מִשְׁכָּב evolved from a masculine ending ים (Gen and Lev) to a feminine plural ending וְ in later times (Isa, Hos, Micah, and Ps). A problem with this theory is that, as noted earlier, the wisdom literature of 4Q184 uses the masculine plural, thus indicating the time of writing is likely not the determining factor.

⁹⁵ Willhelm Gesenius, “מִשְׁכָּב,” *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 517.

⁹⁶ Waltke and O'Connor give the following list of abstract plurals: אֹנִים ‘strength’ (Isa 40:26), בְּשׂוּחַת ‘security’ (Job 12:6), מְבֹטָחִים ‘security’ (Isa 32:18, Jer 2:37; sing. frequent), הָרוּת ‘evil, destruction’ (Ps 5:10), תְּהִירוֹת ‘excellence’ (Dan 9:23), מְחַמְדִּים ‘charm’ (Cant 5:16), תְּרַפּוֹת ‘shame’ (Dan 12:2), דַּעוֹת ‘knowledge’ (1 Sam 2:3, Job 36:4; sing. דָּעָה four times), יְשׁוּעָה ‘salvation’ (Isa 26:18; Ps 18:51, 28:8, 42:6, 44:5; sing. frequent), מִישְׁרִים ‘uprightness’ (Isa 33:15), מְרַרִים ‘bitterness’ (Job 9:18), מְמַתְקִים ‘sweetness’ (Cant 5:16), שִׂשְׁשִׁים ‘delight’ (Prov 8:30). *IBHS* §7.4.2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* §7.4.2. Examples of these include: כְּלוּלָה ‘engagement’ (Jer 2:2), נְעוּרִים ‘youth’ (Isa 54:6), סְנַרְרִים ‘dimsightedness’ (Gen 19:11), עֲלוּמִים, ‘youth’ (Ps 89:46), מְשַׁלְלִים ‘childlessness’ (Isa 49:20), ‘fornication,’ מְהַלְלִים ‘embalming,’ מְפָרִים ‘atonement,’ מְלִאִים ‘installation,’ מְתַחֲחִים ‘engraving.’ Waltke and O’Conner actually classify מִשְׁכָּבִי as a “complex inanimate noun” (120).

⁹⁸ Joüon §90e. As examples of this, Joüon-Muraoka lists the following: “עָבַד cloud, normal pl. עָבִים, || pl. עָבָו only 2 x, in texts of elevated poetry: 2Sm 23:4; Ps 77:18; עָבָה rope, bond, normal pl. עָבָתִים, but referring to the bonds of love Ho 11.4, also for artistic cords, cordage-work Ex 28.14, etc.”

⁹⁹ It is interesting though, that in the four passages where the feminine plural is used, it occurs in the exact same phrase each time (עַל־מִשְׁכָּבוֹתָם), not only with the same preposition and spelling, but also at the end of the clause with the same accentuation. In contrast, the plural masculine (מִשְׁכָּבִי) is used in poetic contexts in parallelism with synonyms (cf. Gen 49:4, 4Q184). This may indicate simply a colloquial way of referring to something in specific contexts. But that seems as far as we can press these observations.

the singular and plural when used in construct. If there is any difference, it is likely more colloquial than technical. Therefore, assuming no appreciable difference between the singular and plural, both must be examined in their respective contexts.

Table 6: Comparison of construct use of מִשְׁכָּב and מִשְׁכָּבֵי

Passage	English Translation	Abs. Noun in Const. Phrase	Hebrew
Numbers 31:17	Kill every woman <i>who has known man intimately</i>	זָכָר = male	וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת אִישׁ :יְהָרְגוּ לַמִּשְׁכָּב זָכָר
Numbers 31:18	But all the girls <i>who have not known man intimately</i> , spare for yourselves	זָכָר = male	וְכָל־הַטַּף בְּנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הִקְיָו לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכָּב זָכָר לָכֶם
Numbers 31:35	of the women <i>who had not known man intimately</i>	זָכָר = male	מִן־הַנְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכָּב זָכָר
Judges 21:11	This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman <i>who has lain with a man</i>	זָכָר = male	וְזֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ כָּל־זָכָר וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת :מִתְחַרְיָמוּ מִשְׁכָּב־זָכָר
Judges 21:12	young virgins who had not known a man <i>by lying with him</i>	זָכָר = male	נַעֲרָה בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יָדְעָה אִישׁ לַמִּשְׁכָּב זָכָר
Leviticus 18:22	You shall not lie with a male <i>as one lies with a female</i>	אִשָּׁה = woman	וְאִת־זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה
Leviticus 20:13	If there is a man who lies with a male <i>as those who lie with a woman</i>	אִשָּׁה = woman	וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִת־זָכָר מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה
1QSa 1.10	He shall not approach a woman to know her <i>through carnal intercourse</i>	זָכָר = male	וְלֹא יִקְרַב] אֵל אִשָּׁה לְדַעְתָּהּ לַמִּשְׁכָּבֵי זָכָר
Gen 49:4	Because you went up <i>to your father's bed</i> ¹⁰⁰	אָבִיר = your father	כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכָּבֵי אָבִיר

In the singular phrases, it is clear that the target of the phrases is women who have lain with males. In other words, the phrase זָכָר (לְמִשְׁכָּב זָכָר) is an objective genitival phrase where the construct noun (מִשְׁכָּב) communicates verbal action, acting upon the absolute noun (i.e., the genitive).¹⁰¹ In this natural understanding of the

¹⁰⁰ All italics mine.

¹⁰¹ AC §2.2.4.

phrase, it is the woman who is the focus, specifically her experience of whether or not she has lain (מִשְׁכַּב) with a male (זָכָר).

If this understanding is imported into Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, then the phrase מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה, if treated as an objective genitive, would qualify the previous prohibition of not lying with a male. Thus, the translation would be, “You shall not lie with a male in the manner of lying with a woman.”¹⁰²

On the other hand, some, like Walsh, contend that the plural phrase in Leviticus has more of a subjective genitival nuance. This would forbid the man taking the role of a woman.¹⁰³ If the construct phrase in Leviticus 18:22 is a subjective genitive, then the command would be that man is not to lie with a man as a woman behaves in sexual relations. Walsh translates the phrase as “to lie with a male as a woman would.”¹⁰⁴

There are good reasons to reject the subjective genitive idea in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. First, the singular occurrences of זָכָר מִשְׁכַּב clearly indicate an objective relationship and are an obvious precedent for our discussion of the phrase מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה. Second, historically the phrase has been interpreted predominantly as an objective genitive and has made sense with that understanding. Third, combining the context of both Levitical prohibitions (18:22; 20:13), it becomes apparent that it is the act of lying with a male that is condemned, not simply taking the role of a woman.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it seems most natural to see the construct phrase (מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה) as having an objective rather than subjective nuance.

It is important to note that IQSa 1.10 uses the phrase לַמִּשְׁכָּבִי זָכָר in what appears to be a subjective role. In context, a young man is being addressed and is told not to approach a woman, to know her (לִדְעוּתָהּ), “by the lying of a male” (לַמִּשְׁכָּבִי זָכָר).¹⁰⁶ This appears to be a clear example contextually of the construct relationship functioning as a subjective genitive.

This example in IQSa reminds us of what grammarians refer to as the elasticity of the genitive construction.¹⁰⁷ This is another indication of why context is the necessary determiner of the nuance of a genitive construction. The exact same phrase

¹⁰² The phrase מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה functions as an adverbial accusative qualifying the manner of action, and not location. With Levine, *Leviticus*, 123. Contra Wells, “Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” 2–5. Wells believes these occurrences refer to location and not manner.

¹⁰³ Walsh argues that in cognate accusative constructions, such as Lev 18:22 and 20:13, “This construction regularly describes an action performed by the subject, not the subject’s experience of someone else’s action.” Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 205. In other words, the man is not to perform the lyings of a woman. For discussion on the issue of cognate accusatives and meaning, see *IBHS* §10.2.1f.

¹⁰⁴ Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 205.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the prohibition in Lev 18:22 clearly targets lying with a male (that is the main emphasis of the grammatical structure by fronting the direct object). Cf. Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 2nd ed. (San Antonio: Cedar Leaf Press, 2009), 105–6. Additionally, both active and passive roles are condemned in Lev 20:13, which indicates it is not taking the role of woman which is important to the author. More will be written on this in the discussion of Lev 20:13.

¹⁰⁶ My translation.

¹⁰⁷ To borrow a phrase from the grammarian Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 74.

can often carry different meanings in a different context.¹⁰⁸ In each instance, it is clear contextually whether the phrase in question is being used objectively or subjectively, and the context must be allowed to determine its nuance. Below is a list of the passages in question along with their classification.

Table 7: Genitive identification of absolute noun

Passage	Author's Translation	Genitive	Hebrew
Numbers 31:17	Kill every woman <i>who has known man by lying with a male</i>	Objective	וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת אִישׁ :הָרְגוּ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר
Numbers 31:18	But all the girls <i>who have not experienced lying with a male</i> , spare for yourselves	Objective	וְכָל־הַטּוֹף בַּנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הַחַיּוֹ לָקֶם
Numbers 31:35	of the women <i>who had not experienced lying with a male</i>	Objective	מִן־הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר
Judges 21:11	This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every male and every woman <i>who has experienced lying with a male</i>	Objective	זֶה הַדָּבָר תַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־זָכָר וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת :תַּחַרְמוּ מִשְׁכַּב־זָכָר
Judges 21:12	young virgins who had not known a man by <i>lying with a male</i>	Objective	נַעֲרָה כְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יָדְעָה אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר
Leviticus 18:22	You shall not lie with a male <i>in the manner of lying with a woman</i>	Objective	וְאִת־זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכַּב־אִשָּׁה
Leviticus 20:13	If there is a man who lies with a male <i>in the manner of lying with a woman</i>	Objective	וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִת־ זָכָר מִשְׁכַּב־אִשָּׁה
1QSa 1.10	He shall not approach a woman to know her <i>by the lying of a male</i> ¹⁰⁹	Subjective	ולוא י[קרב] אל אשה לדעתה למשכבי זכר

¹⁰⁸ The famous example for grammarians is the phrase “love of God.” This phrase can refer in certain contexts to God’s love for someone, or in other contexts it can refer to love *for* God. Another example is the sentence, “Fear of man can be exploited.” In one instance, that phrase may refer to man’s fear of something—an opportunity to gain advantage of them. On the other hand, the phrase can also refer to someone (or an animal) being afraid of man. Thus, the old adage proves tested and true once more, context is king.

¹⁰⁹ All italics mine.

One passage not listed in the chart above is Genesis 49:4. This passage requires particular attention because of the stress placed upon it in recent scholarship. The following is the passage in its English translation alongside the Hebrew.

Table 8: Text and translation of Gen 49:4

<p>Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to <i>your father's bed</i>; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch.¹¹⁰</p>	<p>פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֶל־תּוֹמֵר כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ אָז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵהָ:</p>
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The setting for this verse is presumably the death bed of Jacob when he gathered his sons together to pronounce his official blessing upon them.¹¹¹ The blessing for Reuben comprises 49:3–4. Verse 3 describes Reuben’s character as firstborn of Jacob’s sons, a man of strength and preeminence (יָתֵר). However, verse 4 describes how that dignity and preeminence were forfeited because of his transgression against his father.

Jacob is clear that it was because (כִּי) Reuben went up to his father’s bed that he has forfeited his preeminence among his brothers. Although Sarna believes the phrase “bed of your father” (מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ) is probably elliptical for “bed of your father’s wife,”¹¹² it seems more natural in poetry to depict this transgression as sleeping in the father’s bed.

As has been noted, some have used this passage to try to explain the meaning of the Levitical prohibitions. However, the passage uses poetic parallelism between bed (מִשְׁכְּבֵי) and couch (יְצוּעֵי), indicating that it is not the verbal action of lying down that is in view, but rather, the place of lying (a bed).¹¹³ Just because the plural form is used in this passage does not mean that a singular concept is not in view.¹¹⁴ In fact, in Chronicles Reuben’s sin is that “he defiled the couch of his father” (וַיְחַלְלֵן יְצוּעֵי אָבִיו) (1 Chr 5:1). It is the couch and not the bed that is defiled. More importantly, the plural is used in 1 Chronicles 5:1 for couch (יְצוּעֵי), but it should not be understood as a technical term in that context. All of these considerations lead to the conclusion that Genesis 49:4 uses the plural מִשְׁכְּבֵי to refer to the actual location of a bed. Hence, its use is significantly different than the other uses of מִשְׁכְּבֵי that have been examined in this article. Therefore, although it is a necessary passage to deal with, since it is being used locatively and in poetic parallelism, it does not help explain the Levitical prohibitions.

¹¹⁰ Italics mine.

¹¹¹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 885.

¹¹² Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1989), 333.

¹¹³ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 886.

¹¹⁴ Additionally, it appears significant that the DSS 4Q252 Col. iv:5, a commentary on Genesis found at Qumran, uses the plural for couch (יְצוּעֵי) instead of the singular, thus showing that it is unlikely the plural concept of מִשְׁכְּבֵי is technical in any true sense. Rather, it seems the two terms are meant to be viewed in parallel.

Summary of Evidence on משַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה

In summary, recent scholars have proposed revised interpretations of משַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה. These interpretations hypothesize that this phrase refers to (1) only male-male intercourse as (a) the active partner, or (b) the passive partner; (2) incestuous male-male intercourse; or (3) male-male intercourse when one (or both) of the males has an obligation to a wife. However, when the evidence is examined, these theories do not appear to be the best explanation of the evidence.

There are numerous reasons to reject the recent scholarly theories. First, when examining the word משַׁכְּבֵי itself, it is not clear that it is a technical term in the singular or the plural. It likely has the simple connotation of the act of lying down, which has to be contextually determined.¹¹⁵ Second, when examining the use of the singular phrase משַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה with the use of the plural, משַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה, there seems to be no significant difference. Third, when examining the nuance of the construct phrase, it makes most sense to see the construct phrase functioning objectively with an adverbial nuance, thus allowing for the traditional translation “as one lies with a woman.” Therefore, there is no reason to revise the traditional translation of this construct phrase as it seems to communicate the intended nuance of the phrase.

Leviticus 20:13

Having already examined Leviticus 18:22 in detail, most of the previous discussion readily applies to Leviticus 20:13. However, it is important to acknowledge that these two prohibitions are not identical. There are significant differences worth examining.

Table 10: Comparison between Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13

<p>You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (Lev 18:22)</p>	<p>וְאִתְּ-זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה הִוא:</p>
<p>If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. (Lev 20:13)</p>	<p>וְאִישׁ אִשָּׁה יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־זָכָר מִשַׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה עָשׂוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם מוֹת יוֹמָתוֹ דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם:</p>

There are at least three noteworthy differences between the two laws. First, Leviticus 20:13 does not actually take the form of a prohibition. Second, whereas the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22 focuses on the active party, 20:13 stresses the culpability of both parties. Third, the death penalty is included in Leviticus 20:13 but is not found in Leviticus 18:22.

¹¹⁵ The English word “bed” might provide a helpful example with similar uses to משַׁכְּבֵי. The word bed can refer to a location of sleeping, but it also can refer to the act of sleeping (“bedding down for the night”), or even sexual activity (“he went to bed with her”).

As noted in our previous discussion of the phrase *מִשְׁכָּבִי אִשָּׁה*, these differences have caused some scholars to assume redactional activity.¹¹⁶ For example, Olyan claims that the awkward switch from singular (*אִשָּׁה*) to plural (*אִשָּׁוֹת*) “suggests redactional activity.”¹¹⁷ Additionally, he believes that there is further evidence for editorial activity in the culpability being widened to include both parties in Leviticus 20:13.¹¹⁸ This leads Olyan to believe that in its original form the laws focused on the insertive partner and only punished him, while Walsh assumes the law has been redacted from a focus on the passive partner.¹¹⁹ Thus, many interpreters view Leviticus 18:22 as the earlier law, which is adapted in 20:13 by later redactional activity.

Evangelicals typically and rightfully proceed under the assumption that the Law is not a compilation of multiple sources, but a unified whole, given by God through Moses.¹²⁰ However, it is beneficial to discuss the evidence that Olyan and others put forward because it has direct bearing on the discussion.

At its core, Olyan’s theory of redaction is not strong. But it is also important to note that *even if* Olyan’s theory of redaction were true, it would not prove that *only* the insertive partner was targeted in the original law. Gagnon’s lengthy quote addresses this point:

First, even if 20:13 were a later formulation, it would represent the earliest commentary on the meaning 18:22; namely, that both partners in homosexual intercourse were liable to the death penalty. Presumably, 20:13 would have been formulated by the same priestly circles as those that formulated 18:22. Is this not the best evidence we have of how the formulators of 18:22 would have understood their own proscriptions? Second, *all* of the proscriptions in Leviticus 18 (minus 18:21 which does not deal with intercourse) address only the dominant, active partner (usually the male). The only proscription directed specifically to both males and female is the law concerning bestiality in 18:23, an exception easily explained on the assumption that women were regarded as the initiators in any intercourse with animals. By Olyan’s reasoning, the authors

¹¹⁶ Others see different traditions underlying Lev 18:22 and 20:13. For example, Carmichael sees Gen 19 as the tradition which underlies Lev 18:22, while he sees Tamar (Gen 38) as the tradition underlying Lev 20:13. See Calum M. Carmichael, *Law, Legend, and Incest in the Bible: Leviticus 18–20* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 162. Although it is axiomatic that Moses was well aware of these stories, having written them, there is little evidence these stories are the reason for the prohibitions given.

¹¹⁷ Olyan, “And with a Male You Shall Not Lie,” 186–87.

¹¹⁸ Olyan, 187.

¹¹⁹ Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 206–8.

¹²⁰ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 38. Rooker writes, “Mosaic authorship is clearly affirmed by a straightforward reading of the biblical text. Large amounts of the Pentateuch are attributed to Moses (Exod 24:4; 30:11, 17; 33:1, 5; 39:1, 5, 29; Lev 1:1; 4:1; 6:1; Num 4:1; Deut 1:1, 5; 5:1; 31:22, 30; 33:1). His authorship of the Pentateuch is assumed later by Jews in the postexilic community (1 Chr 15:15; 22:13; 2 Chr 23:18; 24:6; 25:4; 30:16; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh 1:7; 8:1; 13:1; Mal 4:4) and by the New Testament writers (Matt 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:31; 24:27, 44; John 1:17; Acts 3:22). In John 5:46–47 Jesus responds to his own Jewish critics who question his practices by saying: ‘If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?’ Could it be any clearer that Jesus and the Jews of his day had no doubts about who wrote the Pentateuch?”

of the laws against incest would have held only the men accountable for incest, even in cases where the woman was a willing participants or even prime instigator (in contradistinction to penalties prescribed for both participants in 20:11–21). We would also have to assume that the formulators of the prohibition against having sex with “your neighbor’s wife” in 18:20 never intended to penalize the wife in an adulterous affair. Yet all the evidence we have from ancient Israelite law indicates that women involved in adulterous affairs were punished with death, if they were willing participants in the act (Num 5:11–30; Deut 22:13–27; Lev 20:10; Ezek 16:38–41; 23:45–48). The reason why Lev 18:22 focuses on the active male partner is because the passive male partner, the one penetrated, takes the place of the female and the female is not directly addressed in the prohibitions of ch. 18.¹²¹

As Gagnon notes, even if there was redaction, there is little evidence from that fact that the insertive partner would be the only one addressed by the prohibition. But that is not to say these differences should be ignored or are insignificant. Rather, there is great benefit to be had in examining the differences between Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

The first observation to be made is that there are different macro-structures. Although Leviticus 18 and 20 deal with nearly identical material, the context makes clear that Leviticus 18 addresses the would-be offender of the Law, while Leviticus 20 addresses the Israelite community as a whole, establishing their responsibility to deal with sin in their midst.¹²² This point also explains why incest is not addressed in as much detail in Leviticus 20, and why there is such an emphasis on the punishment of transgressors.¹²³

This understanding of the difference in the primary addressee of Leviticus 20 also clarifies why the prohibition begins differently. Leviticus 20:13 is formulated structurally as belonging to a set of laws which deal with the protection of the family (vv. 9–21).¹²⁴ The first part of Leviticus 20:13 reads, “If *there is* a man who lies with a male” (וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אֶת-זָכָר).

The introductory phrase וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר is found in every verse of this section except in verses 9 and 19. English translations typically render the phrase as a conditional sentence, “If a man,” followed by the action that is forbidden. This is because Leviticus 20:9 begins the section with the phrase, “If *there is* anyone who curses his father ...” (כִּי-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקְלֹל אֶת-אָבִיו). Contextually, verses 10–21 are syntactically structured to carry on the nuance of וְי through ellipsis. The meaning of וְי in this context is undoubtedly conditional (as most English translations read). Therefore, grammatically the emphases in Leviticus 20:9–21 are not on forbidding actions (although that is strongly implied). Rather, the emphases are on what must be done with individuals who have committed such transgressions.

Another significant difference between Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is that mutual culpability is stressed in Leviticus 20:13. The phrase, “both of them have committed

¹²¹ Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 115fn183.

¹²² See Structure of Leviticus 18–20 in this article, and Rooker, *Leviticus*, 265.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 329–30; Rooker, *Leviticus*, 268.

a detestable act” (תועבה עשו שנייהם) uses a plural verb (עשו) as well as the word for two (שנייהם). The word for two (שנייהם) is used in construct phrases to identify which people make up the party of two (e.g., Gen 9:22; 24:22; 27:45; 31:37, etc.).¹²⁵ Thus, the combination of שנייהם and הם indicates that both parties involved have committed a “detestable act.” The term used for “detestable act” (תועבה) is the same word for “abomination” in Leviticus 18:22.¹²⁶ According to this Mosaic explanation, it is not only the active or the passive partner who has transgressed, but both of them. This statement seems to be irreconcilable with the idea that this prohibition is based in cultural gender norms, or the ANE concept of dominion and shame/honor.¹²⁷ In contrast to the apparent tolerance of other cultures toward certain homosexual acts, the Mosaic legislation does not qualify this stipulation.¹²⁸ It states simply that both

¹²⁵ “שנייהם,” HALOT, 1605.

¹²⁶ For more on this term, see discussion of Leviticus 18:22 in this article.

¹²⁷ For discussion of homosexuality in ancient Greece, see the following: Kenneth James Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 60–68, 81–109; David Cohen, “Law, Society and Homosexuality in Classical Athens,” *P&P* 117 (November 1987): 7–21. Some scholars who promote the idea that the Levitical prohibitions to a certain extent do match the context of the ancient Grecian model are Walsh, “Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” 201–9; David Daube, “The Old Testament Prohibitions of Homosexuality,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Romanistische Abteilung* 103 (1986): 447–48. Similar to these sources, see Thomas M. Thurston, “Leviticus 18:22 and the Prohibition of Homosexual Acts,” in *Homophobia and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Michael L. Stemmeler and J. Michael Clark (Dallas: Monument, 1990), 7–24. Thurston argues the male is forbidden from these relationships because it would be acting as a woman, similar to the prohibition in Deut 22:5 (ibid., 16). See also, Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 225–26. Fortson and Grams point out that there is some evidence of sexual relationships in the ANE that were related to some form of dominance. These include (1) someone of higher social status dominating someone of lower status, (2) sexual activity between two in the same social position, and (3) someone of a lower status trying to dominate someone of a higher status. However, there is no biblical evidence that such thinking was a part of constructing the Jewish sexual ethic.

¹²⁸ Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 223–34; Gordon J. Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” *The Expository Times* 102, no. 12 (September 1991): 359–63; Harry A. Hoffner, “Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East,” in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 81–90. Wenham notes, for example, that in Hittite Law 189 if a man violates his son it is a capital crime, but it seems clear from context that the crime is due to incest and not due to the homosexual act per se (Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” 361; cf. Hoffner, “Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East,” 85). There seems to be no evidence from the Hittite laws that homosexuality was illegal, though bestiality and incest were illegal. On the other hand, from the Egyptians there appears to be tomb depictions in Egypt that may suggest consensual, adult, homosexual relationships. See Greg Reeder, “Same-Sex Desire, Conjugal Constructs, and the Tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep,” *World Archaeology* 32, no. 2 (October 2000): 193–208; Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 233–34. Additionally, in Middle Assyrian laws A19–20, the law punished accusations of passive homosexual acts, but did not use language of being the active partner (cf. Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” 361–62).

Although there is not an abundance of evidence, the evidence we do have seems to indicate there were considerations of different kinds of homosexual acts. Thus, in light of these ANE references to homosexuality, Fortson and Grams state the following: “If the ancient Near East differentiated between various types of homosexual acts, then unspecified laws against homosexuality, as we have in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, should be understood to forbid any sort of homosexual practice—otherwise authors would have been expected to specify which acts were intended.” Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 223.

parties (active and passive) have done this abomination (תועבה).¹²⁹ Therefore, both are equally culpable of the penalty for this transgression—death.

That Leviticus 20:13 mentions the death penalty and 18:22 does not should not be troublesome. As noted previously, Leviticus 20 appears to be emphasizing the penalties for breaking God's law, while Leviticus 18 stresses the content of the prohibition itself.¹³⁰ This observation is further confirmed by noting that Leviticus 18 does not even use the word for death (מוֹת) while Leviticus 20 uses it often, highlighting the high cost for covenant violation (cf. Lev 20:2, 4, 9, 10–13, 15–16, 27).

The fact that the death penalty is prescribed in Leviticus 20 for transgressors of many of these laws indicates how important these laws were to Israelite society. The death penalty was prescribed for the most important laws which formed the foundation of Israel's society:¹³¹

Table 10: List of sins which required the death penalty

Premeditated murder	Gen 9:5–6; Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16–21, 30–33; Deut 17:6
Adultery	Lev 20:10; Deut 22:21–24
Incest	Lev 20:11, 12, 14
Bestiality	Exod 22:19; Lev 20:15–16
Homosexuality	Lev 18:22; 20:13
Rape of a betrothed virgin	Deut 22:25
Kidnapping	Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7
False witness in a case involving a capital offense	Deut 19:16–20
Priest's daughter committing fornication	Lev 21:9
Witchcraft (divination and magic)	Exod 22:18
Human sacrifice	Lev 20:2–5
Striking or cursing parents	Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:19
Persistent disobedience to parents and authorities	Deut 17:12; 21:18–21
Blasphemy	Lev 24:11–14, 16, 23
Idolatry	Exod 22:20; Lev 20:2
False prophesying	Deut 13:1–10
Working on the Sabbath	Exod 35:2; Num 15:30–36

¹²⁹ In line with our previous discussion of תועבה, it appears significant that this is the only occurrence of תועבה in all of Leviticus 20. At the very least, we can say that there is an emphasis of this transgression that is not found in comparison to others in the chapter.

¹³⁰ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 265.

¹³¹ The following chart is adapted from Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 298.

In regard to the death penalty in the Old Testament, the case laws were not automatically applied in every given situation. In fact, in Numbers 35:31,¹³² it appears that the only situation where there could be no ransom for the death penalty is for premeditated murder.¹³³ This implies that in the other situations there could be ransom given. Thus, the death penalty is not to be viewed as an absolute punishment. However, the mention of the death penalty signifies the gravity of these sins to God.¹³⁴

The fact that Leviticus 20:13 ends with the phrase, “Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם) indicates that both parties are equally culpable and deserving of their punishment. When the term for blood (דָּם) is used in the plural, it communicates the idea that blood has been spilt.¹³⁵ Thus, the term “bloodguiltiness” is likely best understood as a phrase which communicates that their bloodshed is by their own cause. In other words, it is a fair penalty which the guilty deserve (cf. Lev 20:9, 11, 12, 16, 27).¹³⁶

Although some see this idea of mutual culpability as evidence for cultic idolatry,¹³⁷ the Middle Assyrian Laws seem to demonstrate that qualifications (when intended) would not be uncommon if a specific kind of homosexual activity was in view.¹³⁸ Since both Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are absolute and unqualified, it is best to let them remain that way. Indeed, it should be assumed that they were intentionally left unqualified as such.

¹³² “Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death” (וְלֹא-תִקְחוּ לְפָרִי לְגַשְׁתׁ רֹצֵחַ אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה רָשָׁע לְמוֹת כִּי-יָמֹת יִיָּמָת).

¹³³ “Numbers 35:31 prohibits ransom for the life of a murderer. But that suggests that ransom was possible in other crimes for which the case laws specify the death penalty, even when the text does not specifically mention the possibility of ransom. Examples may be adultery, homosexuality, and blasphemy. Exodus 21:30 specifically mentions the possibility of ransom in an otherwise capital case. It may well be that judges in Israel had considerable liberty to determine penalties for crimes, following general principles of law found throughout the Pentateuch.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 206 (cf. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 298).

¹³⁴ Gagnon notes that the death penalty is far more severe than the castration which is called for by the Middle Assyrian Laws. See Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 113–14. Cf. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 265. Rooker notes that Israel placed greater value on the family unit than any other ANE cultures, and thus imposed significantly more strict penalties on crimes against the integrity of the family. In contrast, other ANE cultures imposed their strongest penalties on economic crimes.

Contra Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 86. Vines argues that the death penalty is not a significant argument since the death penalty was applied to “sins” which we as Christians do not view as moral issues, such as working on the Sabbath (cf. Exod 35:2; Num 15:32–36). However, the Sabbath is not a sign for the Church. Thus, there is no significance in keeping the Sabbath. Yet, for Israel, not keeping the Sabbath was tantamount to open rebellion against the King of the nation. For the Sabbath was symbolic of being in complete submission to Him. Thus, although the Sabbath is not an issue for the Christian, the grave nature of transgressing the Sabbath in the Old Testament is often not appropriately appreciated by Christians.

¹³⁵ *IBHS* §7.4.1.b.

¹³⁶ For example, Targum Onkelos reads:

וְגַבְר דִּישְׁכּוּב יִתְדוּרָא אִתָּא תוּעִיבָה עֲבָדוּ תְרִוּיָהוֹן אַתְקִטְלָא יִתְקִטְלוּן קִטְלָא חֵיבִין

“A man who lies with a male as one lies with a female, both of them have done an abominable thing; they must be killed; that is why they must be killed.” See Israel Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Leviticus: An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary (Based on the A. Sperber and A. Berliner Editions)* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1994), 182–83.

¹³⁷ “There is no literary evidence for consensual male-male sexual relations in the land of Israel and surrounding regions specifically, apart from that cultic context.” Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 270.

¹³⁸ Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 115; Wold, *Out of Order*, 43–51.

In summary, there is no reason to suggest redactional activity in Leviticus 20:13, and if one's interpretation of these texts needs a theory of redaction, then that theory should be immediately suspect. Although Leviticus 20:13 does differ from 18:22, it is likely due to the immediate context and purpose of Leviticus 20 rather than two separate traditions. Leviticus 20:13 contributes significantly to our discussion as it reveals the severity of the transgression through its punishment—death. Further, Leviticus 20:13 makes clear that cultural gender roles (e.g., female passivity) are not the backdrop of these laws, for both participants (active and passive) are held mutually culpable and punished equally.

Why Is There No Prohibition against Female-Female Sexual Activity?

Scholars who argue against Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as general prohibitions against homosexuality often do so partially on the basis that there is not a similar prohibition against lesbian activity. If this was a general prohibition against male homosexual behavior, why is there no general prohibition against female homosexual behavior? As Brownson notes,

Why, then, is there no analogous prohibition of a “woman lying with a female as with a man”? If violations of biological gender roles constituted the primary moral logic underlying the prohibition, one would expect the corresponding injunction against female same-sex eroticism as well. But it is absent.¹³⁹

There are major problems with the assumptions made in this argumentation. First, this argument discounts the nature of the Law. The Mosaic Law was not meant to be exhaustive, but instead was intended to function as an application of the undergirding theology that guided Israel. Israelite society would never allow women to engage in lesbian activity while the men were forbidden similar relationships.¹⁴⁰

Second, this argument does not adequately respect the genre of law and its formulation. Laws in the Old Testament are typically written from the perspective of a male, but in no way does this limit the scope of the law to males.¹⁴¹ For example, the Ten Commandments are all written from a masculine perspective. In fact, each of the Ten Commandments is specifically parsed as a masculine singular imperative. However, it would be irrational to say that the Ten Commandments only applied to men.¹⁴² Further, the fact that Talmudic law and Romans 1:26 condemned lesbian

¹³⁹ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 272.

¹⁴⁰ Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 194.

¹⁴¹ In Leviticus 18–20, for example, the *only* commands that are specifically concerning a female are the prohibitions against a woman lying with an animal in Lev 18:23 and 20:16. All other prohibitions are given to a male, or from the perspective of the male.

¹⁴² This illustration taken from Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 194. Furthermore, it would be completely irrational to say that prohibitions such as Lev 19:29 (which prohibits a father from letting his daughter become a harlot) allowed the son to become a prostitute.

activity as a transgression illustrates that Jews would have seen these Levitical prohibitions as applying more broadly than just to males.¹⁴³

Conclusion

Some scholars have argued on the basis of the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* and the immediate context of Leviticus 18 and 20 that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are strictly limited to male-male incest. These arguments have been addressed in this article and have been found wanting. There is no reason to see the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* as pertaining to incestuous relationships.

It was also noted in the survey that Saul Olyan is likely the most significant writer in this area and has convinced many scholars that these prohibitions only deal with specific homosexual behavior between two males. For Olyan, other forms of sexual expression are not forbidden in Israelite culture. However, this view seems too limiting. It is not likely or natural to limit the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* *only* to specific homosexual behavior. The use of the *שִׁכְב* word group seems broad enough to include a general sexual reference.

Another scholar whose view is worth reiterating is Bruce Wells. His view holds that the phrase *מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה* is a technical term which refers to males who are married or under sexual obligation to a wife. Thus, for Wells, the males in view in these prohibitions do not have the right to engage in sexual activity with other men because they are married. But, according to Wells, this does not mean that the prohibition would be the same for all males, since some of them would differ in position and obligation.

This view has also been addressed at length in this article. One of the main issues with Wells' position is that his argument does not evaluate the plural and singular construct phrases in question, focusing only on the plural. This is a major flaw since the singular phrases seem to have the same meaning as the plural. Additionally, Wells hypothesizes a theory of sexual dominion (i.e., obligation) which does not find support in Hebrew culture, nor does it fit with the passages in question (most notably 1QSa 1.10).

In contrast to the recent revisionist positions summarized in this chapter, it has been argued in this article that the prohibitions against homosexual activity are general in nature and scope.¹⁴⁴ In other words, these prohibitions are not limited to

¹⁴³ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 247; Levine, *Leviticus*, 123; William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 9. For an early example of Talmudic commentary, see *Sifra* 9:3, an early commentary on Lev 18:3 which notes the taboo of both male and female sexual relationships. For other discussions of female homosexuality in the Talmud and Hellenistic literature, see *Shabbat* 65a, *Yebamot* 76a, and *Pseudo-Phocylides* 190–92.

¹⁴⁴ Jacob Milgrom has recognized that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 target general homosexual activity, however, Milgrom's view is worth emphasizing, because he understands the application of the passage differently. Although he views the Levitical prohibitions as addressing homosexuality in general, he views the application more narrowly than this article. He writes, "What I said may be both good news and bad news to my Christian friends, depending on their position on gay and lesbian rights: This biblical prohibition is addressed only to Israel. Compliance with this law is a condition for residing in the Holy Land, but not elsewhere (see the closing exhortation, vv. 24–30). Thus, it is incorrect to apply this prohibition on a universal scale." Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1786. In other words, although the prohibition

specific homosexual behavior, nor is the activity limited to a cultic context (i.e., idolatry or purity regulations). These prohibitions would have been understood to preclude both male and female same-sex relationships in any form.

itself is broad, it is only given narrow application to Jews who were at that time living in the land of Israel. Thus, to Milgrom, these prohibitions hold no continuing application for today. However, if we believe many of the laws are a reflection of God's character and His design for creation, then we have to hold to some kind of continuing instructive capacity in the Law.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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The American Revolution was a time not just of conflict between nations, but also between preachers. The differences of opinion between the Loyalists and the Patriots concerning rebellion resulted in differences in their interpretations of Scripture. This article compares two sermons—one by a Patriot, and one by a Loyalist. Patriot preachers largely began with a natural understanding of the biblical text, but then filtered that meaning through the lens of rebellion. The result was a creative, emotion-filled interpretation intended to bolster the cause of revolution. The Loyalists, on the other hand, interpreted and applied Scripture with a strict grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Through a comparative analysis of these two early-American sermons, modern readers have an opportunity to understand the importance of hermeneutics to practical living.

* * * * *

The American Revolutionary period was a time of conflict. Of the many conflicts, one of the lesser known was a battle of ideas between Patriot preachers (those who promoted and supported the Revolution) and Loyalist preachers (those who opposed the Revolution). In addition to differing opinions on the rebellion, the Patriots and Loyalists also had different hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. The hermeneutic employed by the Patriots was described by Charles Turner: “The scriptures cannot be rightly expounded, without explaining them in a manner friendly to the cause of freedom.”¹ Scholars who now approve of the Patriot method report that they had a “nuanced interpretation of Scripture” influenced by violence between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century² and “qualified by the narrative and practices” in the Bible.³ Patriot preachers “typically began with key biblical texts,”⁴

¹ Charles Turner, “A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq; Governor: the Honorable His Majesty’s Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England, May 26th, 1773” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1773), 38.

² Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 135.

³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴ *Ibid.*

but then interpreted them through the lens of recent European history (emphasis mine). For example, in light of their circumstances Patriot preachers found a natural reading of Romans 13 to be unsatisfactory, and thus departed from a “conventional reading.”⁵ As one scholar explained: “Patriots read these passages through the prism of republican ideology.”⁶ Another spoke of their “creative exposition,”⁷ “hasty exegesis,”⁸ “flights of fancy,”⁹ and the fact that it is “not obvious” that Patriot teaching was “responsibly biblical.”¹⁰ He concludes that “exegetical precision was not required in order to enlist the Bible for the patriot cause.”¹¹

The Loyalist preachers, on the other hand, held to a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic. They sought “the true sense and meaning of the text,”¹² “critically examined the New Testament in the original language,”¹³ and sought to know “the circumstances of the writer, and his end and aim in writing.”¹⁴ Loyalist preachers spent extensive time in study, using lexicons and “the best Expositors” in order to properly understand the original Hebrew and Greek.¹⁵ They believed that “a thorough Knowledge of the Scriptures is the most essential Qualification of a good Divine [preacher].”¹⁶ Their goal was to treat what the Bible taught “not as subjects of philosophical disquisition, but as truths or facts, which the Scriptures assert.”¹⁷ Samuel Seabury best expressed the Loyalist approach: “Above all things, when we apply ourselves to the study of the scriptures, we ought to bring with us a candid, unprejudiced mind, ready to embrace and follow the truth where ever it shall lead; ... ready to submit to the will of God in all circumstances, and to obey it in every particular.”¹⁸

In the following analysis of an influential Patriot sermon and a responding Loyalist sermon, the difference in hermeneutical approach will be evident. After the analysis, conclusions regarding Patriot and Loyalist preaching will be drawn and briefly discussed.

⁵ Dreisbach, *Founding Fathers*, 112.

⁶ James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 116.

⁷ Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492–1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 298.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁰ Noll, *In the Beginning*, 301.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹² Jonathan Boucher, “On Fundamental Principles,” in *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1797), 300.

¹³ Jonathan Boucher, *Reminiscences of an American Loyalist*, ed. Jonathan Bouchier [grandson] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), 45.

¹⁴ Jonathan Boucher, “On Civil Liberty; Passive Obedience, and Non-Resistance,” in *Causes and Consequences*, 502.

¹⁵ Charles Inglis, letters to Samuel Johnson on December 27, 1769; December 4, 1770; and December 14, 1771, in John Wolfe Lydekker, *The Life and Letters of Charles Inglis* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), 86–87, 119, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁷ Boucher, *Reminiscences*, 45.

¹⁸ Samuel Seabury, “A Discourse on II Tim. III.16” (New York: H. Gaine, 1777), 23.

**Jacob Duché, *The Duty of Standing Fast in Our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties*
versus
Jonathan Boucher, *On Civil Liberty; Passive Obedience, and Non-Resistance***

Duché

Three weeks after the Battle of Bunker Hill—arguably the bloodiest battle of the American Revolution—Jacob Duché preached a sermon dedicated to George Washington in front of the “First Battalion of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia.” Duché’s text was Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” The text was not unknown. James Byrd reports that it was the third most cited biblical passage during the Revolutionary Era.¹⁹ Duché’s treatment of it was somewhat unusual, however, as will be evident.

The printed edition of the sermon includes Duché’s opening prayer, which includes several important elements. To start, Duché prays to: a) a “providential” God, meaning that He is active in superintending the world;²⁰ b) the “GOD of the armies of HEAVEN,” meaning that He is a warrior God;²¹ and c) the “guardian GOD of nations,”²² suggesting that He will play an active role in guarding either Great Britain or America in the present conflict. Given that several sentences later Duché prays for “our dread Sovereign Lord King George,”²³ one might presume that as a self-described British subject, he expects or desires that God will guard Britain and extend His might on her behalf. But it quickly becomes apparent this is not Duché’s desire or prayer.

The prayer becomes a sort of overture, introducing themes that will be expanded in the body of the sermon. Duché prays that God will “teach” the king that he will gain the greatest glory for himself by “preserving to a free people their undoubted birth-rights as men, and as Britons.”²⁴ He also prays that God will remove those of the king’s ministers who desire “oppression” and “the blood and treasure of his subjects!”²⁵ This is followed by a plea that God would “[s]urround” the king with pious, virtuous, and distinguished “counsellors.”²⁶ His request for God’s blessing on the king’s subjects includes “these his American dominions,” and speaks of those living in “our Parent-land,” as “brethren of the same family!”²⁷

These supplications introduce the rather strange tone of Duché’s sermon. On the one hand, he affirms that the Americans are British subjects and, therefore, entitled to the rights of and considered family members with the Britons. On the other hand, he laments of oppression and the unjust loss of blood and treasure. This schizophrenic double-talk continues as he prays that God would be “in a peculiar manner present

¹⁹ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture*, 170.

²⁰ Jacob Duché, “The Duty of Standing Fast in Our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties” (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, Jr., 1775), i.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, i–ii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

with all those, who are entrusted with our great American cause, as well in council [sic] *as in the field!*" (emphasis mine)²⁸ This prayer is offered in front of a battalion of rebel troops three weeks after a horrendous battle. Essentially, the self-professed British subject prays that God would restore a "peace and harmony" consistent with "true Liberty" against "base submission and slavery" and specially bless and empower those who were fighting in opposition to his "sovereign lord" and those whom he identifies as family.²⁹ At the end of the prayer, he requests spiritual blessings.³⁰

Boucher

Jonathan Boucher preached a sermon in response to Duché's. He began by lamenting that he was "constrained to animadvert on the published opinions of another Clergyman, of great worth and amiableness of character."³¹ Boucher considered his fellow Anglican Jacob Duché a friend. He explains that he would not feel obligated to respond to Duché's message if it "had been confined to points of little moment" and had been of "no great harm."³² But Boucher understood the content of Duché's message to be "pernicious," "dangerous," and "poison."³³

Boucher begins his message with a somewhat lengthy and negative commentary on the state of preaching in America. He rues the reality that contemporary political sermons are "more popular," but "more frivolous," "more unsound," and "less learned" than "such compositions used to be."³⁴ He claims to avoid political questions if at all possible, only dealing with those that "touch the conscience" or "trench upon duty."³⁵ But he admits that "there is a sense in which politics, properly understood, form an essential branch of Christian duty,"³⁶ for they relate to "our duty to our neighbour."³⁷ Boucher uses the concept of "duty" to others to move to his position on subjection versus resistance.

Boucher continues: "Reverently to submit ourselves to *all our governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters*, is indeed a duty so essential to the peace and happiness of the world, that St. Paul thinks no Christian could be ignorant of it."³⁸ In fact, notes Boucher, Paul sees submission to authority as "so essential" that "he recommends it to Titus as a topic on which he should not fail frequently to insist."³⁹ This, he argues, is a "direct and clear" commission for preaching on politics "in the just sense of the word."⁴⁰ That "just sense" is to preach what the Bible means. In this case, it is what Paul instructed Titus to do: "put them in mind to be subject to

²⁸ Duché, "Standing Fast," iii.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., iv.

³¹ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 495.

³² Ibid., 496.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 497.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 498.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be ready for every good work [Titus 3:1].”⁴¹ This is what Boucher intends to do. But he recognizes that “offence” will be taken because “we preach what are called unpopular politics. Preachers who are less anxious to *speak right*, than *smooth things*, are . . . numerous among us.”⁴² In his view, it is telling that “these discourses are not only preached, but published, ‘at the request of battalions, generals, and commanders in chief,’” as Duché’s sermon had been.⁴³ Strengthening his stance, Boucher warns: “wo [sic] unto that people who studiously place temptations in the way of the ministers of God to *handle the word of God deceitfully!* [2 Cor. 4:2] and wo [sic] unto those ministers who are thus tempted to *cause the people to err, by their lies and their lightness!* [Jer. 23:32]”⁴⁴ His implication is that Duché and the other Patriot preachers are guilty of these violations.

Boucher ends the introduction of his sermon with an appeal to those not yet “absorbed within the vortex of party”⁴⁵ and who still possess “minds open to conviction.”⁴⁶ He expresses confidence that the evidence is such that he can persuade listeners or readers who are willing to consider biblically their stance. Recognizing that his position is the “unpopular course,” he is not interested in “any such discussions with those persons among us, who, settling controverted points with their hands rather than with their tongues, demonstrate with tar and feathers, fetch arguments from prisons, and confute by confiscation and exile.”⁴⁷ This is Boucher’s retort to the efforts of mobs and committees (often synonymous) to silence Loyalist argumentation by force. Loyalists understood such tactics to be an admission by the Patriots that they could not stand against the Loyalists with logic and evidence.

The Meaning of Galatians 5:1

Duché

As Duché begins the body of his sermon, he announces that he is preaching to the soldiers “under the two-fold character of a minister of JESUS CHRIST, and a FELLOW-CITIZEN of the same state, and involved in the same public calamity.”⁴⁸ He claims to be “looking up for counsel and direction to the source of all wisdom.”⁴⁹ He says his chosen text of Scripture is one “which will give me an opportunity of addressing myself to you as FREEMEN, both in the spiritual and temporal sense of the word.”⁵⁰ Freedom and liberty are foremost in his mind, and thus are the driving forces for his message. Though he alleges that his concern is both spiritual and

⁴¹ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 498.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 499.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 500.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 501.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 501–2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 502

⁴⁸ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

temporal, and he does address liberty in both manners, it becomes apparent that his ultimate purpose is to make an argument for political liberty.

After this introduction, Duché addresses the meaning of the verse at hand. He spends six pages explaining that the liberty Paul speaks of in the text is *spiritual* liberty. Reviewing the historical context of the writing of the book of Galatians and the verse's context in the flow of Paul's argument, Duché notes that this verse refers to "Gospel Freedom"—freedom from "slavish, carnal ordinances, which the Gospel of JESUS had entirely exploded and abolished."⁵¹ He notes that Christians were not to be bound by "observance of the ceremonial law" as the Jews had been, "but that their real freedom" was only to be acquired through "spiritual powers" which they possessed "through the riches of GOD's free grace in CHRIST JESUS."⁵² Duché also notes that Paul concludes this part of his argument with "my text," Galatians 5:1.⁵³

"Having thus briefly opened the occasion and meaning of the words" continues Duché, "I shall proceed to shew" what "that SPIRITUAL LIBERTY, 'WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE'" means and "what kind of conduct" is expected by the command to "STAND FAST."⁵⁴ In other words, having given the context of the passage and the basic meaning of the words, he will now explain what *spiritual* liberty entails.

He begins by asserting that "there is certainly a Bondage far more severe" than the "loss of our temporal Liberties."⁵⁵ It is a bondage "to the fallen spirits of darkness" who exploit "our own irregular and corrupt passions."⁵⁶ It is a bondage and "tyranny" which affects all men of all time with "its throne in the heart." All are "alike slaves by nature under this bondage of corruption."⁵⁷ Duché describes both its ubiquitous presence and its corrupting influence on all that men do and think. The Bible refers to this bondage as slavery to sin. In an unintentionally ironic statement, he says that one effort by this dark, tyrannical force is "to shake [believers'] confidence in the goodness of their true and rightful Sovereign" on behalf of this dark force's own claim of sovereignty.⁵⁸ The "true and rightful Sovereign" Duché refers to is God, but he recognizes another sovereign whose goodness and legitimacy is being challenged by others making an alternate claim of sovereignty.

Reasoning that everyone longs to be liberated from this bondage, he explains that the only source of relief is God's grace and the "spiritual courage and constancy" offered by Christ.⁵⁹ As he transitions from the nature of the liberty referenced in Galatians 5:1 to standing fast in it, Duché concludes that "the LIBERTY, WITH WHICH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, is nothing less than such a release from the arbitrary power of sin."⁶⁰ It enables "an enlargement of the soul by the efficacy of divine grace, and ... a total surrender of the will and affections, to the influence

⁵¹ Duché, "Standing Fast," 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and guidance of the divine Spirit.”⁶¹ Duché clearly and unequivocally identifies the type of liberty that Paul is referring to as *spiritual* in nature. His subsequent discussion of “standing fast” is brief and consists of admonitions to be “vigilant and prepared” against the attacks of Satan, to be “ready to resist and repel” his assaults.⁶² On the ninth page of a twenty-five page sermon, Duché finishes his explication of what the apostle Paul meant in the verse in question. Set apart by the Roman numeral “II,” Duché begins a broader application of the verse, one not intended by Paul. He begins: “I am now to strike into another path.”⁶³

Boucher

As he often did in the beginning of sermons, Boucher gives a brief lesson in hermeneutics: “To find out the true and precise meaning of any passage of Scripture, it is in general necessary to know the circumstances of the writer, and his end and aim in writing.”⁶⁴ Thus, Boucher proceeds to outline the pressing issue in the context of Galatians 5:1—the dispute over whether or not Jewish rituals were “obligatory on Christians.”⁶⁵ Boucher explains how Paul, in preparation for the thematic verse, discusses and illustrates two types of bondage: “the servile observance” of various rituals of the Law and “the slavery of sin.”⁶⁶ Summarizing the meaning of liberty or freedom as Paul presents it, liberty as applied to the Jews “denoted an exemption from the burthensome [sic] services of the ceremonial law.”⁶⁷ As it applied to the Gentiles, “[liberty] meant a manumission from bondage under the *weak and beggarly elements of the world* [Gal. 4:9], and an admission into the covenant of grace.”⁶⁸ But for both “in common,” liberty “meant a freedom from the servitude of sin.”⁶⁹ “Every sinner is, literally, a slave ... and the only true liberty is the liberty of being the servants of God.”⁷⁰ So, liberty or freedom in Galatians 5:1 is *spiritual* freedom from the bondage of sin. Boucher is adamant: “The passage cannot, without infinite perversion and torture, be made to refer to any other kind of liberty; much less to that liberty of which every man now talks, though few understand it.”⁷¹ It is essential to remember that Duché makes many of the same arguments and comes to precisely the same conclusion regarding the meaning of the verse. But Duché does make it refer to another kind of liberty—the kind “of which every man now talks”—in pursuit of *his* purpose.

⁶¹ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 502.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 504.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Application Regarding *Political Liberty*

Duché

Duché's broader application of Galatians 5:1 is concerned with *political* liberty rather than spiritual liberty. According to Duché: "If SPIRITUAL LIBERTY calls upon its pious Votaries to extend their views far forward to a glorious HEREAFTER, CIVIL LIBERTY must at least be allowed to secure, in a considerable degree, our well-being HERE."⁷² Civil liberty, he argues, is "as much the gift of GOD in CHRIST JESUS" as spiritual liberty, so "we are bound to stand fast in our CIVIL as well as our SPIRITUAL FREEDOM."⁷³ Liberty, he claims, "traced to her true source, is of heavenly extraction," "divine Virtue is her illustrious parent," and "they ought to be jointly worshipped."⁷⁴ Liberty ought to be worshipped? Duché says that "[w]e have the authority of divine Revelation" that liberty was sent to earth and that "the first man felt and enjoyed her divine influence."⁷⁵ He gives no reference however as to where Divine revelation tells us this. He follows with the assertion that "the same Revelation tells us" that "when man lost his virtue, he lost his Liberty too" and "became subject to the bondage of corruption, the slave of irregular passions."⁷⁶ In his earlier discussion of spiritual liberty, he said that Jesus provided the only means of realizing that liberty. Here he argues that Jesus inspired mankind "with such principles as would lead them to know, contend for and enjoy Liberty in its largest, noblest extent."⁷⁷ In other words, Jesus also inspired political liberty, which is the "noblest" kind of liberty, even more noble than spiritual liberty from sin.

Duché proceeds to expound on the way that Jesus, in his view, inspired mankind to political liberty. Whatever man knows of "order, truth, equity and good government" comes from Jesus.⁷⁸ How did Jesus do this? Duché says "it must surely have been this WISDOM OF THE FATHER, that first taught man, by SOCIAL COMPACT, to secure to himself the possession of those necessities and comforts, which are so dear and valuable to his natural life."⁷⁹ In other words, Jesus inspired political liberty by giving man the social contract theory. This assertion must be so obviously true as to not require biblical support, as Duché provides none. He further explains that "though no particular mode of government is pointed out to us in his holy gospel, yet the benevolent spirit of that gospel is directly opposed to every other form, than such as has the COMMON GOOD of mankind for its end and aim."⁸⁰ What is the nature of this "common good?" According to Duché, "this COMMON GOOD is matter of COMMON FEELING. And hence it is, that our best writers, moral and political, as well Clergy as Laity, have asserted, that true government can

⁷² Duché, "Standing Fast," 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

have no other foundation than COMMON CONSENT.”⁸¹ Those “best writers” apparently do not include the writers of Scripture, as Duché again provides no biblical reference. The logical inference to be drawn is that the social-contract theorists, in particular Locke with his emphasis on consent, were inspired by Jesus to grant mankind political liberty. Were they inspired in the same sense as the apostles, particularly Paul and Peter? Duché does not say, instead transitioning to his own understanding of another of Paul’s epistles.

Claiming that *liberty*, as used by the Patriots, “is never used . . . in any of the laws either of God or men,”⁸² Boucher begins an extended discussion on the origin of the Patriot notion of liberty and the Bible’s teaching on liberty in general. “A minister of God” should be “taught by him [God] who knoweth what is fit and good for us better than we ourselves,”⁸³ so he must tell his audience what the Bible teaches irrespective of popular desire or opinion. He adds that “flowery panegyrics on liberty” are “the productions of ancient heathens and modern patriots: nothing of the kind is to be met with in the Bible, nor in the Statute Book. The word *liberty*, as meaning civil liberty, does not, I believe, occur in all the Scriptures.”⁸⁴ He reports that he did find it in the apocryphal book of *Maccabees*, but even there it did not refer to exemptions “from any injunctions, or any restraints, imposed upon [the Jews] by their own lawful government; but only that they were delivered from a foreign jurisdiction.”⁸⁵ According to Boucher, rather than focusing on or even mentioning political liberty, the “only circumstance relative to government, for which the Scriptures seem to be particularly solicitous, is in inculcating obedience to lawful governors.”⁸⁶

Before proceeding with his discussion of biblical teaching concerning government, Boucher pauses for a moment to apologize to his audience for even mentioning this subject in relation to Galatians 5:1. He explains that “occasion has lately been taken from this text . . . to treat largely on civil liberty and government, (though for no other reason that appears but that the word *liberty* happens to stand in the text).”⁸⁷ “[W]ithout too nicely scrutinizing the propriety of deducing from a text a doctrine which it clearly does not suggest,”⁸⁸ he says he intends to “deliver to you what occurs to me as proper for a Christian audience to attend to on the subject of Liberty.”⁸⁹ In other words, Galatians 5:1 has nothing to do with political liberty, but since Duché taught about political liberty from this passage, Boucher feels compelled to respond.

Boucher begins to instruct them about liberty by emphasizing strongly that “the liberty inculcated in the Scriptures, (and which alone the Apostle had in view in this text,) is wholly of the spiritual or religious kind.”⁹⁰ Boucher and Duché had come to the same conclusion about Paul’s meaning in the verse at hand: it is unmistakably

⁸¹ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 12.

⁸² Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 504.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 504–5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 505.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

pertaining to *spiritual* liberty. Boucher immediately takes issue with Duché's broadened application, however, by maintaining that this liberty "certainly gave them [Christians] no new civil privileges. They remained subject to the governments under which they lived, just as they had been before they became Christians, and just as others were who never became Christians; with this difference only, that the duty of submission and obedience to Government was enjoined on the converts to Christianity with new and stronger sanctions."⁹¹ As followers of Christ, they were not given new elements or privileges of political freedom. Instead, believers now had a higher level of accountability to their civil government. Their responsibility to government had, in a sense, become stricter, as it was now commanded by God Himself. The form or practice of their respective governments did not matter: "Be the supreme power lodged in one or in many, be the kind of government established in any country absolute or limited, this is not the concern of the Gospel. It's [sic] single object, with respect to these public duties, is to enjoin obedience to the laws of every country, in every kind or form of government."⁹² The only sense in which believers gained liberty or freedom was from Jewish ritual observances and from the slavery of sin. Boucher mentions two other verses that had been misappropriated in service of political freedom (John 8:32 and James 1:25) and makes clear that they also refer only to *spiritual* liberty.⁹³

Other Passages & "Mr. Locke"

Duché

Duché next turns to Romans 13:3 to make the claim that rulers are "appointed for no other purpose than to be 'A TERROR TO EVIL-DOERS, AND A PRAISE TO THEM THAT DO WELL.'"⁹⁴ Although the quote is not exact, this is what Paul says is the purpose of civil government. But Duché makes two prior statements that change Paul's overall message and open the door for rebellion in a way that Paul never intended. Duché claims that government "was intended for the good of the whole" based on the "fact" that "all Rulers are in fact the Servants of the Public."⁹⁵ That is not what Paul says in Romans 13. According to verse 4, government is a minister of God "for good," but that "good" is determined by God, not the people. The only reference to the people in Romans 13 is to demand their submission and that *they* do good, but Duché interjects the notion that the ruler's power is derived from the people. In the passage, God is the authoritative figure and source of power. Paul specifically says that government derives its power from God (verses 1 and 2), not the people. Thus, whoever resists the power that God *has ordained* will receive judgment (verse 2). Verses 4 and 6 specifically state that governments and rulers are servants *of God*, not the public. Therefore, He has the authority to hold them

⁹¹ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 506.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 506–7.

⁹⁴ Duché, "Standing Fast," 13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

accountable, an authority nowhere granted to the public. Duché, however, claims that this power rests in the public's hands.

On the spurious grounds that rulers are servants of the public, Duché reasons that if rulers "abuse their sacred trust" to "injure, oppress, and enslave those very persons, from whom alone, under God, their power is derived": "does not humanity, does not reason, does not scripture call upon the Man, the Citizen, the Christian of such a community to 'STAND FAST IN THAT LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST ... HATH MADE THEM FREE?'"⁹⁶ According to Duché, to "stand fast" here means to resist the government (not Satan, as he earlier said was the meaning). This is a logical inference if social contract theory is read into the text and people are made the source of authority. But this reading does not stand under a literal interpretation of Romans 13.

Duché then briefly references the other critical New Testament passage concerning man's responsibility to government: 1 Peter 2. He quotes (in substance) 1 Peter 2:13, in which Peter commands submission to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. But Duché reasons, "surely a submission to the unrighteous ordinances of unrighteous men, cannot be 'FOR THE LORD'S SAKE.'"⁹⁷ His argument goes no further, and he moves on to his next point. A better hermeneutic would have served Duché here. The original Greek word translated "ordinance" here means an *institution*. This word is never used for a specific law or command, which is the meaning attributed to it by Duché. Peter is not commanding submission to unrighteous laws. He is commanding submission to government. That submission may entail accepting punishment for refusing to obey unrighteous laws, as in the example of Daniel and Shadrach and his friends. In fact, in the passage, Peter gives the example of Jesus suffering unjustly as an example to us (1 Pet 2:21ff). Duché's reference to 1 Peter 2 does not address this point.

In contrast, Boucher declares: "Obedience to Government is every man's duty, because it is every man's interest: but it is particularly incumbent on Christians, because (in addition to it's [sic] moral fitness) it is enjoined by the positive commands of God: and therefore, when Christians are disobedient to human ordinances, they are also disobedient to God."⁹⁸ If we are blessed by God with a good and just government, we should be grateful, thankful, and careful not to fall into "licentiousness." "If it be less indulgent and less liberal than in reason it ought to be, still it is our duty not to disturb and destroy the peace of the community, by becoming refractory and rebellious subjects, and *resisting the ordinances of God* [Rom. 13:2]."⁹⁹ By way of defending Scripture for its "total unconcern" concerning the nature of government, Boucher explains that it promotes "the great general interests of mankind, by summarily recommending and enjoining a conscientious reverence for law whether human or divine."¹⁰⁰ Boucher here largely lets Scripture speak for itself.

⁹⁶ Duché, "Standing Fast," 13.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 507–8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 508.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 508–9.

He then briefly diverts from Scripture and appeals to other respected authorities. Citing Cicero, he argues that “[t]o respect the laws, is to respect liberty in the only rational sense in which the term can be used; for liberty consists in a subserviency to law.”¹⁰¹ He quotes the Patriot favorite “Mr. Locke” when he said: “where there is no law, there is no freedom.”¹⁰² He cites the history of the “Greeks” and the “Romans” to reinforce the idea that freedom is based on law.¹⁰³ His ultimate point is that “liberty is not the setting at nought and despising established laws ... and not bearing ... the being dictated to, even by the laws of the land; but it is the being governed by law, and by law only.”¹⁰⁴ True freedom is not release from or opposition to laws, but being governed by law as opposed to anarchy. “To pursue liberty, then, in a manner not warranted by law, whatever the pretense may be, is clearly hostile to liberty.”¹⁰⁵ “True liberty, then, is a liberty to do every thing that is right, and the being refrained from doing any thing that is wrong. So far from our having a right to do every thing that we please, under a notion of liberty, liberty itself is limited and confined — but limited and confined only by laws which are at the same time both it’s [sic] foundation and it’s [sic] support.”¹⁰⁶ Liberty without limits and obligations and responsibilities is not truly liberty, but licentiousness.

Having addressed the meaning of liberty and freedom from several angles, Boucher moves to other claims made by Duché. He notes that Duché claims that it is a “settled maxim, that the end of government is ‘the common good of mankind.’”¹⁰⁷ Boucher says that he is “not sure that the position itself is indisputable” or that it follows that “‘this common good being matter of common feeling, government must therefore have been instituted by common consent.’”¹⁰⁸ Boucher believes that there is “an appearance of logical accuracy and precision in this statement; but it is only an appearance. The position is vague and loose; and the assertion is made without an attempt to prove it.”¹⁰⁹ To disprove it, Boucher first reprints a rather lengthy argument by a prominent bishop. Its central point is that:

princes receive their power only from God; and are by him constituted and entrusted with government of others, chiefly for his own glory and honour, as his deputies and vicegerents upon earth: for *they are his ministers*, Rom. xiii. So that the principal end of their government is the advancement of God’s honour ... and therefore, if they fail in the performance of this trust, they are accountable only to him, who entrusted them; and not to the people ... whom he never authorised to call them to account, but to appeal to him only.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*. sect. 53, quoted in Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 509.

¹⁰² John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, sect. 57, quoted in Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 509.

¹⁰³ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 509–10.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 509.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 510.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 511.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 512.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 512–13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 513.

¹¹⁰ Lancelot Andrewes, *The morall law expounded ... that is, the long-expected, and much-desired worke of Bishop Andrewes upon the Ten commandments* (London: 1650), folio 331, quoted in Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 512.

The end of government is not man's common good, but God's glory and honor. Thus rulers are accountable to God, not the people. Furthermore, mankind has never "agreed as to what is, or is not, 'the common good,'" and attempts to establish systems based on "feelings" or "consent" have always failed and been condemned.¹¹¹

According to Boucher, the "popular notion" that government originated by social contract on the grounds of consent has no greater foundation than the idea of social contract itself. That idea is the notion that "the whole human race is *born equal; and that no man is naturally inferior*, or, in any respect, subjected to another; and that he can be made subject to another only by his own consent."¹¹² Boucher pronounces this notion "equally ill-founded and false both in it's [sic] premises and conclusions."¹¹³ In other words, Boucher challenges the idea that "all men are created equal." In a fairly well-known statement in which he employs 1 Cor. 15:41, Boucher says: "Man differs from man in every thing that can be supposed to lead to supremacy and subjection, *as one star differs from another star in glory*."¹¹⁴ He agrees that God intended man to be social, but he argues that there can be no society without government and no government without "some relative inferiority and superiority."¹¹⁵ Using a Platonic-style illustration, Boucher argues that a musical instrument with perfectly equal chords, keys, or pipes can never produce harmony, nor can a society in which all members are equal produce social harmony.¹¹⁶

In addition to questioning man's equality, Boucher identifies other potential weak spots in Locke's argumentation regarding the necessity and centrality of consent. Boucher reasons that if no man could "rightfully be compelled" to be a member of a government formed by compact "but by his own individual consent," then:

it clearly follows, from the same principles, that neither could he rightfully be made or compelled to submit to the ordinances of any government already formed, to which he has not individually or actually consented. On the principle of equality, neither his parents, nor even the vote of a majority of the society ... can have any such authority over any man. Neither can it be maintained that acquiescence implies consent; because acquiescence may have been extorted from impotence or incapacity. Even an explicit consent can bind a man no longer than he chooses to be bound. The same principle of equality that exempts him from being governed without his own consent, clearly entitles him to recall and resume that consent whenever he sees fit; and he alone has a right to judge when and for what reasons it may be resumed.¹¹⁷

As Boucher describes it, this requirement of consent combined with an equality that recognizes no intrinsic authority would inevitably lead to "mankind's first

¹¹¹ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 514.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 514–15.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 515.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 515–16.

expressing, and then withdrawing, their consent to an endless succession of schemes of government. Governments, though always forming, would never be completely formed” because tomorrow’s majority could “unfix” today’s agreement.¹¹⁸ Quoting Locke’s explanation that everyone “puts himself under an obligation . . . to submit to the determination of the majority,” Boucher argues that it must first be proven that “every individual man . . . did first consent . . . to be bound in all cases by the vote of the majority.”¹¹⁹ Boucher points out that in doing so, each individual “would also completely relinquish the principle of equality, and eventually subject himself to the possibility of being governed by ignorant and corrupt tyrants.”¹²⁰ For Boucher, one must consent to everything or not. Either there is equality or there is not. If there is equality and consent, it will constantly be in flux and produce instability. One must prove that everyone gave consent, and if Locke’s “majority” concept solves the problem, then everyone must forfeit equality, become subject to whomever the majority selects, and potentially find themselves back in the clutches of a tyrant. That is the logic of Locke’s argument and solution.

Boucher is not yet finished with “Mr. Locke” and his theories. He suggests that Locke “disproves his own position respecting this supposed obligation to submit to the ‘determination of the majority,’ when he argues that a right of resistance still exists in the governed.”¹²¹ According to Boucher, “resistance” is “a recalling and resuming the consent heretofore supposed to have been given, and in fact refusing to submit to the ‘determination of the majority.’”¹²² Presumably, he continues, *law* is the “rational and practical public manner of declaring ‘the determination of the majority,’” so resistance to established law goes against that determination.¹²³ “A right of resistance, therefore, for which Mr. Locke contends, is incompatible with the duty of submitting to the determination of ‘the majority,’ for which he also contends.”¹²⁴ In fact, Boucher argues, it becomes impossible to “carry into effect” any government “framed with this revered right of resistance,” and he claims that “there is no record that any such government ever was so formed.”¹²⁵ If there were such a government, he says, it “carried the seeds of it’s [sic] decay in it’s [sic] very constitution.”¹²⁶ Inevitably, such a system “can produce only perpetual dissensions and contests, and bring back mankind to a supposed state of nature.”¹²⁷

Boucher sees other problems with the idea of the “determination of the majority.” For example: “on what principles of equality” do we determine who will be given political authority?¹²⁸ He reasons that “[b]y asking another to exercise jurisdiction over me, I clearly confess that I do not think myself his equal; and by his consenting to exercise such authority, he also virtually declares that he thinks himself

¹¹⁸ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 516.

¹¹⁹ Locke, *Second Treatise*, sect. 97, quoted in Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 516.

¹²⁰ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 516–17.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 517.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 517–18.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 518.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 520.

superior.”¹²⁹ Neither party approaches the matter from a belief in equality. Not only that, but to establish a compact, “it is farther necessary that the whole assembly should concur in this opinion.”¹³⁰ “The supposition that a large concourse of people ... should thus rationally and unanimously concur to subject themselves to various restrictions, many of them irksome and unpleasant, ... is to suppose them possessed of more wisdom and virtue than multitudes in any instance in real life have ever shewn.”¹³¹ There is yet another obstacle. To create a government, a power over life and death must be given, but no man possesses power over his own life, so a man cannot transfer that power to another. “He only who gave life, can give the authority to take it away: and as such authority is essential to government, this argument seems very decidedly to prove, not only that government did not originate in any compact, but also that it was originally from God.”¹³² God has given government the authority to take life, not individuals or “the people.”

Given their multitude of problems, Boucher believes that Locke’s theories have been too readily accepted, as they are in opposition to logic, experience, and Scripture. Why have men readily accepted such theories? Boucher suggests that men have sought out “exceptionable notions” in order to be freed from “wholsome [sic] and proper” restraints that are “too often unpalatable to our corrupt natures.”¹³³ “What we wish to be true, we easily persuade ourselves is true.”¹³⁴ Because of this, we follow “these *ignes fatui* [illusions; will-o-the-wisps] of our own fancies or ‘feelings,’ rather than the sober steady light of the word of God,”¹³⁵ which refuses to flatter our pride. Boucher confidently declares: “Of all the theories respecting the origin of government with which the world has ever been either puzzled, amused, or instructed, that of the Scriptures alone is accompanied by no insuperable difficulties.”¹³⁶ Pursuant to this line of thought, he makes several logical arguments derived from the biblical text. He argues that an “all-wise and all-merciful Creator” who had made “creatures capable of order and rule” would not have turned them loose in the world “under the guidance only of their own unruly wills,” especially since they have been “averse from good, and prone to evil” since the Fall.¹³⁷ It is “fair to infer” that government was “the original intention of God” because “men were clearly formed for society” and could not “dwell together ... without the restraints of law.” For God “never decrees the end, without also decreeing the means.”¹³⁸

In contrast to Locke’s social contract theory, Boucher makes a case for patriarchal government—for monarchy. The first man, “by virtue of that paternal claim, on which all subsequent governments have been founded, was first invested with the power of government.”¹³⁹ “The first father was the first king”; “it was thus

¹²⁹ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 520.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 520–21.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 521.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 522.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 523–24.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 524.

that all government originated; and monarchy is it's [sic] most ancient form."¹⁴⁰ Boucher asserts that "this idea of the patriarchal origin of government has not only the most and best authority of history ... to support it," but is "by far the most consistent, and most rational idea."¹⁴¹ He cites Aristotle, biblical history, and the teaching of the Church of England to support the idea of human life organized around the authority of and subjection to a monarch.¹⁴²

After several pages of these alternate arguments, Boucher returns to the Bible. He notes that "the first instance of power exercised by one human being over another is in the subjection of Eve to her husband." He suggests that "Adam could not have assumed, nor could Eve have submitted to it, had it not been so ordained of God."¹⁴³ In the mind of Boucher, this is "equally an argument against the domineering claims of despotism, and the fantastic notion of a compact."¹⁴⁴ Turning from biblical narrative to biblical instruction, Boucher argues that "it is certain that mankind are no where in the Scriptures commanded to resist authority; and no less certain that ... they are commanded to be *subject to the higher powers*: and this subjection is said to be enjoined, not for our sakes only, but also *for the Lord's sake*."¹⁴⁵ It is for the Lord's sake, he explains, because good government glorifies the God who established government. Governments, "far from deriving their authority from any supposed consent or suffrage of men, ... receive their commission from Heaven; they receive it from God, the source and original of all power."¹⁴⁶ Consequently, Boucher says that despite the "sentiment or the language" being obsolete, supreme magistrates may properly be "regarded and venerated as the viceregent of God."¹⁴⁷ Hence, to resist them is to resist God Himself.

Turning from God the Father to God the Son, Boucher focuses on the example of Jesus. Boucher finds instruction not only in the teachings of Jesus, but also in His example. He concludes that "every thing our blessed Lord either said or did, pointedly tended to discourage the disturbing a settled government."¹⁴⁸ The circumstances in Jesus's day were "meritorious and honourable" and ripe for an overthrow by the standards advanced by the Patriots: "At the time when he was upon earth, his country groaned under an unjust and most oppressive bondage. It had just been subdued by a people, whose chief motive for over-running the world with their conquests was a lust of dominion: and it was as arbitrarily governed, as it had been iniquitously acquired."¹⁴⁹ What more justification could a revolutionary want? In addition, Old Testament prophecy had promised the Jews a Messiah. The Jews anticipated this Messiah to be a temporal prince who would usher in deliverance. All signs pointed to revolution and to Jesus as the revolutionary.

¹⁴⁰ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 525.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 525–26.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 524–27.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 532.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 533–34.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 534.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 535.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 536.

Boucher notes that Matthew went out of his way to say that Jesus was “*born king of the Jews*” [Matt. 2:2], that is to say, the person who was their king by birth.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, “[i]t is well known that in no instance whatever did our Saviour give greater offence to his countrymen than he did by not gratifying them in their expectations of a temporal deliverance. . . . It was one of the chief grounds of the enmity of his countrymen towards him, and the only plausible pretence on which he could be arraigned.”¹⁵¹ In addition, “they would have set him on their throne in that way by which alone we are now told authority over a free people can properly be obtained, viz. by the suffrages of the people. To assert his claim *de jure* against those who held it *de facto*, they would fain have *taken him by force . . . to make him a king.*”¹⁵² Finally, He “who could have commanded *more than twelve legions of angels*” did not lack the power to resist Pilate, “who, from the basest of all motives, *gave sentence*, that a person in whom he declared he *found no fault*, should be put to death.”¹⁵³ Jesus had every right to be king—His people were experiencing tyranny, consented to His reign, and longed for the justice He had the power to give. Boucher led his audience to ask: why did Jesus not lead a rebellion?

Despite the ideal circumstances and justification according to human reckoning, Jesus did not, of course, lead a rebellion. Boucher notes that though they did not believe “interference” [involvement] in civil affairs was “contrary to Christianity, it nowhere appears, that either our Saviour, or any of his apostles, ever did interfere with the affairs of any government, or the administration of any government, otherwise than by submitting to them.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, Boucher suggests that His suffering and humiliation on the cross proves that Jesus was not afraid to do whatever it took for the glory of God and the good of mankind. One final justification for revolution is added: “His constant discouragement, therefore, of a scheme so well calculated . . . to emancipate his country (had he estimated . . . the condition of subjects under government, according to our ideas) would have been inconsistent with that love to mankind which he manifested in every other action of his life.”¹⁵⁵ If revolution were an acceptable practice, if it were up to the people to determine a ruler’s legitimacy, and if the political condition of the people were a priority, it would have been unlike Jesus to refuse to relieve their suffering when He had both the power and opportunity to do so.

So, why did Jesus not accept power from the people, overthrow the tyrannical government, and emancipate his country? For Boucher, the answer is simple:

The only rational conclusion . . . is, that he thought it would be better, both for Judea in particular, and for the world in general, that . . . the people should not be distracted by a revolution, and . . . that there should be no precedent to which revolutionists might appeal: his words were not meant to bear merely a local and circumscribed, but a general and extended application, when he directed his followers to *render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*: his practice was

¹⁵⁰ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 537.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 537–38.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 540.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 542.

conformable to this precept; and so would ours be, were we but practically convinced that *it is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his lord.*¹⁵⁶

On one hand, Jesus did not want to distract people from His true mission to provide *spiritual* freedom. On the other hand, He had called His followers to be subject to government, and He intended to practice what He preached. If Christians claim to be His followers, then they ought to do the same. Boucher summarizes the Christian's responsibility in this area: "As Christians, solicitous to tread in the steps in which our Saviour trod, the tribute of civil obedience is as much due to our civil rulers, even though they should happen to be invaders like the Romans, and though, like Herod, the ministers of government should chance to be oppressors, as the duty of religious obedience is a debt which we owe to *the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*"¹⁵⁷

This is not a "degrading and servile principle"; on the contrary "it is the glory of Christianity to teach her votaries patiently to bear imperfections, inconveniences and evils in government, as in every thing else that is human."¹⁵⁸ Boucher argues that "to suffer nobly indicates more greatness of mind than can be shewn even by acting valiantly."¹⁵⁹ His suggestion that Christians are called upon to follow the example of Jesus by suffering leads to his response to Duché's "protest against 'passive obedience and non-resistance.'"¹⁶⁰ Boucher declares it "remarkable" that most Patriot sermons decry "passive obedience and non-resistance" and use opposition to it as a "test of principle, and the watch-word of a party."¹⁶¹ It is remarkable because "whilst the right of resistance has thus incessantly been delivered from the pulpit, ... the contrary position is still ... the dictate of religion, and certainly the doctrine of the established Church, and still also the law of the land."¹⁶² Christianity, the Church of England, and the law require non-resistance and obedience.

But is the obedience owed by the Christian "unlimited?" Boucher distinguishes between "active" and "passive" obedience. The latter is essentially subjection to penalties incurred as a result of disobedience to man in obedience to God. He argues:

No government upon earth can rightfully compel any one of it's [sic] subjects to an active compliance with any thing that is, or that appears to his conscience to be, inconsistent with, or contradictory to, the known laws of God: because every man is under a prior and superior obligation to *obey God in all things*. When such cases of incompatible demands of duty occur ... every well-principled person ... will submit to the ordinances of God, rather than comply with the commandments of men. In thus acting he cannot err and this alone is 'passive obedience;' which I entreat you to observe is so far from being 'unlimited

¹⁵⁶ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 542.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 542–43.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 543.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 544.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 545.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

obedience,' (as it's [sic] enemies wilfully [sic] persist to miscall it,) that it is the direct contrary.¹⁶³

What Boucher calls "passive obedience" is simply subjection that prioritizes obedience to God over obedience to government when the two conflict. The believer disobeys the government when he must in order to remain obedient to God, yet he still remains in subjection to the government (usually meaning accepting punishment) rather than rebelling against it. This is the message of Acts 5:29 in conjunction with Romans 13. Boucher explains: "Resolute not to disobey God, a man of good principles determines, in case of competition, as the lesser evil, to disobey man: but he knows that he should also disobey God, were he not, at the same time, patiently to submit to any penalties incurred by his disobedience to man."¹⁶⁴ Boucher is adamant that this clearly is not *unlimited* obedience, as the revolutionary advocates claim. What is missing from the Patriot sermons and literature is the notion of suffering. They assume that any suggestion of obedience without the option of rebellion must be a call for unlimited obedience. They have no concept of suffering unjustly for God's sake as a result of disobedience. Boucher supports *active* and *passive* obedience, but not *unlimited* obedience.

Though advocates of "resistance" rejected identification as "rebels" or "revolutionaries," Boucher demonstrates that the three terms are so closely related as to be nearly interchangeable. According to Boucher: "To encourage undistinguishing multitudes, by the vague term of resistance, to oppose all such laws as happen not to be agreeable to certain individuals, is neither more nor less than, by a regular plan, to attempt the subversion of the government."¹⁶⁵ He adds that this is more dangerous for free than for absolute governments. He notes the significance of the vagueness of the term *resistance*. Boucher observes that "[e]ven the warmest advocates for resistance ... acknowledge, that ... the term is incapable of any accurate definition."¹⁶⁶ They appeal to "antecedent laws," "natural sense and feelings," and "hidden powers and mysteries" in the British Constitution.¹⁶⁷ This is convenient because it places the matter outside the realm of reason. Boucher suggests that there is no difference between rebellion and revolution, except that revolution is successful. He asks those supporting resistance if those who affected the Glorious Revolution did so by resistance, whether it would be known to history as a rebellion if it had not succeeded. He also asks how the revolution itself differed in principle from "the grand rebellion that preceded it" or from "the subsequent [unsuccessful] rebellions" that came after it "for the purpose of restoring the abdicated family."¹⁶⁸ Resistance by force is rebellion; revolution is successful rebellion. Revolution cannot be accomplished but by resistance and rebellion.

In making this argument, Boucher seizes one more opportunity to assault the views of "Mr. Locke," as Locke famously makes a distinction between the three terms, or at least cleverly turns the tables on who should receive which label. Boucher

¹⁶³ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 546.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 547.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 548.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 551–52.

claims that Locke, “like many inferior writers, when defending resistance, falls into inconsistencies, and is at variance with himself.”¹⁶⁹ In support of this claim, he quotes *The Second Treatise* (sect. 226) in which Locke states that rebellion is not an opposition to persons, but to authority. Boucher answers: “in political consideration, it is hardly possible to dissociate the ideas of authority in the abstract from persons vested with authority. To resist a person legally vested with authority, is, I conceive, to all intents and purposes, the same thing as to resist authority.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Boucher claims that the Patriots, including Duché in his sermon, are urging the people to engage in resistance “clearly and literally against *authority*,”¹⁷¹ not simply against particular persons. To demonstrate that, he identifies the authors of Congress’s “Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms” as “disciples of Mr. Locke.” He then quotes its opening lines. Boucher explains how it denies the “just supremacy” that God has ordained in civil government.¹⁷²

American Situation

Duché

Having dealt with the spiritual necessities, Duché enters into the core of his argument—the specific American situation. He says that “these principles” (i.e. the social contract theory) were the basis for the British constitution “and upon which alone it can still be supported.”¹⁷³ Speaking to his audience of rebel soldiers, he says that now that they know these principles, “I trust it will be no difficult matter to satisfy your consciences with respect to the righteousness of the cause, in which you are now engaged.”¹⁷⁴ His argument follows these lines: the British constitution was based on the social contract; the British have (in his eyes) violated the contract; so American should feel empowered to throw off British rule. Duché laments that the “struggle” is “an unnatural one” against “our brethren” who share so much history and culture in common. But Americans have, he argues, a “hard necessity . . . of defending ourselves, our just and undoubted rights.”¹⁷⁵ This is “one of the heaviest judgments” heaven could bring upon us “for our iniquities,” but we should not “surrender at discretion” [unconditionally] and should not be discouraged from “STANDING FAST,”¹⁷⁶—with “standing fast” meaning rebelling against the government.

Duché maintains that Americans “venerate the Parent Land. . . . We wish to look up to her as the GUARDIAN, not the INVADER of her children’s rights. We glory in the name of children. But then we wish to be treated as children—And children too, that have arrived at years of discretion [able to manage own affairs].”¹⁷⁷ He holds that recent policy suggests that Britain is jealous of “our rising glory” and is

¹⁶⁹ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 552.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 14.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

attempting to check our growth.¹⁷⁸ According to him, “America acknowledges” Britain’s power of regulating trade “over all her dominions.”¹⁷⁹ All Americans want is to be able to keep their own produce.¹⁸⁰ As for taxation, Duché and Americans are satisfied “in our own consciences, that when CONSTITUTIONALLY called upon, we shall not give ‘GRUDGINGLY OR OF NECESSITY’, but chearfully [sic] and liberally.”¹⁸¹ He gives no explanation as to why the provincial assemblies have not levied taxes to “chearfully and liberally” pay, for example, for the upkeep of the British forts protecting the colonies. If they had done so, there would have been no need for the Stamp Tax or any of the other taxes that Americans found so wearying.

Turning to the crucial question of independence, Duché reminds his audience that Americans have “openly disavowed” “any pretensions to, or even desire of independency.”¹⁸² Not only that, but “[h]ave we not repeatedly and solemnly professed an inviolable loyalty to the person, power and dignity of our SOVEREIGN, and unanimously declared, that it is not with HIM we contend, but with an envious Cloud of FALSE WITNESSES, that surround his throne.”¹⁸³ Presumably, that “cloud” consists of members of Parliament and the king’s ministers. Fighting will be inevitable if “some degenerate sons of BRITAIN, and enemies to our common Liberty, still persist in embracing a DELUSION, and believing a LIE” [that Americans want independence] and “SUBMIT OR PERISH is the sanguinary decree” from Britain.¹⁸⁴

Boucher

Boucher, too, leaves discussion of the theoretical and biblical and turns to the American situation. In doing so, he begins with a favorite Loyalist complaint: that the people were being manipulated by troublemakers and rabble-rousers. He reminds the audience that they lived happily under the British government until recently, and that it had “all at once become *oppressive and severe*.”¹⁸⁵ He then asks his audience: “did you, yourselves, make the discovery?”¹⁸⁶ He answers his own question in the negative, and points out that they were “acquainted with these oppression only from the report of others.”¹⁸⁷ He then asks another rhetorical question with intent to answer it himself: “For what, then, ... are you now urged to resist and rise against those whom” you have highly regarded?¹⁸⁸ The answer is that “it is on account of an insignificant duty on tea, imposed by the British Parliament; and which, for aught we know, may or may not be constitutionally imposed; but which, we well know, two thirds of the people of America can never be called on to pay.”¹⁸⁹ He then asks

¹⁷⁸ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 15.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 554.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 554–55.

whether it is “the part of an *understanding people*, of loyal subjects, or of good Christians, instantly to resist and rebel for a cause so trivial?”¹⁹⁰ The Americans claim to be reasonable, loyal subjects of the king, and good Christians. Is this what people of this description do?

Boucher urges them not to fall prey to the propaganda: “learn not your ‘measures of obedience’ from men who weakly or wickedly imagine there can be liberty unconnected with law—and whose aim it is to drive you on, step by step, to a resistance which will terminate, if it does not begin, in rebellion!”¹⁹¹ He further urges the people to work through their provincial assemblies consisting of “chosen ‘fit and able’ persons to represent us” which were legally recognized bodies.¹⁹² If oppression is as serious as is claimed, then all of the assemblies should “concur and be unanimous in so representing it.”¹⁹³ And this response has the advantage that, because they are legal bodies, the British will likely pay attention to “their united remonstrances.”¹⁹⁴ Boucher points to “many and large concessions” that had already been made by the British in response to appeals from individual assemblies, and concludes that “nothing which is reasonable and proper will ever be withheld from us, provided only it be asked for with decency, and that we do not previously forfeit our title to attention by becoming refractory and rebellious.”¹⁹⁵ He advises them to “act the part of reasonable men, and of Christians.”¹⁹⁶ He tells his audience that if they think “the duty of threepence a pound upon tea” is a serious grievance, they should instruct their representatives to “take all the constitutional means . . . to obtain redress.”¹⁹⁷ If that does not work, at least they will know that the consequences were not due to any “misconduct” on their part.¹⁹⁸

Concluding Remarks

Duché

As he draws to a close, Duché speaks directly to the soldiers. He affirms their “conduct for the preservation of [their] temporal rights,” which amounts to taking up arms in resistance to the government, and urges them to “STAND FAST.”¹⁹⁹ Four new (or different) meanings for “stand fast” are given. The first is to stand fast “by a strong FAITH and dependence upon JESUS CHRIST, the great Captain of your Salvation.”²⁰⁰ This is what Duché earlier determined was the meaning of the phrase, except that here he gives it a martial character. Of all the possible terms to describe Jesus, Duché identifies Jesus as “captain,” and advises the soldiers to “enlist under the Banner of his Cross,” suggesting that His cause is synonymous with the American

¹⁹⁰ Boucher, “On Civil Liberty,” 555.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 556.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 559.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 19.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

cause.²⁰¹ He assures them that “UNDER THIS STANDARD THOU SHALT OVERCOME.”²⁰² Duché returns to this notion at the conclusion of the sermon. The second, third, and fourth new meanings have no relationship to Paul’s meaning in the phrase “stand fast.” Duché’s second new meaning is to stand fast “by a virtuous and unshaken UNANIMITY” combined with “SUBORDINATION” in following the “Determinations” of the Congress.²⁰³ Third, Duché encourages the soldiers to stand fast “by an undaunted COURAGE and MAGNANIMITY” to enable them to “be good Christians, as well as good Soldiers” and not engage in cruelty and barbarity.²⁰⁴ He admonishes them not “wantonly to injure and oppress others.”²⁰⁵ While elaborating on this, Duché refers to “the glorious stand that hath been already made for us by our northern Brethren” and says that “surely ‘the Lord of Hosts was with them’” and “surely ‘the God of Jacob was their refuge’”²⁰⁶ [applying Psalm 46:7 to the rebel troops at Bunker Hill] (emphasis mine). The fourth and last alternate meaning is to stand fast “by a steady CONSTANCY and PERSEVERANCE”²⁰⁷ as “the Guardians of LIBERTY,” which he calls “the Heaven-born Maid.”²⁰⁸

To close the message, Duché applies Haggai 2:4, a passage about rebuilding the temple, and Isaiah 45:22, a reference to the future Millennium, to the American cause. The first verse calls for the leaders and people of Israel to be strong, and in it, God promises to be with them. Duché appropriates that blessing for the Americans and asks for *political* “deliverance” “for the sake and through the merits of ... CHRIST JESUS our Lord.”²⁰⁹ Since that deliverance is said to be “for the sake and through the merits” of Jesus, Duché identifies the American cause with the cause of Christ, as other Patriot preachers did (emphasis mine). In a sermon two years later, for example, Abraham Keteltas claimed that the American cause was “a cause, for which the Son of God came down from his celestial throne, and expired on a cross.”²¹⁰

Boucher

As he finishes his sermon, Boucher stresses the obligation and privilege of following Jesus and His disciples in this regard:

It might be hoped that Christians would not think it grievous to be doomed to submit to disappointments and calamities, as their Master submitted, even if they were as innocent. His disciples and first followers shrunk from no trials nor dangers. Treading in the steps of him who, *when he was reviled, blessed, and*

²⁰¹ Duché, “Standing Fast,” 19.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹⁰ Abraham Keteltas, “God Arising and Pleading His People’s Cause; or the American War in Favor of Liberty, Against the Measures and Arms of Great Britain, Shewn to Be the Cause of God” (Newbury-Port, MA: John Mycall for Edmund Sawyer, 1777), 30–31.

*when he was persecuted, suffered it, they willingly laid down their lives, rather than resist some of the worst tyrants that ever disgraced the annals of history. Those persons are as little acquainted with general history, as they are with the particular doctrines of Christianity, who represent such submission as abject and servile.*²¹¹

Boucher appeals to Christians to follow the example of Jesus, calling to mind Peter's instruction in 1 Peter 2:21–23, and he scolds those who portray subjection as degrading or dishonorable. On the contrary, Boucher declares: "I affirm, with great authority, that 'there can be no better way of asserting the people's lawful rights, than the disowning unlawful commands, by thus patiently suffering.' When this doctrine was more generally embraced, our holy religion gained as much by submission, as it is now in a fair way of losing for want of it."²¹² Thus Boucher addresses both the political and the religious issue, raising concern for the faith to a level of importance at least equal with political concerns. In so doing, he maintains that the people's rights can still be effectively asserted through submission without compromising the teachings of Christianity.

Boucher concludes his sermon appropriately by simply quoting 1 Peter 2:13–17. He does so without elaboration, trusting in the clarity and power of the Word of God. He does make one alteration in the text in the published version for emphasis: he puts the words GOVERNORS and SENT²¹³ in all capital letters in the command to be subject to *governors as sent by the king*. By doing this, he intends to encourage the reader to more closely identify its message of submission with the particular American situation. It is also no coincidence that, ending with the quotation of these particular verses, the final statement in Loyalist Jonathan Boucher's sermon is "honour the king."²¹⁴

Observations

Largely because he was the first chaplain to the Continental Congress, Jacob Duché's sermon gained a significant amount of notoriety. For this reason and because of its comprehensive nature, Jonathan Boucher's response to Duché was and is also the best known of his sermons. It would be inappropriate and intellectually dishonest to treat these two sermons as fully representative of the respective camps, but they do illustrate some consistent distinctives of Patriot and Loyalist sermons. More importantly, they represent a rare example of an extant sermon delivered in response to a specific sermon on the other side of the American Revolutionary debate. In this case, we need not speculate as to how a Loyalist would have answered a Patriot's call to arms.²¹⁵

Careful analysis and comparison of these two sermons produce valuable observations that studies have shown to be largely representative of Patriot and

²¹¹ Boucher, "On Civil Liberty," 559–60.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 560.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Also of great interest is Loyalist Charles Inglis's lengthy (71-page) pamphlet response to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. But neither of these works is a sermon; they are political pamphlets.

Loyalist sermons. The first distinction is in regard to hermeneutics. Smith and Duché reflect the prevailing hermeneutic of many Patriot preachers. This hermeneutic was best expressed by Charles Turner: “The scriptures cannot be rightly expounded, without explaining them in a manner friendly to the cause of freedom.”²¹⁶ Although Turner completes the sentence with “as well as of loyalty,” this latter part had little-to-no influence on most Patriot preachers. These preachers almost invariably elevated *political freedom* as the highest principle, and thus read it into many biblical passages. The Patriot sermon discussed in this paper provides clear examples. Initially employing a straight-forward reading of the text, Duché comes to the same conclusion as Boucher as to the apostle Paul’s intention in Galatians 5: *spiritual* liberty. But in a desire to promote his cause, he reinterprets the passage to mean *political* liberty. Boucher’s hermeneutic, and that generally held by Loyalist clergymen, was essentially what is now called the literal grammatical-historical method. That is, they held to a more literal interpretation based on the grammar of the passage in its original languages and the surrounding historical context. They sought to be true to authorial intent. Consequently, they generally held to a natural reading of the text. In their mind, the clear and true meaning of Scripture supported their position, so they need not engage in nuance, manipulation, or creative interpretation.

A second and related observation is that the Loyalist Boucher is more concerned than the corresponding Patriot preacher that a passage of Scripture be applied appropriately. In the case of Duché, though he admits that his chosen text applies only to *spiritual* freedom, he insists on applying it to *political* freedom. Duché manipulates the text in order to make it pleasing to his military audience. Boucher simply holds to the text’s proper meaning and the application intended by the author.

A third observation is the centrality of the theories of John Locke in the battle between Patriot and Loyalist preachers. Duché does not mention Locke by name, but he relies heavily upon Lockean principles. There is at least one significant reason for not mentioning Locke (though many other Patriot preachers did): he wanted to impress upon his audience the idea that the passage of Scripture, and not simply the views of a political philosopher, was the ground of his case for the American cause. This Patriot sermon was preached before soldiers who were being asked to fight. From ancient Rome through history, approval of the gods has been a primary tool employed by rulers to motivate soldiers and to bolster morale. But Boucher notices Locke’s influence in Duché’s sermon, and he wants to ensure that the true source of Duché’s ideas is noticed. From the necessity of a social contract, to an emphasis on consent, to the right of the people to evaluate the legitimacy of a government, to the right of the people to reclaim rights surrendered to a government, to a right of resistance—Duché’s sermon is built upon the theories of Locke. There were many theoretical influences upon the American Revolution, but Locke’s ideas were foremost among the Patriot preachers and, perhaps for this reason, the Loyalist preachers viewed him as their chief theoretical antagonist.

²¹⁶ Charles Turner, “A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq; Governor: the Honorable His Majesty’s Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England, May 26th, 1773” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1773), 38.

Another observation that should be apparent when one reads Duché's sermon is that the Patriot writer tended to lean upon pathos in his argumentation. He employed hyperbole, explicitly appealed to emotions, and used more exclamation marks and capital letters in the printed editions of his sermon. The Patriot preachers were trying to motivate people to take action—to grow frustrated with the status quo, to take up arms (at least metaphorically), and to join the crusade. Loyalist clergymen were encouraging contentment, a quiet life, and rational calm. Their approaches to preaching reflected their respective goals.

A fifth observation is that the two sides display a different level of commitment and subjection to the Church of England. Both Duché and Boucher were Anglican divines and had taken vows to support the Church of England and to promulgate its doctrines. But Duché argues against Church teachings and standards. Boucher reminds the Anglican audience where his adversaries diverge from the expectations and commands of the Church, and he appeals to its authority.

A sixth observation and a critical distinction between the Patriot preachers and the Loyalist clergy concerns the matter of suffering. Much of the Patriot argument concerning biblical passages such as Romans 13 depends on the assumption that Christians need not and should not suffer for disobedience. Christians may be forced to disobey the government because it commands them to violate God's law; both Patriot and Loyalist clergy agree on this. The disagreement centers on what happens as a result of the obligation to disobey the government. Patriot preachers, influenced by Locke (primarily) and Reformed minds such as Theodore Beza and American ministers like Jonathan Mayhew, taught that all men, but Christians in particular, have a right to rebel against authorities who give such commands. Loyalist clergymen, influenced by the apostles Paul and Peter and historical examples in Scripture, taught that when one must disobey the government, rebellion is not an option (Rom 13:2), so one must take the punishment for disobeying and suffer unjustly as did Christ (1 Pet 2:21). In these sermons, Duché and Boucher reflect this crucial point of disagreement.

Finally, perhaps as a function of concern or respect for the status quo, Boucher and Loyalist clergymen paid more attention to process than did Duché and the Patriot preachers. The Loyalists regularly reminded audiences that the Continental Congress, the revolutionary provisional governments, and the various committees had no legal authority or standing. In addition to greater concern about legality and history, Boucher calls upon Americans to follow proper procedures and to be orderly and respectful of institutions. Freedom is ultimately about process and rule of law under legitimate authority. He encourages step-by-step processes and the allowance of time for those processes to produce results. Decorum and protocol are valued by Boucher, not by Duché. If Duché is right in his theoretical arguments, he nonetheless reflects an air of impatience.

In answering the Patriot sermon evaluated here, Jonathan Boucher was embarrassed to debate the meaning of the biblical passage in question, not because he felt inadequate or overmatched, but because the passage had no relevance to the question of whether Americans should rebel against Great Britain. Jacob Duché wanted to use biblical references to make a *political* argument—one based on what political theorists and political activists teach. Jonathan Boucher wanted to make a *biblical* argument—one based on the Word of God.

POSTMODERNISM AND THE GOSPELS: DANCING ON THE EDGE OF DISASTER¹

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A saying that is so true for today's liberal and evangelical critical scholars' investigation in Gospel studies is found in the words of a nineteenth-century German philosopher, "Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying 'there are only facts,' I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations." The state of Gospel studies among liberals is always expected to be pathetically conflicting and arbitrary. Unfortunately, now evangelical-critical scholars evidence no substantive qualitative difference in Gospel studies from their more liberal counterparts. Increasingly as the twenty-first century develops, such distinctions between these two groups blur at an alarming rate, making both groups increasingly unified in presuppositions as well as conclusions in Gospel studies. This article will consider recent developments in the field of Gospel studies with the goal of illuminating shortfalls and providing productive alternatives in scholarly methods.

* * * * *

Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, liberal-critical scholars, with the help of critical-evangelical scholars, conducted an assault on the canonical Gospels. They did this through their study of "post-modernistic" historiography—the writing of history that is of a qualitatively different conceptual viewpoint than has been in past historical writing.

The term "historiography" has a deceptively simple definition: "the writing of history; written history."² Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek cognate

¹ This article constitutes another chapter in the forthcoming work, *Battle for the Gospels*. For other articles/chapters, see F. David Farnell, "Do the Canonical Gospels Reflect Greco-Roman Biography Genre or Are They Modeled after the Old Testament Books?" *TMSJ* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2019) and idem. "Are the Canonical Gospels to be Identified as a Genre of Greco-Roman Biography? The Early Church Fathers Say 'No,'" *TMSJ* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 185–206.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. "historiography."

word family of *ἵστορέω*, or “to inquire into a thing, to learn by inquiry” [*ἱστορία*—history], in addition to the Greek term *γράφειν*, meaning “to write.” The term *ἵστορέω* also has a cognate *ἴστωρ*, meaning “a wise man who knows right,” or “a judge.” Today, the concept of “historiography” signifies not only the body of techniques, theories, and principles of historical research and presentation and methods of historical scholarship, but also the narrative presentation of history based on a critical examination, evaluation, and selection of material from primary and secondary sources and subject to scholarly criteria.³ In other words, *historiography* means the principles, philosophies, and practice that historians engage in for the writing of their accounts of the past. Though seemingly straightforward, historiography involves complex ideas of what it means to “write history.” In the latter term, the idea of a careful, judicious inquirer was latent in the idea, but today concepts of “historiography” have changed qualitatively.

Ancient Greek and Roman Historians

Greek historians made a lasting contribution to the writing of history in Western civilization, making the writing of the past as respectable as philosophy and mathematics. But while the Greeks were, in many ways, the “fathers” of modern historiography, they too were imperfect in their understanding of the writing of history. Usher describes the ancient Greek practice of history writing in the following terms, “Although the earliest historians admitted that their prime duty was to discover and tell the truth, few at any age considered it essential, or even desirable, to obtain information at first hand. Again, although many claim to be impartial, or are ingenious enough to make their prejudices plain, they all make serious omissions and exaggerations.”⁴

The genre of ancient history, more specifically biographical writing, was quite diverse in antiquity. Ancient writers often disagreed as to the role of what today we might call “accuracy” or “objectivity.” Fornara describes the wide variety of ancient historiography in the following terms:

On closer inspection, this literature proves to divide into a small number of distinct genres, each with its own rules, often unstated conventions, and particular focus. Five basic types of historical writing ... can be isolated: genealogy or mythography, ethnography, history, horography or local history, and chronography.⁵

³ Encyclopedia Britannica specifically defines it in the following terms, “the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. The term *historiography* also refers to the theory and history of historical writing.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, Academic ed., s.v. “historiography,” <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/267436/historiography/284257>.

⁴ Stephen Usher, *The Historians of Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1969), x.

⁵ Charles William Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 1983), 1.

Some historians had goals of careful historiography, seeking to report exactly what happened and was said, while others did not. Some would “embellish whatever lay to hand” as to what was said [e.g., *Historiarum Alexandri Magni Macedonis libri qui supersunt*, “All the Books That Survive of the Histories of Alexander the Great of Macedon”—Quintus Curtius Rufus—A.D. first century), while others combined a “stylistic freedom with fidelity of substance” (e.g. Tacitus).⁶ Fornara alleges that “we are not entitled to proceed on the assumption that the historians considered themselves at liberty to write up speeches out of their own head,” but the variety of ancient historiography and its apparent departure from modern objective standards compels him to admit “[t]hat some or many or most actually did so is perhaps hypothetically conceivable.”⁷ Fornara must admit also that the “Thucydidean principle of 1.22 [see below in this discussion for this quote here regarding the principle] seems to have governed the practice of historians, both Greek and Latin,” that yet

[a]lways there was the admixture of the imagination and intellect of the historian, and it obviously increased in the degree that the recollection of speeches actually delivered grew dimmer, or the same speech was recast by a succession of authors to suit the best rhetorical theory. The vagaries of historical tradition accessible to the writer also facilitated self-deception.⁸

He then relates that “these imperfections in the practice of the historians should not detract from the basic integrity of their approach.”⁹

The only account of a philosophy of ancient historiography to have been preserved is Lucian's *How to Write History*. It was written in the latter half of the second century and describes ancient historiography. Lucian faults “shoddy historians” that he is aware of “for a serious fault” of “neglect[ing] to record the events” and instead “spend[ing] time lauding rulers and generals, extolling their own to the skies and slandering the enemies beyond all reserve.”¹⁰ He bemoans that some historians view history “as that which gives pleasure” (eulogy) instead of “what is useful.” These shoddy historians put forth their own view, but Lucian reminds readers that “history has one task and one end—what is useful—and that comes from truth alone.”¹¹ He extols Thucydides as an example of a good historian, among the many bad of his day.¹²

Thucydides is often set forth as a standard in ancient Greco-Roman historiography. He commented regarding his writing of history in his work on the Peloponnesian War that “it was impossible to get clear information on account of

⁶ Fornara, 152–153.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 154–155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁰ Lucian, *How to Write History*, trans. K. Kilburn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1959), 6:6–7, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2, 5.

lapse time,” and that he searched for “evidence I [Thucydides] find that I can trust.”¹³ He noted that “it is difficult in such matters [i.e. Athenian Greek history] to credit any and every piece of testimony.”¹⁴ He further noted regarding speeches:

As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources. Therefore, the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said.¹⁵

Thucydides admits that he often constructed speeches from his own creativity, though he attempted accuracy as much as possible.

Sadly, many ancient historians did not follow the standard of Thucydides. In the early twentieth century, H. J. Cadbury noted,

It must be constantly remembered that the modern criticism of sources, tests of historical probability, and insistence on first-hand evidence were not customary in antiquity even among those writers who in their criticism of others and in their conventional claims for their own work seem most nearly to have understood modern criteria. ... Instead of accuracy the purpose of ancient historians tended to make the form the chief point of emphasis.¹⁶

Admittedly, some ancient historians made little distinction between actual events and legendary or mythical elements.

The questions that must be considered in light of ancient historiography are these: Should the Scriptures be placed on par with Greco-Roman historiography? Were the biblical authors as “creative” as the historians of their day? Many post-modernist evangelical-critical scholars believe that the human element of Scripture make the books of the Bible—and the Gospels in particular—no different than these ancient historians’ quality of writing. Are the Gospels merely “generally reliable,” or can they be trusted down to the very stroke and letter (i.e., “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass”—Matt 5:18 NASB)? This question has startling answers from today’s leading evangelical-critical New Testament scholars.

¹³ Thucydides, “1.2,” in *Thucydides, with an English Translation by Charles Forster Smith* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1919), 3.

¹⁴ Thucydides, 1:20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:22:1

¹⁶ H. J. Cadbury, *Beginnings of Christianity* (1922), 2:11.

Philosophical Shifts in Historiography in the Late Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

For the last 2400 years (at least), since the times of the Greeks and Romans, a common-sense view of history has prevailed that historians wrote to attempt to tell the truth, to describe—to the best of their ability using the sources available to them—what actually happened in the past. When reading a history textbook, one assumes that the historian is describing the what, how, when, and why of the events as they occurred. Importantly, historiography had attempted to differentiate between actual history and mythology that was intrinsic to a culture.¹⁷

However, in the nineteenth century, a philosophical shift began to occur. The shift pushed back against the confidence that the Enlightenment and other “isms” had placed in reason, or what is now termed “modernism.” Enlightenment “reason,” or just common-sense investigative procedures of history, for many, had become overconfident, overly assured in its abilities to understand the world of men. McCallum notes, “Until recently, the consensus in secular (non-Christian) thought has been modernism.” Trusting in rationality, empiricism, and in the application of rationality and empiricism through science and technology, modernists view the world, including humans, as one large machine.¹⁸ The shift is now known as “The Death of Truth” to those who espouse “postmodernism.” Postmodernism is characterized by its rejection of any “absolute truth” or “truth that is true across all times and cultures for all people.”¹⁹ It rejects modernism and its confidence in “knowing,” and embraces a relativistic view that truth varies depending upon bias, culture, and personal experience. Simply put, postmodernism claims that individuals or groups discover truth through their own subjective perceptions. Moreover, “objectivity” or “neutrality” in knowledge is now rejected as impossible. Leffel notes three basic characteristics of postmodernism:

Postmodernism views human beings as cogs in a giant social machine, or ... ‘nodes,’ extensions of their culture.

Postmodernists reject the modernist idea that people can ever be rationally objective. We can never take the self or culture out of reason, and therefore reason can't be trusted any more than intuition or feeling.

Postmodernists argue that people believe they are free to think what they want, but their thoughts in fact inescapably reflect their social environment. We think in the language of our culture and through the personal identity our culture has bestowed on us, for both these reasons, personal freedom—in the Enlightenment sense of autonomy—is an illusion.²⁰

¹⁷ See Keith Windschuttle, “Preface,” in *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York: Encounter, 1996), ix.

¹⁸ Dennis McCallum, “Are We Ready?,” in *The Death of Truth: What's Wrong with Multiculturalism, the Rejection of Reason, and the New Postmodern Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 1996), 13.

¹⁹ See Jim Leffel, “Our New Challenge: Postmodernism,” in *The Death of Truth*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

Certainty in anything is an allusion, since everyone views the world through their own subjective, colored “glasses.” One is incapable of being, in any sense, rationally objective. The question again must be considered by Bible-believing people: is this postmodern idea applicable to Scripture, and in particular to the Gospel accounts of Jesus?

Such thinking has had a direct impact on historiography. The result of postmodernism is that objective “truth” has been “killed,” along with any objective sense of historiography. All history, past and present, is now perceived as having been scrubbed of objectivity, and therefore unknowable. Dixon summarized well, “Today’s postmodern historians view history more as a study of people’s images and thoughts about their society and their past. What *actually happened* is no longer the historian’s primary concern, and in fact, can never be known. Instead, what matters is what people *thought* happened.”²¹ As will be seen, such thinking has weakened confidence in the Gospel accounts’ historicity and factuality, as well as the very gospel itself. Now in postmodern historiography, no fundamental distinction exists between history and myth. Anyone claiming truth, as the Gospels do in their message of Jesus, is fundamentally rejected. Pilate’s retort to Jesus in John 18:38, “What is truth?” has been placed in the center of the discussion of history, and Christianity is a faith based upon history. In terms of historiography, not only has “truth been killed,” but the writing of history is now “killed.” As Windschuttle said, “One of the risks one runs today in defending anything traditional is to be seen simply as a knee-jerk reactionary.”²²

The Rise of Postmodernism

The slaughter of history and truth was a gradual process. Philosophical schools of thought arose to dominance in recent times that overwhelmed modern thinking. Arguably, another term for postmodernism is *nihilism*—the belief that traditional morals, ideas, beliefs, etc., have no worth or value. The following individuals have greatly contributed to the rejection of modernism and its confidence in “objectivity” and “absolute truth.” This movement constitutes a brief overview of postmodern developments.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): The Prophet of Postmodernism

Friedrich Nietzsche may be considered the “prophet” of what is today deemed postmodernism. Many of Nietzsche’s ideas foreshadowed postmodern expression. Nietzsche was born into a religious family. His father was a Lutheran minister.²³ He studied at the German universities of Bonn and Leipzig with an interest in classical

²¹ Tom Dixon, “Postmodern Method: History,” in *The Death of Truth*, 127.

²² Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History* (New York: Encounter, 2000), xiii.

²³ This is an interesting factor in many who damage the Christian faith in recent history, a pattern that oddly occurs many times (Griesbach, Lessing, Paulus, Baur, Holtzmann, Harnack, Bultmann, Barth etc.). For this pattern, consult William Baird’s three volume *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992, 2003, 2013). His excellent three-volume work often inadvertently reveals this pattern in the background of many NT researchers who have negatively impacted New Testament studies.

philology²⁴—the study of language in written historical sources. He soon turned to philosophy, becoming the youngest ever to occupy the Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel in 1869 at the age of 24. He resigned in 1879 due to health problems that plagued him most of his life, and he completed much of his core writing in the following decade, concentrating on developing his own philosophical speculations.²⁵ In 1889, at age 44, he suffered a collapse and a complete loss of his mental faculties. He lived his remaining years in the care of his mother until her death in 1897, and then with his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. He died in 1900.

Nietzsche is most famous for his statement in his *The Gay Science* or *The Science of Joy* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*] (1882):

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?²⁶

Perhaps his most famous contribution to postmodernism, and especially historiography, can be summarized in his statement that “Against the positivism which stops before phenomena, saying ‘there are only facts,’ I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only *interpretations*.”²⁷ Nietzsche rejected the idea that knowledge was cumulative. He opposed the very idea that knowledge, science, or history had any kind of certainty. Thus he contributed overwhelmingly to postmodern, nihilistic doubt: the rejection of everything—the relativity of all. Nietzsche reflected the skepticism of David Hume and is considered the “bridge” to existentialism. In Nietzsche’s claims that God is dead and that only interpretations exist, he helped to dislodge the idea that there was a single “truth” or “moral right” or “meaning of history.”²⁸

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

Martin Heidegger was another key figure in the development of postmodernism. Heidegger was a German existentialist philosopher who, like Nietzsche, rejected Western philosophy since the time of the Enlightenment. He longed for a return to pre-modern modes of thought and experience. As such, he was influenced not only by Nietzsche, but also by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). His father was a sexton in the Roman Catholic Church, and under such influence, Heidegger intended to study for the priesthood. While studying at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger changed his mind and decided to devote himself to philosophy. At Freiburg, he came

²⁴ Philology is a combination of literary criticism, history, and linguistics.

²⁵ *The Portable Nietzsche*. ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1982), 7–14.

²⁶ “The Gay Science,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 95–96.

²⁷ *The Portable Nietzsche*, 458.

²⁸ William C. Placher, “Postmodern Theology,” in *New & Enlarged Handbook on Christian Theology*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 393.

under the influence of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), to whom he dedicated his major work “in friendship and admiration.”²⁹ In 1923, he began a professorship at Marburg. It was at Marburg that he came into contact with the theology of Karl Barth (1886–1968) and met his colleague Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). Bultmann was influenced by Heidegger’s philosophical thought, and the two held regular discussions and taught joint seminars. In spite of this influence, Bultmann adopted Heidegger’s existentialism for his own theological purposes rather than slavishly adhering to Heidegger’s thinking. Also while at Marburg, Heidegger taught the future existentialist philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), a current student at the University until 1928 when Heidegger left Marburg to teach at the University of Freiberg. In 1933, Heidegger was appointed as Rector of Freiberg. Because of his association with the Nazi Regime, after Germany’s defeat he was not permitted to return to teaching until 1951. He has often been criticized by philosophers (especially European philosophers) for his association with Nazism. Although influenced by existentialists like Kierkegaard, in 1946 Heidegger repudiated the label of “existentialist,” distancing himself from existentialists by focusing on “Being” rather than “Existence.”

Heidegger’s philosophy was concerned with understanding the concept of “Being,” or what was termed *Sein* (German “to be”). His central question was why something existed rather than nothing. He is perhaps most famous for two pivotal works that significantly impacted Christian hermeneutics, especially the interpretation of the New Testament text. In 1927, while at Marburg, he published *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*).³⁰ This work ushered him to the forefront of Germany’s greatest philosophers. Another significant work of Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Einführung in die Metaphysik*), was based on a lecture he gave in 1935 at the University of Freiburg. The work was not published until 1953. In these works, Heidegger rejected traditional Western metaphysics. He rejected objectivity in understanding, emphasizing subjectivity relative to the individual so that “preunderstanding” became a central focus in his thinking. To Heidegger, facts, actualities, and grammatical rules never could arrive at objectivity. Instead, understanding is only reached through experience: “an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of understanding of something presented to us.”³¹ He further stated that “meaning is an existentiale of *Dasein* [i.e. a person’s existence or personal experience], not a property attaching to its entities, lying ‘behind’ them, or floating somewhere as an ‘intermediate domain.’ ... Hence only *Dasein* can be meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or meaningless [*sinnlos*].”³²

The impact of this is profound for hermeneutics, for Heidegger’s thinking rejects any form of objectivity in understanding the biblical texts, especially in terms of propositional revelation. This eliminates propositional revelation that would claim that the Bible’s meaning is in the plain, normal sense, since all such meaning is, according to Heidegger, derived from a person’s subjective experience. That is,

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), front dedication page.

³⁰ The treatise first appeared in Spring 1927 in the *Jahrbuch für Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Forschung*, ed. Edmund Husserl.

³¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 191–92.

³² *Ibid.*, 193.

everyone sees through the “rose-colored” glasses of that person’s experience in existence (“Dasein”). Meaning is only understood when a person’s subjective experience “grasps” significance relative to the individual. Thus, what a Bible verse means to someone is what the verse means; the verse does not have an objective, standard meaning outside of the reader. All meaning is relative to personal experience. In terms of postmodernism, the Enlightenment’s confidence in science and truth as an objective goal can, with Heidegger’s approach, never be attained, for such thinking is irrational and must be rejected. Thus, Christian beliefs of inerrancy, propositional revelation, and the very truth of Scripture were rejected by Heidegger, as well as the objectivity of grace, salvation, and the resurrection. Heidegger saw a world of pure chance, deprived of significance; for all beings die, so nothing truly matters. Thus, Heidegger believed that his irrationalism was rational. In essence, for Heidegger, what is known is only a mystical way of knowing.³³ Macquarrie noted, in his work on Heidegger’s thought, that “one could hardly cope to advance very far in understanding of contemporary theology without some knowledge of Heidegger’s thought. His influence seems to appear everywhere—in demythologizing and the problem of hermeneutics; in the doctrine of man; in theories of revelation; in the debate about God.”³⁴

French Theorists Contribute to Postmodern Historiography

The Germans were not the only ones to contribute to postmodernism. While the Germans provided much of the seed for thought, radical French theorists arose (especially during the student social unrest in the 1960s) who were celebrated as significant contributors to postmodernism and “celebrities” by student radical movements of the 1960s. Three major French theories might be mentioned who championed the impotence of human reason and the impossibility of universal moral judgments. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) espoused poststructuralism as well as postmodernism in his over 40 books. In his work, he questioned assumptions of the Western philosophical tradition and more broadly of the Western culture, advocating the “deconstructionism” of Western arrogance as revealed in its certainty, while advocating a radicalization of the spirit of Marxism. Another French theorist is Michel Foucault (1926–1984). Foucault was also critical of modernity. His thought has been described as “a long exploration of transgression, of going beyond social limits, always inseparably linked to knowledge and power.”³⁵ In essence, he wrote critical works against many concepts of modernity produced since the Enlightenment.

Another French theorist was Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) who was a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist. He presented yearly seminars in Paris from 1953 to 1981. In so doing, Lacan influenced many leading French intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s, especially those associated with post-structuralism. His ideas had a

³³ For an excellent in-depth survey of Heidegger’s thought, see Howard M. Ducharme, Jr., “Mysticism: Heidegger,” in *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots*, ed. Norman Geisler (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1981), 205–27.

³⁴ John Macquarrie, “Preface,” in *Martin Heidegger* (Richmond, CA: John Knox, 1968).

³⁵ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 328.

tremendous impact on post-structuralism, critical theory, linguistics, twentieth-century French philosophy, film theory, and clinical psychoanalysis. Macey, in his “Introduction” to Lacan’s *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, considered him “the most controversial psycho-analyst since Freud.”³⁶

Still another leading French theorist in postmodernism was Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998). He was co-founder of the International College of Philosophy (*Collège international de philosophie*) with Jacques Derrida and others in Paris in 1983. Lyotard taught at the Lycée in Constantine, Algeria from 1950 to 1952. In 1972, he began teaching at the University of Paris until 1987 when he became Professor Emeritus. During the next two decades he lectured outside France, notably as a Professor of Critical Theory at the University of California, Irvine and as visiting professor at universities around the world. These included: Johns Hopkins University; University of California, Berkeley; Yale University; Stony Brook University; the University of California, San Diego; the Université de Montréal in Quebec (Canada); and the University of São Paulo in Brazil. Before his death, he divided his time between Paris and Atlanta, where he taught at Emory University as the Woodruff Professor of Philosophy and French.

Lyotard defined postmodernism as “an incredulity toward metanarratives.”³⁷ A metanarrative is a story that expresses someone’s worldview, or basis for reality in life. Lyotard rejected as valid any historical account that claimed to find meaning in events beyond those apparent to the participants who wrote that history. To Lyotard, most of the universe is irrational—simply not accessible to the mind. He conceived, however, that enough pockets of rationality existed (“little narratives”) that enabled people to live and associate together. He rejected the notion that any history could be written to express society in its totality, i.e. he rejected any philosophy of history. To Lyotard, the Enlightenment and modernistic belief in rational progress produced false concepts, such as the writing of “history.” He attacked the Old and New Testament, as well as the Western culture based upon them, in the following terms, “The characteristic features of the Judaic religion, and of the West to the extent that it is a product of that religion, are not to be sought in obsessional neurosis but psychosis.”³⁸

Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and Lyotard owed much of their thinking to the influence of Nietzsche and/or Heidegger.

³⁶ David Macey, “Introduction,” in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: 1994), xiv.

³⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis, 1984), 7.

³⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 102.

American, British, Canadian, and Australian Proponents of French Theory³⁹

In the mid-1970s to early 1980s, the postmodern thinking of the French, as well as the Germans, was embraced by English-speaking countries. In the United States, the “Yale School” of literary criticism popularized these ideas by embracing the poststructuralist ideas of Jacques Derrida, spreading postmodernism into American intellectual circles of education. The Yale School argued essentially that the text of any literature contained ambiguities and deferred meanings, thus rendering as impossible any objectivity in understanding a text.

In Britain, the earliest momentum for these ideas came from the *Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) that existed from 1964–2002.⁴⁰ Its founder, Herbert Richard Hoggart (1918–2014), was also its director from 1964–1969. Hoggart himself specialized in sociology, English literature, and cultural studies. He started at the University of Birmingham as a Professor of English in 1962. Hoggart announced the founding of the Centre for the purpose of studying research in “mass” culture. On the school website, Birmingham University related that:

Under the directorship of first Hoggart and then Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson, and with the commitment of Michael Green throughout, the Centre operated at the intersections of literary criticism, sociology, history and anthropology. Rather than focus on ‘high’ culture, the intention was to carry out group research on areas of popular culture such as chart music, television programmes and advertising. This approach went profoundly against the grain of conventional academic practice.⁴¹

The Centre became known for its radical theories in sociology, such as structuralist Marxism. Although the Centre is now closed, likely as a result of its controversial positions, the University of Birmingham celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014.⁴² The Centre’s archives are housed in the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham.⁴³

In 1985, Quentin Skinner edited and contributed to a collection of essays entitled, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* that was published by Cambridge University Press.⁴⁴ The work centered on essays that represented an iconoclastic group of theories and methods that challenged long-held ideas concerning the human sciences, such as history and sociology. In his “Introduction,” Skinner said that the book “focused on a number of individual thinkers who have played ... a role of exceptional importance in helping to bring about ... changes of theoretical allegiance [e.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Michel

³⁹ For an excellent overview of this period, see Windschuttle, *The Killing of History*, 1–37.

⁴⁰ The Centre was closed in 2002.

⁴¹ <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk>.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Quentin Skinner, ed., *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985).

Foucault].”⁴⁵ He states that the aim was “to illuminate the more general character of the upheavals and transformations that have served to restructure the human sciences over the past quarter of a century.”⁴⁶ Strategically, he notes that “[a]mong these general transformations, perhaps the most significant has been against the assumption that the natural sciences offer an adequate or even a relevant model for the practice of the social disciplines.”⁴⁷ In essence, the book celebrated the rise of postmodernism’s skepticism toward any sense of “objectivity” in understanding human endeavors (i.e. historiography). The traditional Enlightenment perspective of modernity and its certainty was rejected. He observed that:

Utopian and social philosophies ... Marxism ... the Frankfurt School ... Freud ... The Women's Movement has added a whole range of previously neglected insights and arguments; and amidst all this turmoil the empiricist and positivist citadels of English-speaking social philosophy have been threatened and undermined by successive waves of hermeneuticists, structuralists, post-empiricists, deconstructionalists and other invading hordes.⁴⁸

With the writing of this work, postmodernism was demonstrated to be establishing its dominance in a “postmodern” world. Though published by Cambridge University, several of its contributors were professors from American academics who held chairs at distinguished institutions in America, such as Cornell (James Boon, Professor of Anthropology), Princeton (Alan Ryan, Professor in the Department of Politics), and the University of California (David Hoy, Professor of Philosophy). Since 1985, the social sciences, and historiography in particular, have expanded their control and have dominated the field of human sciences. Windschuttle observes,

The ‘restructuring’ celebrated by Skinner has proceeded apace and has now spread to all corners of the Globe. It has found its most fertile soil in the American university system, where the speed of its growth has elicited comments of both amazement and envy from foreign supporters.⁴⁹

Thus, understanding history to be “what really happened in the past” is now seen as old-fashioned and substantively dubious, to the point of impossible. Humanities and social science departments have largely abandoned concepts of objectivity and truth, replacing such ideas with a political agenda that leans toward leftwing radicalism and its political, social, and religious agendas.

⁴⁵ Skinner, “Introduction: The Return of Grand Theory,” in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Social Sciences*, 6.

⁴⁶ Skinner, “Introduction,” 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Windschuttle, *The Killing of History*, 3.

A Great, Fatal Weakness of Postmodernism

This rejection of propositional revelation highlights a glaring inconsistency. The great, perhaps fatal, weakness of postmodernism is its claim that objective truth does not exist. If all is subjectively perceived by the individual relative to his/her own experience, then postmodernism has no substantive ground as a philosophy, for it depends upon its position as an “objective” analysis of the irrationality of objectivity. If postmodernism is correct, not even the postmodernists have a valid reason to assert their own positions, for their position too is one of irrationality. Postmodernists must assume that their position is the only “rational” one in a non-rational (or irrational) world, replete with nothing but subjectivity. As evangelicals accept, consciously or not, postmodern philosophy, the concept of propositional revelation is now being abandoned.

The End Results of the Killing of History and the Rise of the Dominance of Postmodernism

The results of this qualitative change in concepts of historiography toward postmodernism are grave for Bible-believing Christians. The damage to Scripture has been not only from those outside of evangelicalism, but also from “friends” who have capitulated to this kind of philosophical thinking in their own work. Paul’s first-century warning is more pertinent than ever: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col 2:8). His admonition to the Corinthians is relevant today: “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). These are timeless, empirical imperatives for Bible-believing Christians in a world that is increasingly hostile, not only to the essential truths of the Bible, but to ideas containing any certainty or absolutes. Such ideas and/or concepts are now considered “irrational.” Ironically, irrationality now has become rationality.

The same is true of the emphasis laid in existentialist theology on the reality of transforming encounters with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, through the Scriptures. Certainly, the crowning glory of the Scriptures is that they do mediate life-giving fellowship with God incarnate, the living Christ of whom they testify, the Divine Savior whose words “are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). But there is no Christ save the Christ of the Bible, and only to the extent that the Bible’s presentation of Jesus and of God’s plan centering upon Him is trusted can a genuine spiritual encounter with Jesus Christ ever be expected to occur. It is by means of disciplined interpretation of a trusted Bible that the Father and Son, through the Spirit, make themselves known to sinful men. For such transforming encounters, the hermeneutical principles and procedures stated here both mark and guard the road.

The Implications for Gospel Study in a Postmodern World

Having moved from intellectual centers to Christian educational systems, postmodernism has directly impacted the study of the Gospel accounts. The

following are mere highlights of the danger it presents to Gospel interpretation. J. I. Packer, in his “Exposition” to the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy summit on Hermeneutics (1983), summarized the danger facing evangelicals today in regard to existentialist interpretation in the twentieth century. His comments still apply today:

The twentieth century has seen many attempts to assert the instrumentality of Scripture in bringing to us God’s Word while yet denying that that Word has been set forth for all time in the words of the biblical text. These views regard the text as the fallible human witness by means of which God fashions and prompts those insights which he gives us through preaching and Bible study. But for the most part these views include a denial that the Word of God is cognitive communication, and thus they lapse inescapably into impressionistic mysticism. Also, their denial that Scripture is the objectively given Word of God makes the relation of that Word to the text indefinable and hence permanently problematical. This is true of all current forms of neo-orthodox and existentialist theology, including the so-called “new hermeneutic,” which is an extreme and incoherent version of the approach described.⁵⁰

Twenty-first century evangelical-critical scholars now join the more liberal-critical scholarship forces in championing this very position. Indeed, postmodern ideology and concepts against traditional views of “historiography” theories now allow for liberal-critical scholars, as well as their evangelical-critical counterparts, to invent, as well as impose, novel interpretive concepts that sharply contrast with orthodox understanding of the Gospels’ contents (cf. Acts 17:21). One may suggest that postmodernism is foundational to aberrant ideas now advocated by prominent evangelicals.

Propositional Revelation Rejected in a Postmodern World

Several impacts on biblical criticism may be noted. First, the concept of propositional revelation is now being abandoned. Propositional revelation may be defined as a statement that “corresponds to reality.” In essence, the Bible’s statements consist of declarative sentences that affirm or deny something. A proposition is “an expression in language or signs of something that can be believed, doubted, denied, or is either true or false.”⁵¹ The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978, long before the rise to dominance of the irrationalism of postmodernism, stated in Article VI:

We affirm that the Bible expresses God’s truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.

⁵⁰ J. I. Packer, “Exposition,” in *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: ICBI, 1983), 33–34.

⁵¹ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “proposition,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proposition>.

In other words, in its statements the Bible affirms what actually is rather than what is merely subjectively perceived to be true, as would be claimed in postmodernism. Regarding the ICBI documents that speak of the Bible as revelation from God (i.e. Article III, ICBI), Sproul commented:

The spirit of these articles is to oppose a disjunction between the revelation that is given to us in the person of Christ objectively and the revelation that comes to us in equally objective terms in the Word of God inscripturated. Here the Bible is seen not merely as a catalyst for revelation, but as revelation itself. If the Bible is God's Word and its content proceeds from Him, then its content is to be seen as revelation. Here revelation is viewed as "propositional." It is propositional not because the Bible is written in the style of logical equations or analytical formulas. It is propositional because it communicates a content which may be understood as propositions.⁵²

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy arose at a time when existentialist ideas (a strategic root of postmodernism) were making inroads into the church, destroying the plain, normal sense of Scripture, and imposing meanings that were subjective and foreign to the plain sense of the text. The Council sounded the alarm to Bible-believing Christians of the necessity to adhere to propositional revelation in a day when it is being dismantled by advocates of subjectivity in interpretation. More than three-hundred conservative Christian scholars assembled in Chicago to sound forth a warning for future generations of the assault that existentialism (soon to be postmodernism) was having on the meaning of the biblical text.

The concept of propositional revelation is diametrically opposed to prevailing postmodernist thought. Postmodernism now demands that any concept of "fact" or objective "affirmation" is impossible. It rejects objectivity, and instead affirms subjectivity based on the learned experiences of a culture or an individual as determinative of "truth for them," not "truth for everybody." It rejects the notion that "truth" has an independent existence apart from subjective experience.

Grammatico-Historical Meaning of the Biblical Text Now Being Abandoned

The great principle of the Reformation—the championing of the grammatico-historical hermeneutic—is now being voided through the invasion of postmodernism. This hermeneutic is so essential because it is the plain, normal sense of words that provides a decisive check against the subjective biases that an interpreter brings to the text. Grammatico-historical interpretation draws the meaning of the text out of the Bible (i.e., *exegesis*), rather than imposing a foreign sense onto the passage (i.e., *eisegesis*) as so many postmodern forms of interpretation do. Exegesis allows the biblical text and its surrounding context to determine the meaning of a passage; eisegesis welcomes foreign elements into the meaning of the text that the author never had imagined. Postmodern forms of interpretation operate from a basis that the

⁵² R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (Oakland, CA: ICBI, 1980), 12.

text itself has no meaning apart from the personal, subjective experience of the interpreter.

The grammatico-historical hermeneutic signifies that by the rules of grammar and the *facts* of history, the objective meaning of the text may be determined. It champions the idea that interpretation can be “objective” and “neutral.” It affirms the plain, normal meaning of the text. As Terry noted before the onslaught of postmodernism, the grammatico-historical has a basic idea, “i.e., [i]ts fundamental principle is to gather information from the Scriptures themselves the actual meaning that the writers intended to convey.”⁵³ “The grammatico-historical exegete ... will accept the claims of the Bible without prejudice or adverse prepossession, and, with no ambition to prove them true or false, will investigate the language and import of each book with fearless independence.”⁵⁴ Again, the grammatico-historical interpreter “has a fundamental right to assume that no sensible author will be knowingly inconsistent with himself, or seek to bewilder and mislead his readers.”⁵⁵ For grammatico-historical hermeneutics, the meaning of a text is inherent in the words of the text. A principle in the Reformation was that God’s intended meaning of the text (its “objective,” true meaning) could be discovered through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a regenerated mind (1 Cor 1:18–2:17). Postmodernism would see this task as impossible, since the text itself has no meaning apart from the subjective perceptions of those either writing or reading it.

Once again, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) and Hermeneutics (1982) championed the grammatico-historical hermeneutic for biblical interpretation. Why? Those assembled realized the damage that the existentialist interpretation could have on the text. It imposed foreign meanings onto the text, rather than the meaning stemming from a plain reading of the text of Scripture. Only this interpretive approach constitutes a safeguard against novel, creative, as well as aberrant, exegesis. Article XVIII of ICBI (1978) states,

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

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 teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.⁵⁶

Commenting on the ICBI wording of this article, Sproul explains why the 1978 document so strongly upheld the grammatico-historical approach to interpreting Scripture,

Article XVIII touches on some of the most basic principles of biblical interpretation. Though this article does not spell out in detail a vast comprehensive system of hermeneutics, it nevertheless gives basic guidelines

⁵³ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 173.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 173.

⁵⁶ Sproul, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 38.

on which the framers of the confession were able to agree. The first is that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis. Grammatico-historical is a technical term that refers to the process by which we take the structures and time periods of the written texts seriously as we interpret them. Biblical interpreters are not given the license to spiritualize or allegorize texts against the grammatical structure and form of the text itself. The Bible is not to be reinterpreted to be brought into conformity with contemporary philosophies but is to be understood in its intended meaning and word usage as it was written at the time it was composed. To hold to grammatico-historical exegesis is to disallow the turning of the Bible into a wax nose that can be shaped and reshaped according to modern conventions of thought. The Bible is to be interpreted as it was written, not reinterpreted as we would like it to have been written according to the *prejudices of our own era*.⁵⁷

This comment stands in direct contradiction to the postmodern approach, whereby the Scripture has no meaning apart from subjective experience of the interpreter.

The 1982 International Council on Biblical Hermeneutics continued to uphold grammatico-historical hermeneutics. In the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, Article XV states,

We affirm the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text. We deny the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.⁵⁸

Geisler, in commenting on the importance of Article XV, noted,

The literal sense of Scripture is strongly affirmed here. To be sure the English word literal carries some problematic connotations with it. Hence the words normal and grammatical-historical are used to explain what is meant. The literal sense is also designated by the more descriptive title grammatical-historical sense. This means the correct interpretation is the one which discovers the meaning of the text in its grammatical forms and in the historical, cultural context in which the text is expressed.

The Denial warns against attributing to Scripture any meaning not based in a literal understanding, such as mythological or allegorical interpretations. This should not be understood as eliminating typology or designated allegory or other literary forms which include figures of speech. (see Articles X, XIII, and XIV)⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Sproul, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 38.

⁵⁸ R. C. Sproul and Norman L. Geisler, *Explaining Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements* (Matthews, NC: Bastion 2013), 20.

⁵⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary*, 76 (Bastion combined version; see footnote 59).

One is left wondering if evangelical-critical scholars any longer hold to the ICBI principles that the Council so fervently fought for in the 1970s and 1980s.

Preunderstanding Refuted by Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics

Heidegger's concept of preunderstanding, as well as central thrusts of postmodernism and their influence upon hermeneutics, was also responded to in the ICBI statement on Hermeneutics XIX, regarding the "Danger in Preunderstanding,"

We affirm that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.

We deny that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.⁶⁰

Heidegger's (and Nietzsche's) idea of imposition of personal, existential subjective experience onto the text of Scripture had become a plague in the 1950s through the 1970s when the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics formed. They witnessed its damage to scriptural interpretation. Geisler commented,

The question of preunderstanding is a crucial one in contemporary hermeneutics. The careful wording of the Affirmation does not discuss the issue of whether one should approach Scripture with a particular preunderstanding, but simply which kinds of preunderstanding one has are legitimate. This question is answered by affirming that only those preunderstandings which are compatible with the teaching of Scripture are legitimate. In fact, the statement goes further and demands that all preunderstanding be subject to "correction" by the teaching of Scripture.

The point of this article is to avoid interpreting Scripture through an alien grid or filter which obscures or negates its true message. For it acknowledges that one's preunderstanding will affect his understanding of a text. Hence to avoid misinterpreting Scripture one must be careful to examine his own presuppositions in the light of Scripture.⁶¹

Orthodox Inerrancy Weakened or Rejected by Evangelical-Critical Scholarship

The net loss of the first two points, propositional revelation and grammatico-historical interpretation, signifies also the loss of the orthodox, historic concept of inerrancy in the Old and New Testament Writings. Geisler strategically linked inerrancy to hermeneutics,

⁶⁰ Geisler, *Explaining Hermeneutics*, 80.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Article XVIII says: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis.” ... In short, there is an overlap between inerrancy and hermeneutics because inerrancy is not an empty (vacuous) claim. It is a claim that involves the assertion that an inerrant Bible is actually true in all that it affirms. And this truth corresponds literally to the reality about which it speaks.⁶²

The result of postmodernism is that inerrancy is viewed as “irrational.” Some evangelicals now regard inerrancy as unnecessary or of little consequence for Gospel interpretation. Such a rejection of inerrancy is directly tied to hermeneutical methodology. From its very foundation, the orthodox church has maintained the inerrancy of both the Old and New Testaments. While the term “inerrancy” is not used in either Testament, the concept of the Bible as “without error” is firmly upheld in the teachings of both the Old and New Testament. It is not the affirmation of inerrancy that is of recent vintage, it is its denial and redefinition.

⁶² Geisler, *Explaining Hermeneutics*, 12.

REVIEWS

John D. Schwandt. *An Introduction to Biblical Greek: A Grammar with Exercises*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. 498 pp., \$24.85 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Paul Twiss, Instructor of Bible Exposition, The Master's Seminary.

In recent years there has been no shortage of introductory Greek grammars. The task of differentiating between them is not easy, due in large measure to a level of uniformity that emphasizes accessibility to the language. This in turn is driven by the constraints imposed by a first-year Greek class, as seminaries have steadily reduced the amount of time allocated to the original languages. Consequently, professors are limited in what they can accomplish. Even with the most able students, it can be difficult to go beyond the basic principles. Thus, introductory Greek grammars have given heed to this trend, with few venturing beyond the mere fundamentals of the language. The inferred pedagogical approach is one that strives to simplify the task, as time in the classroom is at a premium.

John D. Schwandt's recent effort, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek*, offers a refreshing approach to the language that sits against this trend. Drawing from nearly twenty years of experience teaching Greek, Schwandt has designed a course whose rigor exceeds most grammars available today. Indeed, he makes plain in the preface that his pedagogical style is one that renders necessary that which most would consider as excessive. In particular, Schwandt emphasizes the role of composition in the pursuit of learning New Testament Greek. Absent in most grammars today, Schwandt includes composition exercises, beginning in chapter 3. Though these initially constitute mere two-word phrases, thereafter the resilient student is led along an increasingly difficult path which quickly develops into longer, more complex sentences.

A second methodological feature of Schwandt's work is his emphasis on first principles as they relate to grammatical structures. Resisting the temptation to relegate such discussions to the footnotes, or an advanced volume, Schwandt pursues the "why" question at every opportunity. The result is a grammar that displays the inherent logic of the Greek language, while at the same time demanding less of the student with respect to rote memorization. Additionally, by drawing attention to the undergirding relationships that pervade grammatical structures, Schwandt offers the student an insight into the development of the language over time. Whereas oftentimes Koine Greek is presented in isolation from the diachronic shifts that

produced it, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* situates the language in its broader historical context.

The result of Schwandt's more classical approach is a 37-lesson course which spans nearly 500 pages (including appendices), wherein the student receives a holistic approach to New Testament Greek. Every chapter includes study exercises, and the book can be supplemented with a video course provided by Logos Mobile Education. Not for the fainthearted, Schwandt's grammar is a demanding yet comprehensive introduction to Greek, which if pursued with diligence will undoubtedly reward the able student with a noteworthy degree of proficiency.

At this point it is important to note Schwandt's dependence on H. P. V. Nunn's *The Elements of New Testament Greek* as his pedagogical foundation. Originally published in 1913, Schwandt has sought to leverage Nunn's approach, expanding and supplementing where necessary. With this in mind, a number of concerns present themselves, the validity of which can only be known through use of this grammar in the classroom.

First, Nunn was writing at a time when students beginning seminary generally had a higher level of language training than they do today. Whereas previously a young man may have had competency with several foreign (some even ancient) languages, today it is not uncommon for the beginning seminary student to know no language beyond his mother tongue. As such, Schwandt sets a high bar. The professor who uses this grammar will be introducing students to nuanced and complex grammatical ideas early in the semester. For many it will be their first active consideration of how languages work, and thus a considerable hill to climb. Though the rigor espoused by Schwandt should be commended, expectations should be adjusted accordingly. For some, a conceptual understanding of the logic that gives rise to various paradigms and patterns may prove elusive. Operating under the time constraints of an academic semester, the well-intentioned student may need to content himself with more rote memorization than Schwandt's grammar advocates.

A second, closely related concern pertains to the presentation of material. Though the question of accessibility was not necessarily paramount for Nunn, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* could perhaps improve upon its presentation of information. To be sure, the discussion offered in each chapter successfully communicates the salient point of the lesson. However, the essential principle can be quickly lost amidst much other information on the page. With long explanatory paragraphs and very little highlighted, the beginning student with no prior language training could regularly feel overwhelmed in his studies. Again, the prevalence of this issue could prove to be negligible in a classroom setting, with a professor to guide and direct learning. Provided he gives careful attention to the effective distillation of pertinent material, Schwandt's grammar could be an appropriate resource for beginning students. However, without instructor supervision, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* may be more helpful as a supplemental grammar, or for those already conversant with the language.

A third concern relates to Schwandt's apparent hesitancy to go beyond matters of first-year Greek. Though he is certainly ambitious with regards to the mastery of basic principles, Schwandt seldom ventures beyond grammar into matters of exegesis and theology. More specifically, though he clearly explains the significance of various grammatical structures, oftentimes the discussion is lacking a handful of

worked examples from Scripture, with an explanation as to the attendant theological implications. Augmenting each topic in this way would allow the student to see the eventual fruit of his labors and provide great encouragement along the way. Similarly, there is scope in *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* for representing more fully current discussions within New Testament scholarship. Though it need not be included in the main body of the grammar, an occasional footnote alerting the eager student to recent developments could provide a much-needed stimulus in the troughs of a seminary semester. By way of example, Schwandt's discussions of deponency and aspectual theory are brief, failing to represent their relative significance within present scholarly trends.

Admittedly, these concerns are relatively minor and should not detract from the evident strengths of Schwandt's grammar. Though certainly not unique, *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* is undoubtedly more inductive than most first-year texts available today. The success of Schwandt's approach will be tested through its application. However, in large part, it will depend upon the establishment of expectations. In an age that consistently seeks to offer shortcuts to mastery, Schwandt admirably insists upon a more certain path: one that is demanding and time consuming, but rewarding. Ultimately professors may decide to use *An Introduction to Biblical Greek* alongside another grammar, or as a reference point for their own teaching. The spectrum of abilities within a seminary class coupled with the constraints of a busy semester may hinder its usability as a primary textbook. However, it should not be overlooked altogether. Teachers of first-year Greek would surely benefit by engaging with the course and considering how it might factor into their classroom instruction.

David J. MacLeod. *The Suffering Servant of the Lord: A Prophecy of Jesus Christ*. Second edition. Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018. 283 pp., \$24.66 Paperback.

Reviewed by Kevin D. Zuber, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary.

The prophecy of Isaiah has sixty-six chapters, and yet one chapter has occupied preachers, biblical scholars, and theologians more than any other, indeed perhaps more than all the others.¹ As MacLeod attests, "Through the centuries students of the Bible have almost unanimously celebrated the importance of Isaiah 52:13–53:12."²

¹ For both academic and popular treatments of this chapter (listed by date) see: William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer, eds., *Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998); Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, eds., *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012); John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to God: Rediscovering the Most Remarkable Chapter in the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

² David J. MacLeod, *The Suffering Servant of the Lord: A Prophecy of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 1. This assertion is backed up by four pages of quotations from many on the importance of Isaiah 53.

This work by David J. MacLeod is a welcome addition to the many who have already published volumes on this extraordinarily important chapter. MacLeod's work stands out from others in that his work is at once that of a preacher, a biblical scholar, and a theologian. In a way it is three works in one, and while each element (the sermonic, the academic, and the theological) could be expanded (sermonically), handled in more detail (exegetically), and mined for more depth (theologically), this work is compelling, more than sufficient, and eminently practical.

MacLeod explains that this work began as a series of sermons delivered to several Bible conferences over a number of years. Those messages were reworked into journal articles (in the informative *Emmaus Journal*, published by Emmaus Bible College), and then those articles were reworked into the chapters of this book. Thus, the elements of the sermonic and the academic can be discerned throughout. The theological aspects are woven into the exposition and the extensive footnotes as well as in several appendices.

The book is mainly comprised of five chapters that expositionally follow the text of Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. In the first chapter, in Part I, preliminary issues are dealt with (i.e. the historical setting of Isaiah, the relation to the other servant songs, the literary genre, the outline of the passage and crucially the matter of the subject of the passage: MacLeod succinctly offers compelling evidence that the subject is none other than Jesus Christ). In Part II of the first chapter, and in the chapters to follow, the reader will find MacLeod's insightful exposition arranged according to a clear and accurate outline drawn from the text of Isaiah itself. It is in the main text of the chapters that one can discern the original sermonic elements (e.g. the amusing anecdote from Jack Fish's high school days when he read Isaiah 53 to a class that was convinced it was from the New Testament,³ and an illustration drawn from the "Peanuts" comic strip⁴). Here too one reads pithy quotes from F. B. Meyer and Charles Spurgeon and MacLeod himself (e.g. speaking of the subject of Isaiah 53, "Like Cinderella's slipper, the description fits only one person, namely, Jesus Christ"⁵).

MacLeod's scholarship is also exhibited in his exposition throughout as he cites many credible, academic-level commentaries and scholarly monographs on the background and text of Isaiah, as well as sources to explicate the Hebrew text. However, it is in the extensive and closely reasoned footnotes that the depth of MacLeod's scholarship is most evident. Not a few of these footnotes extend over several pages and deal with technical matters such as textual issues (e.g. the discussion of "He will sprinkle" in Isa 52:15⁶) and questions of interpretation (e.g. the discussion of the first two lines of Isa 53:9⁷).

MacLeod also addresses several doctrinal issues in the main text of the exposition, but at times he is more deliberate in his theologizing. This can be seen in the conclusions to each message/chapter, and even more deliberately at the end of the fifth chapter (e.g. "Doctrinal Notes")⁸ and especially in several appendices. For

³ MacLeod, *Suffering Servant*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–27n108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 108–9n75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

instance, Appendix 1 (“The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 in the Jewish Interpreters”⁹) is nearly a chapter on its own, and is a particularly helpful overview for anyone who does not want to delve deeply into the vast literature of Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53, but who would like to understand briefly this interpretation. Other appendices helpfully deal with practical theological issues, such as the question of physical healing and the atonement and popular objections to the doctrine of substitution. Another appendix surveys the extensive hymnology that was inspired by Isaiah 53.

MacLeod’s book is an edifying and compelling read for its sermonic elements; it is interesting and informative for the textual and detailed exegetical discussions; and it is helpful for its doctrinal insights. Any preacher who is planning an exposition on Isaiah or key prophetic chapters would profit from consulting this book. The scholarship in the footnotes can be profitably helpful to both the budding and established scholar, and the theologian will benefit from MacLeod’s doctrinal insights. Most vitally, MacLeod consistently holds up “the Suffering Servant of the Lord” for the reader to consider, to know, and to believe in. The reader of this book will undoubtedly come to a deeper appreciation of the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

⁹ MacLeod, *Suffering Servant*, 155–82.