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Authentic Christianity

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The desire of believers to display real faith through appropriate action is rooted in the witness of Scripture and exemplified in Christian history. Jesus Christ asked this haunting question of those who wished to identify themselves as His disciples: “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” The Lord proceeded to illustrate the difference between two types of disciples with an architectural metaphor. One disciple comes to Christ, hears His words, “and acts on them.” This one is praised as having penetrated to “the rock”¹ and built his house upon Him. This one is an authentic disciple, manifesting his beliefs in action. The second type, however, hears the Lord’s words, “and has not acted accordingly.” The second disciple is not founded upon the rock, so that when judgment comes, “the ruin of that house was great.”² The second disciple is a hypocrite, a person whose actions do not match his claims. These are the two disparate options present to those who hear Christ: authentic discipleship or hypocrisy.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus employs an agricultural metaphor to make a similar point, proceeding one step further by demonstrating that the ability to be authentic is itself grace in action. The Father is the “vinedresser,” His Son is the “vine,” and the Son’s disciples are the “branches.” If a disciple would live, he must abide in communion with the vine, for love, the divine gift of life, moves through Him. The vinedresser will prune His branches to help them grow properly and produce good fruit. The production of fruit, or good works, naturally occurs as part of the flow of life from within the vine. If a branch does not abide in the vine and produce the fruit of loving obedience, it will be treated appropriately as refuse for condemnation.³ Divine love, expressed in the flood of divine grace through Christ, has determined human fruitfulness in good works to be the proper expression of the faithful reception of divine grace. In Christ’s theological system, if we dare describe Jesus’ teaching thus, there is no contradiction between grace and good works, for divine love empowers human obedience.

The authentic Christianity that Jesus taught has often had to reassert

¹A prophetic reference to the Messiah; Isa 8:14.

²Luke 6:46–49. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

³John 15:1–11.

itself against deceptive alternatives in the history of the churches. One major theological error that has opposed itself to authentic Christianity is works-righteousness. This error seeks not so much the exhibition of good works as a result of salvation, but the identification of those good works as the basis for justification before God. A second major theological error that has opposed itself to authentic Christianity is antinomianism. This error seeks to preserve the basis of justification in grace, but through the denial that good works are a necessary fruit of the Christian life. Each error originates in a theological shortcoming. Works-righteousness forgets that salvation is by grace through faith apart from good works. Antinomianism forgets that justification must be accompanied by regeneration, the divine transformation of human life that issues forth in good works. If works-righteousness is the besetting error of medieval Christianity with its sacerdotal economy of salvation, antinomianism in its doctrinal and ethical forms is the insidious error lurking at the door of evangelical Christianity.

Outstanding exemplars of authentic Christianity may be found in every period of Christian history, perhaps most poignantly in the lives of many martyrs in the early church, of many so-called “heretics” in the Middle Ages, and of the biblicistic Anabaptists in the Reformation. However, authentic Christianity is not the preserve of the distant past, as seen in the thought and life of the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the twentieth century or in the rising desire for “radical” Christianity today. Expressions of authentic Christianity in both Scripture and history are considered in the following essays, but we focus here upon an English Reformer.

In his groundbreaking study of Thomas Cranmer, Ashley Null treats the sixteenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury and author of the Book of Common Prayer as a major theologian in his own right, who should not be overshadowed (as is too often the case with elementary histories) by Martin Luther or the continental Reformed. Drawing from the medieval scholastic and liturgical tradition, as well as Renaissance humanism and the writings of the continental reformers, Cranmer wrestled with the problem of grace and good works. Cranmer fully embraced the Reformation understanding of justification as the extrinsic righteousness of Jesus Christ that is applied to the believer through the gift of faith apart from works. However, he did not stop with that essential truth. Rather, in “the moment” in which God applies the righteousness of Christ in justification, His Holy Spirit renovates the human being. “Through the gift of saving faith, the ungodly received pardon. However, concomitant with pardon, the justified received a renewed will to love which enabled them to lead a new life pleasing to God.”⁴

In other words, the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone may not be sundered, theologically or

⁴Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178–79. Diarmaid MacCulloch's magisterial *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) will long remain the standard theological biography.

experientially, from the biblical doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which entails a transformed will that ensues in good works. Cranmer holds at bay the pernicious errors of works-righteousness and antinomianism simultaneously through recognizing that salvation is the concurrent work of the one God through His Son and His Spirit in the distinct but contemporaneous acts of justification and regeneration. Justification no longer remains alone as the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. Rather, “if the profession of our faith of the remission of our own sins enter within us into the deepness of our hearts, then it must needs kindle a warm fire of love in our hearts towards God, and towards all other for the sake of God.”⁵ Luther’s necessary claim for justification is balanced by Cranmer’s equally necessary claim for repentance through a life of true discipleship.

This volume is dedicated to a biblical, historical, and systematic presentation of such expressions of authentic Christianity. Five young theologians were commissioned to write the following essays, and each expresses a profound desire to live for Christ genuinely. Their superb contributions include a theological interpretation of suffering in Hebrews, a historico-systematic presentation of radical voices from the Anabaptists to Bonhoeffer to today, an evangelical-free church critique of emerging church hermeneutics, a call to entertainment-soaked Christians to recover a biblical approach to recreation, and a dynamic sermon on seeing Jesus clearly from the Gospel of Mark. In addition to these younger theologians, we have included a profound review essay, on God’s “abandonment” of His Son at the cross, from a mature hand. Gerardo Alfaro demonstrates how theological interpretation should read Scripture subtly and the history of interpretation critically. Gratitude is expressed to Madison Grace particularly for helping commission the essays below and generally for his expert assistance in the continual production of this journal.

⁵Thomas Cranmer, “Corrections of *The Institution of a Christian Man*, by Henry VIII,” cited in Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 25.

*When Hope Screams:
Learning How to Suffer as Sons
from the Book of Hebrews*

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When Hope Screams

My daughter, Hope, is precious, at least in my eyes. This utterly biased perspective is probably true of most fathers. There are times when my whole world stops and zeroes in on her toothy grin, or her cackling laugh. Especially when she is walking outside (she *loves* being outside) and turns to look at me with her hand outstretched for me to hold. Or when she scampers over to give me a hug when I walk through the door. Or when she lays her head on my shoulder when she is exhausted after a long day. When Hope laughs, smiles, or grins, life is good and all the world seems right.

But, when Hope screams, that whole world seems to come unhinged. Aside from having a spirited disposition, she is also quite capable of emptying her lungs and filling a room with piercing volume. After only a short while of this screeching intensity, she can work herself up to the point where the original cause of the situation becomes superfluous, as the act itself of being upset perpetuates the pain. Suddenly, my words no longer soothe her sobs, and she no longer finds rest in my arms. I remember one night in particular. Late into the evening, she woke up with a startling, desperate cry. We were visiting relatives, so for several hours, we attempted in vain to calm her trembling body back to sleep. Though she finally lay back down, we were never able to identify the cause of this particularly acute ordeal. Holding a screaming child who will not be pacified is an unnerving affair. In these sobering moments, I am forced to reckon with the fact that I am not capable of shielding her from the harsh realities of the fallen world into which she was born. I can do nothing to change the fact that the moment she took her first breath, countless others breathed their last.

Suffering is often as difficult to understand as it is to endure. The burden of sorrow and the weight of suffering are interwoven elements of our lives. Thus, grappling with the gravity of pain in a sin-riddled world is not an optional task. Tragedy, loss, and heartache often carry enough force to shake

even the strongest theological foundations. In the pursuit of faithfulness amidst pain, we are not helped by easy answers or superficial articulations of the questions. Though believers have sometimes encouraged one another by diminishing the horror of human pain, the claims of the gospel are more drastic than that. In Scripture, we hear a voice that speaks to the wounds of worst-case scenarios. Indeed, Christian hope is most needed when life screams.

In attempting to understand the nature of human pain, there are at least three types of suffering that a person might experience. First, someone might experience the just and natural consequences of his or her sin. Second, someone might experience undeserved persecution for faith in Christ. Or, third, someone might experience the effects of living in a fallen world. This last category involves suffering that often seems utterly meaningless. Though they have divergent origins, all three of these categories convey genuine hardship and represent a challenge to the thought process of a believer. Any Christian response to the problem of pain must be able to account for at least these broad areas. How should we respond to the myriad of situations that involuntarily bring forth from the depths of who we are the wrenching query, “Where now is my hope?” (Job 17:15).¹

When Hope Screamed

Hope in the New Testament is often connected to the resurrection and the life that is found as a result of being “in Christ.”² This hope is not simply a vague and wishful longing for a better future, but rather is rooted in the certainty of God’s character and his plan of redemption.³ Just as Christian hope is only found *in Him*, in a real sense, it ultimately *is Him*. Hope at the most profound level is not an abstract concept but a living person.⁴ In the Old

¹Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

²For instance, see Acts 23:6; 26:6; Rom 4: 18; 4:2; 12:12; 15:4; 15:13; 2 Cor 1:10; Col 1:5; 1 Thess 1:3; 4:13; 2 Thess 2:16; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet 1:3. For an overview of the concept of hope in Paul’s letters, see J. M. Everts, “Hope,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 415–17. Everts notes that “every statement Paul makes about Christian hope is also a statement about what God has given the believer in Christ.” Though the writer of Hebrews does not use the “in him” language in the same way that Paul does, he nevertheless emphasizes the importance of being identified with Christ. For instance, he describes Jesus as one who is “able also to save forever those who draw near to God *through Him*, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). The idea of being “in Him” is closely related to the notion of “considering Him” that is prevalent in Hebrews.

³Brad Eastman, “Hope,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 499, argues that “the meaning of ‘hope’ and its cognates in the NT is radically different from that of the English word *hope*. Rather than expressing the desire for a particular outcome that is uncertain, hope in the NT by definition is characterized by certainty.” Cf. the important definition of faith found in Heb 11:1.

⁴S.H. Travis, “Hope,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson and David

Testament, the notion of hope is closely associated with the Lord Himself. Yahweh is the “Hope of Israel” (Jer 14:8; 17:13; 50:7), and the foundation of the worship of God’s people is the hope found only in the Lord.⁵ In his letters to the churches, Paul makes a similar identification. In Colossians 1:27, he explains that “God willed to make known” to His saints “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” As he begins his first letter to Timothy, Paul makes this equation in simple and startling terms. He asserts that he is an “apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). The highest hope of a believer is Jesus Himself. Thus, holding on to hope involves clinging to the promises and person of Christ.⁶

Jesus is our Hope, and one day Hope screamed. The fact that Jesus suffered throughout His life is not something that we tend to think about or dwell upon. Our tradition sometimes even intentionally obscures this element of Jesus’ humanity. The passion of Jesus begins at His birth. The “little Lord Jesus” did in fact lay down “His sweet head” away in a Bethlehem manger, but the “little Lord Jesus” who “no crying He makes” is a Jesus who never existed. Rather, Jesus drew His first breath among a people who would ultimately put Him to death. As John says in the prologue to his Gospel, Jesus is one who came to His own, and his own did not receive Him (John 1:11). As a small child, Jesus fled from forces that sought to murder Him, and years later He stood before a court of His kinsmen who handed Him over to a Roman ruler on trumped up charges of treason. He grew in “wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52) and into a “man of sorrows,” who was “well acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). As He tells his disciples at key points in His ministry, the “Son of Man is going to suffer” (Matt 17:12).

Throughout the Gospel narratives, Jesus experiences and speaks about His own suffering. As the Gospels progress, they move steadily toward the consummation of Jesus’ suffering in Jerusalem. Luke in particular highlights

Wright, (Downers Grover: IVP, 1988), 321, observes that the concept of hope “can define either the *object* of hope, namely Christ and all that his final coming implies, or the *attitude* of hoping.” These two senses of hope are complementary, as “the ground of hope is God’s past activity in Jesus Christ, who points the way to God’s purposes for his creation.”

⁵In the book of Psalms, the theme of hope is closely related to the fact that the Lord is faithful and worthy of worship. To give one example, Ps 31:23–24 states, “O Love the Lord, all you His godly ones! The Lord preserves the faithful and fully recompenses the proud doer. Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.” See also, 33:18, 38:15, 39:7, 42:5, 71:5, etc. In a number of other places in the Old Testament, the theme of hope is prominent. For example, both the absence and presence of hope are mentioned often in the book of Job (e.g., Job 7:6, 11:18, 13:15, 17:15, etc.). Cf. Lam 3:21–22.

⁶Along these lines, Nancy Guthrie, *Be Still, My Soul: Embracing God’s Purpose & Provision in Suffering* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 11, writes of her own experience with suffering, “Holding on to hope, for us, has not been a vague, sentimental experience. . . . I am not holding on to hope in terms of a positive perspective about the future or an innate sense of optimism, but rather holding on to the living person of Jesus Christ. I am grabbing hold of the promises of God, his purposes, and his provision, and refusing to let go.”

the high cost of this journey toward the cross. On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about “His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Soon after this, Luke records that “when the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Until they get there, Luke takes pains to chart the progress of this journey, as discipleship takes place “on the way.” As they press forward, the disciples frequently fail to understand that Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem for the purpose of humiliation rather than exaltation. Jesus warns them that “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . and be killed and be raised up on the third day” (Luke 9:22). Later, He gravely states, “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men” (Luke 9:44).⁷ Luke makes it crystal clear that as Jesus heads to Jerusalem, He heads also to the cross.⁸

As this final journey ends, the humiliation of Jesus’ incarnation reaches an apex on a hill outside the city.⁹ There the “King of the Jews” replaces the crown He had lain aside in Bethlehem with one made of thorns. Though severe and horrifying, the physical suffering of Jesus was only one element of His passion. The biblical writers take care to emphasize also that Jesus was bearing the full wrath of a holy God. Through His work on the cross, Jesus redeems a rebellious people and fulfills the purpose for which He came, to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). These physical and spiritual elements converge on the cross, as Jesus accomplishes His ultimate mission on earth. All of the Gospel writers note the meaning and intensity of these final moments of Jesus’ crucifixion. Mark records that “Jesus uttered a loud

⁷Cf. Jesus’ similar statements in Luke 18:31. In His teaching, Jesus also urges His disciples to remember that they too must share this experience of their master. These are footsteps that they must walk in as well (e.g., Luke 14:26–27). As He walks with two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, Jesus reiterates this theme by asking, “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). Jesus had to suffer, and His disciples must follow Him even in this. A forceful illustration of this notion is Luke’s record of Simon of Cyrene carrying Jesus’ cross behind Him on the road to Calvary (Luke 23:26). Richard N. Longenecker, “Taking up the Cross Daily: Luke-Acts,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 70, notes that “for Luke, Simon of Cyrene . . . symbolized the attitude of Christian discipleship, carrying the symbol of Jesus’ suffering.” See also Jesus’ statements to Paul in Acts 9:16: “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

⁸In Luke, being a disciple means following Jesus as He journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross. In Acts, being a disciple involves journeying *from* Jerusalem by the power of the Holy Spirit in light of the cross. Luke takes pains to show that Jesus and his disciples journeyed “on the way” in His Gospel, and in Acts, He describes the message of Christianity *as* the Way (e.g., Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22). In both books, the work of Christ on the cross is central to the meaning of discipleship. As they journey to Jerusalem, the cross is the goal. As they journey away from Jerusalem it is the foundation of discipleship. The cross is thus both the cost of and the catalyst for discipleship. It is the cost, because disciples of Christ must pick up their cross daily and follow in His suffering. It is the catalyst, because the work of Christ on the cross enables and empowers His disciples to carry out His will.

⁹Cf. Heb 13:12: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” The writer urges his readers to identify with this element of Jesus’ life by going “out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

cry, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:37).¹⁰ His last words were loud and agonized. His final breath was a scream.

Learning How to Suffer as Sons

How can seeing the connection between our pain and the life and work of Christ equip us to suffer well? One way might be to fill out what it means to be one of God’s children. Being an adopted child of God has implications for the manner in which you suffer. According to the writer of Hebrews, part of learning how to suffer as a son or daughter of the King means enduring hardship as “discipline.”

What is the discipline of the Lord? What do you normally think of when you hear that phrase, and how does “the discipline of the Lord” relate to suffering? Relating suffering to the concept of discipline might at first seem foolish or absurd. But, could this understanding of the discipline of the Lord be based on the wisdom of the Word? In Hebrews 12:1–13, the writer grapples with just this issue.¹¹ Carefully reflecting on this passage can help us answer the questions, What exactly *is* the discipline of the Lord, and do faithful believers experience it?

The book of Hebrews is a written sermon to a church of believers who were undergoing persecution and the temptation to waver in their faith.¹² They were a people experiencing spiritual exhaustion from external and

¹⁰The parallel Gospel accounts depict a similar scene. Matthew recounts, “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit” (Matt 27:50). Luke notes that “Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit’” (Luke 23:46). John notes with finality that Jesus, “knowing that all things had already been accomplished to fulfill the Scripture,” said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

¹¹N.C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12.1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5, notes that in its synthesis and development of the themes of sonship, suffering, and perseverance, this paragraph unit expresses “supremely the letter’s paraenetic aim: to reinvigorate the flagging faith of the readers.” Croy observes that “this text is admittedly not among the most celebrated passages of the epistle.” He points out the dearth of “topical monographs or essays” on Heb 12:1–13, but nevertheless maintains that “one should not think that this passage is inconsequential, a sort of epistolary backwater.” Croy’s monograph is one of the only extended studies of this passage in print. Most commentators following him take his work on this subject into account.

¹²Though the general consensus among scholars has been to leave the question of authorship and audience undecided, it can nevertheless be said with some confidence that the writer of Hebrews was a prominent leader among the churches, a competent exegete exceedingly familiar with the Greek septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible (LXX), and a skilled literary and rhetorical craftsman. Cf. Radu Gheorghita’s comment on the exegetical competence of the author in *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1: “The Author’s scriptural repertoire includes numerous quotations from the Old Testament, extensive use of OT language and ideas, references to the OT’s important cultic institutions, events and persons, and a variety of OT summaries, parallels, allusions, and echoes of scriptural texts.” The writer also seems to be fairly well acquainted with the congregation to whom he writes. For instance, he addresses the readers in intimate terms as “brothers” and characterizes Timothy as “our brother” (13:22–23).

internal factors.¹³ Hebrews addresses this issue directly and equips them to press on by reminding them of important truths about *who they were* and *who had saved them*. If you are a believer experiencing spiritual exhaustion from external and internal factors and grappling with how to understand your pain in light of what you believe about the gospel, then there is a word here about who *you* are and who has saved *you*.

The author begins chapter twelve by encouraging his readers to “lay aside” the sin that so easily entangles them and to run with endurance the race that is set before them (12:1–2). The word picture of running a race stretches throughout this chapter. Running this race requires all the energy of the runner. It requires concentration, training, and endurance. This goal is achieved by looking to Jesus who is the “author and perfecter of faith.” Jesus has endured the cross and despised its shame “for the joy set before Him.” Alluding to Psalm 110:1, the writer says that Jesus then “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁴ These first two verses of chapter twelve are the climax of a long string of a “great cloud of witnesses” in chapter eleven, who endured various trials “by faith.”¹⁵ After this striking and stunning description of Jesus as one who has accomplished the perfect work of redemption on the cross, the writer applies this example specifically to his readers and their situation.

Consider Him Who Has Endured

We could say that this passage makes two main points or gives two primary exhortations for us to follow.¹⁶ In the first command, the writer urges his readers to “consider Him who has endured such hostilities by sinners against Himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:3). The verb “consider” carries the notion of reflective reason and careful consideration of the person or object under scrutiny.¹⁷ Most likely the word includes

¹³The addressees were most likely second-generation believers that were undergoing persecution and the temptation to fail to press on to maturity in their faith. For a survey of these issues, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 9–13. That there was threat of persecution is apparent from 10:32 (former persecution) and 13:2 (present imprisonment). Cf. William L. Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 443: “The intended audience was almost certainly the members of a house church with a history of fidelity to Christ.”

¹⁴Ps 110 is one of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament and is particularly important in the book of Hebrews as a whole. David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 84, argues that “a good case can be made for understanding Ps 110:1, 4 as the key text that the author interpreted in the epistle.”

¹⁵Note the pervasive πίστει (“by faith”) language of Heb 11 (11:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31). This clearly established theme in the immediately preceding context informs the urgent exhortations of Heb 12.

¹⁶The first is in v. 3, and the second comes in v. 7. “Consider” and “endure” are the only two imperatives in this passage and are thus the two most prominent verbal ideas in the immediate context.

¹⁷See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago:

both the idea of “considering” as well as “making a comparison.” The “him” of this sentence is identified as “the one who has endured hostility.” This one surely refers to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, found in verse two. The command “heightens the appeal” that was sounded in the previous verses. We are now charged with considering the one whom we have fixed our eyes upon.¹⁸ Rather than avoiding the thought of these painful moments, here we are asked to meditate upon them. The writer urges us *to pause* and consider the sufferings of Christ “point by point, going over them again and again, not the sufferings on the Cross only, but all that led up to it.”¹⁹

This stationary command is striking because he has just told us to run the race with endurance. He now urges us to *slow down* for just a minute and consider the fact that someone has gone before us. A good way to begin this reflection is to think about what Hebrews says elsewhere about Jesus. In the immediate context, these hostilities include the cross that Jesus “endured” and the shame that He despised.²⁰ This trial was brought about “by sinners” and “against Himself.”²¹ In chapter 5, the writer characterizes the work of Jesus during “the days of His flesh,” by recounting that “He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death” (Heb 5:7).²² Although Jesus was “a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (5:8). These words are essentially a summary

University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἀναλογίζομαι.” Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 251, observes that this word has mathematical implications of “reckoning” and “clearly implies a careful assessment.” Further, “the idea must be of considering each aspect of the hostility which Christ had to endure against him until a complete picture is obtained.” Cf. J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 510.

¹⁸Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 460.

¹⁹B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 399.

²⁰The word ἀντιλογία (“hostilities”) is a broad term that can include the general idea of violent strife or dispute, but more specifically hostility or rebellion. See BDAG, s.v. “ἀντιλογία.” A form of ἀντιλογία occurs in Jude 1:11 with reference to the rebellion of Korah: “Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion” (καὶ τῇ ἀντιλογίᾳ τοῦ Κόρε ἀπώλοντο). In the LXX this word refers to the rebellion (and lack of faith) of the people at the waters of Meribah in Num 20:13, 27:14, Deut 32:51, 33:8, Ps 81:7, and 106:32. Cf. Matthew Thiessen, “Hebrews 12.5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel’s Discipline,” *New Testament Studies* 55.3 (July 2009): 366–79. Thiessen argues that the writer understands the discipline of v. 5ff as a subtle allusion to the “discipline” of Israel during the wilderness wanderings.

²¹Allen, *Hebrews*, 576, observes that these phrases serve “to focus qualitatively on the intensity of the entire crucifixion event, including not only the physical suffering entailed, but also the concomitant opposition of all involved in the physical and spiritual realm.”

²²Reflecting on Heb 5:7–8, Russell D. Moore, *Adopted For Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 52, writes, “Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane isn’t placidly staring, straight-backed with hands against a rock, into the sky as a shaft of light beams down on his face, as in so many of our paintings and church stained-glass window artistry. He is screaming to his Father for deliverance, to the point that the veins in his temples burst into drops of blood (Luke 22:39–44). That’s the *Abba* cry. It’s the scream of the crucified.” Cf. the previous discussion of the nature of Jesus’ incarnation.

of the previously mentioned Gospel narratives that recount Jesus' passion and crucifixion. The suffering community is tasked with considering a Savior who has already suffered on their behalf. Since He has suffered, He can come to the aid of those who suffer (see Heb 2:10–18). In 6:18–20, the suffering and work of Jesus are connected with the hope of believers. Because God is faithful to his promises, the writer reasons, “we who have taken refuge” have “strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us” (6:18). “This hope,” he says, is “an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us” (6:20). Because we are connected to this Redeemer who has suffered on our behalf, a “better hope” has been brought in “through which we draw near to God” (7:19). The work of Christ is thus the foundation of a believer's perseverance in belief in the midst of suffering.

The reason the writer gives for considering Christ in this manner is “so that” we might not grow weary and lose heart. These words reveal the purpose of considering Jesus. The phrases “grow weary” and “lose heart” carry the idea of physical fatigue and the process of becoming exhausted due to exertion. They indicate the wearying of a person's soul in running the race mentioned in verse 2. This danger involves growing weary of the whole task of running. There is a real possibility here of finally succumbing to fatigue.²³ The picture is of a slow drain of physical strength as the runner steadily wears down. The contest is depleting both the physical and mental resolve of the runners. The author's purpose in writing this section is to effect a *reversal* of this “down in the dumps” disposition. He hopes to prevent them from growing weary in their souls and losing their strength to press on to the finish line.²⁴ The antidote for this disease of fatigue is the thought of Christ and his sufferings. By setting the suffering of Christ before his readers, the writer urges, “*onward* Christian soldier, marching off to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.”²⁵

In response to this command, we might raise at least two objections. First, we might simply think that we have suffered too much. We might think that our struggle against sin, our laboring against those who would persecute us, or our battle against a faceless physical affliction is too taxing on our souls. We might be thinking of checking out of this excruciatingly long, no end in sight, not-what-I-signed-up-for marathon of hardship. There are just too many obstacles littering the path, and the striving is giving way to despairing. In response to these thoughts, the writer states boldly, “you have not yet

²³Cf. BDAG, s.v. “κάμνω.” The perfective aspect of the subjunctive aorist verb κάμνητε indicates that the danger involves growing weary of the whole task of running. On perfective aspect, see later note 29.

²⁴Cf. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 315. Noting that the readers have already “joyfully suffered the loss of their goods,” Calvin notes that they were in danger of “fainting half way in the contest.” For him, one of the reasons why the writer gives this exhortation is because “Christ will have no discharged soldiers.”

²⁵Sabine Baring-Gould, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin” (12:4). The comparison with Christ now becomes a contrast.²⁶ The idea of shedding blood is probably an allusion to the suffering of Christ Himself and to the later martyrdom of believers. The readers have not experienced this level of persecution yet, though the writer wants to prepare them for it.²⁷

This race being run involves striving against sin. The writer probably leaves the concept of “sin” general so that he can include its many forms.²⁸ This sin could thus involve any number of things, such as personal moral sin, or in light of the situation being addressed, it could also include a lack of faith in the midst of trials. Sin itself is seen as an adversary to be fought against. As in verse 1, all the things that hinder the runner are viewed as sin. Throwing off the trappings of sin is difficult, as they so easily entangle us (12:1). Serious striving is required to put them to death. This striving oftentimes comes alongside of genuine suffering in the life of a believer. In this situation, we are encouraged to look away from our own situation and to consider the situation of another. The writer intimates that only by looking *away* from yourself and *on* to Christ can you avoid growing weary and losing heart. So, this first statement is simply a reminder that unlike Christ, you have not yet resisted “to the point of shedding blood” in your “striving against sin.” He has done what you have not yet done. Your current struggle against sin has not yet resulted in your death and is still in progress.²⁹ Because you

²⁶F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 340, notes that “the recipients of this epistle had not been called upon to endure anything like their Master’s suffering.”

²⁷The idea of resisting to the point of shedding blood comes from the phrase μέγρις αἵματος. This phrase is generally associated with the termination of life and can include the notion of martyrdom. Their persecution has not yet included martyrdom (10:32–34) nor matched that of their Savior (12:1–2). The use of αἵματος here is a figurative extension of its primary sense of “blood,” entailing the “seat of life” (BDAG, s.v. “αἷμα”). This usage is an example of synecdoche, where a part of an entity stands for the whole (i.e., the blood represents the life of a person). Cf. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 342n64, who notes that in extrabiblical parallels, the phrase is used of “mortal combat.” He regards the idea of martyrdom likely in light of 11:35–38. Contra C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 525.

²⁸Wescott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 400, observes that “the conflict of the Hebrews is spoken of as conflict with sin rather than sinners (v. 3), in order to emphasize its essential character . . . and to include its various forms.” The noun τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (“sin”) is likely being viewed collectively and thus includes a wide array of disobedient behavior. In this case, it could be a personification of sin “as an adversary” and might also refer to the “sin of unbelief.” For a survey of the interpretive options for this term, see Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 513–14.

²⁹The aorist tense of ἀντιλατέσθητε (“resisted”) at the beginning of the sentence contrasts with the present tense of ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι (“striving”) at the end of the clause. Their current struggle against sin has not yet resulted in their death and is still in progress. Consequently, it cannot yet be viewed as a whole. The aspect of these verbs confirms the significance of this contrast. The aorist tense is semantically coded with perfective aspect, which views the action as a whole, while the present tense conveys imperfective aspect which views the action as a close, continuous occurrence. For the significance of the aorist aspect, see Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 86–

have not yet ceased living, you must not yet cease striving. In other words, if you are still breathing, God is not finished with you yet. In redirecting our thinking on this matter, the writer urges us onward once again. There is still another leg of this “race” up ahead that needs to be run.

The second thing you might think is that because you are suffering, then the Lord must not love you. You might be tempted to think that the hardship you are encountering is a result of God abandoning you in your time of deepest need. This line of thinking is countered in an abrupt and dramatic way in verses 5–6. The writer says, “You have forgotten the exhortation that is addressed to you as sons.” The word for “forgotten” here has a forceful sense of “to forget completely.”³⁰ They had completely forgotten an important exhortation that was meant specifically for them.³¹ This type of exhortation involves encouragement as well as rebuke and is one that addresses them as sons.³² This passage marks the first time in the book that the readers are addressed as children of God. In 2:10, the author mentions Christ “bringing many sons to glory,” but here he identifies them directly as sons. A major theme of Hebrews is that Jesus is *the* Son through whom God has spoken (1:1). So, that the writer intentionally identifies us as sons is no trivial characterization.³³ We can be called sons, because *the* Son has gone before us.

This forgotten address is one that is ongoing, contemporary, and relevant.³⁴ What makes this present tense idea important and surprising is that

98. Especially, 97: “The aorist presents an occurrence *in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence.*” For an introductory treatment of an aspectual understanding of Greek tense, see chapter one of Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

³⁰The word ἐκλήθησθε most likely has a forceful sense of “to forget completely.” This verb is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, but its usage in extrabiblical literature points to a strong sense for the verb as something along the lines of “forget (altogether).” See BDAG, s.v. “ἐκλανθάνομαι.” Additionally, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 646, suggests that the prefix εκ- here intensifies the force of the verb.

³¹Note that the “exhortation” (παρακλήσεως) is addressed “to you” (ὕμῖν).

³²The phrase ὡς υἱοῖς (“as sons”) is what identifies the readers directly as sons. The noun παρακλήσεως here involves the idea of a strong word of exhortation. Compare how the author characterizes his work in Heb 13:22 as a word of exhortation (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως). Similarly, in Acts 13:15, Paul’s interpretive discourse on a text from the Law and the Prophets is described as a λόγος παρακλήσεως. Thus, in 12:5–6, the author gives an exhortation within an exhortation, which he will then explain and expand. One might even view 12:3–11 as a sermon within a sermon.

³³Günther Bornkamm, “Sohnschaft und Leiden,” in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walter Eltester (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 198, fittingly characterizes the “thema” of 12:5ff as “Der Sohn und die Söhne.”

³⁴This contemporaneity is conveyed by the present tense and middle voice of the verb διαλέγεται. This particular usage probably conveys the idea of instruction about something (BDAG, s.v. “διαλέγομαι”), but the verb also implies a communicative situation involving speech and direct discourse. So William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Word Books, 1991), 420. The subject of the verb is most likely the exhortation, which is drawn from the Scripture, which is the manner in which God “speaks” in the book

what follows is a quotation from the Old Testament. The writer is about to ask his readers to view their suffering as discipline from the Lord, and he draws his exegetical support for this bold exhortation from the wisdom of the Scriptures, in particular, Proverbs 3:11–12.³⁵ By quoting this passage from Proverbs, he applies the wisdom of the Lord to the situation of suffering. In their original context, these verses appear alongside commands to trust the Lord, fear the Lord, and honor the Lord, making this quotation intimately connected to those ideas.³⁶

The manner in which the writer describes and introduces this quotation is also drawn from its Old Testament context. The shape of the book of Proverbs guides the reading of the individual proverbs that it contains, and the first nine chapters paint a picture of a father instructing his son in the ways of wisdom. This extended analogy provides the narrative framework for the rest of the book.³⁷ Thus, the structural context of the book of Proverbs implies that the kind of wisdom contained in the Proverbs is the kind that a godly father would pass along to his son. This feature of the quotation's context allows the writer of Hebrews to apply these words from Proverbs directly to his contemporary readers. The proverb can thus fittingly address us *today* as sons.

This forgotten “exhortation” in verses 5–6 reads, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by him. For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. And he scourges every son whom he receives.” These quoted words consist of a strong discouragement from neglecting the discipline of the Lord. Notice that the writer unambiguously designates the source of the discipline. This is no generic hardship or faceless rebuke. On the contrary, it is the discipline of the Lord. This word is directed in intimate terms to “my son.”³⁸ The singular use of “son” here is sandwiched

of Hebrews. See these options viewed separately in Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 515. Cf. O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 463, who notes that the verbal idea here “underscores the relational dimensions, for in the utterance of the scriptural text God is in conversation with his children.”

³⁵The text is virtually a verbatim quotation of the LXX translation of Prov 3:11–12, with one minor difference. The keywords of this quotation are son (υἱός), discipline (παιδεία), and Lord (κύριος). These words are particularly suited to the writer's purpose in Heb 12 and serve as the links in several of the semantic chains running through this chapter. A “semantic chain” is an instance of “the use of lexis in grouping,” and specifically an example of grouping “items from the same semantic domain.” See Cynthia L. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 47–50.

³⁶These verses function as the “crowning exhortation” of a series of four exhortations in the larger unit of Prov 3:1–12. The first three directives are to “trust the Lord” (3:5), “fear the Lord” (3:7), and “honor the Lord” (3:7). See Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 986.

³⁷For the rhetorical unity of chapters 1–9, see Glenn D. Pemberton, “The Rhetoric of the Father in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30.1 (2005): 63–82. Michael V. Fox calls this first major section the “hermeneutical preamble to the rest of the book” in “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116.4 (Winter 1997): 613.

³⁸The “preponderance of the textual variants” of both the LXX of Prov 3:11 and the

between the plural uses of “sons” in verse 5 and in verse 7. In his exposition of this proverb, the writer intentionally broadens the scope of this instruction. Thus, he demonstrates that this model of fatherly discipline applies to all of God’s children.³⁹

The concept of discipline is crucial for understanding the content of this quotation and the purpose of this passage. The term itself is also one of the verbal elements that stitch the tapestry of this section together.⁴⁰ Though we usually only associate “discipline” with punishment, the concept is broader than that. The term can be defined as “the act of providing guidance for responsible living” and conveys the idea of both discipline as correction for disobedience and discipline as training in obedience.⁴¹ The concept also combines the idea of teaching with the notion of active guidance. This is no bare instruction that is in view. Rather, the picture is of a father *giving* a word of instruction and also *guiding* the efforts of the son who carries it out. You can see this from the book of Proverbs itself. In Proverbs, discipline can entail correction (13:24, 23:12–14, 29:17), reproach (5:12, 15:32), and also

Hebrews text point to the addition of $\mu\omicron\nu$ by the writer. See Gheorghita, *Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 50. This addition adds to the intimacy of the address, and is also likely drawn from the context of the book of Proverbs, where the address “my son” is common (e.g., Prov 1:8, 10, 2:1, 3:1, etc.). Bornkamm, “Sohnschaft und Leiden,” 197, notes that this addition renders the scriptural quotation as an immediate address to the faithful as the very Word of God (Anrede unmittelbar als Gottes eigenes Wort an den Frommen).

³⁹Ellingworth, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 648, labels $\nu\acute{\iota}\acute{\epsilon}$ (“son”) as a “generic singular.” Thus, the term can broadly be applied to all the readers (both genders). The writer confirms the gender inclusive nature of his address in his general statements in v. 8 and v. 11. By pluralizing the singular elements of the quotation, the writer also applies the Scriptural exhortation to the direct situation the readers are facing. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 422, argues that the two plurals “generalize the text and apply it to the experience of the community as a whole.” Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 195, follows this line of reasoning. Thus, the TNIV rendering of the “sons” language in this passage with a gender-neutral “children” represents a legitimate extrapolation. However, it also obscures the specificity and perhaps the theological impact of the father-son relationship the writer is highlighting.

⁴⁰A form of the word for discipline occurs in 12:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11. O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 467, notes that “the concentration of this distinctive vocabulary in Hebrews 12 unifies the section.”

⁴¹See BDAG, s.v. “ $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$.” The only other uses of this term in the New Testament outside Hebrews are Eph 6:4 and 2 Tim 3:16. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 420, argues that “the biblical concept of discipline ($\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$) combines the nuances of training, instruction, and firm guidance with those of reproof, correction, and punishment.” Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, argues on the whole that $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ lacks a negative punitive sense in this passage and mostly involves the positive sense of educational instruction and moral training. He bases this observation on a study of the concept in Greek (37–66), Jewish (77–161), and biblical contexts (162–214). Croy’s analysis is helpful in highlighting this aspect of discipline here. Building on Croy’s work, Thiessen, “Hebrews 12.5–13,” 367, maintains that non-punitive discipline is involved here by seeking to demonstrate that the discussion of discipline in this passage “should be understood as an allusion to the $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ that Israel experienced in the wilderness period.” Nevertheless, because the idea of “striving against sin” is present in the immediate context (12:4), it seems best to affirm that both sides of the discipline coin are in play in 12:3–11. Further, most commentators recognize that elements of corrective discipline are present at least in the context of Prov 3:11–12.

guidance and instruction (23:19).⁴² To illustrate, think of the hands of a father. The hands that help his daughter learn how to walk down the hallway are the same ones that will stop her from bolting down the stairs or into the street. Think of his voice of instruction. The same voice that says, “Yes, daughter, say Daddy,” is the same voice that says, “No, daughter, never say anything like that to your Mother.” This dual concept is at play in this passage and is particularly fitting for the type of argument the writer is making and the type of situation that he is addressing.

The danger for those experiencing hardship is the temptation to neglect this discipline. The action of regarding lightly involves having “little esteem for something.”⁴³ The discipline of the Lord must not be spurned nor merely tolerated, but rather esteemed and highly regarded. We could say that regarding the discipline of the Lord rightly means not regarding it lightly. The proverb characterizes taking the discipline of the Lord lightly as growing weary when the reproof of the Lord comes. The use of the phrase “grow weary” echoes and builds on its use in verse 3.⁴⁴ Here we find out why there is a possibility of growing weary, namely, the presence of the discipline of the Lord. From the proverb’s perspective, growing weary of the Lord’s discipline approaches a rejection of it. The idea of “reproof” most likely involves rebuke and correction for wrongdoing, but also the concept of scrutiny and careful examination. Like the writer says in Hebrews 4:12, the piercing Word of the Lord lays bare and judges “the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” No part of the soul is hidden from His sight nor exempt from His hand of discipline.

The reasoning given for these words is that “the Lord disciplines the ones that He loves” (12:6). The text makes an intimate connection between “discipline” and “love” that is not necessarily common sense.⁴⁵ You would not automatically put these two concepts together in this way. We typically

⁴²In the LXX passage from Prov 3:11, παιδεία is translating a Hebrew word (בְּיָדָיִם) which can include the idea of discipline, training, and exhortation/warning. This semantic range can be seen from the usage of forms of παιδεία in the book of Proverbs. Examining the concept of discipline in the book of Proverbs is particularly important in this case because the Old Testament quotation is the way the writer introduces the concept. The rest of the paragraph is a reflective development of the quoted text. Two other important texts for the notion of fatherly discipline in the Old Testament are Job 5:27 and Deut 8:5. In light of the other allusions to the wilderness wanderings in Hebrews, the latter is especially important. Israel was to know in their hearts that God “was disciplining them” just “as a man disciplines his son.”

⁴³The verb ὀλιγώρει involves the concept of neglect and the act of having “little esteem for something.” See BDAG, s.v. “ὀλιγώρεω.” In the LXX of Prov 3:11, ὀλιγώρει translates the Hebrew word מִנְאֵם, which entails the strong notion of rejection. Cf. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), s.v. “מִנְאֵם.” Thus, the act of growing weary of the Lord’s discipline is closely related to the act of rejecting the Lord’s discipline.

⁴⁴Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 644, observes that in v. 3 “the author is anticipating the quotation of Prov 3:11 in v. 5.”

⁴⁵The word order perhaps anticipates the surprising nature of the assertion. The author forefronts “whom the Lord loves.”

separate these two notions, but here we see that discipline does not necessarily entail cruelty. Just the opposite is true in this case. The motivation for the rebuke and instruction is love. Thus, where the Lord is concerned, the act of disciplining should not be viewed solely in negative terms.⁴⁶ The present tense of the verb also indicates that this process is ongoing. By actively training His children, the Lord demonstrates that He loves them. This discipline is further described in vivid and visceral terms as “scourging.”⁴⁷ The corporeal image confirms and emphasizes the physicality of this suffering. The severity of physical hardship is always for the purpose of guidance or correction, a difficult but essential element of “discipline.” The one whom the Lord loves and receives also experiences His discipline and instruction. These verses put the negative ideas of correction and suffering in an organic relationship with the positive ideas of love and sonship. The ideal son in the book of Proverbs is to accept discipline from his father, and he is also to accept discipline from the Lord. The writer of Hebrews applies this reality directly to his readers.

Endure Hardship as Discipline

In verse 7, we see the second main point of the passage and the second command. One way to recognize the contours of this shift in the text is to visualize the writer delivering this portion of his sermon. The writer is basically taking the wisdom of the proverb and setting it down right in front of his congregation. After introducing the concept of discipline by reading a quotation from Proverbs, the preacher looks up from his text, makes eye contact, pauses, gains our full attention, and startles us with a penetrating exhortation: “Endure hardship as discipline.”

The concept of discipline that begins the sentence is drawn straight from the quoted proverb of verses 5–6. The discipline of the Lord is the interpretive lens by which the readers are to view and make sense of their suffering. Though this sentence could be taken and translated as a statement like, “it is for discipline that you endure,” I think the NIV best captures the sense of the context. The statement has the force of an engaging command to *endure*.⁴⁸ The verbal idea of enduring hardship as discipline drives the rest of

⁴⁶Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 987, observes that “with reference to their difficulties,” the readers are “to discern the Lord’s hand lovingly training them in right character.” Cf. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 649.

⁴⁷Again, the parallelism of v. 6b to v. 6a is similar to that of v. 5c to v. 5b. O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 464, calls this parallelism a “chiastic form,” where the “negative theme of painful suffering is incorporated into the positive notions of love and sonship.” Cf. Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 362: “The verse is artfully arranged in an intricate pattern that interweaves chiasm and parallelism to emphasize the ‘life’ that results from true discipline.”

⁴⁸Though ὑπομένετε could be taken and translated as an indicative (i.e., “it is for discipline that you endure”), the exhortatory nature and structure of the paragraph point to its imperatival force. Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 518, surveys the proponents of both the indicative and imperative rendering. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis of Hebrews*, 265n93, understands ὑπομένετε as an imperative and argues that “the high level of second person plural imperatives in the passage makes an imperative more likely.” O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 464, follows the same logic. So too Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421–22. Contra Ellingworth, *Letter*

the paragraph. The writer takes the centuries old proverb and turns it into a present word for his readers. Because the specific cause of this hardship is left unspecified, the directive here is to endure whatever trials might come along as discipline, as either correction or guidance from the Lord.⁴⁹ The writer suggests that this mindset will infuse their seemingly unjustified and unnecessary hardship with meaning and purpose.⁵⁰ This is a staggering exhortation that covers all of life's circumstances. This discipline trains a believer to be who the Lord has called him or her to be in those painful situations. Just as Christ endured undeserved hostilities, so too the readers are called upon to endure as divine discipline any similar hostilities, specific hardships, or possible consequences of sin.

After this strong command to endure hardship as discipline, two key statements follow that provide the reason to endure hardship as discipline. First, the writer says in verse 7, "God deals with you as sons." He expects his readers to endure hardship unto discipline as children of God. The phrase "as sons" is drawn directly from the proverb in verse 5.⁵¹ Regardless of the origin and nature of your hardship, you can rest in the reality that it is God Himself who oversees this process as a wise and patient Father.⁵² Your identity is defined by your relationship to the one who disciplines you. The implication of this assertion is that if you are in Christ, you are neither an orphan nor an only child. You have been adopted by the Father into a family of sons and daughters. God is dealing with and identifying you as one of His children. We might have wondered if God had abandoned us because of our pain, but the writer assures us to the contrary that God is not rejecting us. Rather, He is disciplining us, and there is a Grand Canyon separating those two notions.

After the statement that God deals with you as sons, in verses 7–8 the writer illustrates this relationship with the example of a human father and

to the Hebrews, 650.

⁴⁹There is most likely an implied object of ὑπομένετε that can be supplied by the context. This reasoning appears to be behind the NIV's rendering of v. 7a: "Endure hardship." See also the similar renderings of the HCSB, NAB, NRSV, and NJB. O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 465, recognizes that commentators/translators tend to supply an implied paraphrase to clarify the "highly compressed" exhortation, but notes that "the main idea is that endurance is part of their training in faith." Cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421, who notes that the meaning of this clause "can be conveyed only through paraphrastic expansion in light of the immediate context."

⁵⁰The εἰς in this prepositional phrase puts forth discipline (παιδείαν) as the purpose of the enduring ("unto discipline"). See Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 362.

⁵¹The ὡς ("as") in the phrase "God deals with you as sons" (ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῶν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός) implicates the readers as sons, rather than merely drawing a comparison between the readers and those whom God deals with as sons. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 647, comments that "Scripture addresses the readers, not as if they were sons, but *qua* sons, in their real status."

⁵²O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 465, observes that the emphatic position of ὁ θεός at the end of the sentence represents "clear evidence of God's fatherly care."

son.⁵³ We are asked, “What son is there whom his father does not discipline?”⁵⁴ The force of the rhetorical question is that discipline *is* a natural and essential element of being a son. When a father disciplines his son with consistency and care, he is serving his God-ordained function. It is a proper and necessary activity. In other words, the discipline experienced by a son confirms his sonship. From the flow of the argument, it is clear that a negative answer is expected in response to the question.⁵⁵ What son is there whom his father does not discipline? In a real sense, there is not one.⁵⁶ The father-son relationship demonstrates that discipline is an essential component of sonship and part of what it really means to be a son of this divine father.

Following the rhetorical question, the writer makes a related conditional statement that affirms again that discipline is a vital part of sonship. He says in verse 8, “but if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Underlying this statement is an immediate sense of tension at the thought of one without this discipline.⁵⁷ There are two ways here of expressing this disconnected state of affairs. The ones without discipline are first called “illegitimate children.” This term describes a child whose status as a member of the family is dubious and who is “without the rights and privileges of a recognized son.”⁵⁸ These individuals are also “not sons.” Readers of biblical literature will

⁵³In verse 7a, the writer declares that God deals with the readers as sons, and in verses. 7bff, the writer expands various elements of that statement. The conjunction γὰρ (“for”) that begins the sentence in 7b closely subordinates the rhetorical question to the immediately preceding statement that God deals with believers as sons in 7a. Just as two main indicative statements followed the imperative of the first part of the paragraph, the imperative to endure unto discipline is also followed by two primary indicative statements. The writer gives the first one here in verse 7, and he will give the second one in the summary statement of verse 11.

⁵⁴The punctuation that ends the verse (:) and the interrogative pronoun τίς (“what”) that begins it identify this clause as a rhetorical query rather than a declarative statement. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 345, notes that τίς usually introduces an “identifying” question, as is the case in this instance. As in verse 6a, the γὰρ here supplies the grounds for the preceding statement.

⁵⁵Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 276, notes that with open questions such as this one, “context must provide the decisive information.”

⁵⁶In objection to the writer’s point, one might point to specific and sundry examples of a son *not* being disciplined by his father, or of a son being disciplined with abusive cruelty. However, the writer speaks here of the essence of an ideal father-son relationship. The effect of his meaning might not require the readers necessarily to be able to produce personal testimony to this reality in their own past. In fact, one might assume that readers would automatically recognize that there was something amiss in a specific father-son relationship that was devoid of the type of discipline described in this passage.

⁵⁷The simple repetition of the predicating verb ἐστε (“you are”) plus a negating element in both parts of the clause creates a striking contrast. If one is without (χωρίς) discipline, he is not (οὐχ) a son.

⁵⁸See BAGD, s.v. “νόθος.” The term νόθος pertains to “being born out of wedlock or of servile origin and therefore without legal status or rights.” Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 272, note that this designation applies both “substantively and symbolically.”

recognize this as a grave appellation. To be a non-son is to be cut off from the relationship that defines an individual as a redeemed believer. Thus, the writer makes a bold and startling claim when he argues that those who are devoid of discipline are severed from sonship.

This connection between suffering and sonship runs directly counter to the “believe, receive, then life’s a breeze Christianity” that has captivated the hearts of so many American believers. The Christian who anticipates a life without pain or suffering of any kind is one destined for disillusion, but this passage of biblical wisdom aims to do more than demonstrate the reality of suffering. It also seeks to equip believers to see design in the shattered pieces of that broken world.

In verses 9–10, the writer provides a second round of support for the statement that “God deals with you as sons,” by insisting that divine discipline is for the ultimate good of those who receive it. To demonstrate this truth, the writer transitions from talking about the nature of a son to talking about the nature of a father. In shifting focus, a direct comparison and contrast is made between an earthly father and the heavenly father. He says in verse 9, “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them.” His readers have all had human fathers, and these earthly fathers were also their instructors, or discipliners.⁵⁹ This set-up is the expected state of affairs in a father-son relationship.⁶⁰ According to this text, the disciplinary role of these fathers is worthy of respect. A father corrects and guides his children, but this human example indicates a greater reality.

The force of the comparison comes in verse 9: “Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”⁶¹ If earthly sons benefited from the discipline of earthly fathers, then should they not also be subject to the “Father of spirits” all the more?⁶² There is a clear and direct verbal contrast between the father “of the flesh” and the Father “of the spirits.” Our earthly fathers instructed us and watched over our physical lives, but our heavenly Father holds sway over our spiritual existence. The verb “be subject to” carries the idea of submission and obedience. We are to submit ourselves to the

⁵⁹The accusative singular masculine noun παιδευτᾶς seems to be in an appositional relationship to πατέρας. Thus, the one who is the father is also “the one who disciplines/instructs.” One might render the relationship by saying that they are the fathers, namely, the ones who discipline.

⁶⁰Cf. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 343: “We accepted the discipline because it was their province to impose it and our duty to submit to it.” O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 460, sees a comparison between the “character, intention, and results” of paternal discipline and divine discipline in vv. 9–11.

⁶¹The rhetorical question draws out the force of the comparison between the two fathers. The οὐ at the beginning of the sentence demonstrates that a positive answer is expected. Thus, it has the force of an exhortation. Allen, *Hebrews*, 582, argues that the writer here is “engaging in mitigated exhortation.” In other words, “by saying ‘how much more should we submit,’ he is exhorting his readers to do just that.”

⁶²Wescott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 404, observes that by forefronting the phrase “shall we not much rather” and modifying the sentence structure, the writer “brings forward the overwhelming superiority of the obligation.”

instruction and discipline of the heavenly Father. We are to recognize His authority and voluntarily acknowledge our humble status in relation to Him. The discipline of our earthly fathers should convince us to submit in this way to the discipline of our heavenly Father. The last words of the sentence raise the intensity of the statement and the stakes of the situation. Those who submit to the Father in this manner also *live*. Recognizing and receiving the discipline of the Lord is a matter of life and death for the believer. Even in the face of death, this type of submission leads to life.

The comparison between the two levels of fatherhood continues in verse 10, where the writer states, “for they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them.”⁶³ The phrase “for a short time” refers to the abbreviated length of time in which the discipline took place. The appropriate time for an earthly father to discipline his child is during childhood.⁶⁴ The second phrase “as seems best to them” further modifies the discipline of the fathers. They disciplined “at their discretion.” They worked toward what seemed best to them from their limited perspective.⁶⁵ Earthly fathers do the best they can with what they have, but they are not perfect. They make mistakes. They misplace motives. They might even be overbearing in their discipline.

By contrast, the heavenly Father “disciplines us for our good” (12:10). The guidance and correction of our spiritual Father has a distinct purpose. When He disciplines, the process is far from meaningless or unnecessary. He works for the ultimate advantage and benefit of His true children, and discipline is one of His chosen methods. This is where we have to trust in His wisdom once again: *He* is the one who gets to decide what is *good* for us. To trust in God in this manner is to acknowledge that He is not only sovereign, but also good. This conviction is necessary for one to speak of God’s purpose as well as God’s provision in suffering. It must function as the inner nerve that runs throughout every difficult experience and trial.

The end of verse 10 reveals the deeper purpose of this divine discipline: “so that we may share His holiness.” A share in God’s holiness is the supreme benefit and ultimate good of those who trust in Him.⁶⁶ Only those who partake of His discipline get to partake in His holiness.⁶⁷ God’s children are to

⁶³The close relationship with the previous sentence is confirmed by the coordinating conjunction γάρ (“for”) and the shared thematic content. This verse serves as the reason for submitting oneself to the Father.

⁶⁴The phrase might also serve as a contrast to the discipline of the heavenly Father and so comment on the brevity of the hardship/discipline that is experienced during life on earth.

⁶⁵See BDAG, s.v. “δοκέω,” specifically the lexical data under entry 2.b.β. The idea here includes the notion that the discipline sprang at least in part from the fathers’ own desires. Though, this does not necessarily have to be a negative statement.

⁶⁶Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 344, comments that “the holiness mentioned here is rather the goal for which God is preparing his people—that entire sanctification which is consummated in their manifestation with Christ in glory.” Cf. 1 Thess 5:23, Rom 8:18, and Col 3:4.

⁶⁷The writer makes use of the “partaking” language earlier in Heb 6:7, where the good land (γῆ) receives/partakes of the blessing of God (μεταλαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ).

be holy as He is holy, and discipline is one of the ways He brings this about. In other words, the hardship of discipline is *for your good* and *for your holiness*. Recognizing the implications of these two phrases is crucial for those seeking to draw encouragement from this passage.

When Sorrow Becomes Joy . . .

In verse 11, the writer gives the second main reason to endure hardship as discipline. After quoting and illustrating a passage from the book of Proverbs, the writer concludes this paragraph by penning a theological proverb of his own that relates to the character and effect of discipline in the life of a believer.⁶⁸ He writes, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” He begins his summary statement by emphasizing “all discipline.”⁶⁹ In Hebrews 12:3–11, there is a trajectory that goes from specific striving against sin to this statement on the hardship of all discipline in general.

The writer keys in on the way we typically perceive suffering and hardship. It hurts! The grief is real, the pain throbs, the diagnosis devastates, and the loss of life is traumatizing. All discipline seems for the moment to be marked not by joy but rather by sorrow.⁷⁰ This statement stresses the “in the moment” temporal aspect of this discipline-induced hardship as well as the immediacy of the perceived sorrow.⁷¹ In Luke 22:45, Luke describes the disciples in the garden as having fallen asleep because they were “exhausted from sorrow.” This picture of sorrowful exhaustion illustrates the disposition

Paul uses the term in a similar context in 2 Tim 2:6 to describe the diligent farmer who “receives a share” of the crops (τῶν καρπῶν μεταλαμβάνειν). Thus, in a striking metaphor, the writer asserts that the reward of a life of divine discipline is a “share” in His holiness (τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ).

⁶⁸In terms of the paragraph unit, this is the second main indicative statement following the second main imperative. Though this verse linguistically parallels the previous two in its use of a μὲν . . . δέ construction, it essentially deactivates the specific elaborations of the father-son relationship and makes a statement on “all discipline” in more general, almost proverbial terms. Thus, this sentence functions well as a summative statement concluding this pericope. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis of Hebrews*, 265, describes it as a “gnomic statement” about discipline. She also notes that “the summary forms a cohesive tie between παιδεία (discipline) and the athletic imagery in vv. 1–2 and 4 with the word γεγυμνασμένοις (trained), and signals that the athletic metaphor is still active” (Ibid., 265–66). The διὸ of v. 12 also signals a transition and supports viewing v. 11 as the last verse of the present paragraph.

⁶⁹As the first element in this sentence, the phrase πάντα παιδεία (“all discipline”) is in an emphatic position. There is also a striking case of alliteration in the first few phrases of the sentence that makes use of a reiterated “π” sound: πάντα δὲ παιδεία πρὸς μὲν τὸ παρὸν. The author uses a similar device to begin the prologue (1:1). These features heighten the prominence of this summary statement.

⁷⁰The word for joy (χαρᾶς) occurs three other times in the book of Hebrews (10:34, 12:2, and 13:17), and the word for sorrow (λύπη) only occurs here in the book.

⁷¹In this sentence, the μὲν . . . δέ construction also serves to highlight the contrast between the two temporal locations (i.e., “on the one hand, *now*” . . . “but on the other hand, *then*”).

addressed here. In the mind of the one experiencing the hardship of discipline, life often seems marred by sorrow and even incapable of producing joy. In these moments, it does not seem to be what is best for us, but what is worst for us. There are days when “discipline” seems like the deepest darkness imaginable, where you desperately try to make sense of your surroundings in a constant state of stumbling over yourself.

However, this perception of darkness is not the final word on our suffering. These sorrows do not have ultimate staying power. There is a future time following the present time of sorrowful discipline.⁷² Though the present is perilous, the afterwards is on the horizon. This future time involves the fruit of the discipline we have received, namely, “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (12:11). This reward of peace and righteousness is “yielded” by the guidance and correction of the Lord to which His children have submitted themselves. Just as a field produces a crop after much labor and preparation, so too does a life of discipline yield the fruit of peace and righteousness.⁷³

This reward is only for “those who have been trained” by the difficult discipline mentioned throughout this paragraph. The idea here involves the result of intense training over an extended period of time. Those who receive the peaceful fruit of righteousness are those who have been brought into a state of “being trained.” Believers are to endure as “trained” sons, as those who have maintained their training. From the writer’s perspective, this is the only way to “run the race set before us” (12:1). The only hope we have for being able to endure the running of this race is if we have been trained by the discipline of the Lord.⁷⁴ An out of shape runner could never hope to cross the finish line of a marathon. Neither can an untrained believer hope to persevere to the end in a way that honors the Lord and respects his authority.

By holding out this future reward in front of his readers, the writer reminds us that we must be careful not to assess God’s discipline by the measuring stick of their own temporary feelings and emotions.⁷⁵ The very real

⁷²In Heb 10:34, the writer points out an example from the readers’ own experience of the effect of looking to a future reward in the midst of trials. He reminds them, “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one” (10:34). Here, they were able to experience the sorrow of material loss with joy because they had their gaze set on a higher reality. In terms of 12:11, they were holding out for “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

⁷³The language of “yielding” is part of an agricultural metaphor. Thus, there is a blending of athletic and agricultural imagery in this final word about discipline. David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 174, argues that though these fruits are “gifts of eschatological salvation that point to the new age and the future perfection,” there is nevertheless “no need to restrict the enjoyment of these benefits to the future.” In other words, there is an already/not yet aspect involved in the yielding of this reward in the life of the believer. The writer also makes use of the “yield” metaphor in Heb 6:7–8.

⁷⁴In Heb 5:14, the writer also makes use of the training metaphor in relation to living a holy life. He writes, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

⁷⁵Cf. Calvin, *Hebrews*, 320: “The object, then, of this admonition is, that chastisements cannot be estimated aright if judged according to what the flesh feels under them, and that

sorrow of our situation will be replaced by the joy that awaits us. In the New Testament, the two concepts of joy and sorrow often keep company. Building on the argument developed in Hebrews 12, James urges his readers, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (Jas 1:2).⁷⁶ In a context similar to Hebrews 12:11, Jesus tells His disciples in John 16 that though they will grieve His absence, their sorrow will become joy.⁷⁷ These two expressions represent the full gamut of human emotion and typify the “pilgrim character of hope” that believers experience in this lifetime.⁷⁸

. . . And that Scream Becomes a Shout

Though the world we live in is full of pain, there have been hints that a day is coming when all will be made right. We have heard rumors of another world. Later in Hebrews 12, readers are given a glimpse of the final destination of the race that they are running: the heavenly kingdom (12:18–24). And entering into the kingdom means entering into the presence of the King. The peaceful fruit of righteousness is the kind of reward that is enjoyed at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ, who is our hope, suffered and made the ultimate sacrifice, and one day His scream will change its tone. On that day, the “Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16). Rather than closing their eyes to the pain around them, believers have been granted the prospect of a different line of sight. A believer is someone who endures in this life by “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”

therefore we must fix our eyes on the end . . . and by the fruit of righteousness he means the fear of the Lord and a godly and holy life, of which the cross is the teacher.”

⁷⁶James continues by encouraging his readers to “let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:3–4). As in Heb 12, James addresses this issue in relation to growing in maturity and striving against doubt in the midst of trial and temptation. Thinking in terms of the canonical context of the New Testament (e.g., in the ordering of English Bibles), the beginning of the book of James serves as an important development of the discussion regarding the nature of suffering at the end of the book of Hebrews. These two passages complement each other and are important texts for understanding the dialectic relationship between joy and sorrow. See also what Paul says about these matters in Rom 5:3–4 and Rom 8:18.

⁷⁷Cf. John 16:21–22. In relation to the tension between joy and sorrow in the Christian life, Travis, “Hope,” 322, observes that “a Christian’s hope is not utopian. He expects progress but not the perfection which will only come by God’s own act at the final coming of Christ. He can cope with human failure without despair, because he trusts ‘the God of hope’ (Rom 15:13) whose kingdom is surely coming.”

⁷⁸See Stephen R. Spencer, “Hope,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 307. Cf. the sojourn theme in Heb 11:8–16. “By faith,” Abraham lived “as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land . . . for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:9–10). In Heb 11, the individuals considered faithful are those who confess “that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” and who “desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (11:16).

(Titus 2:13). If you suffer in this world as sons and daughters of God, hold on, Hope is coming, and He will make all things right.⁷⁹

Toward the end of the vision he sees in the book of Revelation, John is shown a foretaste of this coming day. He recounts, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1).⁸⁰ He also sees “the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). He then hears a “loud voice from the throne,” which declares, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (21:3). In a recognition of the pain and suffering that has taken place between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem, John is told that God Himself “will wipe away every tear from their eyes” and “there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain” (21:4). This scene provides a picture of the fulfillment of the new covenant. God and mankind have been reconciled, sins have been forgiven, pain is no more, and the curse has been reversed. In short, paradise has been restored.

This vision John sees on the Island of Patmos is drawn from a prophetic vision of this recreation in the book of Isaiah. There the Lord declares, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17). This promise of things to come should cause us to “be glad and rejoice forever” in what the Lord creates (65:18). The Lord himself will “rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in [His] people.” On this day, the effects of suffering will be silenced, for “the voice of weeping” and the “sound of crying” will “no longer be heard” (65:19). Ours is a world where parents have to bury their newborn children, where sons have to bury their middle-aged fathers, and where friends have to bury the companions of their youth. But on that day, “no longer” will there be “an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days” (65:20). Then the children of the Lord “will not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity,” but the offspring of the Lord will be blessed, as the lion lies down with the lamb and all is made right (65:23).

⁷⁹The exhortation to wait and hope is important elsewhere in Hebrews. In 9:28, the writer encourages his readers that will one day Jesus will “appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.” He notes in 10:36–37, “You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay” (10:36–37). Finally, in the prologue to the “hall of faith” in chapter eleven, he reminds his readers that faith is the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1).

⁸⁰The newness of this new creation is indicated by the fact that “the first heaven and the first earth passed away,” and as a result “there is no longer any sea.” Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 268, notes that the use of the word *καὶνὸν* here indicates “the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously and radically renewed in quality or nature, stands in continuity with the present one.” Similarly, Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1991), 247, calls *καὶνὸν* an “eschatological catchword” that conveys the consummation and renewal of the “old order.”

Though the race set before us is long and strewn with suffering, one day the runners will lift up their heads to hear him “who sits on the throne” say, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). On that day, as the finish line comes into sight, the race will be finished, and “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” will once again say, “It is done” (21:6). Not only has Jesus gone before us, He also stands at the finish line. Looking forward to this future reality is the transformative gift that Christian hope offers to hurting believers.

The readers of Hebrews were striving to persevere in the midst of suffering. One of the purposes of Hebrews 12:3–11 is to encourage them in this situation to press on in the faith. These believers had *forgotten* key truths that had the ability to sustain them. They had forgotten something about their past: Christ has gone before them (12:3–4). They had forgotten something about their future: the peaceful fruit of righteousness (12:11). And they had forgotten something about their present struggle: God is dealing with them as sons (12:5–10). The writer addresses this theological amnesia directly by pointing his readers to Jesus, the One who suffered on their behalf.

The same exhortation should still carry weight for biblical readers, and our primary response should be the same as well. The writer has given us two commands in this passage: to consider Him and to endure hardship. We can see the relationship between the two by reversing their order. We can only endure hardship *by* considering Him.⁸¹ As we consider Christ, we must never forget to remember the exhortation that God has given us in Hebrews 12:3–11. *Remember* something about your past: Christ has gone before you. *Remember* something about your future: the peaceful fruit of righteousness. *Remember* something about your current suffering: God is dealing with you as sons and daughters. This is a word you will never want to forget. You will want to have these words woven deep into the fabric of your being, so that when the pain of suffering begins to throb, it will do so to the rhythm of the Gospel proclamation: You are His, and you can suffer in His arms.

In the end, remember that the Bible presents to us a God who beckons in the midst of pain, “Be still, my child, and cling to your Redeemer.”

⁸¹Puritan pastor Richard Baxter makes a similar exhortation in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 235: “If you say that your comfort is all in Christ, I must tell you, it is a Christ remembered and loved, and not a Christ forgotten or only talked of, that will solidly comfort you.” Modernized wording.

*True Discipleship:
Radical Voices from the Swiss Brethren
to Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Today*

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“Following Christ—what that really is, I’d like to know . . .”¹ is the fortuitous query Dietrich Bonhoeffer addressed to his friend Erwin Sutz in 1934, a few years before the publication of his most famous work, *The Cost of Discipleship*.² The question Bonhoeffer raised in the early twentieth century is as pertinent for Christians today as it was for first century Christians. For Bonhoeffer this question arose from his focus on the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew.

Here one can find the central teachings of Jesus for living the Christian life. The Sermon on the Mount was perplexing to many gathered there who believed that their own interpretations and practices of the Law demonstrated obedience to God. Jesus took their understanding a step further yet remained true to what the Law in fact taught. In fact at the beginning of the sermon He clearly stated that He was not presenting anything new, that He had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. However, what was perplexing to many of those listening to Jesus’ teaching here is that He employed a radical interpretation of the Old Testament text, one that required a righteousness that far exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

So what was so radical about following the teachings of the Scriptures many had followed for many centuries? It was that Jesus demanded a complete adherence to the letter and spirit of the Law where one is a murderer not only by an outward act, but also by the inward murderous intentions of the heart towards another. Likewise one is not an adulterer by

¹Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, London, 28 April 1934, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London: 1933–1935*, ed. Keith Clements and et al., trans. Isabel Best, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 136.

²Though the English *The Cost of Discipleship* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1959]) has been the popular title of this work, the original German title was *Nachfolge* (Discipleship). This essay will utilize the original title and new translation found in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

only committing an outward act, but through the mental cultivation of lust leading to such an act in one's mind. What was so "radical" in this teaching was that obedience to God now included inward acts of the mind and heart as well as outward attempts at righteousness. The teaching showed His hearers what true discipleship required—purity of both the hands and the heart. The question for us today is, "Is this radical teaching true for twenty-first century Christians as well?"

This essay will consider a few voices that have addressed the picture of discipleship demanded by Jesus in His sermon. First, we will look at the writings of two Anabaptist Swiss Brethren of the sixteenth century in Europe; then we will look at the twentieth-century works of Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.³ Hopefully these voices will help shed light on what true discipleship is and demands in our churches and in the world at large in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ while living in the light of what that gospel requires.

These voices focus on the central demands Christ lays down for His followers: "Will you obey me or not?" Or to put it another way, "How true is your discipleship?" The picture of discipleship that emerges may accurately be described as "radical." This term often has the connotation of "thoroughgoing or extreme. Especially as regards change from accepted traditional forms."⁴ The voices that follow would not affirm such a picture of discipleship. Rather, if "radical" is to be employed by any of these voices it must be understood as, "of or going to the root or origin," or "forming a basis or foundation."⁵ This definition accords well with their teachings on discipleship. It needs to be understood that what these voices advocate is indeed foundational for Christianity and, as they see it, not just another means of expressing the Christian faith. For them, discipleship is simply what Jesus expects from His followers.

The Swiss Brethren

Though most of the credit for the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century is given to Martin Luther, another voice from that time also resounded against the dangers of Catholic dogma. This voice existed before, but became far more apparent in the Reformation movement in Zurich alongside Ulrich Zwingli. Though echoing the Reformers and their five solas, what differentiated this voice was that it advocated a

³The choice of subjects for this essay is merely a sampling of Anabaptist and other voices resounding for discipleship. Their particular inclusion here is due to their unwavering application of their beliefs in what a disciple should be, though others could be examined as well (e.g. Conrad Grebel or Pilgram Marpeck). Also, the connection of the Anabaptists with Bonhoeffer is not new. Cf. Abram John Klassen, "Discipleship in Anabaptism and Bonhoeffer" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School and University, 1971).

⁴*Random House Dictionary*, s.v. "Radical."

⁵*Ibid.*

complete reform of the church, or what some call a restitution of the church.⁶ The early members of the movement, known as the Swiss Brethren, did not prevail against their opponents, but they left behind some writings and, more importantly, followers to carry on their teachings.

Perhaps no better source to discuss discipleship and the Swiss Brethren is Harold Bender, whose *The Anabaptist Vision* brought a central focus to diverse Anabaptist voices.⁷ In a follow-up essay on that work, Bender reiterated that discipleship is seen as the central motif especially against the common claims of Scripture, church, and love.⁸ His reasoning for setting discipleship apart from these other elements was the all-encompassing aspect of discipleship, which would include Scripture, church, and love. He states, "In essence the discipleship which the Anabaptists proclaimed was simply the bringing of the whole life under the Lordship of Christ, and the transformation of this life . . . after His image."⁹ Furthermore, Bender argues that the role of discipleship distinguished these Anabaptists from other Spiritualists, whose vigor vanished when facing persecution. For the Anabaptists "there was no crypto-discipleship;" for them one would "openly take his stand for his Lord regardless of consequences."¹⁰ Though many examples could be offered that fit this description, this essay will briefly look at two: Balthasar Hubmaier, the writing theologian of the group, and Michael Sattler, whose teaching and exemplary martyrdom spread far and wide.¹¹

Balthasar Hubmaier

Though by no means the first member of the Swiss Brethren, Balthasar Hubmaier became one of the most important for the simple fact that he wrote more than any of the other leaders of the movement, leading some to

⁶Cf. Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study of the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Boston: Starr King, 1958; reprint: Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer), xvi, chapter 1.

⁷Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1976). One of the difficulties in Anabaptist studies is determining who is an Anabaptist given their many diverse and even polarizing theologies. For a good discussion on the diversity of the Radical Reformation see the introduction in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds. *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957).

⁸Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24.1 (1950): 25-27. Bender's view of a centrist discipleship motif has been challenged. See James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.2 (1975): 83-121; J. Denny Weaver, "Discipleship Redefined: Four Sixteenth Century Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54.4 (1980): 255-79. Perhaps Littell, *Anabaptist View of the Church*, xiv, says it best, "It is not easy to extract a central concept or classifying principle."

⁹Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," 29.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹Cf. John H. Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 1 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 13-15; William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd ed. rev. and enlarged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 72.

call him the “Anabaptist Theologian.”¹² The appropriateness of this title is apparent when one looks at his biography. Hubmaier was, like many Anabaptist leaders, previously a priest in the Catholic church. He was trained as a theologian under the tutelage of Johann Eck, the Catholic defender against the Reformers.¹³ His journey towards Anabaptism would lead him through the Reformation ideas pioneered by Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich. There he came in contact with Conrad Grebel and company, who began the Anabaptist movement in that city by instituting their own baptismal service on 21 January 1525.¹⁴ Indeed, it was this issue of baptism that initially led Hubmaier into the Anabaptist camp.

As an Anabaptist writer, the subject of baptism was central to Hubmaier’s works and it is the subject that led to his death as a martyr only a few years later. Baptism plays into Hubmaier’s theology, however by no means is it the only differentiating doctrine. Explicitly, the Anabaptists, and especially Hubmaier, saw that baptism was integrally connected with ecclesiology and the Christian Life, leading to a stress on issues such as the Lord’s Supper and the Ban (church discipline). It is from his writings on these topics that one can see Hubmaier’s theology of discipleship develop and become established.

Hubmaier’s theological formulations are all based upon his rugged appeal to the use of Scripture alone. In a casual perusal of his works, one sees Hubmaier making the claim that he will not debate anyone or argue a doctrine except by the Scriptures alone. This is exemplified through a poster he put up in Waldshut 2 February 1525, where he gives a public challenge to prove infant baptism.

Whoever wishes to do so, let him prove that infants should be baptized, and do it with German, plain, clear, and unambiguous Scriptures that deal only with baptism, without any addition. . . . Now let a Bible, fifty or one hundred years old, as the right, proper, and true arbiter be placed between these two positions. Let it be opened and read aloud with imploring, humble spirit, and then let this dispute be decided and once for all brought to a conclusion. Thus I shall be well content for I want always to give God the glory and to allow his Word to be the sole judge; to him I herewith desire to submit and subject myself and all my teachings.¹⁵

¹²Thus the subtitle of Hubmaier’s collected works. Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. and trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, Classics of the Radical Reformation 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989).

¹³Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, ed. William R. Estep, trans. Irwin J. Barnes and William R. Estep (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 48–49.

¹⁴For more on the progression of Hubmaier from Catholicism to Anabaptism see Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 68–87.

¹⁵Balthasar Hubmaier, “A Public Challenge to all Believers,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, ed.

On another occasion, in prefacing a “Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book,” Hubmaier likewise asks for a discussion based upon just Scripture. Here he further shows his dependence upon Scripture in his willingness to be corrected by it. “Where I am found wrong I should be simply judged in body and life with sword, fire, or water.”¹⁶ As this work progresses he broaches the subject of theological method and comments on the methods almost universally employed. “As soon as one speaks concerning a Christian subject no one says, ‘Christ teaches and commands thus,’ but ‘The one writes this; the other something else.’ Thus we look to men than to God himself.”¹⁷ Hubmaier’s dependence upon the Word of God as the sole guiding hermeneutical principle for theology and Christian obedience is what leads him to come to his “radical” view of the Christian life.

As his respect for Scripture grew, so too did his view of discipleship. Shortly after his baptism, and public identification with the Anabaptists, Hubmaier wrote his *Summa of the Christian Life*, wherein he presented not only his beliefs about infant baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but also his overall approach to following after Christ. In the preface he implores his readers to, “Search the Scriptures; they will give testimony of Christ and the Christian Life.”¹⁸ Walking through the steps of faith from realizing sin, accepting Christ, and being baptized, he presents the manner in which believers should conduct themselves. “He has also committed himself and resolved to live henceforth according to the Word and order of Christ, but not out of human capacity.” He recognizes that the believer who holds to the gospel in faith will endure persecution on account of the gospel, but Hubmaier encourages the believer to put to death the flesh daily and “[t]hen the person brings forth good fruits which give testimony of a good tree. Day and night he practices all those things which concern the praise of God and brotherly love.”¹⁹ For Hubmaier the Christian life is nothing if it is not one where believers are daily living out their faith and producing good works.

In 1527, Hubmaier wrote “On Fraternal Admonition,” which summarizes his doctrine of church discipline. As with most Anabaptists, Hubmaier ties the Ban closely to Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and by consequence, the Christian life. From the beginning of this work he shows that believers, those who have “heard the Word of God, accepted it, believed it, committed itself in water baptism,” should

Pipkin and Yoder, 80.

¹⁶Balthasar Hubmaier, “Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, ed. Pipkin and Yoder, 172.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁸Balthasar Hubmaier, “Summa of the Entire Christian Life,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, ed. Pipkin and Yoder, 83–84.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 87.

live according to the command of Christ, . . . to work and to suffer, in fortune and misfortune, in joy and suffering, in living and dying, yea however God may dispose;

that it desires to accept all things willingly and with Christ to suffer, die, and be buried, Rom. 6:4, in the hope and confidence also to rise again with him by the glory of the Father;

to walk in newness of life and henceforth not to permit sin to rule in the mortal body nor to be obedient to its desires, but rather to abandon one's members in obedience to God the Lord to be weapons and an instrument of righteousness that they might become holy and might reach that goal which is eternal life.²⁰

As he continues his justification for employing fraternal admonition Hubmaier presents it as the practice of the church that ensures that Christians truly are living as Christ called them to be. He sees this "ordinance" of the church as a hinge without which baptism and the Lord's Supper are "pointless" and "fruitless."²¹ His reasoning is based on a particular understanding of the nature of humanity. The flesh is weak and seeks after its own desires, a description he gives to "Protestants" like himself.

For we all want to be good Protestants by taking wives and eating meat, no longer sacrificing, no more fasting, no more praying, yet apart from this one sees nothing but tippling, gluttony, blaspheming, usury, lying, deceit, skinning and scraping, coercing, pressing, stealing, robbing, burning, gambling, dancing, flattery, loafing, fornication, adultery, rape, tyranny, strangling, murder. Here all the frivolity and insolence of the flesh finds free play; . . . Here no Christian deeds shine forth from anyone.²²

The situation of the Protestant Christians that Hubmaier is commenting on is that they lack discipleship. Though the claims of justification by grace have been made, these "followers" of the Protestant movement are far from Christ. True followers, with the help of church discipline, seek Christ above all earthly desires and as such are willing to endure hardships and persecutions.

Hubmaier's focus upon the church ordinances goes to the root of the problem of discipleship. In *A Form for Water Baptism* Hubmaier again demonstrates his concern for true discipleship for all those who would be baptized. "But in true doctrine and in Christian deeds, one must freely proclaim and do what God has commanded us and not otherwise, and trust

²⁰Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Fraternal Admonition," in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, ed. Pipkin and Yoder, 373.

²¹*Ibid.*, 375.

²²*Ibid.*, 375–76.

again to the Word of God for its efficacy, even if the whole world were to fall away."²³ Discipleship must mean for believers that adherence to the Word of God is non-negotiable. In Hubmaier's Lord's Supper liturgy, immediately before the congregation partakes of the elements, they recite a "pledge of love." This pledge reminds them of their submission to God and to their neighbors. The Supper for Hubmaier was not what many describe today as a "mere memorial." Though he did advocate the memorial nature he also advocated an imitative, ethical response for the church in it. On this point of Hubmaier John Rempel comments, "The act of remembering has an ethical and not a mystical character: to think on Jesus' sacrifice is to act on it."²⁴ Through this one act believers are reminded of what Christ has done as well as their responsibility to pledge their love to Him and others.

Along with most Anabaptist leaders from this time period, Hubmaier's life ended in execution, mainly for his beliefs regarding the church, baptism in particular. His emphases upon ecclesiology came from his plain reading of Scripture and his belief to be obedient to its every command no matter the consequence. Thus, the view of discipleship for Hubmaier was one of complete obedience, which included persecution, even death. The focus was not on the temporal but upon the eternal. The worldly realm is passing away with all its truth, but the eternal realm will not pass away and indeed *its* "truth is unkillable."²⁵

Michael Sattler

The martyr's death of Hubmaier was one among many Swiss Brethren leaders in a very short span of time. Given the quick loss of important leadership to the movement we might wonder how it was preserved until leaders like Menno Simons and Pilgram Marpeck arrived on the scene. The answer, according to John Yoder, is that there was a "bridge" between the first and second generation Anabaptists. "That Anabaptism survived as a viable movement with visible structures . . . was the work of Michael Sattler more than any other one person and was the effect of the *Seven Articles of Schleithem*."²⁶ Sattler suffered a martyr's death like many of his comrades, but the story of his death was spread throughout Germany, Austria, and Switzerland thereby influencing the lives of thousands. Yoder points out that Sattler perhaps is the "most significant" leader of the first generation,²⁷ while William Estep

²³Balthasar Hubmaier, "A Form for Water Baptism," in *Balthasar Hubmaier* ed. Pipkin and Yoder, 391.

²⁴John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgrim Marpeck, and Dirk Philips*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 33 (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1993), 88.

²⁵"Truth is Unkillable" is a signature phrase of Hubmaier and can be found at the end of his writings. For a discussion on this phrase see *Balthasar Hubmaier*, ed. Pipkin and Yoder, 42n12.

²⁶John H. Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 1 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 7.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 10.

describes him as a “superlative witness,” who is still “felt to this day.”²⁸ With such accolades Sattler proved to be an important figure among the Anabaptists, and as such had important views on Christian discipleship.

Like Hubmaier and other Swiss Brethren, Sattler’s view of discipleship was grounded upon his use of Scripture. In presenting to the Strasbourg Reformers, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, his understanding of doctrines later spelled out in the *Schleitheim Confession* Sattler defended his beliefs: “I together with my brothers and sisters have understood out of Scripture.”²⁹ This sentiment resounded again at his trial, where he was charged with acting contrary to the imperial mandate against Lutheran doctrine. His response to this charge was that he had not acted against the mandate; rather, he kept to the “gospel and the Word of God.” He further claimed, “Counter to the gospel and the Word of God I do not know that I have done anything; in witness thereto I appeal to the words of Christ.”³⁰ He concluded his defense at his trial by requesting that his accusers send for Bibles and “learned” in order to search the Scriptures concerning his teachings. In a statement that sums up his biblical approach he says, “If they [the learned men] show us with Holy Scripture that we are in error and wrong, we will gladly retract and recant, and will gladly suffer condemnation and the punishment for the offense. But if we cannot be proved in error, I hope to God that you will repent and let yourselves be taught.”³¹ Scripture was the basis for his teaching and the conduct of his life. Strict accordance to what it said was his guiding principle and the foundation upon which his view of discipleship was built.

Discipleship for Sattler was simply separation from this world or, as J. Denny Weaver calls it, “Solidarity with Christ.”³² In his early discussions with Bucer and Capito, he marks his distinction by defining Christians as citizens of heaven and not of this world who “practice in deed the teaching of Christ.” He separates himself from these reformers because he cannot agree with their teaching on items such as baptism, the Supper, and the sword (nonresistance). His strict view of the teachings of Christ led him to leave his home, because he believed he would be “doing a dishonor to God” if he remained.³³ This commitment is born from a simple reading of Scripture and a commitment to be obedient to the commands of Christ. From his earliest writings as an Anabaptist, Sattler presents a form of discipleship that is wholly committed to Scripture and unwilling to compromise.

The main writing attributed to him is the *Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God concerning Seven Articles*, otherwise known as the *Schleitheim Confession*. Here the Anabaptists’ radical views found their

²⁸William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd ed. rev. and enlarged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 57–75, esp. 72.

²⁹Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, 20.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 71.

³¹*Ibid.*, 73.

³²Weaver, “Discipleship Redefined,” 256–61. See also, Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, 21.

³³*Ibid.*, 23.

most fruitful exposure at this time. Estep believes it is a “turning point” for the Swiss Brethren and cites Sattler as the major architect.³⁴ The purpose of the confession was not to provide a comprehensive list of doctrines that the Anabaptists held; rather, it was intended to identify the distinctives of the Brethren over against the Protestants. Yoder rightly calls it a “common man’s handbook on Anabaptist distinctives.”³⁵

The issue of discipleship is apparent from the beginning of the confession’s cover letter. It states that the purpose of the confession is to clarify beliefs vis-a-vis those who “have turned away from the faith, thinking to practice and observe the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ.”³⁶ Sattler’s circle presents a true picture of the Brethren: “for they who are Christ’s have crucified their flesh with all its lusts and desires.”³⁷ The intention of the document was that these true followers receive right teaching and separate from those whose teaching was not according to Scripture.

The first article of the confession concerns baptism. As with all Anabaptists their primary distinctive was believers’ baptism. Like Hubmaier, they did not see baptism as merely an entrance of the believers into the church but as a ceremonial act of commitment to Christ for “those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him.” This imagery, drawn from Romans 6, emphasizes the walking with Christ and His subsequent afflictions, a path on which many followers of this confession would literally find themselves walking.

On the Lord’s Supper (article 3), the document emphasizes the separation from the world again. Though the memorial view of the Supper is taught, they also hold to a closed view of communion—only believers who have been rightly baptized should partake in the Supper. Their reasoning for this is from 1 Corinthians 10:21, which the confession quotes, “Nor can we at the same time partake and drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils.”³⁸ The communal separation that article three represents is further exemplified in article four’s advocacy of civil separation. Drawing from both the Old and the New Testaments, Sattler explains that separation from the world is for the sake of Christ. Thus, anything that is not united to Christ is not worthy of Christians. Such things Sattler lists as “all popish and repopish works of idolatry, gatherings, church attendance, winehouses, guarantees and commitments of unbelief, and other things of the kind, which the world regards highly, and yet which are carnal or flatly counter to the command of God, after the pattern of all the iniquity which is in the world.”³⁹ The followers that Sattler wanted were those who were committed only to the things of

³⁴Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 64.

³⁵Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, 31.

³⁶Ibid., 35.

³⁷Ibid., 36.

³⁸Ibid., 37.

³⁹Ibid., 38.

heaven and who turned away from the fleshly cultures in which they lived, whether ecclesial or secular.

On one of the most controversial articles of the confession, the sword, Sattler lines out his clearest teaching of discipleship for his followers. Though the context questions a Christian's civil involvement, the principle of discipleship taught by Sattler is clearly present. It states, "Thus we should do as He [Christ] did and follow after Him, and we shall not walk in darkness. For He Himself says: 'Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"⁴⁰ The article sums up its teaching by appealing to Christ's headship over the church, "as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through Him, so that there be no division in the body, through which it would be destroyed."⁴¹ The representation of discipleship the *Schleitheim Confession* presents is one of complete submission. As Christ submitted to the Father, so too should His followers be in submission to Him and His teaching in the face of other comforts, churches, or cultures.

As the confession gained prominence in the region, Sattler was soon arrested and put on trial. In his last letter to his congregation in Horb he encourages the believers to stay true to the biblical teachings. He presented the benefits of standing firm in Christ in the midst of persecution: "that you can be recognized in the midst of this adulterous generation of godless men, like bright and shining lights which God the heavenly Father has kindled with the knowledge of Him and the light of His Spirit."⁴² The pastoral spirit of the letter exudes with warnings for his congregation to walk in the way of Christ

through cross, misery, imprisonment, self-denial, and finally through death; thereby you can assuredly present yourselves to God your heavenly Father as a purely righteous, upright congregation of Christ, purified though His blood, that she might be holy and irreproachable before God and men, separated and purified from all idolatry and abomination, so that the Lord of all lords might dwell among them and [that she might] be a tabernacle to Him.⁴³

Thus, the last encouraging words he leaves with his congregation are to persevere in the way of Christ, to be true disciples who do not fall away, who accept the Lord's discipline, and who love both God and neighbor.

There is not room in this essay to reproduce the account of Sattler's trial and execution, but suffice it to say that he endured consistent with the principles of the faith for which he was indeed being executed. Though the

⁴⁰Ibid., 40.

⁴¹Ibid., 41.

⁴²Ibid., 56.

⁴³Ibid., 58.

crowds and magistrates jeered him and tried to provoke him, his position was founded in Scripture alone and his assurance was in Christ alone.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The inclusion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in this essay may seem both obvious and awkward at the same time. With Bonhoeffer's ever-popular work *Discipleship*, one finds what may be among the best works on the subject ever written.⁴⁴ The popularity of this work, especially his terminology of "costly grace," is widespread. Indeed the execution by Hitler of this pastor-theologian resistance fighter has led some to proclaim him a martyr of our time.⁴⁵ However, this was not always the case, which is why some might find it awkward to include him alongside other more "evangelical"⁴⁶ voices. Many think of his later work as political activism unrelated to his faith at all.⁴⁷ It also could be argued that late in his life he rejected much of what he presented in *Discipleship* and his other works of that period.⁴⁸ Although I am not in agreement with all these criticisms they should not be ignored or summarily rejected. What they help provide is a highlight of the complex, multifaceted nature of the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The reason for his inclusion here, awkward as it may be for some, is that he, at one time

⁴⁴Barth considered *Discipleship* as "Easily the best that has been written on this subject . . ." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 2*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 533.

⁴⁵For instance, two of the most recent biographies on Bonhoeffer introduce him as a Martyr in their titles. See, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (London: T&T Clark, 2010) and Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

⁴⁶Here I am using "evangelical" in the sense following D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1–19.

⁴⁷See Eberhard Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 23.1 (Fall 1967): 4–6.

⁴⁸See the German editors' afterword to *Discipleship*. Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt, "Editors' Afterword to the German Edition," *Discipleship*, 29–314. Writing from prison years later Bonhoeffer comments on *Discipleship*: "I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life. I suppose I wrote *Discipleship* at the end of this path. Today I clearly see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it. Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself—whether it be a saint or a converted sinner or a church leader (a so-called priestly figure!), a just or an unjust person, a sick or a healthy person—then one throws oneself completely into the arms of God, and this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities—then one takes seriously no longer one's own sufferings but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane. And I think this is faith; this is *μετάνοια*. And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian." Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, Tegel Prison, 21 July 1944, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, Christian Gremmels, Eberhard Bethge and Renate Bethge with Ilse Tödt, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 486.

in his life, presented a view of discipleship that contemporary evangelicals cannot afford to ignore.

Biography

While an immediate analysis of Bonhoeffer's pastoral, discipleship-centered works might be sufficient for this essay, doing so would insufficiently address the important historical context in which this Lutheran theologian ministered. Though there are biographies aplenty on Bonhoeffer (cf. note 45 above), no one can adequately look at his life without at first consulting the premiere biography by his student and friend Eberhard Bethge, which still remains the authoritative work on Bonhoeffer.⁴⁹ It is Bethge who is able to provide a broad contextual framework for his friend's life that is helpful to explain what he wrote and why he acted. Bethge notes two major turning points in Bonhoeffer's life. "The first may have occurred about 1931–32 and might be formulated thus: Dietrich Bonhoeffer the theologian became a Christian. The second began in 1939: Dietrich Bonhoeffer the Christian became a contemporary, a man of his own particular time and place." Thus Bethge outlines three periods for Bonhoeffer's life: the theologian, the Christian, and the contemporary.⁵⁰ In this essay we will focus upon the middle period of his life, but we will first briefly sketch the period that led to Bonhoeffer becoming a Christian.

Born into a large family at the turn of the twentieth century, Bonhoeffer reaped the benefits of a rich ancestral heritage that included pastors, theologians, historians, politicians, and academics.⁵¹ In Bonhoeffer's childhood his father became the chair of Psychiatry at the University of Berlin while his mother managed the house, which involved training the children in the ways of Christianity, though they were little encouraged to attend church services.⁵² At a young age Bonhoeffer decided he would become a minister and a theologian much to the disdain of his older siblings, who thought of the church as a "poor, feeble, boring, petty, and bourgeois institution." Dietrich's only response was, "In that case I shall reform it!"⁵³

As a university student Bonhoeffer was able to study under some of the great minds of his time including his neighbor Adolf von Harnack. Though many of his professors in history wanted Bonhoeffer to study under them, it was theology that drew Bonhoeffer. His dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* examined sociality in the church, a topic that would remain a constant through much of his life.⁵⁴ The next few years would lead him in the direction

⁴⁹Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

⁵⁰Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," 7.

⁵¹Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 3–13.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 15–18, 35.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Joachim von Soosten, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

of both ministerial and academic careers, with posts and studies in Berlin, London, and New York, as well as the beginnings of his ecumenical/political involvement.

However, as Bethge notes, it was in 1931 to 1932 when the theologian became the Christian. In a letter Bonhoeffer wrote in 1936 he reflects upon this period of his life:

I plunged into work in a very unchristian way. An . . . ambition that many noticed in me made my life difficult. . . .

Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian.

I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of personal advantage for myself . . . I pray to God that will never happen again. Also I had never prayed, or prayed very little. For all my loneliness, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far that must go.⁵⁵

Though other examples can be given, Bethge is correct to point to this time as a turning point in Bonhoeffer's life. In his biography he also highlights, as Bonhoeffer mentions above, that those around the young minister noticed a change in him. Bonhoeffer now regularly attended church, held a meditative approach to the Bible, practiced his theological confession, and was moving closer to a "communal life of obedience and prayer."⁵⁶

Politically, two events were also occurring during this phase of Bonhoeffer's life. One was his growing involvement in the ecumenical movement that would later, because of his international contacts, bolster his appeal as an agent of the *Abwehr*. Second, the Nazi party under Hitler's leadership was growing in power and would take over the nation and, in particular to Bonhoeffer, the state church. In both of these instances Bonhoeffer would prove himself to be a bold and courageous voice in a time of turmoil. Eventually he would be a part of the church that pulled out of the national church to create what they termed the Confessing Church. It

⁵⁵Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 204–05.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 204.

is from this ecclesiastical movement that Bonhoeffer would be called to become the leader of an “illegal” seminary.

Eventually Bonhoeffer would altogether lose the ability to speak publicly, teach at the university, or even publish his work, all of which descended from his devotion to what he believed to be the truth. It is in this historical context where we find him writing two of his most well known works, *Discipleship* and *Life Together*, both of which illustrate Bonhoeffer’s view of what true discipleship should look like.

***Nachfolge* (Discipleship)**

Discipleship was published in 1937 and from it readers can be taken to the heart of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. However, other research has shown the continuity of thought in Bonhoeffer from *Discipleship* to *Ethics*, and onward.⁵⁷ Furthermore, one cannot see this work as being the product of only his seminary years at Finkenwalde. The content itself existed a few years prior and many of the thoughts can find their beginnings in earlier works such as *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.⁵⁸ The question that has stayed with Bonhoeffer and that he is attempting to answer in *Discipleship* is, “What does true discipleship look like?” The answer he finds contains many layers, but has a singular emphasis upon looking to Jesus Christ alone for all faith, doctrine, and life.

To understand this radical Christocentrism that Bonhoeffer advocates as discipleship, one must begin with the understanding of grace. Drawing from his experience as a pastor, a theologian, and a Lutheran, he looks at grace anew, differently than others around him, and tries to regain Luther’s own understanding before his followers marred it.⁵⁹ According to Bonhoeffer the appropriate Lutheran view of grace is the justification of a sinner who is seeking after Christ. This teaching devolved into an understanding of grace justifying only sin and not the sinner. The latter doctrine understands grace as a prerequisite to faith; the former understands it as a consequence.⁶⁰ This latter he calls “cheap grace.” “Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of the community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the

⁵⁷Cf. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 457–58. In particular he states, “not only did the direction and basic questions underlying *Discipleship* already exist in 1932 in a complete form, but the answers had also been formulated.”

⁵⁸Cf. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, “Editors’ Introduction to the English Edition,” *Discipleship*, 17–19.

⁵⁹The editors of *Discipleship* comment on this in their introduction. “Luther’s doctrine became a mere presupposition demanding that good Christians refrain from simple obedience, lest they expose themselves to the ironic accusation that they were denying the all-sufficiency of grace. And so, as the twisted logic went, the Christian simply had to conform to the world.” *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 51.

cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ Many of Bonhoeffer’s contemporaries could be accurately described by this category, especially as they tacitly allowed Hitler to lead them.

What Bonhoeffer argues for is Luther’s understanding of justification being applied to the sinner and not just sin. This occurs when one is truly following after Christ. He terms this “costly grace.” “It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live. It is costly, because it condemns sin; it is grace, because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God’s Son . . . and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God.”⁶²

The difference between this second understanding of grace is foundational for an understanding of discipleship and goes to its root and in particular to obedience. Cheap grace, on the one hand, does not see a need for obedience, because sin has been covered. Costly grace, on the other hand, understands faith as that which cannot exist apart from obedience. Such thinking leads Bonhoeffer to the central thought of his text: “*only the believers obey and only the obedient believe.*”⁶³

It must be said here that Bonhoeffer is not advocating fundamentalism or establishing a new legalism. In fact, what he is doing is just the opposite. His call in this work is for Christians to realize their dependence upon Christ for their lives. Salvation is through Him and with Him and His way is the way of the cross. In his discourse upon the role of the cross in discipleship he states, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁶⁴ This call may entail a physical death, but the greater point is that the call is for one to take on a spiritual death in denying oneself. He says, “Self-denial means knowing only Christ, no longer knowing oneself. . . . he [Jesus] is going ahead; hold fast to him.”⁶⁵ A life lived apart from Christ and His cross is a life that is ashamed of the gospel. It is a life that rejects the church and Christ its head.

Much of Bonhoeffer’s thinking on the topic of discipleship comes from his reading of the Sermon on the Mount; in fact, a large portion of his work is a homily upon the entire sermon.⁶⁶ His presentation is an exposition of

⁶¹Ibid., 44.

⁶²Ibid., 45.

⁶³Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 63. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 450.

⁶⁴This quotation is from the earlier English translation, *The Cost of Discipleship*, which Bishop G.K. Bell, a friend of Bonhoeffer, used to preface the English edition and is better known. The new critical edition translates this phrase as, “Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death.” Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 87. The editors point out that the German reads: “Jeder Ruf Christi führt in den Tod.” Literally, that says, ‘Every call of Christ leads unto death.’ Ibid., 87n11.

⁶⁵Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 86.

⁶⁶Ibid., 100–98. Cf. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 451. Kelly and Godsey, *Discipleship*, 4, point to this center of the work in mentioning Bonhoeffer’s letter to Karl Barth. In 1936 he

the text in Matthew. In commenting on the Sermon's conclusion, one finds Bonhoeffer's understanding of its teaching, as well as his understanding of discipleship in general. He says, "Jesus knows only one possibility: simply go and obey. Do not interpret or apply, but do it and obey. That is the only way Jesus' word is really heard. But again, doing something is not to be understood as an ideal possibility; instead, we are simply to begin acting."⁶⁷

The point Bonhoeffer is making here is simple. Discipleship means following after Jesus and doing what He says to do. Faith and action, word and deed, come together in one's discipleship and that is seen only through following the master Jesus. Those who hold to faith apart from action hold to a cheap grace. The words from James really apply in this situation, "Show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (Jas 2:18). The particular "action" that Bonhoeffer advocated was to be acted in and for this world. It is not an action that has a certain agenda such as feeding starving children, ending war, or eradicating disease. Rather, it is a decision that finds its orientation in, through, and from Jesus. "Discipleship in essence never consists in a decision for this or that specific action; it is always a decision for or against Jesus Christ."⁶⁸

The location for being Christ's disciple is in the church-community. In the last part of the work Bonhoeffer brings the concept of discipleship into the concrete realm of the visible church-community, the place where believers find true justification and sanctification.⁶⁹ The practical aspects of discipleship are outlined all in reference to the visible community that is trying to imitate its head: Jesus Christ. Here the issues of baptism and church discipline are discussed because they specifically relate to the vitality of the church community. Therein we discover Bonhoeffer's insistence on the communal nature of discipleship. The church becomes the "space for Christ" in

wrote, "die Fragen der Auslegung der Bergpredigt und der der paulinischen Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Heiligung." They provide this translation "those of the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount and the Pauline doctrine of justification and sanctification." Bonhoeffer to Karl Barth, Finkenwalde, 19 September 1936, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Illegale Theologen-Ausbildung: Finkenwalde 1935-1937*, ed. Otto Dudzus and Jürgen Henkys assist. Sabine Bobert-Stützel, Dirk Schultz, and Ilse Tödt, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 14 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1996), 235-36. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 45-54, notes this letter as well and shows that at first Barth was uncertain about the project.

⁶⁷Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 181.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁹Though Bonhoeffer treats these two concepts closely at times he also keeps them quite distinct. "While justification appropriates to Christians the deed God has already accomplished, sanctification promises them God's present and future action. Whereas, in justification, believers are being included in the community with Jesus Christ through Christ's death that took place once and for all, sanctification, on the other hand, preserves them in the sphere into which they have been placed. It keeps them in Christ, within the church-community. While the primary issue in justification is our relationship to the law, the decisive factor in sanctification is our separation from the world in expectation of Christ's coming again. While justification incorporates the individuals into the church-community, sanctification preserves the church-community with all the individuals." *Ibid.*, 259.

the world.⁷⁰ The individualized (non-ecclesial) Christian cannot find true discipleship; it is only in and through the church.⁷¹

In summary, the whole program Bonhoeffer advocates in *Discipleship* is based upon Christ, follows Christ, and focuses on the end of time.⁷² The true disciple of Jesus Christ is the one who is truly “following after” Jesus, doing what He says to do when He says to do it.

Gemeinsames Leben (Life Together)

After the closing of the seminary at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer took up the task of writing a book that is seemingly about his experiences there, especially in the Brother’s House of the seminary. However, the basis for his beliefs outlined in this book was established years before. The central theme of community was a topic for Bonhoeffer in his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* wherein he argued one of the recurring themes of his life’s work, Kirche ist Christus als Gemeinde existierend (the church is Christ existing as church-community).⁷³

One also can see hints of his desire to practice his thoughts with a community in a letter written to Erwin Sutz in 1934 when he is contemplating coming to the seminary. “I no longer believe in the university; in fact I never really have believed in it—to your chagrin! The next generation of pastors these days, ought to be trained entirely in church-monastic schools, where the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship are taken seriously—which for all three of these things is simply not the case at the university and under the present circumstances is impossible.”⁷⁴ The fruition of this work that was experimented at the seminary is found in *Life Together*.

If *Discipleship* is the theological-ideological treatise for believers then *Life Together* is the practical-theological handbook for churches. In it one finds Bonhoeffer’s understanding of what community is:

Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. . . . We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. . . . It means, *first*, that a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means, *second*, that a Christian

⁷⁰Ibid., 236.

⁷¹Bonhoeffer makes this point especially clear through his discussion on sanctification. “Sanctification apart from the visible church-community is mere self-proclaimed holiness.” Ibid., 262.

⁷²Cf. Ibid., 276–80. Especially note page 280: “Those who have faith are being justified; those who are justified are being sanctified; those who are sanctified are being saved on judgment day. This is not because our faith, our righteousness, and our sanctification, to the extent that they are ours, would be anything other than sin. Rather, it is because Jesus Christ has made our ‘righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that those who boast, boast in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 1:30).”

⁷³Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 211.

⁷⁴Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, London, 11 September 1934, in Bonhoeffer, *London: 1933–1935*, 217.

comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, *third*, that from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity.⁷⁵

The centrality of Jesus for the community reflects almost the same argument made in *Discipleship*. In *Life Together* the practical and communal aspects are more in focus, but the radical dependence upon Jesus alone remains the same.

Like the call for Christians to reject cheap grace that Bonhoeffer made in *Discipleship*, in *Life Together*, he is calling for Christians to become “disillusioned” with the existing Christian culture. Knowing that the course he is advocating may be one that has “unpleasant and evil appearances” he presents a picture of a community that “begins to be what it should be in God’s sight” and that “begins to grasp faith in the promise that is given to it.”⁷⁶ The disillusionment with the present culture and the striving for a true faith community is achievable only in dependence upon Jesus Christ. The connection of the community to Christ is central for any hope of attaining the goal of life together. The means to gain the type of community he advocates is not through an ideological or programmatic realization, but rather through participation with God in Christ.⁷⁷

At this point Bonhoeffer oscillates between true, spiritual community, and false, emotional community. The former is based in truth, the latter in desire. The emotional community is one that is ruled by power, technique, and abilities. The Word of God and the Spirit rule the spiritual community.⁷⁸ Though there may be those in the emotional community who utilize the Word and speak of Christ, these are not their primary motivations. The community that is truly seeking Christ and is motivated by His Word is the one that serves. This service is never for the sake of itself but ever for the sake of its Savior.

From his argument of what true community is, Bonhoeffer sets out to show practically what the true community should be. The emphases of education highlighted in his letter to Sutz find their expression in the remaining pages. The theology and practice of worship for a believer in a community is the concern of the rest of the book. The subjects range from communion to service but the theology of discipleship remains foundational. The motivation to engage in worship both individually and corporately is based upon one’s submission to living a life imitating Jesus. The role the community plays in this task is to be the space of His Body in the world. In the church believers

⁷⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, and Albrecht Schönherr, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtess, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 31.

⁷⁶Ibid., 35.

⁷⁷Ibid., 38.

⁷⁸Ibid., 40.

come in contact with each other, find the nearness of Christ in the world and the fullness of their call to discipleship in the presence of other Christians.⁷⁹

In summary, Bonhoeffer's idea of community is not one that is found in seeking a new monastery so that Christians can hide from the world until Christ's return. The vision of the community seen here is one where individuals can worship and be rejuvenated so that they can act out discipleship in the world. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church and his Christology coalesce with one another. Church community is an essential part of his view of discipleship.

Conclusion

The voices of Hubmaier, Sattler, and Bonhoeffer may still seem an odd combination for some, but hopefully their teachings on discipleship have converged to help reevaluate discipleship for twenty-first century evangelicals, who too often equate discipleship merely with teaching. From these voices, and a proper reading of the Great Commission, one can see that discipleship is inclusive of but much greater than the practice of teaching.

Recently, some contemporary voices have also highlighted this inadequate view of discipleship in many of our churches. In particular Francis Chan's *Crazy Love*⁸⁰ and David Platt's *Radical*,⁸¹ though not without their critics, have created waves and discussions that question the status quo of many of the practices in evangelical churches. Their arguments, much like those of Hubmaier, Sattler, and Bonhoeffer, implore us to seek Christ and his Word instead of the ways of man. They, too, are willing to sacrifice the comforts of this world for the greater blessings of following the will of the Savior of the world.

In conclusion, true discipleship, at least according to these voices, is not all that radical, as if it exists in degrees. Certainly the obedience Christ demands is great, the trials may be many, and the sufferings intense, but the true disciple really would not want it any other way. To dodge these demands, trials, or sufferings is to leave the path of Christ and set out on a much more dangerous one. The simple path is to hold to Jesus and to discern His call, a task that Bonhoeffer says is not hard to find,

Thus, when we ask the question of where we can hear Jesus' call to discipleship today, there is no other answer than this: listen to the word that is preached, and receive the sacrament. In both of these listen to Christ himself. Then you will hear his call!⁸²

⁷⁹Cf. Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr, "Editors' Afterword to the German Edition," in Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 127.

⁸⁰Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008).

⁸¹David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2010).

⁸²Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 204.

Emerging Church Hermeneutics and the Historical-Grammatical Method¹

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Introduction

The emerging church (EC) has received assessments and critiques in a variety of forms, far too many to count. Most of these have been scattered throughout the covert blogosphere by various well-known and anonymous individuals. Many of these assessments appear to lack much genuine and extensive interaction with EC literature, EC people, EC organizations, and emerging churches in all their complexity,² lending the critical comments varying degrees of validity. However, appraisals of the EC have also been made by some within the evangelical academic community.³ These assessments

¹The present essay was originally written in 2007, which accounts for the datedness of some of the material, as well as the integration of updated material consonant with developments in the emerging church and evangelical biblical hermeneutics.

²This indictment against EC critics has been made by Tony Jones, former Coordinator of Emergent, who gave a blanket-dismissal of many criticisms made against the EC and Emergent: "Honestly, I care little about these critiques. They come from those who either have no idea what Emergent is all about and/or could not possibly be persuaded from their position anyway," http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/05/is_emergent_the.html (Accessed 6 November 2006). While Jones has certainly not been able to read or listen to every criticism of the developing EC, his frustration may have warrant, especially since many of the concerns against the EC are brought from those who could bring more substantial criticisms if their assessments were more thorough, requiring perhaps that they enter into the "conversation" more fully.

³A sample of assessments and critiques from the evangelical academic community include the following: Talbot School of Theology's "Conversations with An Emerging Church" (13 May 2005); The Master's Seminary's Spring Lecture Series, "The Emerging Church Movement" (Spring 2006); Dallas Theological Seminary's podcast, "DTS Dialogue: The Emerging Church Movement" (30 May–1 June 2006); The 2006 Fall Contemporary Issues Conference at Westminster Theological Seminary, "Eternal Word in an 'Emerging World'? An Emerging Church Forum" (26–28 October 2006); an entire issue devoted to the EC in *Criswell Theological Review* 3.2 (Spring 2006); engagement from evangelical scholars D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); R. Scott Smith, "Post-Conservatives, Foundationalism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.2 (June 2005), 351–63; and the recent essays in Bill Henard and Adam Greenway, eds., *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the*

made by scholars in the academy were partly beckoned by members of Emergent in their 2005 response to their critics.⁴ And while important areas of concern that exist and are developing within the EC have been examined (e.g., ecclesiology, soteriology, preaching, views of truth, postmodernism, atonement theories, etc.), an important area of assessment that has been largely neglected is the realm of biblical hermeneutics.

Importance of this Study

Biblical hermeneutics has received little focused attention both by those in the EC and their critics.⁵ This is disconcerting for at least two reasons. First, EC people, even those holding to the traditional consensus of hermeneutics being the “art *and* science of interpretation,”⁶ generally agree that hermeneutics is incredibly important.⁷ Second, hermeneutics provides the “tools” necessary to mine God’s very self-disclosure, the sacred Scripture. Sound biblical hermeneutics, properly applied by grace and the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, guide and drive the interpreter into understanding what God has said.⁸ Without sound hermeneutical principles, there would

Emergent Church Movement (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009). Assessments also continue to be made regularly at the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society.

⁴Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Spencer Burke, Bran McLaren, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, Chris Seay, “Official Response to Critics of Emergent,” 2 June 2005, <http://theoblogy.blogspot.com/2005/06/official-response-to-critics-of.html> (Accessed 3 June 2005).

⁵There is ground for this conclusion, made in 2007, to be a bit softer in light of these works: Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Scot McKnight, Kevin Corcoran, Peter Rollins, and Jason Clark, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What’s Emerging* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011). Tim Conder and Daniel Rhodes, *Free For All: Rediscovering the Bible in Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009); and by way of critique, Douglas K. Blount, “A New Kind of Interpretation: Brian McLaren and the Hermeneutics of Taste,” in Henard and Greenway, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, 109–28.

⁶Andrew Rogers, “Reading Scripture in Congregations: Towards an Ordinary Hermeneutics” in *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church*, ed. Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2007), 81, 97 (italics mine). Evangelicals have also granted that hermeneutics is both a “science” and “art” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002], 314; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970], 11). There has been noticeable recoil in the EC to viewing hermeneutics as a “science.”

⁷Tony Jones has stated to this author, “I think that I and others actually do have a pretty well developed theory of interpretation” (Personal email correspondence, 28 May 2005). Mark Driscoll, referred to as being on the “right wing of the EC” (designation by Jones in conversation with this author), though viewed with reservation by those within and without the EC, is also concerned about the EC’s hermeneutics, which “changes the rules of hermeneutics but keeps the Bible.” Driscoll further states, “In previous generations, the fight was over the inerrancy of Scripture. Today, the fight is over the authority and meaning of Scripture” (Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* [Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004], 168). Whether Driscoll is correct on this assessment is another issue, but it does show perhaps one reason for his early conflict with the EC.

⁸This “application” of sound hermeneutics, called “exegesis,” deals with the activity of applying sound hermeneutical principles to understand what biblical authors said and why

be no obedience to what God has said, for His very words would be unobtainable. Any person or movement (evangelical, emerging, Baptist, whatever) that receives God's pleasure and favor will be one that has become postured so as to hear and understand what God has said. This was relayed by God to His people in the Old Testament:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh 1:8)

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isa 66:2b)

Conversely, any people (or movement) easily invoking God's displeasure are those playing carelessly with what God has said. Consider how the Bible describes God's people during and after the Babylonian captivity:

But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them. (Jer 32:23)

And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. (Neh 9:29, 30)

The importance of sound hermeneutics for anyone, therefore, cannot be overstated. Simply put, without the ability to hear and understand God's Word, everyone is hopelessly lost.

Limitations of this Study

Three disclaimers are in order at the outset of this paper. First, this study will not engage the contemporary hermeneutical debate ongoing

they said it (cf. Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, rev. ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 27). Wayne Grudem, ETS past President, refers to "exegesis" as "the practice of interpreting Scripture," when one "applies" hermeneutical principles to the biblical text" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 108–09). See esp. the significance of the coinherence of Spirit and Word in Pilgram Marpeck's theology, Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 82–90.

within the evangelical world that began with Thiselton's work,⁹ except with the following point of clarification. Whereas evangelical hermeneutics formerly was entirely a field of study devoted to articulating sound principles for understanding the biblical text, it has now become a field given over to the impulses of non-evangelical scholars,¹⁰ concerned primarily with philosophical, epistemological, and ontological issues revolving around author, text, and reader. One free church evangelical has identified this trend as focusing on "meaning as an existential reality," rather than on principles helping interpret what the author said, meant, intended, and why.¹¹

Second, there has been a tendency by those in the EC and others to view the historical-grammatical method of interpretation with measured disdain.¹² This often occurs when evangelical, emerging, and other scholars characterize or ignore the historical-grammatical method, its role in history, and arguments for its plausibility.

Third, this essay is written by someone who has been a pastor and church planter, from an evangelical, free church perspective. Having served in a variety of Baptist and free churches as church planter, pastor, and layman, this author stands in the middle of an evangelical tradition with a rich hermeneutical legacy. And having labored for three years seeking to see a community of believers established among the emerging, postmodern generation in California's central valley, a generation at present largely detached from any religious tradition, the perspective of this author is very sensitive and sympathetic to issues raised by the EC. However, without sustained correction, poor hermeneutics may be a major downfall in the EC, limiting the ability to hear and obey God, thus spoiling their ministry in the church and the world.

Goal of this Study

This essay's goal is to compare and contrast some of the more important hermeneutical trends operative in the EC with those of the historical-grammatical method. Four dominant hermeneutical principles in the EC will be given. After a presentation of these principles is made, along with statements from representative EC writers, contrasting principles from the historical-grammatical method will be presented. With each historical-grammatical principle, accompanying scriptural references will be given where appropriate. After making comparison, a petition for more sound exegetical practice

⁹Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). Thiselton's work has been described by one evangelical scholar as that which brought evangelicals into "the new age of hermeneutics" (William W. Klein, "Review of 'Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*,'" *Trinity Journal* 2.1 [Spring 1981]: 71–75).

¹⁰E.g., Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer Wittgenstein, Ricoeur, Levinas, Derrida, Fish, Rorty, etc.

¹¹Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 27.

¹²Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 116; Brian D. McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 159–63; Idem, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 44.

will be made to those within the EC. Before presenting EC hermeneutics, the important role the historical-grammatical method has played in evangelical Bible interpretation will be briefly established.

The Historical-Grammatical Method and Evangelicals

The historical-grammatical method is the established hermeneutical method of evangelicals.¹³ It was the method of interpretation espoused by Milton Terry.¹⁴ Three Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) past Presidents said Terry's work "became a standard hermeneutical manual at the turn of the [nineteenth] century," was seen as "the standard work on biblical hermeneutics for most of the twentieth century," and into the twenty-first century "continues to enjoy considerable influence amongst evangelicals."¹⁵ After Terry, the Baptist Bernard Ramm's work (1950) was what Wilbur Smith predicted would become "the accepted text for hermeneutical studies in the majority of conservative schools in this country."¹⁶ It became a standard work representing historical-grammatical hermeneutics, articulating with clarity and precision the method guiding the interpreter "to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God."¹⁷

During early battles over the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, Montgomery stated that "the evangelical sine qua non" is "biblical authority defined hermeneutically." He went on to show how the view of biblical authority and inerrancy held by evangelicals necessarily generated "concrete hermeneutical guidelines." In line with the historical-grammatical method, these guidelines begin with taking the Scripture "in its natural sense (*sensus literalis*), unless the context of the passage itself dictates otherwise."¹⁸ A decade later conservative evangelicals formed the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI),¹⁹ affirming that the only method of interpretation

¹³This is not to say that the *consistent* application of the historical-grammatical method is the hallmark of evangelicals. That would only be the case with dispensationalism specifically, which "claims to employ principles of literal, plain, normal, or historical-grammatical interpretation consistently" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and exp. [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 20). Therefore, the historical-grammatical method (albeit not always consistently applied) is the hallmark of the broad spectrum of evangelicals.

¹⁴Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: 1890; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

¹⁵Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 123; Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 9; and Southern Baptist John H. Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44.2 (June 2001), 204.

¹⁶Wilbur M. Smith, "Preface" to Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, xvii.

¹⁷Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 2 (italics his).

¹⁸John Warwick Montgomery, "The Approach of New Shape Roman Catholicism to Scriptural Inerrancy: A Case Study For Evangelicals," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10.4 (Fall 1967), 221–22, 224.

¹⁹With over three hundred scholars, pastors and laymen, ICBI's purpose was to "to define, defend, and apply the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element of the

compatible with inerrancy was the “grammatico-historical.”²⁰ Proponent of the ICBI’s Chicago Statement (1978), ETS past President Carl Henry affirmed that the evangelical consensus of his day would generally agree with Harold Lindsell and Bernard Ramm’s description of the historical-grammatical method. He stated that “evangelical Christianity . . . understands words in their basic usual sense,” and further, “The rule among evangelicals is to follow the natural meaning of the Scripture text.” Summarizing, he states, “In brief, evangelical Christianity espouses grammatical-historical interpretation rather than alternatives that attach to the Bible passages exotic meanings that depend upon reader decision.”²¹

Having briefly observed the historical-grammatical method’s important role in evangelical hermeneutics in the last sixty-plus years, and that it has served as the established hermeneutical method of conservative evangelicals in America, this paper now turns to examine the main operative components in the EC’s hermeneutics.

Hermeneutical Trends of the Emerging Church

Specific hermeneutical principles operative within the EC have been designated as such after observing identifiable hermeneutical trends existing in multiple individuals/leaders/organizations as they are seeking to interpret and relate to the biblical text. While it is not always easy to identify every trend that exists in the EC, one can observe its leaders, official EC groups, and others engaged in the conversation. Tony Jones has stated, “I’m on the record on this blog and in other places about my hermeneutic positions.”²² Also on record are those whose voices can be heard in the conversation.

Four principles are worthy of note for this paper, and for the sake of contrasting EC hermeneutics with the historical-grammatical method. They will be treated in the following order: (1) Preunderstanding as Variable Starting Point; (2) Scriptural Ambiguity; (3) Authoritative Community; and (4) Personal and Contextual Influence.²³

authority of Scripture and a necessary ingredient for the health of the church of Christ in an attempt to win the church back to this historic position” (Norman L. Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], ix).

²⁰Article 18 of the Chicago Statement (1978) says, “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking into account its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture” (Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 497). This was also significant with the 2006 annual ETS meeting, where the majority affirmed the proposed inerrancy resolution, which predicated an implied affirmation of the plausibility of the historical-grammatical method by the majority of the ETS full membership.

²¹Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982; reprint, 1999), 4:103–04.

²²<http://theoblogy.blogspot.com/2006/10/keller-on-emergent.html#comments> (Accessed 1 November 2006).

²³Principles in this list are chosen due to the significant effects each of them has in generating subsequent hermeneutical decisions.

Emerging Church Principle #1: Preunderstanding as Variable Starting Point

Preunderstanding has much in common with Gadamer²⁴ and (in the evangelical world) Thiselton's "two horizons" of interpreter and text belonging in different contexts and traditions, providing horizons needing to converge together to synthesize/generate/ascertain meaning.²⁵ But preunderstanding is more than influential factors; it is about decided leanings and determined precommitments that are fixed before coming to a text for interpretation. For example, some in the EC have decidedly assumed the hermeneutic of "exile." From the 2003 Emergent convention Jason Clark and John Green state their thesis: "Exile is the context for our biblical interpretation; that Christian eschatology plays a significant part in shaping the theology of an exiled community. . . . Exile has some essential theology for us today."²⁶ Here, the interpretive "grid" was suggested and determined before the Bible was even engaged. Consider also the missional hermeneutic advocated by Conder and Rhodes, which is a necessary component enabling believers to read the text together and "hear it as God's Word."²⁷

Preunderstanding is also seen in Ray Anderson, who references the early church controversy over Gentile conversion and concludes, "To use the Word of God to forbid the work of God was to misread the Scripture text. Paul then had to go back deeper into the narrative of the Scripture text to find a basis for affirming the narrative text of the work of God."²⁸ His starting point for Scripture's interpretation is based on what is determined to be a "work of God," and not on what is read outright in the text. Scot McKnight, lecturing on the EC, with reference to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, stated, "Bible study piety emphasizes 'inspired by God' while the emerging movement emphasizes 'equipped for every good work.'"²⁹ While his point may have validity,

²⁴Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2002).

²⁵Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 11. One writer stated that so many as eight following factors are influential in determining meaning: authors, audiences, contexts, communities, languages, texts, truth conditions, and cultural functions (Jorge J. Gracia, "Meaning," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 495). Each one of these factors can contribute to one's "preunderstanding." See also Conder and Rhodes, *Free For All*, 21–42, albeit they would take issues with a number of the "lenses" they list; and the premise of Franke, *Manifold Witness*.

²⁶Jason Clark and John Green, "Hermeneutics and Eschatology," posted on Emergent podcast, 25 August 2006, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/podcast> (Accessed 6 November 2006).

²⁷Conder and Rhodes, *Free For All*, 229–30.

²⁸Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 122.

²⁹"What is the Emerging Church?" Fall Contemporary Issues Conference, Westminster Theological Seminary, 26 October 2006, <http://www.foolishsage.com/wp-content/uploads/McKnight%20-%20What%20is%20the%20Emerging%20Church.pdf> (Accessed 12 November 2006), 24. It appears that what McKnight means by "Bible study piety" is those who embrace and perform historical-grammatical exegesis as a beginning point to knowing and loving God.

he makes the unnecessary dichotomy in order to show an assumed starting point for the EC. According to McKnight, the EC is looking to be involved in activity that pleases God without having to emphasize the necessary attention that must be paid to what God has said in the Bible.

Emerging Church Principle #2: Scriptural Ambiguity

Brian McLaren has said of himself, "I have often gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated, and that shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue (carefully articulated) often simulate more thought than clarity."³⁰ While dealing with the "medium" of Jesus' message, McLaren places emphasis on the parables, which, according to him, allow for "interactive readership" and show Jesus to be "subtle, indirect, and secretive." He sees Jesus invoking some of McLaren's own methods in the usage of parables. In New Testament parables, McLaren asserts that Jesus means: "*Don't just listen with your ears; listen with your heart. Don't just hear my words; hear my deeper meaning. Don't listen for the literal meaning accessible to your rational mind; seek deeper for a meaning that requires that you make a personal investment of your sincere effort and your imagination.*"³¹

Carl Raschke is committed to a "polymorphous nature of the text and meaning as sign-play," forcing the reader into a radical reader-response role, where the text addresses the reader in the *vocative*.³² Anderson also contributed to EC hermeneutical ambiguity, stating, "Without consideration of the narrative of the work of God, the Word of God takes precedence. However, when the narrative of the work of God's Spirit through Jesus Christ is taken into account, we now discover what I have called an 'eschatological preference.'" Again he states that "where apostolic teaching and practice is clearly governed by the readiness or openness of the situation to experience full freedom in Christ, the hermeneutical criterion of the resurrected Christ as a continuing presence in the church is, in my opinion, indispensable."³³ He gives further examples of this hermeneutic at work, including those surrounding the historic changes at Fuller Seminary. And then, while emphasizing that Scripture and experience do not share "the same revelatory status," he states explicitly:

These contemporary narratives of the work of the Spirit do not become holy Scripture, nor do they become revelation in the same way that Scripture itself is. However, the contemporary narratives as evidence of the work of Christ serve as *hermeneutical*

³⁰McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 23.

³¹McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, 44 (italics his).

³²Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 142.

³³Anderson, *Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 126–27.

criteria in reading and applying the Scripture narratives as Word of God.³⁴

Due to a strong desire to be open to God's working in the world today, this approach to inspiration affirms that there are simply many issues in life that Scripture either has not addressed, or else is not entirely clear on, or else it *is clear*, but simply needs to be reinterpreted under the rubric of the contemporary working of Christ.³⁵

Emerging Church Principle #3: Authoritative Community

The EC believes that the Bible is to be interpreted by the people, for the people. EC Bible interpretation allows "interactive relationship"³⁶ and is seen as a social, community venture where conversation allows life to flow while living amongst one another.³⁷ Jason Clark and John Green state, "We all approach texts from a certain point of view; each method reflects the goals, habits, beliefs of the different communities."³⁸ Grenz and Franke write that this task "emerges out of the process of give and take, as participants in the community converse over their shared cultural meanings as connected to the symbols they hold in common as Christians."³⁹ And Conder and Rhodes affirm, "The living community shapes the way we read and understand the Scriptures."⁴⁰ What is striking about Conder and Rhodes's position is the minimal role they attribute to the Spirit in this process. Not that they affirm his absence in the process of community interpretation, but they find particular evidences of transformation and the coming together for interpretation to be certain guarantees or "unmistakable markers of a divine presence." And they advocate a seeming contentedness with a sort of community-empowered rather than Spirit-empowered reading of the text.⁴¹

Stating that their "greatest desire" is to follow and serve the Word of God while they "love, have confidence in, seek to obey, and strive accurately to teach the sacred Scriptures," members of Emergent state further, "We are radically open to the possibility that our hermeneutic stance will be greatly enriched in conversation with others."⁴² Doug Pagitt's church, Solomon's

³⁴Ibid., 135 (italics mine).

³⁵See also Conder and Rhodes, *Free for All*, 122–30, for how the application of familiar biblical texts to specific threads in the shared life of the community becomes a means of interpreting texts anew. Further, they also wish to avoid immediate interpretive conclusions (148), while elsewhere affirming there are places where the Bible does speak clearly (200). Consider the complex and altogether different thesis in Franke, *Manifold Witness*, 73–89.

³⁶McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, 45.

³⁷Ched Myers, "Stories to Live By: Reading the Bible in the New Millennium," <http://www.theooze.com/articles/print.cfm?id=91> (Accessed 2 August 2005).

³⁸"Hermeneutics and Eschatology."

³⁹Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 166.

⁴⁰Conder and Rhodes, *Free for All*, 63.

⁴¹Ibid., 71–73, 189–93.

⁴²Tony Jones, et al., "Official Response to Critics of Emergent."

Porch, takes this idea of community as an interpretive principle one step further. Solomon's Porch includes the Bible as "a member of our community of faith—an essential member that must be listened to on all matters on which it speaks. . . . Yet we try to treat the Bible as the sort of best friend to whom one gives the benefit of the doubt."⁴³ Part of Pagitt's weekly sermon preparation involves an intimate Bible discussion group during which insights and ideas are gleaned from church members in preparation for Sunday's message. He says, "I'm just suggesting what is normally done between the pastor and a commentary be done between the pastor and the community."⁴⁴

For some in the EC, the individual believing "communities" also include the tradition of the church.⁴⁵ Jones has stated that Emergent Village seeks to be "a catalyst of conversation, community, and ultimately, interpretation." Clarifying Emergent's hope, he says, "We want the church to reclaim its place as the authoritative community of interpretation of scripture, culture, and human existence."⁴⁶ As such, the community determines truth.⁴⁷ While arguing for the need to preserve a "Rule of Faith" and a "hermeneutical tradition" simultaneously, Andrew Rogers makes the same suggestion, that the church should become the authority in doctrine and hermeneutics.⁴⁸ On one hand, this idea seems very similar to the Roman Catholic idea of authority, where interpretive authority is centralized in the church. On the other hand, it also seems similar to the Orthodox idea of *sobornost*, signifying "catholicity" and "conciliarity," which Russian writers claim as "a special characteristic of the Orthodox Church, contrasted with the emphasis on juridical authority in the [Catholic] Church and the excessive individualism of the Protestant communions."⁴⁹ It is the Orthodox means of safeguarding the truth, with the corporate church being the authorized interpreter of the Bible. *Sobornost* is based on the idea that "the Church as a whole is being led by the Holy Spirit," and therefore "all who are truly led by the Spirit will necessarily come to the consensus in all matters of faith and practice."⁵⁰ Similar to this idea of

⁴³Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 122–23.

⁴⁴Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 186–89.

⁴⁵Nathan Humphrey, "A Baptist Benediction," <http://www.theooze.com/articles/article.cfm?id=271> (Accessed 12 August 2005).

⁴⁶Tony Jones, "Is Emergent the New Christian Left 2: Tony Jones Takes on Chuck Colson and 'true truth,'" 25 May 2006, http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/05/is_emergent_the_1.html (Accessed 1 November 2006).

⁴⁷Incidentally, there might be some recent change in Jones's position. See his interview with Christian George, "Restless Pilgrim Podcast #3: Tony Jones," 17 November 2009, where in speaking about Bible interpretation, Jones corrected himself using the term "discern" rather than "determine," <http://restlesspilgrim.com/2009/11/restless-pilgrim-podcast-3-tony-jones/> (Accessed 8 January 2010).

⁴⁸Rogers, "Reading Scripture in Congregations," 99–102.

⁴⁹"Sobornost," in F.L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed., rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1522.

⁵⁰Alexey Kolomytsev, "Bible and Tradition as Sources of Authority in Eastern Orthodox Theology," (unpublished paper). These notions are consistent with one of Emergent's values: "Commitment to the Church in all its Forms," <http://www.emergentvillage.com/Site/>

an authoritative community (which seems to run contrary to the EC's push for decentralization of authority and communities) is the influential factor of one's own context.

Emerging Church Principle #4: Personal and Contextual Influence

For the EC, hermeneutics does not take place in a vacuum. Early on, Dave Tomlinson spoke of his approach to interpreting the Bible in this way: "I realized that every reading of the Bible involved an interpretation, and that taking Scripture seriously necessitated a constant dialogue between the text, the historical teachings of the Church, and my own thoughts and culturally conditioned presuppositions."⁵¹ Tony Jones goes further, stating plainly: "[m]y approach to the text varies, depending on the particular text and, quite honestly, what side of the bed I woke up on."⁵²

For a succinct definition, Jason Clark and John Green state, "Hermeneutics is about the lenses we use to interpret texts; our interpretive grid." With a purported 1% of people in the United Kingdom attending churches, they feel a great spiritual depression providing their minds with reason to embrace an appropriate predetermined hermeneutic. In their case and for their context, they believe that the appropriate hermeneutic is "exile."⁵³ Here again is Anderson's idea of letting contemporary narratives serve as "hermeneutical criteria" for how the Bible is interpreted.⁵⁴ While making strides to maintain the need for exegesis and a role for authorial intent (something hugely neglected in the EC), John Franke, leaning on literary theorists, advocates that "once an author writes a text, it takes on a life of its own as it is read and interpreted in new and constantly changing situations." With a pneumatological account that makes way for "the fullness of the speaking of the Spirit," who intends to guide the church throughout its history, Franke finds that this speaking "always involves the response of the reader."⁵⁵

Having examined four of the most important areas for EC hermeneutics, this paper now turns to make a responsive presentation of hermeneutical principles from the historical-grammatical method.

Historical-Grammatical Emphases in Light of Emerging Church Hermeneutics

Historical-grammatical principles that contrast those in the EC are: (1) Inspiration as Starting Point; (2) Scriptural Perspicuity; (3) Authorial Intentionality; and (4) Piercing Objectivity. These principles will be explored because they are counter-emphases offered by the historical-grammatical

Belong/Order (Accessed 10 December 2005).

⁵¹Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, 111.

⁵²Personal email correspondence, 12 June 2005.

⁵³"Hermeneutics and Eschatology."

⁵⁴Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 135.

⁵⁵Franke, *Manifold Witness*, 77. See, however, the thoughtful thesis throughout this work, including the advocacy of "interdependent particularity" for the church(es) (134–47).

method. Throughout this section, an attempt will be made to show how the principles set forth in this method are consistent with how the Bible prescribes itself to be interpreted.

Historical-Grammatical Principle #1: Inspiration as a Starting Point

The Bible is an inspired book. This is the starting point for evangelicals. Ramm says, “The divine inspiration of the Bible is *the foundation* of historic Protestant hermeneutics and exegesis.”⁵⁶ Being inspired, the reader’s “overriding concern” should be “to read it for what it really is: the word of God.”⁵⁷ It has moral/spiritual, supernatural, and revelational aspects to it.⁵⁸ It is different from any other book, “its chief value” being that it is “divinely adapted to be profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).”⁵⁹ EC sympathizer Andrew Rogers finds himself searching for some method for “objectifying the text,” though not necessarily viewing it as “inspired.” He asserts that “if it is to address us as God’s word, then it needs to have that otherness in order to arrest our current horizon and transform it.”⁶⁰ It is the absolute authority, and as such has been described as the book “before which we sit judged rather than judging.”⁶¹

Sailhamer suggests that the classical orthodox view of biblical inspiration should effect a hermeneutical method that is faithful to the very *words* of Scripture. It was the words (ῥαφή, 2 Tim 3:16) that God inspired and therefore this method of Bible interpretation should be devoted to “reading the *words* in terms of their grammatical, namely historical sense.”⁶² Paul described Scripture as “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

In contrast to the EC’s starting point, the notion of “pre-understanding” seems to be a relatively new principle. It appears to have been first observed by evangelicals in the mid 1980’s, by Baptist Don Carson. This principle makes a distinction between the interpreter’s mental baggage (which everyone has to some degree) and the preunderstanding that means “something like ‘immutable non-negotiables,’ a function of an entire world view at odds with Scripture,” which will not allow Scripture to bring it into question. Though there is a fine line between the two, Carson correctly asserts that with the latter preunderstanding, “it becomes *impossible* for the Scriptures to exercise authority over our thoughts and lives where our ‘pre-understanding’

⁵⁶Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 93 (italics mine).

⁵⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 176.

⁵⁸Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 94.

⁵⁹Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 141.

⁶⁰Rogers, “Reading Scripture in Congregations,” 101.

⁶¹Frances M. Young, “Patristic Biblical Interpretation,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 570.

⁶²Sailhamer, “Johann August Ernesti,” 206 (italics his).

is immutably non-negotiable.” In this case, the reader begins with “epistemological limitations imposed by ‘pre-understanding.’”⁶³

Evidencing distaste for this approach by his former EC colleagues, Driscoll refers to this postmodern view of interpretation as believing “the interpreter ultimately has authority over the text and can use it as he or she pleases rather than submit to it.”⁶⁴ If the Bible is inspired, interpreters must be able to interpret and understand the text clearly before proper application can be made. Moreover, British Baptist Steve Holmes notes the Scottish Baptist Declaration of Principle’s affirmation that a sort of belief in inspiration is necessary for the reader as well as the author, indicating the need for the present “guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Emphasizing Bible reading as a gathered community, he says, “In church meeting, in being together around the Bible, we discover the guidance of the Holy Spirit and properly use our liberty to follow Christ as best we can discern.”⁶⁵ This leads to the next hermeneutical principle.

Historical-Grammatical Principle #2: Scriptural Perspicuity

“God’s revelation is always clear,”⁶⁶ which is true precisely because it cannot be otherwise. If the contrary occurred, the resultant lack of clarity would force symbols and descriptions into “emotive preferences, and this would raise the specter of illusion.” If statements about God cannot be affirmed as literally true, is God able to be known at all?⁶⁷ But God can be known wherein He has revealed Himself. Mark Thompson has stated that “the ultimate guarantee that God’s word will be heard and understood, that it will achieve the purpose for which it was spoken and written, is the power and goodness of God himself.”⁶⁸

A few comments are in order regarding the nature of hermeneutical ambiguity that EC interpreters see in the Bible. Baptist Carl Henry mentioned that the reformer John Calvin “saw satanic influences at play in the notion that the ‘fertility’ of a text determines its true meaning and nurtures a hidden import.”⁶⁹ Calvin’s notion is relevant since the very question the serpent asked in the garden was the one which tried to conceal and cast doubt on what God had said. This happened by a questioning of God’s Word

⁶³D.A. Carson, “A Sketch of the Factors Determining the Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984; reprint, 1993), 13, 15.

⁶⁴Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, 168.

⁶⁵Stephen R. Holmes, “Baptists and the Bible,” *Baptist Quarterly* 43.7 (July 2010), 414. See also the significance of holding Word and Spirit together in Franke, *Manifold Witness*, 74–77.

⁶⁶Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd rev. ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955; reprint, 1967), 197.

⁶⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:121.

⁶⁸Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 111.

⁶⁹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:105, citing John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians*, 4:22.

(“Did God actually say . . . ?” Gen 3:1) and then by offering a contradictory statement directly opposed to what God had said (“You will not surely die,” Gen 3:4). It is worth noting that this “conversation,” which included a question, dialogue, and ultimately an antithesis (the serpent’s contradiction of God’s Word), did not actually yield a synthesis, nor any fuller meaning, nor any sound interpretation of what God said. The results of reading God’s Word as ambiguous in this instance were catastrophic. Consequently, God’s Word was not applied by those who actually had heard and understood God’s Word. The first humans experienced consequences of their disobedience.

Paul warned Timothy that in the last days, there would be those who were “[a]lways learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7), which seems descriptive of those who choose to see the text of Scripture as totally unclear, thereby deliberately disregarding what God has said. This can only be the result of either a lifestyle consistent with those described by Paul in the verses prior to 2 Timothy 3:7, or else a precommitment to seeing the text as unclear, having a minimalist desire to want to apply it, or both. At its logical conclusion, the lack of commitment to the major reformational principle of the biblical text’s clarity ultimately yields no text from which to make any personal application. There would therefore be no need for obedience any longer since there would be nothing (i.e., no text) to interpret and obey. On the other hand, God has spoken clearly in the Bible, and the “one qualification and one only for being able to extract meaning from Scripture . . . is the aid of God’s Spirit.”⁷⁰ The Spirit is the One who enables the joyous discerning of the meaning of God’s Word in Scripture, which is determined by authorial intent.

Historical-Grammatical Principle #3: Authorial Intentionality

Tom Wright gives a good description of this principle: “the ‘literal’ sense was *the sense that the first writers intended*.” This involves the pursuit of “‘discovering what the writers meant’ as opposed to engaging in free-floating speculation.”⁷¹ Bruce and Scott assert that the “ultimate objective” of Bible interpretation is “the intent of the human and divine authors.”⁷² Moisés Silva refers to “authorial intent” as the fundamental element of the *sensus literalis* principle:

Grammatico-historical exegesis is simply the attempt to figure out what the biblical writer, under divine guidance, was saying. The basic question is then, “What did the author mean?” The only evidence we have to answer that question is the text itself. In other words, we dare not speak about the Bible’s infallibility

⁷⁰Holmes, “Baptists and the Bible,” 416.

⁷¹N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 73, 135 (italics his).

⁷²F.F. Bruce and J.J. Scott, Jr., “Interpretation of the Bible,” ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 615.

in such a way that it legitimizes random and arbitrary interpretations of the text.⁷³

In the interpretive process of the historical-grammatical method, careful attention must be paid to the Bible's "claims and character as a human production."⁷⁴ Wells reminds the reader that due to the Spirit's inspiration of the Bible and His work in illumination, "the content of Scripture is not subject to being overridden by the interests of the interpreter, or those of a later culture, or those of an ecclesiastical tradition."⁷⁵ This view of authorial intent (which dictates meaning in the historical-grammatical method) runs totally contrary to the EC priority wherein "the meaning of a text is up to the interpretive community."⁷⁶ It is in this postmodern context where "[t]he reader effectively supplants the author and plays havoc with the text."⁷⁷ Yet, as Thompson skillfully reminds, "the divine author has not relinquished this text." He goes on to say,

To speak of the vulnerability of the written word, adrift on a sea of interpretations, is a strangely romantic notion when the word concerned is the very word of God. The Bible is not merely the record of God's activity long ago in human history; it is the means by which, through the illuminating and convicting work of the Spirit, God directly and personally addresses his people in the world today. Contemporary reading of Scripture . . . exists within that redemptive history in which God is continuously active and never absent.⁷⁸

As Luke told Theophilus, the intent for which he wrote his gospel account was as follows: "it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3–4). And the apostle John also clarified the intention of his writing: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Authorial intent has much to do with purpose, meaning, and content. The biblical authors had and have something to say, which are one and the same. Much different than the historical-grammatical hermeneutics' emphasis on authorial intent, the conversation taking place within the EC *is the means* of interpretation, which causes the most influential interpretive factor to be those in the community with the loudest voice, and when new members

⁷³Moisés Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50.1 (Spring 1988), 70.

⁷⁴Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 500.

⁷⁵David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 174.

⁷⁶Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian*, 100–01.

⁷⁷Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 128.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 133.

come into the community, it will further change the community's conventional, ever-changing, subjective understanding of what the Bible has said. It is certain that these leaders and their followers will be active in generating different meanings of the things that God has clearly said. And if those with the louder (and more influential) voices in the conversation become mute at any point (or worse, they stop dealing with the Bible in its original context altogether), then nobody will interpret anything in the EC. Andrew Rogers's attempt to synthesize a "Rule of Faith" and "interpretive tradition" as a community guide⁷⁹ would ultimately also end up being left to the louder-voice elites in the community. And this will ultimately be the result of Jones's desire for the church to be the authority in conversation as well. No doubt, Jones's voice will be among the loudest of the bunch.

In Orthodoxy's *Sobornost* and in Roman Catholic interpretation, everything also of significance is left up to the official clergy and historical statements. There is little need for emphasis on biblical exegesis. Lay involvement in the matters of hermeneutics and doctrine (and almost everything else unless it is giving money) can become bothersome and largely insignificant. The interpretive idea of authoritative community appears to be moving in a direction that will ultimately muzzle or else attempt to swallow the Bible's transcultural effectiveness completely. For each community would have its own contextual, theologically-driven hermeneutics and rule of faith. If this becomes the case, and the Bible were only read to confirm one's beliefs or the beliefs of a community, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Muslim, and every other community would never be confronted with the life changing truths in God's Word. They would all be left alone without a witness to the gospel of grace and the true salvation that is revealed in God's Word. And in a post-modern context, interaction between communities would be forbidden, unless one enters another community. This would be devastating. For it would eliminate evangelism, the Christian's responsibility to make disciples and to obey what Paul exhorted Timothy to do for the entirety of his ministry: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2).

Positively speaking, God has given His people His Word as a stewardship. Local Christian communities are not to "determine" the meaning of the text, according to the radical EC position, but they are to discern it, by the Spirit's enablement. The Bible, then, does not need to be "related to," but must be understood, applied, submitted to, and preached. This brings the present section of this paper to the final principle under consideration.

⁷⁹Rogers, "Reading Scripture in Congregations," 81–107.

Historical-Grammatical Principle #4: Piercing Objectivity

Instead of being defined by a theological grid that isolates/marginalizes evangelicals from the rest of the world, evangelical Christians are defined as such because the God of the Bible, the only God who is God, has saved them through the hearing of His Word (see Rom 10:13–15) when they believed. He has spoken by His Word and by grace believers have heard, believed, and are growing in grace so as to increasingly obey that Word. It is a fixed Word, not changing while confronting any individual or community, for God has revealed Himself therein. Peter referred to this objective Word by saying,

And we have something more sure, the prophetic Word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. (2 Pet 1:19)

Congregationalist David Wells has described the objectivity of God's word in this way:

Revelation, then, is public, not private. It is public in the sense that God's primary locus of communication is not within the self nor are his intentions accessed by intuition. He has spoken and he continues to speak, through the words of Scripture which constitute the Word of God. . . . This revelation . . . is a history which took place apart from human consciousness, and not within the human psyche, and though it has to be understood and interpreted, its meaning is always objective to the interpreter.⁸⁰

In this Word, brought to bear by the divine invasion and illumination of the Holy Spirit, believers hear God, see Him, know Him, and love Him. Vanhoozer stated, "To come to Scripture is to be confronted with a truth that is both objective and rational on the one hand and personal and relational on the other."⁸¹ Accordingly, Holmes proffers, "It captures us in unexpected ways; it subverts our expectations, evades our classifications, and overturns our assumptions. Our task is, in humble, prayerful dependence on God's Spirit, to be open and attentive to the way in which Christ shall choose to address us today."⁸²

The Bible is a fixed canon, a sacred and determined text, inspired by God and without error in the autographs. God has spoken and His people must not look any place else for Him to speak. He has spoken with words, in time and history. The remaining responsibility subsequently is on the interpreter

⁸⁰Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 174.

⁸¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (March 2005), 110.

⁸²Holmes, "Baptists and the Bible," 422.

to humbly engage the exegetical task—i.e., reading. The importance of being acquainted with the Scriptures through sound exegesis cannot be overstated, for sound Bible interpretation plays a huge role in soteriology. Consider Paul's words to Timothy: "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). And this *objective word* can be interpreted *objectively*. Consider prescriptions for approaching the Word from other New Testament writers:

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (Jas 1:21)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever." And this Word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation. (1 Pet 1:22–2:2)

Thompson affirms, "We have our own issues and interests and we can just as easily read these into the text as heed its call to repent of them. God's word might not be far from us, but it always confronts us as a word *outside* us."⁸³ The remaining task for believers then is to begin to interpret that external, fixed Word, and to apply that text liberally. This will not be adequately done with any postmodern hermeneutic, which neither allows the interpreter to know when he has heard God, nor when he has obeyed God. But evangelicals have a hermeneutic faithful to guide one into the hearing of the Word of God: the historical-grammatical method. God has spoken with words in time and history. Now God's people, under the guidance of and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, have the responsibility of engaging increasingly in exegesis so that they might be able to hear that Word more clearly in order to be more faithful to it.

Having examined four of the most influential hermeneutical principles in the EC, along with their counterparts from the historical-grammatical method, the final, concluding section of this paper will be devoted to encouraging those within the EC towards a more sound exegetical praxis.

⁸³Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 128.

Conclusion

There are certainly those in the EC who are acutely aware of their hermeneutics. But actively being aware of one's hermeneutical position, and seeking to nurture a more sound, faithful exegesis are different things altogether. While the EC has been addressing many issues in the church and broader culture, focused attention on EC hermeneutics has largely been disregarded.⁸⁴ This has often left EC hermeneutics to a default mode, or else hermeneutics have been driven by other influential factors indicative of those in the EC. But as pastors and leaders in the broader church, the only way forward that will bring honor and pleasure to God is a direction that will cultivate a more faithful and careful approach to God's Word. This must be done through faithful exegesis rooted in the sound hermeneutical principles articulated by the historical-grammatical method.

A Plea for Sound Exegesis in the Emerging Church

Bernard Ramm stated, "Only in the priority of literal exegesis is there control on the exegetical abuse of Scripture."⁸⁵ Warfield has elsewhere stated that "what the Scripture says, God says."⁸⁶ Therefore, this paper advocates an approach to the Bible as God's Word that encourages the EC to engage exegetical practices consisting of the following:

Grammatical Exegesis. Every statement written has some form of grammatical construction. It is up to the reader to identify grammatical features employed by the author, for every grammatical sentence is made up by certain linguistic laws and principles. The *autographa* (original text) is inspired by God, and therefore the original languages are critical for approaching the sacred, inspired text. Being aware of Greek and Hebrew grammatical features will enhance one's understanding of the text as it is studied, whether in a community or individually.⁸⁷

Lexical Exegesis. This is a study of the words from the Bible. "Literal," and "lexically-based" exegesis has been the hallmark of evangelical exegesis. Biblical inspiration is limited to the words of Scripture. In language, words usually represent units of thought. In the Bible, words must be studied according to their context and normal usage. Again, knowing or having a

⁸⁴Rogers, "Reading Scripture in Congregations," 102, shows steps to correct this by generating focused thought in the area of EC hermeneutics. He suggests that communities embrace the responsibility of developing and passing down both "belief and hermeneutical tradition together" so that the subsequent generations of congregations might be able to carefully observe what might have been lost, gained, or corrupted through mediation. Rogers continues this work amongst a variety of churches, and by working with the UK's Bible Society.

⁸⁵Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 124.

⁸⁶Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 283–332.

⁸⁷Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 136–42.

working knowledge with the languages that the Bible was originally written in will assist one's discovery of what the text said.⁸⁸

Historical Background. Not only is a study of the Word's context important, but utilizing information that can elucidate the original text's historical background will be helpful as well, whether based on internal or external evidence. Reconstructing a text's historical background can be incredibly helpful in clarifying what the author said.⁸⁹

Interpretation before Application. Whereas those in the EC have often failed to do this, the more sound approach is to come to the text in the same way the Old Testament describes going to the house of the Lord: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil" (Eccl 5:1, 2). Before any application is made, the interpreter needs to understand what the Bible says so as to ensure the sacred text is sacredly interpreted, by the Spirit's enablement. Exegesis must take place prior to application, otherwise it may not be the Bible that is applied at all, but only one's (or a community's) personal ideas of what the Bible may or may not say.

Practical Steps for Those in the Emerging Church

Some further preliminary suggestions are offered as a way forward for those in the EC:⁹⁰

- Read your Bibles more often, not less.
- Nurture, cultivate, free up, and appoint leaders who love and know the Bible well.
- Learn Greek and Hebrew.⁹¹ Use the languages often. Make available and encourage people in your community to learn the biblical languages.
- Encourage teachers and leaders to prepare from the original text of Scripture.

⁸⁸Wright, *The Last Word*, 74, 128; Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 128–36.

⁸⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.1 (March 2005), 11; Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 154–61.

⁹⁰By way of qualification, the EC, by definition, is a fluid conversation among a diverse group of people and organizations. From the time this essay was constructed, a number of those within the EC have modified their positions (not just on biblical hermeneutics), including those who align ideologically with Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009). Among these is Jason Clark, "It was the best of years and worst of years," 4 January 2010, <http://deepchurch.org.uk/2010/01/04/it-was-the-best-of-years-and-worst-of-years> (Accessed 10 January 2010). See also the relational adieu that Anthony Jones gives to Emergent Village in "Goodbyes to Emergent Village," 7 January 2010, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2010/01/goodbyes-to-emergent-village.html> (Accessed 10 January 2010).

⁹¹This should be paramount for those who believe the Bible is inspired.

- Repent of anything that might prevent you from honestly reading what a text says. I.e., know your own context well and repent of any self-aware preunderstandings.
- Rest in the goodness and sovereign power of God, Who has spoken and speaks by His Word, wants us to pay attention to it and, by grace and the Spirit's enablement, obey it.

This paper has examined four of the most important hermeneutical principles operating within the EC. These principles were then contrasted with those of the historical-grammatical method, which has been the accepted evangelical and free church hermeneutical method. This is a much more biblical method of interpretation. Accordingly, the hope of this paper is to encourage those in the EC (at whatever spectrum in the "conversation") to learn from historical-grammatical method, from how the Bible consistently prescribes itself to be interpreted. Just as evangelicals have learned much from the EC, especially with regard to social involvement and missionary impetus, among other things, it is hoped that those within the EC would also learn from evangelicals by attempting to be more faithful to sound biblical hermeneutics in order to understand more clearly what God has said in the Bible so that they might obey it and Him more fully.

The Twenty-First Century Believer and Entertainment: Living Radically in the Age of Distraction

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As new technology has developed and proliferated during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such progression has inevitably contributed to the expansion of entertainment. Though many non-technological forms of entertainment have existed historically, the twenty-first century is unique in that it is an age in which entertainment is predominantly technological in nature. If it is the case that technological advance and entertainment go hand in hand, then today there are more options for entertainment than at any other point in human history.¹

The lure of entertainment is nearly inescapable, even to Christian believers. Indeed, unfortunately for believer and unbeliever alike, entertainment often dons the guise of an almost Faustian Mephistopheles, an attendant whose services man tends to believe he can easily employ in his narcissistic quest for fleeting moments of true happiness without ever fully considering the ultimate consequences thereof. Believers are not immune to such allure and can quickly find themselves ensnared in an endless cycle of worldly gratification if they are not vigilant to avoid it.

The aforementioned potential peril notwithstanding, a theological essay on entertainment might seem rather superfluous; after all, if entertainment can be dangerous, a case, in turn, might be made for believers to avoid it altogether, thereby affording this author the opportunity simply to declare all entertainment wrong for all believers and end this exercise forthwith. However, just as technological advances have severely complicated all manner of moral quandaries for modern believers,² the issue of entertainment for the

¹This essay focuses on the more technological forms of entertainment; its observations and assertions apply to all forms of entertainment. I am not discounting non-technological forms of entertainment; however, even a cursory examination of our current milieu proves that technological forms of entertainment exceed non-technological forms in popularity by far. Therefore, I find it prudent to examine how technological progression presents challenges to the twenty-first century believer.

²E.g., abortion, bioethics, human cloning, etc.

believer is not hermetic; being hastily dismissive would be of little benefit to believers who find themselves with serious questions regarding it.

This essay is an attempt to examine seriously the role of entertainment in the life of the twenty-first century believer. It cannot be entirely prescriptive; ultimately, the issue of the believer's involvement in entertainment lies between him and the direction of the Holy Spirit. In addition, it cannot be a comprehensive study. Instead, what I propose to do in this essay is to demonstrate that the primary matter of concern involving believers and entertainment is not the morality of the content of entertainment, but rather the desire to be entertained and the consequent meaningfulness of entertainment. This is not to suggest that the morality of entertainment is unimportant. On the contrary, Scripture makes quite clear that certain things should not fill the minds of believers (Phil 4:8, Rom 12:2, et al.) and there exist many forms of entertainment whose contents could easily invite believers to sin. Nevertheless, as we will see, as dangerous as the content of entertainment may be, what is even more potentially deleterious to the believer is the degree to which he desires entertainment and the propensity to afford it inordinate significance.

To this end, we begin with a brief look at a biblical view of entertainment as presented in the book of Ecclesiastes. We then move to the early church's view of entertainment, suggesting that it has always been a concern for believers. Moving from the ancient to the modern, we examine the cultural context of the twenty-first century next and show how the prevalence and acceptance of entertainment creates a direct challenge the believer cannot ignore. We follow this discussion with some observations on the desire for entertainment and then conclude with a brief summary.

The Bible and Entertainment

Scripture does not speak explicitly regarding entertainment with blanket passages that declare all forms of it inherently right or wrong or that declare how much of one's life should or should not be spent involved in it. Robert K. Johnston, in *The Christian at Play*, touches upon this reality when he notes that "[P]lay is an incidental concern of those [biblical] writers focusing upon redemption and covenant. . . ."³ Perhaps more bluntly, Alan

³Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 6. The theology of play is an area in need of further study, especially in light of the exponential growth of entertainment options in the twenty-first century. In vogue during the 1970s with the publication of David L. Miller, *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (New York: World Publishing, 1970) and Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), it since has received relatively little attention, Johnston's work being a welcome exception. See also Robert Greg Burk, "Representative Approaches to Theology of Play: Their Significance for Contemporary Christian Lifestyle" (Th.M. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972); Gordon Dahl, *Work, Play, and Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America* (New York: Abingdon, 1964); David L. Miller, "Theology and Play Studies: An Overview," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 349–54; Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play: Toward*

Richardson adds, “The general standpoint of the Bible is that it is ‘folly’ (i.e., sinful) to be idle between daybreak and sunset. A six- or an eight-hour day was not envisaged. Hence we must not expect to derive from the Bible any explicit guidance upon the right use of leisure.”⁴ Nevertheless, one does find in the biblical texts various passages that provide general guidance regarding entertainment.

The purpose of this section is to show that though it is not of direct concern, Scripture does indirectly address entertainment through passages related to recreation and enjoyment. In this regard, one may look at several related themes in the Bible to arrive at a basic biblical understanding of entertainment, rather than simply pulling various passages out of context and running the risk of proof-texting. We will examine themes present in the book of Ecclesiastes as representative of a biblical view.

Although throughout Ecclesiastes, one finds several instances in which the Preacher (*Qobeleth*) warns the reader of the vanities of life (Eccl 1, 12:8, et al.), there are other instances in which he seems to encourage the reader to enjoy the good gifts that God bestows upon the faithful (Eccl 2:24–26, 3:12–13, 9:7–9, et al.). While the apparent disparity present between the “vanity” passages and “enjoyment” passages has long been one of the most significant hermeneutical issues of the book, it is beyond the scope of this essay to resolve fully such disparity.⁵ These difficulties notwithstanding, Derek Kidner, in *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, comes close to summarizing my own position when he states concerning the Preacher’s view of work in Ecclesiastes 2: “The real issue for him was not between work and rest but, had he known it, between meaningless and meaningful activity.”⁶ I contend that the vanity and enjoyment passages are each to be taken at face-value and are not necessarily contradictory; the Preacher is justified in enjoying God’s goodness as it is manifested in earthly pleasures, so long as he does so within the context of their ultimate meaningfulness in relation to the will of God.

With such an understanding of Ecclesiastes, one arrives near to what this essay argues regarding entertainment as a whole. If the Preacher is saying that the enjoyment of earthly things is vanity when enjoyed by an unbeliever who gives no acknowledgement to or consideration of God, then he is correct. But he is also correct if he is referring to the believer who pursues earthly enjoyment in such an unbelieving manner; and he is yet again correct if he is referring to the believer who does acknowledge that the enjoyment comes from God’s goodness, yet pays no attention as

a Psychology of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); and Rudolph F. Norden, *The New Leisure* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965).

⁴Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SCM, 1952), 53.

⁵For such discussion, see, among others, Robert Gordis, *Kobeleth—The Man and His World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1968); Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976); Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (New York: Abingdon, 1972); and R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989).

⁶Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, 35.

to whether it is a meaningful or meaningless pursuit. The strictly moral or ethical content of the enjoyment is of little concern to the Preacher, for he is not declaring some forms of enjoyment to be morally bankrupt while others are good. Rather, he is looking to the pursuit of said enjoyment and how much it really matters. The vanity lies not within the content of that activity, but within the potential meaninglessness of that activity in relation to the will of God.

The Preacher comprehends the recreational function of enjoyment, yet he does so within its proper context.⁷ By recognizing that enjoyment comes only from God, he is not only giving God due credit, but he is also asserting that the very essence of enjoyment itself lies in its relationship to God. For the Preacher, there is no enjoyment to be had outside of God, and consequently, the meaningfulness of enjoyment derives from God exclusively. The believer's desire for enjoyment is good, but it is to be tempered with a firm understanding that its purpose is to glorify God through recreation.

There are similarities to this understanding in the Sabbath passages. Throughout the Old Testament, one finds multiple references to the Sabbath that God instituted in Genesis by His example of resting on the seventh day following creation (Gen 2:2f). The Sabbath was clearly intended for rest (Exod 16:22ff., 20:8–11, 23:12, Mark 2:27, et al.). It is not enough, however, to stop there, for although the institution of the Sabbath does indeed require the cessation of labor after six days, it also introduces the question of what “rest” consists.⁸

There is perhaps a hint of this concern in the repetition of the Decalogue found in Deuteronomy 5, where Moses tells the Israelites regarding the Sabbath commandment, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:15).⁹ It is apparent here that the Sabbath is something more than simply a day in which one does not

⁷By “recreational,” we mean the original meaning of “recreation,” i.e., the meaning derived from its Latin etymological origin, *recreare*, “to restore, refresh.” Note that this extends beyond the most common current understanding of “recreation,” i.e., a mere pastime.

⁸I have elected not to pursue a comprehensive word study for “rest” in this essay due to space considerations and due to the relatively straightforward way in which שבת (Gen 2:2) is typically translated in a majority of English translations of Sabbath passages as “rest,” i.e. “the cessation of labor.” Such an understanding is not without its critics, however, as some claim that שבת does not have any connotation of “abstention from labor” in the pre-exilic writings. Gnana Robinson, “The Idea of Rest in the Old Testament and the Search for the Basic Character of Sabbath,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92.1 (1980): 32–42 is representative of this position. The question of what actually constituted “labor” or “work” on the Sabbath was of significant concern to the Israelites, especially during Second Temple Judaism. For more on this discussion, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 307.

⁹Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

perform labor, as a link is drawn between the Sabbath command for rest and the previous slavery Israel had experienced in Egypt.¹⁰

Akin to what was observed in Ecclesiastes, there is a recreational element present in the Sabbath, as the Israelites are to rest in God's goodness during this day, being refreshed and restored as they worship Him and spend the day focusing on Him rather than on the work and activities of daily life.¹¹ In terms of the link to their aforementioned deliverance from Egypt, the basis of the Sabbath commandment outside the Sabbath's direct creational context (Gen 2:2f) is the very deliverance on which the Israelites are to meditate subsequently. The rest they experience on this day is a literal rest that comes from the cessation of labor, but it is also a God-given spiritual rest that is recreational in a recreative or restorative sense.

In summary of the biblical understanding of enjoyment or entertainment (at least from the perspective of Ecclesiastes and related Sabbath passages), God intends for His people to delight in His goodness and find pleasure in the things He has created and provided. Nevertheless, care must be exercised by the believer in order that he does not inordinately desire enjoyment and that he adequately considers the meaningfulness of the enjoyable activities he undertakes.

The Early Church's View of Entertainment

With the biblical view in place, the next logical step is to examine what the earliest believers thought about entertainment. With a newfound faith, the Christ-followers of the first few centuries AD faced tremendous challenges as they attempted to understand what it meant to put their faith into practice. Church history shows the struggles through which early believers persevered, especially in regard to waves of persecution and polemical battles against heresies and polytheism. But could the early church have struggled also with entertainment, albeit with less entertainment options than are present today? We will demonstrate below that entertainment was indeed a

¹⁰J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 128. McConville sees "[a] strong association here between Sabbath observance and deliverance from Egypt into the promised land" as well as a connection to the Jubilee celebration, which he views as "a restoration of the whole society to its ideal condition as a community established by the saving act of God into justice and blessing."

¹¹Johnston goes so far as to see the Sabbath as being "intended to be an instance of 'play,'" *The Christian at Play*, 89. While such an understanding is too prescriptive, he does seem to pick up somewhat on the recreational aspect intended by God's institution of the Sabbath. His definition of "play" is the following: "I would understand play as that activity which is freely and spontaneously entered into, but which, once begun, has its own design, its own rules or order, which must be followed so that the play activity may continue," 34. Johnston also views Israel's festivals, dances, feasting, and hospitality as similar instances intended for "play" (110–18), though it is worth noting that all such instances have direct theological connotations (some are even commanded) and are intended for specific theological purposes rather than general entertainment.

concern of the early church, as presented through the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

One of the earliest instances in which an early church Father addresses ancient forms of entertainment occurs c. 160 in *Oratio ad Graecos*. Tatian writes:

I saw other men who had trained to become heavyweights, and carried round a load of superfluous flesh, to whom prizes and garlands are offered. The judges summon them not to a display of manliness but to a contest of violent brawling, and the garland goes to the hardest hitter. . . . The spectators take their seats and the gladiators engage in single combat about nothing, and no one goes down to their aid. Are your celebrations of this kind really a good thing?¹²

Admittedly, Tatian is writing to pagans rather than to believers. However, one can easily extend the disdain he holds for pagans who view gladiatorial spectacles to believers who view them also.

Other early church fathers were concerned about believers attending ancient entertainment events as well. Lactantius writes, regarding gladiatorial events, “For he who reckons it a pleasure, that a man, though justly condemned, should be slain in his sight, pollutes his conscience as much as if he should become a spectator and a sharer of a homicide which is secretly committed. And yet they call these sports in which human blood is shed.”¹³

Of additional concern to the fathers were the theaters. Theophilus says of them, “And we are not allowed to witness the other spectacles [at the theaters], lest our eyes and ears should be defiled by taking part in the songs which are sung there.”¹⁴ Likewise, Clement of Alexandria admonishes believers who frequent the theaters by declaring, “The Instructor will not then bring us to public spectacles; nor inappropriately might one call the race-course and the theatre ‘the seat of plagues.’ . . . Let spectacles, therefore, and plays that are full of scurrility and of abundant gossip, be forbidden. For what base action is it that is not exhibited in the theatres?”¹⁵

¹²Tatian *Oratio ad Graecos* 23.1, in *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, ed. and trans. Molly Whittaker, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 44–47.

¹³Lactantius *Divinarum Institutionum* 6.20.10–11, in *Lactance: Institutions Divines, Livre 6*, ed. and trans. Christiane Ingreneau, Sources chrétiennes [SC], no. 509 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007), 314. English translation taken from *The Divine Institutes* 6.20, trans. William Fletcher, Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF], American ed., vol. 7 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 186.

¹⁴Theophilus *Ad Autolyicum* 3.15, ed. and trans. Robert M. Grant, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 119–21.

¹⁵Clement of Alexandria *Paidagogos* 3.11, in *Clément d’Alexandrie: Le Pédagogue, Livre 3*, ed. Henri-Irénée Marrou, trans. C. Mondésert and C. Matray, SC, no. 158 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 148–51. English translation taken from *The Instructor* 3.11, trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, ANF 2 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 289–90.

On the surface it might seem as though the fathers are only concerned with the immoral content of these forms of entertainment rather than the act of pursuing entertainment itself. Clement, however, continues, “For if people shall say that they betake themselves to the spectacles as a pastime for recreation, I should say that the cities which make a serious business of pastime are not wise. . . . And ease of mind is not to be purchased by zealous pursuit of frivolities, for no one who has his senses will ever prefer what is pleasant to what is good.”¹⁶ For Clement, the constant pursuit of entertainment for recreational purposes is unwise and the cities that have thrived upon that human desire have exhibited their folly accordingly. “Ease of mind,” as he states, is attained not through leisurely activities, but, by implication, through one’s relationship with God through Christ.

Tatian, Lactantius, Theophilus, and Clement are not the only Ante-Nicene Fathers who expressed thoughts regarding the believer and entertainment. Tertullian, the preeminent theologian of the late second century, likely wrote more regarding entertainment than any of the other Ante-Nicene Fathers simply by dedicating an entire treatise to the subject: *De Spectaculis*. The work is addressed specifically to catechumens and other believers, and in its opening chapter, Tertullian acknowledges the power that entertainment can hold over a believer when he states, “[A]nd you too I would have rethink it all, who have witnessed and borne your testimony that you have already made that approach; lest by ignorance, real or pretended, any of you fall into sin. For such is the force of pleasure, that it can prolong ignorance to give it its chance, and pervert knowledge to cloak itself.”¹⁷

Here Tertullian asserts that worldly pleasures can affect believers in two negative ways. First, believers can become ensnared by them due to ignorance (i.e., not knowing that they are sinful). Secondly, they can become ensnared by them due to intentional self-deception (i.e., knowing that worldly pleasures are sinful, yet trying to convince themselves otherwise). But what exactly makes the amusements, which are based on pleasure, sinful?

For Tertullian, the basis on which the “spectacles” are sinful is not just their content, though he certainly views such content as unequivocally wicked.¹⁸ The spectacles are also sinful because of the desire for pleasure that leads people to them: “For, just as there is a lust for money, a lust for dignity, for greed, for impurity, for vainglory, so there is a lust for pleasure. The shows are a sort of pleasure. Lusts, named as a class, include, I would suppose, pleasures

¹⁶Clem. *Paid.* 3.11 (ed. H. Marrou, SC 158 [1970]:150–51). English translation taken from *The Instructor* 3.11(ANF 2:290).

¹⁷Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 1, trans. T.R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library [LCL] 250 (London: William Heinemann, 1931), 231.

¹⁸Tertullian makes numerous references to the depravity of their content in *De Spectaculis*. See 5, 9–12, 17–19, and 23. In fact, he is so opposed to the bloodlust he sees evident in believers who attend violent amusements that he ends his treatise by sarcastically intimating that such believers should long for the greatest “spectacle” of all, which is yet to come: the return of Christ, at which time they will watch as unbelievers are condemned to hell, 30.

also; similarly pleasures, understood as a class, include the special case of the shows.”¹⁹ The progression that Tertullian demonstrates is easily followed. The very essence of any amusement is pleasure; after all, were the amusement not pleasurable, people would not pursue it. Because people lust after pleasure, they must also lust after the amusements which fulfill the desire for pleasure, and such lust, by extension, is wrong.

Tertullian does not stop with that realization, however. He takes his argument against the lust for pleasure a step further by describing how such pleasure can affect the spiritual life of the believer. He writes,

What concord can the Holy Spirit have with the spectacles? There is no public spectacle without violence to the spirit. For where there is pleasure, there is eagerness, which gives pleasure its flavour. Where there is eagerness, there is rivalry, which gives its flavour to eagerness. Yes, and then, where there is rivalry, there also are madness, bile, anger, pain, and all the things that follow from them, and (like them) are incompatible with moral discipline.²⁰

Tertullian understood that the conflict that arises within the believer regarding entertainment is a spiritual conflict. The desire itself for entertainment can progressively lead to any number of sinful thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Though the activity that the believer might view at the theater or in the arena may be sinful, an inner spiritual battle rages even before the believer experiences such entertainment, as the real battle is over the desire for entertainment. The application for the purposes of this essay should be clear: the primary issue is the desire to be entertained in the first place.

What can we say in summary concerning the early church’s view of entertainment? It would be dishonest to claim that the foremost concern of the early church fathers regarding entertainment was the desire for it. Clearly, when they spoke about entertainment, they typically spoke about its content. However, as Tertullian’s statements illustrate, behind every discussion of the content of entertainment is the presupposition that the entertainment is being desired. We now turn to a discussion of that desire within the context of our current milieu.

A “Radical” View of Entertainment?

On 4 May 2010, David Platt’s *Radical* was published and quickly began an influential push in evangelical circles back to a more biblical Christianity. In his book, Platt argues that American Christianity has fallen prey to the mentality of the “American dream,” a mentality that

¹⁹Tert. *Spect.* 14 (LCL 250 [1931]: 268–69).

²⁰Tert. *Spect.* 15 (LCL 250 [1931]: 270–71). Glover notes that *disciplinae* could be more specifically translated as, “Christian standards,” 270.

favors “self-advancement, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency, by individualism, materialism, and universalism” to the detriment of the gospel.²¹ Platt sees a significant difference between the Christianity many evangelicals claim and biblical Christianity as found in the New Testament, and as such, he seeks to help the reader return to a faith that minimizes selfish and worldly pursuits and emphasizes the furtherance of the gospel to the glory of God. While not directly about entertainment, *Radical* nevertheless has practical considerations regarding the desire for it.

On 18 February 2010, Carnegie Mellon University professor and video game designer, Jesse Schell, at the 2010 D.I.C.E. Summit, discussed how video games are invading real life. During his presentation, which quickly became the most talked about presentation at D.I.C.E., he described a future in which everyday activities, from the mundane (e.g., brushing one’s teeth) to the more significant (e.g., doing well in school), are monitored by an array of sensors and become more and more game-like as individuals make concentrated efforts to perform certain activities in order to be tangibly or intangibly rewarded by the companies who are monitoring them. After providing numerous examples of how this might play out, he stated near the end of his presentation, “And so, it could be that these systems are just all crass commercialization and it’s terrible, but it’s possible that they’ll inspire us to be better people, if the game systems are designed right.” He then made the harrowing prognostication, “Anyway, I’m not sure about all that, but I do know this stuff is coming. Man, it’s got to come. What’s gonna stop it?”²²

On 31 December 2010, when he appeared on NPR’s *On the Media*, Schell made what is perhaps an even more disturbing prediction. Asked by the host, Brooke Gladstone, concerning his D.I.C.E. presentation, “Is this a future that you look forward to, where there is a potential distraction around every corner, a lot of which are just ads?” he replied:

I certainly don’t look forward to all of it. There’s going to be a lot of parts of this that are going to seem quite devilish, because so many people are going to be competing for our attention. I often think of it this way: The twenty-first century is going to be a war on the attention of humanity. Where civilization focuses its attention, I mean, that’s what defines what the civilization cares about.²³

²¹David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 19.

²²Jesse Schell, “When Games Invade Real Life,” video recording of presentation given at the annual meeting of the D.I.C.E. Summit, Las Vegas, NV, 18 February 2010, http://www.ted.com/talks/jesse_schell_when_games_invade_real_life.html (Accessed 5 November 2010).

²³Jesse Schell, interview by Brooke Gladstone, *On the Media*, “The Future of Gaming,” NPR, 31 December 2010, <http://www.onthemediamedia.org/stream/ram?file=/otm/otm123110pod.mp3> (Accessed 1 January 2011).

If one puts these views in perspective, he is presented with a rather bleak outlook regarding the current state of affairs. If American Christianity has largely bought into the American dream of selfish pursuit and if a “war on the attention of humanity” is coming (if it has not already begun), then one can see the dangerous cocktail that is being served to twenty-first century believers, who are all too eager to entertain themselves to no end. To be certain, Platt focuses primarily on materialism in his argument and Schell is primarily concerned with the implications of “gamification”²⁴ on mankind’s attention, but the applicability of their assertions to entertainment and the current discussion in this essay is easily observed and not overstated.

Platt indicates that American believers have succumbed to selfish pursuits and Schell observes that the competition for the attention of mankind will soon be at its fiercest point in human history. These problems have everything to do with the desire for entertainment. For the undisciplined or injudicious believer, the combination of unbridled desire and multiple entertainment options vying for attention could prove disastrous, as he quite willingly drowns himself in a morass of infinite distraction concocted from the admixture of his own selfishness and negligence.

Can this be prevented? If Platt can call for a return to a more biblical faith, an intentionally “radical” way of living amid a Christianity that has fallen short of its biblical counterpart, why not extend that call to taking a “radical” view of entertainment? It certainly can be done, but the call for believers to pay careful attention to the extent to which entertainment permeates their lives and to make necessary changes accordingly raises a number of subsidiary issues that must first be acknowledged.

First, one must acknowledge that the twenty-first century is unquestionably dominated by entertainment. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American family spent approximately \$2,693 on entertainment in 2009, which represented roughly 4.2% of its annual income.²⁵ By comparison, the average American family spent approximately \$3,126 on healthcare in 2009, which represented roughly 5% of its annual income, and it spent approximately \$2,619 on food eaten away from home, which represented roughly 4.2% of its annual income.²⁶ If Americans are willing to

²⁴“Gamification” has become the *de facto*, yet still debatable, term used to describe the process of making real life more game-like by applying game mechanics to non-ludic activities. See “The Great Gamification Debate!” Video recording of a panel discussion given at the annual meeting of the Game Developer’s Conference, San Francisco, CA, 1 March 2011, <http://www.gdcvault.com/free/gdc-11> (Accessed 13 March 2011). I intend to examine the implications of gamification for theology in a future project.

²⁵Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, “Consumer Expenditures Survey (Annual) News Release,” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.htm> (Accessed 13 December 2010). By “American family,” I am referring to what the Bureau of Labor Statistics terms “consumer unit,” which it defines as “families, single persons living alone or sharing a household with others but who are financially independent, or two or more persons living together who share expenses.”

²⁶Ibid.

spend nearly as much money on entertainment as on healthcare and more money on entertainment than on food eaten away from home, then it should be readily apparent how important entertainment is to them.

The domination of entertainment does not end with financial expenditure, however. The average American spends 35 hours per week watching television,²⁷ American gamers ages two and older spend 13 hours per week playing video games,²⁸ and Americans spend 22.7% of their time on the Internet on social networks, which is more time than on any other Internet activity.²⁹ Clearly, from all indications, the American desire for entertainment is all but preeminent and this trend sees no signs of abatement anytime soon. The danger for the believer to adopt an entertainment-focused mindset, much like how he has adopted the mindset of the American dream, is real.

Secondly, one must acknowledge that not all entertainment is bad and that some can actually be of some spiritual benefit outside of the basic rest and relaxation it provides. Although the relationship between the church and forms of entertainment has long been contentious,³⁰ there remain some forms of entertainment, particularly those that have the ability to foster Christian fellowship or that have prominent narratological elements, that are especially worthy of the believer's time.³¹ For example, under the first

²⁷The Nielsen Company, "Three Screen Report, Volume 8, 1st Quarter 2010," 3, [http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/3%20Screen/2010/Three%20Screen%20Report%20\(Q1%202010\).pdf](http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/3%20Screen/2010/Three%20Screen%20Report%20(Q1%202010).pdf) (Accessed 8 September 2010).

²⁸The NPD Group, "Extreme Gamers Spend Two Full Days per Week Playing Video Games," http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_100527b.html (Accessed 8 September 2010).

²⁹The Nielsen Company, "What Americans Do Online: Social Media And Games Dominate Activity," http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/what-americans-do-online-social-media-and-games-dominate-activity/ (Accessed 8 September 2010).

³⁰For non-technological forms, see the preceding section of this essay. For technological forms, see Edward M. Berckman, "The Changing Attitudes of Protestant Churches to Movies and Television," *Encounter* 41.3 (1980): 293–306; Kyle Haselden, *Morality and the Mass Media* (Nashville: Broadman, 1968), 153–70; and William D. Romanowski, *Pop Culture Wars: Religion and the Role of Entertainment in American Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 34–57.

³¹The reason I find forms of entertainment that are narratological in nature to be of particular benefit is that they are the most conducive to the communication of truth. This is evidenced by the fact that God has eternally chosen and instituted a divine soteriological metanarrative in which He communicates and redeems through the second person of the Trinity, the Son, through whom God has perfectly revealed Himself. By way of example, whereas playing a game of flag football might produce physical enjoyment, fellowship, and could promote positive concepts such as healthy exercise, teamwork, unity, etc., it is not narratological: no clearly defined narrative is being expressed by playing the game. Conversely, reading a novel is entirely narratological in nature; a narrative is being expressed to the reader, and this narrative contains a plot with characters who perform specific actions, by virtue communicating particular meaning to the reader. This is not to suggest that similar meaning could not be expressed by players to each other during a recreational activity like flag football, but I would find the metaphysical discussions in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, to be more apropos to a novel than to a football field.

category could fall informal gatherings of believers for leisurely purposes rather than for formal corporate worship, while the second category could hold such entertainment media as literature, film, or even some video games that can convey meaningful narratives containing spiritual truths.³²

Thirdly, one must acknowledge that the desire for entertainment is inherent to all humans and that Scripture affirms this desire when exercised appropriately. In the previous section regarding the Bible and entertainment, we attempted to show briefly that the biblical view of entertainment is one of affirmation so long as recreation glorifies God and stays in its proper place in relation to its ultimate meaningfulness. In terms of applying this to the current context, the twenty-first century believer must understand that the meaningfulness of his entertainment choices ultimately derives from their conformity to the will of God for his life.

There can be no hard and fast rule by which one can measure how meaningful any recreational activity is. The reality is that such measurement relies upon the individual's relationship with God and is communicated through the direction of the Spirit. Prayerful consideration of entertainment options extends beyond the content of those options to the options themselves. Playing a video game in lack of sophisticated narrative might initially appear to be rather meaningless, but is it being used recreationally, refreshing the spirit of the player? Watching a televised college football game might appear to be pointless in the grand scheme of things, but what if it is restorative to the exhausted pastor who has ministerially labored the rest of the week? Again, as stated earlier, the meaningfulness of recreational activity is derived exclusively from God. How such is manifested in the life of the believer is particularized.

To be clear, man may be free to choose his entertainment options, but he is also free to choose them unwisely. Robert Lee puts it well when he states, "Leisure offers a marvelous opportunity for freedom to be exercised, but where there is no commitment that freedom becomes aimlessness or apathy."³³ Certain entertainment choices may be devoid of any objectionable content whatsoever, yet still be contrary to the will of God for a particular believer because he is aimlessly amusing himself with them instead of committing his leisure time to the will of God, which can perhaps lead to the potential undertaking of some other activity that God has directed him to pursue, such as personal evangelism, leading a Bible study, or serving in a homeless shelter. In some instances, it might be God's will for a believer to spend free time refreshing himself with some sort of entertainment or

³²Since the rise of theological film criticism in the 1970s, numerous books have been written on the evaluation of film from a theological perspective, but one of the most recent (and best) is Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Craig Detweiler, ed., *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010) has been published regarding video games, but it consists of various essays, a number of which are considerably lacking.

³³Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America*, 254.

leisure. In other instances, God may be leading him to spend that time in an activity that is related to a specific area of work for the kingdom.

Relatedly, the fourth and final issue one must acknowledge is that the desire for entertainment always has as its corollary the extent of that desire. Although Tertullian's statements illustrated this issue above, let us envision for a moment a world in which God has directed things to be so that every form of entertainment in existence has no sinful content whatsoever. Even in such a scenario, it would still be possible for a believer to sin regarding entertainment in ways such as inordinately desiring to be entertained or spending too much time being entertained to the neglect of life responsibilities or God's will. Anything that is not inherently wrong can be abused or misappropriated, and entertainment is no exception.

Only after the believer has acknowledged and addressed these issues should he make any necessary changes to his lifestyle or attitudes in order to move away from a self-fulfilling, entertainment-focused mindset. Without giving these issues due consideration, one runs the risk of potentially eschewing all forms of entertainment altogether or making changes that never address the heart of the matter. The call to live radically in regard to entertainment is indubitably needed, but it must be issued circumspectly.

Conclusion

In Ephesians 5:15–17, Paul admonishes believers with words that apply to all aspects of the Christian life, but also befit this discussion: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Walking wisely and making the best use of time with the understanding of the Lord's will summarizes how living radically (in regard to entertainment or otherwise) should appear. Though it may be discouraging to admit that a great number of believers today give no thought whatsoever to the implications living this way holds for entertainment, it also reveals the need for a return, à la Platt's appeal, to being guided by biblical principles rather than by selfish desires.

For the twenty-first century believer, such a return necessitates acknowledgment and action. Living radically in this age of distraction requires a conscious effort to examine continually the extent to which one desires to be entertained and pursues it. Entertainment is a gift from God, and He intends His people to use it recreatively for His glory. Nevertheless, attention must be paid to motivation and desire, thus liberating entertainment from the selfish pursuit of it, and transforming it from an end in itself to the means to a better end: glorifying God.

Seeing Jesus Clearly: A Sermon from Mark 8:22–33

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As we continue our study through the Gospel of Mark, we find ourselves face-to-face with one of the strangest stories in all of the New Testament. It is certainly one of the oddest miracles in the ministry of Jesus and the most baffling event in the Gospel of Mark. That is saying a lot considering we have already seen Jesus cast demons out of a lunatic and into pigs that run squealing head-first into the sea. The story we come to this morning is one of those moments in the life of Jesus that startles us, leaves us unsure what to think, and just hoping that no one will ask us about it. But our commitment to walking through books of the Bible forces us to deal with it and, as always, the digging required to discover the meaning produces diamonds of great value. Turn with me as I read Mark 8:22–33.

²²And they came to Bethsaida and they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. ²³Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, “Do you see anything?” ²⁴And he looked up and said, “I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around.” ²⁵Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. ²⁶And He sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.” ²⁷Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” ³⁰And He warned them to tell no one about Him. ³¹And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke

Him.³³ But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (NASB)

The story begins normally enough, but the longer it goes, the stranger it becomes. Jesus and His disciples came to Bethsaida. Someone brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. At this moment, Jesus did what any of us would do in this situation. Jesus takes him by the hand, leads him out of the city, spits in his face and touches him. We all know that’s exactly what to do when confronted with someone who needs to be healed. Oddly enough, this is not the first time Jesus has done this. In Mark 7 Jesus stuck his fingers in a man’s ear and then proceeded to touch his tongue with His saliva. This is also not the strangest part of Mark 8. The odd part is not that Jesus spits in the man’s face; it is what happens next.

In verse 23, Jesus says something shocking: “Do you see anything?” This is a question you do not expect Jesus to ask. We expect him to make an authoritative statement that the man has in fact been healed. Instead, Jesus asks the man, “Do you see?”—as if to say, “Did the miracle work?”

This is strange for a number of reasons. First of all, Jesus usually knows when something works, and it usually works! Miracles are not really a problem for Jesus. As we read this question, we almost wonder if Jesus was going through a bit of a slump in his miracle working. Maybe He had tried one a few days before in front of a lot of people, and it didn’t go so well. Now, He is a little bit nervous. He doubts his abilities. So, instead of taking a chance in front of a crowd of people, he leads the man out of the city, tells the man that He will try, and does it with a bit of a “here goes nothing” mentality. And after he tries, He sheepishly says, “Do you see anything?”

What is even stranger than Jesus’ question is the response of the blind man. Verse 24 tells us that the man says, “I see men, for I see . . .” Let’s stop right there. The blind man who was brought to Jesus can now see. He says twice that he can see. “I see men.” “I see.” Obviously, something miraculous just happened. Jesus touched the man and he was healed. Or was he? The man continues and says, “I see men, like trees, walking around.” Either this man has found himself in a village surrounded by very large men with extra extremities, who look like trees, or perhaps somehow the man is seeing, but he is not seeing clearly. At the end of verse 24, we find a man that has been healed—sort of. His sight is restored—partially. He can see—but not clearly.

So, Jesus goes at it again. Verse 25 tells us that Jesus looked at the man intently, “Then again He laid His hands on his eyes . . .” At the end of the verse, it says, “and he began to see everything clearly.” The second work of Jesus seemed to fully heal the man. Jesus, aware that the man had been healed, tells him not to go back to the village and not to tell anyone what happened. After two attempts, the man finally sees clearly and went away with clear instruction.

This is a strange story. What do we do with a story like this? Well, we have a few options.

Option Number One

I admit that this is not an academic option. I have never seen it in a commentary, but it seems the most obvious. Maybe the reason the man could not see is because he had spit in his eyes. After all, Jesus did just spit in his eyes and then ask if he could see. Sure, he can see, but it is a little blurry with spit in his eye. Jesus wipes it out and there you have it—perfect sight. I admit this is not a great option, but it is an option.

Option Number Two

Maybe this was a very tough case of blindness. There is Bartimaeus blindness in chapter 10, and there is Bethsaida blindness in chapter 8. Bethsaida blindness is a tougher kind of blindness, and it just takes a couple attempts—even for Jesus.

Option Number Three

Could it be that Jesus was making a statement about modern medicine? I would never have thought of this myself but someone recently sent me an article from a Christian medical journal using this text to point to a condition called agnosia. A person is able to see, but the brain is not communicating with the eyes. They see, but not clearly. This condition was just discovered recently. Maybe Jesus was letting us know that He knew about this medical condition before anyone else knew about it. It is a decent option, but it is interesting to me that Jesus might be making a point that would not be understood for 2000 years. It does not seem like the best option.

Option Number Four

Or could it be that Mark has placed this story right here in Mark 8—a story that he alone records—as an illustration of a point he is trying to make. Could it be that there is a deeper meaning to this story that *we* cannot yet see clearly?

Well, before looking at the best option, let's move on and leave this story for now. We will come back and try to answer some of these questions in a moment. As we move from the *strangest* story in the Gospel of Mark, we go on to the most *climactic* moment in the gospel of Mark. Thus far, everything in the Gospel of Mark has been leading up to this moment in Mark 8:27–30.

As we have seen over the past few months, in chapters 1–8, Mark is trying to answer one question, and one question alone: Who is this man named Jesus? In chapter 1, he answers the question four times. He answers it when John the Baptist says He is the Messiah. He answers it when the Father opens up heaven and declares Him as His Son. He answers it when Jesus says, “The time is at hand; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.” The question is even answered when Jesus walks from

the temple and is confronted by the demons, who say, “We know exactly who You are, you Holy One of God.” Over and over, Mark is attempting to answer this question. The only problem is that no one seems to get it. No one seems to understand who Jesus is.

This is certainly clear in the third chapter of Mark. To the crowd Jesus is a fascinating man who does a lot of wonderful things. They are convinced it is worth keeping an eye on him. To the religious leaders Jesus is an infuriating man who does a lot of frustrating things. They are convinced he is demonic. To his family he is an embarrassing man. They are convinced he has gone insane. They are so convinced of his insanity that they go and try to take him back home by force. And the disciples, who of all people should understand, do not know what to think about him. They are confused. It becomes more evident with every chapter that He is the Messiah, and it seems with every chapter that the disciples are more and more clueless.

Think about chapter 4. Jesus calms the sea, gets into the boat, and the disciples look at Him and say, “Who is this man?” In chapter 6, Jesus feeds 5,000 people, walks on the water, and meets them in the boat. They are terrified by Jesus’ power over the sea because they “gained no insight from the incident of the loaves.” They did not get any closer to understanding who Jesus was, even from watching Him miraculously feed the 5,000.

Chapter 8 is an even more startling example of the disciples’ lack of understanding. Prior to this text we are considering in this message, Jesus feeds 4,000 people. Remember, he has already fed 5,000. This is the second time they have watched Jesus miraculously feed a multitude of people. After the miracle, He has an interaction with the Pharisees. Jesus and the disciples get into the boat. He is talking to them about the leaven of the Pharisees and giving them some important kingdom principles, but they are not listening to Him. They are distracted. In 8:16 we learn they are not listening because “they began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.”

I do not know everything the disciples *should* have known by this point, but one thing seems certain: they should have known that coming up with bread is not a problem for Jesus. If Jesus can do anything, He can come up with bread. He has already miraculously provided for 5,000, then for 4,000. Jesus multiplies bread well. There are 13 people in the boat, and 12 of them could not concentrate on what Jesus was saying because they were so worried about the fact that they do not have enough bread for their short trip. This is shocking. How could they be worried about bread?

The following verses show that Jesus was obviously not pleased with their lack of understanding. He actually unleashes on them in verse 17 with a series of eight questions. *Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand? When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?* Then, in verse 21, He looks at them

and says, “*Do you not yet understand?*” When we read this question, we can almost feel the intensity, the echo of that question ringing in the air, and a daunting silence that followed.

The answer to Jesus’ final question is clearly, “NO.” They do not yet understand. They do not understand who He is. They appear to be completely blinded to the reality that they were in the boat with the promised Messiah.

It is at this very moment, as the question is still echoing, that the text moves immediately to this strange healing story. Back to that in a moment, but first we come to that climactic moment in verses 27–30. It says that Jesus was going out with his disciples about 25 miles to Caesarea Philippi. On the way Jesus was discussing something with them. If you mark in your Bible, circle that little phrase *on the way*. It becomes quite significant. This phrase is never used in Mark until 8:27. From 8:27 to the end of chapter 12, it is used nine different times. We will see why in a moment.

As they are walking, Jesus says to them in verse 27, “Who are people saying that I am?” They answer, “Some say you are John the Baptist, others say you are Elijah. Some even think you are one of the prophets.” It is interesting to note that the disciples do not say that some think He is the Messiah. Most people were not thinking He was the Messiah. This was not one of the opinions expressed in chapter 3. They were looking for something different than this in a Messiah. They believed the Messiah was going to be a superhero who would come and destroy what they felt was their most oppressive enemy—the Romans. They were not looking for a servant who would die because they failed to see that their worst enemy was the wrath of God, and the sin that was confronting them. They wanted a military leader, not a suffering Savior. They were not expecting a Messiah like Jesus.

Jesus gets a little more pointed in verse 29. After asking who everyone else says He is, Jesus says, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Then, out of the blue, right after Jesus unleashes eight questions to oblivious disciples who clearly do not understand who He is, Peter completely shocks us. Peter, without any hesitation, declares, “You are the Christ.” This is a huge statement, not just for Peter but for any Jew. When Peter declared his belief that Jesus was the Christ, he declared his belief that Jesus was the Promised One from Genesis 3:15. Peter was essentially saying, “We believe that you are the anointed One, the anointed prophet, the anointed priest, and the anointed king. We believe that every prophet, priest and king in the Old Testament was simply a type of the One who was to come. And you are the One! You are the One for whom all of us have been waiting. We believe you are the Messiah.” This is an incredible moment! It seems that Peter, as the representative of the disciples, actually finally begins to see. It is almost as if the veil is lifted. All of a sudden, the disciples see Jesus!

Immediately after Peter’s declaration, in verse 30, Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about Him. This seems like an odd time to tell them that. Why would He not want them to tell when they finally understand that He is in fact the promised Messiah? What happens next answers that question.

Look what happens in verses 31–33, right after Peter makes his declaration, and Jesus warns them not to tell. Verses 31–32 say, “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he was stating the matter plainly.”

Do you know the reason verse 31 says, “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer”? It is because Jesus had never talked to them about suffering before this time. It is not until they finally realize that He is the Christ that Jesus begins to tell them He is going to suffer, be rejected and die. He states this three times in Mark 8, 9, and 10. In Mark 8–10, He is not trying to get them to understand that He is the Messiah; He is trying to get them to understand what kind of Messiah He is.

Now, they should have known this. As a matter of fact, in Luke 24 and in 1 Peter 1 we are told that the Old Testament points us to the suffering of the Messiah. But friends, this is all new to them. They do not see this coming. They finally understand He is the Messiah, which is a major breakthrough. But their preconceived notion of what the Messiah would be like did not fit with what Jesus was now saying. This is more than obvious from what Peter does in verse 32. It says, “And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.” You have to appreciate the boldness of Peter. Even if unbelievably inadvisable, this comment was courageous and filled with sensitivity. He wanted to rebuke Jesus, but he did not want to do it in front of everybody. That would be rude. So he did the kind, gracious thing and took Jesus aside to rebuke Him privately. We do not know what Peter said, but it must have been something like this: “Jesus, look at me. Look me in the eye. I want you to repeat after me: I am the Messiah. I am the Messiah. Jesus, say this after me: I am not defeated. I will not be killed. I will destroy my enemies. I will not be defeated. Come on, Jesus. That’s enough pitiful, sad, defeated talk. Let’s get going here. You are the Messiah. We finally believe it. Let’s go knock out some teeth.” Whatever Peter might have said at that moment, he graciously took Him aside to do it privately.

Jesus does not return the favor. In verse 33, it says, “But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” Wow! This is a harsh statement. Anytime that Jesus calls you Satan, it is a bad day. This is a hard thing that Jesus said.

Why would Jesus respond so strongly to Peter? There is one reason. It is because Jesus is *on the way*. You see, when it says in verse 27 that Jesus is *on the way*, it is not referring to Jesus traveling to Caesarea Philippi. When this phrase is used, it is stated nine times, all the way through chapter 12. Every time it is used, it tells us about a Jesus who is setting his face like flint toward Jerusalem. Jesus has come to die. He is going to die. He is going to accomplish the mission the Father sent Him to accomplish. He is going to be obedient to the will of God, and no one—not even good-hearted Peter—will stop Him from doing what God has sent Him to do. He is a man who

is on His way. He is focused. He knows exactly where He is headed. He is headed to the cross.

It is clear that the reason Jesus says that Peter has his mind set on man's interests and not God's is because Peter had created *his own idea* of who Jesus should be. He had his own idea of who he wanted Jesus to be. The only problem is that his idea of the Messiah was not the right idea of the Messiah. It is not who Jesus was. Peter said, "Jesus, you can't talk like this. It does not fit in with my idea of You." But Jesus did not care about Peter's idea of Him. Jesus had come as a suffering servant, and no one would get in His way. "Peter, if you are trying to get in my way, get behind Me. I will suffer. I will die. I will give my life as a ransom for many." Peter understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but did not understand what He had come to do.

So, what about the story of that blind man? Let me try to answer a few questions about him by asking you some questions. At this moment, did the disciples know that Jesus was the Messiah? Yes, they declared it. And what an amazing moment it is when they finally get the point that Jesus is the Messiah. We see the veil lifted, and they finally see Jesus. But, let me ask you, do they understand what kind of Messiah He is? Not at all. That is clear from Peter's open rebuke. Listen, when we come to the end of verse 33, we realize that the disciples may know that Jesus is the Christ, but they do not have a clue as to what kind of Christ He is. In other words, the disciples finally see Jesus, but they do not see Him clearly.

Let me remind you that, in his Gospel, Mark spends eight chapters trying to answer one question: Who is Jesus? Every chapter and every verse leads up to the climactic moment in 8:29 where he answers it: Jesus is the Christ. The question is answered. He never goes back to this question. The answer is: He is the Christ. Up to this moment, they know He is the Christ, but they do not yet understand what kind of Christ He is. But from this moment on, to the end of the Gospel of Mark, he is trying to answer a new question. The new question is: What kind of Christ is He? That is a question they clearly need to have answered.

And right here, literally at the center of the Gospel of Mark, when Mark is transitioning from one question to another, when the disciples see—but do not see clearly, we have this strange, often over-looked or intentionally skipped story of a man who could see, but not clearly.

Do you know the reason this story is literally at the center of the Gospel of Mark? It is because this story is the *hinge* on which the entire Gospel of Mark swings. The point of the story is simply this: The disciples are at a stage where they see Jesus, but do not see Him clearly. Do you know the reason Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about Him? It is because the last thing Jesus wanted was His disciples going from town to town spreading a shallow, incorrect, and unclear picture of who He was. He knows they see, but they do not see clearly. The last thing He wants is for them to go out and share with people an unclear picture of Jesus—their *idea* of Jesus, not the real Jesus. Just like the blind man from Bethsaida, they see, but they do not see clearly.

You might be thinking to yourself that although this has been an interesting story and a fascinating look at the Gospel of Mark, what in the world does this have to do with me? The reality is that it could have everything to do with you.

Sadly, we live in a time and a culture in which many churches are filled with people just like the disciples in Mark 8. Our American churches are filled with people who like Jesus, are fascinated with Jesus and are familiar with the things He has done. Yet, they do not know Him, nor do they see Him clearly. Many of them, just like the disciples in Mark 8, have created their own picture of Jesus. As a result we find ourselves surrounded by people who call themselves Christians, yet they fail to see that you cannot inherit the promises of Christ without trusting the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Instead of trusting in Christ, they trust in thousands of personal experiences. Instead of trusting wholly and completely in the atoning, finished work of Christ on the cross, they see Jesus from afar, acknowledge the great things He has done, yet never personally trust His death as the all-sufficient means by which they must be saved. They see Him, but they do not see Him clearly.

We face another problem as well. Our churches are often filled with people who fail to see the inseparable connection between the life that Jesus lived and the life He calls His followers to live.

We see a pattern that emerges as we look at what takes place in Mark 8. Three times this happens: once in chapter 8, once in chapter 9, once in chapter 10. Jesus predicts His suffering for the first time and is rebuked by disciples who do not understand. Then what does Jesus do? Look at verses 34–38. He tells them that He is not just telling them about His life; He is telling them about their lives. Jesus tells them that He is not the only One who must suffer. Anyone who wants to come after Him must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Him. Whoever wishes to save his life must lose it. The only way you are going to save your life is if you lose it.

In chapter 9, we find Jesus once again predicting His suffering. While He is predicting His suffering—by the way, it says while they are “on the way”—the disciples are debating which one is going to be the greatest. They still do not get it. Jesus then stops and tells them that this is not just the road He is going to walk; this is the road they must walk. I am a servant, and you must be a servant as well.

In chapter 10, Jesus predicts His suffering. While He is predicting His suffering, James and John come to Him asking if, in His glory, they can sit on His right and on His left. They still do not get it. Jesus told them it was not His to give them the positions on His right and left, but they must drink the cup that He must drink and must be baptized with His baptism.

In Mark 10:45, he tells them what they do not yet understand. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. How is it, men, that you do not understand that if even the Son of Man does not come to be served, you should not expect to be served

either? Here is the point Jesus is trying to make to His disciples in the latter part of Mark: *The call to discipleship is a call to follow Jesus.*

This is why in chapter 8 He says if you want to be my disciple, you must follow Me. He is saying that you must not only embrace and trust in the death of Jesus Christ; you must also embrace the life and suffering of Jesus Christ. The failure of the disciples is that they do not see Jesus' death, nor do they see His life, clearly. As a result, they do not clearly see what it means for them to trust and follow Jesus. Their blindness to the suffering and rejection of Jesus leads to their blindness to the reality that they must also suffer and be rejected if they want to follow Him.

I do not know where we went wrong, where we took a turn. But somewhere it happened that people in our churches began to believe that you can enter through the small gate and never walk the narrow path, that you can somehow accept His death but never embrace His life. Do you know the saddest part of all? They heard that gospel from the church. Here is what they heard. If you will just repeat after me, and if you will embrace these facts about Jesus' death, you can be sure that no matter what your life looks like, you will spend eternity in heaven with Christ. The problem is that now I stand before people every week who believe their eternity is secure because they affirmed some facts about Jesus' death. Yet they know nothing about embracing his death. They know nothing about embracing His life. They fail to see the inseparable connection between not only entering by faith through the small gate, but by faith walking the narrow path. Oh, how it grieves me beyond measure to know that I am talking to people who will never see their need for Christ because they think they have something they do not actually possess. This is exactly why preaching an unclear picture of Jesus is a dangerous thing to do.

Or could it be that some of you, like Peter, are worshiping a Jesus that does not exist? Could it be that some of you have created your own picture of Jesus that, although nice, is not reality—a Jesus who asks you to *believe* in His death but does not require that you *follow* Him in His death. How sad it would be to embrace a wrong picture of Jesus in life and die and spend eternity separated from Him! I beg you, on Christ's behalf, trust Jesus' death on the cross alone as the payment for your sins and submit to Him as the Lord of your life. Trust His death and embrace His life. Make sure that you not only see Jesus, but that you see him clearly.

My friends, if we do not see Jesus clearly, we do not see Jesus at all. We do not have the freedom to create a Jesus who is more palatable to our way of living and our way of thinking. I cannot help but wonder if there is someone who sees Jesus, but not clearly. You believe that He is in fact the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the One who has come to seek and save the lost. You see Jesus. But the question is: "Do you see Him clearly?"

Review Essay:
Did God Abandon Jesus at the Cross?

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Jesus' Cry from the Cross: Towards a First-Century Understanding of the Intertextual Relationship between Psalm 22 and the Narrative of Mark's Gospel. By Holly J. Carey. Library of New Testament Studies. New York: T&T Clark, 2009. 240 pages. Hardcover, \$130.00.

The Book

Holly J. Carey has written an important monograph that will impact both biblical and theological camps. The issue is not new, but for some reason, as she observes, it has been seriously neglected. What is the theological importance of the meaning of Jesus' cry from the cross? I am going to leave the answer to this question for later, but Carey's thesis should be visited carefully.

According to our author, there is a tendency among Bible interpreters to read the passage of Mark 15:34 in an atomistic manner, and thus arrive at a conclusion that may not be what Mark intended. However, if we read the narrative of this Gospel contextually, Carey contends, we will find that the meaning of the famous cry is not necessarily one of abandonment. In fact, Mark's implied readers would have interpreted the passage in light of the whole content of Psalm 22. The reason for this is to be found not only in the abundant material of the Psalm that saturates the whole passion narrative of Mark's writing, but also it has to do with Mark's whole narrative. Thus, Mark has provided a consistent pattern wherein when Jesus' death is announced His resurrection and vindication is always present.

The first and second chapters are devoted to providing some kind of hermeneutical background for the study. The first chapter provides solid interaction with major contemporary interpreters. The second is an introduction to the discussion of how Mark is to be read as a narrative as well as his use of Old Testament quotations, allusions, and echoes. Chapter two is also critical for understanding the complexity involved in recognizing when the Gospel writer is actually making use of Old Testament material, since this issue is not as simple as some interpreters have believed. For example, some theologians have argued that since Mark only quotes Psalm 22:2, there

is no basis whatsoever to believe he intended the entire Psalm. This section convincingly demonstrates this idea to be bluntly simplistic.

Chapter three presents an analysis of Mark's narrative. It is this narrative that allows us to see that the writer has created an expectation on the implied readers. They are supposed to wait not only for Jesus' passion, but also for His vindication via the resurrection. Central, but not exclusive to the evidence provided, are the predictions of Jesus' death throughout this Gospel. Carey renames those predictions as to include the resurrection. They are not simply predictions of Jesus' death, but of His resurrection as well, and as such they create an anticipation of Jesus' vindication after His death and passion.

So, Carey concludes: "The implied readers' expectations of Jesus' vindication after suffering, fostered by various passages that foreshadow these events in the Markan narrative, makes it likely that the same plot of Ps. 22 (the suffering and vindication of the speaker) would have been recalled when Mark includes the allusions and citation of the Psalm in the context of Jesus' death. In other words . . . an allusion to Ps. 22 in Mark 15:34 would probably have not gone unrecognized by his implied readers because they would have been prepared previously by the narrative to anticipate and recognize the shared reference (implicit in the citation, explicit in the narrative) to his vindication within the plot of the Psalm" (171–72).

Chapter 4 provides further support for the author's case. In this section evidence is given that the most common way in which Mark deals with Old Testament passages is contextual and not atomistic. Mark's intertextual use of Scripture reveals that this pattern is present in all scriptural genres (poetry, history, prophecy, etc.) and in all types of quotations and allusions. In Carey's words, the fact that Mark uses Scriptures like this "lends considerable weight to the likelihood that he is again doing so in Mark 15:34." (172).

Chapter 5 explores whether there is enough historical evidence to support the thesis that the implied readers of the Gospel of Mark would have interpreted Mark 15:34 in the light of the larger context of Psalm 22. First, there is a traceable and cohesive tradition of the Righteous Sufferer in Scripture and extracanonical texts. People in that socio-cultural environment would have easily recognized texts belonging to this tradition and its suffering-vindication pattern. Second, the liturgical use of the Psalms during the first century among Qumran and synagogue worshipers strongly suggests that Mark's readers would have enough knowledge of Psalm 22 to "fill in the blanks" left by the incipit of this Psalm in Mark 15:34. Finally, there seems to be several extracanonical texts portraying Psalm 22 as a suffering individual who ultimately is vindicated by God. The fact that chapter six confirms the image of the Righteous Sufferer is profusely used by Mark to present Jesus only buttresses the whole line of argument: Jesus' cry at the cross is being portrayed within this story line.

Exegesis of Mark 15:34 is tackled only after the whole narrative of Mark has been searched for the presence of Psalm 22 (139–50). Thus, abundant and strong evidence is offered, showing that Mark uses the Psalm not only

in his passion-resurrection narrative, but also in other sections. Space is also provided for evaluating other interpretative suggestions as to the meaning of Mark 15:34. Most of them, however, fail in that they exclude evidence that does not fit their previously adopted schemes (160).

Reading Mark 15:34 in context should include being sensitive to the intricate layers of the narrative, and resistance to extracting the text from his surrounding context. To help with this, Carey provides four guiding questions to illuminate the meaning of the passage within its own context. First, she studies the meaning of “abandonment” and concludes that in the whole Bible, with only one possible exception, God does not “abandon” in the sense of removing His presence. In fact, the meaning of “abandon” in this passage is not as obvious as is often assumed.

Second, is there any suggestion in the passage that God did not abandon Jesus? Carey’s reading of the crucifixion and final sections of Mark produces plenty of evidence that shows in fact God did not abandon Jesus in the sense of removing His presence. For example, God may be answering Jesus’ prayer in the tearing of the temple veil. Moreover, the centurion’s confession reveals that Jesus’ relationship with God did not stop at the crucifixion. These and other “narrative indicators” demonstrate that “the Markan Jesus has not been abandoned by God in the sense that the presence of God has left him altogether. Instead these phenomena suggest that the ‘abandonment’ of Jesus refers to his helpless situation at the hands of his enemies” (163).

The third question she formulates is about how to reconcile a supposed abandonment by God of Jesus at the cross with the relationship they both enjoyed throughout the narrative. If God really abandoned Jesus at the cross, how do we explain his close and intimate relationship with Jesus through all of Mark’s narrative? The way Jesus interacts with the Father according to Mark’s narrative is one of the strongest reasons to hold that God did not abandon Him at the cross. Even at the cross it is more natural to see them both as “being together in this” too (163).

Finally, Carey answers the questions of those who may consider it a problem to have a Jesus who is suffering while God is still present. To say that God did not abandon Jesus at the cross does not mean that Jesus’ suffering was not real or severe. In other words, affirming that Jesus’ suffering is not due to God’s personal absence does not take away its seriousness and importance for the whole argument of the Gospel. Jesus’ suffering is as severe as that in Psalm 22. However, Mark does not want his readers to get the idea that “Jesus was completely and utterly abandoned by God without receiving his intervention as the psalmist had. If that was the case, why did he include such a triumphant ending of vindication in his narrative?” (166).

After summarizing the argument, the book finishes by providing a reading of Matthew and Luke as the “earliest readers” of Mark. This arrangement helps Carey not only maintain the autonomy of her study of Mark, but also leads the reader to see how the two other Gospel narratives integrated a similar reading of this Psalm.

Theological Implications

Carey's book is of monumental importance for Christian theology. For one thing, Christian theology will always be a *theologia crucis*. This means that if you want to affirm something about God and His relationships with His universe, you have to go through Jesus and ask whether that statement coheres with His revelation. It also means that Christology has its center at the cross. In other words, whatever we want to say about God has to be tested against the cross of Jesus.

That being the case, we should not overlook the fact that the cross of Jesus is a revelation mediated by the biblical text. This of course means hermeneutics. We cannot isolate this cross from its literary and historical context. The meaning of the cross of Jesus should not come solely or mainly from our common knowledge of other crosses in the past or the present. To do so would reduce God's revelation to natural theology.

What is then the meaning of the cross of Jesus? It is obvious that here we cannot provide a full answer to the question. At the same time, the way we understand Jesus' words on the cross will fully impact that answer. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to explore whether Jesus' cry of Psalm 22:2 has been correctly understood.¹

Carey says that in order to answer this question, we need to explore the contextual narrative where this verse appears. On the one hand, we should avoid bringing to the text dogmatic presuppositions, which do not find direct support in the text itself. On the other hand, reading the text at "face value" is not a strategy that produces better and more reliable results. Neither of these two options should be followed. A right understanding of the text demands that we see it first in terms of the writer's own discourse, and second in terms of the way the initial audience may have understood it.

Interestingly, when you review the theological literature on the meaning of Jesus' cry, there seems to be general agreement, even between those representing the two options. According to both, God the Father abandoned Jesus. Conservative theologians will tell us that the meaning is clear and we should not tamper with it. Since Jesus at the cross was representing sinful humanity, the least you can expect is that God the Father may turn His back on Him. On the other hand, liberals and liberationists will complain against those who try to dulcify the meaning of that abandonment. Those trying to do so not only go against "the most historical interpretation" of this text, but also are unable to provide a serious theodicy within this "God-forsaken world."²

And so, you find yourself entangled between these two poles. In either case you are in trouble for you either have not taken the cross of Jesus seriously, or you want to dulcify its historical interpretation. What Carey's work has clarified for us is that taking the cross historically and seriously does not necessarily mean to see it as abandonment. It has also helped us see that the pure affirmation of taking the cross historically and seriously does

¹Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 43.

²Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), 395–422.

not mean we are in fact doing that. Some of those proposals that claim to be historical and serious about the cross have actually read the cross without its context. Oftentimes the interpretation of the cry of Jesus has come either from a systematic point of view or from a theodicy previously accepted. In order to correct this, the meaning of the cry of Jesus has to come first from the literary context where it is placed in Scripture. We need to be grateful for Holly Carey for doing exactly this.

Systematic Repercussions

Taking Carey's monograph as a basis, I want now to provide some feedback on the problems we find whenever we want to affirm that God abandoned Jesus at the cross. But first, we need to be clear as to the meaning of this "abandonment." If by "abandonment" you mean that God did not do anything to stop the crucifixion, then I do not see how you can deny it. If by "abandonment" is meant that God the Father (the triune God indeed!) wanted this to happen, then there is no way to oppose it from a biblical standpoint. Nonetheless, the problem is that some theologians want to say more than that. They want to say that God turned His back on His Son, that He frowned at Him because of His being loaded with human sinfulness. God the Father was supposed to be disgusted with Jesus for this, and He hid His face from Him. God the Father rejected Jesus the Son and abandoned him to suffer crucifixion and His absence. Jesus was abandoned to suffer in complete loneliness, this being the reason for His cry.

It is this second meaning that is problematic, because it has scant support from Scripture, if any. Instead, the God of Jesus Christ is the one who planned the passion to take place. He punished human sin on Jesus His Son, but He did not reject Him. The prophet Isaiah asserts that it was "us" who rejected Him, not God (53:3–5). As Scripture continually attests, the Father received this sacrifice and accepted it (53:10–12). While everyone else deserted Jesus, the Father was with Him (John 8:29; 16:32). The Father loved Jesus *because* of the cross (John 10:17). Jesus was the very same representation of the Father, even in the context of Jesus' departure (John 14:10); the Father and the Son shared in the same works (John 14:8–11), including the cross (John 10:18). Attempting to dissolve this unity, even in the context of Jesus representing sinners, is called by Karl Barth "the supreme blasphemy," for "God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away. . . . He does not come into conflict with Himself. He does not sin when in unity with the man Jesus He mingles with sinners and takes their place."³ It is this meaning of "abandonment" that we need to evaluate and consider. Here are some theological observations.

I have noted above that for some conservative theologians the answer about the meaning of Jesus' cry is found in a predetermined understanding of the atonement. If sinfulness means separation from God, and Jesus is taking the place of sinners, then there is need for real separation. This logic, however,

³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 185.

does not take the biblical data in the correct order. When doing theology, at least from an evangelical point of view, you want to check first if you have direct answers concerning your question. In this case, our question is exactly this: Do we have in Scripture direct and clear statements telling us that God abandoned Jesus at the cross? It will be very easy to jump to the conclusion that Mark 15:34 (and Matthew's parallel) tell us so. However, after reading Carey's work such an answer is not possible any more. We will have to look for evidence somewhere else.

After reviewing all possible evidence, however, we have to agree that there is no other passage in Scripture that directly expresses that God abandoned Jesus. Even Jürgen Moltmann, someone who has constructed a whole theological metaphysics based on the abandonment of God, has to take refuge in a very weak textual variant.⁴ It is questionable therefore that with this scarce evidence Moltmann may be willing to express his case with such powerful words as these: "On the cross the Father and the Son are so widely separated that the direct relationship between them breaks off."⁵ Once again, there is no direct biblical evidence for this type of statement.

Of course, after surveying all the direct evidence (or lack of it), it may be that the only biblical evidence that exists is indirect. That is not a problem per se; however, if that is the case you have to be extremely careful, because you may be reading your pre-commitments into the text. You have to ask first if there is not another way of integrating your observation or presupposition. For example, biblical scholars would agree that sin results in separation from God and that Jesus came to bridge this separation. To jump from this to Jesus' cry on the cross is too long a jump. We have to consider first what this separation is and if there is any other way in which this separation was assumed and bridged by Jesus. Karl Barth's extended discussion of this matter should suffice here as a more biblical example of how God dealt with this separation by means of the "way of the son of God into the far country."⁶

Another example of bringing theological conclusions to the cross would be related to a passage such as 2 Corinthians 5:21. This passage can be used to argue that since Jesus became "sin," God the Father had to separate from Him, and once again this is what we have in Jesus' cry at the cross. However, this interpretation overlooks several critical things. First, it does not take into account that the word "sin" in this context can be better translated as an "offering for sin," as supported by most modern translations. This, of course, will relate the Father not as the one abandoning the Son, but as the very same person who is giving this offering, and therefore present at the cross. Second, even if you take the word to mean directly "sin," we should ask ourselves if we are willing to say that Jesus actually became "sin," or if the word is used in a more representational or metaphorical way. If the former, we should ponder the serious theological problems we are getting into. For example, if Jesus actually "became" sin, how is it that God accepted His sacrifice, if in order to

⁴Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 166.

⁵Ibid., 174.

⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1. 157–357.

be accepted His person and work were supposed to be blameless? If the latter option is the true one, then the ultimate reason for God taking away His presence from Jesus disappears. Third, the context of this passage, as no other, presents God as intimately involved with Jesus at the cross, reconciling the world to Himself. If you were to ask this passage, where is God the Father at the crucifixion? The passage has one single answer: "God was in Christ" (19). Even if the Father is seen as the one executing the punishment for sin on His Son, this does not require Him being absent. On the contrary, the very same action requires His presence.

Connected to the previous discussion is the role of the wrath of God. This theme should be explored in more detail, but here I am only interested in showing that even this *image* does not necessitate God's absence at the cross. If by the wrath of God we mean God's justice in action and not an anthropopathic explosion of emotions (similar to the parent's reaction to their disobedient child who is punished and secluded in his room), then we have to understand that applying that justice presupposes the very same presence of the one executing it. That the justice of God is in action at the cross of Jesus is clear from a biblical standpoint. The wrath of God means *the cross* for Jesus. The terrible thing that takes place at the cross is that God himself is on it, suffering and judging. However, that this punishment requires God the Father to remove His presence from Jesus is something the biblical data does not support.

On another issue, we should ask ourselves whether Jesus was ignorant about the reasons of God's actions at the cross? From a liberal point of view, for example, there is no problem if you present Jesus as questioning the presence of the Father at the cross. Bultmann said that historically we do not know if Jesus relinquished His faith in God at the cross. Conservatives, however, would have a problem if they actually take the question of Jesus in a literal sense. This is often overlooked. To take the question literally would mean, first of all, the realization that Jesus is asking for reasons about God's absence. But if this is the case, are we willing to affirm that Jesus did not know why God abandoned Him? According to the Gospels, Jesus is completely aware that He is going to the cross with the purpose of giving Himself up in the place of the sinner. This means that, if Jesus expected a separation from God because of this, His question does not make sense.⁷ In other words, if the Father had in fact separated from Jesus due to his vicarious condition, He had to know why that was the case. But, then, why the question? Should we take this question other than literally? Carey's book once again is useful here.

We should add to the previous observation some other comments related to those who want to take the question of Jesus in a literalistic sense. First of all, we need to observe that even if Jesus' words were to be taken in this way, we should not overlook that His words are presented in a question

⁷Boff, from a liberationist point of view, solves the problem by having Jesus not being completely sure about God's will concerning the cross. Leonardo Boff, *Jesucristo el Liberador* (Bogotá, Colombia: Libros SRL, 1977), 127–30.

format and not as an affirmation. It is not useful simply to argue that Mark 15:34 *affirms* that God abandoned Jesus. It does not. It is a question. If you want to take the abandonment part of this verse literally, you should also take the “question part” the same way. This is also connected with the way some theologians try to buttress their argument for separation. They want to affirm that before the cross Jesus calls God His Father, but now at the cross He calls Him “God,” the reason being His separation from Him. Berkouwer, for example, argues for a change in the way Jesus addressed God before and after that question. Berkouwer seems to be unaware, however, that Jesus uses “Father” and “God” as He keeps praying *on the cross*.⁸ When exactly was Jesus separated from God if He keeps praying even until the very moment of death? Even more, Berkouwer’s way of arguing completely ignores the importance of a direct Old Testament quotation. There has not been any change in the relation of the Father and Jesus, at least not one that you can prove or trace back to the use of “God” in Mark 15:34. Moreover, as Bauckham mentions, Jesus calls God His God at the cross reflecting that His trust in Him is still intact, even amidst enormous suffering.⁹

The Doctrine of the Trinity

There are some other problems coming from a systematic theology perspective for those who believe that the Father removed his presence from Jesus. Most of these issues are related one way or the other to the doctrine of the Trinity. Once again, for liberal and liberationist theologians, who tend to see the doctrine as a late and secondary development of Christian theology, this is not a real concern. For conservatives who consider the Trinity as being central for all Christian doctrines, however, its importance is paramount. When affirming that Jesus was separated from the Father, what are the implications for the Trinity? Are we saying that it is possible for the Trinity to be separated? To take refuge in the humanity of Jesus is not convenient for two major reasons. First of all, to insist that something happened to Jesus and not to God the Son comes too dangerously close to Gnosticism. The one being crucified and affected by the cross is none other than God the Son. Second, the salvific importance of the cross relies on the fact that the one affected by it is not only the human Jesus, but the Son of God. It is because of the divine person at the cross that this is efficacious. There is no alternative, the one at the cross had to fully experience the cross.

But then, can we really conceive theologically any separation between Father and Son? There is no escaping this question either. Some scholars, who want to affirm the separation at the cross between the persons of the Trinity, end up saying that the separation was actually not as radical as sometimes is thought.¹⁰ But, what is the meaning of this? Was there separation or not?

⁸Cf. G.C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 221.

⁹At points Bauckham uses “abandonment” as meaning actual departure, though. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 258.

¹⁰Taylor, after arguing for real separation, ends up saying that Jesus, “*seemed* to be forsaken by Him” (italics mine). Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 162.

Others will take refuge in the category of “mystery” or of “paradox,” but will keep emphasizing the reality of the separation.¹¹ While warning about not trying to dissolve the mystery or the paradox, these scholars end up doing exactly that when clearly maintaining the reality of the separation between the two persons.

Another interesting factor often neglected in this discussion is the place of the Holy Spirit at the cross. This is an important issue derived from the doctrine of the Trinity. Even for those who will not completely accept Augustine’s idea of the Spirit as being the eternal and loving link between the Father and the Son, believing that there might be a separation between these two may include serious repercussions in our understanding of the triune God and His work of salvation. Where is the Holy Spirit when such separation takes place? It is relatively easy to polarize the relationship between God the Father and the Son in order to give support to the idea of separation. The Father is the holy one and Jesus is the one representing sinful humanity, then the relationship breaks off. But, what about the Holy Spirit, who is both as holy and as involved in salvation as the Father? Graham Cole rightly concludes that there is little direct evidence as to the role of the Spirit during the cross. However, we do have the whole New Testament supporting the fact that salvation is Trinitarian. There is also serious indication that Hebrews 9:14 is referring to the Holy Spirit as being the power by means of which Jesus offered His sacrifice.¹² While agreeing with Cole on this, I find it extremely difficult and problematic to assent to his conclusion that the Holy Spirit is the one who “kept the triune Godhead from imploding—as it were—when the barrier of sin went up between the Father and the Son.”¹³

This is not acceptable for various reasons. First, it makes the core of salvation dependent only on the Father and the Son, since the Spirit only keeps things from breaking off completely. (Notice again that there is not actual separation here). For me this sounds like a mediatory anthropological and political metaphor has found its way into our image of God and salvation. The Holy Spirit seems to be the one who mediates in between two extreme irreconcilable poles, He Himself not being identified with any of them intrinsically. It is the Father who is offended by sin. It is only the Son who is burdened and suffering because of sin. This is not the biblical image of the Spirit who is holy and who both suffers and is offended by human sinfulness.

Second, from this image you can get the idea that the Father’s holiness is the only one affected by sinfulness. The other two members of the Trinity are somewhat excluded from this absolute attribute. We should never forget,

¹¹A good summary of several interpretations is given by John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), 80–82. The problem, once again, with Stott’s own option is twofold: 1) the myth of the “face value” thesis; and 2) based on this a type of psychologization of Jesus by means of which, the interpreter knows exactly how Jesus (and the Father!) must have felt at the cross, without more evidence from the text.

¹²Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 164–67.

¹³Ibid., 167.

however, that the problem of sin is not an issue only between one of the persons of the Trinity and humankind. The whole Trinity is involved and affected by it. But if sinfulness is pictured as affecting only the holiness of the Father (thus causing separation between him and the Son), are we not implying that the Spirit and the Son are less holy than the Father? Some would even say that the reason God did not want to see His Son at the moment of the cross was because of His holiness. But if that is the case, what do you do with the Son's own holiness, and with the holiness of the Holy Spirit, who again according to Hebrews nine was energizing Jesus to offer His sacrifice *at* the cross? Are we not risking an implication that the Son's and the Spirit's deity can deal with sinfulness closer than what the Father's can? Is not this a practical way of implementing some sort of ontological subordinationism?

Having said all this, we should not forget to say that this is not denying the clear teaching of Scripture that at the cross, God punishes sin in the person of the Son (Isa 53). But because it is the Son, the Father is directly involved, not separated from Him.¹⁴ The whole God is there experiencing and dealing with what sin is, albeit from different perspectives. As the Father, He experiences sin as the reason for His Son's suffering and death. As the Son, He suffers human sin in faithfulness. As the Spirit, He gives himself to God in the person of the Son. The triune God uses the same historical event of the crucifixion to punish sin. It is not as if there is another thing the Father and the Son are doing to expiate sin. The punishment of God *is* the historical and human crucifixion of the Son. Punishment of sin in the Son takes place in that God does not intervene to stop the crucifixion. But this does not mean He has abandoned the Son in the sense of taking His presence away from him. The picture of God as turning His back to the Son is not biblical. God is with His Son, but He is not intervening to stop the crucifixion.¹⁵ The triune God is present at the crucifixion. The cross is not an experience for Jesus alone. The cross is possible because the triune God is there. The cry of Jesus at the cross is the cry of the person of Psalm 22, the messianic righteous sufferer, who in the midst of extreme mistreatment claims His innocence and asks God to vindicate Him. God will answer His prayer evidently even before the resurrection. All the events surrounding the cross after the cry can be seen as God responding to the Messiah. The gentiles, represented by the

¹⁴Some medieval paintings have an extraordinary portrayal of the Father holding Jesus' arms as he hangs on the cross. See, François Boespflug, "The Compassion of God the Father in Western Art," *Cross Currents* (Winter 1992–93): 487–503.

¹⁵Peter Lombard seemed to be reflecting the Scriptures in this: "And so, if that abandonment is understood as a dissolution of the union, a severance of God and man took place before Christ had died. But who would say this? So let us profess that God abandoned that man at death in some way, because for a time he exposed him to the power of his persecutors; God did not defend him by displaying his power so that he would not die. The Godhead severed itself because it took away its protection, but did not dissolve the union; it separated itself outwardly so that it was not there to defend him, but was not absent inwardly in regard to the union. If at that time the Godhead had not held back its power, but had displayed it, Christ would not have died." Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book III: *The Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano (Ontario: PIMS, 2010), 89.

centurion, can now confess that the one on the cross is so intimately related to God as to be called His own Son! This is a much better picture of God, perfectly in accordance with the picture Jesus presented of His Father during His life and ministry.

Book Reviews

Biblical Studies

Logos Bible Software 4, Scholar's Platinum LE Library, Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, \$1,689.95.

Logos totally renovated their Bible study software and made an excellent product even better. Logos Bible Software 4 (hereafter, Logos 4) retains the best features of Logos 3,¹ but has a number of improvements, which this article will examine. Here is another bonus: there are additional books in all Logos Bible Software packages.

This review will examine the *Scholar's Platinum LE Library* (hereafter, Platinum)—the penultimate Scholar's collection. The Scholar's series, from smallest to largest, is: Basic, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Portfolio—each package adding hundreds of electronic books to the previous package. The obvious standout feature in Platinum is its vast collection of almost 1,250 electronic books, averaging \$1.40 per book, unquestionably a bargain. This immense number is likely larger than the total number of Bible-related books a typical person owns. This reviewer will first examine the books and then evaluate the Bible study software of Platinum.

Platinum Books by Categories. A bird's-eye view of Platinum shows its breadth of resources. It contains 26 English Bible translations, 21 interlinears, 355 commentaries (individual volumes of 33 different commentary sets—12 of which are unique to Platinum), 36 reference books, 41 Bible introductions and surveys, 29 media resources, 46 preaching and teaching books, 76 ministry resources, 61 original language grammars and tools, and over 550 other resources. There are so many e-books in Platinum that just listing the book titles and authors would make this software review ten to fifteen times the maximum length this journal allows! A full listing of the books in Platinum is available at www.logos.com/comparison.

Yet, in any bundled collection of books there is typically a mix of books: from new to old, excellent to mediocre, and useful to useless. Of course, the value of any book varies from reader to reader, because each user has different needs. For instance, this reviewer will likely never use the lectionaries in Platinum, but other users will find them essential. So, the key to analyzing a collection is to calculate if the price of the indispensable books is still a good deal.

Upgrade Book Comparisons. A helpful analysis of Platinum's worth is to compare it to the smaller Scholar's packages. Silver costs \$370 more than Basic and has 250 more books. Gold costs \$380 more than Silver and has 200 more books. Platinum costs \$310 more than Gold and has 300 more books. It is easy to see the cost is worth it when considering the cost of the best books in each upgrade. Only Platinum and Portfolio include the *Baker NT Commentary* (12 volumes), the *Baker*

¹If one is not familiar with Logos Bible Software 3, it would help to read the following review of it since its basic features are in Logos 4. James R. Wicker, "Review of 'Logos Bible Software, Scholar's Library: Gold, Series X, Version 3,'" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50.1 (Fall 2007): 100–03.

Exegetical Commentary on the NT (8 volumes), the *Pillar NT Commentary* (10 volumes), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (BDAG—the undisputed best Greek lexicon), and the *Grammar of the Greek NT in Light of Historical Research*.

Software Review. Now this review will examine the Bible study software of Platinum, which is Logos 4. The new look in Logos 4 is much more inviting—with graphics, color, multiple columns, and it has more readily-available features. There is a book of the day, devotion, guest blogger article, customizable daily Bible reading, lectionary, Logos news, book excerpts, pictures from books in the collection, and more. Yet, even with the new features and a home page displaying much more content than in Logos 3, Logos 4 is easier to use.

Ease of Use. The new Passage Box is a nice addition to the user-friendly home page, and it immediately accesses the Bible text and a myriad of study helps. Simply typing a Scripture reference brings many helpful tools in different panels: the Passage Guide, five favorite Bible translations, favorite Bible commentaries, the Information Panel, and Text Comparison. The Study Passage, Study Word, and Study Topic tools on the Logos 3 home page are not available on Logos 4 because the Passage Box makes them obsolete. Just typing a word opens the powerful and improved Search tool. The new Command Box uses shortcuts to open resources and tools, and it replaces the Logos 3 Quick Navigate bar.

From the home page one can easily access the major features of Logos 4: four searches (Basic, Bible, Morphology, and Syntax) and three guides (Passage Guide, Exegetical Guide, and Bible Word Study). The searches use new drop-down menus, so searches are easier to conduct than they were in Logos 3. The three guides make it easy for a person who does not know Hebrew or Greek to glean helpful biblical information from the original languages of the Bible: (1) cut and paste a Hebrew or Greek word from a reverse interlinear Bible (based on the English text) or (2) type in the English transliteration and Logos 4 will suggest the correct Hebrew or Greek Word. The eight reverse interlinear Bibles (two are NT only) make it easy for anyone to see the underlying Hebrew or Greek word behind each English word as well, and it is simple to view their morphology, lexical meanings, semantic domains, and other helpful information.

Web Connection Enhancements. The biggest change in Logos 4 is that it takes more advantage of the Internet, resulting in four handy improvements. First, updates² are easier—they run in the background, and they are more frequent because they are automatic. Second, a minor hassle with all previous versions of Logos is gone: there is no need for manually backing up licenses, e-books, highlights, clip-pings, layouts (formerly called workspaces), bookmarks, comments, or notes from the office computer to the home computer because they are done automatically. All of these features are instantly available when accessing Logos 4 from a second computer regardless of the location. Third, there is no longer a need to keep a hard copy of the entire Logos 4 program for a faster reload in case one's computer crashes or one upgrades to a new computer. Now the entire software program and personal library is available from the Internet.

More Portability. The fourth benefit of the enhanced web connection has the most exciting possibilities of all the new features in Logos 4. Logos has purposefully avoided the PDA/smart phone market until now. However, it is now accessible via iPhone and iPad and is more portable than ever before. Curling up on a couch and

²Fairly frequently Logos sends minor updates on its software and its resources.

reading most of the books in Platinum on a small reader is now possible.³ Neither the iPhone or iPad can hold all of the books, so one does need an Internet connection to access them. If the user is about to board an airplane and lose the connection, it is easy to download a half dozen or more books into the memory of the iPhone or iPad.

Faster and Improved Searches. Logos 4 is faster than its predecessors, with a completely reworked database. The Bible Speed Search in Logos 3 is no longer available because it is not necessary in Logos 4. All of the searches are fast. Also, Logos 4 retains the powerful automatic searches of its predecessors with a number of improvements. As with Logos 3, many users may not get beyond the three powerful basic study guides because they do so much and are so easy to use. These guides, along with the four searches make use of most of the tools in Logos 4. Explorer is new for Logos 4, and it is a light, handy version of the Passage Guide.

Automatically-Saved Layouts. The more one uses Logos 4, the more likely the user will develop different routines and have various screen layouts for diverse studies. Use one layout for a personal Bible study, another layout for preparing a Sunday School lesson, and another for each sermon series. Each layout will have specific tools open, particular tool configurations, and certain resources. Logos 4 automatically and frequently saves layout changes, and it retains the last 20 unnamed layouts, which is helpful. One can instantly return the screen to a previous layout. This is the virtual equivalent of having multiple desktops available, each devoted to a specific Bible study project with just the right resources open.

Multiple Histories and Bookmarks. In addition to Layouts, Logos 4 has six ways of keeping track of a specific page number of a particular resource the user has previously visited. These tools are handy for revisiting previous studies and resources.

Enhanced Library Tool. The Library tool in Logos 4 is much improved. It has the books well organized with no duplicate entries and sixteen information fields for each book. One can search or sort each field as well as toggle on or off the field information in the search pane, and one can combine searches in multiple fields. For instance, look up all of the books by a certain publisher that have “Jesus” in the title, and the search takes just a fraction of a second.

Morphological and Syntactical Searches. Although both of these tools were excellent in Logos 3, their structure is reworked in Logos 4. Now they are more user friendly (as are the Basic and Bible Searches). They are also better at preventing mistakes, such as not allowing “tense-voice-mood” parameters for a noun morphological search. As a help to the novice or intermediate user, some grammatical/syntactical relationship examples are automatically generated in the Bible Word Study. Platinum syntax searches are based on one Hebrew and four Greek syntactical databases. It would be nice to add another Hebrew syntactical data base to this collection.

These searches are the most advanced work Logos 4 does, and it does it well. However, they are the most difficult to understand and apply for most users since they deal with Hebrew and Greek grammar and syntax. Therefore, the text and video guides at Logos.com are resources for training in how to use these tools as well as most of the tools and features on Logos 4.

Biblical People, Places, and Things. These three separate tools are configured alike, and the layout is very handy. Typing a name on one of them instantly

³So far, over 1,000 titles are available, and Logos is working on securing the remaining titles for this app.

brings a collection of Scripture references, Bible dictionary articles, family tree (for Biblical People), pictures, and interactive maps. There are graphics and Infographics: 95 high-resolution pictures with informational panels, such as a comparison of footprint sizes of David, Goliath, Shaquille O’Neill, and Robert Wadlow, the world’s tallest man in modern times. These are excellent teaching tools.

Other New Features. The Drawing Tool allows a person to use a virtual marker to draw on the computer screen, a great tool when using Platinum on a video projector for a class. There are two new charts as well as a fun 3D effect for the Passage Analysis. Preposition Use (for Greek) in the Bible Word Study is a helpful interactive circle and line graph illustrating the spatial aspects of prepositions with the search word. Stereo Views are 168 sets of views of the Middle East in true stereo format (paired pictures). This reviewer found the Handouts tool (automatically generated but customizable) and Read Aloud tool (think of an uneducated robot voice) not very helpful.

Summary. Platinum is a great collection of electronic resources for in-depth Bible study. This reviewer continues to be in awe that such a huge amount of books can reside in one’s computer—to be read, highlighted, marked up, compared, and searched—and that one can leave groups of them open on a number of virtual “desks” to return to any time. In addition, this collection resides on an excellent software platform: Logos 4. It is truly a collection of numerous helpful tools that Bible users on every level can benefit from using: from Bible novice to Bible scholar. The new features in Logos 4 make it even easier for the Bible beginner to use and benefit from while also adding to the available depth of research for the Bible expert. Logos 4 gives more information, explanation, and tools to a person who does not know Hebrew or Greek than any Bible program of which this reviewer is aware. Yet, it also meets the needs of the Hebrew and Greek expert. The new pictures, graphics, and maps help the Bible learner better understand God’s Word and also add to the tools a Bible teacher can instantly use and share with a class. When compared with all other electronic Bible study programs, Platinum is the Cadillac or Lexus in all aspects: quality, innovation, value, and superior performance. When studying the Bible one should use the best tool available.

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***Ecclesiastes.* By Craig Bartholomew. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Edited by Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 448 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

Every civilization in history has asked the questions that the book of Ecclesiastes seeks to address. The Bible never presents mankind’s struggle to understand His world as wrong or sinful, but neither does it always provide easy answers. Craig Bartholomew, in the seventh volume of the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms series, has attempted to tackle and unravel some of these questions by analyzing the struggles of the wise man. This commentary, and indeed the entire series, is intended primarily for pastors and students. (9)

The simple organization of the book belies the difficult struggles it depicts. It includes a brief prologue and epilogue with the remainder of the material under

a lengthy section with twenty-one subsections. The work is well, and at times, even tediously, documented.

The introduction adequately outlines the critical issues complicating the study of the book. Reader's today will quickly and passionately identify with the questions that arise from this study, and, in fact, Bartholomew admits that it is sometimes "easier to see how Ecclesiastes applies today than what it meant in its original context" (17). He notes that the book has been variously interpreted literally, allegorically, and critically (21).

Bartholomew acknowledges that the text seems clearly to refer to Solomon in 1:1, and that the reader is intended to think of the wise man in the text as Solomon (104), though he believes Solomon was neither the author nor Qohelet (43–54). He asserts that Qohelet was likely a real person, but that it is not significant if he was not (48), referring to the book as "fictional autobiography cast in a frame narrative," (74) and "royal fiction" (104). He further contends that the narrator of the text and the implied author represent the same individual (79), with "Qohelet" functioning as a "nickname" for the wise man (12:8–14) who called the people to assembly (18). In the end, he concludes that the authorship of the book cannot be determined definitively (54), which makes the setting for the implied audience difficult to ascertain.

The body of the work includes the author's translation of each pericope, followed by sections on Interpretation and Theological Implications. In the Interpretations sections, Bartholomew intricately analyzes the Hebrew text, drawing out the key points of the struggle. The Theological Implications section further expounds on each passage, noting ideas and themes that are addressed elsewhere in Scripture, and also demonstrates how those truths apply to the church today. In it, he notes practical sections on obedience through both word and deed (156), worship (209), social justice (222), the dangers of the love of money and the need for contentment (239–43; 338), theodicy (258), mankind's search for meaning in life (269–77), and the rediscovery of joy in life (353–58). He also sees the book of Ecclesiastes as background for Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom (99).

According to Bartholomew, the book of Ecclesiastes is about the struggle to resolve the tension between two approaches to the difficulties of life: despair and blithe (93). These two ideas are represented by the often-used phrase *hebel*, which he defines as "enigmatic" (93), and a *carpe diem* attitude. Ultimately, the nature of Qoheleth's struggle, according to Bartholomew, is whether or not life has any meaning (113), which he discovers, in the end, that it does (376). Qohelet never lets go of the mysteries, but embraces the fear of the Lord as the place to start in understanding (376–77). Bartholomew sees a "turning point" in Qohelet's life demonstrated in 11:7, symbolized by light and eyes that see the sun (381).

The strength of Bartholomew's work is the careful exegetical work in the Interpretation sections. One may sometimes wish for other topics to be addressed in the work, such as the struggle between faith and doubt, or a more practical application of some of the topics addressed (given its stated target audience of pastors). However, the writing of the book is clear, the research is thorough, the scholarship is apparent, and the relevance is obvious. This volume would be a helpful resource for students, teachers, and preachers.

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***A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. By Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 799 pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.**

At first glance, it is immediately clear that the third edition of Hill and Walton's *Survey* is expanded over the second edition (608 pages in the second edition versus 799 pages in the current volume). But bigger is not better; better is better. This volume is better.

The most notable improvement is in the graphics. Numerous color pictures, charts, and maps have either been added or improved to make this volume much more aesthetically attractive.

While the text of this most recent edition is largely the same as previous versions, some new content has been added, along with expanded further reading sections, discussion questions, a summary of the outline of each chapter, some recent archeological discoveries pertinent to Old Testament studies, and an update on a couple of dates. In addition, the organization of the material is greatly improved. Moreover, helpful sections on worship and the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament have been added at the end of the text.

While these improvements make this volume attractive, a few drawbacks remain. The most critical weakness of this volume is that it fails to correct some of the errors from its previous editions. First, there is a biblical reference error in the preface (11). Second, the opening statement in the chapter on Jeremiah seems either inaccurate or, at least, needs clarification. The authors state that "The book of Jeremiah occupies more space in the Bible than any other book" (534). That statement is not true with reference to the actual text space (unless one counts the book of Psalms as five books instead of one); it is not true of the amount of time covered in the book; nor is it the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Perhaps the writers have another condition in mind that makes that statement accurate, but it is not clear in the text. Third, in a couple of places, the text could have been clearer on the distinctions between the roles or relationship of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. The text credits Sheshbazzar with leading the initial group of returnees (679), which to be sure is so-mentioned in Ezra 1:8-11; however, the authors do not mention Ezra 2:2, which clearly references Zerubbabel as one of the key leaders of the return. Later, the text credits Sheshbazzar with laying the foundation of the Temple (680), which Ezra 5:16 stipulates, but the authors fail to reference Ezra 3:8-13, which credits Zerubbabel with beginning that work. Fourth, the text incorrectly references Habakkuk instead of Haggai (680). Finally, the authors state that the first deportation of Israel by the Babylonians took place in 597 BC (535); however, they later claim that the first stage of the deportation actually took place in 605 BC (572).

Nevertheless, despite these concerns, Hill and Walton should be commended for their work on the *Survey* and also for the improvements that this volume contains. It is a textbook that should be considered by faculty planning on teaching a survey course in Old Testament and by students interested in learning about the subject.

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***Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey.* Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 336 pages. Paperback, \$19.99.**

One cannot help but applaud the goal of any work that attempts to make theology practical. To that end, the stated goal of this work is to compose a volume that combines the interests in “academic study of the Bible with a passionate commitment to making this scholarship of use to the church” (15). The work seeks to accomplish this by providing “biblical interpreters with examples of best interpretive practice” (17). Overall, that goal has been accomplished. This volume is a resource for students and pastors interested in rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

The articles in this work are taken from the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. The authors chosen are noted scholars and represent a variety of theological backgrounds and denominations. Vanhoozer admits that the various authors approach the interpretation of the text from at least three different perspectives, but sees that as representative of the discipline and a strength of the approach of this text. Some of the authors approach the text with an interest in demonstrating God’s hand in the authorship of the text. Others, according to Vanhoozer, focus only on the final form of the text, with little interest in the questions of authorship; still others highlight the influence of the text on contemporary believing communities (23–24).

The organization of the text is simple and effective. The book begins with an Introduction by Vanhoozer, who outlines the book and defines the point and purpose of theological interpretation of the Bible. Despite being the identical Introduction to the companion New Testament volume in the series, Vanhoozer’s chapter effectively defines the content, goals, and approaches of the work. Next, this work includes 36 chapters (with the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles combined into one chapter each) covering every book of the Old Testament.

Each chapter includes sections on the history of interpretation, a brief discussion of the content and the message of the biblical book, the role of that book in the canon, and a concluding section that focuses on the contemporary use of that biblical book in the church today or relevant theological issues that derive from the study of the book. Several sections demonstrate careful forethought in the organization, including the employment of the same author (John Bimson) for both Ezra and Nehemiah, and the assigning of chapters to scholars who have written previously in the field (e.g. Wenham on Genesis, McConville on Joshua, Throntveit on Chronicles, Bartholomew on Ecclesiastes, and Longman on Songs).

The authors demonstrate a solid, thorough approach to the text combined with an intentional focus on making the message practical today. The articles are well-researched with enough documentation and bibliography to focus interested readers towards further research in the field.

The brevity of the volume will likely leave serious students unfulfilled. Moreover, given the space parameters for each chapter, detailed discussions on themes and topics is not possible. Finally, the volume would be strengthened by the addition of a chapter presenting a general overview of theological interpretation throughout the Old Testament.

Ultimately, for the quality of scholarship presented, the scope of the text, and the affordability of a one-volume study, this book is a valuable asset for any student

of the Bible. It is a resource that will not just sit on the shelf; it is likely to be read and reread for interest and reference for a lifetime.

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***Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories.* By Steve Mason. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. 443 pages. Softcover, \$34.95.**

Steve Mason, Professor of History and Canada Research Chair in Greco-Roman Cultural Interaction at York University in Toronto, is an authority when it comes to Titus Flavius Josephus. He is the author of *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees, Josephus and the New Testament*, and serves as the general editor of the twelve-volume series *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*. His most recent work, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories*, consists of a collection of two papers (chs. 1, 9) and nine previous publications (chs. 2–8, 10–11) arranged into three parts: Part One, Josephus: Interpretation and History (5–137); Part Two, Josephus and Judea (139–279); and Part Three, Christian Origins (281–373). Together they form a unified work that addresses the relationship between reading first century narratives and reconstructing past history. The book concludes with a detailed bibliography (375–408) and three indexes: Modern Authors, Ancient Persons and Places, and Ancient Sources (409–43). There is, however, no subject index.

Part One begins with four chapters that deal with Josephus's narratives. In chapter 1, "Josephus as Authority for First-Century Judea" (7–43), Mason addresses "a fundamental problem in the use of Josephus's writings for studying Roman Judea, namely, his status as an *authority*" (7), and thereby concludes "the content of Josephus's narratives makes clear their limitations as mirrors of episodes in Judean history" (42). For him they are "artistic narratives and not manuals of factual nuggets that may simply be appropriated as historical facts" (2).

Chapters 2–4 serve to develop his approach. In chapter 2, "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus's Judean War in the Context of a Flavian Audience" (45–67), Mason addresses questions of audience, because knowing Josephus's Roman audience "matters for interpretation" (46). Mason demonstrates that Josephus does not "spell everything out, since . . . he relies upon prior audience knowledge and values," and as a result "we become alive to the possibilities of irony" (67). Thus in chapter 3, "Figured Speech and Irony in T. Flavius Josephus" (69–102), Mason shows how all of Josephus's works shared in the language games of figures of speech and irony current in Flavian Rome. Thus Josephus, as an author, tends to distance himself from the compositions he creates. Mason concludes in chapter 4 with "Contradiction or Counterpoint? Josephus and Historical Method," whereby "with some trepidation" (103–37) he challenges literary or narrative approaches that attempt to extract historical facts from Josephus's writings. Yet his aim is "to bring the burgeoning literary study of Josephus into direct engagement with the ongoing historical use of his writings" (134). For Mason "the abundant evidence of Josephus's narratives invites us to test them against various historical backgrounds" (137).

Part Two continues with four chapters that focus attention on first understanding that *Ioudaioi* \ *Iudaeus*, when used in the Greco-Roman literary world, was regarded as an ethnic designation that encompassed more than *just* a religious belief system. Thus Mason concludes chapter 5, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism:

Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” by saying that “the *Ioudaioi* remained what they always had been: Judeans,” and that “the Greco-Roman world knew no category of religion, no *-isms* denoting religious allegiance, and no Judaism” (184). Naturally, the consequences of this are important for Christianity in that “the *Ioudaioi* were understood not as a ‘licensed religion’ (*religio licita*) but as an *ethnos*, the followers of Jesus faced formidable problems explaining exactly what they were, and increasingly so as they distanced themselves from, and were disavowed by, the well-known *ethnos*” (184). He then moves to survey the Judean cultural landscape presented in Josephus’s writings in order to demonstrate why Josephus is not to be used as an author of history.

Chapters 6–8 focus attention on the Pharisees and Essenes as features of the “Judean cultural landscape” and ultimately describe the *literary* role they play in Josephus’s literature (3). On the one hand in chapter 6, “Pharisees in the Narratives of Josephus” (185–215), Mason demonstrates that Josephus portrays the Pharisees “as an occasional aggravation to the elite” (213) and essentially “has a general interest in ignoring them (even in *Antiquities*), only occasionally exposing them as examples of the demagogic type that he and his audiences deplore” (215). On the other hand in chapter 7, “The Philosophy of Josephus’s Pharisees” (217–38), Mason fulfills three tasks: provides a contextual reading of Josephus’s Pharisees as *philosophical school*, investigates the larger uses of philosophy in Josephus’s works, and examines the philosophical school passages in *War* (2.119–66), *Antiquities* (13.171–73, 18.12–22) and *Life* (10–11). In the end, Josephus’s portraits of the Pharisees are merely digressions in his overall literary point. Thus, “Josephus’s handling of the three Judean philosophical schools,” according to Mason, “should make us wary about using his descriptions of the Pharisees in these sketches for historical purposes” (238).

In chapter 7, “The Essenes of Josephus’s Judean War: From Story to History” (239–79), Mason reveals how the Essenes are “an integral part” of the story line in the *War* and “that understanding the way in which *War* uses the Essenes lays new obstacles before the Qumran-Essene hypothesis” (241). Essentially, *War* is about describing the character of the Judean *ethnos*, and Josephus “presents the Essenes as embodying the virtues of the entire nation” and having greater character than even the Spartans (260). In the end, Mason argues that advances in Josephus studies (like the one presented here) warrant a re-evaluation of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis, because Josephus appears to be opposed to much of what the Scrolls appear to represent when it comes to their identity with the Essene sect.

Part Three concludes the work with three chapters whereby Mason first applies his understanding of the “crucial term” *euangelion* (chs. 9–10) in canonical and non-canonical works, and then applies his methods for examining Josephus’s literary presentation of the Pharisees and Sadducees to the presentation in Luke-Acts (ch. 11). On the one hand in chapter 9, “Paul’s Announcement (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον): ‘Good News’ and Its Detractors in Earliest Christianity” (283–302), Mason argues that “Paul’s letters show him proclaiming The Announcement as his personal mandate” (301) that differed from the other apostles and that “Paul’s Announcement was evidently offensive, or at least seriously deficient, for it undercut much of Jesus’ own teaching and practice as his disciples understood it” (302). Only later does *euangelion* gain a more harmonized understanding of “good news.” On the other hand in chapter 10, “For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel’ (Rom 1:16): The Gospel and the First Readers of Romans” (303–28), Mason addresses the audience of the Book of Romans and “the peculiarities of Paul’s *euangelion*-language in the letter” (301,

327). He concludes that the audience is not a mixed audience made up of both Jew and Gentile because of the so few references to Gentiles in Romans (1:5–6; 1:13; 11:13; chs. 14–15). Thus the audience is solely a Jewish one to whom “Paul is unwilling to connect full-blooded Judean Christianity—of the kind that would maintain a traditional Judean regimen in spite of the death and resurrection of Jesus—with his *euangelion*” (325). Ultimately Paul’s use of *euangelion*-language is unique to him and his Gentile mission and thereby “not as meaningful to non-Pauline Christians” (328).

In chapter 11, “Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and Sanhedrin in Luke-Acts and Josephus” (329–73), Mason contends, “the hallmark of our time is a profound historical agnosticism” (329), which he appears to counter by focusing on “the new concern,” namely that historical “evidence only has meaning in context, as part of someone’s story. If we do not know what it means in context, we cannot use it for historical purposes” (330). Thus, Mason looks at the literary function of the chief priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees as employed by Luke (Luke-Acts) and Josephus (*War*, *Antiquities*, *Life*, and *Against Apion*) in their respective literary context before suggesting any reconstruction of history. In some respects, their portraits are similar. Both present the chief priests as “the traditional Judean aristocracy, who had supreme control of nation affairs from their base in Jerusalem”; the Sadducees have “a tiny base in the aristocracy,” deny life after death, and reject special traditions of the Pharisees; and, the Pharisees occupy a middle ground between the chief priests and the common people, maintain precision in obeying the law and evidencing great piety, and maintained a minority in Jerusalem’s council (327–73). In other respects, they differ. For instance, unlike Luke, Josephus is “an enthusiastic spokesman for the Judean aristocracy,” and he views “the common people with a combination of pity and contempt because they are vulnerable to whatever self-appointed leaders come along” (372). Ultimately, Mason’s concern revolves around how to glean from narratives information for an accurate “historical reconstruction.”

Although Mason appears to swing the pendulum concerning the historical relevance of Josephus’s works, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* is an excellent reminder that his writings are *not* historical records. The texts cannot mean something today that they did not mean to Josephus or his Greco-Roman audience. They are narratives that make selective presentations of historical events to address real social issues of Josephus’s Greco-Roman world, and that like the Greco-Roman historian, Josephus wrote artfully by employing figured speech and irony to present a perspective. Mason’s efficacious mastery of ancient Greco-Roman sources and his methodological approach to interpreting narrative literature serve to enhance his ability to solidify this one truism: Not all of our historical questions about Judean history can be answered through the writings of Josephus, particularly when it comes to understanding the beliefs, practices, and roles of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Mason constantly appeals to the literary aims of Josephus. *War* addresses “the question of the Judean ethical character,” because in Josephus’s Greco-Roman world “behavior issues from one’s innate character” (187–94). Thus, he describes and defends the character of the Judeans to explain the Jewish war with Rome. *Antiquities* is an anti-monarchal apologetic to point out that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely both in Rome and in Judea (90–92, 194–208). Thus, Josephus himself has no messianic expectation, though messianic hopes existed. *Life* is “a celebration of Josephus’s character,” “a cheerful and proud appendix

to *Antiquities*: ‘about the author’” (120–22), who “does not number himself among the Pharisees” and thereby remains detached from any one group (208–13). Mason rightfully argues that historical reconstruction must take into consideration literary aims of the author *before* any historical reconstruction. Yet, Mason’s suggestion that Paul’s *euangelion* differs from that of the other apostles will attract reaction as will his perspective that Luke–Acts is a second century text. Nevertheless, there are numerous nuggets to be gleaned from his overall methodological approach to answering his fundamental question: What is the relationship between reading first century narratives and reconstructing past history?

In summation, Mason challenges clearly several categories, while presenting a well-founded methodological approach for interpreting narratives. *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* is an excellent unified collection of essays, but it is not for the novice reader. Even for those familiar with some of the non-critical and even the more modern critical usages of Josephus, it might help to read first Mason’s earlier work *Josephus and the New Testament*, and then Per Bilde’s *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Works, and Their Importance* (Sheffield, 1988).

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1–3 John. By Robert W. Yarbrough. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 434 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.

Robert Yarbrough is Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. He is also one of the main editors for the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament to which he contributes this volume on 1–3 John. In his preface, Yarbrough provides six areas that would set his commentary apart from other recent commentaries on John’s epistles. In my reading, two of the six areas have especially significant and beneficial effects on his commentary. First, he reads the epistles of John as works of John the apostle and eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry. As a result, Yarbrough is attentive to connections between John’s epistles and the teachings of Jesus, as well as connections to the Gospel of John (ix–x). Second, he uses a variety of interpreters, ancient and modern, to inform his study of John’s epistles. His work therefore points us to insights from previous interpreters and gives a sense that he has not isolated himself in the midst of contemporary scholarship.

Yarbrough fails to note a third area that sets his commentary apart from others in the field. This third area is his engagement with biblical and systematic theology. Such engagement adds a helpful and welcome dimension to his treatment of John’s teachings at certain points. For instance, John makes some confident assertions in 1 John 5:14–15 that might sound like Christians can expect to receive whatever they ask for when they pray. Yarbrough proceeds to interpret these verses with an eye on the immediate context and on relevant biblical teachings on prayer (300–03). A second example occurs with respect to 1 John 2:2. This verse speaks about Jesus as “the propitiation for our sins” and those of “the whole world” (71). Yarbrough notes that 1 John 2:2 is often quoted in the theological debate over the extent of the atonement. He goes on to provide brief comments that provide his perspective on the significance of 1 John 2:2 for this debate (80–81).

In the comments above, I have already noted some of the positive distinguishing features of Yarbrough's commentary. I would add another feature that could be a plus or a minus depending on the reader. In a number of cases, Yarbrough attends to matters of Greek syntax that would be helpful for those with training in Greek. Most of his comments can be deciphered for someone with access to an intermediate Greek grammar, like Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*. In general, someone with little or no knowledge of Greek may be intimidated by these syntax comments and by the quantity of quotes from the Greek text throughout the commentary. I would add here that Yarbrough sometimes uses common Latin phrases in his discussion without translation or explanation. These may be challenging for some readers.

In terms of his treatment of specific points, readers will want to consider Yarbrough's comments about 1 John 3:4, 6. In these challenging verses, John asserts something to the effect that true believers do not sin. Unlike others, Yarbrough thinks the solution to the difficulty does not rest upon the tense or verbal aspect of the Greek verbs used to speak about sinning (183). Rather, John must be limiting his conception of sin in some way. The sins in view could involve "heinous rebellion" against God and be related to the "sin unto death" of 1 John 5:16 (182). I would not agree with Yarbrough here, but his arguments are worthy of consideration alongside of the cases for other solutions.

In my assessment, Yarbrough's commentary is a useful and welcome addition for those who appreciate his emphases. His work is clearly in the evangelical camp. It provides good examples of interpretive work that resists isolation from theological concerns and from the helpful contributions of a range of previous interpreters.

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Theological Studies

***That Scripture Might Be Fulfilled: Typology and the Death of Christ.* By Paul Hoskins. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009. 200 pages. Softcover, \$15.99.**

In this volume, Paul Hoskins aims to provide an "accessible introduction to typology" that will help demystify some of the "mysterious uses" of the Old Testament in the New Testament (xv). For Hoskins, the biblical writers demonstrate that in his death, Jesus fulfills a number of "types" found in Old Testament texts. To make sense of the New Testament portrait of the suffering and death of Christ, an interpreter must recognize that the biblical writers have connected their message to the witness of the Old Testament. Hoskins strives to demonstrate the enduring value of typology in the pursuit of this task.

In chapter one, Hoskins begins by acknowledging that there is "baggage associated with typology" and that "types and typology are widely associated with fanciful interpretations of the Old Testament" (18). In certain circles, typology can become a catchall term for bad interpretation. In this context, Hoskins maintains that a controlled, modest use of typology can prove fruitful for understanding the way the New Testament writers speak about Christ. He defines typology as "the aspect of biblical interpretation that treats the significance of Old Testament types for prefiguring corresponding New Testament antitypes" (20). In this scheme, "Events (like the Exodus), persons (like David), or institutions (like the Temple) are common

categories for Old Testament types” (20). These types prefigure and correspond to the later appearance of an antitype. This typological relationship rests on a high view of God’s providence in history where God both shapes the history of Israel and also inspires the Scriptures that record and interpret that history. Thus, the typological relationship is designed by God. In this divine plan, the antitype does not merely repeat or echo the traits of the previous type, but rather fulfills, replaces, and surpasses that original event, figure, or institution. Hoskins seeks to show that the meaning of these terms is built upon their use in the New Testament (27–30).

In an effort to “curb the excesses that have damaged the reputation of typological interpretation” (25), Hoskins suggests a number of interpretive controls that can guide readers. For instance, Hoskins argues that a careful study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is essential. Because typological relationships span the Testaments, the most convincing examples are ones supported by both Old Testament and New Testament texts. In other words, the biblical material “should produce convincing evidence for a correspondence” (25). Consequently, Hoskins argues that interpreters should put no more emphasis on a connection than is warranted by the biblical evidence. The identification of a typological relationship in the history of interpretation can also guide readers. In this respect, Hoskins presents the patristic period as a rich resource for typological interpretation, while noting some cautions. Returning to issues of definition, Hoskins points out the important differences between typology and allegory. He argues that in the church fathers, one can find examples of allegory, good typology, and also bad typology. Accordingly, contemporary interpreters should not collapse these categories and think of typology primarily as an allegorical endeavor.

After this introductory chapter, Hoskins examines specific examples of typology in the New Testament, beginning with texts from the Gospels. Hoskins first shows how the direct quotations of the Psalms of David in the passion narratives of the four Gospels point to an underlying David typology (chapter two). He next investigates the Old Testament texts that Jesus alludes to in his words at the Last Supper (chapter three) and also traces how Jesus is portrayed as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb in the gospel of John (chapter four).

In the last two chapters, Hoskins switches gears and examines the way the writer of Hebrews presents Jesus as the fulfillment of key old covenant institutions. Specifically, he traces how the writer uses Old Testament types to teach believers that they can enter into the true tabernacle through the blood of Jesus (chapter five) and how the unique sacrifice of the Messiah takes away sin (chapter six). Hoskins concludes that the writer “believes that God specifically designed the Tabernacle and its sacrifices to prefigure the better realities to come” (135). In these five chapters, Hoskins argues that a close study of the New Testament reveals a host of significant Old Testament types. For him, “the abundance of these types shows how abundantly God was predicting the climax of his saving work in Christ” (165).

Two important strengths of this volume relate to the sometimes neglected and misunderstood topics of typology and the Old Testament. In relation to an academic context, Hoskins provides a clear definition and illustration of traditional typology. Acknowledging that there are many ways to do typology poorly, Hoskins outlines the primary elements of the approach and offers a set of reflective controls for how to practice it responsibly. He strives to stay within the bounds that the New Testament writers set in finding and examining the relationship between types and

antitypes. This typological modesty is instructive and should ease the apprehensions of some who have reacted to exaggerated caricatures of the approach.

In relation to a church context, Hoskins outlines the way that a pastor or teacher could recover the riches of the Old Testament for the interpretation of the New Testament. His chapters discuss at length significant New Testament texts that are frequently neglected due to their pervasive use of the Old Testament (e.g., Heb 8–10). Further, Hoskins sketches the context of several broad Old Testament themes (e.g. the old covenant sacrificial system). These expositions in particular will equip pastors with a framework that can help them lead their congregations in thinking about their practice of the Lord's Supper. Hoskins also supplies a few sets of texts that readers can use in reflecting on the significance of Christ's death during the Easter season (189–90). These elements serve one of Hoskins' goals in writing, namely, to aid believers in their Bible reading and to encourage them in their worship.

One area where this volume might be strengthened relates to the understanding and identification of types in Old Testament texts. Though Hoskins helpfully highlights the way that types are identified by Jesus and the New Testament writers, there may also be room for reflection regarding the compositional strategies of the Old Testament authors. One might ask what role the Old Testament authors play in the way that types are originally portrayed. Is it possible that one of the reasons why a New Testament author has identified a person or event as a type is because an Old Testament author has portrayed it as such? For example, it seems that the Old Testament writers already view David as a paradigmatic figure whose life represents a pattern for the coming Messiah. Demonstrating that a typological relationship is a function of the compositional strategy of both Old Testament and New Testament writers would deepen the character of the connection. Even if only a few types fall into this category, it might be helpful to ask this kind of question more directly.

Moreover, many of the connections Hoskins notes between the two Testaments involve quotations and allusions. His arguments here might profit from further reflection on the nature of these intertextual connections and on the criteria for identifying and confirming their presence in New Testament texts. In other words, there may be a number of literary considerations that would complement Hoskins' cogent historical and theological analysis.

In sum, for the reasons outlined above, pastors and scholars would benefit from carefully considering the approach and interpretive work presented in this accessible resource.

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***Systematic Theology, Vol. 1. Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in light of the Church.* By Douglas F. Kelly. Dublin: Mentor, 2008. 680 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

In this volume, Douglas F. Kelly, a Reformed theologian, wants to construct a contemporary presentation of the doctrine of God based on the historic orthodox catholic tradition that the church fathers, medieval theologians, Calvin and his Reformed followers established. It is no wonder why Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin are Kelly's favorite sources. T.F. Torrance and Stăniloae appear as Kelly's most

reliable interpreters of contemporary trinitarian theology. With this work's special emphasis on the Trinity, it displays other interests as well, such as epistemology, revelation, covenant theology, and so on.

Chapter one, "Knowledge of God: God Reveals Himself," is a prolegomena in the study of God. Here Kelly presents the community of faith as the ultimate locus and authoritative interpreter of The Trinity. Chapter two, "Knowledge of the Triune God through Creation and Conscience," simply concerns the relationship between general and special revelations, but this chapter is not directly related to the doctrine of God. Chapter three, "Western Rejection of God's Testimony to Himself in Creation and Conscience," explains how the atheistic Enlightenment has kept people from speaking of God as revealed in creation and conscience. A meaningful and direct discussion of the triune God begins in Chapter four, "The God Who Is," where Kelly demonstrates his knowledge of Hebrew, parallel with his Old Testament scholarship. Kelly introduces Stăniloae's interesting explanation of why God is three in person, rather than two. The third person of the Trinity warrants "the sense of objectivity for the two by the fact that he keeps the two [Father and Son] from becoming confused within an indistinct unity because of the exclusiveness of their love" (275). Kelly does not favor some Western theologians' attempt to embrace the Palamite distinction between essence and energies and deification in the doctrine of the Trinity, although he reflects no intention to condemn the Eastern tradition at all. The Western distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity along with the identity between them is better than the Palamite distinction in preserving the validity of revelation of God in Himself in the economy. The Reformed concept of union with Christ through the real but spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist surpasses the Eastern doctrine of deification. This union with Christ keeps one from thinking of a transformation into the substance of God, although Orthodox theology never intended to teach that sort of pantheism.

Chapter five speaks of the divine attributes of God. Similarly, chapter six does not explicitly discuss the Trinity but contains very helpful critiques on the New Perspective movement. Chapter seven, "The One Lord Exists as Three Persons," is the first chapter that attempts to provide a biblical foundation of a theological formulation of the threeness and oneness of God in the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament. Chapter eight, "The Christian Church Thinks Through how God is One Being and Three Persons," speaks of the definition of "person" and the importance of *perichoresis* in the triune nature of God. Modern Augustinian scholars would not agree with Kelly's argument that the Cappadocians began their discussion of the Trinity from the threeness of Persons, whereas Augustine began with the oneness of the divine substance. In fact, Augustine saw the threeness of the divine Persons as a theological presupposition that had been handed over to him.

In chapter nine, "The Full Co-equality of the Trinitarian Persons," Kelly, following Torrance, is critical of the Eastern emphasis of the Father's monarchy within the Trinity. The alleged superiority of the Father weakens the Son and the Spirit's divinity, encouraging a subordination of their nature. Kelly agrees with Torrance that the Father's monarchy was not universally accepted as the official position of Eastern Orthodox trinitarianism. Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus asserted that the whole Trinity, not the Father, is to be the source of the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit are not passive recipients of their generation and procession respectively. They are sovereign subjects of their relationship with the Father (549). Therefore, Kelly sees a valid argument in Augustine's *filioque* that not only the Father

but also the Son should be the source of the Holy Spirit. This reviewer is curious about Kelly's response to the issue of the eternal functional subordination of Christ, a topic that has been debated among conservative evangelicals for years.

This reviewer personally enjoyed reading three of Kelly's lengthy appendices: "Feminist Theology and the Fatherhood of God," "St. Augustine's Psychological Analogies of the Trinity," and "The Differing Approaches of the Cappadocians and Augustine to the Trinity." In particular, he fairly represents Augustine's psychological analogies and the *filioque*. However, this reviewer questions why these articles should be separate appendices, distinct from the main discussions.

Kelly provides his excellent analysis and critical evaluations of Eastern Orthodoxy's doctrine of God by citing many lengthy primary quotations from the Greek fathers and contemporary Orthodox theologians. Kelly's careful citations show his readers that he is not simply providing proof-texts. This certainly presents an opportunity to confirm whether Kelly rightly reads his primary sources. In addition, some readers would like Kelly to engage in critical evaluations of Rahner and Moltmann, whose trinitarian theologies did not receive sufficient attention.

Unfortunately, this volume does not provide an adequate biblical foundation of each topic as one could find in Akin's *Theology for the Church*. Kelly's work is definitely not a systematic theology textbook for seminary students or pastors. This work lacks the pastoral implications of theological conclusions that Kelly made. It is more like a theological encyclopedia on the doctrine of God for theologians and professors at a school of theology. In spite of these few negative comments regarding the structure of this work, anyone who desires to study the doctrine of the Trinity should read Kelly.

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***Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study.* By James Leo Garrett, Jr. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009. 742 + xxvii pages. Hardcover, \$55.00.**

With *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*, James Leo Garrett, Jr. has written a book that rivals his own magnum opus, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, in its long-term relevance and utility. Indeed, there is little doubt that Garrett's *Baptist Theology* is the most important text to have been written on the Baptist movement in the last 100 years, and will probably retain that distinction for another like period. Every Baptist pastor should purchase this masterpiece and consult it often; every college and seminary professor should assign it to every student who enrolls in a course related to Baptist history, theology, or ecclesiology; and, every research scholar with a stake in Baptist history should consult this book regularly for its insights. With that clear affirmation of this book's essential status for the library of every Baptist theologian and minister, we now consider its method and contents.

First, regarding his method, Garrett draws upon his expertise as an historical theologian and his many years of teaching courses on Baptist Theology and Baptist Theologians at the Master's and Research Doctoral levels in writing this book. That hard-won maturity is evident in the depth and breadth of his knowledge of both the primary and secondary sources related to his subject matter. Each chapter considers the major theologians and theological movements within a particular sub-tradition, and a conclusion summarizing his findings is provided at the end of each chapter

(although not identified by a subtitle). Garrett balances carefully the need for both conveying historical insight and demonstrating historical sensitivity in his writing style. On the one hand, through careful reading, he attempts to let each theologian or sub-tradition speak on its own, demonstrating a rare sensitivity to allow the subject to speak through accurate compilation and selective quotation. On the other hand, Garrett models historical insight by explaining to his readers the deeper significance of the contributions made by our Baptist forefathers and by select Baptist contemporaries, but always with appropriate restraint.

Second, regarding its contents, the book is divided into thirteen chapters and additional conclusion. The chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning with the “roots” of Baptist beliefs and proceeding to detailed considerations of the English General Baptists; English Particular Baptists; Early American Baptists; Awakening and Missionary Baptists; Baptist Landmarkism; Baptists in Controversy; Biblical Theologians; Twentieth-Century Southern Baptists; Recovering Evangelicalism and Reassessing the Baptist Heritage; Incursions into Baptist Theology; Missions, Ecumenism, and Globalization; and, New Voices in Baptist Theology. Also provided is a list of abbreviations (necessary for keeping the bibliographical references from becoming too lengthy in such a comprehensive and well-researched text); a helpful glossary of important terms in Baptist theological discourse that was compiled by Dongsun Cho; a preface and dedication by the author; and, an index of persons. We will not attempt to summarize the contents of the chapters as that would result in the authorship of a small book. Rather, we interact with some of the more critical aspects of the author’s contribution.

Regarding the roots of Baptist beliefs, Garrett plants Baptists firmly in the broader Christian garden, highlighting widespread Baptist affirmations of the orthodox developments in Trinitarian and Christological doctrine made by the early church fathers and codified in the conciliar creeds. Garrett also notes the Baptist appropriation of such Reformation doctrines as justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. As for the much controverted issue of the relationship of seventeenth-century English and American Baptists to the sixteenth-century continental European Anabaptists, Garrett judiciously notes that the question is not about whether early Baptists read Balthasar Hubmaier but whether the Anabaptist “concepts of religious freedom, baptism, church discipline, and the rightful use of the sword” prepared the way for later English Baptist developments. Garrett indicates from original sources that Baptists personally and explicitly affirmed some distinctive Anabaptist doctrines while they rejected yet others (11–16). Similarly, Baptists affirmed yet transcended various doctrines garnered from the native British movements of Separatism and Independency. Garrett is aware of the fractious debates regarding Baptist origins but is primarily concerned with what history definitely has to say about the matter.

In his discussion of the English Baptists, Garrett rightly places the General churches first in his discussion, but fails to incorporate Stephen Wright’s recent groundbreaking research, which argues, compellingly, that the Particular Baptists most likely garnered the practice of immersion from the General Baptists rather than vice versa (35–36). Garrett also notes that Thomas Grantham, a General Baptist, authored the first treatise “which can be reckoned as a systematic theology,” a fact commonly overlooked by proponents of Calvinist theology (42). In his chapter on the Particular Baptists, Garrett fails to note that the First London Confession was organized along the lines of John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

(even as it incorporated the Separatists' *A True Confession* of 1598), but correctly notes that the first Particular Baptist confession expressed only "a mild form of the *ordo salutis*" (53–55). Garrett provides a fivefold indicator for identifying Hyper-Calvinism (89), by which he concludes that John Gill, in spite of modern defenders like Timothy George and Tom Nettles, "can hardly be removed from the ranks of the Hyper-Calvinists" (99). Garrett's conclusion that Gill's rejection of baptism as a church ordinance "would not be accepted by the great majority of later Baptists" may disappoint modern enthusiasts for Calviniana, but Garrett is doubtless correct (102).

In discussing the early Calvinistic American Baptists, this distinguished Southwestern Seminary professor considers not only their theological teachings but also their ecclesiology through the church disciplines published in the Philadelphia and Charleston associations. He also avoids a myopic Calvinist historiography through dealing with the American General Baptists as well as the consolidation of a dominant "moderately Calvinistic" or "moderately Arminian" theology in the ubiquitous formula known as the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (132). Garrett skillfully maintains a separate theological history for the Separate Baptists, who, though they adopted the Calvinistic Philadelphia Confession as the only one available to them, affirmed this did "not mean that every person is to be bound to the strict observance of everything therein contained" (165). Garrett, like other impartial historians, also accepts as genuine the report of John Ryland Senior's horrendous rebuke to William Carey that he should restrain his zeal for missions (169). Fortunately, Carey ignored such advice and with the collaboration of Andrew Fuller, among others, helped launch the first modern missionary society. Garrett considers the theological ruminations of the missionary Baptists as well as that of their Primitive Baptist and Campbellite detractors.

Garrett's discussion of Landmark Baptists exemplifies his characteristic deep reading of both primary and secondary sources, privileging the former while interacting with the latter with discernment. Unfortunately, Garrett states that Benaiah Harvey Carroll agreed with the Landmarkers "in denying a universal church," though it would be more accurate to say that Carroll was "delaying" its appearance (235). Garrett considers not only Landmark contributions, but also the ecclesiological ruminations of non-Landmark Baptist theologians in the nineteenth century. He concludes this chapter by outlining four effects that the Landmark movement had upon twentieth-century Southern Baptists (246–47). A fifth one could have been added to account for the popular though inappropriate use of "Landmarkist" as a means to denigrate those today who actually hold to non-Landmark but firmly Baptist ecclesiological positions.

Garrett's chapter on "Baptists in Controversy" outlines the battle between Campbellites and Baptists, and summarizes the battles that the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon engaged with the Church of England, with the Hyper-Calvinists, and with the Downgrade tendencies evident, for instance, in the theology of John Clifford. Garrett also provides a lengthy description of the problems created by the growth of liberalism in North America, holding separate and nuanced discussions regarding the theologies of fundamentalists, conservatives, mediating theologians, and liberals. This chapter in itself may be worth the price of the book as Garrett painstakingly listens to theologians often flippantly lionized or demonized by their opponents. In this chapter alone, Garrett demonstrates what it means to be a competent historical theologian even as he maintains his own theological convictions.

Another groundbreaking chapter, on Biblical Theologians, will be of especial value to those Baptists engaged in the discipline of biblical studies.

Chapter nine considers the influence of theologians such as Edgar Young Mullins, Walter Thomas Conner, Herschel Harold Hobbs, and Wallie Amos Criswell on Southern Baptists in the twentieth century. It also summarizes confessional statements and doctrinal controversies that have defined as well as fractured Southern Baptists. Garrett's expertise as an historical theologian also deserves notice in this chapter, as he knew many of the combatants in the various controversies, yet he always attempts to treat them with empathy and accuracy. Chapter ten considers the concurrent attempts of more contemporary theologians to recover evangelicalism and/or reassess the theological heritage of Baptists. This is a debate in which the current reviewer has been involved so a critique will be withheld. Chapter twelve is a wide-ranging essay that takes into account the missiological and ecumenical contributions made by various Baptists including Billy Graham and William Owen Carver. African-American theologians as well as far-flung global theologians receive treatment in a chapter that will prove beneficial in uncovering confessional discussions not properly appreciated in other parts of the world. In chapter 13, Garrett considers the contributions of ten "new voices" in Baptist theology, ranging from Christian ecumenist Paul Fiddes to Christian hedonist John Piper.

In the eleventh chapter, Garrett steps perhaps his furthest into an evaluative mindset by defining various "incursions" into Baptist theology. Having discussed three such "incursions" in previous chapters, he focuses here upon four others: Modernism, Dispensationalism, the English Christological controversy, and Open Theism. While this reviewer would perhaps agree with the definition of three of these movements as incursions, it is surprising to find Dispensationalism valued (or, devalued) as such (560). Garrett is more than aware of the developmental nature of all theology, including Baptist theology, so the temporal lateness of Dispensationalism should not be the only factor that necessarily identifies a theological movement as an "incursion." Indeed, according to the same logic, could not detractors identify Baptists' own primary principle of believers' baptism by immersion as an "incursion" into the greater Christian tradition? Again, could not the missiological focus of late eighteenth-century Baptists be identified as an "incursion" rather than a proper development from existing ground principles? While this reviewer might even agree with much of Garrett's theological critique of traditional Dispensationalism, orthodox Dispensationalist theology does not seem to deserve the proffered appellation, especially considering the unseemly company of clearly heterodox movements such as Modernism, Arianism, and Open Theism.

In spite of my rare questioning of Garrett's method and contents, the reader should be in little doubt that this reviewer considers Garrett's *Baptist Theology* to be the most important work available on a subject that needs renewed consideration, especially by its own adherents: Baptist Theology. As Garrett notes in his conclusion, while the Calvinist-Arminian debate, the Liberal-Conservative debate, and the reaffirmation of Christian and Reformation orthodoxy are necessary considerations, perhaps the most critical issue at the beginning of Baptists' fifth century of existence is the "state of comparative neglect or assumed irrelevance" into which Baptist distinctives have fallen among many Baptists. "Today's question may be whether Baptists hold to and clearly affirm and practice their distinctives" (725-26). Thus, with characteristic subtlety and grace, James Leo Garrett, Jr. has prophetically framed the contemporary question from the perspective of a grand historico-theological

narrative. May Baptists answer that question and its prior question, “What does the Lord Jesus require of His New Testament churches?” as well in the future as our illustrious ancestors have in the past.

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Historical Studies

***To Express the Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality of Anne Steele.* By Cynthia Y. Aalders. *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 40 (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008).**

In 1998, Tom Oden released a book about an important, but largely forgotten, American evangelical figure who had influenced leaders and established the direction of the entire holiness movement. He was shocked at how underappreciated and underreported her life and teachings were (incidentally, it was Phoebe Palmer). When the reader finishes Cynthia Aalders’s excellent book, he or she may wonder the same thing about Anne Steele. Called the first significant female hymn-writer of the modern period by Bruce Hindmarsh and the Baptist equivalent of Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and John Newton by Richard Arnold, Anne Steele (1717–1778) was “one of the most well-known and best-loved devotional hymn-writers of the eighteenth century” (2). In this book, Aalders seeks to dismiss misconceptions about Steele’s life and reintroduce her to a new generation of spirituality students.

To Express the Ineffable is Aalders’s thesis project written under Hindmarsh at Regent College in Vancouver where she serves as the Director of Admissions. Consequently, it is not primarily a biography but more an analysis of Steele’s theology and spirituality as observed in her hymns and poems and buttressed by her diary and personal letters. Aalders focuses on the areas of ineffability, suffering, and longing, arguing that Steele used her hymns to probe the divine-human encounter from both perspectives of doubt and hope. However, to accomplish her goal, Aalders works to correct biographical errors often associated with Steele.

The few historians who have dealt with Steele have often characterized her as a sullen and depressed woman. They refer to her mother dying when she was three, a horse-riding accident that left her invalid, and her fiancée drowning mere hours before their wedding. Aalders counters that Steele had a strong relationship with her stepmother in a loving home (she lived with her father and stepmother until she was fifty-two) and a strong heritage of Particular Baptist leaders. Her father, a wealthy timber merchant, supported her and even paid to publish her books of poems and hymns. As to the horse-riding accident, Aalders notes that Steele lived an active life and turned down at least three proposals of marriage, so she could not have been invalid. Aalders simply dismisses the story of the drowning fiancée, a tale she can trace to Joseph Ivimey but no further (not coincidentally, Ivimey grew up in the town where the poor man drowned).

In contrast, Aalders paints a picture of an educated, cheerful, and hopeful woman who approached her hymns from a personal, introspective, and honest viewpoint and was willing to confront thoughts of suffering and doubt. In this, she combined the structure of Watts with the thematic freedom of Wesley and the darkness of Cowper. Aalders argues that Steele’s ability to capture this feminine emotion so well at the cusp of the evangelical revival that celebrated such emotion made her

enormously popular and influential among important eighteenth-century Baptists such as Caleb Evans, John Ash, and Benjamin Beddome. Steele knew that human language could not capture God's glory, but felt a responsibility to use her gifts in a frail attempt. She confronted her experiences of pain and loss in her own life with her hope of eschatological perfection.

To Express the Ineffable is a gem of research for anyone interested in eighteenth-century Baptist life and literature. Aalders fills every page with exquisite footnotes of primary and secondary sources (including the personal correspondence of the entire Steele family). The book even contains a very useful index and bibliography. It is a must-have for students of this subject. For those interested in Steele herself, Aalders includes a wide range of carefully chosen verses and a facsimile of one of Steele's manuscripts. However, the reader should be aware that while the book is incredibly strong on Steele and her contemporaries, it is weak on Baptist history and theology. For example, she misses connections between Hanserd Knollys and Katherine Sutton, as well as Benjamin Keach and John Rippon. Most strangely, she assumes that because Steele attended a Particular Baptist church, she would have known the 1644 London Confession. The differences between the 1644 and 1689 confessions have been well-documented, and signees of the 1689 confession have admitted never to have seen the 1644 confession. This leads Aalders to a rather superficial understanding of Calvinism, which she neither validates in general nor explains how Steele would have understood this system (the theological discussion of ineffability leaves much to be desired).

Aalders also leaves some work for future exercises. Most importantly, she fails to place Steele's work on a timeline. Aalders notes, for example, the great impact of various deaths in Steele's life. She also notes that Steele wrote for personal devotion earlier in life, and only gradually shifted to congregational hymns. Unfortunately, she does not take any of that into account when using Steele's verse to validate theological observations. Also, Aalders touches on the subject of gender differences not only in the content of hymns but also in public perception and the ability to publish. Because this is a thesis, she understandably leaves that subject largely untouched, but it would be an extremely valuable subject to investigate in the future. Finally, Aalders insufficiently explains how and why Steele's work disappeared with time.

In summary, anyone interested in this subject or this period of history would do well to take advantage of Aalders's excellent research. In the process, he or she will learn to appreciate an interesting and important figure in the history of spirituality.

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***Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America.* By Barry Hankins. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 272 pages. Softcover, \$20.00.**

In this volume Barry Hankins, Professor of History and Church-State Studies at Baylor University, delivers a concise yet thorough biography of Francis Schaeffer, situating him as a central figure in the evangelical movement of mid-twentieth century America. In describing Schaeffer's life and work, Hankins argues that Schaeffer was often on the leading edge of major developments in American evangelicalism and that Schaeffer's greatest and most lasting contribution is not found

in his reasoned apologetic arguments but rather in his call for cultural engagement among evangelicals, an appeal which helped shift the movement away from the separatist ideals of an earlier fundamentalism and toward positive interaction with culture.

The opening chapters present the first five decades of Schaeffer's life in an engaging narrative style. Hankins recounts Schaeffer's conversion as a teenager and his subsequent education at Westminster and Faith Seminaries—experiences that ensured that young Schaeffer, coming of age in the midst of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, would land firmly in the fundamentalist camp, displaying a bent for militant separation from anything remotely resembling modernism. He then traces the striking changes in Schaeffer's attitude during his time working in Europe, as his interaction with the many non-Christian perspectives on the Continent caused Schaeffer to realize that stringent separatism was far less effective in evangelism and ministry than engaging people in rational discussion about their cultural worldviews and presuppositions. This transformation in Schaeffer's philosophy of ministry is most clearly seen in chapter three, which details Schaeffer's work and ministry at L'Abri. Drawing particularly on interviews with former workers and guests at L'Abri, Hankins includes numerous insightful and heart-warming anecdotes about this period of Schaeffer's ministry, stressing his emphasis on love as the "final apologetic" (72). This is the best chapter of the book, because Hankins considers L'Abri to be the embodiment of what he most admires about Schaeffer's ministry: cultural engagement and the apologetic of love.

In his remaining five chapters Hankins takes a notably different tack. Diverging from his earlier narrative style he investigates the balance of Schaeffer's life in a more thematic manner, exploring Schaeffer's worldview largely through the lens of his books and films. Chapter four, for example, launches into an extended discussion on "The Trilogy," three books which laid out Schaeffer's basic arguments for Christianity. Although perhaps too long, this chapter does provide a helpful overview of Schaeffer's views of history and philosophy. The succeeding chapters are similarly structured, alternately emphasizing Schaeffer's role as a progressive voice in American evangelicalism, his deep involvement in the battle for biblical inerrancy, his philosophy as expressed through his films, and his later gravitation toward Christian Right political activism.

The strengths of this volume are numerous. First, Hankins provides a great depth and breadth to his presentation of Schaeffer by drawing on an array of sources including Schaeffer's own works, the accounts of those close to him, lectures, correspondences, and interviews. Second, Hankins' prose, , makes this book an engaging read. Third, although his account is often laudatory, Hankins does not shy away from critical evaluation; for instance, he often notes Schaeffer's rather shallow grasp of the details of history and particular philosophies. He also discusses at some length Schaeffer's bristling indignation at criticism he received from historians George Marsden and Mark Noll.

While Hankins' writing is excellent, his abrupt switch from narrative style to a thematic one is somewhat jarring, and the second half of the book lacks much of the flow present in the early chapters. As a result the latter chapters, while still well-written, are a bit drier. They are also at times repetitive, though this is partially a reflection of Schaeffer's own tendency to revisit the same themes in his various books and films. Hankins also overreaches in his attempt to create a symmetrical framework for Schaeffer's life and thought when he asserts that Schaeffer's European ministry

was not indicative of a massive shift in perspective from his earlier fundamentalism but was instead merely a temporary interlude between the earlier and latter fundamentalist tendencies that bookended his life (159). Such a claim seems to dismiss the possibility that Schaeffer was capable of changing and developing his views, and simply ignores the human tendency to maintain numerous competing attitudes simultaneously. Nevertheless, these few drawbacks pale in comparison to the book's contribution to understanding a key figure in evangelical history.

In the final analysis, Hankins' work provides an excellent evaluation of Schaeffer's intellectual and philosophical legacies and their immense impact on evangelicalism. Moreover, it paints a memorable picture of the man himself, warts and all. This volume is accessible for any educated reader, and should be equally at home in a graduate or undergraduate classroom and in the personal library of anyone interested in the shape of mid-twentieth century evangelicalism.

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Pastoral Studies

***Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream.* By David Platt. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010. 230 pages. Softback, \$14.99.**

“Do we really believe [Jesus] is worth abandoning everything for? . . . Do you and I believe him enough to obey him and to follow him wherever he leads, even when the crowds in our culture—and maybe in our churches—turn the other way?” (19). These questions express the heart of *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* by David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills (SBC) in Birmingham, AL. *Radical* is a commentary on contemporary Christian culture in America and the disastrous consequences of conflating biblical discipleship with the American Dream. The work is a transparent testimonial of the author's own struggle to reconcile the gospel and “an American church culture where success is defined by bigger crowds, bigger budgets, and bigger buildings” (2). The core of the problem in Platt's analysis is that “we as Christ followers in our American churches have embraced values and ideas that are not only unbiblical but that actually contradict the Gospel we claim to believe” (3). As a response to this problem Platt challenges readers to hear and obey Christ, no matter what the cost might be.

The book's content is structured in nine chapters. Chapters 1–3 contrast the self-centered, self-reliant attitude pervasive in the American Christian culture with the Christ-centered, self-denying message of the gospel. For Platt, discipleship is a “radical abandonment to Christ”—an abandonment that means “giving up everything we have to follow Jesus” (12). The God-centeredness of the gospel demands dependence upon God by all who would seek to accomplish His purposes in the world (chap. 3).

Chapters 4 and 5 describe God's purposes for His people and the means whereby they are accomplished. First, Platt argues that “enjoying [God's] grace” and “extending his glory” constitute the two overarching global purposes of God (65). “God blesses people with extravagant grace so they might extend his extravagant glory to all peoples on the earth” (69). Second, the means of accomplishing these purposes is a multiplying community of believers (i.e., the church) in which each Christ follower leads others to follow Christ (chap. 5).

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the twin barriers of materialism and universalism that are undermining gospel-centered living among those who claim the name of Christ. Platt sees materialism as a “blind spot” within the contemporary church and likens its acceptance to the way slavery and Jim Crow prejudices were uncritically accepted by the church during that time. The final two chapters address unbelief (chap. 8) and call readers to specific, sacrificial responses in the areas of prayer, Bible reading, giving, mission, and Christian community (chap. 9).

Platt’s work deserves commendation in many areas. The book exemplifies a deep commitment to biblical exposition and a concern to lead readers to application. Although each chapter engages key texts on the issues in view, the book is not a running commentary on Scripture. Platt crafts his message with rhetorical competency, moving freely between biblical exposition, first-hand accounts of the underground church around the world, testimonials from members of his congregation, and probing application questions. While the material in the book is diverse, the author’s ability to organize it into a unified whole gives the book an accessible quality that almost all readers will appreciate. The accessibility and usefulness of the book within the local church context is further extended by the resources available at www.radicalthebook.com, the book’s companion website. (Here visitors can purchase a multi-week small group study and access free resources, including a free downloadable version of the first chapter and audio sermon files by the author that parallel the book’s content.)

Finally, Platt takes the simple and profound truth of the gospel and applies it with devastating precision to the American church context. While “the cost of discipleship is great,” writes Platt, “I wonder if the cost of nondiscipleship is even greater” (14). The book is not over-laden with statistics, but two Platt presents are quite memorable: (1) 26,000 children died today of hunger and preventable diseases, and (2) no less than 4.5 billion people on our planet are without Christ and, therefore, without hope in this world. In light of these sobering realities, Platt calls believers to recognize the gospel mandate to proclaim and demonstrate Christ’s love to the world.

Two items about what this work is *not* may be in order. First, readers will not find extended arguments or sociological studies to support Platt’s presuppositions about the status of the American church. He is content to illustrate his foundational claims with a few examples and move forward. Second, the work does not, nor intends to, set forth an exhaustive biblical theology on stewardship. Platt does acknowledge the limitations of the book’s scope and points readers to other resources. These issues, however, in no way undermine the substantive contribution of this work.

Do we treasure Christ above all? Are we willing to give up everything for Him and the sake of His gospel? These questions must be asked and answered if believers are to submit themselves to the Lordship of Christ. In final analysis, Platt has written a timely and beneficial work that is already being used by God to help believers and local congregations in the American churches rightly answer these questions.

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***Worldliness*. Edited by C.J. Mahaney. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 191 pages. Hardcover, \$12.99.**

There are no small parts. Even in the New Testament, the briefest appearances of some individuals often provide rich insight and even warning to the body of Christ. Such is the case with Demas. He appears as a companion of Paul sending greetings, along with Luke, to the church in Colossae (Col 4:14). Then he again emerges as one of several greeters in Paul's letter to Philemon (v. 24). With such a resume, the reader might expect to find him in one of Paul's later letters appointed as a church pastor or on some missionary assignment. Instead, Paul reports in his final letter to Timothy that "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim 4:10). This revelation of the true treasure of Demas' heart serves as a warning to all followers of Christ of the trappings and enticements of the world in which we live.

The danger of the love of the world, or worldliness, operates as the subject of focus for C.J. Mahaney and others in Crossway's 2008 volume, *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*. Mahaney, president of Sovereign Grace Ministries, authors the first and fifth chapters as well as functioning as the volume's editor. In the spirit of Mahaney's 2005 book, *Humility: True Greatness* (Multnomah), this volume provides a compact and accessible look at one of the most urgent areas of concern for contemporary Christianity. Though contemporary in look and feel, this volume, thankfully, has more in common with seventeenth century treatments of the same and similar topics by the English Puritans than it does with some of the modern misguided prescriptions for the "Christian life." In short, *Worldliness* is more Bible than just merely "biblically based," more like a well lit mirror that hides nothing than a well dressed window that distracts the eye, more Puritan than Pietist, more truth than experience, and more relevant wisdom from heaven rather than trendy street smarts.

Mahaney's first chapter functions as the theological foundation upon which the remaining five chapters and two appendices are built. Focusing on 1 John 2:15-17, which begins, "Do not love the world or the things in the world," Mahaney states that "the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world" (22). Since what constitutes the "world" can often confuse or mislead, Mahaney asserts that the world that Christians are forbidden to love is "the organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God" (26). How is one to know where he stands? Mahaney offers the following test:

Imagine I take a blind test in which my task is to identify the genuine follower of Jesus Christ. My choices are an unregenerate individual and you.

I'm given two reports detailing conversations, Internet activity, manner of dress, iPod playlists, television habits, hobbies, leisure time, financial transactions, thoughts, passions, and dreams.

The question is: Would I be able to tell you apart? Would I discern a difference between you and your unconverted neighbor, coworker, classmate, or friend?

Have the lines between Christian and worldly conduct in your life become so indistinguishable that there really is no difference at all? (24).

Mahaney continues, though, to note that often the conflict that ensues among believers when confronted with love for the world focuses wrongly on external standards. He explains that people either try to categorize worldliness as the violation of a specific set of universal rules on the one hand or people claim that any attempt to draw boundaries is legalism on the other hand. Both miss the mark as “worldliness does not consist in outward behavior, though our actions can certainly be an evidence of worldliness within. But the real location of worldliness is internal. It resides in our hearts” (29).

What is worldliness? Mahaney concludes that “it’s loving the values and pursuits of the world that stand opposed to God. More specifically, it is to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God” (27). He probes, “If you are more excited about the release of a new movie or video game than about serving in the local church, if you’re impressed by Hollywood stars or professional athletes regardless of their lack of integrity or morality, then you’ve been seduced by this fallen world (31). But Mahaney does not leave the reader without hope. Indeed, he provides the antidote to worldliness with this advice, “Do you want the world to lose its appeal? Then crowd out worldliness by filling your affections with the cross of Christ” (34).

Chapters 2 through 5 provide detailed assessments of “God, My Heart,” and “Media,” “Music,” “Stuff,” and “Clothes.” Chapter 6 faithfully brings the volume to a conclusion by examining the ways in which Christians now not in love with the world should, in fact, love the world in which they live (John 17:18). Here Jeff Purswell gives a review of God’s plan for the world and then encourages believers to enjoy, engage, and evangelize the world—seeing the world always through “the prism of Christ’s saving work on the cross” (170).

Worldliness is a small book with a message of eternal weight that reorients the mind. Like the literature of the Puritans, this volume serves to diagnose and probe while providing a remedy of hope for the internal battle waged by all in the twenty-first century. This is good as “the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

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