



SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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The Gospel of Discipleship

Recently, the relationship of the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ on the cross, which we know as the gospel, has been sharply distinguished from the thorough result that the gospel exercises within the Christian believer's life, which we know as discipleship. Calvinist theologian Donald A. Carson has called for evangelicals to "underscore this distinction" between gospel and discipleship. Although Carson allows that one might claim that discipleship is a necessary conclusion of the gospel, he treats such a conclusion as a concession at best: "We may even argue . . ." Furthermore, driven by concern to maintain the gospel over against what he calls "moralism," Carson flatly denies that the commands of Christ constitute "any part of [the gospel]," and that more than once.¹

While we concur with Carson that the gospel must not be confused with works righteousness, this centennial issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* underscores, by implication, that the grace of discipleship is necessarily and, without room for dissimulation, integrally connected with the gospel. The commands of the Lord and the human response in discipleship may not be treated as mere theological concession. Those who have been regenerated through the gospel should be wary of cutting the gospel off from its necessary results in the name of preserving it. Charles Haddon Spurgeon argued vigorously against the Hyper-Calvinists of his day that the widespread evangelistic offering of grace through universal preaching of the gospel, as well as the transformative results of that gospel, must not be downplayed.²

Steven W. Smith, professor of expository preaching at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, headlines this issue with an excellent essay for preachers of the gospel. He encourages them to consider Jesus Christ as the focal point and thus hermeneutical guide for their proclamation of Scripture, demonstrating this by walking the expositor through four major Christological passages (John 1:1–5; Col 1:15–20; Phil 2:5–11; Heb 1:1–5). Smith illuminates the glorious privilege and humbling responsibility of the Christian proclamation of Scripture when he concludes, "Therefore, expository preaching is faithful to the text for the very reason

¹D.A. Carson, "Editorial," *Themelios* 34.1 (2009): 1–2.

²Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995).

that the text speaks of Christ. In explaining the words of the Word, one is explaining the Son of God Himself Who is revealing God Himself.”

Edward L. Smither, a guest essayist from the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, moves the discussion from Scripture into the early church. Using the lesser known *Life of Augustine*, written by the great Western theologian's friend, Possidius, Smither considers the hortatory function of early Christian biography. While recognizing the similarities between hagiography and biography, Smither differentiates between the various types of the biographical genre. With regard to *Life of Augustine*, which he informatively introduces to the initiate, Smither argues that the early Christian *vitae* (lives) must be read as the early church would have read them. *Imitatio* (imitation) was “more than a mere literary device in hagiography but a continuation of Augustine's convictions for discipleship, particularly for church leaders.” The reintroduction of this ancient genre may have positive spiritual results within the contemporary churches.

Benjamin B. Phillips, resident systematic theologian at the Harvard School for Theological Studies in Houston, Texas, explores the relationship between discipleship and evangelism. Drawing upon Scripture, Christian history, and contemporary cultural discourse, Phillips considers discipleship and its relationship to evangelism systematically according to the Edwardsean themes of sin's ugliness and Christ's beauty. Treating the Great Commission as foundational, Phillips argues that discipleship includes the proclamation of the gospel. Evangelism, the preaching of the gospel that saves by grace through faith in Christ, is a function of Christian discipleship. Furthermore, “the disciple-making that starts with evangelism does not end there.” The Christian life is to be characterized by a continual transformation from the ugliness of sin into the beauty of Christ through “constructive discipling.”

Next, Timothy K. Christian, professor of theology at the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, evaluates the biographical aspects of Augustus Hopkins Strong's theological shifts. Professor Christian summarizes some of the findings of his doctoral research for this journal through a careful comparison of Strong's personal discipleship with his theological conclusions. The distressing aspect of this research is that the famous theologian, whose works are still influential, allowed for the furtherance of liberalism. Carl F.H. Henry and Grant Wacker, among others, have examined Strong's “ethical monism,” but Christian details the impact of Strong's personal life upon his formal theology, utilizing extensively Strong's own autobiographical musings. The author's ruminations as to why Strong shifted so radically in his late age are careful and thought provoking. Those with a high regard for Strong will be challenged to re-evaluate this northern evangelical and his legacy.

Finally, Chris Shirley, professor of Christian education at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues that discipleship is a task the Lord gave to the local church, an institution too often held in low regard, especially in these days of effervescent evangelical parachurches. After a cursory biblical and confessional consideration of discipleship, Shirley proposes an integrative model for the local churches as they pursue discipleship in obedience to Christ and according to the practices of the apostles. "Raising up successive generations of committed disciples is the responsibility of the local church. While this maxim may be obvious, the reality is that far too many churches have abandoned intentional discipleship. Instead, the church must reclaim her role as disciple-maker." Shirley not only makes this large claim, he also demonstrates how the recovery of church discipleship might begin.

Discipleship and the gospel are integrally related. The gospel is the good news of God's gracious work on behalf of man; discipleship is the human response to His grace and, as a rather comprehensive term within soteriology, is itself a grace. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news from God for mankind and, being His work, it is sufficient on its own. The good news does not need to be protected and hedged with extrabiblical "orthodoxy" in order to preserve it or even "recover" it. The gospel and its necessary results, as defined within Scripture, including discipleship, simply need to be preached.

Spurgeon understood the confluence between gospel and discipleship very well and refused to let anyone build a hedge around the gospel. He was concerned that such hedging might hinder the gospel and its necessary effects. When preaching about the thief who repented on the cross, Spurgeon dwelt upon the self-sufficient nature of the gospel: "You may pick a jewel from a dunghill, and find its radiance undiminished; and you may gather the gospel from a blasphemous mouth, and it shall be none the less the gospel of salvation."³ He explained the vigorous nature of true faith in the gospel and the many results of such faith as empowered by the Word of the Lord. A relevant quotation from the Prince of Preachers provides the final word about the sufficient and transformative power of the good news for disciples of Jesus Christ:

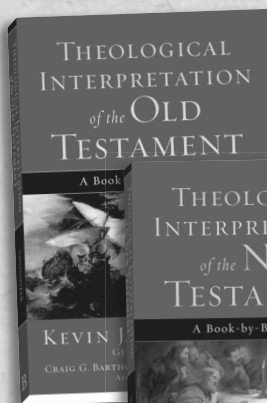
Many good people think that they ought to guard the gospel; but it is never so safe as when it stands in its own naked majesty. It wants no covering from us. When we protect it with provisos, and guard it with exceptions, and qualify it with

³Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Dying Thief in a New Light," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised*, vol. 32 (1886; reprint, Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1974), 53.

observations, it is like David in Saul's armour: it is hampered and hindered, and you may even hear it cry, "I cannot go with these." Let the gospel alone, and it will save; qualify it, and the salt has lost its savour.⁴

⁴Ibid., 50. Cf. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, 99.

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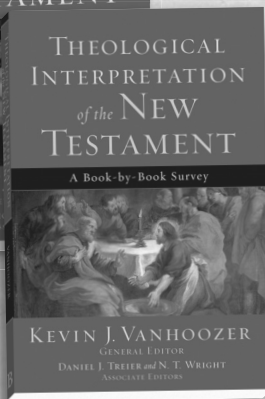


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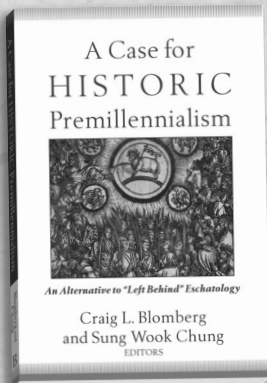
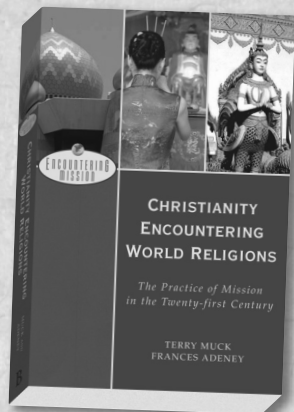
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Christology of Preaching

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Contemporary homiletic theory is often driven by immediate pragmatic ends: change lives, draw a crowd, attract seekers, or affect an immediate response. These ambitions in sum are not morally disabled. The problem is that in the expediency to accomplish selective ends, one may forget that biblical preaching is always informed by a salient theology. Clearly the declaration of the good news is shaped by one's ecclesiology, theology proper, pneumatology, doctrine of man, and of course a doctrine of revelation.

Recent literature on expositional preaching generally begins with an assumed or stated premise that expository preaching must be accompanied by a proper doctrine of revelation.¹ Specifically, the longstanding

¹For example: Harold Bryson, *Expository Preaching: Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995); Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Sidney Griedanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Walter Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992); Wayne McDill, *Twelve Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994); Stephen Matthewson, *The Art of Preaching the Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); David L. and Stephen K. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1989); Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Hadden Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999). All of these texts include a modicum, if not a full development of a doctrine of revelation and its relationship to preaching. These works were all published within the last twenty years. It is interesting to note that two historically important works on preaching, John Broadus' *The Preparation and Delivery of*

evangelical argument for expository preaching has been the perfect nature of Scripture. An example of this foundational argument is found in the preface to John MacArthur's work on expository preaching. He begins the book with five postulates that serve to illustrate the relationship between inerrancy and exposition:

1. God is.
2. God is true.
3. God speaks in harmony with His nature.
4. God speaks only truth.
5. God spoke His true Word as consistent with His true Nature to be communicated to people.²

What then does this mean for preaching? MacArthur goes on to write,

1. God gave His true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached (Matt. 28:20; Acts 5:20; 20:27). Correspondingly, every portion of the Word of God needs to be considered in the light of its whole.
2. God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered, without altering the message.
3. Only the exegetical process that yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2.³

The logic is that the perfect nature of Scripture begs its sufficiency. In turn, the sufficiency of Scripture begs that it be treated with faithful expository proclamation. If Scripture is sufficient then the text of Scripture must move beyond influencing the sermon. Rather, the text should determine the essence of the sermon, so that the sermon borrows its content, structure, and "spirit" from the text. (By "spirit" I mean the author's intended emotive aims of the text, determined by the genre, so that the dramatic tension of a narrative or the sting of a Pauline rebuke, is reflected in sermons respectively). This is expository preaching: faithful exposition born from the conviction that the content, the structure, and the emotive design are all inspired and perfect.

Sermons and Andrew Blackwood's *The Preparation of Sermons* contain little if no discussion of a doctrine of revelation.

²MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 25.

³*Ibid.*, 25, 26.

However, Christian preaching should begin with Christ. Preaching, along with all theological conversations, could begin with Jesus, but preaching ought to begin with Christ in particular for the reason that Christ is God's Communication. There is more to say about Christ, but not less: He is no less than the very act of communication, means of communication, and end of communication. God's means of communication should influence, if not dictate, the means chosen by the preacher. The purpose of this article is to examine four Christological passages and their implications on preaching. These are passages about God's communication of Himself and in this way helpful to understand Christian pastoral preaching.

Limitations

There are at least two apparent problems with examining these Christological passages as preaching texts. These will be addressed before the passages are examined. First, the incarnation is unique. It is clear that the incarnation is singular and distinct. It is obviously more than a metaphor for preaching ministry. Therefore this argument will be approached with that understanding, honoring the singular importance of the incarnation.

Secondly, one may fairly ask, "Why deal with inferred communication passages when there are explicit passages on preaching?" For example, there is a host of popular literature on preaching that describes Christ's way of communicating, then prescribes ways that a pastor should communicate, all the while ignoring the plain teaching of Scripture. Some will examine Paul on Mars Hill and treat his precedent for quoting secular poems as prescriptive for pastoral preaching. While there is precedent in Paul, some accept Paul's strategies as prescriptive, while ignoring passages in the other epistles in which Paul explains clearly how, and what, one should preach.⁴ It is imperative, therefore, to affirm the clear New Testament passages as primary passages that deal plainly with preaching, and to acknowledge that a student of preaching would begin with these texts.

With these dangers noted why then pursue a homiletic theory from implicit and not explicit passages on preaching? Three reasons are sufficient.

First, preachers are communicators. There is more to say about preaching, but it could be said fairly that contemporary preaching is often cursed with individuals so committed to a certain style of preaching that they fail to communicate. The ministry of the word is not the attempt to mirror a style or react against a style, rather it is to make the teaching of the text plain.

Secondly, this communication that preachers practice is a borrowed

⁴For example, see 1 Cor 1; 2:1-5; 1 Tim 4:1-8; or Titus 1:9.

art. Preachers did not invent communication. The first recorded act of communication is Genesis 1:3, where God said “Let there be light.”⁵ This is a difficult communication model to study. For while there is a sender of the message (God) and there is a message (the command for light to be) the receiver of the message is harder to define. We only know that the light got the message, and became. The first act of communication between two parties is Genesis 1:26, “Let Us make man in our own image.” Preachers did not invent communication. Communication existed perfectly in the Godhead long before we trifling beings came attempting to do imperfectly what God has always done perfectly.

Thirdly, the incarnation is perfect communication. If one were to define communication as representation, then one could say that the incarnation is the ultimate act of communication. In John 1:18 the apostle notes that “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” The invisibility of the Father seems almost inconsequential because the Son has “explained him.” Christ perfectly represented the Father, and therefore perfectly communicated the Father. Thus the incarnation is ultimate communication, because God is communicating God.

So while it is essential to acknowledge the temptations involved in looking at the Christological passages as preaching passages, and to acknowledge the need to approach these passages with exegetical honesty, it is still impossible to ignore that every preacher is attempting to do what Christ did perfectly, and that at the least Christ’s incarnational ministry can be instructive for Christian preaching. Four Christological passages will now be explored for their implications on preaching.

The Christological Passages

John 1:1–5

“In the beginning was the Word . . .”

It has been suggested that John’s use of *λογος* to describe Christ is an attempt to address the Greek philosophic mind. It has also been suggested that *λογος* is written to the Semitic mind. While many things have been suggested by John’s use of *λογος*,⁶ perhaps the simplest explanation is the best, namely that Christ was God’s Speech. Calvin translated verse one:

⁵Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

⁶For a sample discussion of possible Greek and Semitic influences see Simon Kistomaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 69–70.

“In the beginning was the Speech, and the Speech was with God, and the Speech was God.”⁷ Calvin wrote,

As to the Evangelist calling the Son of God the Speech, the simple reason appears to me to be, first, because he is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and secondly, because he is the lively image of His purpose; for as Speech is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God. And to say that He reveals Himself to us by His Speech. The other significations of the Greek word *logos* do not apply so well. It means, no doubt, definition, and reasoning and calculation; but I am unwilling to carry the abstruseness of philosophy beyond the measure of my faith.⁸

Thus Calvin is suggesting that the answer to the *λογος* question is quite simple. Christ was the Communication of God. Two conclusions can be drawn from this approach: First, Christ was what God wanted to say and second, Christ was the way God wanted to say it. Both of these entities are present in John 5:19,

Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner.

Thus, the existence of Christ was the mind of God. To pursue Calvin's thought, since the existence of the Son is the communication of the mind of the Father, then the work of the Son is the visible expression of the mind of God. Therefore, the healing miracles are actually God's Speech on the power of His Son, and on His attitude toward human suffering. Christ's commentary on taxes to be given to the federal government is God's Speech on the Christian's relationship to earthly powers. Jesus' actions at a well in Samaria were God's speech entitled, “What I think about loose women.” The keynote address is the cross, whereby in the actions of His Son God held forth that He loved humanity and was forever committed to the salvation of the elect. In the beginning was the *Speech*. The existence of Christ was the mind of God.

This would mean that there was never a time when Christ was not what God was thinking. Every action of the Son was a syllable in the

⁷John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Vol II*. Calvin's Commentaries in Twenty Three Volumes, Vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 26.

⁸Ibid., 26

Speech of God. There were no wasted words in God's Speech. This is ultimate communication.⁹

Expository preaching attempts to reflect the mind of God on a matter. During the exposition of the text of Scripture there should never be a time when God is not represented. Every word should pitch to the idea of representing the text. A sermon which is largely human opinion on a subject cannot speak the mind of God and so imitate Christ's own communication of the Father. Thus, there is a need for faithful exposition; exposition which faithfully represents the Word of God as Christ faithfully represented the mind of God.

Consequently, this is in contrast to the New Homiletic whose concerns seem largely anthropocentric. The New Homiletic has faced criticism for being closely sympathetic with neo-orthodox theology and for being reflective of postmodern philosophy. However, perhaps the problem of the New Homiletic is that while it takes very seriously what is on the mind of man, this emphasis subjugates understanding the mind of God.

For example, in David Buttrick's *Homiletic Moves and Structures*, one will find less of exegetical practice, and a great deal of the science of semiotics. Buttrick's emphasis is illustrative of the vibe of the New Homiletic; namely, that the chief concern of the preacher is the study of the mind of man. In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Barth responds to Schleiermacher by saying, "one can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice."¹⁰ A homiletic theory with an anthropocentric strain will be challenged to accomplish the purposes of God in preaching.

By contrast, a faithful exposition of Scripture reveals the words, which reveals the Word, Who reveals God Himself. True expository preaching understands the mind of men, but seeks first to uncover the mind of God. Thus the *λογος*, the Son, is exposed in the human speech of preaching.

Colossians 1:15–20

"And He is the image of the invisible God . . ."

The structure of Colossians 1:15–20 is to posit Christ's supremacy over all things then to build subsequent arguments around this idea.¹¹ The

⁹See Augustine, *On The Trinity*, Book 13, trans. Arthur West Haddan, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, ed. Phillip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 3:166–82.

¹⁰Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1928), 196.

¹¹The textual divisions could begin at v. 9 or 12, and could extend to v. 23 or 29. However v. 15 begins with Christ as the subject proper, and in v. 21 the subject of the sentence transfers to the recipient of the letter.

supremacy of Christ is illustrated by at least five proofs: Christ is the very image of God (v. 1a); Christ is the source of, sustains, and is the reason for all creation (vv. 1b–17); Christ is head over the church by virtue of His resurrection (v. 18); God was pleased that the πλήρωμα of Himself be in Christ (v. 19); and Christ is the means of reconciliation to the Father (v. 20). For the purpose of this paper attention will now turn to this first proof, the reality that Christ is the εἰκὼν of the Father.

In verse 15 Paul uses interesting wordplay, seemingly to point to the contrasting work within the Trinity. He notes that Christ is the *image* of the *invisible*. This is a strange and wonderful rhetorical device, for it presents the dilemma of re-presenting something that is actually invisible. Christ is the visible expression of a God who is invisible. Thus the unknown of the Father is known through the Person of Christ.

Perhaps this is the most pressing rationale for a pastoral ministry that contains serious exposition. The preacher faithfully reveals the Word of God; the words of the Word faithfully represent the Son of God, and God's Son perfectly represents the Father. In this way, the preacher stands in God's direct revelation of Himself as the fallible instrument among the perfect Word, the perfect Son, and the perfect Father. The weight of the accountability to God is almost unbearable. The preacher's unfathomable responsibility is to expose the people to the Word. It seems strange that modern preachers would want to do anything less. The explanation of the text is so pregnant with the weight of responsibility that it alone is sufficient. Miraculously, God has graciously allowed that preaching, through the power of His Spirit, *can* represent the text, the text *will* point to Christ, and Christ *will* point to the Father.

While the representation of Christ brings accountability to the preacher, it also brings an equal accountability to the listener. The listener is accountable to God for the simple reason that God communicated Himself to us in the person of Christ.¹² In *The Everlasting Man*, G.K. Chesterton argues for a distinct human origin when he writes,

It is the simple truth that man does differ from the brutes in kind and degree; and the proof of it is here; that it sounds like a truism to say that the most primitive man drew a picture of

¹²This is illustrated by the relationship of Colossians 1:15, "All things were created by Him and for Him"; and Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The implications of this integration on the problem of those who have not heard the Gospel will not be explored here. However an important aside is the weight that this natural revelation adds to the responsibility of preachers to connect nature and Christ.

a monkey and that it sounds like a joke to say that the most intelligent monkey drew a picture of a man. Something of division and disproportion has appeared; and it is unique. Art is the signature of man.¹³

Some suggest that the drawings of the primitive man were not art in a technical sense. Rather, the drawings were an attempt to re-present certain events making them more of a chronicling than an expression of art. Regardless, they were at least representation and certainly communication. Thus if “art is the signature of man,” perhaps communication is the accountability of man. In other words, the presence of communication allows a holy God to hold men liable since they have been communicated to through the person of Jesus Christ.

There is a sense of accountability to a God who has so clearly revealed Himself and will again reveal Himself. All preachers therefore, are doubly accountable to represent a text faithfully, which in turn represents Christ perfectly, who represents the Father perfectly.

Philippians 2:5–11

“Although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself”

Paul’s description of Christ’s *εἰκένωσεν* or “emptying” is a source of textual, and historically, theological concern, namely that Christ chose to set aside his rights as God. This does not suggest that He was no longer God, rather that He made a conscience choice to daily neglect the use of His attributes with which He was fully endued.

In essence Christ concealed Himself so that He might reveal the Father. Thus the veiling of Christ’s full identity was necessary for God to be known fully.

In the same way the Christian preacher’s “rights” are willfully suspended in an effort to reveal the Father. Christ’s emptying was a necessary means of accomplishing the communication of the incarnation. Preaching can only veil God or the preacher, if the preacher is not veiled, then God will be. Thus the preacher must be tied to the text in a way that hides himself and throws light upon God through the Scripture. As François Fénelon noted,

¹³G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 33–34.

The good man seeks to please only that he may urge justice and the other virtues by making them attractive. He who seeks his own interest, his reputation, his fortune, dreams of pleasing only that he may gain the bow and esteem of men able to satisfy his greed or his ambition.¹⁴

The divesting of oneself of rights, privileges and status seems particularly foreign to what any human, preacher or not, desires. The natural desire of a preacher is to consummate the call of God within the pride of one's ability. This position is antithetical to Christian preaching for the very reason that the proclamation of the Word of God cannot be separated from its means. There is no separation from the means of communication, Christ incarnate, and the message He came to preach.¹⁵ Christ came to say that one must die to himself and then find life in Him. The medium in which He spoke those words was a broken, humble spirit of an individual who, in reality, laid claim to all that existed. The clarity of the method of Christ did not veil, rather it facilitated, the message of the Gospel. The message Christ preached was modeled in the way that He preached it. Can Christian preaching do any less?

All internal desires for wealth, fame, notoriety, attention, accolade, praise, and comfort fight the very message preached. What blistered irony that when a sinful spirit carpets the heart of the preacher, the most faithful explanation of the Word is drowned. It defeats the purpose of God. And, if God will not use this type of man, then logically cunning exegesis and contemporary application cannot overcome this errant posture.

Hebrews 1:1–5

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.”

The author of Hebrews structures this chapter to show the superiority of Christ over the prophets and over the angels. To build this argument he notes that, among other things Christ is the *χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ*, the exact representation of the Father. Apparently this text seems to have a cohesive relationship between Paul's idea of Christ as the *εἰκὼν*

¹⁴François Fenelon, *Dialogues on Eloquence*, trans. Wilbur Samuel Howell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 62.

¹⁵This is an allusion to Marshall McLuhan's suggested relationship between the message and medium of communication. The Christological application of McLuhan's thought is a subject worthy of further explanation. For an anthology of McLuhan, see *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (Perseus: New York, 1995).

of God. (Col 1:15). While the two texts are similar, they emphasize two different facets of Christ's character.

In the Colossians text, the emphasis is on the visibility of Christ versus the invisibility of the Father. The value of the εἰκὼν is that he is the visible of that which cannot be seen. The emphasis in Hebrews 1:3 is on Christ's representation of the essence of the Father. What Christ represented was truly God. This in turn aids an understanding of Colossians 1:19, namely that the Father was pleased that the πλήρωμα of God was in Christ. From these passages one can conclude there was nothing that God wanted to reveal of Himself that Christ was not. When Christ ascended he left nothing unsaid. All that the Father wanted to communicate was done so perfectly through Jesus. If the preacher is to model perfect communication, he must ask if he has said what the text said. It is true that some sermons never seem to end, yet the liability exists to sit down when God is not finished speaking. Within customary constraints, the text should be mined for God's full revelation of Himself, knowing that until this has happened the sermon is not finished.

Christ left the pulpit of His incarnation knowing that He had not wasted a word expressing to the world the essence of the Father. Again, echoing the Colossians text, the preacher is called to represent the Word exactly, which represents Christ exactly, who in turn represents the Father exactly.

Application

If those charged with the exposition of Scripture are to understand the mission to imitate the obedience of the incarnation it would have at least nine effects on the pulpit ministry.

1. *There will be a refusal to represent the text weakly.*
How could one offer anything but faithful exposition of a Word that so faithfully, and perfectly represents One who so faithfully and perfectly represented the Father.
2. *The preacher will see himself in the line of God's chosen revelation of Himself. (1 Cor 1:21).*
3. *The preacher will be profoundly humble.*
Could arrogance exist where the preacher understood his role as a conduit of the truth of God?
4. *The preacher will refuse to bring anything, any word, or any thought before people in which the net effect was to distract from the text of Scripture.*

5. *The preacher will refuse to use the pulpit as a place to showcase rhetorical ability.*
6. *The preacher will be more committed to the effort needed to communicate the message, mirroring the way that Christ took tremendous pains to communicate Himself in the incarnation.*
7. *The preacher will preach with a confident assurance.*
8. *The preacher will refuse to judge the effect of His preaching by immediate emotional response.* If the incarnation teaches us anything it is that the real fruit is fruit that remains.
9. *The preacher will call for decision.* No one can be exposed to the Christ of Scripture and remain neutral.

Conclusion

John 1 instructs us that Christ is the Word of God. If Christ is the *λογος* of God, then preachers should speech God. This requires consciously identifying what is on the mind of God as we identify what is on the mind of man. According to Colossians 1, this invisible mind of God was revealed in Christ who is the image of the Father. There is an accountability on the part of people who can so clearly see Christ, and a double accountability to preachers, by faithful exposition, to represent this representation. Hebrews 1 convinces the preacher that he is to strive for exact representation, and Philippians 2 yields that the preacher is to reveal the Father by the emptying of his personal rights and privileges.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were multiple attempts to decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. In the late 1800s Napoleon had captured Egypt, and in 1877 French soldiers began to dig in an effort to build a fort for Napoleon. One of the soldiers, Pierre-François Bouchard, found a block of black basalt stone, later to be named the Rosetta Stone. It measured three feet nine inches long, two feet four and half inches wide, and eleven inches thick and it contained three distinct bands of writing. Etched on the stone were three languages: on the top was hieroglyphics, demotic in the middle, followed by Greek on the bottom. Hieroglyphics were common in Egypt, but up to that date no one was able to decipher the mysterious language. While the historical value of the demotic was uncertain, they quickly realized that the names of royalty in the bottom Greek text corresponded to similar characters in the cartouches within the hieroglyphics. After twenty years Jean-François Champollion broke the code and deciphered the meaning of the hiero-

glyphics. The language could not be understood apart from a translating language.¹⁶

On the Rosetta Stone of the Word of God, Christ is the translating language. One reads Scripture and ponders at the hieroglyphics of a God who would love Israel; the wrath of a God who would destroy Sodom; or the wisdom of a God who would create man. He is beyond comprehension. Yet on the pages of the same book is God's Speech, Jesus Christ. In his humanity he decoded the God who was beyond our comprehension. Thus the bottom Greek of Christ translates for us the top hieroglyphic of God.

Therefore, expository preaching is faithful to the text for the very reason that the text speaks of Christ. In explaining the words of the Word, one is explaining the Son of God Himself Who is revealing God Himself. And, according to 1 Corinthians 1:21, this was the plan of God from the beginning. The plan was for the preacher to reveal God's Son, by preaching God's Word. Therefore, while the impetus for exposition surely merges from a commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, clearly a commitment to exposition is also borne on the shoulders of a salient Christology.

¹⁶Richard A. Strachen, Katheleen A. Roetzel, *Ancient Peoples: A Hypertext View*. <http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/hieroglyphics/rosettastone.html> (Accessed 8 September 2006).

***“To Emulate and Imitate”:
Possidius’ Life of Augustine as a Fifth
Century Discipleship Tool***

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I. Introduction¹

In the final chapter of his *Vita Augustini* (*Life of Augustine*), Possidius declares, “I want to emulate and imitate him in the present world and enjoy the promises of almighty God with him in the world to come.”² While stating this resolution at the end of his work, Possidius actually articulates his intent for writing the *Vita* in the first place—to invite others, particularly spiritual leaders, to reflect upon Augustine’s example and to imitate it.

In this article, I will argue that the *Vita*, a work largely ignored by Augustinian scholars, served as a sequel of sorts to Augustine’s *Confessiones* in that it continued to inspire and exhort servants of God and church leaders toward making spiritual progress (*proficere*) while also providing practical help for how to minister in the fifth-century uncertainty of Roman Africa. To make the case, I will first show that while Possidius’ work generally resembles the corpus of the third- and fourth-century saints’ biographies (*vitae*), its unique features and purpose do distinguish it from the period’s

¹This article was first read as a paper at the 59th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, CA on November 14, 2007. I wish to thank my colleagues in the Patristics and Medieval study group for their helpful feedback, especially Dr. W. Brian Shelton, who wrote the formal response. I am also indebted to my colleague Dr. Emily Heady at the Liberty University Graduate Writing Center for her feedback and wordsmithing.

²*Et in hoc saeculo aemulator et imitator existam, et in futuro omnipotentis Dei promissis cum eodem perfruar.* Possidius, *Vita Augustini* [VA] 31.11. All Latin quotations of Possidius and Augustine are from *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, [PL] S. Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino> (Accessed 6 March 2009). English translations are either my own, or from John E. Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine* (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1988).

hagiography. Finally, through Possidius' lenses, I will argue that imitation (*imitatio*) was more than a mere literary device in hagiography but a continuation of Augustine's convictions for discipleship, particularly for church leaders. In short, I trust this contribution will encourage students of Augustine to "take up and read" Possidius' *Vita* and that modern ministers will consider afresh the role of imitation in mentoring and discipleship.

II. Who was Possidius?

Possidius (c. 370–440) claimed to have known Augustine on an intimate level for forty years.³ He probably joined Augustine's garden monastery at Hippo in 391 and then later moved with Augustine into the clergy house (*monasterium clericorum*) in 395 when he was consecrated as co-bishop in Hippo.⁴ Around 400, Possidius was set apart as the bishop of Calama (modern Guelma, Algeria) and served in that role until 437 when he was forced to flee as the Vandal Genseric conquered the city.⁵

According to the acts of the North African church councils, Possidius was an active participant in the councils of Carthage of 403, 404, 407, 410, 411 and 418 as well as the council of Milevus in 416.⁶ At times, his involvement included traveling after certain councils to communicate a decision or to carry out the will of the assembled bishops.⁷ Following the council of Milevus, Possidius co-signed Augustine's *Epistulae* 176–177—addressed to Bishop Innocent of Rome—letters that communicated the theological position of the Numidian bishops regarding Pelagius.

Possidius' episcopal service was repeatedly met with violence. After attempting to reach out in an evangelical and unifying manner to his Donatist counterpart in Calama in 403, Possidius was physically beaten by a Donatist mob.⁸ Similarly, in 408, he was the victim of an attack at

³Cf. Possidius, *VA* 31.11.

⁴Cf. Edward Smither, "Principles of Mentoring Spiritual Leaders in the Pastoral Ministry of Augustine of Hippo," (PhD diss., University of Wales-Lampeter, 2006), 204–20; cf. Possidius, *VA* 19.6; and Gustave Bardy, *Saint Augustin: L'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Bibliothèque Augustinienne, 1948), 209.

⁵Augustine, *Epistula* 101; Mark Vessey, "Possidius," in Allan Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 668.

⁶André Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-empire*, Vol. 1, *Afrique (303–533)* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1982), 56–58.

⁷Following the councils of 404 and 410, Possidius traveled to the imperial court at Ravenna. After the councils of 407 and 418, he traveled with Augustine in Africa on church business. Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 280–81; Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-empire*, 57.

⁸This "outreach," a directive of the council of Carthage of 403, was an attempt to solve the Donatist schism. Vessey, "Possidius," 668; Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 271; Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-empire*, 890–91.

the hands of a pagan mob. Following this incident, Augustine personally traveled to be with his disciple and colleague, which most likely explains his noticeable absence at the councils of Carthage in 408 and 409.⁹ Finally, during the horrific Vandal siege of Calama in 428, Possidius and other clergy took refuge with Augustine in Hippo.¹⁰ Possidius did return to Calama after Augustine's death in 430 for a brief period of time; yet, as noted, he completely abandoned the city in 437.¹¹

Thus, Possidius' claim to a close relationship with Augustine is quite credible. After several years of common living in the Hippo monasteries, Possidius maintained regular contact with Augustine through collaboration during and after annual church councils, including some extended periods of travel. Othmar Perler has further argued that the two bishops were in contact during Augustine's other travels.¹² Finally, as a result of his displacement from Calama in 428, Possidius was with Augustine during the final two years of Augustine's life and present when Augustine died.¹³ Rotelle argues that since Possidius received only one letter from Augustine (*Epistula* 245)—a primary means of clerical communication for Augustine—the two men must have been in such regular contact that correspondence was not warranted.¹⁴

The *Vita Augustini* was Possidius' only literary contribution. As Possidius probably returned to Calama in late 431 or early 432 after the Vandal siege of Hippo, the *Vita* was most likely composed sometime between 432 and 437.

III. Hagiography as a Genre

In order to give a context in which to analyze Possidius' *Vita*, it would be beneficial first to survey briefly the corpus of *vitae* in circulation prior to the fifth century as well as to consider hagiography in general as a genre of religious literature. What was its nature and structure? Who were the

⁹Augustine, *Epistula* 91; Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 285; Othmar Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1969), 266–69.

¹⁰Possidius, *VA* 28.13; 29:1–2; Vessey, "Possidius," 668; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1967, 2000), 409.

¹¹Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 17.

¹²Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* 86, 232, 265–69, 346; and Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 283–85.

¹³Possidius, *VA* 29, 31.

¹⁴Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 12. Letters were of course one of Augustine's primary means of communicating with and mentoring his Hippo monastery alumni who were serving the African church. 105 of Augustine's 252 extant letters were addressed to clergy and nearly all contained an element of mentoring. Cf. Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 220–54.

authors and audiences? What were its purposes and intents in relation to the life of the church?

1. Hagiography in Modern Regard

The corpus of “saints’ lives” is vast and includes over 8000 individual biographies stemming from the early church through the medieval period.¹⁵ Despite its widespread audience and acceptance in antiquity, the majority of modern church historians have little regard for its historical value. Hence, hagiography has become a much castigated notion leading scholars to dismiss it as pious fiction or fraudulent plagiarism, and thus of little historical value.¹⁶

Edward Gibbon sharply criticized it for being untruthful yet rationalized its lack of historicity on account of the hagiographers’ pious intentions.¹⁷ Hyppolète Delehaye, in his definitive work *Legends of the Saints*, dismissed the accounts of the saints as legends fabricated by plagiarizing writers who could not distinguish between history and myth.¹⁸ He further attacked readers of hagiography for being simple and primitive.¹⁹ In particular, Delehaye seems to have a certain disdain for miraculous accounts.²⁰ Thomas O’Loughlin suggests that Delehaye’s de-mythologizing approach to hagiography was a forerunner to Bultmann’s critical approach to Scripture as Delehaye’s work precedes Bultmann by some twenty years.²¹

In the last century, John J. O’Meara also dismissed hagiography as a credible historical source, assigning it lesser status on the intellectual chain of dignity, especially when compared to great works of early Christian thought. The great irony is that while O’Meara held these views and discouraged scholarly work in hagiography, he became a leading scholar in Irish Latin works and produced a translation of *The Voyage of St. Brendan*.²²

¹⁵*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiqua et Mediae Aetatis*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 1898–1901, 1949); Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13.

¹⁶Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 16, 55.

¹⁷Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (New York: Modern Library, 1932), 467; Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 55.

¹⁸Hyppolète Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V.M. Crawford, *Medieval Sourcebook*, 12, 66. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/delehaye-legends.html> (Accessed 3 September 2007).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 50.

²¹Thomas O’Loughlin, “Introduction,” in Hyppolète Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), x.

²²John J. O’Meara, *The Voyage of St. Brendan* (Buckinghamshire, UK: Colin Smythe, 1991). I am indebted to my conversations and correspondence with Thomas O’Loughlin, a student of the late O’Meara, who shared with me these insights.

The modern dismissal of hagiography by these and other scholars is actually more reflective of a post-nineteenth century worldview than a patristic or medieval one. As Heffernan argues, a “modern understanding of medieval sacred biography remains overly committed to this post-Enlightenment position. Such an empirical view . . . misunderstood and misrepresented the idea of history which sacred biography claimed for itself.”²³ The modern empirical view not only dismisses outright the miraculous and supernatural, but it also suspiciously interprets the author’s intentions and motives.²⁴ While its reductionist tendencies reveal a rationalist bias toward myth, the value of hagiography is relegated to a mere existential level as Gibbon has concluded. That is, though historically inaccurate, it is religiously meaningful.²⁵

Ironically, patristic and medieval intellectuals like Athanasius, Augustine, Jerome, the Cappadocians, Aquinas, and Bonaventure all had a high regard for hagiography and most contributed to this genre. Unlike the post-Enlightenment historians, their spiritual worldview was not at all vexed by the miraculous nor did they question the sincerity of the hagiographer.²⁶

In appealing to modern scholars to read hagiography with less skepticism, Heffernan has rightly renamed this genre “sacred biography.” While the position of this paper is certainly not an uncritical acceptance of hagiography, I maintain with Heffernan that there is much value in surveying these texts in order to gain some historical understanding, especially when the particular account can be corroborated from other sources. As we shall consider shortly, hagiography ought to be considered for its authorial intent vis à vis the original audience and for its value as a discipleship tool in the early church.

2. Nature of Hagiography

Before moving to the broader question of intent and purpose, the categories, nature and general patterns of hagiography must be treated. Delehaye categorizes hagiography according to its level of historical reliability,²⁷ not terribly unlike the Islamic science of the *hadith* tradition.

²³Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 39.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵Kevin Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 39; David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1989, 2000), 129–30, 182; Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 41.

²⁶Delehaye admitted as much. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 65. Cf. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 27, 61.

²⁷Delehaye’s levels include: (1) saints officially canonized by the church (2) eyewitness accounts (3) accounts based on written sources (4) accounts based on imagined sources and

Yet, as a genre, patristic hagiography falls into three broad categories: accounts of martyrdom, lives of saints, and sermons or orations dedicated to saints or martyrs. A brief consideration of each category follows, including a summary of some key examples.

Martyrs. Beginning with Luke's account of Stephen in Acts 7,²⁸ arguably the earliest account of Christian martyrdom, the lives and testimonies of the martyrs quickly began to be written and circulated in the church in the early centuries.²⁹ This form of hagiography was, of course, accelerated by sporadic periods of persecution against the church prior to Galerius' edict of Nicomedia in 311. The stories of the martyrs developed within the context of the church's battle with the lapsed and the confessors, schismatic movements (Novatianism, Donatism), and the resulting questions of soteriology and church membership. They also surely contributed to the cult of martyrs and veneration of saints that plagued the church in the patristic period.³⁰

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is a famous account of the bishop of Smyrna's arrest and execution around 155.³¹ Though generally discounted because of the voice heard from heaven³² and Polycarp's inflammability at the stake,³³ it was nevertheless recorded by eyewitnesses shortly after the event.³⁴ While the author is clearly biased toward Polycarp's humility and holiness,³⁵ the work is addressed to the community of faith³⁶ to encourage them to follow Polycarp's imitation of Christ even to the point of martyrdom.³⁷ Thus, he was "an outstanding martyr whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, since it was in accord with the pattern of the gospel of Christ."³⁸

(5) forgeries. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 108–15.

²⁸Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 218.

²⁹Herbert Mursurillo provides a translation of some key accounts of martyrdom. Herbert Mursurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

³⁰For more on the accounts of martyrdom and cult of martyrs, see W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965). For more on hagiographical accounts of martyrdom, see Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 218–21.

³¹*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, 1999), 222–45.

³²*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9.1.

³³*Ibid.*, 15–16.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 15.1; 18.1. This criteria would put it high on Delehaye's scale of credibility. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 112–13.

³⁵*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 7.3.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 1.2.

³⁷A similar case can be made in Ignatius' *Letter to the Romans*, 6.3. Cf. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 173.

³⁸*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19.1. English translation is from Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 243. This value is also repeated in 22.1.

The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, equally as famous as Polycarp's account, is the story of an aristocratic North African woman, her servant Felicitas, and three other men who were executed in the arena in Carthage in 203. Allegedly edited by Tertullian, the text has three voices: Perpetua's own diary,³⁹ her fellow martyr Saturus,⁴⁰ and an anonymous author and narrator.⁴¹ While Delehaye would certainly have problems with the four dream narratives in the text,⁴² the fact that Perpetua and Felicitas are canonized by the church does give more historical credence to the account.⁴³ With sacrificing all for Christ as the primary theme, the hagiographer's intended purpose is explicit—to be read for the “edification of men”⁴⁴ and for “the edification of the church.”⁴⁵

Lives. A second area of hagiography is simply a testimony of the “lives” (*vitae*) of saints. The earliest and most well known accounts in the patristic period, which will be discussed briefly, are dedicated to monks (Antony, Paul, Malchus), monk-bishops (Martin of Tours), and bishops (Ambrose).

Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, a much celebrated work by the embattled bishop of Alexandria, was written to extol the virtues of heremitic monasticism. Though Athanasius, like other hagiographers, appealed to his own credibility as a reporter,⁴⁶ modern readers have been skeptical of a piece that includes such supernatural elements as elaborate battles and even conversation with the devil,⁴⁷ delivering others from evil spirits,⁴⁸ healing,⁴⁹ and visions.⁵⁰ Perhaps Athanasius' greatest bias was depicting Antony as a thoroughgoing Nicene Christian who left his monastic dwelling to make an appearance in Alexandria to express an anti-Arian position!⁵¹ Despite these problems, Athanasius' purpose is also clear—to show through Antony's life that Jesus is Lord and that the Christian is victorious in the

³⁹James W. Halporn, *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr, 1984), 3–10.

⁴⁰Ibid., 11–13.

⁴¹Ibid., 1–3; 14–21.

⁴²Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 200.

⁴³Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 108–09.

⁴⁴“... aedificationem hominis . . .” Passio 1.1, in Halporn, *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, 11.

⁴⁵“... exempla in aedificationem Ecclesiae legere debet . . .” Ibid., 21.11.

⁴⁶Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, Prologue.

⁴⁷Ibid., 5–6; 16–43; 55–56.

⁴⁸Ibid., 48; 63–64.

⁴⁹Ibid., 14–15; 57–58; 61–62; 71; 83–85.

⁵⁰Ibid., 60; 65.

⁵¹Ibid., 67–70; 82.

spiritual realms,⁵² and that his readers would emulate Antony's devotion to monastic discipline.⁵³

It seems that Jerome's purpose in writing the *Vita Pauli* was to show that Paul, an Egyptian monk who fled into the Egyptian desert during the third century Decian persecution the Apostle, and not Antony was the originator of the heremitic monastic life. He would later contribute the *Vita Malchi*, a monk's battle to preserve his virginity amidst the challenges of slavery, kidnapping, depression, and forced marriage.⁵⁴ Despite his prowess as a translator and exegete, Jerome's hagiographical work is the most difficult to believe amongst the *vitae* and has been deemed "monastic romance" by one scholar.⁵⁵

Sulpitius Severus' *Vita Sancti Martini* was a prized piece depicting the life of the soldier turned monk who later became bishop of Tours. Despite Severus' statement of his veracity,⁵⁶ Boniface Ramsey dismisses the work as filled with "fantastical improbabilities"⁵⁷ largely on account of Martin's confrontations with the devil,⁵⁸ exorcisms,⁵⁹ healings,⁶⁰ and bold confrontation of evil pagan rituals.⁶¹ Though we would expect Delehaye to side with Ramsey in his assessment of Severus' account, he surprisingly refers to Severus as an historian.⁶² Perhaps Delehaye gives more credence to this text because much of Severus' account comes from his own personal contact with Martin.⁶³ Aside from the miraculous accounts, Martin is also remembered for his stature as a monk-bishop⁶⁴ as well as an ally and disciple of Hilary of Poitiers in the battle against Arianism.⁶⁵ Regardless of modern disagreements over the *Vita's* credibility, Severus' intended purpose for writing is clear: "I think I will accomplish something well worth the

⁵²Ibid., 94.

⁵³Ibid., Prologue.

⁵⁴Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome* (London:Routledge, 2002), 85.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Sulpitius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 1. Latin text available online at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/sulpiciusseverusmartin.html> (Accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁷Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London: Routledge, 1997), 195.

⁵⁸Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 6; 21–24.

⁵⁹Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰Ibid., 7–8; 15; 18–19.

⁶¹Ibid., 11–14.

⁶²Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 61.

⁶³Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 25.

⁶⁴Ibid., 9–10. There are two helpful studies on the patristic monk-bishop phenomenon: Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Philip Rouseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the 'Monk-Bishop': Elements in Some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1971): 380–419.

⁶⁵Cf. Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 6.

necessary pains, if I write the life of a most holy man, which shall serve in the future as an example to others; by which, the readers shall be roused to the pursuit of true knowledge, and heavenly warfare, and divine virtue.”⁶⁶

Paulinus of Milan dedicates the *Vita Ambrosii* to Augustine, who had requested that Paulinus write a testimony of Ambrose’s life in the pattern employed by Athanasius, Jerome, and Sulpitius Severus.⁶⁷ Thus, Paulinus’ claim to truthfulness is also disregarded by modern commentators as an obligatory literary device,⁶⁸ and three particular events in the work are considered fabricated: the account of bees swarming in and out of the infant Ambrose’s mouth;⁶⁹ his raising a dead child to life;⁷⁰ and his ascension from catechumen to bishop in eight days.⁷¹ Further, Ambrose’s initial refusal of the episcopal appointment is regarded as a trope—another hagiographical device intended to highlight his humility and holiness.⁷² Ironically, Ambrose’s conflict with the devil and ministry as an exorcist are not addressed with the same scrutiny.⁷³

Despite these criticisms of Paulinus’ motive and accuracy, his *Vita* contains elements that are historically reliable and can be corroborated by Ambrose’s letters and the acts of church councils in Italy. Though previously a local Roman governor, he did indeed change careers in 374 and became the bishop of Milan. It is also evident that he was a defender of the church of Milan against its enemies, which included civil authorities and Arian church leaders.

Regardless of the historical quibbles surrounding *Vita Ambrosii*, Paulinus’ key theme is simply that Ambrose was a holy man and bishop for the people of Milan.⁷⁴ Thus, his purpose was to encourage Christians and church leaders alike to imitate Ambrose’s example.

Sermons and Orations. Sermons and orations also functioned in the same manner as the lives of the martyrs and saints and should also

⁶⁶ “. . . unde facturus mihi operae pretium videor, si vitam sanctissimi viri, exemplo aliis mox futuram, perscripsero: quo utique ad veram sapientiam et caelestem militiam divinamque virtutem legentes incitabuntur.” Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 1. English translation is from Sulpitius Severus, *Life of St. Martin*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: MA, Hendricksen, 1994), 9:4.

⁶⁷Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 1.

⁶⁸Ibid., 2.

⁶⁹Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰Ibid., 28.

⁷¹Ibid., 9. Cf. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 195.

⁷²Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 9.

⁷³Ibid., 21.

⁷⁴Ambrose is referred to as holy (*sanctus*) on seven occasions by Paulinus (Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 16.3; 18.4; 33.1; 40.1; 45.2; 51.1; 52.1). Cf. Emilien Lamirande, *Paulin de Milan et La Vita Ambrosii: Aspects de la religion sous le Bas Empire* (Paris: Desclée, 1983), 77.

be considered in the corpus of early church hagiography. In *Oratione* 21, Gregory of Nazianzus commemorated the life of Athanasius while Gregory of Nyssa accomplished the same in a funeral eulogy to his brother Basil of Caesarea. Augustine dedicated around 100 sermons to the memory of the martyrs, preaching them on their feast days.⁷⁵ It was for this reason that he refused the request of Paulinus of Milan—whom Augustine had commissioned to write the *Vita Ambrosii*—to write a general life of the martyrs.⁷⁶

To demonstrate how sermons also related to the overall genre of hagiography, a brief survey of Augustine's nine sermons commemorating Cyprian, the martyred bishop of Carthage, will be considered.⁷⁷ Augustine preached *Sermo* 309 in Carthage and his purpose was to celebrate Cyprian's victorious martyrdom.⁷⁸ Cyprian is depicted as a heavenly citizen engaged in battle in the earthly city with political leaders whom Augustine referred to as the devil's agents.⁷⁹ In this context of suffering, Augustine highlighted Cyprian's practical and tangible work as a bishop.⁸⁰

Sermo 310 was most likely preached in Hippo, which alone indicates that Cyprian's life and martyrdom were known by the greater North African church.⁸¹ As Cyprian was renowned for his preaching, writings, and what others reported of his life, Augustine seems to build upon that reputation in this sermon and implicitly invites the hearer to imitate Cyprian.⁸² Finally, Augustine adds that God is victorious in martyrdom.⁸³

In *Sermo* 311, Augustine reminded his listeners that "the right way to celebrate the festivals of the martyrs should be by imitating their virtues. It's easy enough to celebrate in honor of a martyr; the great thing is to imitate the martyr's faith and patience."⁸⁴ As martyrs like Cyprian gave

⁷⁵These sermons can be found in English in John E. Rotelle, *Sermons: Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century [WSA]*, 3:9–10 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994).

⁷⁶Augustine, *Epistula* 29*.1; Louis Hamilton, "Possidius' Augustine and Post-Augustinian Africa," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004): 92.

⁷⁷Augustine preached each sermon on September 14, Cyprian's feast day and the date of his martyrdom in 258. Though Augustine actually preached ten feast day sermons about Cyprian, *Sermo* 313F does not mention Cyprian and will not be examined in this study.

⁷⁸Augustine, *Sermo* 309.1.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 309.2, 6.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 309.4.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 310.1.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 310.4.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 310.2.

⁸⁴"*Sed celebratio solemnitatis martyrum, imitatio debet esse virtutum. Facile est honorem martyris celebrari: magnum est fidem atque patientiam martyris imitari.*" Augustine, *Sermo* 311.1 in PL 38. All English translations of Augustine's *sermones* are from *WSA*.

their lives and rejected the world's pleasures, Augustine urges his people to renounce the world and live for eternity.⁸⁵

In *Sermo* 312, Augustine tells of Cyprian's conversion experience and the fate of those who emulated his faith. He recounts, "Some people, you see, by imitating Cyprian gained life."⁸⁶ Through remembering Cyprian's life of faith in word and in deed, Augustine concludes by praising the God of Cyprian.⁸⁷

Augustine focuses on Cyprian as a model convert, pastor, confessor, and persevering saint in *Sermo* 313.⁸⁸ A model that brings glory to God, Cyprian is depicted as a sword in Lord's hands, slaying His enemies yet making friends of them as they come to saving faith.⁸⁹

In *Sermo* 313A, Augustine again reminds his hearers, "it's easy to celebrate the feasts of the martyrs; it's difficult to imitate the martyrs' sufferings."⁹⁰ Acknowledging the average person's love for the shows in the coliseum and imaginative identification with the gladiator, Augustine challenges them to imitate Cyprian who was put on display for his holiness and commitment to truth.⁹¹ Augustine also indicates in this sermon that Cyprian's *Passio* was read publicly in the church and thus well known to the African Christians.⁹²

In *Sermo* 313B, Augustine speculates that even Cyprian's persecutors became imitators of his faith, were converted, and followed him in martyrdom.⁹³ He adds in *Sermo* 313C that because of Cyprian's death, God is praised and believers are encouraged, and the pleasant aroma of Christ has spread in Carthage, Africa, and throughout the world.⁹⁴ In *Sermo* 313D, Augustine highlights Cyprian's consistent life and teaching: "what he taught before he carried it out, what he carried out because he already taught it."⁹⁵ As Cyprian followed Christ in His sufferings, Augustine challenges his hearers to deny the temporal world and live for eternal purposes.⁹⁶ Finally, in *Sermo* 313E, Augustine refers to Cyprian's example as a lover of peace and unity as well as a responsible martyr in order to

⁸⁵ Augustine, *Sermo* 311.3.

⁸⁶ "Alii enim Cyprianum imitando vixerunt." Ibid., 312.3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 312.5.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 313.2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 313.2, 5.

⁹⁰ "Facile est martyrum sollemnia celebrare; difficile est martyrum passiones imitari." Ibid., 313A.1.

⁹¹ Ibid., 313A.3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Augustine, *Sermo* 313B.4.

⁹⁴ Augustine, *Sermo* 313C.2.

⁹⁵ ". . . hoc docuit antequam faceret, hoc fecit quia iam docuerat." Augustine, *Sermo* 313D.4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 313D.2–4.

condemn the violence of the Donatist Circumcellions whom he regarded as false martyrs.

3. Summary

As we have shown to this point, in the early church there was a great deal of interest in the lives of the martyrs, saints, monks, and bishops and their memories were preserved through the genre of hagiography or through sermons. Church fathers like Augustine and Jerome not only contributed to this church literature but encouraged its reading as a means of teaching in the church. Not surprisingly, the authors of hagiography were typically clergy and the audience was generally understood to be the communion of saints.⁹⁷

In terms of its historical reliability, hagiography ought to be scrutinized, for as we have seen, there are indeed some fanciful accounts that are desperate for further verification from other sources. We must also admit that most hagiographers had a strong bias regarding their subject such as Athanasius presenting Antony as anti-Arian. Yet, a wholesale denial of all that is supernatural or that pertains to the devil seems to reflect a post-Enlightenment, empirical worldview that has too easily dismissed the important role played by hagiography as a result of the criticisms of Gibbon, Delehaye, and O'Meara, among others.

These important questions of historicity aside, what was the intent of the hagiographers as they communicated their *vitae* to the church? Already implicit in our discussion, the key purpose seems to be discipleship—teaching the church on the life of faith through concrete examples. Thus, to borrow from Augustine's thought, truth (*res*) is more effectively understood and applied through a saint's life than through propositional statements or eloquent communication (*verba*).⁹⁸ Not unlike many of the hagiographers surveyed to this point, Gregory of Tours announced his intentions at the outset of his *Vitae Patrum*: "to build up the church . . . the life of the saints not only opens up their intentions but also excites the minds of the listeners to emulate them."⁹⁹ Though dismissing the *vitae* as legendary accounts, Delehaye also acknowledges their didactic value: "The saints show forth every virtue in superhuman fashion . . . they make every virtue attractive and ever invite Christians to seek it. Their life is indeed the concrete manifestation of the spirit of the Gospel."¹⁰⁰

In light of the church's mission and function to teach the community of faith, Heffernan regards hagiography as narratives or literary mosaics

⁹⁷Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 14, 19.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 5, 32.

⁹⁹English translation cited in Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 4.

¹⁰⁰Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 181.

that actually served as catechetical tools. Comparing them to the Bible stories housed in the stained glass of medieval cathedrals, he concludes that “the primary social function of sacred biography . . . is to teach (*docere*) the truth of the faith through the principle of individual example.”¹⁰¹

IV. Possidius’ *Vita Augustini*

Possidius’ *Vita Augustini* will be explored within the context of the general survey of patristic hagiography offered to this point, including its purposes, nature, and historical concerns. After considering the sources, general structure and content of the *Vita*, its continuity and uniqueness within the matrix of early church hagiography will be discussed in order to more clearly reflect upon Possidius’ purpose for writing.

Before moving to this discussion, a brief word must be said about the relationship between Possidius’ *Vita* and Augustine’s *Confessiones*. Probably written around 397 as a response to Paulinus of Nola’s request for a testimony of Augustine’s spiritual journey, *Confessiones* was a transparent account in which Augustine confessed his sinful past,¹⁰² but more significantly, “what I am now.”¹⁰³ The bishop of Hippo openly shared with his readers his struggle with lustful thoughts;¹⁰⁴ food and gluttony;¹⁰⁵ his fascination with sounds, shapes and colors;¹⁰⁶ a lust of the eyes;¹⁰⁷ pride,¹⁰⁸ and that he enjoyed the praise of men.¹⁰⁹

Despite some recent skepticism over Augustine’s motives for writing *Confessiones*,¹¹⁰ Augustine’s readers—both clergy and the laity—must have identified with his struggle for purity related through his honest account. Indeed, such transparency attracted those who wanted to sojourn with Augustine in the journey of faith in the earthly city.

While Possidius certainly had a personal understanding of *Confessiones*, he was also aware of its wide readership in Africa and around the Mediterranean world.¹¹¹ Thus, he writes: “I do not intend to recount everything that blessed Augustine has told us in his *Confessiones*, where he

¹⁰¹Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 19.

¹⁰²Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.5.6; 1.10.16; 1.13.21–2; 1.19.30; 2.2.2; 3.1.1; 2.4.9.

¹⁰³“*Hic est fructus confessionum mearum, non quails fuerim, sed qualis sim.*” Augustine, *Confessiones* 10.4.6.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 10.30.42.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 10.31.43, 45, 47.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 10.33.49–50; 10.34.51.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 10.35.54–7.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 10.36.59.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 10.37.61; Smither, “Principles of Mentoring,” 143–44.

¹¹⁰James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine of Hippo: A New Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 36.

¹¹¹As noted, the initial request for *Confessiones* came from Nola in Italy.

describes the kind of person he was before receiving grace [in baptism] and the kind of life he lived after receiving it."¹¹² Though not a seamless sequel, Possidius intentionally seems to offer a complimentary account of *Confessiones*.

1. Sources

While Possidius certainly had a favorable bias toward Augustine, modern historians have a difficult time criticizing Possidius for his sources. Having shared the same living space with Augustine from 391 to 400 and from 428 to 430, and having kept in close contact with the bishop of Hippo, Possidius' *Vita* gains credibility because of his personal eyewitness accounts.¹¹³ In the opening preface, Possidius aims to relate "what I saw of him and heard from him,"¹¹⁴ and "what I learned from him and what I experienced myself in many years of close association with him."¹¹⁵ For instance, Possidius was surely present in the church at Hippo when Augustine began to preach while still only a presbyter.¹¹⁶ Possidius also draws upon the eyewitness testimonies of others in his presentation.¹¹⁷ He further relies upon documentary evidence that included the records of public debates¹¹⁸ and Augustine's own letters.¹¹⁹ Perhaps in contrast to the fanciful hagiographer, Possidius is forthright about what he cannot verify.¹²⁰

That Possidius wrote the *Vita* shortly after Augustine's death and based it on seemingly reliable sources certainly exonerates him from the criticism Delehaye has leveled against hagiographers in general.¹²¹ In fact, without mentioning Possidius, Delehaye gives some merit to Possidius' method of gathering sources and reporting.¹²² As we will show, Possidius' account is further strengthened when read in concert with Augustine's sermons and letters, for these documents are generally regarded as reliable. Thus, Rotelle concludes, "No one doubts the historical authenticity of the

¹¹²"*Nec attingam ea omnia insinuare, quae idem beatissimus Augustinus in suis Confessionum libris de semetipso, qualis ante perceptam gratiam fuerit, qualisque iam sumpta viveret, designavit.*" Possidius, *VA* Praef.5.

¹¹³Possidius, *VA* Praef.1; 15.1–6; 22.8; 24.5; 17; 28.13; 29.1–2; 31.1–3, 5.

¹¹⁴"... *quae in eodem vidi, ab eoque audivi.*..." Ibid., Praef.1.

¹¹⁵"... *quae per eum didici, et expertus sum, quam plurimis annis eius inhaerens caritati.*..." Ibid., Praef.3.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 5.3.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 4.1–3; 27.6, 9.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 6; 7; 24.7; 16.2–4; 17.6–7.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 8.5; 20.3; 30.

¹²⁰Ibid., 15.5, 7.

¹²¹Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 70.

¹²²Ibid., 113.

Life of Augustine,¹²³ while Vessey adds that it is “substantially reliable so far as it can be checked.”¹²⁴

2. Structure and Content

Trained in rhetoric and the art of eloquent communication, Augustine was a prolific writer and communicator who put those skills to use in some 117 books, many of which were persuasive and apologetic in nature.¹²⁵ Possidius, on the other hand, does not seem to have excelled as a preacher,¹²⁶ and his communication in church councils—particularly exchanges with the Donatists—was concise and sometimes blunt.¹²⁷ These tendencies can also be observed in the *Vita*—a short text of only 12,000 words written in simple Latin.

Introduction. Following a brief preface detailing his intentions, Possidius dedicates the first chapter to recounting Augustine’s birth, family, conversion, and baptism. In chapter 2, Possidius reiterates Augustine’s renunciation of his career and resolve to abandon the world for an ascetic life.¹²⁸ As noted, he justifies the brevity of these two chapters by acknowledging his readers’ familiarity with these biographical accounts in *Confessiones*. From this basis, Possidius does begin a sequel to *Confessiones* by revealing aspects that Augustine does not choose to address.¹²⁹ Apart from this introduction, chapters 3–18 and 27.6–31 can generally be considered chronological accounts, while chapters 19–27.5 are reflections within this chronological structure of Augustine’s character.

Initial Chronological Account (Chapters 3–18). In chapter 3, Possidius recounts Augustine’s return to Africa and the establishment of a proto-monastery on his family’s estate at Tagaste.¹³⁰ In the latter half of the chapter, Augustine makes his initial journey to Hippo to meet with a Roman official desiring to follow Christ and renounce the world.¹³¹

Chapter 4 is devoted to Augustine’s celebrated career change in 391 in which he was ordained against his will by Bishop Valerius. This passage is regarded as a trope by many scholars as Possidius places Augustine in line with Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Paulinus of Milan as holy men who resisted the ministry but ultimately

¹²³Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 18.

¹²⁴Vessey, “Possidius,” 668.

¹²⁵Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 4.2.3, 12.28.

¹²⁶Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 266.

¹²⁷Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 15.

¹²⁸These accounts are corroborated in *Confessiones* 8.12.30.

¹²⁹The events of Possidius, *VA* 1–11 could have been treated in *Confessiones* as they occurred before its redaction c. 397.

¹³⁰Possidius, *VA* 3.1–2; Smither, “Principles of Mentoring,” 197–204.

¹³¹Possidius, *VA* 3.3–5.

yielded their own will to the high calling. Despite a sure bias on Possidius' part, the fact remains that prior to 391, Augustine was on no observable course for church ministry, while after 391, he remained in ministry for forty years. Also, Possidius' account seems to be confirmed by Augustine in *Sermo* 355.¹³²

In chapter 5, we read that Valerius allows Augustine to continue in his monastic vision while serving as a presbyter and the Hippo garden monastery is founded.¹³³ In the remainder of the chapter, Possidius discusses Valerius' controversial practice of allowing Augustine to preach before he had attained the office of bishop,¹³⁴ which is corroborated by Augustine's *Epistula* 29 and his sermon on the Creed given to the bishops at the council of Hippo in 393.

Possidius summarizes Augustine's ministry as an apologist against the Manicheans in chapters 6 and 7. This ministry, supported by sermons, teaching, and books, consequently served to strengthen the church in orthodoxy.¹³⁵ In chapter 8, Possidius recounts Augustine's promotion to co-bishop with Valerius in 395—another ordination that Augustine seemed to resist before complying.¹³⁶ Yet, Possidius correctly shows that Augustine was not in favor of Valerius' manner of ordaining clergy, such that he broke with this practice when he was made sole bishop of Hippo in c. 397.¹³⁷

In chapters 9–10 and 12–14, Possidius summarizes Augustine's interaction with the Donatists. While this contact included rather amicable debate through letters and personal encounters,¹³⁸ Possidius also notes the violence of the Circumcellion faction to which he was personally a victim.¹³⁹ Finally, Possidius records the imperial suppression of the Donatists, verified by the council of Carthage of 411, an action that Possidius interpreted as “unity and peace.”¹⁴⁰

In the context of these Donatist battles, Possidius in chapter 11 parenthetically mentions the clergy house (*monasterium clericorum*), which had been initiated by Augustine in 395 upon his consecration as co-bishop.¹⁴¹

¹³²Augustine, *Sermo* 355.2; see also my argument in Edward Smither, “An Unlikely and Unrecognized Influence? The Impact of Valerius of Hippo on Augustine,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007): 251–64.

¹³³Possidius, *VA* 5.1; Smither, “Principles of Mentoring,” 204–08.

¹³⁴Possidius, *VA* 5.2–5.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 7.2–4.

¹³⁶This account is corroborated by Paulinus of Nola's *Epistula* 32 (in the corpus of Augustine's letters).

¹³⁷Possidius, *VA* 8.5; Augustine, *Epistulae* 126; 213.

¹³⁸Possidius, *VA* 9; 14.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 10; 12.

¹⁴⁰“... et multiplicabatur pacis unitas...” *Ibid.*, 13.1.

¹⁴¹Possidius, *VA* 11; Augustine, *Sermo* 355.2; Smither, “Principles of Mentoring,” 208–20.

Possidius' point is to show that Augustine succeeded in training quality men within the monastery who then were sent as bishops to the churches of North Africa.¹⁴²

In chapters 15–16, Possidius recounts further contacts Augustine had with the Manicheans, including a personal encounter with a certain Firmus, who became a Christian,¹⁴³ as well as a public debate in Carthage that also resulted in Manicheans being converted.¹⁴⁴ Possidius concludes this chronological section in chapters 17–18 with a summary of Augustine's contacts and debates with Arians¹⁴⁵ and his writings and work in church councils dealing with the Pelagian controversy.¹⁴⁶

Account of Augustine's Character in Ministry (Chapters 19–27.5).

While chronicling Augustine's career as a monk-bishop and defender of the church against heresy—an account repeatedly supported by other documents—Possidius comments on Augustine's holy character in carrying out this work. In chapter 19, Augustine is portrayed serving as a civil judge, a responsibility imposed upon bishops by the *Codex Theodosius*. Though other sources reveal that Augustine loathed this responsibility, Possidius indicates that Augustine persevered in this duty in order to influence the citizens of Hippo with a biblical perspective.¹⁴⁷ In chapter 20, Augustine is recorded successfully interceding for residents of Hippo before the Roman authorities.¹⁴⁸ In chapter 21, Possidius highlights Augustine's involvement in the African church councils in which he labored for the benefit of the church and its clergy.¹⁴⁹ Finally, in chapters 23 and 24, Possidius discusses two of Augustine's other roles as bishop—caring for the material needs of the poor and administering church property. He concludes that Augustine fulfilled these duties with care, integrity, and simplicity.

The remaining chapters in this section of the *Vita* reveal Augustine's monastic values of simplicity and holiness. In chapter 22, Possidius shows Augustine's modest dress and diet. Though meals were certainly not extravagant in the Hippo monastery, Possidius emphasizes Augustine's hospitality and table fellowship, including the famous warning about gossip: "Let those who like to slander the life of the absent one know that their

¹⁴²Possidius, *VIA* 11.3; Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 218–20.

¹⁴³Possidius, *VIA* 15.5–7.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 16.1–4.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 17:1–7; corroborated by Augustine's *Epistulae* 238–39.

¹⁴⁶Possidius, *VIA* 18.1–5.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 19.4; Augustine, *Epistulae* 33.5; 213.5; 24*.1; Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 187.

¹⁴⁸This account is confirmed by Augustine, *Epistulae* 152–55.

¹⁴⁹Augustine probably took part in twenty-two church councils between 393–427. Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 267–81; Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, 430–76.

own are not worthy at this table."¹⁵⁰ In chapter 25, Possidius highlights the Hippo monastery's discipline as monks were to refrain from swearing, were at times rebuked, and were constrained to regularly forgive one another. Similarly, in chapter 26, Possidius adds that significant efforts were made to limit contact with women. Under no circumstance was a woman allowed in the monastery and if a priest needed to visit a woman for the purpose of ministry, then he was required take another priest or bishop with him. In 27.1–5, Possidius relates that Augustine, for the sake of holiness, refrained from visiting the women's monastery and refused social engagements such as dinner invitations.

Second Chronological Account (Chapters 27.6–31). The final section of the *Vita* is a chronological account of Augustine's final days, which also coincided with the Vandal conquest of Hippo in 430. As noted, Possidius, resident in Hippo from 428–430, wrote these final chapters based on his eyewitness accounts. In the remainder of chapter 27, Possidius begins to relate Augustine's final days by first considering Ambrose's experience in death as well as Cyprian's writings on entering eternity. At the outset of chapter 28, Possidius shows Augustine preparing not only for death but for the imminent Vandal siege by reviewing all of his books and publishing his *Retractationes* or "reconsiderations."¹⁵¹ Possidius seemed to have been involved in this editing process, which of course included his *Indiculus* or index of Augustine's works that was appended to the *Vita*. The rest of chapter 28 details the horror and destruction caused by the Vandal movement eastward from Mauretania Caesarea, a tragedy in which Possidius himself was displaced and forced to flee to Hippo.¹⁵²

Ironically, in chapter 29, as Augustine's health is declining, Possidius reports that a sick visitor came to Augustine for prayer and the ailing bishop responded by laying hands on him and successfully praying for his healing. Chapter 30 presents a unique parenthetical thought in the dying narrative as Possidius includes the full text of a letter written by Augustine to a bishop requesting wisdom on how clergy ought to respond to the Vandal persecution.¹⁵³ In the rather lengthy response, which makes up one-fifth of the entire *Vita*, Augustine urges clergy not to abandon their congregations during persecution.

In chapter 31, Possidius records Augustine's last days—a time in which he ceased receiving visitors and concentrated on confession and

¹⁵⁰"*Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere vitam, Hanc mensam indignam noverit esse suam.*" Possidius, *VA* 22.6.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 28.1–3.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 28.4–13.

¹⁵³The letter is not in the collection of Augustine's letters and is believed to have been published by Possidius. Rotelle, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, 126.

prayer.¹⁵⁴ Employing an economy of words that characterizes the *Vita*, Possidius added: “Then, with all his bodily members still intact and with sight and hearing undiminished, as we stood by watching and praying, he fell asleep with his fathers (as the Scripture says) in a good old age.”¹⁵⁵ After that, Possidius reflected on Augustine’s legacy, which included his writings and his disciples—many of whom had become bishops in the African church.¹⁵⁶ Finally, Possidius concludes the *Vita* by reiterating his motives for writing, which will be dealt with in the next section.¹⁵⁷

3. Continuity with Patristic Hagiography

Possidius’ work stands clearly in the tradition of patristic hagiography for several reasons. First, he is noticeably biased toward his subject and his favorite descriptors for Augustine are “blessed” (*beatissimus*)¹⁵⁸ and “holy” (*sanctus*).¹⁵⁹ In this sense, his presentation of Augustine closely resembles Paulinus’ account of Ambrose. In portraying Augustine as a holy man in life and deed, Possidius also references him within a fraternity of other saints mentioned in the *Vita*—David, Cyprian, Athanasius, Valerius, and Ambrose.¹⁶⁰

Secondly, though Possidius has endeavored to present a chronological account, especially in chapters 3–18 and 27.6–31, this value gives way to the higher priority of remembering Augustine’s character. Thirdly, like other hagiographers surveyed, Possidius makes a claim to truthfulness by defending the merits of his endeavor as well as the reliability of his sources.¹⁶¹ Fourth, his stated audience is also the church or communion of saints.¹⁶²

With that, Possidius’ work preserves the primary purpose of hagiography—presenting a concrete holy example that the church could imitate. In the preface to his work he states clearly, “I have tried to use whatever talents and literary powers I have for building up the holy and true catholic church of Christ the Lord.”¹⁶³ Possidius’ own resolve, articulated at the

¹⁵⁴Possidius, *VA* 31.1–3.

¹⁵⁵“*Membris omnibus sui corporis incolumis, integro aspectu atque auditu, et, ut scriptum est, nobis astantibus, et videntibus, et orantibus obdormiuit cum patribus suis enutritus in bona senectute.*” Ibid., 31.5.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 31.6–8.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 31.9–11.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., Praef.5; 11.3.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., Praef.6; 2.2; 6.4; 9.2; 12.9; 13.5; 16.2; 24.4; 24.6.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 30.36 (David); 27.11 (Cyprian); 30.22 (Athanasius); 24.17 (Ambrose); 4.1; 5.2 (Valerius).

¹⁶¹Ibid., Praef.3.

¹⁶²Ibid., Praef.4; 12.4–5; 14.7–8; 18.9; 21.1.

¹⁶³“... *studens ex qualicumque accepto ingenio et sermone aedificationi prodesse sanctae ac verae Christi Domini catholicae Ecclesiae.*” Ibid., Praef.1.

close of the *Vita* was “to emulate and imitate” Augustine—an invitation he surely gives to his readers in presenting Augustine’s humility, simplicity, chastity, care for widows and the poor, high regard for the holy Scriptures among other character qualities.¹⁶⁴ Finally, Possidius is quite aware that he is writing within this ecclesiastical literary tradition and is content to offer his own contribution:

We know from our reading that other devout men belonging to our holy mother, the catholic church, have set themselves a similar task in the past. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they have used voice or pen to convey, for the information of those desirous of hearing or reading, what they knew of the great and outstanding individuals who lived their lives in accordance with the Lord’s grace that is given to all and who persevered in that grace until death.¹⁶⁵

4. Unique Features

Despite the *Vita Augustini*’s similarity to the corpus of patristic hagiography, it does seem to break with the genre in at least three areas. First, it is the most historically reliable of the *vitae* previously surveyed and winsomely stands up to the scrutiny raised by critics like Delehay. Possidius’ use of generally reliable sources—eyewitness accounts, documentary sources, and his appended *Induculus*¹⁶⁶ of Augustine’s writings—seems to indicate that he understood the enduring historical value of his work. As Augustine was a careful theologian, exegete and philosopher, Possidius seems to employ this same precision in his historical work.

Secondly, Possidius breaks with the hagiographical tradition because his *Vita* is quite practical, depicting a monk-bishop at work serving the church and combating heresy. In what Van der Meer described as “nothing very remarkable,” Possidius does purposely depart from the “divine, holy man” nature of the accounts of Antony, Martin, Perpetua, Paul, and Ambrose.¹⁶⁷ Most notably, Possidius’ *Vita* contains only one miracle

¹⁶⁴Ibid., Praef.5–6; 31.1–2; 11.2; 22.1–8; 26; 27.3; 9.2; 2.1–2.

¹⁶⁵“*Id enim etiam ante nos factitatum fuisse a religiosissimis sanctae matris Ecclesiae catholicae viris legimus et comperimus, qui divino afflato Spiritu, sermone proprio atque stilo, et auribus et oculis scire volentium, dicendo et scribendo similia studiosorum notitiae intulerunt, quales quantique viri ex communi dominica gratia in rebus humanis, et vivere, et usque in finem obitus perseverare meruerint.*” Possidius, *VA* Praef.2.

¹⁶⁶I am indebted to Thomas O’Loughlin’s insights on the *Indiculus*, which he related to me in conversation.

¹⁶⁷Frederick Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: Church and Society at the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, trans. B. Battershaw and G.R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 274;

story, an aspect that has caused historians to be suspicious of Possidius as a hagiographer.¹⁶⁸ Yet Possidius' work does seem faithful to Augustine's view of the miraculous, particularly as a basis for spiritual authority.¹⁶⁹ For instance, Augustine was concerned at one point that the *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicitas was being placed on par with the canonical Scriptures.¹⁷⁰ Though he did gain a greater appreciation for miracles and even relics as a part of worship later in his life, Augustine proceeded with caution and approached miracle accounts in a rather empirical fashion.¹⁷¹ Thus, Possidius frames his *Vita* with the principles of his mentor in mind.

Thirdly, though Possidius declared that his audience was the church, it seems that he was also aiming a bit more specifically and writing to its leadership, the clergy. In this sense, Possidius has an audience within an audience. As *Confessiones* was probably requested by a bishop, Paulinus of Nola, its primary readers were also clergy. Thus, when Possidius, in his preface, acknowledges that his readers were familiar with *Confessiones* and prepares his account in a complementary manner, he is probably primarily writing to those in ministry. With that, the focal point of Possidius' *Vita* is Augustine's holy work as a monk-bishop—defending orthodoxy, preaching, serving as a judge, caring for the poor, administering church property, etc.—an occupation that could most be appreciated by other clergy.¹⁷²

Louis Hamilton argues that Possidius' focus is even more specific in that he aims to give clergy direction for leading the church in the midst of persecution brought on by the Vandal conquest.¹⁷³ While Possidius alludes throughout the *Vita* to the instability of Roman Africa, the most compelling evidence is the inclusion of Augustine's entire letter to Honoratus in chapter 30, which answers queries on leading the church amidst such suffering. That Augustine's letter comprises one-fifth of Possidius' work certainly lends credence to Hamilton's thesis.

Having been a member of Augustine's clerical monastery in Hippo, Possidius certainly highlights Augustine's role as a mentor to emerging spiritual leaders who would go on to serve as deacons, presbyters, and bishops in the North African churches.¹⁷⁴ Having benefited from Augustine's training and preparation in the monastic context, Possidius of course served for over thirty years as the bishop of Calama. Hence, it seems quite

Hamilton, "Possidius' Augustine and Post-Augustinian Africa," 93.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 88.

¹⁶⁹Possidius, *VA* 29.5.

¹⁷⁰Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 193.

¹⁷¹Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 22.8; *Epistulae* 227; 29*; *Retractationes* 1.13.7; Brown, 418–19.

¹⁷²Hamilton, "Possidius' Augustine and Post-Augustinian Africa," 96–97.

¹⁷³Ibid., 86, 96.

¹⁷⁴Possidius, *VA* 11.3.

plausible that Possidius would continue Augustine's mentoring legacy to spiritual leaders by writing up an ordered and practical account that the clergy—especially those struggling to lead their churches in persecution—would find encouraging, and of course, be compelled to imitate.

V. Conclusion: Possidius, Augustine, and *Imitatio*

Possidius' *Vita Augustini*, a largely undervalued presentation of Augustine's life and ministry, stands clearly in the tradition of patristic hagiography. Yet, Possidius, while certainly biased in commemorating his mentor, diverges from the miraculous "divine-man" narratives of the third and fourth centuries and offers a practical account of a bishop serving the church in the midst of the fall of Roman Africa. While Possidius' *Vita* is certainly intended for the church, he seems to be primarily inviting other clergy to "imitate and emulate" Augustine in uncertain times.

Though Possidius' primary purpose in writing—encouraging imitation and emulation of Augustine's example—is consistent with the aims of patristic hagiography, imitation was also a key discipleship value for Augustine. His monastic program, which followed in the tradition of Pachomius and Basil, where the group itself was the key means of spiritual growth for individuals,¹⁷⁵ was dependent upon Augustine's disciples observing his tangible holiness in the daily context of the monastery and church at Hippo. That Augustine stayed in regular contact with Hippo alumni such as Alypius and Possidius not only testified to his relational nature but to his ongoing personal mentoring that required imitation.¹⁷⁶ As we have shown in the summaries of Augustine's sermons on Cyprian, he preached the virtues of the Christian life by holding up for imitation the concrete example of such a Christian, bishop, and martyr. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, a further examination of Augustine's writings shows that *imitatio* was probably his most cherished value in discipleship.¹⁷⁷ Thus, in one sense, Possidius has carried on Augustine's principle of mentoring others, especially spiritual leaders, through telling Augustine's story and inviting his readers to imitate Augustine.

Ironically, apart from the *Indiculus*, the *Vita* tells us virtually nothing of Augustine's work as a theologian or philosopher, which seems to indicate that Possidius regarded Augustine as a servant to the church more than a thinker. Augustine himself reflected these pastoral priorities in a terse reply in 410—the same year that the Vandals sacked Rome—to a student posing questions on Cicero:

¹⁷⁵Smither, "Principles of Mentoring," 66–107.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 283–85.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 310–14.

For my mind fails to find a proper appearance of things when I think that a bishop, torn this way and that by noisy concerns of the church, holds himself back from all these, as if he suddenly became deaf, and explains minor questions about the Ciceronian dialogues to a single individual.¹⁷⁸

It seems that Possidius' pastoral focus, not to mention the *Vita's* membership in the largely disregarded corpus of hagiography, explains why most Augustinian scholars have not given serious regard to the *Vita Augustini*. It is thus the goal of this article to call for a respectful re-reading of Possidius with appreciation for its historical value as well as its aims to promote spiritual growth within the church and in the lives of its leaders.

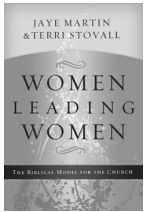
¹⁷⁸*Non enim decora facies rerum attingit sensum meum, cum cogito episcopum ecclesiasticis curis circumstrepentibus districtum atque distentum, repente quasi obsurdescentem cobibere se ab his omnibus, et dialogorum Tullianorum quaestiunculas uni scholastico exponere.*" Augustine, *Epistula* 118.1.2. English translation from Roland Teske in *WSA*, 2.2.105.

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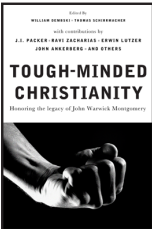
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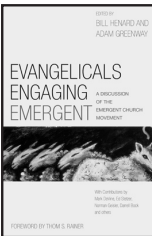


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*The Attraction of Beauty in an Ugly World:
On the Relationship of Discipling
and Evangelism*

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In their 2004 album *Head for the Door*, the Exies recorded a song called “Ugly,” which asked,

Are you ugly?
A liar like me?
A user, a lost soul?
Someone you don’t know
Money it’s no cure
A Sickness so pure
Are you like me?
Are you ugly?

We are dirt, we are alone
You know we are far from sober!
We are fake, we are afraid
You know it’s far from over
We are dirt, we are alone
You know we are far from sober!
Look closer, are you like me?
Are you ugly?¹

Whether they realize it or not, this secular musical group has painted a pretty faithful, if incomplete, picture of the impact of sin on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. To be sure, the biblical images for sin’s effect with which we are more familiar are the metaphors of blindness and deafness (Matt 13:14–15; 2 Cor 4:4), and death (Eph 2:1). These

¹The Exies, “Ugly,” on the album *Head for the Door* (Virgin Records, 2004).

concepts point to the way in which sin affects our reaction (or lack thereof) to divine revelation. The value of the Exies' metaphor, when applied Christianly, is that it reminds us of how sin makes us unattractive to each other, how we are much less than the "very good" creation God designed us to be (Gen 1:31).

The idea that sin makes people ugly is the corollary of Jonathan Edwards' understanding of beauty. For Edwards, arguably history's greatest American theologian, God is "infinitely the most beautiful and excellent." "All the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation is . . . the reflection of the diffused beams of that being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory."² Edwards understood creaturely beauty to consist in the reflection of God, conformity to God's character and purposes.

Edwards' conception of beauty points us to Christ as the One who is supremely beautiful in creation. As God, Christ is beauty-itself, the perfect image of the Father (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4). As man, Christ is the perfect fulfillment of what God intended humanity to be, such that He is the "New Adam" (1 Cor 15:45). Insofar as that which is beautiful is also attractive, Christ will be found to be the most attractive Person in all creation (John 12:32).³

The beauty of Christ's own character is replicated in the lives of individuals and churches as people are progressively remade in the "image of Christ." Christlikeness is precisely the result which God has promised He will achieve in all of His children (Rom 8:29). It is also the aim of our own response to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives (Col 3:10–11). Our labor in forming Christlikeness in people is most commonly called "discipling" (Gal 4:19; Matt 28:19–20). What we are about is the transformation of our depraved characters into the character of Christ, the replacement of vice with virtue—in short, exchanging ugliness for beauty.

A Brief Sketch of the New Testament Teaching on Discipling

The foundational command to disciple people is found in Matthew 28:19–20, where we are commanded,

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded

²Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation II. The Nature of True Virtue*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 550–51.

³Doug Blount, "Apologetics and the Ordinances of the Church," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 43 (2001): 68–83.

you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.⁴

Christ's command clearly entails the work of evangelism as the way in which a person comes to the faith in Christ that leads them to baptism as their first act of Christian obedience. Yet the disciple-making that starts with evangelism does not end there. The task of "teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you" has, in the New Testament, at least two more distinct, but fully necessary elements.

First of these, both in order of importance and sequence, is the work of constructive discipling. In order to observe the commandments of Christ, one must be taught what they are and how to obey them in the 'real world.' A.B. Bruce insisted that "Christian instruction is to be a continuous process . . . with a view to enabling disciples to walk worthily of their vocation."⁵ This means that constructive discipling requires more than mere classroom instruction. It is not merely the conveyance of theoretical information, but practical training to live a Christlike life in the present culture.

Acts describes apostles such as Paul doing this kind of work as they "strengthen[ed] the hearts of the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). Paul also taught that pastors are to fulfill this responsibility when he reminded the church that God has given pastors for "the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). Churches are specifically enjoined to look for this focus and ability in 1 Timothy 3:2, where being "able to teach" (cf. "teach them to observe everything I have commanded you"!) is made a non-negotiable requirement for an overseer (pastor).

Yet, it is a gross misconception to think that the responsibility to help people learn Christlikeness lies only with apostles, pastors, and other specially-called and gifted individuals in the church! Paul calls on all Christians to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess 5:11). Hebrews assigns the task of provoking practical Christlikeness to all Christians by commanding them to

consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (NASB)

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

⁵A.B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 5 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:340.

Ultimately, the creation of Christlikeness in a person is a miracle of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:18–25; Rom 8:11). Yet the Spirit uses various tools to accomplish His purpose. These tools include (but are not limited to) the ministry of the Word (Eph 5:26) and the corporate worship of the church (Col 3:16). Significantly, the Spirit also uses the living examples of individual Christians to provide contextualized models of Christlikeness for others to imitate (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6). Pastors are certainly to teach others by means of a Christlike example (1 Tim 4:12; 1 Pet 5:3). But the New Testament also expects that older, more mature Christian men and women will develop the kind of relationships with younger Christians that will allow the older to develop Christlikeness in the younger through word and deed (Titus 2:2–5).

Constructive discipling is necessary for developing the beauty of a Christlike character in people. Without such training, younger Christians will struggle more than need be both to learn what Christ expects of them and how to live it out in daily life. Unfortunately, constructive discipling is not by itself sufficient to develop the character of Christ in Christians struggling against the enticement of their sinful natures and a seductive world (cf. Rom 7). The New Testament also requires corrective discipling.⁶

Where constructive discipling encourages virtue, corrective discipling addresses vice redemptively. Corrective discipling is commanded and modeled in the New Testament every bit as strongly as constructive discipling. At least eleven times the New Testament commands or commends the work of correction to Christlikeness, using words and phrases like:

Rebuke (Luke 17:3; 1 Tim 5:20; 1 Tim 4:2)

Correct (2 Tim 2:25; 3:16)

Turn a sinner back (Jas 5:19)

Appeal (1 Tim 5:1; Jude 3)

Show him his fault (Matt 18:15)

Reprove (2 Tim 4:2)

Save, snatch from the fire (Jude 23)

At its extreme, corrective discipling will involve public rebuke, and even expulsion (Matt 18:17; 1 Tim 5:20; 1 Cor 5). But these actions are options of last resort to correct a brother who persists defiantly in sin. They are not the usual ways in which the New Testament envisions corrective

⁶I choose the phrase “corrective discipling” instead of the more common “church discipline” because of the unfortunate connotations the latter phrase often carries. Our concern here is much more broad than formal church action against the unrepentant perpetrator of gross sin.

discipling to work. The paradigm for the normal practice of corrective discipling is actually best seen in Galatians 6:1–2,

Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you won't be tempted also. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Here, Christians who are walking with Christ are to help those who are struggling to do so. The goal is the restoration of the sinning brother to obedience and growth in Christlikeness, and thus to unimpeded fellowship with others. Rather than being high-handed or condescending, the spiritual brother should be gentle and encouraging. The discipling Christian must take care not to be tempted also, either by the sin being addressed in the life of the one he is discipling, or by pride.⁷ The goal is neither the self-congratulation of the discipler nor a saint-versus-sinner battle, but rather is to create a situation in which by walking together, one Christian may help another avoid sin and instead faithfully reflect the character of Christ. When Christians come to the aid of one another this way, Paul says, they are fulfilling Christ's command to love each other as Christ has loved us (John 13:34).

Jesus emphasized the redemptive aspect of corrective discipling alongside its corrective aspect by telling us, "if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3).

James encouraged corrective discipling as an expression of love for other Christians when he reminded us that "whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Jas 5:20). This parallels the teaching of Peter, who urged Christians to "keep your love for one another at full strength, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8).

The New Testament expects us to "teach them to obey everything that I have commanded" through both constructive and corrective discipling. Both are necessary. Constructive discipling serves to encourage Christians to cooperate with the Spirit's work of transforming them into the image of Christ. Corrective discipling adds the encouragement and strength of other Christians in obeying Christ to our own when we are too weak to stand alone. If necessary, it also applies progressively stronger forms of confrontation to the life of one who defiantly refuses to deal with

⁷Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 275.

gross sin in their lives. By means of these complementary tools, the Holy Spirit fosters the beauty of Christlikeness in His people.

The Apologetic Connection Between Discipling and Evangelism

The Great Commission certainly connects evangelism and discipling in sequential order—one is not yet obedient to Christ if one has not come to Him in penitent faith for salvation! Yet more must be said about the relationship between these two elements of the Great Commission. Evangelism addresses those who are enslaved to sin and not yet saved—those outside the church. Discipling, both constructive and corrective, addresses those who are reaching for Christlikeness because they are saved—those inside the church. The common denominator is that both evangelism and discipling serve to resolve the problem of sin in the lives of people.⁸ Moreover, as the great Latin American evangelist Luis Palau argued, corrective discipling (esp. church discipline) helps to preserve church leaders and evangelists from having to deal with major sin inside the church—something that inevitably distracts from evangelism.⁹

The connection between discipling and evangelism is stronger, however, than sequential ordering, the correlation of interior and exterior, or even the avoidance of embarrassment or distraction for the evangelist. The New Testament makes the life of the disciplined Christian and church the primary apologetic for the truth of the proclaimed Gospel.¹⁰

Jesus laid down the essential connection between the fruit of discipling and evangelism in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Christ’s command comes as the climax to His claim that His disciples are as salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13–15). At first blush, this command seems to conflict with Jesus’ marginalization of public acts of piety, “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matt 6:1). Yet there is no real conflict. In Matthew 6, Jesus is condemning the common practice of first century Jewish religious leaders, who made a public show of their religiosity (esp. almsgiving, prayer, and fasting), in order to be praised by men. The “good works” which Christ has in mind in Matthew 5:16 are

⁸J. Carl Laney, “The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1986): 353–54.

⁹Luis Palau, “Discipline in the Church”, *Discipleship Journal* 16 (July/Aug 1983), <http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.16.11.html> (Accessed 12 March 2008).

¹⁰Joseph Woodell, “Aesthetic Christian Apologetics” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006).

the kinds of things seen in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–12), the character traits described in the “you have heard it said . . . but I say to you” formulae (Matt 5:21–48) and the description of the character corresponding to the words of the model prayer (Matt 6:19–7:6). In other words, the good works Christ affirms are those which flow naturally out of the Christlike character of the true disciple.¹¹

Christ’s expectation is that the result of such good works (i.e. Christlike character) shining like a light set on a hill is that non-Christians will come to “give glory to your Father in heaven.” The result is more significant than the grudging admission that God is at work in the life of the one who is becoming Christlike—it seems to extend to glorifying God to the point of conversion.¹² No one truly glorifies God short of the affirmation that “Jesus is Lord” (Phil 2:11).

Jesus’ affirmation that people would respond to the Christlikeness of His followers by coming to penitent faith in Himself does not undermine the requirement that the gospel be proclaimed verbally (Matt 10:7; Mark 16:15; Luke 4:18, 43). Jesus was a preacher of the gospel, and His life attracted many to His message. He did not allow any to rely on their lifestyle alone to fulfill their responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

Paul affirmed much the same apologetic strategy in Titus 2:7–8,

Set an example of good works yourself, with integrity and dignity in your teaching. Your message is to be sound beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us.

The message which is to be beyond reproach is both the proclamation of the gospel itself and the correlation of the life of the preacher with that message. Paul is not content, however, to rest the apologetic burden on the life of the preacher alone. He extends it to the lives of all Christians, older men and women, younger women, young men, and even bondservants whose lives are to “adorn” the teaching of the gospel (Titus 2:2–10). For Paul, the preaching of the gospel is enhanced by the behavior of Christians. Their goal should be to “make the Gospel as attractive as possible for those around them” through their Christlikeness.¹³ The proof of the gospel, the silencing of its opponents, is in the lives that the Gospel transforms (Titus 2:11–14).

¹¹Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 128–33.

¹²*Ibid.*, 131–33.

¹³William Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 189.

The most famous apologetics passage is Peter's charge that Christians be ready to give an account of their hope in 1 Peter 3:15–16,

sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. (NASB)

Peter's exhortation to be ready to make a defense of the faith is embedded deeply within a passage that commends the discipleship which results in Christlikeness. His command to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts," and "keep a good conscience" sets the defense of the faith firmly in the context of a Christlike life.¹⁴ It builds on Peter's restatement the apologetic strategy of Christ, mentioned in 1 Peter 2:12,

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they may, by observing your good works, glorify God in a day of visitation.

Peter did not rule out reasoned defense of the faith, but neither did he emphasize it. Instead, he called upon Christians to defend the faith through the beauty of their Christlike character and behavior. The result Peter expected was the same that Christ expected. The beauty of Christlike behavior will prompt even opponents of the gospel to reconsider their negative response and ultimately to glorify God through coming to Christ for salvation.¹⁵

The teaching of Jesus, Paul, and Peter, the greatest preachers of the New Testament, demonstrates that the way in which the New Testament envisions the preached gospel becoming attractive to non-Christians is through the beauty of the Christlike character and behavior of Christians individually and churches collectively. They did not divorce the two, as if merely by living out good character one could claim to be doing evangelism. They tied proclamation and character, not only of individuals but of the church as a whole, into a package of compelling beauty.

¹⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 174. See also J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 189.

¹⁵Schreiner, 122–24.

The Apologetic of Beauty in History

History indicates that the apologetic of Christ and the apostles has met with considerable success when it has been conscientiously applied over time. Two test cases, from different ends of the history of the church, serve to demonstrate the attractiveness of the beauty of Christlikeness. The ante-Nicene church rested its apologetic defense for the truth of Christianity on the beauty of the church, especially on the Christlike love of Christians. More recently, Baptists in America took great pains to ensure the moral purity of their churches and the practical Christlikeness of their members.

The apologetic approach of the church in the first through fourth centuries, the period from the church's birth to the first ecumenical council of Nicea (325 AD), demonstrated dependence on the New Testament pattern. Jesus had commanded His disciples to let their "light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Many of the great apologists in this period, especially in the second century, were sufficiently confident in this strategy and in the lives of Christians whom they had never even met, to make the lives of Christians generally the basis of their defense of the faith against persecutors and emperors alike.

In 138 AD, Aristedes wrote his *Defense of Christianity to the Emperor Hadrian*. In it, he contrasted the power and moral beauty of Christ and His followers with that of the opponents of Christianity. He famously divided humanity into four "races": the barbarians, the Greeks, the Jews, and the Christians.¹⁶ For Aristedes, three of these followed religions that are irrational. The barbarians worship gods by offering them gifts. Yet these gods are so weak, that men must then guard the gifts so that they are not stolen by robbers.¹⁷ The Greeks were little better. They worshipped gods and goddesses who are merely morally degenerate humans writ large.¹⁸ While Jews follow revealed religion, Aristedes accused them of having succumbed to pride by coming to adore the Law and angels more than God Himself.¹⁹ Christians, however, were characterized by customs superior to any of the other three "races." Most significant among these was the love which bound Christians from many different backgrounds together.²⁰ Aristedes, then, made the moral character of Christians, especially their

¹⁶Aristedes, *Apologia* 2.1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alan Menzies, trans. H.R. Kay, Reprint Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 9:264–65.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 3.2

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 8.1–13.8

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3.2

²⁰*Ibid.*, 15.2–10

Christlike love for each other, the core of his defense of the faith.

The author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* (mid to late second century)²¹ also employed the same basic logic as Christ and the apostles. He argued that the Christian faith is superior to all others because it alone comes from God. Everything else is the product of human wisdom. For proof, the *Epistle* offered the “wonderful and confessedly striking method of life” found in Christ’s followers. They do not commit infanticide. They share their resources and love all men in spite of persecution. They return blessing for cursing.²²

Most impressive, however, is *A Plea for the Christians* written by Athenagoras (176). In this work Athenagoras answered the charge that Christians were atheists because they denied the existence of the pagan gods. Though he offered a series of defenses, this chapter culminated in what he undoubtedly considered his strongest argument—the lives of Christians. The summation of his case for Christianity against the philosophers is sufficiently striking to warrant recounting in full.

Allow me here to lift up my voice boldly in loud and audible outcry, pleading as I do before philosophic princes. For who of those that reduce syllogisms, and clear up ambiguities, and explain etymologies, or of those who teach homonyms and synonyms, and predicaments and axioms, and what is the subject and what the predicate, and who promise their disciples by these and such like instructions to make them happy: who of them have so purged their souls as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and, instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them (to abstain from which is of itself an evidence of no mean forbearance), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives? On the contrary, they never cease with evil intent to search out skillfully the secrets of their art, and are ever bent on working some ill, making the art of words and not the exhibition of deeds their business and profession. But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit

²¹Dating for this letter is uncertain, with some scholars favoring dates as early as 130 AD and others ranging as late as the early 200’s AD. Nevertheless, it is fairly certain that the document derives from the ante-Nicene period we are considering. See David Freedman, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) col.1 s.v. “Aristides,” by Robert Grant.

²²Mathetes, *Epistle to Diognetus* 5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. anonymous, Reprint Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:26.

the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth: they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbors as themselves.²³

Athenagoras, like the apologists who came before him, offered as his strongest proof for the validity of the Christian faith, the virtue to be found in the lives of Christians. His contrast of poor and uneducated Christians with highly sophisticated philosophers is all the sharper in light of the elitist claims for the power of philosophy to develop virtue in the lives of those with the leisure and intelligence to pursue it.²⁴

None of these apologetic works are even thinkable apart from the firm assurance of these authors that their claims could be sustained by any interested party in the life of virtually any Christian and any church one might choose to examine! That these authors were willing to risk staking their case for the truth of the faith on such claims bears strong witness to the thorough-going commitment to Christlikeness and thus to discipling across the church in the ante-Nicene period.²⁵

In this same period of time, the Church experienced the most explosive period of growth in its history. Stark estimates the growth rate in this period at about forty percent per decade.²⁶ In less than 300 years, Christianity went from being a minority Jewish sect, to being a large enough target to warrant persecution, to being the largest single religion in the Empire, to being a sufficiently large percentage of the population (especially in cities) to prompt the emperor Constantine to adopt it as the primary tool for unifying the Empire.

More recently, Baptists in the United States also took a holistic approach to discipling very seriously, especially before the twentieth century. Greg Wills has shown that in the 80 years between 1781 and 1860, Georgia Baptists alone exercised the most serious form of corrective

²³Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 11, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, eds. Johannes Quasten and Joseph Plumpe, trans. Joseph Crehan (New York: Newman, 1955), 23:41–42.

²⁴Blount, "Apologetics and the Ordinances of the Church," 72–78.

²⁵Examined from another perspective, the work of Rodney Stark connects the dramatic growth of Christianity in the ante-Nicene period in part to its willingness to risk death in epidemics in order to fulfill the command to care for the sick. While Stark does not describe this as Christlikeness, the willingness to risk death in order to care for those who are at least technically your enemies surely constitutes a high expression of likeness to the One who laid down His life for us while we were yet enemies of God (Rom 5:6–11). See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. 73–94.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 7.

discipline (exclusion) on more than 40,000 church members. Nationally, the reported expulsions by Baptists amounted to one or two percent of their membership annually; formal church discipline was exercised on about three to four percent of members annually.²⁷

Wills notes that Baptist churches in the United States experienced the greatest growth in the periods in which they practiced corrective discipling. Earlier Baptists maintained strict discipline—and grew at twice the rate of the population of the United States. By contrast, he notes, Southern Baptists since 1960 have virtually abandoned consistent, formal corrective discipling, and have barely been able to stay ahead of the growth in the general population.²⁸

Conclusion

The gospel makes claims which fall harshly on the ears of most non-Christians; you are a sinner (Rom 3:23); you stand under the judgment and wrath of God (Rom 6:23); and, there is nothing you can do to gain God's favor (Isa 64:6). Though the gospel is also attractive in itself as "good news," its beauty is seen more clearly, its attractive power felt more keenly, in the context of lives transformed to Christlikeness.

The transformation from a depraved character to one which images the character of Christ is achieved through the discipling which teaches and encourages obedience to the commands of Christ and conformity to His character. This is the task of all Christians, though it is also a non-negotiable requirement for those the church calls to pastor. Discipling requires the constructive communication of both the "what" and the "how" of following Christ. No less necessary, however, is the operation of corrective discipling, both informal and formal. Refusal to help brothers and sisters who are falling into sin to deal successfully with that sin and return to growing in Christlikeness is nothing less than a refusal of Christ's command to love each other as He has loved us (Gal 6:1–2).

Both the experience of Baptists in the United States and the ante-Nicene church suggests that when the church takes the task of discipling seriously, fulfilling both the constructive and corrective aspects of discipling, the long-term result is the numerical growth of the church.

²⁷Greg Wills, "The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 26. Greg Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1789–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸*Ibid.*, 28. Indeed, as Wills notes acerbically, Southern Baptist numbers in the post-1960 era are artificially inflated by the fact that it is "much easier to become a Baptist and almost impossible to become an ex-Baptist" today than it was in the earlier centuries.

The Christlikeness of Christians individually and collectively provides a powerful apologetic that enhances the success of the preaching of the gospel. It should come as no surprise that the connection between evangelism and discipling made by Christ and the apostles should bear the fruit God has promised. The beauty of Christ seen in the lives of those who reflect His character is attractive, especially in contrast to the ugliness of a sin-scarred world.

The Experiential Theology of Augustus Hopkins Strong after a Century

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The following conversation was repeated at least two dozen times: “What is the subject of your dissertation?” “The theology of Augustus H. Strong.” “Was he the *Strong’s Concordance* guy?” “No, that was James Strong.” James Strong (1822–94) and Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921) were contemporaries. Both were New Yorkers. James was born in New York City; Augustus was born in Rochester. James was a Methodist; Augustus was a Baptist. James wrote the *Exhaustive Concordance*; Augustus did not. So, who was Augustus Strong and why is he significant?

Augustus Hopkins Strong was a Baptist pastor,¹ seminary president, theologian,² author, and denominational statesman. He is variously described as “perhaps the most notable Baptist theologian of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries,”³ “one of the most influential conservative Protestant thinkers in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,”⁴ and “one of the most influential Baptist theologians of the twentieth century.”⁵ Through his students he influenced many states and nations. “For forty years many of the most influential and educated Baptist ministers of the North sat in Strong’s classrooms at Rochester and learned their theology from him.”⁶ In 1918 Strong noted, “The forty years

¹First Baptist Church, Haverhill, MA (1861–65); First Baptist Church, Cleveland, OH (1865–72).

²President and Professor of Systematic Theology, Rochester Theological Seminary, Rochester, NY (1872–1912).

³Kurt A. Richardson, “Augustus Hopkins Strong,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 289.

⁴Steven R. Pointer, “Augustus H. Strong,” in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 1.

⁵Gregory Alan Thornbury, “Augustus Hopkins Strong,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 139.

⁶*Ibid.*, 140.

of my presidency and teaching in Rochester Theological Seminary have been rewarded by the knowledge that more than a hundred of my pupils have become missionaries in heathen lands.”⁷ Further, his writing outlived both him and his students. Wacker notes that Strong’s *Systematic Theology* “may well have been the most widely read theology textbook in the major Protestant seminaries,”⁸ and this remained true for some sixty years after Strong’s death.

Thiessen observed, “Only a very small percentage of books survive more than a quarter of a century” and “a much smaller percentage last for a century.”⁹ Strong’s *Systematic Theology* is a rare exception. The first of eight editions, published in 1886, quickly became known as an orthodox, Calvinistic, Baptist theology. Few content changes were made through the first seven editions. The seventh edition of 1902 grew by two pages—from 758 pages in the first edition to 760 in the seventh. The eighth edition (1907–1909), however, contained major changes.

Modernism was in its ascendancy at the turn of the twentieth century. The Modernist/Fundamentalist Controversy among Northern Baptists was on the near horizon. Though Strong believed he was firmly lashed to the mast of orthodoxy, he was attracted to modernism’s Siren song. In fact, he made major shifts in his thinking around the turn of the century. Between 1902 and 1907 Strong determined to incorporate his new convictions into his *Systematic Theology*.

Strong expanded the eighth and final edition, originally published in three volumes, to 1166 pages and significantly altered the content. For example, he was an “immediate” creationist, but he became a “mediate and immediate” theistic evolutionist. He was an inerrantist; he became a denier of inerrancy. He previously rejected historical criticism; he then embraced its conclusions. Even so, Grudem states that Strong’s *Systematic Theology* “was widely used in Baptist circles for most of the twentieth century, until it was replaced by Millard Erickson’s *Christian Theology*.”¹⁰

Continuing Influence

Strong was a dominant figure in his day. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Strong’s influence, though much reduced, continues.

⁷Augustus Hopkins Strong, *A Tour of Missions: Observations and Conclusions* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1918), v.

⁸Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 6.

⁹Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 45.

¹⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1229.

He is often quoted in theological works. For instance, Thornbury notes, “Clark Pinnock has recently elicited Strong’s support in his advocacy of soteriological inclusivism.”¹¹ Aside from footnotes in scholarly works, Strong has another indirect present-day influence. Since his *Systematic Theology* was widely used in Baptist seminaries until the mid-1980s, several contemporary theologians, including Millard Erickson¹² and Paige Patterson,¹³ received their first theological training indirectly from Strong. Did Strong’s theology, therefore, play some role in the twentieth century in the Southern Baptist Convention? With 2007–2009 being the centennial of the publication of the eighth edition of Strong’s *Systematic Theology*, it is appropriate to reexamine the influential theology of Augustus Hopkins Strong.

An Experiential Theology

A second and lesser-known work by Strong provides the key to interpreting the shifts in his *Systematic Theology*. Strong wrote his *Autobiography* between his sixtieth and eighty-first birthdays.¹⁴ He reviewed his life for his children and grandchildren, noting twelve theological lessons learned along the way. He wove these lessons into his life story, and they demonstrate his personal theological shifts.

Strong’s theological lessons grew out of his personal spiritual experience, as outlined in the *Autobiography* and admitted elsewhere. In the introduction to the eighth edition of his *Systematic Theology*, Strong expressed his thanks to God “for that personal experience of union with Christ which . . . enabled . . . [him] to see in science and philosophy the teaching of . . . [his] Lord.”¹⁵ On 13 January 1913, the alumni presented a bronze bust of Strong to the Rochester Theological Seminary. Strong had retired, but was on hand for the unveiling and delivered an autobiographical address, entitled “Theology and Experience.” He stated, “I have no message except the message of my personal religious experience. . . . [M]y views of evangelical doctrine have been necessarily determined by the circumstances of my individual history.”¹⁶

¹¹Thornbury, “Augustus Hopkins Strong,” 141; Clark H. Pinnock, “Overcoming Misgivings About Evangelical Inclusivism,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2.2 (1998): 33.

¹²Millard J. Erickson, interview by Timothy Christian, 2 April 2005, Albany, NY.

¹³Paige Patterson, interview by Timothy Christian, n.d., Londonderry, NH.

¹⁴Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong*, ed. Crerar Douglas (Valley Forge: Judson, 1981), 25, 348.

¹⁵Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., rev. and enl., 3 vols. (1907–1909; reprint, Valley Forge: Judson, 1993), viii.

¹⁶Augustus Hopkins Strong, “Theology and Experience,” in *One Hundred Chapel-*

Strong's twelve theological lessons were sin; regeneration; atonement; the church; union with Christ; Christ the Creator; prayer; Christ's race guilt; Christ's race responsibility; ethical monism; the unity and sufficiency of Scripture; and, divine immanence.¹⁷ This article will focus on seven of the lessons. These sufficiently illustrate the various ways in which personal experience formed and revised Strong's theology. We will note where Strong remained faithful to his Baptist heritage, and where he did not.

1. Sin

His first lesson in Christian doctrine was "the depth and enormity of sin."¹⁸ This realization began during the spring break of his junior year at Yale. Strong arrived home on 8 April 1856, ready to enjoy a spring break. He was disappointed to learn that Charles Finney was conducting his third revival campaign in Rochester.¹⁹ Strong was not interested, but his exuberant family convinced him to attend. That night, the church building was packed; Strong sat in a chair in the middle aisle. He recalled:

I remember nothing of the sermon or the service, until the very close. . . . I had no thought of personal responsibility or of being forced to a decision. . . . Mr. Finney . . . ask[ed] all who were convinced that they ought to submit themselves to God to rise from their places, pass through the aisles, and go into the room below. To me it was like a thunderclap from a clear sky. I knew that I ought to submit myself to God. . . . For the first time in my life I felt compelled to act.²⁰

The embarrassed but convicted collegiate, along with about fifty others, made his way to the basement room set aside for inquirers. The church's pastor, Frank F. Ellinwood, asked if he was a Christian. Strong confessed he was not. The pastor said:

Talks to Theological Students Together with Two Autobiographical Addresses (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1913), 4.

¹⁷Strong, *Autobiography*, 88–346.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁹Lewis A. Drummond, *A Fresh Look at the Life and Ministry of Charles G. Finney* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 189, 241. Finney's first revival campaign in Rochester was in 1830–31, in which Strong's father, Alvah Strong, was converted. The second continued for two months in the spring of 1843. The third continued through the winter and spring of 1855–1856.

²⁰Strong, *Autobiography*, 84.

“You have some feeling on the subject of religions?” “No, I have no feeling at all.” “But by your coming here you have virtually said you know you ought to submit yourself to God?” “Yes,” I replied, “I know I ought.” “Will you, then, submit yourself to God, now?” “That is a great question,” I answered. “I do not know what it means, and do not know how.” “But you know that you have been doing wrong all your life; will you begin now to do right? You have been living for self; will you now begin to live for God?”²¹

Strong hesitated. What might God require? Could he promise to live for God without knowing what he promised? Even so, the promise was made. Later, he wrote:

I do not remember that the pastor prayed with me or said anything further except to express the hope that I would soon find the light. I went out from the inquiry room, and the darkness outside seemed the very image of the darkness of my soul. All the way home I was saying to myself, “What a fool I have been to promise I know not what!” But then the good Spirit within me led me to respond, “God knows, and God will show me.”²²

That evening, on his knees at his bedside, Strong promised to read the Bible and pray every day, vowed his faithful service, and asked God for wisdom and direction. “I had no feeling that God heard or that my prayer was answered,” he confessed. “All I knew was that I had done the best I could.”²³ Later, Strong observed:

I had no idea that night that I was a Christian, nor was I even sure that I had truly turned to God. But I now believe that night to have been the night of my conversion. It was indeed a very *unintelligent conversion*. I do not remember that I had any thought of the Lord Jesus Christ as the way to God or as the sacrifice for sin; much less did I regard myself as having come into any definite relationship of union or fellowship with him. Nor did I think of the Holy Spirit as in any way influencing me. . . . My conversion was a purely New School conversion. To my mind, coming to God was an affair of my own will alone, and conversion was simply the giving up of my sins and the

²¹Ibid., 85.

²²Ibid., 86.

²³Ibid.

beginning of a life of obedience. Yet I now see that here were *repentance and faith in the germ*. I did hate my sins and wanted to turn from them. I did cast myself upon God for help and salvation, and though *I did not realize it*, this was a casting of myself upon Christ, who is none other than God manifested to help and to save; this was *implicit reliance* upon the Holy Spirit, who is none other than God manifested to enlighten and to regenerate.²⁴

One is justified to query whether it is possible to receive salvation without a conscious faith in Jesus Christ. Is a desire to give up one's sins and a determination to live obediently an unconscious faith in Jesus Christ? Is a desire to live right, without any thought of Jesus Christ, implicit reliance on the Holy Spirit, or is it implicit reliance on self? No matter how he later explained it, Strong was not then confident of his salvation. He attended Finney's meetings, morning and evening, for three weeks. He responded to the invitation a dozen times. He asked Christians to pray for him. He prayed and read the Bible. He urged friends and family to join him in submitting to God. Still, he had no inner peace. Strong's spring vacation concluded, and he feared his religious resolve would dissolve upon returning to college life.²⁵ He confessed, "The train moved out of the station. I took my seat, buried my face in my hands, and said to myself, "This train is taking me to hell!"²⁶

On the first Sunday morning back at school, Strong attended the campus prayer meeting. His classmates were surprised, but welcoming. He told them he was determined to be a Christian if he could find the way. They prayed for him, but no one pointed him to Jesus Christ.²⁷ A month passed. As promised, Strong read the Bible and prayed daily. Still, he feared he was not a Christian. One day in May 1856, II Corinthians 6:16–18 gave him hope. He said:

The outer word seemed to be an inner word; God himself seemed to be speaking; light and power were communicated to me; I listened and believed. I said to myself, "I *have* come out from among them; I *have* bound my soul not to touch the unclean thing—sin. And here God himself declares that he will receive me and be a Father to me and that I shall be his son. The promise is mine; God, who cannot lie, has spoken it; I *am*

²⁴Ibid., 86–87 [emphasis added].

²⁵Ibid., 87.

²⁶Ibid., 88.

²⁷Ibid., 90.

a child of God!” And as I said the words, I felt that a tie was established between me and God more close and dear than any tie of blood. A thrill went through me as I realized my new relationship with the Eternal One. I could no longer keep from pouring out my soul in prayer. I shut up the book and knelt by my bedside, praising God for his mercy to me, a sinner. . . . At last, and for the first time in my life, I was right with God, and right with my own conscience.²⁸

Shortly before his death, Strong pointed to the memorable May evening, rather than to the emotional night at the Finney meeting, as the night of his conversion.²⁹ No matter which conversion sequence one follows, the profound effect of Strong’s personal religious experience upon his life and theology is indisputable.

One example of Strong’s personal religious experience seemingly forming his theology was his affirmation of soteriological inclusivism. As noted above, he described his initial religious experience as “repentance and faith in the germ.” He stated, “Though I did not realize it, this was a casting of myself upon Christ.”³⁰ Apparently, Strong considered his “very unintelligent conversion”³¹ to be a representative, perhaps normative, experience. He concluded that there are God-seekers among the “heathen” who are sorry for their sins and cast themselves upon the mercy of God. These are saved by Jesus Christ, he believed, even though they are unaware of their Savior or their salvation.³² He described them as “apparently regenerated heathen.”³³ A chart comparing Strong’s personal religious experience and his soteriological inclusivism is revealing.

²⁸Ibid., 90–91.

²⁹Augustus Hopkins Strong, *What Shall I Believe? A Primer of Christian Theology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1922), 87. See also, Strong, “Theology and Experience,” 18.

³⁰Strong, *Autobiography*, 86–87.

³¹Ibid., 86.

³²Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 842–43.

³³Ibid., 843.

Strong's Personal Experience

"I did cast myself upon God."¹

"I did hate my sins and wanted to turn from them."²

"I do not remember that I had any thought of the Lord Jesus Christ as the way to God or as the sacrifice for sin."³

"I had no idea that night that I was a Christian.... though I did not realize it, this was a casting of myself upon Christ."⁴

Strong's Inclusivism

"God-seekers,
who are sorry for their sins,

even though they have never
heard about Jesus Christ,

may be saved by Jesus Christ
though they are unaware of
their Savior or their salva-
tion."⁵

Strong was baptized into the membership of the First Baptist Church of Rochester in August 1856. He then returned to Yale for his senior year, determined to do his duty and be a witness. During the year he led five classmates to profess faith in Jesus Christ.³⁴

2. The Atonement

Strong believed that "Christ's atonement is the only ground of acceptance with God and the only effectual persuasive to faith."³⁵ No one has "a right to believe in God as a Savior except upon the ground of the sacrificial death of Jesus."³⁶ This realization captivated him during his graduate school years. A call to preach accompanied his conversion.³⁷ He graduated from Yale in the spring of 1857, and entered the two-year course at Rochester Theological Seminary in the fall. Interestingly, Mrs. Charlotte Stillson was one of the greatest influences on his life and future ministry during his seminary training.

Preaching a Sufficient Savior

The Rapids was a squalid area three miles south of Rochester. Its residents were known for fighting, drinking, and gambling. "There were three grogshops, no church, and only one dilapidated schoolhouse."³⁸ An afternoon Sunday school and evening preaching service were held in the schoolhouse. Strong was the Sunday school superintendent and preacher for a year and a half.

³⁴Strong, *Autobiography*, 92–93.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 251.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 94.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 113.

Mrs. Stillson lived in the only decent house in the Rapids. She was a joyful Christian servant, though her husband was an unbeliever. She visited the Sunday school children and encouraged their parents to attend the preaching service. She helped to clothe the ragged, taught mothers to sew, gave medicine to the ill and Christmas presents to the poor.³⁹

Each Sunday Strong taught a young women's Sunday school class at the First Baptist Church of Rochester. Following the morning service, he walked to Mrs. Stillson's home for lunch. They then led the Sunday school, returned to her home for supper, then again walked to the schoolhouse by lantern light for the evening service. Often they walked through rain, mud, or snow. The school was usually packed to capacity with some seventy-five people.⁴⁰

Strong said, "At the Rapids I seem to myself to have got my first glimpse of Christ as a conscious factor in my religious experience. I began . . . by recognizing that his atonement constituted the only ground for my acceptance with God."⁴¹ Through a thorough study of the book of Hebrews with his Sunday school class, Strong realized Jesus Christ was the ideal priest and sacrifice—He was divine and He freely offered up Himself. His experience at the Rapids made the realization practical rather than theoretical. When inquirers were troubled about their salvation, Strong directed them to Jesus Christ whose death on the cross paid their sin debt. Many found immediate peace through faith in Jesus Christ. Strong learned to give more helpful spiritual counsel than he had received.⁴²

It was good that Strong's preaching ministry began among the poorly educated. Previously his public speaking tended toward a rhetorical display. At the Rapids, however, he learned the powerlessness of rhetorical display and intellectual appeal alone. People of all classes need a simple, clear presentation of "the gospel of Christ," which "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).⁴³

Further, Mrs. Stillson profoundly influenced Strong. She was his first acquaintance who seemed to live continually in intimate communion with the Savior. He stated, "I learned from her example the doctrine of a present Christ. . . . I could not thereafter either live or preach as if Jesus were a theoretical or distant Redeemer."⁴⁴

Strong's formal education at Yale College and Rochester Theological Seminary gave him credentials for ministry. His practical education at the

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 116.

⁴²Ibid., 116–17.

⁴³Ibid., 114.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Rapids gave him a message and method for ministry. His professors taught him philosophical and theological theories. Mrs. Stillson encouraged his personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ, the only ground of acceptance with God.

3. The Church

Strong also developed his doctrine of the church.⁴⁵ He was convinced the church is composed only of those who believe in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ He was convinced of the Baptist doctrines of a regenerate church membership and of a congregational polity. Historically, these were at the center of Baptist ecclesiology.⁴⁷ Strong agreed that one must profess faith in Jesus Christ before being baptized. Further, one must be a baptized church member before receiving the Lord's Supper.

Strong's *Systematic Theology* section on "the doctrine of the church" remained the same through all eight editions. Among Baptists, Strong may be best known and remembered for his ecclesiology. In fact, one suspects the reputation he maintains as a conservative, Baptist theologian is largely due to his ecclesiology.

Modernism seems to have had no affect on Strong's ecclesiology. His early soteriological understanding of union with Christ, however, greatly influenced it. The spiritual union of all believers with Christ and the consequent union of all believers with one another led him to two principles: regenerate church membership and congregational church government. All of his ecclesiology focused on and developed from these. Strong settled the doctrine of the church in his mind as he considered his life's calling and work.

In the spring of 1859, two months before seminary graduation, Strong sought treatment for a chronic respiratory condition. The family physician believed his condition would be terminal without immediate treatment, and prescribed a year of fresh air and exercise.⁴⁸ Apparently, the doctor was right; Strong fully recovered over the next fourteen and a half months as he hiked through Europe and the Middle East.⁴⁹ Strong returned home vigorous, healthy, and ready to begin his life's work.⁵⁰ But where? In which denomination? His Baptist seminary education had not

⁴⁵Ibid., 150.

⁴⁶Ibid., 251.

⁴⁷John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 57.

⁴⁸Strong, *Autobiography*, 123-24.

⁴⁹Ibid., 134.

⁵⁰Ibid., 124-42.

convinced him of a Baptist view of church polity or of the ordinances, and this proved to be an obstacle.

Ezekiel G. Robinson, the president of Rochester Theological Seminary, recommended Strong to the First Baptist Church of New York City. Strong preached to the church, but was disappointed when they did not issue a call.⁵¹ Next, Robinson recommended Strong to the First Baptist Church of Haverhill, Massachusetts, a church of 300 members. After Strong preached for them, the church issued a call. However, when he told them he was not certain baptism was required for one to receive the Lord's Supper, they withdrew their call.⁵² Strong was not disappointed. Haverhill was a factory town of about 10,000 people, some thirty miles north of Boston. He preferred a bustling city to Haverhill's conservative, small town atmosphere. After these two experiences, Strong realized his ambivalence about the doctrine of the church would be an obstacle in any Baptist church. He must settle the issue.⁵³

The next year, 1861, was eventful for Strong as well as for the nation. That year, Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated President of the United States. That year, the Confederate States of America were formed and Jefferson Davis was inaugurated as President. That year, the War Between the States erupted. That year, Strong's denominational identity was settled. And that year, his engagement to one woman was broken, and he met and married another.

Strong spent a productive winter preaching for the North Baptist Church in Chicago.⁵⁴ During those months, he studied diligently and finally settled his ecclesiology. He wrote, "Though my worldly ambition and personal preference and college friendships and family relationships would have led me to be a Congregationalist or a Presbyterian, conscience and Scripture compelled me to be a Baptist."⁵⁵ As a result, six months after his initial visit, the First Baptist Church of Haverhill reissued their call. Strong felt compelled to accept.⁵⁶ He had been engaged to Charles Finney's daughter, but the engagement was broken. His home church ordained him in August 1861. Mrs. Stillson introduced him to Miss Hattie Savage shortly thereafter. By Christmas, he and Hattie were married and settled in their new home and ministry.⁵⁷ 1861 was an eventful year, to say the least.

⁵¹Ibid., 143–44.

⁵²Ibid., 144.

⁵³Ibid. 144–45.

⁵⁴Ibid., 146.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 150.

⁵⁷Steven R. Pointer, "Augustus H. Strong," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed.

Strong's faithful ministry endeared him to his new congregation, though their New England reserve often kept them from verbally expressing it.⁵⁸ Strong was drafted into the Union army and was willing to serve. The church, however, urged him to stay with them. They paid \$350 for someone to serve in his place,⁵⁹ a common practice in the north.⁶⁰

4. Union With Christ

Another of Strong's theological lessons was union with Christ. Toward the end of his second year at Haverhill, Strong's pastoral ministry became an overwhelming drudgery. He was physically exhausted, emotionally despondent, and spiritually drained. Strong said, "I felt that I was far from God, that I somehow lacked the essence of a Christian experience, that my preaching was destitute of life and power. And yet at this very time I was exhausting myself with my efforts to do my duty."⁶¹

The Strongs spent August of 1863 in Rochester. One month earlier, from the first through the third of July, the Battle of Gettysburg had raged just 300 miles south of Rochester. In Strong's heart, another conflict raged. Privately he pledged to leave the ministry if he could not find peace during that summer vacation. He determined to rest, pray, and read nothing but the Bible. While reading the books of Acts and John, Strong was deeply impressed with the personal reality that Jesus Christ indwells all believers. Strong wrote:

Now I saw that it was a *union of life* which Christ was describing, a union in which the Spirit of Christ interpenetrates and energizes ours, a union in which he joins himself so indissolubly to us that neither life nor death, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from him. . . .

I can describe the effect of all this upon my ministry only by saying it was life from the dead. . . . My fear and my despondency were gone; my physical health began to mend . . . I preached with a joy and self-forgetfulness that I had never known before. Preparation of sermons became a delight. . . . All this was connected with a new experience with regard to prayer. . . . I not only prayed with a faith that I had never known before, but also

Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 2.

⁵⁸Strong, *Autobiography*, 151.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁰Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Fredericksburg to Meridian* (New York: Random House, 1963), 151.

⁶¹Strong, *Autobiography*, 162.

I came to feel that the Lord desired me to ask great things and desired to accomplish great things by me.⁶²

Following this experience, Strong was convinced theology's "central truth" is union with Christ.⁶³ He understood the union to be a soteriological reality. He noted, "Christ had come to me at the time of my conversion, little as I then understood it, and had formed an indissoluble union with my poor weak soul. I had been ignorant of his presence within me."⁶⁴

In the four lessons discussed so far, excluding his later adoption of soteriological inclusivism, Strong was faithful to his biblical and Baptist heritage. The theological lessons were formed during his preparation and pastoral ministry years (1856–72). In contrast, three additional lessons, developed during his days as a seminary president and professor (1872–1912), reveal modernism's growing influence, which progressively undermined his Baptist heritage.

5. Race Guilt

A fifth theological lesson was his "first new and original contribution to theological science."⁶⁵ Herein, he offered a new explanation of "the imputation of the sin of the race to Christ."⁶⁶ Strong felt the sin of the race being placed on Jesus Christ had been explained insufficiently. He believed the relationship between Christ's deity and atonement and between Christ's two natures demanded a more comprehensive presentation.⁶⁷ He had already formulated this innovation by the time he published the first edition of his *Systematic Theology*.⁶⁸

Strong believed, subsequent to Adam's original sin, all people are born in the state into which Adam "fell—a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation."⁶⁹ It is not simply that Adam was the federal (representative) head of the race and all his descendants have the responsibility for his sin imputed to them. Strong called federal headship "a legal fiction."⁷⁰ Instead, he held the natural (seminal) headship view. Since all people are Adam's descendants, all are organically united to Adam. All sinned in him. All, being in Adam's loins, actually participated in Adam's sin. Depravity,

⁶²Ibid., 163, 165.

⁶³Ibid., 164.

⁶⁴Ibid., 163–64.

⁶⁵Ibid., 252.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., 251–52.

⁶⁸Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1st ed., 409–21.

⁶⁹Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 596.

⁷⁰Ibid., 614.

guilt, and condemnation are justly bestowed on all people, for Adam's sin is actually that of every person.⁷¹ Further, Strong believed Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, born in Bethlehem, and is, therefore, the God-man.⁷² He faithfully taught God's triune nature.

Considering the fallen nature of humanity and the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, Strong asked, "How now was to be explained the imputation of the sin of the race to Christ?"⁷³ Strong sought to answer a philosophical objection to Jesus Christ's atonement.

Our treatment is intended to meet the chief modern objection to the atonement. Greg, Creed of Christendom, 243, speaks of "the strangely inconsistent doctrine that God is so *just* the he could not let sin go unpunished, yet so *unjust* that he could punish it in the person of the innocent. . . . It is for orthodox dialects to explain how the divine justice can be *impugned* by pardoning the guilty, and yet *vindicated* by punishing the innocent."⁷⁴

Strong attempted to show that God was not unjust to place the guilt and punishment of the human race upon His innocent Son. Instead of simply acknowledging that God's love compelled Him to give His Son as the substitutionary sacrifice for sinful humanity (John 3:16), Strong attempted to produce a rationalistic explanation. His innovative answer was that God was not unjust to impute sin to, and punish sin in, Jesus Christ because He bore the race guilt of sin.

If Christ took our nature, he must have taken it with all its exposures and liabilities. Though the immaculate conception freed him from depravity, it still left him under the burden of guilt. For the nature which he had in common with us all he was bound to suffer and die. Hence it must needs be that Christ should suffer; hence he pressed forward to the cross as the reparation due from humanity to the violated holiness of God.⁷⁵

Strong rightly differentiated between guilt and depravity. Race guilt, however, is something other than Christ bearing the race's guilt. Strong

⁷¹Ibid., 644.

⁷²Ibid., 673, 684.

⁷³Strong, *Autobiography*, 252.

⁷⁴Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1st ed., 413.

⁷⁵Strong, *Autobiography*, 252.

believed Jesus Christ was freed from depravity by virtue of His Divine conception in the virgin's womb, yet He inherited human guilt at the incarnation by virtue of His human nature. "As the Christian has depravity but not guilt," Strong stated, "so Christ had guilt but not depravity. And thus he could through the eternal Spirit offer himself without spot to God."⁷⁶

Traditionally, Baptists taught that Jesus Christ received the guilt of, and the punishment for, the sin of the human race on the cross.⁷⁷ Strong, however, moved the imputation of humanity's guilt to Jesus Christ from the cross back to the incarnation.

6. Race Responsibility

Strong's next theological lesson, race responsibility, was his second "new and original contribution" to theology. He decided race guilt did not go far enough. It focused on the imputation of original sin to Christ, but did not consider Adam and his posterity's subsequent sins. Christ atoned for personal sins as well as for original sin.

Founded in Creation—Necessary Atonement

Strong stated, "Christ's union with the race in his incarnation is only the outward and visible expression of a prior union with the race which began when he created the race."⁷⁸ Strong now extended union with Christ beyond salvation or even the incarnation. He moved it back to creation. In so doing, Strong moved from a soteriological union with Christ to an organic union with Christ. He stated, "As in him [Jesus Christ] all things were created and as in him all things consist or hold together, it follows that he who is the life of humanity must, though personally pure, be involved in responsibility for all human sin, and so it was necessary that the Christ should suffer."⁷⁹ Strong declared that the Creator's union with His creation caused the Creator to share the responsibility for His creatures' subsequent actions. Christ's suffering was therefore necessary, and in effect, the fulfillment of a just sentence of judgment.⁸⁰ His substitutionary death was both possible (because of His incarnation) and necessary (because of creation). He had to suffer for the sins of humanity, and for His own race

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷*A Faith to Confess, The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689: Rewritten in Modern English* (Leeds, England: Carey Publications, 1975), 28-29; *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1197.

⁷⁸Strong, *Autobiography*, 253.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

guilt and race responsibility for sin.

Just as Strong differentiated between depravity and guilt, he also differentiated between race sin and personal sin. "Race sin was committed by the first father of the race."⁸¹ Every human who grows beyond the infant years commits personal sin.⁸² Strong affirmed Christ's freedom from personal sin, but not from race sin. The necessity of the atonement for Strong is derived from Christ's union with the human race. Jesus Christ would have been under a sentence of death even if God had chosen not to save any human beings. It would have been necessary for Him to die for His guilt and responsibility for sin. Strong stated, "Although Christ's nature was purified, his obligation to suffer yet remained."⁸³ Even though Strong conceded, "He might have declined to join himself to humanity, and then he need not have suffered,"⁸⁴ Strong's concept of race responsibility, founded in creation, seems to obligate Jesus Christ to the incarnation, and, therefore, to suffering and death. Carl F.H. Henry similarly observed:

Strong had thus . . . replaced the Biblical view of a gracious atonement with that of a necessitated atonement—necessitated indeed not alone because of a more intimate creative union of Christ and humanity which seemed to verge toward pantheism, but because of a supposed guilt on Christ's part which . . . could not escape compromising the personal purity of the pre-incarnate Logos.⁸⁵

The Bible declares that Jesus Christ voluntarily laid down His life when He died on the cross (John 10:14–18). Jesus Christ willingly received the punishment for human sin when He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24a). Strong acknowledged the cross was "the voluntary execution of a plan that antedated creation,"⁸⁶ yet he also declared it a necessity to atone for Christ's race guilt and race responsibility. In Strong's view, God the Father was not unjust to impute the sin, guilt, and punishment of humanity to Christ only because Jesus deserved to suffer for sin; in fact, it was necessary for Him to suffer. Union with the race

⁸¹Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 596.

⁸²Ibid. "In recognizing the guilt of race-sin, we are to bear in mind . . . that no human being is finally condemned solely on account of original sin; but that all who, like *infants*, do not commit personal transgressions, are saved through the application of Christ's atonement" [emphasis added].

⁸³Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 757.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Carl F.H. Henry, *Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951), 224.

⁸⁶Strong, *Autobiography*, 253.

through creation and incarnation not only *imputed*, but also *imparted* race responsibility for sin and race guilt to Jesus Christ.⁸⁷

One questions, in spite of Strong's verbal gymnastics to the contrary, how Jesus Christ could be personally pure if He had *imparted* as well as *imputed* race sin and race guilt. Strong repeatedly emphasized that Jesus Christ's virgin conception and birth protected Him from depravity but not guilt.⁸⁸ One may simply ask, "Why?" If His Deity did not protect His humanity from guilt, how can one be certain it protected Him from depravity? Henry believed Strong was trapped by his own logic. Henry asked, "If before Christ can properly bear all race sin he must be personally involved in race sin, then must it not be maintained that before he can personally bear all personal sin he must likewise be personally involved?"⁸⁹

If union through creation and incarnation caused Christ to inherit both race sin and race guilt, how could He be a substitutionary sacrifice for humanity's sins? Strong's evangelical contemporaries asked the same question. Henry stated, "Evangelical thinkers . . . insisted that if Christ were genuinely guilty in any sense, he could not atone; and if he provided atonement, he could not have been under guilt."⁹⁰ Was not the value of the atoning sacrifice dependent on the absolute purity of the sacrifice? Was not Christ's sacrifice on the cross the innocent suffering for the guilty? Peter declared, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

Continuing Atonement—Teaching Moment

Insistence on Christ's race sin and race guilt led Strong to declare a continuing atonement instead of a completed atonement.⁹¹ Since he had declared that Christ's race responsibility for sin began at creation, Strong stated, "So through all the course of history, Christ, the natural life of the race, has been afflicted in the affliction of humanity and has suffered for human sin. This suffering has been an atoning suffering, since it has been due to righteousness."⁹² Consequently, Jesus Christ's death on the cross became a teaching moment. It was merely the public declaration of a continuing history of atoning activities. Strong stated, "Christ therefore, as incarnate, *rather revealed* the atonement *than made* it. The historical work of atonement was finished upon the Cross, but that historical work only

⁸⁷Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 761.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 762.

⁸⁹Henry, 224n.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 225.

⁹¹Neither the *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* nor *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession* made any allowance for a continuing atonement.

⁹²Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 763.

revealed to men the atonement made both *before and since* by the extra-mundane Logos.”⁹³

Strong’s continuing atonement was not well received by some of his contemporaries. Henry stated:

Evangelical thinkers saw in Strong’s affirmation . . . of a supra-historical suffering, a sacrifice of the doctrine of a once-for-all atonement. They insisted that . . . the divine compassion . . . must not be confused with a vicarious suffering on account of sin. . . . Strong’s readiness to speak of the present suffering of Christ for sin, so that while the historical suffering is ended the supra-historical suffering will continue until sin no longer exists, seemed to evangelical theologians to evacuate the historical passion of all final significance.⁹⁴

The concerns of Strong’s contemporaries were valid. The writer of Hebrews contradicts a continuing atonement and declares a completed atonement. The once for all death of Jesus Christ on the cross replaced the repeated symbolic Levitical sacrifices; Jesus Christ’s sin sacrifice was superior and final (Heb 9:24–26). On the cross Jesus did not say, “And so it continues.” He said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Carson observed, “Jesus’ work was done. . . . The verb . . . denotes the carrying out of a task . . . to the full extent mandated by his mission. And so, on the brink of death, Jesus cries out, *It is accomplished!*”⁹⁵ Hendriksen added, “As Jesus saw it, the entire work of redemption (both active and passive obedience, fulfilling the law and bearing its curse) had been brought to completion.”⁹⁶

Strong’s race guilt and race responsibility added new content to his Christology. The theological lessons seemed to question Christ’s sinlessness. Further, Christ’s cross was no longer the historical, once for all, climactic, redemptive event. Rather, Strong presented it as a teaching moment; it was the public declaration of Christ’s continuing atoning suffering.

7. Ethical Monism

Another of Strong’s theological lessons, his third “new and original contribution to the science of theology,” was the philosophical system he called “Ethical Monism.” Race guilt and race responsibility seemed to

⁹³Ibid., 762 [emphasis added].

⁹⁴Henry, 225–26.

⁹⁵D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 621.

⁹⁶William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–1954), 2:435.

open the door to an adapted version of monism. Strong's emphasis on Jesus Christ's union with humanity and with the universe through His incarnation and creation was compatible with a monistic worldview.

Geisler notes that monism is a philosophical worldview; it sees all existence as "one." "God and the universe are one thing." In contrast, "Christianity is committed to the 'many' of pluralism, holding that God differs from creation,"⁹⁷ and the things created differ from one another. C.S. Lewis described monism as "Everythingism."⁹⁸ He explained:

I mean by this the belief that "everything", or "the whole show", must be self-existent, must be more important than every particular thing, and must contain all particular things in such a way that they cannot be really very different from one another—that they must be not merely "at one", but one. . . . Thus the Everythingist, if he starts from God, becomes a Pantheist; there must be nothing that is not God. If he starts from Nature he becomes a Naturalist; there must be nothing that is not Nature. He thinks that everything is in the long run "merely" a precursor or a development or a relic or an instance or a disguise, of everything else.⁹⁹

Monism, pantheism, and naturalism seem to share a core worldview.

Strong believed the drift of modern thought, whether in physics, philosophy, literature, or theology, was all in the direction of monism. He believed monism was the ruling philosophy of his time, and would be the philosophy of the future.¹⁰⁰ Around the turn of the twentieth century, religious modernism increasingly focused on divine immanence, almost to the exclusion of divine transcendence. An overreaching divine immanence and monism were compatible.

Evangelizing an Intellectual

Most of Strong's fellow Baptists thought the drift toward monism was a drift away from truth, and destructive to biblical faith. Strong's perspective was different. He saw monism as a "movement of the Spirit of God, giving to thoughtful men, all unconsciously to themselves, a deeper understanding of truth and preparing the way for the reconciliation of

⁹⁷Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), s.v., "Monism."

⁹⁸Clive Staples Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 269.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Augustus Hopkins Strong, "Ethical Monism," in *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland Press, 1899), 16, 22.

diverse creeds and parties by disclosing their hidden ground of unity.”¹⁰¹

For Strong, monism was new light from the Holy Spirit. “Theology must make use of the new light,” he warned, “or lose her hold upon thinking minds.”¹⁰² Strong believed a part of the theologian’s assignment is to show how modern ideas and Christianity are compatible; it is key to evangelizing intellectuals. Strong’s passion for evangelizing intellectuals was personal. Did he make major theological shifts in a desperate attempt to evangelize one particular intellectual? The reader must judge.

Strong had two sons, Charles and John. He longed for them to be faithful followers of Christ. He hoped they would be ministers of the gospel and ultimately join him on the seminary faculty. Both boys professed faith in Christ; both professed a call into the ministry; and both attended Rochester Theological Seminary. John graduated, became a pastor, and served on the faculty. Charles, however, broke his father’s heart when he, as a seminary student, denied his Christian faith and became an agnostic. He studied at Harvard and in Germany and was briefly a professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, and then at Columbia College in New York City. Strong and John D. Rockefeller had been friends since Strong’s pastorate in Cleveland. The families periodically visited and traveled together. In 1889 Charles married Bessie Rockefeller (John’s daughter), and they subsequently moved to Europe where they lived most of the rest of their lives.¹⁰³ Strong seemed willing to make nearly any theological accommodation to convince Charles the Christian faith was compatible with his beliefs. As far as Strong knew, Charles never returned to his faith.

At Strong’s urging, the First Baptist Church of Rochester disciplined Charles. In 1891, the church excluded him from its membership when he denied the faith. Twenty-five years later, Strong urged the church to restore Charles to membership. It did so, even though Strong confessed, “I do not see that he has changed his views of Christ and of Christianity or that he now accepts Christ as his divine Lord and Redeemer.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, in part, a father’s broken heart led him to conclude that Charles’ “filial loyalty and his persistent search for truth . . . are signs of Christ’s working in him, though he is as unconscious of their Author as was Saul on his way to Damascus. . . . I now see more clearly that the Light that lighteth every man is Christ.”¹⁰⁵ This statement was certainly consistent with a monistic worldview; it equated love with faith, and a search for truth with knowing the Savior.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 22.

¹⁰²Strong, *Autobiography*, 254–55.

¹⁰³Ibid., 257–64.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 351.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

Ontological Union

Ethical monism was Strong's adapted version of monism. Neither his spiritual experience nor theology allowed him to accept the monism taught in the Universities in his day; they were largely either naturalistic or pantheistic. Naturalistic monism tends toward atheism. Pantheistic monism "concludes that God must be equally present in what we call evil and what we call good and therefore indifferent to both."¹⁰⁶ Recognizing this fact,¹⁰⁷ Strong devised a monism he believed was "entirely consistent with the facts of ethics — man's freedom, responsibility, sin, and guilt;"¹⁰⁸ thus the name, ethical monism. Strong's monism was a metaphysical interpretation of his central truth of theology: union with Christ.

If pantheism, as Lewis stated, is the inevitable religion of monism, one can readily see why some suspected Strong had become a pantheist. A metaphysical view of union with Christ tends toward pantheism. Erickson states:

The underlying idea here is the pantheistic concept that we are one in essence with God. We have no existence apart from his. We are part of the divine essence. Christ is one with us and is in us by virtue of creation rather than redemption. This means that he is one with all members of the human race, not merely with believers. This explanation, however, goes beyond the teaching of Scripture; all of the biblical statements about union with Christ pertain exclusively to believers. Various passages make it clear that not everyone is included among those in whom Christ dwells and who are in Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17).¹⁰⁹

Erickson accurately notes that union with Christ is exclusively a soteriological reality. When Strong pushed union with Christ back to creation, he interpreted a *soteriological* reality as an *ontological* reality. Strong stated, "There is but one substance—God," and everything else is but a "finite and temporal manifestation of God."¹¹⁰ To many of Strong's

¹⁰⁶Lewis, 135.

¹⁰⁷Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., 108: "It has been charged that the doctrine of monism necessarily involves moral indifference; that the divine presence in all things breaks down all distinctions of rank and makes each thing equal to every other; that the evil as well as the good is legitimated and consecrated. Of pantheistic monism all this is true,—it is not true of ethical monism."

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 963.

¹¹⁰Strong, "Ethical Monism," 45.

contemporaries, this sounded like an affirmation of the general definition of pantheism: "God is all and all is God."¹¹¹ Yet, Strong was deeply wounded by the accusation that he had become "a pantheist and a Buddhist."¹¹²

By definition, monism denies God's personality. If God is all and all is God, then how can God be a distinct person? By definition, monism also denies God's transcendence. If everything is one, how can one transcend itself? God is not distinct from and transcendent over all if all is God.

In the minds of most who understood Strong's philosophical arguments, he had denied both God's personality and transcendence. Strong refused to acknowledge this, and argued for a personalistic monism. He invested his considerable intellectual and literary skills attempting to convince his friends that his adapted beliefs were actually a clarified orthodoxy. In doing so, he redefined philosophical and theological terms. He declared that when he used certain words, they now meant what they had never meant. It is little wonder many did not understand ethical monism, and most who did, did not approve.

Conclusion

In light of these facts, one question remains unanswered. Why did an internationally respected, conservative, Baptist theologian radically change parts of his theology when he was seventy years old? As one would expect, no single answer will suffice. For summary purposes, consider five possible reasons.

First, Strong sometimes made the mistake of interpreting the Bible through the lens of his culture. Every theologian and pastor must guard against this subtle temptation. Strong's environment was progressive. His entire life was lived in an environment of almost perpetual technological, economic, sociological, intellectual, and spiritual advancement. His progressive environment seemed to influence his mind-set; it encouraged openness to modernism; it guided his approach to theology and his understanding of a theologian's task. Strong stated, "Theology is a progressive science, not because the truth itself changes, but because human apprehension and statement of the truth improve from age to age."¹¹³ He believed his age had "the advantage of a point of view which include[d] all the

¹¹¹Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), s.v. "Pantheism": "A term coined by John Toland (1670-1722), literally meaning 'everything God.' The view is that God is all and all is God. It differs from 'panentheism,' which views God as in all."

¹¹²Strong, *Autobiography*, 255.

¹¹³Augustus Hopkins Strong, "Christ in Creation," in *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*, 1.

good” of past generations, but “exclude[d] their errors.”¹¹⁴ Strong believed the ruling idea in any era was God’s revelation for the day. The theologian’s assignment, therefore, was to help the Christian community understand Christianity’s compatibility with contemporary science and philosophy. Modernism, Strong believed, could be used, with discernment, to discover the good and true. He believed modern philosophical and theological ideas were gifts from God that could be used to advance the gospel and ultimately bring in the millennial kingdom.¹¹⁵ Therefore, Strong welcomed new ideas; he was compelled to adapt them into his theology.

A Christian should continually learn. If one discovers he is wrong, he should be willing to correct his beliefs. Such change is commendable. However, when Strong revised his theology, he did not admit his previous beliefs were wrong. Instead, he affirmed his faithfulness “to the old doctrines,” and noted, “I interpret them differently and expound them more clearly.”¹¹⁶ The evidence, however, does not justify the claim. This writer does not agree, for example, that Strong’s denial of the Bible’s infallibility and inerrancy, his affirmation of Christ’s race guilt and race responsibility, his explanation of a continuing atonement, nor his ethical monism were merely different, clarified explanations of old doctrines.¹¹⁷

Second, Strong’s idea that new scientific and philosophical declarations are one form of God’s revelation for their day¹¹⁸ undermined the Bible’s final authority. The concept led Strong to significant theological shifts. Those shifts were always in the direction of liberalism, away from his Baptist heritage, and never toward conservatism.

Third, Strong tended to interpret the Bible by his experience rather than interpreting his experience by the Bible. Above, we noted how Strong’s personal religious experience led him to embrace soteriological inclusivism. We noted that his concern for evangelizing his son Charles may have encouraged him to adapt many elements of modernism into his theology.

Again, experiential Bible interpretation is a subtle and appealing temptation, especially in a postmodern era. Faith should be experiential; faith should be real and personal. Experience, however, must not become the final authority for truth. The Bible is the Christian’s ultimate authority for faith and practice. It is the unchanging foundation.

Fourth, in his later years, Strong seems to have become so confident in his theological prowess, that he considered himself a valid authority.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Strong, “Ethical Monism,” 22.

¹¹⁶Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 8th ed., vii.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 196–242; cf., Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1st ed., 95–114.

¹¹⁸Strong, “Ethical Monism,” 22.

His defense against critics who questioned his redefinition of theological and philosophical terms¹¹⁹ was, “This term now means something different when I use it.” “Because I said so” may be an exasperated parent’s answer to an argumentative child, but it is not a valid explanation from a theologian.

A fifth reason Strong was willing to make major theological shifts may have been his faculty. Faculty members interact. They drink coffee and discuss theology. They influence one another. Strong was committed to what we now identify as “unlimited academic freedom.” He brought a theologically diverse group of scholars onto the Rochester Theological Seminary faculty. Walter Rauschenbusch, the “Father of the Social Gospel,” was among them. A biographer of Rauschenbusch noted:

When Rauschenbusch joined the English faculty in 1902, he was one of only two liberals on the faculty, along with Walter Betteridge, professor of Old Testament. Yet Rauschenbusch was part of the first generation of liberal faculty that the increasingly theologically irenic Strong brought to the seminary from 1902 until his retirement in 1912.¹²⁰

Note the time frame. Strong’s eighth edition was prepared between 1902 and 1909. Did he hire liberal faculty because of his changing views, or did his views change because of friendships with those men? At the least, Strong’s theological sifts were likely emboldened by interactions with his faculty.

Augustus H. Strong’s *Systematic Theology* continues to have an influence among Baptists one hundred years after its publication. W.A. Criswell praised it as “a good illustration of how a pastor ought to read and study.” He noted that most of it was “incomparable,” but warned, “So let the pastor read as he would eat a fish—when he comes to an unpalatable bone, just eat around it; do not swallow it!”¹²¹ This is good advice, not only with regard to his theology, but with regard to his life as a disciple.

Although he was not the perfect disciple of Jesus Christ, we can learn from Strong’s efforts. For instance, we may learn that, while seeking cultural relevance in ministry and theology, we must be careful to build only upon the certain foundation of God’s Word. An appeal to any other final authority for theology, life, and ministry is inadequate and likely will lead to theological error, as it did with Augustus Hopkins Strong.

¹¹⁹A.J.F. Behrends, “Ethical Monism,” *The Methodist Review* 77 (1895): 361.

¹²⁰Christopher H. Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always But Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 159.

¹²¹W.A. Criswell, *Criswell’s Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman, 1980), 69.

It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church

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In *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*, George Barna identifies what he calls a transformation in the process by which millions of believers are growing in Christ. According to Barna, many of these “revolutionaries” are leaving the local church in an effort to experience purposeful spiritual growth outside the structure and authority of what they consider to be an ineffective model for achieving God’s purposes in contemporary society. Barna points out, and rightly so, that local churches are not achieving stellar results in transforming the lives and worldviews of their members. He endorses a self-serving discipleship process in which believers piece “together spiritual elements they deem worthwhile, constituting millions of personalized ‘church’ models.”¹ However, Barna’s solution to the problem is to disregard a biblical understanding of the local church and disregard the role of the church in the disciple-making process.² He also predicts that by 2025, the local church will be rendered irrelevant, as millions of born-again Christians sever their institutional and denominational ties in favor of “alternative faith-based communities” and ministries focusing on media, arts, and culture.³

My intent is not to argue with Barna regarding the integrity of his research, or to disregard the existence of these so-called “revolutionary” Christians. There may or may not be, as Barna concludes, over 20 million believers who are bypassing the local church in their efforts to achieve

¹George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 64.

²Albert Mohler, “A Revolution in the Making?,” February 13, 2006, <http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/mohler/1378183/> (Accessed 25 March 2008).

³Barna, *Revolution*, 48.

significant spiritual growth.⁴ What I would argue, however, is that the local church is a biblically-ordained and relevant vehicle for transformational discipleship. Additionally, I would suggest that the church was given the primary responsibility for making disciples. Therefore, relegating the task to individual choice, para-church organizations, or “faith-based communities” is a dereliction of our mission. Jesus commissioned those who would become the formative core of the early church to make disciples.⁵ If that mandate is not being carried out effectively in the context of the local church, the solution is not to abandon the mission, but to strengthen our efforts at accomplishing the charge.

The purpose for this article is to call the local church to renew her commitment to growing authentic disciples, and to reform a discipleship process that we have been using for too long with lackluster results. In many churches, where discipleship is seen as just a component of its mission, the process takes the form of programs for motivated learners or an elective track for the truly committed. What I propose is an integrative model for discipleship in the local church. In this model, discipleship is not just one component of the church, but a guiding value that permeates every ministry area. The model begins by envisioning a biblical paradigm for the result of the process that answers the question, “Who is a disciple?” The second element of the model presents the functions of the church as disciple-making tools, answering the question, “What is discipleship?” The third element includes the options for delivering spiritual growth experiences, and answers the question, “How do we make disciples?” When these three elements are merged, both philosophically and pragmatically, the result should be transformed disciples and healthy churches.

Before a more detailed explanation of the model, I will define three important terms in light of their relevance to the meaning and functioning of the model. These words are disciple, discipleship, and church.

Disciple

The word “disciple” occurs at least 230 times in the Gospels and 28 times in Acts.⁶ Literally, disciple means learner; the Greek word *mathetes* is the root of our word mathematics, which means “thought accompanied by endeavor.”⁷ Disciples think and learn, but they also move beyond learning

⁴Ibid., 13.

⁵Matt 28:18–20; Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

⁶Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: The Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 40.

⁷Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1999), 15.

to doing—the endeavor. Even in Jesus’ time, disciples were those who were more than pupils in school, they were apprentices in the work of their master.⁸

The essence of the word disciple changed from the first time it is used in Matthew 5:1 to the last mention in Acts 21:16. In the gospels, disciple already had a meaning before Jesus used the word. In the first century, the cultural understanding of a disciple was one who was more than just a learner; the disciple was also a “follower” (once again we see the connection between thinking and doing).⁹ Throughout the Greco-Roman world, great teachers were making disciples. Philosophers like Socrates had devoted followers who were trained under the guidance of an exemplary life. Disciples spent time with their master and became learning sponges, soaking up the teaching and example of the one from whom they were learning. Rabbis like Hillel and Shammai had disciples who learned how to interpret the Scriptures and relate them to life. The Bible also tells us that there were disciples of the traditions of Moses (John 9:28) and that John the Baptist had disciples (Matt 9:14, 11:7, 14:2), some of whom joined Jesus’ mission.¹⁰

Initially, all of Jesus’ followers were referred to as disciples; but what we generally think of as the “disciples” today are the twelve men whom Jesus chose to train and send out for His kingdom work. This group was the seedbed of the incipient church. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He gave His disciples—now apostles—the responsibility to go and make disciples as He had done. The qualifications for true disciples were: (1) Belief in Jesus as messiah (John 2:11, 6:68–69); (2) Commitment to identify with Him through baptism; (3) Obedience to his teaching and submission to his Lordship (Matt 19:23–30, Luke 14:25–33).¹¹

In the book of Acts, Luke uses the term disciple to describe all followers of Jesus Christ.¹² He also mentions that these believers were first called Christians at Antioch, but this is one of only two times he uses this word, and in both occasions the term is used by outsiders.¹³ In addition,

⁸Ibid.

⁹Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 41.

¹⁰Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 53–61.

¹¹Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 105–18.

¹²Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 18. Luke also uses brothers, Christians, people, and believers to refer to followers of Christ.

¹³John B. Polhill, *Acts*, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 273. Although the label is used in Acts 11:26 and 26:28, Polhill asserts that its early use outside the church may reflect (1) the establishment of a Christian identity outside Judaism, and (2) a common way that Gentiles would refer to other Gentiles who became Christ followers.

these disciples are usually mentioned in light of their relationship to a particular city, implying their association with a local group of believers.¹⁴ Consequently, we can assume that, in the New Testament church, followers of Jesus Christ considered themselves to be a part of a local body of believers—the church—and they understood their role within that body to be as a disciple.

There is an “identity crisis” in contemporary Christianity that is forestalling spiritual growth in the lives of believers and is eroding the health of the local church. This is not a contemporary crisis; Bonhoeffer warned that the church had “evolved a fatal conception of the double standard—a maximum and minimum standard of Christian obedience.”¹⁵ Hull describes the problem that lingers even today:

The common teaching is that a Christian is someone who by faith accepts Jesus as Savior, receives eternal life, and is safe and secure in the family of God; a disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others. But I must be blunt: I find no biblical evidence for the separation of Christian from disciple.¹⁶

Although there is only anecdotal evidence to substantiate Hull’s claim, the proof is in the lack of power in the lives of most believers and the general effectiveness of the church in making an impact on society and accomplishing the Great Commission. The longer that we perpetuate the myth that disciple is a secondary identity reserved for the elite, the more we will continue to produce “bar-code Christians” who are following after a “non-discipleship Christianity.”¹⁷ Everyone who expresses faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior becomes a disciple and, by implication, begins a lifelong, Spirit-led journey of growth and formation in the likeness of the One whom they follow.

Discipleship

Disciples of Jesus Christ fulfill their calling through discipleship: “the process of following Jesus.”¹⁸ Although the word discipleship does not appear in the New Testament, the concept is implied through Jesus’ command in the Great Commission to make disciples. The suffix “ship” is

¹⁴Acts 6:7; 9:26; 11:26; 14:21–22, 26–28; 18:23, 27; 19:1; 21:3–6.

¹⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 47.

¹⁶Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 33.

¹⁷Ibid., 41–44.

¹⁸Ibid., 35.

derived from the Old English “scipe,” meaning “the state of,” “contained in,” or “condition”. Discipleship is the state of being a disciple; we are always in the condition of being disciples—loving Christ and obeying our Master. Another idea expressed through this suffix is “an art, skill, or craft.”¹⁹ Discipleship is not only an internal condition of believers, but also involves the active manifestation of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Another common word derived from the suffix “scipe” is “shape,” which means to create or form.²⁰ In Galatians 4:19, Paul writes: “My dear children for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you, how I wish I could be with you now.” Here, Paul expresses a longing to see spiritual formation occur in the lives of the Galatian disciples—that their discipleship would produce changed lives and provide evidence that transformation was occurring. Spiritual formation is the sanctification or transformation that happens during the process of intentional discipleship. While some would argue that spiritual formation is the process of growth in Christ, or that it is a systematic inculcation of disciplines, I would suggest that formation is the result of discipleship.²¹ Through discipleship, followers of Jesus Christ are formed into an ever-clearer image of him.

Church

In article VI of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), the nature of the church is described:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.²²

The local autonomous church is the model that is affirmed in Scripture. According to Hobbs, “the word ‘church’ never refers to organized Christianity or a group of churches” but to either the local body of Christ or the church universal.²³ The above statement also affirms the mission of

¹⁹*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. “-ship.” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/-ship> (Accessed 24 March 2008).

²⁰*Dictionary.com Unabridged*, 1.1st ed., s.v. “-ship.”, <http://dictionary.referece.com/browse/-ship/> (Accessed 24 March 2008).

²¹Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 35.

²²*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article VI.

²³Herschel W. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message: Revised Edition* (Nashville:

the local church: “to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 is the force behind the evangelistic thrust of the church and Matthew 28:18–20 describes the work that is to be done by the church in the fulfillment of her mission: making disciples.

The local church is composed of disciples who should be investing themselves in the lives of other disciples. The process of following Jesus—discipleship—is the curriculum of this Christ-focused school for making disciples. In Acts 2:42–47, we see a glimpse of the way in which the early church practiced the disciple-making task: “add[ing] to their number . . . teaching . . . fellowship . . . praising God . . . [giving] to anyone as he had need.” This passage serves as a curricular outline for the priorities of both the local body and the individual disciple after baptism (Acts 2:41): continuing evangelism, teaching, fellowship, worship, and ministry.

Instead of consigning discipleship to a program of the church, we should be magnifying its missional role. The health and strength of a local church hinges on her effectiveness in making disciples. Unfortunately, according to Ogden, there are some who believe that the church is irrelevant to the discipleship process.²⁴ However, unless local churches make committed disciples, all the evangelism, teaching, fellowship, worship, and ministry will be empty and powerless.

An Integrative Model

Raising up successive generations of committed disciples is the responsibility of the local church. While this maxim may be obvious, the reality is that far too many churches have abandoned intentional discipleship. Instead, the church must reclaim her role as disciple-maker. Wilhoit clearly defines the local church’s assignment:

Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period. It represents neither an interesting, optional pursuit by the church nor an insignificant category in the job description of the body. Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form. Our charge, given by Jesus himself, is to make disciples, baptize them, and teach these new disciples to obey his commands. The witness, worship, teaching, and compassion that the church is to practice all require that Christians be spiritually formed. . . . [t]he fact

LifeWay, 1996), 69.

²⁴Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 31.

remains that spiritual formation has not been the priority in the North American church that it should be.²⁵

In order to establish once again the primacy of formative discipleship in the local church, I would propose an integrative model for church-based discipleship.²⁶ It is *integrative* in the sense that it joins together three essential elements in the formation process: a *paradigm* for the authentic disciple, the *practices* of the local church, and the *production* systems used to make disciples in the local church context (see Fig. 1). Within this model there is an assumption that churches would use it as a philosophical and theological guide for decision-making and evaluation.

Paradigm

Creation begins with an end in mind. When God created the world, He knew what He would be creating before He spoke it into existence.²⁷ When Jesus chose his disciples, he already had the final product in mind. He focused his ministry efforts on shaping these disciples into an ever-clearer representation of himself.²⁸ Likewise, the local church should begin the process of making disciples by starting with the end in mind: a paradigm of an authentic disciple, a vision of what it means to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught his followers concerning the character and convictions of a true disciple, and Scripture records his teaching on this subject in numerous places within the Gospels.²⁹ However, John 15:1–17 serves as a representative passage that I believe most fully develops the essential attributes of a disciple: living in Christ, loving one another, and laboring for the kingdom.³⁰

Living in Christ. In John 15:4, Jesus calls his disciples to abide in Him. Pentecost explains the meaning of abide as “drawing from something that sustains life.”³¹ In this case, the disciple’s relationship with Jesus is

²⁵James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15–16.

²⁶Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 346. The author calls for a more “integrative understanding” of discipleship in which process, rather than programs, is the focus.

²⁷Gen 1:1

²⁸John 17:26

²⁹Luke 9:62, 14:26–33, John 8:31, 13:35 are a few examples of Jesus’ requirements of his disciples, stated both in negative and positive terms.

³⁰Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 357–58. Although Wilkins does not use these particular phrases, he uses the idea of three marks of a disciple: abiding in Jesus’ word, loving one another, and bearing fruit. I have used these ideas in their relationship to John 15.

³¹J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 52. Pentecost uses the examples of plants abiding in the ground, fish abiding in the sea,

1. Paradigm—John 15:1-17

- We should make disciples in an intentional design and clear expectations
- This intentional teaching process becomes a paradigm for making disciples
- Paradigm answers the question: What is an authentic disciple?



2. Practice—Acts 2:28-47

- The church is a disciple-making entity
- The practices of the church should be a curricular guide for disciple making
- Practices answers the question: What is discipleship?

3. Production—Matthew 28:18-20

- The production of disciples occurs in various contexts
- These are delivery systems used to facilitate spiritual formation
- Production answers the question: How do we make disciples?

Figure 1: Integrative Model for Making Disciples Through the Local Church

what maintains spiritual health and vitality. This essential relationship is the first priority of a growing disciple. Jesus states that spiritual formation is dependent upon this sustaining relationship, one in which the disciple receives a constant flow of spiritual nourishment from the divine source. Without this nourishment, the disciple is incapable of any growth and devoid of spiritual power.³²

and birds abiding in the air. These examples illustrate a symbiotic relationship in which a living entity relies upon its environment for life. In the same way, the disciple's abiding relationship with Christ is that nurturing environment.

³²John 15:5-8.

Living in Christ describes the relational priority of the disciple's life. It is in this relationship that he is formed from the inside out. Disciples develop an abundant life in Christ as they worship—corporately and personally—and as they spend time reading, meditating upon, and memorizing the Word of God. The discipline of prayer enriches the intimacy of the disciple's relationship with Christ and attunes his heart to the will of the Father. These and other formative disciplines change the inner man and develop Christ-like character within the heart of the disciple. The evidence of growth is the presence of Spirit-produced fruit that characterizes the one who lives in Christ. Authentic disciples cultivate their love for God, though Christ, and then express that deepening love for Him through love for others in the body and by being on mission for Him in the church and in the world.

Loving One Another. A distinctive proof of one's status as a disciple is love expressed toward others in the body. Twice in John chapter 15, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another.³³ This love was not to be based on subjective feelings for one another, but on their mutual identity as members in the body of Christ. Previously, Jesus had demonstrated the extent of his love for them by taking on the role of servant.³⁴ This act of humble service was an object lesson about the love that Jesus desired for his disciples to express towards each other. He would go on to "lay down his life" at the cross for these friends, and thereby fulfill the symbolism of his servant act in John 13. These two expressions of love serve as literal and figurative standards of the way in which Jesus' disciples should relate to one another. The authentic disciple builds loving relationships within the body of Christ and expresses that love through a willingness to deny self-interest in deference to the needs of fellow disciples.³⁵

In order to develop the type of love that Jesus commanded us to have for one another, disciples must be willing to share in the experience of spiritual community. Implied within the description of the early church is a life of *koinonia*, through which the disciples shared common expressions of love for other believers, including those in close proximity and those far away.³⁶ Consequently, the paradigm for an authentic disciple must refer to the desire one has to share in the communal life of the body, as well as the

³³John 15:12, 17.

³⁴John 13:1–17.

³⁵This is the "same love" that Paul describes in Philippians 2:1–11, where he exhorts the disciples to imitate the self-sacrificing attitude of Christ in their relationships with one another.

³⁶Paul's collection for the saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26, 1 Cor 16:1–3) was an opportunity for the wider body of Christ to express their love for a sister church.

love he expresses to other disciples, including unselfish acts of fellowship, devotion, and ministry.

Laboring for the Kingdom. In John 15:16, Jesus explains the purpose of the spiritual fruit that adorns the life of a devoted disciple. Pursuant to the fact that the fruit is associated with a mission—together with an official appointment and a directive to “go”—Jesus sends out those he has chosen to accomplish his kingdom purpose. Their fruit would be evidenced both internally and externally. The presence of the fruit of His Spirit would be the proof of internal transformation and of their relationship with Him.³⁷ Their external fruit—reproducing themselves through evangelism, teaching, and ministry—would offer practical testimony to the outworking of their faith in Christ. Authentic disciples labor for the kingdom through the active and ongoing witness of their faith in Jesus Christ and by using their Spirit-given gifts in service and ministry to His body.

To be a laborer in the kingdom requires that disciples understand their role within the church as full-fledged ministers of the gospel. It is through the church, and with the church, that followers of Christ accomplish the work of the kingdom; each member of the body is responsible for using the aforementioned grace gifts to build up the church in cooperation with other members.³⁸ In addition, every disciple is responsible for living with a missional perspective: seeing every aspect of life as an opportunity to expand the kingdom of God through evangelistic zeal and personal disciple-making.

Practices

In Acts 2:42–47 we find a model that most would agree contains the essential functions of the church. The practices outlined in this passage include evangelism, teaching, fellowship, ministry, and worship.³⁹ While some would use the term discipleship to describe the teaching practice, I would argue, from the biblical perspective outlined earlier in this article, that discipleship is not a function of the church, but is its principal mission.⁴⁰ The local church is, or should be, a disciple-making entity. It should be through the efforts and ministry of the church—the gathered

³⁷Gal 5:22–23.

³⁸1 Cor 12:7.

³⁹Morlee Maynard, *We're Here for the Churches: The Southern Baptist Convention Entities Working Together* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001) 9–14. Maynard lists the basic functions of the church as worship, evangelism, missions, ministry, discipleship, and fellowship. I am using Maynard's descriptions of these functions, although I will use a slightly different nomenclature in this article.

⁴⁰Hull agrees: “Discipleship is not just one of the things the church does; it is what the church does.” Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 24. Likewise, Wilkins states that “discipleship is the ministry of the church.” Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 345.

body of Christ—that disciples come to know Christ and then make Him known.

Discipleship is the process through which we make authentic disciples; the tasks of the church form the curriculum. Each task represents a body of knowledge and praxis. Each task alone is insufficient to shape authentic disciples; however, the tasks in concert provide a synergism that creates a productive environment for discipleship. As the church fulfills each of these tasks, authentic disciples are nurtured and the health of the church is enhanced.⁴¹

Evangelism. Evangelism is the starting point for discipleship.⁴² Churches are called to “share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others through words, deeds, and lifestyle of church members . . . [and] call people to repentance and faith both locally and throughout the world.”⁴³ Evangelism includes the strategy of missions, which is an organized outgrowth of a kingdom perspective on evangelism. Churches should teach about missions, support missions, and provide opportunities for disciples to experience missions locally and internationally.⁴⁴

The practice of evangelism, as a component of discipleship, also provides a starting point for making authentic disciples. When a person makes a commitment to follow Christ, he begins a lifelong relationship of living in Christ; at the time of conversion, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer with His presence and the potential for greater growth in Christ occurs. The disciple now has the responsibility to identify with Christ in His church through baptism and then to share the gospel with a lost world and make new disciples. Compassion for the lost should grow as his love for Christ and others increases. Evangelism also offers the disciple an opportunity to labor for the kingdom by testifying to others about God’s work in his life.

Worship. “Worship is acknowledging God in experiences that deepen a Christian’s faith and strengthen a Christian’s service. This function is a response to God’s presence in adoration, celebration, and praise; in confession of sin and repentance; and in thanksgiving and service.”⁴⁵

⁴¹Hull, *Disciple Making Church*, 64. Authentic spiritual formation, according to Hull, depends on consistently practicing the spirit of the functions outlined in Acts 2:42–47. He presents these practices in the form of five “commitments”: commitment to Scripture, one another, prayer, praise/worship, and outreach.

⁴²Harold S. Bender, *These Are My People: The Nature of the Church and its Discipleship According to the New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962), 76. Bender cites Acts 14:21 as evidence that making disciples begins with “a response to the preaching of the Gospel.”

⁴³Maynard, *We’re Here For the Churches*, 10.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Worship is experienced in a disciple's life in three ways: corporate worship, personal worship, and life stewardship. The local church provides corporate worship as the body gathers regularly to proclaim God's worth, through preaching the Word and celebrating the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁴⁶ As an extension of corporate worship, the disciple should practice regular private worship through Scripture reading and meditation, prayer, fasting, and other disciplines. Worship is also the act of stewarding one's life to God's honor, including the dedication of time, talents, and finances for His purposes.

Worship is a vital element in the growth and development of the authentic disciple. The act of worship is a personal manifestation of love for Christ and an expression of the living reality of His presence in the lives of His followers.⁴⁷ The disciple's love for other believers increases as they encourage one another in worship and express their corporate unity.⁴⁸ Worship also provides disciples opportunities to labor for the kingdom by using their spiritual gifts and by offering financial gifts that will be used to continue the ongoing kingdom work of the church.⁴⁹

Teaching. "The church has responsibility to teach, exhort, and encourage, rebuke and discipline one another."⁵⁰ The task of teaching disciples in the church occurs on two levels: scripturally and experientially. "Teaching the Bible to believers . . . provides the foundation for making disciples and for nurturing them."⁵¹ The church also provides "experiences that nourish, influence, and develop individuals within the fellowship of a church." Teaching provides the disciple with a foundation for a biblical worldview through both formal and informal experiences, through both study and application.

Essential characteristics of the authentic disciple are developed through the task of teaching. There is nothing more important to the development of one's life in Christ than consistent study of and obedience to the Word of God. *The Baptist Faith and Message* affirms that "all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation."⁵² The Bible guides our relationship with Him and instructs us in how we are to live out our faith in Him. Similarly, the Bible informs the proper conduct of our relationships with one another. We learn about the meaning of love and its application through scriptural instruction. The Bible also teaches us

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Rom 12:1–2.

⁴⁸Heb 10:25–26.

⁴⁹1 Cor 14:26; Ps. 116:17–18.

⁵⁰Maynard, *We're Here For the Churches*, 12.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article I.

about our kingdom responsibilities, our ministry gifts, and the work God has planned and prepared for his disciples.

Ministry. The task of ministry is defined as “a loving response in Jesus’ name to the needs” of all persons, and “involves the church in specific actions to meet human needs in the name of Christ.”⁵³ The importance of ministry in the discipleship process cannot be understated; this is the practical expression of the disciple’s obedience to Christ’s commands and an imitation of his example. The New Testament example of church-based ministry accentuates the effectiveness of corporate efforts as well as the role of the church in providing ministry opportunities to growing disciples.⁵⁴

Ministry is an outgrowth of two of the characteristics of the authentic disciple and an expression of the third. Love for Christ is perfected by the intentional development of one’s life “in” Christ. That love flows into mutual relationships in the body and into the disciple’s relationships with those outside the church. The kingdom labor of ministry is born at the nexus of love for Christ, obedience to His commands, and compassion for people.

Fellowship. The discipline of fellowship is difficult to define because it describes a Spirit-created bond within the body. Disciples cannot “do” fellowship, as one does ministry, evangelism, worship, or learning. Instead, fellowship is a manner of life and attitude in the church; we live “in” fellowship with one another. “Fellowship is the intimate spiritual relationship that Christians share with God and other believers through their relationship with Jesus Christ.”⁵⁵ This relationship is expressed through corporate and individual actions that maintain the unity that the church experiences as result of their common relationship in Christ. Primary among the expressions of fellowship in Christ is the meaningful celebration of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:16–17).

Fellowship is established in the disciple’s relationship with Christ. Although growth in Christ nurtures one’s personal desire to live in unity with other disciples, the effect of corporate growth is much more conducive to sustained fellowship. This points to the need for a discipleship process in the local church that emphasizes gathering in varying sizes of relational groups: mentoring relationships, small groups or classes, ministry teams, and congregational assemblies. It is within these settings that disciples learn how to love one another and are offered opportunities to express that love through action.⁵⁶ These manifestations of fellowship are usually

⁵³Maynard, *We’re Here For the Churches*, 11.

⁵⁴Acts 6:1–7.

⁵⁵Maynard, *We’re Here For the Churches*, 13.

⁵⁶Glenn McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality* (Grand Haven, MI: FaithWalk, 2004), 98.

offered in the form of ministry to the church. Authentic disciples labor for the kingdom when they contribute to the health and well-being of the body by maintaining fellowship through their acts of mutual ministry.

Production

The production of disciples in the local church is facilitated through various formats or delivery systems, including the family, personal relationships, small or large groups and church ministries. Each of these formats is biblically-based and provides a context for spiritual growth using different methodologies and distinctive goals. While some would argue concerning the effectiveness of one system over another, I would submit that churches that provide experiences in each of these contexts will create a more comprehensive environment for making disciples. McDonald observes:

Churches that are “in the Spirit” simply spend most of their time working, planning, and praying over relationships. It is their recurring experience that their most cherished goals are met as they help their members . . . enter and sustain a relationship with a spiritual mentor; teach another person the basics of the Christian life; listen for God’s voice in the context of a small group; and step out of their comfort zone in the realm of mission.⁵⁷

Family. The family was the first classroom for religious instruction ordained by God. He commissioned parents with the responsibility of teaching their children and passing along from one generation to another not only the truth of God’s word, but also an all-encompassing love for Him and desire to serve Him alone.⁵⁸ Although parents have given over the lion’s share of this responsibility to church leaders, God’s intention has not changed. The family is still the most effective context for evangelism and spiritual development.⁵⁹ Discipleship through the family includes:

- Equipping parents to disciple their children
- Promoting spiritual growth opportunities in the home
- Strengthening marriage relationships

Home-based discipleship not only targets the efforts of the church where it can be most effective, but it also strengthens relationships in the family and forges a church “partnership” with parents, wherein the

⁵⁷Ibid., 16.

⁵⁸Deut 6:4–9.

⁵⁹Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 345.

ministry of the church serves to support rather than to supply spiritual training for children. However, the emphasis on family discipleship will not be as applicable to single adults, older adults, or childless couples. This emphasizes the need for options and balance in discipleship delivery systems.⁶⁰

Personal Relationships. The need for personal investment in discipleship is confirmed through scriptural examples including Paul's relationship with Timothy and Titus, as well as Jesus' unique relationship with Peter.⁶¹ Para-church organizations, such as Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators, specialize in these mentoring relationships between mature disciples and new or growing converts.⁶² The institutional church, perhaps because of the emphasis on programs and gatherings, has often appeared less effective in nurturing these relationships within the local body. The elements of this discipleship format include:

- One-on-one relationships
- Mentoring and coaching
- New or growing converts learning from mature disciples

This format benefits the disciple by providing a context for two people to experience life together, as the new or growing believer receives a significant investment from the disciple maker. In addition, discipleship can be individualized according to the maturity, needs, and capabilities of the disciple. From the disciple-maker's perspective, personal relationships provide for greater accountability and more accurate assessment of spiritual growth.

Groups. Group experiences constitute the most common process for discipleship in the local church. The purpose of a group will dictate its size and focus. Large group experiences are useful in communicating a large amount of information in a classroom setting, using a presenter with expertise in a particular area. These include conferences, workshops, and Bible study programs. Small group options include Sunday School classes, home groups, accountability groups, gender groups, and special interest groups. The Sunday School class is the most common group model;

⁶⁰Ibid. Wilkins believes that both the home and the church have been given the responsibility for the disciple making process. In Matthew 12:46–40, Jesus affirmed the identity of a new “spiritual family” that would become the role of the church.

⁶¹Matt 16:15–19; John 21:15–17; 2 Tim 1:2–6; Titus 1:4.

⁶²Hull, *Disciple Making Church*, 30–31. According to Hull, these organizations use a “Christocentric” model of disciple making that focuses on the accumulation of knowledge and development of ministry skills in groups of “like-minded, gifted, task-oriented people.” He recommends a “churchocentric” approach and recognizes a broader mission and “a multiplicity of beliefs about church priorities.”

these groups deliver discipleship through Bible teaching and fellowship experiences. The “university model”—a schedule of specialty courses related to spiritual growth—is another typical group approach that churches use as a part of a discipleship process. These small group strategies, meeting at either the church site or in homes include common elements:

- Shared leadership approach
- Focus on systematic discipleship or targeted learning
- Emphasis on “building community” and accountability

Groups are a pragmatic approach to discipleship because they provide a context for spiritual formation that is routinely efficient. The larger the group becomes, however, the more difficult it is to establish accountability and assess genuine growth. Balancing the need for building relationships with an instructional agenda can also be problematic. Both factors are important in the discipleship process, but one or the other usually receives the greater emphasis. However, groups remain the most common vehicle for discipleship; creating a process that uses a variety of delivery systems will help to mitigate the weaknesses of any singular approach.

Church Ministries. One of my criticisms of a compartmentalized discipleship approach—presenting discipleship as a church program rather than a church process—is that important church ministries are neglected in the evaluation of discipleship strategies. Ministries that play an essential role in spiritual formation include:

- worship services, formed around the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the ordinances
- deacon ministry
- mission teams
- evangelism programs
- community outreach

Every ministry program of the local church provides growth experiences that should be included in an integrative discipleship process. By doing so, discipleship can be delivered through the normal “rhythm” of church life rather than creating new programs. In addition, leaders begin to see the discipleship potential in their ministries and can use that understanding to plan in conjunction with other leaders. As a result, church health improves along with individual growth.

Using the Integrative Model

The integrative model for discipleship in the local church is designed to be descriptive and prescriptive; in other words, the usefulness of the model lies in its ability to serve as an evaluative tool for assessing the current state of discipleship in the local church, as well as its value in planning, improving, and implementing an intentional discipleship process.

The model uses a modified “merging traffic” symbol to illustrate Matthew 28:18–20. The arrow points to the goal of making authentic disciples who are growing in Christlikeness and reproducing themselves. Simultaneously, the same process is improving the health of the local church; healthy churches are composed of growing disciples. Three distinct paths flow towards this goal: a paradigm for the authentic disciple, the practices of the local church, and the contexts used for the production of disciples.

The paradigm path describes the characteristics of a disciple who is developing in an upward relationship of devotion to God through Christ, an inward relationship of love for the body, and an outward relationship of compassion for the lost world. This description includes the markers for assessing the development of disciples in the local church and provides the objectives for discipleship planning.

The path of practices focuses on the fundamental tasks of the local church and describes a healthy, kingdom-focused agenda. The role of these practices in this discipleship model is, first, to acknowledge the importance of the church in making disciples and, second, to provide an outline for comprehensive discipleship. Assessing or planning the content for a discipleship process should take into account the thematic balance inherent in the church practices.

The production path presents a list of options for delivering discipleship through the local church. Although not an exhaustive list, the options represent the most common approaches for making disciples. The purpose of the production path is to emphasize the importance of using a multifaceted approach to content delivery. Disciples are developed in a variety of contexts: learning in classrooms, sharing with fellow disciples, worshipping in the congregation, working on the mission field, serving in ministry, relating to mature role models, and maturing in a family setting.

The integrative aspect of this model begins at the point at which these roads converge. Comprehensive discipleship planning begins with an end in mind. What kind of disciple are we seeking to make? With a paradigm in place, we can address content decisions. How do the practices of the church guide our process for making authentic disciples? With our concept and content established, we can provide a context for growth.

What formats can we use to produce authentic disciples? By asking these questions in conjunction with the principles in this integrative model, church leaders have the tools they may use to maintain a comprehensive discipleship process and reclaim the biblical mandate to make disciples and establish healthy and kingdom-focused churches.

Book Reviews

Biblical Studies

***Ezra & Nehemiah*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. By Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007. 256 pages. Hardcover, \$29.99.**

Before investing in Levering's work on Ezra and Nehemiah, one should carefully read the preface and introduction to ascertain the author's approach. To be fair, Levering admits that he is not attempting to write a traditional commentary (21). However, a subtitle clarifying the focus of this text would be helpful. Even Levering's own stated goal falls short of the direction of this commentary. The author states that his goal "is to illumine how these two books fit into the unity of the Bible" (19). More specifically, as the author later stipulates, the book is an attempt to trace the theme of "eschatological restoration" within the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as only understood by reading them through the lenses of later biblical works (35). As such, the book does not attempt to exegete the texts of Ezra and Nehemiah, but focuses on aspects within them that point toward prophecy and fulfillment. This accentuates the greatest limitation of the work as the author often forces the eschatological fulfillment into the text, thus weakening its significance on its historical context.

The book is structured around the chapter divisions of the two books. The effort of the author to demonstrate how Ezra and Nehemiah fit within the context of the rest of Scripture and specifically the New Testament is laudable, though the connections, at times, appear forced. The style of the book is somewhat confusing. The author is prone to lengthy asides (cf. 161–12) and frequently interacts with Bede in the chapter using parenthetical references, but also includes footnotes of the other authors cited. The bibliography is rather selective, with many excellent recent sources absent and showing a decided proclivity towards a select few sources, with only sparse interaction with the others. The references to Bede are so frequent it is often difficult to determine where Bede stops and where Levering begins again.

The struggle for the reader begins with Levering's noncommittal stance on the historicity of the books themselves. This is demonstrated by the author's attempt to establish the significance of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah by advocating Ezra's role in the composition of the Old

Testament canon. He suggests, with Friedman, that it was Ezra who “took on the enormous, intricate, and ironic task of combing these alternative versions of the same stories into one work” (30), but only benignly concludes that “his prophetic authority enables him to produce a canonical text of the Torah that adequately, despite its errors, expresses the original divinely revealed Torah” (29–30).

The weakest section of the book is the conclusion to the book of Nehemiah, which is decidedly misnamed. The entire chapter is more of a polemic for the Roman Catholic Church with little to do with the text of Nehemiah. Instead, Levering uses that chapter to advocate that one is not a believer if he or she is not a part of the church (211–13).

When the author interacted with the text, a few helpful insights emerge. However, those occasions are infrequent and are often followed by *non sequitur* conclusions (cf. 152). In the end, the author’s unanswered rhetorical question summarizes the entire work. He asks, “Did Ezra and Nehemiah, in their efforts to reconstitute Israel culturally and politically, take a wrong turn or at least a dead end?” (30) Perhaps that should also be asked of the author.

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***Proverbs.* By Tremper Longman III. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 608 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

Tremper Longman has brought his experience to a helpful and practical commentary of the book of Proverbs. This volume is the second in Baker’s series on Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. While the series admits to seek as its target pastors and seminary students, the book demonstrates a simple outline and is replete with practical application that any Bible student will find helpful. The text is marked by a thorough and helpful use of Hebrew, highlighting both the speakers and the intended audience while revealing the proverbs in their context whenever possible with the balance of Scripture and New Testament application. Frequent use of footnotes allows interested readers the chance to engage in further study of significant topics and the bibliographical section is impressive.

The introduction of the commentary addresses the critical issues regarding the title, place in the canon, authorship, date, setting, genre and style. Longman also addresses the book of Proverbs in the context of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In addition, Longman includes an excellent section on the theology of the book of Proverbs that exposes

those who only superficially read the text and miss its theological truths. Among the selected topics discussed, Longman explains the sources of wisdom described in the book of Proverbs. He lists observation and experience, tradition, and mistakes, but omits other sources as described in the book including: the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7), the Word of God (Prov 6:23; 16:20; 28:4–5, 9; 30:5), divine direction (Prov 16:90), and wise counsel from others (Prov 20:5, 18).

The commentary divides the book of Proverbs into five parts. Longman demonstrates that the first nine chapters of the book are organized as comments on the path of one's life portrayed as a journey with dangers to avoid along the way. Parts two through five, Longman suggests, reveal a more random arrangement and are divided in this work into two sections of collections of proverbs by Solomon, sayings of the wise, and the final section which encompasses the sayings of Agur and King Lemuel and the Poem of the Virtuous Woman.

Each chapter begins with his translation followed by a section on interpretation. Since the first division of the book demonstrates a more organized structure, Longman concludes each chapter in that division with a section on theological implications. Longman explains that chapters 10–31 of Proverbs are intentionally random partly due to the means of collection and partly by intention to address life-situations, reflecting "the messiness of life" (40). Longman is suspicious of commentators who find "under-the-surface-arrangements" (42) within the book. Thus, the final four sections of the commentary proceed with the same verse-by-verse exposition, but leave the implications to the topical studies outlined in the appendix.

The strength of the work is the strong exegetical commentary throughout. Readers will find the topical studies section in the appendix especially helpful. This section outlines 28 topics arranged alphabetically and lists the passages in which they are addressed.

Longman presents the book of Proverbs as a practical book, the purpose of which is to "give prudence to the simpleminded . . . [and also] to give knowledge and discretion to the 'young'" (97). It is addressed to anyone who will listen to its teaching (103), and maintains that those who follow its instructions pursue wisdom, yet understand that "there is always more to learn" (219). Longman explains that some of the proverbs in this book are always true, while some are bound by time and condition.

Those interested in a more detailed explanation for the divisions of the sections of the commentary may leave somewhat disappointed with only a brief paragraph or two introducing each new division of the book.

This commentary leaves the reader with a greater appreciation for God's Word, a greater understanding of this magnificent book, and access

to the wisdom it seeks to convey. It will be an excellent asset for pastors, teachers, seminary students, or anyone interested in a detailed discussion of Proverbs.

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***The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World.* By Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley. Jerusalem: Carta, 2006. 448 pages. Hardcover, \$99.95.**

While the publisher advertises this as an “atlas of the biblical world,” this is not your typical Bible atlas. One may be tempted to interpret this work as an historical geography textbook, but it is not your typical historical geography textbook. The content and incorporation of primary sources would define the target audience as scholars, but the structure and writing style focus on students. The title of the book belies the scholarly intent and approach of the book. The study of the Bible must be done in its geographical, cultural, and historic contexts. The revelation of Scripture (or as the authors articulate it within its literary context—“the epic literature of the ancient Israelites”) occurred and developed on a small strip of land that served as a bridge and a barrier as armies and ideas marched across its soil.

The authors have succeeded in producing an historical geography resource for all students, scholars, and those who take seriously the study of biblical history. The atlas consists of twenty-five chapters from the “Dawn of History” (early and intermediate Bronze Ages) to “The Bar Kochba Revolt 132–135 CE.” It includes three introductory chapters addressing the topics of the history of the discipline of historical geography, the ancient worldview, and the geography of the Levant. The first sixteen chapters were written by Anson Rainey and R. Steven Notley wrote chapters 17–25.

The format of the book is consistent for each chapter, which deals with a specific segment of history. A discussion of Egypt is followed by Mesopotamia (e.g. Kassites, Anatolians, and Assyrians) and then sometimes other regions such as the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean, North Syria, or Phoenician Coast. After this broad historical overview of the ancient Near East, a discussion of the history of ancient Palestine follows. Most chapters end with excursuses addressing issues pertinent to historical texts and/or archaeology. The book contains references and an index at the end.

One of the unique features of the work is the color coding—references (red text), original texts (light blue), and their translations into English

(dark blue). Throughout the text pertinent primary data is accessible in the body of the work, whether it is original Egyptian hieroglyphs, cuneiform (in transliteration), Hebrew, or Greek. In addition, when a biblical text is quoted, it is first written in Hebrew and/or Greek, followed by an English translation. Archaeology discussions play an auxiliary role.

The text reflects years of scholarship. The authors are well known and trained in their respective disciplines and have control of the biblical and other textual data. They make a concerted effort to ensure that this work will be used by students and non-specialists. While they move the reader from the primary texts and data to an historical reconstruction, there is no rehashing of every scholarly opinion of individual site identification that is common in earlier works of historical geography. The format is well designed and the illustrations are exceptional.

While the work uses historical critical methods and views the biblical text as literature, there is an underlying assumption that beneath the biblical accounts there is solid history. A student or scholar who digests this work will be well equipped to address the biblical text within its historical and cultural context. The theologian or biblical scholar who has a high view of the biblical text, and is not shy to confront primary data, will find many gems to mine from this work and a foundation for handling the biblical text within its revealed history.

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***Romans. Hermeneia.* By Robert Jewett. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. 1140 + lxx pages. Hardcover, \$90.00.**

Robert Jewett is known for his longtime fascination with Pauline literature and theology, particularly as found in Romans. His work in the field is demonstrated by the depth and breadth of this commentary that covers things grammatical, syntactical, and theological while his pastoral heart is shown by his comments that are practical and applicable to the current world. The stated purpose of the commentary is to be as comprehensive as possible while remaining readable (1), certainly a laudable if lofty goal.

Jewett believes that Paul's main concern in writing Romans is to promote his mission to Spain, and in so doing to unite the disparate elements of a divided Roman church into a single body under the "shameful cross" of Christ (1). The introduction continues to outline Jewett's method, bringing to bear all critical forms of evaluation including socio-rhetorical along with historical and cultural information. In terms of the structure of

Romans itself, Jewett outlines a typical persuasive letter, though he differs in the details from others. Jewett lists the various parts: *exordium* (1:1–12), *narratio* (1:13–15), *propositio* (1:16–17), *probatio* (1:18–15:13), and *peroratio* (15:14–16:24). He certainly simplifies the overall outline of the letter, which clarifies the flow of Romans.

Each section of the commentary is broken down such that information can be easily accessed. For example, 7:7–25 begins with a translation along with text critical notes (the notes are intentionally limited to changes that make a difference in sense). Jewett then gives a brief analysis of the section as a whole, noting what verses belong together and how the section coheres to the previous and coming portions of the text. He then explains the contentious issues of the passage (in this case determining who the “I” of 7–25 is), explains the various positions, both historic and current, along with the major proponents, and then explains and defends his own conclusion (“I” refers to Paul’s pre-conversion self as seen through his post-conversion eyes, building on the work of Lambrecht and Stowers). He follows this with a detailed outline of the section based upon rhetorical disposition. Finally, Jewett gives a verse by verse exegesis of the text, melding grammar, syntax, theology, and praxis into this portion.

Robert Jewett has crafted a magnificent commentary on Romans. In no way is this a revolutionary text or a major breakthrough for exegetes of Romans, rather it is a compendium of scholarship on the letter along with detailed, critical analysis offered with an eye toward application in today’s world. The only complaint one can offer is that Jewett assumes Paul cannot have a developed Trinitarian understanding of God, and thus neglects such passages as Romans 8:9–11. While Jewett’s offering is not a landmark in the understanding of Romans, it is one of the most complete works on Paul’s letter because it incorporates various disciplines into a coherent whole. This commentary is intended for scholars and pastors who have retained a deep understanding of Greek, and it should be on the shelf of all those who want to study this letter from Paul.

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***Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study.* By Markus Bockmuehl. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 297 pages. Paperback, \$22.00.**

Markus Bockmuehl is a professor at Oxford University. His complementary interests in New Testament studies and early Christian studies contribute to the central points of *Seeing the Word*. In order

to appreciate the central points of *Seeing the Word*, the reader needs to appreciate Bockmuehl's underlying concern for creating a new way forward for New Testament studies. He is concerned about two types of narrowness that tend to undercut the ability of scholars to attend to what the New Testament says, and to do so in dialogue with a wide array of other scholars. The first type of narrowness claims that "Christian confessional and theological convictions have no place in serious study of the Bible" (76). This is a well-represented position among those who labor in the academic study of the Bible, especially in secular university settings (55–56). The second type of narrowness is a single-minded focus on a uniquely Christian, theological interpretation of Scripture that has difficulty hearing contributions from those who do not share the same Christian or theological convictions (59). Bockmuehl's point is that one aspect of Scripture is its role as "public truth." Because it is "public truth," it is desirable to create "a credible rallying point around which secular, Jewish, and Christian approaches to the New Testament" could "meet for discussion and debate about the Christian claims" (59).

Bockmuehl then goes on to set up two proposed areas of focus that could lead to a helpful discussion about what the New Testament actually says and allow for the input of an array of scholars (61–74). First, it would be helpful to focus on "effective history," which means focus upon the effects of the New Testament, especially on its earliest readers (65–66). In other words, beginning from the early church, what effects did the New Testament have upon those who received it? Second, it would be helpful if those engaging in conversation about what the New Testament says were to agree to read the New Testament together with a focus upon what the New Testament says to its implied readers. Its implied readers view the New Testament as truthful and authoritative, because they have become "Spirit-filled" Christians who are part of the church (69–72). Even readers who are not Christians can contribute to this discussion of what the Bible says to its implied readers (73). He recognizes that this calls for a "distinction between interpretations that seek to hear and expound the text and those that intend primarily to subvert it, whether doggedly or glibly" (74).

In chapters two through seven, Bockmuehl seeks to clarify and demonstrate how these two areas of focus for New Testament study are both defensible and fruitful for interpreters. His examples include an overview of the way these two approaches show up fruitfully in the contributions of E.C. Hoskyns to the study of the Gospel of John and to New Testament theology (chapter 5).

Bockmuehl's work provides three important benefits for believing interpreters of the Bible. First, he reminds believing interpreters of the important contributions that can be made by those who are willing to

interpret the New Testament in line with the presuppositions of its first primary audience. Second, he also reminds us that believing interpreters have gone before us and that we can learn from them, both positively and negatively. Third, he encourages believing interpreters to realize that it would be fruitful for the study of the New Testament for them to invite others to read the New Testament like a believer would. Other important benefits of Bockmuehl's book for all interpreters include its positive disposition toward New Testament theology and toward a healthy relationship between good theology and good exegesis.

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***Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 15.* Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by David E. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 702 + xxiv pages. Hardcover, \$65.00.**

The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* has long been considered a staple of Old Testament studies. Now with the completion of the English translation of volume 15, the almost three-decade effort is nearly finished. This work concludes the study of the Hebrew words: forthcoming are volumes 16 and 17, covering the Aramaic terms and a general index respectively.

This volume is a translation from the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, which was published in 1994. In all, 61 scholars contribute to the 86 articles comprising this volume which ranges from **שִׁכָּר** (to become intoxicated) to **תַּרְשִׁישׁ** (Tarshish). Occasionally, one of the editors or other contributors will add a paragraph in the middle of the discussion that supplements that material. These interjections are added seamlessly into the flow of the article and add to the scholarship. The words are arranged alphabetically according to the Hebrew, but are transliterated throughout the dictionary. Thus, while knowledge of biblical Hebrew is helpful in understanding the discussions, it is not essential.

The authors' preface from the very first volume stated their three-fold goal, "The major goal of all the studies in this work is to present the fundamental concepts intended by the respective words and terms, the traditions in which they occur, and the different nuances of meaning they have in each tradition." To accomplish that goal, each article includes a thorough investigation of the various concepts, traditions, and interpretations of the words, including etymology, lexical field, occurrences, derivatives, archeological insights, cognates, and both theological and secular uses. The

various nuances of the lexemes are systematically addressed to give a full understanding of the term.

The work is thoroughly annotated and many of the articles include an extensive bibliography. This particular volume includes articles of significant importance. The publishers point out **שְׁלוֹם** (peace), **שֵׁם** (name), **יָם** (heaven), **שָׁמַע** (hear), **שָׁמַשׁ** (sun), **שָׁפֵט** (judge), and **הוֹרָה** (instruction), as being particularly significant. Also included are **שָׁלַח** (send), **שָׁמַר** (watch, keep), **שָׁנָה** (year), **שַׁעַר** (gate), and **הוֹלָדוֹת** (family, clan).

This volume will be an invaluable tool to students and ministers seeking to understand better these terms in an effort to communicate more effectively.

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***Understanding Matthew: The Early Christian Worldview of the First Gospel.* By Stephen Westerholm. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 160 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.**

Stephen Westerholm's goal in *Understanding Matthew* is to extract Matthew's worldview from the First Gospel by seeking to understand "how Matthew made sense of things, and to see how it makes sense to make sense of things that way" (26). Westerholm concludes that Matthew's basic message is that Jesus "is a fit object of devotion and discipleship" (14). Thus, "Matthew wrote . . . not to inform readers of the nature of Christian discipleship but to summon them to a *life* of discipleship" (16). Throughout Westerholm's book, he employs Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a conversation partner since Westerholm thinks that Bonhoeffer lived Matthew's call to discipleship accurately and faithfully.

Westerholm appropriately sets the stage for a book about worldviews by defining "worldview" in chapter one: a worldview is "our basic understanding of life, the framework within which we interpret our lives and the world around us" (21). From here, Westerholm presents two interrelated chapters. In chapter two, Westerholm explores Jesus' famous recitation against worry (6:24–34). Herein, Jesus' fundamental worldview surfaces: "Jesus simply assumes that the people to whom he speaks believe that there is a God and that God is their benevolent heavenly father" (28). Chapter three wrestles with the difficulties imposed by the high moral demands of the Sermon on the Mount. These demands make sense within Jesus' (and Matthew's) worldview: "Jesus lives in a world of good and evil—of infinite goodness and unacceptable evil" (49).

In chapters four and five, Westerholm briefly retraces the history of Abraham, Moses, David, and the Babylonian Exile in order to note their

importance for interpreting Matthew's worldview. This history reaches its climax in Jesus, who inaugurates God's reign. After discussing what Jesus *does* in chapter five, Westerholm presents who Jesus *is* in chapter six, namely someone who assumes the divine functions of God and who demands absolute allegiance (112). Westerholm describes this allegiance as true discipleship in chapter seven. Chapter eight serves as the book's conclusion and reminds the reader that Matthew is better read narratively instead of thematically.

Understanding Matthew allows the readers' eyes to glide effortlessly through its pages. Especially helpful is Westerholm's reminder that it is important to understand an author's worldview. Westerholm grounds the interpreter in the authorial intent of the text and seeks to avoid emphasis on Matthew's sub-themes to the exclusion of his primary theme, namely discipleship. Going a step further, Westerholm correctly reminds the exegete that Matthew wrote his story in order to elicit allegiance to Jesus. The rest of the Gospel must be read through this lens.

Aside from these strengths, *Understanding Matthew* has at least three major weaknesses. First, Westerholm apparently has in mind a scholarly audience, but the book does not exhibit the marks of a scholarly work. Although he offers splendid explanations of several difficult passages and Matthean theologies (39–40, 48–51, 66–67, 95, 114–117), Westerholm does not interact with scholarly literature, offers no bibliography for further research, and provides no Scripture index. In essence, Westerholm should delineate his audience in the introduction.

Second, Westerholm over-simplifies Matthew's worldview. Westerholm is correct in that Matthew's worldview does assume the existence of a benevolent creator; it is deeply rooted in the heritage of Abraham, Moses, David, and the Exile; and it does assume that Jesus is the Messiah after whom all people should unswervingly follow. However, Westerholm fails to say enough. A few strategically placed footnotes concerning the complexity of Matthew's worldview would eliminate Westerholm's apparent flattening of the evidence.

Third, Bonhoeffer's role in the book is unexpected and artificial. It is unexpected in light of the book's title, which gives no indication of Bonhoeffer's salient role. It is artificial in that it is often unclear why certain sections about Bonhoeffer were added. Given the prominent role that he plays in the work, the title or sub-title should inform the reader of his presence and/or function. In so doing, Westerholm might better market his book to those who are interested in Bonhoeffer's life and hermeneutic and better explain its purpose.

Understanding Matthew fails to include enough adequate information to use it as a primary textbook for understanding Matthew's worldview.

However, it might function well as supplementary reading for an undergraduate class or church.

Keith Campbell

***Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary.* By C. John Collins. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006. 318 pages. Softcover, \$17.99.**

Passionate discussion is once again taking place regarding the nature of Scripture and what is meant by inerrancy. Much of this discussion has been generated by Peter Enns's book *Inspiration and Incarnation* and Greg Beale's rigorous interaction with some of Enns's troubling claims. A good portion of the disagreement centers on the extent to which the Old Testament reflects ancient Near Eastern assumptions and how the world picture the Bible generates should be conceived given what modern science tells us about the universe. John Collins did not intend to engage the Enns-Beale debate, but his book is nevertheless a timely contribution to the discussion.

Collins is uniquely suited to write this volume, having a background in science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Now a professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Collins addresses linguistic, literary, historical, and scientific questions in this thorough study of Genesis 1–4. Collins's first two chapters set out his methodology and rationale, aiming at "ancient literary competence." The reader is introduced to "A Discourse-Oriented Literary Approach," which is how Collins describes the method he employs in analyzing the text as well as the criteria he uses to evaluate interpretative options.

Having set forth his methodology, Collins first takes up Genesis 1–4 in its literary context, then discusses the creation week (Gen 1:1–2:3), the garden of Eden (2:4–25), the Fall (3:1–24), and what takes place after Eden (4:1–26). This section of the book is a commentary on the text—not arguing a thesis but discussing the text according to the methodology Collins set forth. Interspersed are extra notes on many points of interest, such as the nature of death in Genesis 2:17, the location of Eden, and whether Genesis 3:15 is a protoevangelium. Collins also traces reverberations of these texts through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Having thoroughly discussed Genesis 1–4, Collins turns to the question of sources, unity, and authorship. He concludes that Genesis 1–11 is a unified composition that fits best with the ancient claim of Mosaic authorship.

Collins then argues in chapter 9 that the communicative purpose of Genesis 1–4 is to set forth the worldview that undergirds the religion of the Pentateuch (244). Chapter 10 takes up historical and scientific issues,

and it is here that Collins's work contributes to the Enns-Beale discussion: "the worldview is intended to be normative, while the world picture need not be; by this distinction I, as a modern who accepts contemporary cosmology as part of my world picture, can share a worldview with some ancient whose world picture involved a stationary earth with an orbiting sun" (262). At the same time, Collins emphasizes the importance of understanding phenomenological language and suggests that the world picture described in the Bible might not be as different from our own as some, such as Peter Enns and Paul Seely, suggest. Collins argues against the view that "the water under the earth" (Exod. 20:4) refers to a subterranean ocean (264), and asserts, "There is no evidence that the 'expanse' . . . *must* be describing a solid canopy as a physical entity; it is enough to take it *as if* the sky were such" (264, emphasis his). For Collins, "it may well be that some biblical statements reflect a world picture that we cannot share—say, on the size of the earth, or that the moon is a lamp rather than a reflector. But this does not mean that the world picture is part of the message being communicated" (265). These considerations are significant contributions to the ongoing discussion of the relationship between the inerrancy of the Bible and modern science.

This book furthers our understanding of Genesis 1–4 and those wrestling with the relationship between science and the Bible will benefit from what Collins says in this and other volumes. Less satisfactory is Collins' methodology, with particular reference to his appeals to interpretive criteria and discourse analysis. Many of Collins' conclusions are derived from considerations not set forth in his methodological discussion. For all the focus on the science of interpretation, Collins also practices it as an art. This is not to take issue with the artistic aspects of interpretation, traditional hermeneutics, or with coming to interpretive conclusions based on criteria that are not articulated. It is to insist that interpretation is both a science and an art. That being said, the importance of the subject matter, the quality of Collins's work, and the timeliness of this contribution make this a valuable volume.

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Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar.* By Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi. *Invitation to Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006. 364 pp. \$49.00.

Warning: the use of this grammar could revolutionize the study of Hebrew. Follow all instructions. Use only if the desire is to learn the language. Mix with diligence to achieve desired result: ability to read Hebrew.

Kregel has published not only the text of *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew* produced by Fuller and Choi, but also a set of six DVDs containing two semesters' worth of lectures through the grammar. What ignites the use of the grammar and the DVDs, however, is undoubtedly the workbook. The grammar gives the student the raw data. The DVDs present Fuller lecturing through the grammar. And the workbook—if used—will drill students on the material until the fundamentals of the language are instinctive for them. Grammar, DVDs, workbook: a worthy combination.

Fuller and Choi honed this material through years of classroom use. This reviewer studied under both as they were perfecting this material and method. The process they taught is the method that involves several iterations through the material in different formats: lecture, reading, carefully crafted questions, and targeted drills.

Working through a language in this manner takes the student again and again through the material. Students of Hebrew who faithfully work through this material find that the fundamentals of the Hebrew language become part of the furniture of their minds. The process may seem extensive and demanding, but it gives students a real shot at learning a very foreign, very difficult language.

There are debates among Hebrew grammarians as to the best approach to learning the language. The student who comes to this grammar will combine the fundamentals of the language with a core of memorization. The method of this grammar, with its brilliant drills, may make it the best approach to learning Hebrew. The drills will challenge students not only to reproduce the material but master it.

Great teachers, like great coaches, emphasize the fundamentals. Russell Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi understand the fundamentals of the Hebrew language, and their grammar presents these fundamentals in systematic detail, with an array of pithy mnemonic devices that make the learning of a difficult language enjoyable.

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Theological Studies

***Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission.* By R. Larry Shelton. Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006. 268 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.**

R. Larry Shelton, who serves as Richard B. Parker Professor of Wesleyan Theology at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, argues that the traditional models of the atonement cannot meet the existential needs of postmodern people. Shelton finds his ideal model of the atonement in “the covenant motif” that presents the interpersonal relationship between “divine commitment and human obligation” (19). Sin is the violation or abandonment of human obligations such as obedience and faith. Animals were sacrificed to restore the abandoned obedience and faith of sinners toward God. Likewise, the ultimate purpose of the atonement in and through Christ was not to get rid of the penalty of sins but to transform sinners into faithful and obedient children of God.

In light of the interpersonal relationship between God and man in the context of covenant, the forensic (penal substitution and satisfaction), classic (recapitulation, ransom, and Christ the victor), and moral influence views of the atonement all fall short of the biblical presentations of the death of Christ. In particular, Shelton says the penal substitution view seriously distorts the truth of the atonement, for it describes the relationship of Christ and sinners in terms of the impersonal mercenary transaction between the two parties. This view also diminishes the importance of on-going repentance and obedience. Therefore, many evangelicals have lost the sense of participation by faith in the atoning work of Christ. Shelton asserts that many advocates of penal substitutionary atonement fail to connect the atonement with the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and often imply that penal substitution is the only theme of the atonement. Shelton’s critiques of the penal substitution view of the atonement need to be heard.

Notwithstanding Shelton’s constructive critiques of the penal substitution view, I note several areas of disagreement. First, Shelton’s denial of the transference of sins in the Old Testament sacrificial system and in the cross of Christ must be rejected. As Shelton argues, it is true that laying one’s hand(s) on the animal to be sacrificed represents the identification between the victim and the giver of that victim. Unlike Shelton’s argument, however, identification is not mutually exclusive to the transference of sins. Rather, identification and transference are complementary to each other. Without the real transference of value between a victim and a person offering that victim, there is no real identification between two parties.

Second, Shelton's denial of propitiation as the appeasement to the divine wrath must be reconsidered. Unlike Dodd, Shelton admits that the wrath of God toward sin really appears, but will not consider God as the object of propitiation. Consequently, the death of Christ did not appease God's anger toward sinners but simply got rid of the sins that caused the wrath of God. However, this view fails to recognize that God is not only the subject but also object of the propitiation.

Third, Shelton's presentation of the penal substitution view is not fair. Shelton's assertion is that the kernel of the penal substitution view is union with Christ. None of the responsible representatives of this view presents the forgiveness of sins and the declarative righteousness of a believer in a way of *ex opera operato*. The penal substitution view strongly emphasizes faith as the only means through which sinners can be identified with the crucified Christ.

In sum, Shelton is right to argue that the atonement is not merely the matter of changing the legal status of sinners before God but involves the restoration of the covenantal relationship between God and sinners. In addition, he correctly warns that penal substitution is not the only valid perspective of the atonement. Unfortunately, however, Shelton himself is in danger of holding to only a subjective theory that does not see God as judge or take his retributive justice into account. Is the restoration of the broken covenantal fellowship possible without establishing forensic justice? Abraham's appeal to the justice of God must be echoed to contemporary opponents of penal substitution: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25, KJV).

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***Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement.* Edited by Mark D. Baker. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 204 pages. Softcover, \$18.00.**

Any reader who holds a view that Jesus died on the cross to bear God's righteous wrath against our sin will discover before he finishes the first chapter that the essays in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* were not compiled for him. Rather, the editor is clear throughout the book that his goal is to explore every image of the atonement *except* penal substitution. He describes his viewpoint as "Looking for Alternatives to Penal Satisfaction" (27, 192 n. 17) and explains that "people with a penal-satisfaction-only view of the atonement are not the intended audience of this book" (29).

The editor, Mark D. Baker, serves as associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. This book follows *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, which argued for a multiplicity of atonement images other than penal substitution. The present work is a collection of eighteen essays which originally took the form of sermons, youth Sunday School lessons, chapel addresses, articles, and even a portion of a novel. All of the essays are included with the aim of explaining the death of Christ in terms other than penal substitution. Rather than summarize every essay, one will serve as an example. The first essay is a scene from C.S. Lewis' classic *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and is intended to demonstrate that Aslan's self-sacrifice to the White Witch on behalf of Edmund could be considered as both the conquering of evil powers and as substitution, but not penal substitution.

Baker's book should be commended for at least three reasons. First, these essays cause the reader to clarify one's view of the atonement. Everyone who preaches or teaches about the cross implicitly or explicitly answers the following question: Was Christ's death on the cross intended to satisfy God's wrath (objective view) or to inspire us toward self-sacrifice and forgiveness (subjective view)? Although Southern Baptists will disagree with Baker's theological conclusion, the variety and number of essays provided enables readers to identify and understand the subjective view. Second, this work should be commended for its effort to contextualize the message of the gospel. This scandalous message is not intended to remain only in our mind or on our bookshelf, but explained, illustrated, and applied in words and images that are understandable to our contemporary audience. Third, the format of the book provides a platform for many voices to be heard on this subject, from recognized names (such as Richard Hays and Rowan Williams) to other names that are not as well known. The format of the book also allows for brief commentary from the editor about how each essay contributes to the book's theme.

Two of the challenges that the book faces are found in its style and theology. First, the use of biased language is a literary device that weakens this work. Although the aim of the book is to reject one view of atonement in favor of many others, it is a misstep to characterize penal substitution in the following ways: "the formulaic transactional understanding promoted by evangelical pop-atonement theology" (117); God is "the offended potentate who needs somewhere to vent his rage" (119); and "a God who kills somebody out of loyalty to an abstract principle doesn't feel truly loving" (129). Even the viewpoints of those with whom we disagree should be fairly presented. Second, this book faces certain theological challenges. Due to its commitment to the subjective view of the atonement, it argues for forgiveness without penalty or payment (61, 83). Sin is alienation from

self (132) rather than enmity with God. The cross was “sacred violence” (48) and it was a Girardian expression of God’s undermining of the sacrificial system by submitting to it as a victim (71). Jesus is the scapegoat (68, 142) and expiation (167) but not the sacrificial goat or propitiation in Day of Atonement imagery. Some of the contributions can be read as providing atonement images in *addition* to penal substitution (such as C.S. Lewis, Richard Hays, and Curtis Chang). But the aim of the editor and most of its contributors is to provide the images as *alternatives*. Although there is merit in many of these other atonement images, they are all inadequate when separated from the idea that Christ became sin for us and died our death at the cross.

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***Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples.* Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. Nashville: B&H, 2006. 257 pages. Hardcover, \$19.99.**

In *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger seek to apply the “simple revolution” of the last few years to the way church is done in America. Recognizing that “the healthiest churches in America tended to have a simple process for making disciples” (ix), Rainer and Geiger began a research project which confirmed that there is a “highly significant” correlation between the simplicity of a church and its ability to thrive. After conducting their research, Rainer and Geiger conclude that “church leaders need to simplify” (4). Thus, the aim of their book is to encourage and equip these leaders to produce simple and revitalized churches.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part describes the “simple revolution” in general and provides definitions and examples of what a simple church looks like. In chapter one, Rainer and Geiger assert that “simple is in. Simple works. People respond to simple” (8). This observation drives the rest of the book. After noting that companies like Apple, Google, and Southwest Airlines capitalize on simplicity, they argue that Jesus himself was the “original simple revolutionary” (16).

In chapter two, Rainer and Geiger recreate two church consultation trips so the reader can “see a simple church in action” (31). One of these churches is an established church with many programs and multiple vision statements. The other is younger and has experienced consistent growth in recent years. Rainer and Geiger compare and contrast the methodologies of these two churches, highlighting the complexity of the former and the simplicity of the latter.

Borrowing the metaphor of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, in chapter three, Rainer and Geiger demonstrate the need of many churches to reconstruct the way they “do church.” They define a simple church as “a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth” (60). They then describe their research method. Deciding against an extended set of case studies, they opted for a more expansive survey approach. They randomly selected from both growing and declining churches to participate in the survey and then sent the data to an independent statistics analysis company for processing. The first phase of research was limited to Southern Baptist churches, and the second phase included the other major evangelical denominations. For the authors, the result of this research confirms that “in general, churches that are vibrant and growing are simple” and that “the vibrant churches are much more simple than the comparison churches” (67). On the basis of this research, Rainer and Geiger delineate four elements they deem necessary to form and maintain a simple church. These elements are clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. To illustrate these ideas, they provide “three simple stories” that highlight different churches in America that are thriving as a result of having a “simple church.”

Whereas part one defines and illustrates a simple church, part two attempts to enable church leaders to transform their churches into simple churches. Chapters five through eight each develop one of the concepts of clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. To have an effective simple church, leaders must clearly articulate the vision of a simple process of discipleship (clarity). They must strategically design their programs to move their members to deeper levels of commitment (movement). They must ensure that every program is part of the same simple process (alignment). Finally, they must refuse to add any program to the church’s agenda if it does not contribute to the simple goal of making disciples (focus). Chapter nine summarizes the process of becoming simple and provides four practical steps designed to achieve the four elements of a simple church.

Two primary strengths of this book are its overall purpose and its clear structure. Rainer and Geiger intend to provide church leaders with “a framework for a simple ministry process” (236). They achieve this aim by clearly describing the need for simplicity in church life (chapter 1), defining the nature of a simple church (part 1), and delineating the actual process of becoming this type of church (part 2). While these features of this volume should be carefully considered by any church leader, there are few concerns. Rainer and Geiger consistently present the idea of a simple process of disciple-making as “revolutionary.” The simple church is “discovered” (ix) rather than re-discovered. Consequently, a serious discussion of the biblical foundations of disciple-making is absent from the book.

Most often, the motivation and evidence given for an assertion comes from survey research or statistics rather than scriptural texts or theological principles. The biblical text is used primarily as an illustration rather than as a foundation. A representative statement as to why the reader should accept a given point is because it “has been validated by our research” (111). Thus, the chief motivation given in *Simple Church* for doing church in this manner is because “simple is in,” rather than because the New Testament mandates disciple-making.

Ched Spellman
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***Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology As Wisdom.* By Daniel J. Treier. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 278 pp. \$30.00.**

What is the nature of theology? What should be the respective goals of theological education and the theological interpretation of the Scriptures? Is it scientific knowledge, exegetical insight, or something else? In this revised dissertation, Daniel J. Treier, Associate Professor of Theology in the School of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College, seeks to answer these questions. He is troubled by a litany of “fractured relationships: between academy and church, biblical scholarship and theology, theory and practice, even between holistic thinking and specialist detail” (xiv). His concern is to chart a map whereby these relationships might be mended. The key feature of this map is a common destination, namely, the goal of (Christian) wisdom.

The book is divided into three parts: (1) Education and the Nature of Theology (chs. 1–3), (2) Interpretation and the Nature of Wisdom (chs. 4–5), and (3) Education and Interpretation: Synergy (chs. 6–7). In “Education and the Nature of Theology” (chs. 1–3), Treier defines theology as follows: “Linking virtue and the voice of God in Scripture, theology is an every person, transforming, communicative praxis, subject to a chastened understanding of public criticism” (30). Chapter 2 contains a theological reading of Proverbs 3:13–18 in which he considers how wisdom and its attendant knowledge function in the formation of Christian virtue and “practical reason” (*phronesis*; cf. 46). Treier distinguishes Christian *phronesis* from its Aristotelian counterpart, both in its focus upon humility and its goal of love leading to peace. Wisdom is only found in the Word of God (i.e., Christ as He is communicated via the Scriptures). Treier argues (contra Lindbeck) that Christian theology holds a true correspondence to reality (ch. 3). While he cites Reinhard Hütter’s “pneumatolizing of history” as a helpful corrective to Lindbeck’s intratextuality, Treier criticizes Hütter

for making theology an activity of the few and placing church authority in distinction “over against Scripture” (84). Wisdom is something for the entire Christian community, not merely a small group of the spiritually elite.

In part two, Treier considers “Interpretation and the Nature of Wisdom” (chs. 4–5). In chapter 4 he outlines the postmodern context and construal of the nature of biblical interpretation and its elevation of the reader/community above “authors, subject matter, and text” (e.g. Stephen Fowl). Treier seeks to strike a balance between Fowl’s “ecclesiastical positivism” (which equates church practice with revelation) and models of biblical theology that identify “God’s action . . . too immanently or statically with the human texts of the Bible” (126) and ignore the performance of the text (127). In chapter 5, Treier considers general hermeneutics as well as the possibility and actions of understanding. He examines (a) the nature of special hermeneutics with relation to Scripture; (b) the problem of distance as it pertains historically to authors and audiences and hermeneutically to “human authors and divine author”; and (c) weighs the value of various models of meaning and interpretation (esp. Vanhoozer, Thiselton, and Wolterstorff).

In part three, “Education and Interpretation: Synergy” (chs. 6–7), Treier relates the findings of the previous two sections. In chapter 6, Treier applies the Christian version of practical reason (*phronesis*) to the academy’s pursuit of scientific knowledge (*Wissenschaft*). Treier notes the distinctive commitments of Christian interpretation (170), but argues for a public engagement of theology. Though Christians must not allow apologetics and external conversations to drive their theology (171), they should recognize their sinfulness and be open to areas of criticism from outside the Christian community (174; e.g., slavery). He also considers how the “textual practices” of theological interpretation should interact with historical, literary, and philosophical disciplines (176–79). In the final chapter, Treier summarizes his case that wisdom offers a helpful way to connect our understanding of “the nature of theology and theological education” (187). Here he gives an intriguing discussion on the relation between general and special hermeneutics. He follows Barth’s Trinitarian model of revelation in explicating his own understanding of Word and Spirit and coordinates his brand of theological interpretation with other prominent voices in the field.

As one would expect from a revised dissertation, the work shows an immense amount of research and scholarly interaction. Treier engages a variety of thinkers and academic disciplines, including theological interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics, systematic theology, practical theology, biblical theology, virtue epistemology, etc. His interdisciplinary methodology is consistent with at least one of his stated objectives, namely to point

a way toward mending the fractured relationships within the academy.

The accessibility of the work is somewhat low for those in the outer courts of the discipline. The work is written on a high academic level and assumes a significant amount of previous interaction with the disciplines and works with whom the author is engaging. Further, Treier includes several extended, untranslated quotes in German and rarely if ever quotes Scripture in English (e.g., German [43] and Greek [55]). Though a standard practice in scholarly literature, it is an interesting feature for a (revised) book decrying the growing gap between the academy and the church. However, these aspects simply point to the fact that Treier's focus is the academy. Those outside the academic camp will benefit from his thesis, but they will likely struggle with its form.

Consequently, this work is recommended primarily for readers with at least an intermediate familiarity with texts in the fields of philosophical hermeneutics and theological interpretation. Nonetheless, those interested in these disciplines would do well to use Treier's extensive bibliography as a stepping stone for further study. His discussion of virtue's role in interpretation holds value for those interested in what a Christian version of virtue epistemology might look like (chs. 6–7). This work is commendable for its depth of insight, its purpose of reconciling the church and academy, and its focus upon theology as “an every person, transforming, communicative praxis” that humbly but boldly interacts with the world without being compromised. In arguing for an understanding of theology as wisdom, Treier has effectively connected theory and practice. His overall argument is persuasive and patient readers will find benefit.

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Missions and Evangelism

Evangelism for the Rest of Us: Sharing Christ within Your Personality Style.
By Mike Bechtle. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. 156 pages. Paperback,
\$12.99.

Mike Bechtle makes use of personality theory and offers his view of biblical evangelism to make introverts feel comfortable with evangelism. He offers his new work on the assumption that extroverts write the books on evangelism, and that these books do not offer introverts much help. Bechtle provides personal illustrations and suggestions he has found helpful in witnessing as an introvert. He even gives readers a personality

inventory to help them determine whether they are introverts or extroverts (36–37).

Essentially, Mike Bechtle's book is one of the best and worst books I have read on evangelism. The weaknesses of Bechtle's book are serious. To begin with, Bechtle uses personality theory as a foundation for personal evangelism. Confusion exists among theoreticians of personality theory, and by using it, Bechtle may intensify the confusion many suffer in evangelism.

Additionally, Bechtle demonstrates an inappropriate use of Scripture. First, as harsh as it sounds, Bechtle distorts biblical texts. For example, he explains 1 Corinthians 12:17–18 in terms of personality theory instead of spiritual gifts. In that text, Paul argues for appreciation of all spiritual gifts, but Bechtle revises the text to argue for appreciation of all personality types (24).

Second, Bechtle's use of 2 Kings 7:9 is equally troubling. The full verse states the four lepers said, "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. *If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us.* Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace" (2 Kings 7:9, emphasis added). When Bechtle quotes it, he removes the words about God's judgment. In their place, he inserts ellipsis points. When used appropriately, ellipsis points improve the author's style. By inserting the ellipsis points where he does, Bechtle leaves out a significant motivation for evangelism that emphasizes the theology of 1 and 2 Kings—judgment according to God's word. That Bechtle has distorted 2 Kings 7:9 becomes manifest in his comments after the verse quotation: "If the four lepers hadn't reported what they had seen, *they would have lived while the city perished*" (emphasis added). Bechtle asserts the opposite of the biblical record. He offers assurances for the lepers that the Scripture does not offer. In fact, the Scripture offered no assurance of life had they remained silent; contra Bechtle's view, it offered judgment.

Next, Bechtle betrays unawareness about extroverts. He leaves readers with the mistaken notion that extroverts find it easier to witness than introverts do. How I wish that were the case! Not only do introverts fail to witness, but extroverts fail, too. Both struggle with evangelism. Evangelism is tough for all of us, but we should all do it because others going to hell is far worse.

Finally, Bechtle's book includes other weaknesses. It includes the standard caricatures and straw men found in many evangelism books, and this will annoy sensitive readers. Accumulating annoyances, Bechtle labels as myths that make introverts uncomfortable with evangelism. Among these are truths that have helped Christians of all types become faithful and fruitful witnesses (52–59).

I fear the cumulative effect of these weaknesses upon introverted readers. They may lead introverts to think more of themselves and less of lost people. Specifically, Bechtle's work may encourage introverts to be more sensitive to their introversion without considering the introversion of lost people. Bechtle admits that he has yet to witness to an employee at a hotel where he frequently stays (94). Someone has to say something about salvation, and the introverted lost person is not likely to start the conversation. I fear that Bechtle's work does not offer much help in winning introverted lost people to Christ.

The weaknesses of Bechtle's work are serious, but there are also significant strengths. First, Bechtle's view of God and evangelism deserves credit. For the most part, he has perceived God's passion for getting people into the kingdom. According to Bechtle, this requires Christians to influence intentionally unbelievers with the gospel (50, 117).

Second, Bechtle's emphasis on building relationships with unbelievers will help any Christian who has a sincere love for them. Bechtle instructs and illustrates the sacrifice necessary to immerse ourselves into the lives of lost people. Following his instruction at this point could revolutionize the evangelistic ministry of many churches.

Third, Bechtle encourages readers to open themselves to a variety of tools in presenting the gospel. He suggests that developing relationships with unbelievers, handing out tracts, organizing crusades, and standard approaches to personal evangelism training (e.g., *Evangelism Explosion*) can effectively deliver the gospel to unbelievers. This is not to say that every use of these methods is appropriate, or that these methods have not suffered some abuse. He does not trash other methods, however, because they are not his preferred method (70–71, 147).

Finally, Bechtle provides tools to aid witnesses with an evangelism skill that has proven to be one of the most elusive—starting a conversation. Bechtle provides specific instruction on this topic that will help witnesses amass conversation starters (139–41). Most of these suggestions will aid extroverts and introverts alike.

Bechtle's strengths are such that he could have left out the personality theory and written an excellent book on personal evangelism. The weaknesses notwithstanding, I suggest readers study his work, but that they study it as they eat fish—eat the meat and throw away the bones. They should be careful not to allow the weaknesses of Bechtle's work to keep them from his admirable strengths.

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***Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture.* By Michael Frost. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006. 333 pages. Softcover, \$19.95.**

Michael Frost unapologetically argues that the age of Christendom has come to an end. As a result, Christians presently live in a generation where their normal way of life and modes of thought are no longer the accepted norms for society. The author approaches the subject from an Australian point-of-view. In this, he promotes the concept that Christians should live “missional” lives so as to promulgate the Gospel of Christ. By “missional,” he refers to the idea of believers living in close community with one another and through this community, being salt and light to the outside world in every difficult situation that it might face.

The author opines that believers have been exiled because of the demise of Modernism and the rise of Postmodernism. Consequently, they have been forced to change based upon the requirements set forth by culture. Christians, as exiles, should live as the “exiled” Christ lived and minister to people wherever they may be (i.e. bars, street corners, shopping areas, and ball fields). The core of Frost’s work consists of five methods, each dealing with a specific promise that the exiled Christians should employ, and he dedicates a significant portion of the work to this end.

The missional concept is not new. Darrel Guder’s excellent work, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in America* explains it from the idea of the kingdom of God. Yet, missional in all of its definitions and explanations focuses on neither the traditional understandings of evangelism nor missions. Being missional is simply being like Christ in one’s everyday life. Frost further advances the idea by proposing that Christians should focus on injustices that are done to people (i.e. socially and economically). While Christians must recognize that injustices committed against individuals are biblically wrong, the idea that this is the sole end of a missional Christian is not theologically accurate. Jesus described His mission to the world: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Christ’s purpose was not necessarily to heal people’s physical abnormalities and infirmities, neither was it to protect people from the injustices of the Roman world nor improve their way of living. Each of these represents a facet of a theological conceptualization known as liberation theology and also touches upon another heretical doctrine presently being indoctrinated in the West—the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.

Frost fails to promote adequately a new idea which will radically revolutionize the church. True, the world is changing and perhaps Modernism has seen its best days; however, a total alienation to the concepts

of missions and evangelism demonstrates a questionable approach to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Frost is part of the emerging movement, and as a result, one of his primary motivations is to find problems and breakdowns in the church and to replace them with innovative methodologies. However, in the first two millennia of the church, missions and mission work have been synonymous with the heart of the church. Organizations such as the Moravians, the Student Volunteer Movement, and the Southern Baptist Convention were built on the foundation of missions. This is not to say that many of the methods once employed by them are not outdated; however, it sheds light upon the idea that historically, missional life for a Christian has been the sharing of Jesus Christ with the world and the continual evangelization of that individual or people group.

One encouraging word from *Exiles* is the author's focus upon incarnational community. A deep and sacrificial relationship with others helps to break down walls in order to share the gospel of love with those in need. Incarnational community encourages a believer to live as Christ to those around him. This elicits the opportunity to engage others in a non-threatening environment while maintaining the Word of God.

Overall, Frost's work is encouraging to the Christian who lives in the present age. Yet, it lacks the evangelistic fervor one might hope to see. *Exiles* focuses too much on the physical and social needs of people while neglecting to recognize the lostness of man. Because of this disregard for sin and humanity, Frost fails to catch the concept of what it really means to live missionally. However, it must also be said that the author entices the reader to delve further into missional existence.

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***The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia.* Library of Modern Middle East Studies 50. By David Dean Commins. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006. 288 pages. Hardcover, \$85.00.**

The average citizen on the street has one of three responses to the sudden emergence of Islam as a global issue. First, he may well identify all who follow Islam as being part of a violent faith, which renders each Muslim individually suspect and somehow guilty of the actions of all Jihadists. The second prevalent view, born out of religious pluralism, is to defend Islam as a legitimate religion, opining that much about it is surely misunderstood. The third and most prominent perspective (the one discussed at Starbucks) is probably a simple shake of the head when the subject is broached. A wondering question about who can possibly understand what

is going on in our world usually follows. This latter group tends to believe that if the United States would just leave Iraq, somehow most of the problems on the front page of the newspaper would be replaced by the latest hero of *American Idol*. However, readers and thinkers who still operate with a fairly basic understanding of Islam have heard or read about Wahhabi Islam and are often quick to identify Al Qaeda and the work of Osama Bin Laden as the offspring of the Wahhabi expression of Islam, which is traced to Saudi Arabia. Many who have tried to be more studious about Islam, having read the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*, as has this reviewer, are still guilty of this essential conclusion regarding both Al Qaeda and the Wahhabis.

David Commins, Professor of History at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, has written what is to this point the definitive volume on the history and content of the Wahhabi mission and its particular relation to Saudi Arabia. Commins was a visiting scholar at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh and has written in 1990 on Islamic Reform and in 2004 an historical dictionary of Assyria. He remains one of the best informed authorities in America on the nature and history of Islam.

The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia is not the most scintillating book ever published, but what is lacking in readability is accomplished superbly in the validation of its arguments and support of those conclusions from Islamic sources. (For those who desire a perspective about life in Saudi Arabia with greater adventure and color, yet perceptive regarding the tribalism of the Arabian Peninsula, Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* [New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2008] is a scintillating volume to augment the picture.)

The reader will find numerous insights in Commins. Most people think primarily of two denominations within Islam, namely, Sunni and Shia. Some who have a bit more background might include Sufism as a third denomination. Others would protest the use of "denomination," since that tends to be a term associated principally with various aspects of the Christian faith. However, Commins himself actually makes use of that terminology once in the book (166). But what relatively new readers in Islam will find enlightening is the multiplicity of legal traditions informing Islam as well as different religious groups normally led by some new leader who arises and demands a following. The number of these groups will be surprising to most non-initiates. However, the biggest surprise of all will be the author's tracing of Wahhabism as it relates to the development of Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden.

Commins argues that revivalism among Islamic leaders and the rise of preaching radical Islam certainly has some things in common with Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia. However, he concludes that Wahhabism,

while having common goals with radical Islam is, nevertheless, opposed to the developments that have unfolded in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Wahhabis believe, for example, that religious authorities cannot announce Jihad. Only the ruler of the country can do that, and hence the widespread use of Jihad among Muslim revivalists is considered illegitimate by Wahhabism. There are also other points in which Wahhabism would differentiate itself. The present state of Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden owes its origin rather to teachings of Sayyid Qutb, arising originally in Egypt. On the other hand, Wahhabism's base has been in Saudi Arabia; and while Osama Bin Laden is a Saudi and was definitely impacted by Wahhabism, he was able to muster considerable following among younger Muslims and mold together these Muslims of divergent perspectives to fight the infidels (Russians) in Afghanistan. His own attitude toward Saudi Arabia was then altered rather dramatically by the influence of democratic reform movements in Saudi Arabia, which ultimately led to allowing the United States military to move into Saudi Arabia for the protection of that kingdom as well as Kuwait and to resist the onslaught of the Baathists in Iraq.

The result of all of this, Commins concludes, is that "the Wahhabi mission's two-hundred-year reign as a hegemonic regional religious culture is in jeopardy" (205). Most readers will be surprised at this conclusion. Commins makes no attempt to predict the future, observing that it is not the responsibility of the historian to do so. Clearly there is substantial conflict within Islam, and the reading of this book gives one a far greater perspective in that regard.

The book employs endnotes; and while they are quite helpful in citing other sources and expanding information given briefly in the text, I confess my own preference for footnotes to avoid on a regular basis having to turn to the back of the book to ascertain what has been cited. On the other hand, the chronology beginning with the 1744 rise of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and coming all the way to the National Dialogues held in Saudi Arabia in 2004, is very helpful. By the same token, a glossary of terms, while in need of expansion, was nevertheless quite useful, and the reader can check repeatedly on unfamiliar terms and keep in mind what Commins is citing. Finally, the bibliography is thorough and demonstrates the breadth of Commins' grasp of the Islamic world.

Several groups should take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the pages of this book. Anybody intending to do business anywhere in the world where the Muslim faith is heavily represented could profit immensely in relating to these various factions by gaining awareness and understanding of them. Those seeking to interact philosophically and theologically with Islam cannot afford to bypass this volume. Finally, it would be difficult to imagine a more critical volume for the reading of those who

are engaged in state department work or in foreign affairs religiously or politically. David Commins has given us a superb and enlightening history and a rare insight into the Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia.

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Ethics and Philosophy

***Effective Parenting in a Defective World.* By Chip Ingram. Carol Steam, IL: Tyndale House, 2006. 181 pages. \$13.99.**

This a helpful resource for any pastor or parent, who is looking for a common-sense book on raising children in a problematical cultural context or, as the author calls it, our “defective world.” One of the characteristics of this text is that it sets forth some sound principles of action, most of which have a biblical basis, and then develops several types of applications to modern family situations. Each of the principles that are utilized also confront a modern myth that many parents believe. For instance, some parents would hold the myth that a good parenting goal is to make their kids happy, while the parenting reality is that their goal should be make their kids holy. Another parenting myth is that parenting could be straightforward if only they could find the right formula or how-to book, while the reality is that good parenting will always require adapting the parenting approach. It is interesting that Chip Ingram does have a penchant for setting forth lists of how-to’s and formula sounding presentations or arguments for approaches for handling a number of common problems in child-raising. Those arguments tend to be rather well nuanced, biblical and logical, as well as being nicely illustrated, primarily by the author’s own experiences.

It cannot be said that this book has a depth of Bible exposition, but there are numerous biblical passages that are used in a somewhat popular fashion to forge the basis of many of the guiding principles that are given for healthy parenting. The author does not claim to be doing biblical counseling, but rather is carefully giving guidance for child raising in a positive, Christian manner, with fairly regular doses of logic or reasonable insight and parenting experience given for added measure. It is an enjoyable and believable approach and one that could be beneficial to most pastors, family counselors, and struggling Christian parents.

The first three chapters deal with some essential guidelines for parenting. The next four chapters focus on some of the more problematic issues faced in parenting, such as discipline and punishment. The last two chapters share “five smooth stones” for preparing one’s children for facing

the giants of life. For example, one of those “stones” is to teach them how to “suffer well,” or to persevere with understanding that suffering is normal and to be expected in life, even as Christians.

It should be added that there is a video unit that can also be used to accompany this material for both individual learning and for group interactions. Each chapter finishes with a brief section of exercises for applying the concepts of the chapter. These can be helpful for the parenting couple, a single parent, or as conversation starters for a group process.

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Software

***Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible*. CD Rom. Version 2.0. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems. \$324.95.**

Serious textual study of the Bible must involve the science and art of textual criticism, comparing variants to determine the original reading of the text. These pursuits use the critical apparatus, and the *Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible 2.0* (SESB) greatly enhances these examinations by providing the Old Testament and New Testament modern critical apparatus in electronic form. So far, other electronic software offers only old (Tischendorf's) or incomplete modern versions.

A textual apparatus includes shorthand notes that tell what the variant textual readings are and where they occur: the specific papyri, manuscripts, ancient translations, and/or ancient quotations by the church fathers. Without examining the apparatus one cannot knowledgeably examine the question of the provenance of such passages as Judges 16:13–14; Matthew 6:13b; Mark 11:26; 16:9–20; Luke 23:34a; 24:12, 36b, 40; John 7:53–8:11; Acts 8:37, and Romans 16:24—to mention some of the better known—most of which are noted in modern translations with brackets or marginal notes. One must examine the apparatus to determine which is the preferred reading for Genesis 4:8; Psalm 2:11–12; 22:1, 16; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 15:6; 27:24; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:1; 8:26; John 10:29; and 1 John 5:7–8, to mention a few texts with variant readings.

Version 2.0 of the SESB adds fifteen resources to version 1.0: The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) with critical apparatus and the WIVU morphological and syntactical tags, the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ—the fifth major critical edition of the Hebrew text) with apparatus, a morphologically-tagged Septuagint with the CCAT-database, the Nestle-Aland

Novum Testamentum Graece 27 with apparatus and Gramcord morphological tags, the UBS4 *Greek New Testament* with apparatus, the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, and the *Gospel of Thomas* in Greek, Coptic, English, and German. In addition, there are the following modern Bible versions: English (NIV and NRSV), Greek (1), German (3), French (4), Dutch (5), Norwegian (4), and Danish (1), as well as four original language dictionaries (including the Septuagint: Lust; NT: Barclay Newman, which is the smaller one at the end of the UBS4).

As fine as this product is, Logos Research Systems might increase its usefulness and accessibility by adding the following: (1) a German and an English book on textual criticism, such as *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, by Paul D. Wegner, (2) *A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, 2nd edition, by Bruce M. Metzger (available for individual purchase), (3) a constituency tree analysis of the WIVU syntax tagging of the entire Old Testament, (4) an apparatus for the LXX and for the Vulgate, and (5) offer UBS4 apparatus as a separate resource so one can view it in a separate screen.

The minimum system requirements are: Microsoft Windows 98 or later, Pentium 133 MHz, 64 MB memory, CD Rom reader, 60 MB hard drive, and 800 x 600 screen resolution.

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