

# THE NEW ATHEISM



SOUTHWESTERN  
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

# THE NEW ATHEISM

## SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 54

FALL 2011

NUMBER 1

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Paige Patterson, *President, Professor of Theology, and L.R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism*  
(*"Chair of Fire"*)

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Oxford Study*  
*Program, and Director of the Center for Theological Research*

**ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Jason G. Duesing, *Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Assistant Professor of Historical*  
*Theology*

Keith E. Eitel, *Professor of Missions, Dean of the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions, and*  
*Director of the World Missions Center*

Mark A. Howell, *Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church Daytona Beach*

Evan Lenow, *Assistant Professor of Ethics and Director of the Riley Center*

Miles S. Mullin II, *Assistant Professor of Church History, J. Dalton Harvard School for Theological*  
*Studies*

Steven W. Smith, *Professor of Communication, Dean of the College at Southwestern, and James T.*  
*Draper Jr. Chair of Pastoral Ministry*

Jerry Vines, *Jerry Vines Ministries*

Joshua E. Williams, *Assistant Professor of Old Testament*

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**

W. Madison Grace II

*Southwestern Journal of Theology* invites English-language submissions of original research in biblical studies, historical theology, systematic theology, ethics, philosophy of religion, homiletics, pastoral ministry, evangelism, missiology, and related fields. Articles submitted for consideration should be neither published nor under review for publication elsewhere. The recommended length of articles is between 4000 and 8000 words. For information on editorial and stylistic requirements, please contact the journal's Editorial Assistant at [journal@swbts.edu](mailto:journal@swbts.edu). Articles should be sent to the Managing Editor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 22608, Fort Worth, Texas 76122.

Books and software for review may be sent to Managing Editor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 22608, Fort Worth, Texas 76122.

Please direct subscription correspondence and change of address notices to Editorial Assistant, P.O. Box 22608, Fort Worth, Texas 76122. Change of address notices must include both the old and new addresses. A one volume subscription in the United States is \$27. An international subscription is \$32.

*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (ISSN 0038-4828) is published at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas 76122. Printed by Branch-Smith Printing Inc., Fort Worth, Texas 76101. For the contents of back issues and ordering information please see [www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm](http://www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm).

## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL . . . . .	1
MALCOLM B. YARNELL III	
OUTRAGEOUS QUOTES BY NEW ATHEISTS . . . . .	3
INTRODUCTION TO NEW ATHEISM: APOLOGETICS AND THE LEGACY OF ALVIN PLANTINGA . . . . .	6
JOHN D. LAING	
THE NEW ATHEISTS: LESSONS FOR EVANGELICALS . . .	13
JOHN D. LAING	
SHOULD WE FEAR THAT WE ARE DELUDED? COMMENTS ON DAWKINS' <i>THE GOD DELUSION</i> . . . . .	29
JOHN B. HOWELL III	
THE "TERGIVERSATION" OF ANTONY FLEW: A REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF <i>THERE IS A GOD</i> . . . . .	45
JOHN D. WILSEY	
HOW TO DEBATE AN ATHEIST—IF YOU MUST . . . . .	55
WILLIAM A. DEMBSKI	
BOOK REVIEWS. . . . .	71

## *The New Atheism*

*Malcolm B. Yarnell III*  
*Managing Editor*  
*ctr@swbts.edu*

This issue provides an apology to the aggressive movement known as new atheism. Apologetics is a Christian discipline that bases its *raison d'être* on the biblical mandate and examples of Christian *apologia*. For instance, Paul in Acts 26 provided a lengthy *apologia* to that urbane ruler, Agrippa II, the last of the Herodians. Drawing upon his cultural and religious history, the apostle quickly came to the focus of his *apologia*, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his own life-changing encounter with the Resurrected One. Paul's understanding of apologetics was not merely rational, though it was that, but also relational, personally and affectively, and its rational-relational aspects found their fulcrum in the gospel.

Similarly, in this issue of *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, this seminary's leading apologists bring both pristine logic and personal affection to their God-given task. Apologetics, which Southwestern Seminary places within philosophical and ethical studies, has an important position among the classical theological disciplines. Biblical studies consider the foundation of the faith; theological studies offer critical reflection on the communication of the faith from Scripture; preaching and pastoral studies, as well as missions and evangelism, dwell upon the proper communication of the faith. If the purpose of apologetics is to defend the faith, the place of apologetics is to come alongside the preacher, the evangelist, and the missionary in offering a reason to those outside the community why the Christian faith is believable and preferable.

Each of the authors in this volume exemplify why and how apologetics functions. For instance, John Laing, of Southwestern's Harvard School, has not only completed the huge task of bringing these essays together, but he has contributed two fine articles himself. The first uses the legacy of Alvin Plantinga as a means to introduce the subject of new atheism and how Southwestern's apologists have chosen to address it. His second essay describes how evangelicals ought to engage the new atheists with subtlety and empathy. He concludes, with a superb blend of rationality and relationality, "Apologetics is both an intellectual and spiritual exercise and should always begin with prayer born out of love for the lost."

Second, John Howell interacts with perhaps the most venomous of the new atheists, Richard Dawkins. Howell's rejoinder exposes the irrational basis of Dawkins' atheism, meanwhile demonstrating how the various arguments

for the existence of God should be properly conceived and wielded. Where Dawkins is guilty of “a question-begging and reductionistic view,” Christians should provide a reasoned yet spiritually sensitive response. Howell concludes that the real problem for Dawkins is not reasonable but hamartiological.

Third, apologists draw upon both natural theology, which is limited to the general revelation of God, and dogmatic theology, which relies supremely upon the special revelation of God in Christ through Scripture. John Wilsey’s article demonstrates the capability of general revelation to convert an honest intellectual to theism, while also implicitly affirming that general revelation is not enough, for the special revelation of Jesus Christ is required for salvation. Antony Flew may have accepted God as a postulate after years of debating Christian apologists, but that did not mean he became a Christian. Something else is required, and this is where the disciplines of preaching and evangelism must step forward.

Fourth, Bill Dembski puts in writing a talk he has given in several venues. In “How to Debate an Atheist—If You Must,” Professor Dembski draws heavily upon the means of grace known as the Word of God to exemplify how apologetics can, through the Holy Spirit, become another channel of that divine means of grace. According to Psalms 14 and 53, “the fool has said in his heart that there is no God.” With his characteristically subtle wit, Dembski argues that there really are no atheists; there are just foolish people who “said” they are atheists.

Finally, there are a number of important book reviews that should be noticed in this issue, not only in the area of philosophy, but *inter alia* in biblical studies, theological studies, and historical studies. We begin with a series of “outrageous quotes” made by the new atheists themselves so that the reader can gain a sense of how belligerent the new atheism is.

As for the title, “The New Atheism,” let it be noted that atheism is not new, for it is as old as man’s rebellion against God. The new atheism is “new” only in the sense of its cantankerous desire to defeat belief in God in the public square. Atheism is not new and neither is its result: divine judgment on such foolishness. The new atheists will discover that the God they say does not exist will remain the same living God long after their vain attempts to build a godless civilization have collapsed into ruins.



## *Outrageous Quotes by New Atheists*

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 51.

“The only difference between *The Da Vinci Code* and the gospels is that the gospels are ancient fiction while *The Da Vinci Code* is modern fiction.”

Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 123.

“The nineteenth century is the last time when it was possible for an educated person to admit to believing in miracles like the virgin birth without embarrassment.”

Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 187.

“More generally (and this applies to Christianity no less than to Islam), what is really pernicious is the practice of teaching children that faith itself is a virtue. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument.”

Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 347.

“I suspect that the Binker [imaginary friend] phenomenon of childhood may be a good model for understanding theistic belief in adults. I do not know whether psychologists have studied it from this point of view, but it would be a worthwhile piece of research. Companion and confidant, a Binker for life: that is surely one role that God plays—one gap that might be left if God were to go.”

Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 390–91.

“It is time that we admitted that faith is nothing more than the license religious people give one another to keep believing when reasons fail. While believing strongly, without evidence, is considered a mark of madness or stupidity in any other area of our lives, faith in God still holds immense prestige in our society.”

Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 67.

“[I]f God exists, He is the most prolific abortionist of all.”

Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 38,  
upon citing percentages of pregnancies which end in  
so-called “spontaneous abortions”

“[T]he United States is unique among wealthy democracies in its level of religious adherence; it is also uniquely beleaguered by high rates of homicide, abortion, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and infant mortality . . . three of the five most dangerous cities in the United States are in the pious state of Texas.”

Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 44–45.

“[T]he biblical God is a fiction, like Zeus and the thousands of other dead gods whom most sane human beings now ignore. . . . [J]ust imagine if we lived in a society where people spent tens of billions of dollars of their personal income each year propitiating the gods of Mount Olympus, . . . where untold billions more in tax subsidies were given to pagan temples, where elected officials did their best to impede medical research out of deference to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and where every debate about public policy was subverted to the whims of ancient authors who wrote well, but who didn’t know enough about the nature of reality to keep their excrement out of their food. This would be a horrific misappropriation of our material, moral, and intellectual resources. And yet this is exactly the society we are living in.”

Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 55–56.

“It is time we recognized the boundless narcissism and self-deceit of the saved. It is time we acknowledged how disgraceful it is for the survivors of a catastrophe to believe themselves spared by a loving God, while this same God drowned infants in their cribs [after Katrina hit New Orleans]. Once you stop swaddling the reality of the world’s suffering in religious fantasies, you will feel in your bones just how precious life is—and, indeed, how unfortunate it is that millions of human beings suffer the most harrowing abridgements of their happiness for no good reason at all.”

Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 54.

“Speaking for myself, if the biblical heaven and hell exist, I would choose Hell. Having to spend eternity pretending to worship a petty tyrant who tortures those who insult his authority would be more hellish than baking in eternal flames. There is no way such a bully can earn my admiration.”

Dan Barker, *godless*, 170.

“Those who advocate a piece of folly like the theory of an ‘intelligent creator’ should be held accountable for their folly; they have no right to be offended for being called fools until they establish that they are not in fact fools.”

S.T. Joshi, *Atheism: A Reader*, 20.

“The kindly God who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us (all creatures great and small) and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight—that God is, like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in. *That* God must either be turned into a symbol for something less concrete or abandoned altogether.”

Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, 18.

“I should emphasize this, to keep well-meaning but misguided multiculturalists at bay: the theoretical entities in which these tribal people frankly believe—the gods and other spirits—don’t exist. These people are mistaken, and you know it as well as I do. It is possible for highly intelligent people to have a very useful but mistaken theory, and we don’t have to pretend otherwise in order to show respect for these people and their ways.”

Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 401n5.



“But I am not joking when I say that I have had to forgive my friends who said that they were *praying* for me. I have resisted the temptation to respond, ‘Thanks, I appreciate it, but did you also sacrifice a goat?’ I feel about this the same way I would feel if one of them said, ‘I just paid a voodoo doctor to cast a spell on your health.’ What a gullible waste of money that could have been spent on more important projects! Don’t expect me to be grateful, or even indifferent. I do appreciate the affection and generosity of spirit that motivated you, but wish you had found a more reasonable way of expressing it.”

Dennett, “Thank Goodness,” in *The Portable Atheist*, 280.

“Many people are good. But they are not good because of religion. They are good despite religion.”

Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, 248.

“Violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children: organized religion ought to have a great deal on its conscience. There is one more charge to be added to the bill of indictment. With a necessary part of its collective mind, religion looks forward to the destruction of the world. By this I do not mean it ‘looks forward’ in the purely eschatological sense of anticipating the end. I mean, rather, that it openly or covertly wishes that end to occur. Perhaps half aware that its unsupported arguments are not entirely persuasive, and perhaps uneasy about its own greedy accumulation of temporal power and wealth, religion has never ceased to proclaim the Apocalypse and the day of judgment.”

Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 56.

“Faith is the surrender of the mind; it’s the surrender of reason, it’s the surrender of the only thing that makes us different from other mammals. It’s our need to believe, and to surrender our skepticism and our reason, our yearning to discard that and put all our trust or faith in someone or something, that is the sinister thing to me. Of all the supposed virtues, faith must be the most overrated.”

Hitchens, on *Penn & Teller: Bullsh\*t!*,  
Season 3, Episode 4: “Holier Than Thou,” aired 23 May 2005.

“We have no more reason to believe Jesus rose from the dead than that a pot of fish did.”

Richard Carrier, “Why the Resurrection is Unbelievable,” in *The Christian Delusion*, 309.

## *Introduction to New Atheism: Apologetics and the Legacy of Alvin Plantinga*

*John D. Laing*  
*J. Dalton Havard School for Theological Studies*  
*Houston, Texas*  
*jlaing@swbts.edu*

Atheism is on the rise, or at least it seems to be. Of course, it may just be that we think this is the case because we are more sensitive to changes that have taken place in our own day. After all, the decade of the 1970s seems to have been just as friendly to atheism as our own time has been. It was in the 70s that prayer was taken out of schools, that *Roe v. Wade* claimed abortion a fundamental right of women (at least during the first trimester), and that atheism dominated the philosophy departments of most universities. Similarly, the era immediately following the Second World War could also lay claim to the title of most atheistic era, at least with respect to gains of atheism in the public imagination. The net effect of two world wars was to destroy the optimism in humanity found in liberal theology and to usher in a time of despair. The popularity of atheistic existentialist writings spoke to the masses in a way with which religion seemed unable to compete. At a minimum, we must acknowledge that Sartre and Camus (and Nietzsche before them) paved the way for the mainstream acceptance of atheism in later years.

Nevertheless, it still appears that in the last decade or so, atheism has gained a wider audience and its adherents have become more vocal and confrontational. It is hard to imagine a movie like Bill Maher's *Religulous*, a satirical, but patently offensive and in many ways, disingenuous attack on religion, being produced and enjoying a multi-million dollar premier and run in the theaters prior to our day. Other similarly offensive and insulting attacks on religion have followed, most notably the numerous episodes of Penn & Teller's *Showtime* blockbuster, *Bullsh\*t!*, dedicated to questions of religion and faith. In a particularly egregious action, Penn Jillette, the show's host, wore a helmet with a makeshift lightning rod affixed, blasphemed, and then dared God to strike him dead. The antics and tirades of professional comedians could be dismissed as publicity stunts or attempts to boost ratings with shock value, but unfortunately, their words and claims—hostility included—actually reflect the ideas and dispositions of a growing number of average Americans. In this issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, we

hope to examine the writings of the key intellectual leaders of this new brand of atheism, known, curiously enough, as the “New Atheism.”

The new atheism gets its name, not from the content of the arguments its proponents put forth, but rather from the attitude and approach with which it is presented. In fact, most of the arguments offered by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and others are not new, and are not even as sophisticated as when originally given by A.J. Ayer, Bertrand Russell, Antony Flew, J.L. Mackie, and others. The writings of the new atheists are characterized less by philosophical rigor and reasoned arguments, and more by “angry, sarcastic, and sloppily argued attacks” on religion generally and Christianity specifically.<sup>1</sup> The bombastic nature of the new atheist attack on religion has led a number of professional theologians and philosophers of religion to dismiss it out of hand as lacking seriousness and scholarship, and this, even though most of its key proponents have earned doctorates in science and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Still, it is a force to be reckoned with, if only due to the popularity of the books, many of which have been on the *New York Times*’ best seller list and atop the Amazon.com sales charts. For this reason, some Christian scholars have seen the need to engage their arguments with book-length treatments.<sup>3</sup>

In order to illustrate the dismissive and hostile attitude of the new atheism, as well as the outrageous claims sometimes made, a brief section of quotations from several of the key authors in the movement has been provided. Many more quotes could have been included, and editorial decisions were difficult to make, but the selections presented should be sufficient to give the reader at least a taste of what the new atheist writings are like.

The articles in this issue are not meant to address all of the claims and arguments made by the new atheists, but rather to meet some of the most outlandish and/or compelling, while offering some advice for engaging atheists in dialog. All of the authors of articles in this volume are deeply committed Christians and professors of philosophy at Southwestern Baptist

<sup>1</sup>Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds. *Contending with Christianity’s Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), vii.

<sup>2</sup>David Hart, “Believe it or Not: David B. Hart sees the New Atheism Going the Way of the Pet Rock,” *First Things* 203 (2010): 35–40. John F. Haught, “Amateur Atheists: Why the New Atheism Isn’t Serious,” *Christian Century* 125.4 (2008): 22–23, 25–27, 29. Peterson has given compelling reasons for remaining engaged despite the tenor of the discussion. Gregory Peterson, “Why the New Atheism Shouldn’t be (Completely) Dismissed,” *Zygon* 42.4 (2007): 803–06.

<sup>3</sup>Gregory E. Ganssle, *A Reasonable God: Engaging the New Face of Atheism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); R. Albert Mohler, *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008); Alister McGrath and Joanna Colicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007); John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). For a more scholarly analysis of the new atheism, see Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Berlinski, not a Christian, has also responded to the claims of the new atheists: David Berlinski, *The Devil’s Delusion: Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions* (New York: Basic, 2009).

Theological Seminary. All are concerned with equipping the church to engage the culture and respond appropriately to the challenges posed by critics of the faith. The reader will notice that there is significant overlap in several places. This should be seen as helpful in that it reinforces the points made and illustrates the unity of thought on these issues among conservative Christian scholars.

The reader may also notice that a number of the articles reference the apologetic work of Alvin Plantinga. Perhaps more than any other contemporary thinker, Plantinga has impacted the discipline of Christian philosophy and apologetics. Some have even claimed that he, along with a few others—William Alston, Richard Swinburne, Nicholas Wolterstorff, George Mavrodes, Arthur Holmes, Robert Merrihew Adams and Marilyn McCord Adams, to name a few—helped make Christian philosophy respectable.<sup>4</sup> His career has been characterized by ground-breaking work in both areas, and he has won the admiration of many philosophers, theist and atheist alike. His entire career has been dedicated to engaging the arguments of atheism at the scholarly level with the philosophical rigor of a logician, and so it seemed appropriate and necessary, in an issue dedicated to examining the latest incarnation of atheist thinking, to include a brief summary of his work and its impact on the discussion. At significant risk of oversimplification, it is my hope to summarize the main points of his contribution to the topic at hand.

It is perhaps best to think of Plantinga's work as including defensive and offensive apologetics. His defensive work has largely focused on two basic arguments against the belief in God. First, he has responded to atheist claims that belief in God is irrational or immoral due to insufficient evidence, and he has refused to accept the burden of proof to the contrary. Second, he has rebutted the argument that God's existence is impossible given the problem of evil. In recent years, his work has taken on a decidedly more offensive tone in his attack on the rationality of materialistic naturalism (at least insofar as the proponent holds to Darwinian evolution).

Plantinga is most famous for his response to the evidentialist argument against theism, in which the claim is made that one may only be justified in believing something on sufficient evidence. The classic version of the underlying principle was given by W.K. Clifford, who claimed, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."<sup>5</sup> The claim, then, is that belief in God is "irrational or unreasonable or not rationally acceptable or intellectually irresponsible or somehow noetically

<sup>4</sup>For example, commenting on the impact of Plantinga's work, Sennett writes, "Today Christian philosophers enjoy a *prima facie* credibility that we did not have just a generation ago . . . It is no longer the unspoken discipline-wide assumption that theism in general and Christianity in particular are intellectually indefensible and out of place in the academic arena." James F. Sennett, "Introduction," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), xiii–xiv.

<sup>5</sup>W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879), 186.

below par because . . . there is *insufficient evidence* for it.”<sup>6</sup> The idea is that persons can only be justified in believing in God if they do so because they have been convinced of His existence by some sort of evidence, and this, usually by means of an argument from the evidence or from basic beliefs. Plantinga questions the premise that belief works this way, and offers counter-examples to the claim. For example, we believe that other persons have minds, but we do not do so because we have constructed elaborate arguments to that effect.<sup>7</sup> Rather, Plantinga claims, we just believe in other minds, and are justified in doing so because it is reasonable to do so, and it is a belief which is proper for us to hold.<sup>8</sup>

At the heart of the discussion is the nature of “basic beliefs,” or those beliefs which persons justifiably hold without appeals to evidence or argument, and which form the base upon which all other beliefs are formed. Proponents of the evidentialist objection hold to “strong foundationalism,” which limits basic beliefs to those items or propositions which are self-evident or self-referentially true, or which are incorrigible. Plantinga has questioned such a limiting, and has noted that the requirement—self-evident or incorrigible or directly argued from such—is not met by strong foundationalism itself! He has instead suggested that belief in God is properly basic, that one may believe in God without any evidence at all, and that such belief is still justified, warranted, and acceptable. His position, because it draws upon the ideas of Calvin and other reformers, has come to be known as reformed epistemology.<sup>9</sup> That is, Plantinga has claimed that we are well within our epistemic rights to believe that God exists, even if that belief is not based on evidence or logical argumentation beginning with self-evident or incorrigible truths (though it may be based on evidence). Since he does not accept the requirement of evidence for justifiable belief, he also does not agree that the theist must accept the burden of proof; there is no presumption of atheism, contrary to Flew, among others.

Plantinga has also taken agnostics to task, arguing that suspension of belief is not an option. Beginning with Anselm’s ontological argument, which argues that God must exist in reality because He exists in the mind as

<sup>6</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Plantinga developed the argument in several places, but most obviously in the work entitled, *God and Other Minds*. Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup>Plantinga writes, “belief in other minds and belief in God are in the same boat when it comes to justification, and a person can be entirely justified in accepting either or both, whether or not there are cogent arguments for either from other propositions she believes.” *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>9</sup>Plantinga’s most developed treatment of reformed epistemology can be found in his trilogy of epistemology books published by Oxford University Press: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

an idea and existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone, Plantinga argues that the great-making attributes traditionally ascribed to God require one to either believe His existence is impossible or is necessary. He draws upon possible worlds semantics and modal logic in order to make his case. By definition, a proposition which is true in all possible worlds is necessarily true, a proposition which is true in no possible worlds is impossible or necessarily false, and propositions which are true in some possible worlds but not in others, are possibly true, or possibilities. Plantinga notes that God's greatness and perfection—something he takes all persons will agree are attributes of a God-being if One were to exist—require that He have necessary existence, since a being with necessary existence would be greater than a being with contingent existence. Thus, if God exists, He must exist in all possible worlds. This admission, though, has the consequence of disallowing agnosticism, which makes the claim that it is possible God exists. Recall, though, that in possible worlds semantics, if it is possible God exists, then He exists in at least one but not all, possible worlds. However, it has already been acknowledged that if He exists, He has necessary existence and must exist in all possible worlds, one of which is the actual world. In other words, if it is possible a perfect being with necessary existence exists, then He must exist. The agnostic must either accept that God exists, or he must move to the more ardent atheist position and claim that it is not possible that God exists, that belief in God's existence is illogical because His existence is impossible.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, though, Plantinga has also sought to answer the strongest logical argument against God's existence, the logical problem of evil, by appeal to what has come to be known as the "free will defense."<sup>11</sup> The logical problem of evil claims that there is a logical contradiction in simultaneously affirming that God exists, He is all-good, He is all-powerful, and evil exists; it is not possible that all four propositions are true. Plantinga rightly notes that this argument assumes that an all-good being must eliminate all evil and suffering that He can eliminate, and that an all-powerful being could eliminate all evil and suffering. He questions both of these assumptions. First, he notes that an all-good being may have many reasons for not eliminating all evil and suffering that He can eliminate, but grants that the end result must be some form of greater good. Second, he argues that an all-powerful being may not be able to eliminate all evil and suffering if He is going to meet that greater good. By way of example, Plantinga appeals to free will, and notes that it is possible that even an all-powerful, all-good God could not create a world where people are free and they always choose to do good.

<sup>10</sup>See *God and Other Minds* as well as Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). Since perfect ontology requires necessary existence, the only options available are that God exists in all possible worlds or God exists in no possible worlds—He either necessarily exists (must exist) or it is impossible that He exist.

<sup>11</sup>Plantinga's free will defense appears in *God and Other Minds; God, Freedom and Evil*; and in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).



(E.g., It is possible that it may not have been within God's power to create a world where Adam is free with respect to eating the forbidden fruit and he chooses to refrain from eating because whenever he is free, he chooses to eat). If this is the case, then the logical problem of evil fails as an argument against the existence of God as He is traditionally conceived. This means that the atheist must have another logical argument against theism. The atheist is clearly in trouble.

Plantinga moves beyond defensive arguments, though, to attack atheism and the presumed understanding of human development: naturalistic evolution. At its most basic, his argument is the claim that philosophical naturalism (i.e., atheism) and evolutionary theory (Neo-Darwinism) are contradictory; that one cannot consistently hold to both.<sup>12</sup> Of course, this is an oversimplification, but in Plantinga's own words, "My claim was that naturalism and contemporary evolutionary theory are at serious odds with one another—and this despite the fact that the latter is ordinarily thought to be one of the main pillars supporting the edifice of the former."<sup>13</sup> James Beilby has aptly summarized Plantinga's argument as three steps. The first step is to call into question the reliability of our cognitive faculties (memory, perception, reason, etc.) if evolutionary theory, unguided by God (or some other Intelligence), is true. That is, Plantinga begins by noting that if philosophical naturalism (natural realm is all there is) and Neo-Darwinianism (evolution by means of natural selection through random genetic mutation with selection toward survivability) are true, then there is good reason to suppose that the human mind has evolved so as not to produce true beliefs, but instead to function in a way that enhances survivability, and this very well may not include true beliefs.<sup>14</sup> While Plantinga goes on to argue that the probability our cognitive faculties produce true beliefs is low, given naturalism and evolution, he really only needs to show that it cannot be known, and this seems obviously true.

This leads to the second step in the argument, which is the claim that if a person accepts naturalistic evolution and that the probability his cognitive faculties evolved to produce true beliefs is low or inscrutable, then he has good reason to doubt the reliability of his own cognitive faculties! The third step clearly follows, which is the claim that the evolutionary naturalist should question the reliability of his belief in philosophical natural-

<sup>12</sup>Plantinga is currently authoring a book-length treatment of the argument, but it first appeared in his books on belief and justification. See *Warrant and Proper Function*, 194–237; and *Warranted Christian Belief*, 217–40.

<sup>13</sup>Alvin Plantinga, "Introduction," in *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism*, ed. James Beilby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>14</sup>"But if *naturalism* is true, there is no God, and hence no God (or anyone else) overseeing our development and orchestrating the course of our evolution. And this leads directly to the question whether it is at all likely that our cognitive faculties, given naturalism and given their evolutionary origin, would have developed in such a way as to be reliable, to furnish us with mostly true beliefs." *Ibid.*, 3.

ism and Neo-Darwinian evolution. Thus, Plantinga has demonstrated that the conjunction of philosophical naturalism and Neo-Darwinian evolution is self-defeating (or self-referentially incoherent), and this means that one cannot rationally accept it. But Plantinga takes his argument one more step (which I suppose would suggest that it is four steps)—he argues that the philosophical naturalist ought to accept Neo-Darwinian evolution, and this leads him to conclude that naturalism itself is self-defeating: “anyone who accepts naturalism ought also to accept evolution; evolution is the only game in town, for the naturalist, with respect to the question of how all this variety of flora and fauna has arisen. IF that is so, finally, then naturalism simpliciter is self-defeating and cannot rationally be accepted—at any rate by someone who is apprised of this argument and sees the connections between N&E and R.”<sup>15</sup>

It is our sincere hope that the articles and other writings presented in this volume are of help to the church and to individual believers in their own faith journeys, as well as their apologetic endeavors. Atheism poses a greater challenge today than it has in the past, but we may have confidence in the truth of God’s Word and in His grace to us. The life of the mind and the life of the spirit should not be divorced, and it is in this spirit of reflection, hope, and confidence that this issue is presented for consideration.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 12. N&E and R are references to naturalism, evolution, and the reliability thesis.

## *The New Atheists: Lessons for Evangelicals*

*John D. Laing*  
*J. Dalton Harvard School for Theological Studies*  
*Houston, Texas*  
*jlaing@swbts.edu*

### **Introduction**

In this article, I will argue that evangelicals have something to learn from the “new atheism.” While most seek to respond to Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and others with critical engagement and/or hostile retort, I will demonstrate that Dawkins, et al. have provided the church and Christian academics with valuable opportunities for self-evaluation, spiritual refinement, and academic development. Rather than merely attacking the new atheists for their views, we may profit from first considering the substance of their arguments and refining our own thoughts about God, faith, and the proper way to respond to unbelief. This process can aid theological development and clarify our view of the relationship between the academy and the church. It can thereby strengthen our apologetic and evangelistic efforts, as well as our own relationships with God. Specifically, we will see that the concerns raised by the new atheists are valid and worthy of an answer, that apologetic presentations should offer a sound theology, and that the new atheism has a spiritual component. Each of these truths has implications for how we approach the apologetic task.

### **Apologetics, the Ivory Tower, and the Church Pew**

First, our engagement with the new atheists can remind those of us in the academy that the debate does not merely impact the ivory tower. One of the criticisms lodged against the new atheists is that some of their arguments have more in common with rhetorical flourish than philosophical rigor. Perhaps the work that has drawn the greatest amount of such criticism is Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*. Two examples of scholarly responses should suffice to demonstrate the common nature of this critique. Alvin Plantinga, senior philosopher at the University of Notre Dame, refers to Dawkins’ work as “an extended diatribe against religion in general and belief in God in particular,” and goes on to offer the following critique:

Now despite the fact that this book is mainly philosophy, Dawkins is not a philosopher (he’s a biologist). Even taking this into

account, however, much of the philosophy he purveys is at best jejune. You might say that some of his forays into philosophy are at best sophomoric, but that would be unfair to sophomores; the fact is (grade inflation aside), many of his arguments would receive a failing grade in a sophomore philosophy class.<sup>1</sup>

Consider the comments of Alister McGrath:

*The God Delusion* is a work of theater rather than scholarship—a fierce, rhetorical assault on religion. . . . Dawkins seems to think that saying something more loudly and confidently, while ignoring or trivializing counterevidence, will persuade the open-minded that religious belief is a type of delusion. . . . [T]he fact that Dawkins relies so excessively on rhetoric rather than the evidence that would otherwise be his natural stock in trade clearly indicates that something is wrong with his case.<sup>2</sup>

But what Plantinga, McGrath, and other professional philosophers have not fully appreciated is that although Dawkins' arguments are weak (or "jejune"), they are nevertheless persuasive to many laypersons.<sup>3</sup> That is, while apologetics is a technical academic discipline, we need to remember that it impacts the average person on the street and in the pew. A cursory Google or YouTube search will reveal hundreds, if not thousands, of blog and/or video entries dedicated to perpetuating the arguments presented by the new atheists, and these are read and viewed by strong believers and unbelievers, as well as those we may deem, "the undecided."<sup>4</sup> There is often a disconnect between those of us in the academy and those in the "real world." In fact, some of my students have complained about this when required to read Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil* as a textbook.

I have typically assigned it in my apologetics classes because in a relatively short work, two of this most influential philosopher-apologist's arguments are presented in an accessible manner (his modal version of the ontological argument and the free will defense). It affords the apologetics student exposure to the academic discussion in the discipline without overwhelming him with material which is too technical or involved for the novice. While Plantinga's arguments are elegant, ingenious, and convincing

<sup>1</sup>Alvin Plantinga, "The Dawkins Confusion," *Books and Culture* 13.2 (2007): 21.

<sup>2</sup>Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 96–97.

<sup>3</sup>I realize that some could take issue with this claim, since both Plantinga and McGrath took the time to write responses to Dawkins' work and to address his arguments, but my point is that we often address rhetorical arguments with philosophical disputation rather than with rhetorical response and this can leave the average reader with a sense that the real objection has not been addressed.

<sup>4</sup>Of course, anyone who is truly undecided about Christ must be characterized as an unbeliever, but what I have in mind here is that group of persons who are not staunch atheists, but have not yet accepted the gospel.

to at least some scholars, many students complain that all of the appeals to analytical philosophy, modal logic, and technical philosophical jargon make the arguments virtually useless in pastoral ministry. After all, it is the rare instance that someone becomes convinced of Christianity's truth because he was shown that, on possible worlds semantics, he must affirm the truth of God's existence or replace his agnosticism with a hard-core atheism grounded in formal argumentation for the incoherence of the traditional attributes of God! It would seem difficult to find many, if any, converted under such circumstances. So while Plantinga has offered some powerful arguments, their technical nature can appear unhelpful to the masses.

Perhaps we can find solace in the fact that it is not only Christian academics who are guilty of this error. A similar disconnect occurs between atheist philosophers and their lay constituency as well. For example, Keith Parsons criticizes Alister McGrath for responding to what he calls, "messianic atheism," the idea that a utopian society dominated by peace and tolerance would result if everyone accepted atheism. Parsons complains that atheists simply do not make any such claim:

I know of no major atheist thinker who has said that the general adoption of atheism, even if feasible, would per se be *sufficient* to deliver mankind from oppression and ignorance. Unless McGrath can supply us with some substantiating names and claims here, it is hard not to suspect that he is tilting at windmills.<sup>5</sup>

But a closer examination of Parsons' argument reveals that he is here demanding an analytical rigor which fails to address the broader point, looking for arguments which present a relationship of entailment between acceptance of atheism and an utopian society, and we must grant that he is technically correct that none exist. This approach to argumentation is a common tactic of philosophers—to ignore or discount the power of suggestive argument because it does not provide for strong cause/effect relationships—on both sides of the theistic fence. But the fact of the matter is that often suggestive arguments do have a force that is not only convincing to the masses, but also carries some substantive weight. While McGrath cannot provide names of atheists who argue for an entailment relationship between acceptance of atheism and an utopian society, he can demonstrate that many have made a suggestive claim of this sort. In fact, many of the new atheists make arguments to this effect when they suggest that all terrorism, war, and destruction are the result of religious belief. For example, in the context of his discussion of the religious basis for Islamic terrorism, Sam Harris suggests that religion itself or religious thinking, no matter which religion is in view, is the culprit:

<sup>5</sup>Keith M. Parsons, "Atheism: Twilight or Dawn?" in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008): 53.

We live in an age in which most people believe that mere words—“Jesus,” “Allah,” “Ram”—can mean the difference between eternal torment and everlasting bliss. Considering the stakes here, it is not surprising that many of us occasionally find it necessary to murder other human beings for using the wrong magic words, or the right ones for the wrong reasons.<sup>6</sup>

When he is confronted with the atrocities of atheist regimes, Harris responds that those actions have nothing to do with the theistic claims (or lack thereof) or worldview of the perpetrators. Rather, he argues that the real culprit is fanaticism: “The problem with religion—as with Nazism, Stalinism, or any other totalitarian mythology—is the problem of dogma itself.”<sup>7</sup> He goes on to suggest that if all persons were liberal, open-minded atheists, suffering, which results from institutionally driven moral evil, would disappear: “Countries with high levels of atheism are also the most charitable both in terms of the percentage of their wealth they devote to social welfare programs and the percentage they give in aid to the developing world.”<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, more than one Christian apologist has responded to these claims that religion leads to terrorism by simply denying that terrorism must follow from religious belief, rather than responding to the force of the objection. That is, as a Christian philosopher, I can point out that an entailment relationship does not exist between theism and terrorism, and this would be pretty easy to make. After all, there is nothing inherent in belief in God that would lead one to commit acts of terror, but such an answer is hardly the case I would want to make. Instead, I want to demonstrate not only that Christianity does not *necessarily* lead to terrorist tendencies, but that Christianity, properly construed, *cannot* lead to terrorist tendencies. For his part, Parsons has not really answered McGrath’s objection and ironically, in the process has unwittingly discounted the force of the religious terrorism argument used by atheist apologists like Harris. It seems to me that this strategy of merely answering the specific objection raised is short-sighted because, while it technically refutes the claim, it also ignores the force of the argument. The individual who is not theologically or philosophically trained may not understand the finer points of the response, and thus, find the original claim persuasive. Those of us in the academy need to take note and respond appropriately.

### **Apologetics and Theological Fidelity**

Second, since apologetics often manifests itself in the popular culture, those who engage in it must be careful to employ its arguments in ways

<sup>6</sup>Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 35.

<sup>7</sup>Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage, 2008), 43.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.



which are theologically responsible and which present biblical truth in a clear and concise manner. The dangers of misinterpretation and misinformation are ever-present. By way of example, I will consider the widespread use of Pascal's Wager in popular apologetics. Christopher Hitchens, well-known journalist and new atheist apologist, was recently diagnosed with throat cancer and authored a series of articles reflecting on his experience battling the disease. He has apparently received a large number of letters related to the spiritual aspects of his situation. Some have callously wished him a happy eternity in Hellfire, but most have expressed an earnest desire for his salvation—both physical and spiritual. Hitchens has made it clear that he plans to doggedly maintain his atheism to the end (at least as long as he keeps his sanity, he has sarcastically noted), and this, despite the seemingly sound logic of Pascal's famous Wager, which many have utilized in an attempt to cause him to reconsider. At the popular level, the Wager is typically presented as a choice for the atheist between two options, with four possible outcomes. If the atheist remains in unbelief and he is correct, nothing will change, but if he is incorrect, he will lose infinitely (i.e., be condemned). If, however, he believes in God and is wrong, he will not have lost anything, but if he is right, he will gain something of infinite value (i.e., eternal life). When considered in terms of a decision matrix with unbelief resulting in either no change or substantial loss, and belief resulting in either no change or substantial gain, the rational thing to do is believe, and in fact, to remain in unbelief is unwise, irrational, and irresponsible! Hitchens' response has been to attack the Wager as denigrating the nature of faith and salvation, and thus, question its use in apologetics and evangelism. He writes,

Ingenuous though the full reasoning of his essay may be—he was one of the founders of probability theory—Pascal assumes both a cynical god and an abjectly opportunist human being. Suppose I ditch the principles I have held for a lifetime, in the hope of gaining favor at the last minute? I hope and trust that no serious person would be at all impressed by such a hucksterish choice. Meanwhile, the god who would reward cowardice and dishonesty and punish irreconcilable doubt is among the many gods in which (whom?) I do not believe. I don't mean to be churlish about any kind intentions, but when September 20 [pray for Christopher Hitchens day] comes, please do not trouble deaf heaven with your bootless cries. Unless, of course, it makes you feel better.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Hitchens, "Unanswerable Prayers: What's an atheist to think when thousands of believers (including prominent rabbis and priests) are praying for his survival and salvation—while others believe his cancer was divinely inspired, and hope that he burns in hell?" *Vanity Fair* (2010): 93. Sam Harris, another of the so-called, "Four Horsemen" of the new atheism, makes a similar point regarding the Wager and what is communicated about the nature of saving faith: "But the greatest problem with the wager—and it is a problem that

The complaint about the Wager's inadequate presentation of the nature of faith is not new. William James famously criticized it along these lines as immoral: "We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted willfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality: and if we were ourselves in the place of the Deity, we should probably take particular pleasure in cutting off believers of this patten from their infinite reward."<sup>10</sup> There are several ways that one could respond to James here, from questioning his confidence in his own knowledge of what the Deity should do (not to mention the hubris required to make such an assertion!), to requiring clarification of his reference to "believers of this pattern," noting that true believers are all the same.<sup>11</sup> But these issues aside, what is of greatest concern here is the presentation of the nature of faith and how it works. James rightly regards the idea of "believing by our own volition" as "simply silly," and unworthy of biblical faith.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that Pascal would concur, and anticipated objections of this sort. In his presentation of the Wager, he agrees that persons cannot simply choose to believe, but he identifies the inability as a spiritual problem, or a problem of the "passions," and not as a defect of the intellect or reason.<sup>13</sup> While the most reasonable response to the Wager is belief, people are not always able to act in the most reasonable way. It is at this point that Pascal's apologetic takes on a pastoral tone; the cure to the spiritual problem of unbelief is to begin with acts of piety which will diminish the passions. While Pascal, consistent with Catholic faith, focuses primarily on the sacraments as a means of sanctification or enabling belief, the broader point is one with which many modern evangelicals can agree. As one struggles with unbelief and opens himself to the work of God through acts of piety—Bible study, worship, personal devotion, prayer, Christian service, and charity—the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will create, enable, or strengthen faith.<sup>14</sup>

infects religious thinking generally—is its suggestion that a rational person can knowingly will himself to believe a proposition for which he has not evidence. A person can profess any creed he likes, of course, but to really believe something, he must also believe that the belief under consideration is true. . . . Pascal's wager suggests that a rational person can knowingly believe a proposition purely out of concern for his future gratification. I suspect that no one ever acquires his religious beliefs in this way (Pascal certainly didn't)." Sam Harris, "The Empty Wager," *The Washington Post*, 18 April 2007, [http://www.samharris.org/site/full\\_text/the-emp/](http://www.samharris.org/site/full_text/the-emp/) (Accessed 20 March 2011).

<sup>10</sup>William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans Green & Co. 1896), 6.

<sup>11</sup>James Cargile, "Pascal's Wager," *Philosophy* 41 (1966): 252.

<sup>12</sup>James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 6.

<sup>13</sup>Pascal believed that he had already demonstrated that no good objection to belief in God exists and therefore, the most reasonable thing to do is believe. Thus, the barrier to faith must be spiritual and not intellectual. He writes, "get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and yet you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions." Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimar (New York: Penguin, 1995), 124.

<sup>14</sup>For a contemporary discussion of Pascal's view of faith, see Virgil Martin Nemoianu,

The most common attack on the Wager is to claim that it gives little direction regarding which deity one should bet on (and hence, worship) and can be used to argue for belief in just about any god. This is commonly known as the “many gods objection.”<sup>15</sup> A variation on this argument, known as the “many practices objection,” notes that different religions often have religious rites and practices which are incompatible, and that this reduces the value of the Wager to nil. A somewhat humorous example of this kind of critique can be found in Richard Gale’s “sidewalk gods,” imaginary divine beings who reward or punish persons based on the number of cracks in the sidewalk they step upon during their earthly lives.<sup>16</sup> There could be a virtually infinite number of sidewalk gods, all with mutually exclusive requirements for proper piety, beginning with a sidewalk god who rewards for stepping on one crack and punishes for stepping on any other number, then another god who rewards for stepping on two cracks, etc. Such conflicting religious directions—whether conceived as to which being one ought to swear allegiance, or which practices one ought to adopt—leave the Wager unable to assign a probability of any value to one belief or practice over against any other. So, for example, in the Ancient Near East, followers of the Canaanite god, Molech, could use a version of the Wager to convince persons to sacrifice their own children at Megiddo, while at the same time, Israelites could use it to convince persons that following Yahweh, with His prohibitions against human sacrifice and requirement of animal sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, is the most reasonable move. While there is certainly a point to be made, the many gods and many practices objections fail to take the context and limited goal/function of Pascal’s Wager seriously.

The Wager is not intended to stand alone as an argument or to function as one argument for belief in God alongside other traditional “proofs” for God’s existence (e.g., ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, etc.). Rather, it is meant to serve two limited roles in apologetic discourse. First, it can serve as the culmination to a dialogue between a theist and non-theist *if and only if* the unbeliever has agreed that rational argumentation about God’s existence leads to a relative parity between theism and atheism. Immediately prior to his presentation of the Wager, Pascal claims that arguments for and against the existence of God cannot demonstrate their

“Pascalian Faith and the Place of the Wager,” *Heythrop Journal* 52.1 (2011): 27–39. Nemoianu notes that in Pascal’s writings, faith is not conceived as mere intellectual assent, but rather is the inclination of the will to love God.

<sup>15</sup>The articles and essays propounding the many gods objection seem endless. Some of the more notable and classic formulations can be found in the following works: Michael Martin, “Pascal’s Wager as an Argument for Not Believing in God,” *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 57–64; Antony Flew, “Is Pascal’s Wager the Only Safe Bet?” in *The Presumption of Atheism and other Philosophical Essays on God, Freedom, and Immortality* (New York: Harper, 1976), 61–68; J.L. Mackie, “Belief Without Reason,” in *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 199–216; Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 345–54.

<sup>16</sup>Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, 350.

cases beyond all doubt, though he thinks there are good reasons to believe. Second, it can serve as a beginning point for further discussion about the relative strengths of Christianity over other religions, a discussion which might include apologetics for the historicity of the Gospels or Bible, the veracity of the resurrection, or the triune nature of God. The Wager itself is not meant to demonstrate or convince one of the truth of Christianity, but only to show that it makes sense to explore religion further in order to possibly engender faith.<sup>17</sup> In fact, following his presentation of the Wager, Pascal offers numerous arguments in favor of Christianity, including appeals to the historicity of the Bible, personal experience of Christ, the antiquity of the Old Testament and the consistency between it and the New, fulfilled prophecies, the exemplary and unwavering lives and testimony of the apostles, and the teachings and person of Christ.

It seems to me that at least three things follow from this. First, the Wager should not be trotted out every time we engage an atheist and have a hard go of it. If the atheist is convinced that his worldview is more rational than theism, the Wager will not sway him and may very well turn him off. This seems to be the case with Hitchens. Second, the most common criticisms of the Wager are unfounded, as they critique it for results it was not intended to obtain. Just because the Wager does not help one decide which god is the best or which practices to adopt does not mean that it is virtually useless and unhelpful in the dialogue between believers and some unbelievers. All that follows is that it has a limited application. Third, since the Wager has a limited function and is susceptible to both misuse and misinterpretation, care must be taken in its use. The response of Hitchens to the presentation of the Wager in many of the letters he received serves as evidence of the lack of care and precision with which many of us engage in apologetics, theological discourse, and even preaching. Another example should make this clear.

A story that has become something of a stock illustration of the Christ's Passion in at least some evangelical circles is that of a father who works as

<sup>17</sup>Some proponents of the many gods objection claim that even here the Wager fails, for it relies on some specific claims about the nature of God. Saka notes that a generic god-concept will not work because there can be competing claims about the very nature of god. Paul Saka, "Pascal's Wager and the Many Gods Objection," *Religious Studies* 37.3 (2001): 321–41. See also the debate between Alan Carter and Douglas Groothuis over the goodness of God and the requirement that He be trustworthy if one is to bet on Him. Alan Carter, "On Pascal's Wager; Or Why All Bets Are Off," *Philosophia Christi* 3.2 (2001): 511–16; Douglas Groothuis, "Are All Bets Off? A Defense of Pascal's Wager," *Philosophia Christi* 3.2 (2001): 517–24; Alan Carter, "Is the Wager Back On? A Response to Groothuis," *Philosophia Christi* 4.2 (2002): 493–500; Douglas Groothuis, "An Unwarranted Farewell to Pascal's Wager: A Reply to Carter," *Philosophia Christi* 4.2 (2002): 501–08. Anderson, however, recognizes that the proponent of the Wager must make certain claims about the nature of God, something akin to the process involved in the ontological argument; there has to be some agreement between the atheist and theist over what a being called "god" would be like. However, he thinks this reduces the strength of the argument because it severely limits its use and application. Robert Anderson, "Recent Criticisms and Defenses of Pascal's Wager," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37.1 (1995): 51.

a drawbridge operator for the railroad (or some other similar hazardous occupation) in his community. As the story goes, the man's son followed him to work one day and, although he had been repeatedly warned of the dangers, was found to be playing amongst the gears of the switching mechanism for the bridge just as a train was approaching. The father is forced to make the horrifying decision to lower the bridge, save the passengers, and doom his son to a slow and agonizing death. This, of course, is meant to communicate the immense sacrifice of the cross, whereby God's Son died for the salvation of humanity, but the story is fraught with problems, the least of which is not that it fails to account for the active role of the Son in the passion.<sup>18</sup> Careless illustrations like this one have led many modern theologians to criticize the penal substitutionary model of the atonement as child abuse.<sup>19</sup> Such characterizations miss the mark partly because they too closely align the analogy of human father-son relationships to that of the first and second persons of the Trinity, and partly because they view the gospel as analogous to a pagan story of a father's sacrifice of his son to a malevolent deity. But this is a misunderstanding of the cross, which is a story of the self-giving of God in the person of the Son, and of the perfect union of His infinite justice, wrath, mercy, and love.

The point here, then, is that we must take care when using illustrations, analogies, or apologetic arguments to communicate or defend truths of the faith to unbelievers. Hitchens was presented with a very self-serving and dysfunctional, as well as unbiblical, view of faith by the irresponsible use of Pascal's Wager. It is unfortunate that he could see it while the well-meaning believers who wrote to him could not. It is our responsibility from God and before God to honor His Word by presenting it accurately and with integrity. When we engage unbelievers in dialogue and make use of apologetic

<sup>18</sup>Other problems persist: the son in the story dies partly as a result of his own disobedience, a claim we would hardly wish to make of Jesus; the father is depicted as conflicted regarding who to save, but the Son's crucifixion was part of God's will and plan before humanity sinned or even existed, etc.

<sup>19</sup>These arguments became most prominent in the liberation theologies of the latter part of the twentieth century, particularly in feminist and womanist theology. See, for example, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 1–30; Julie M. Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology: Jesus of Nazareth, European Women, and the Christological Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 50–52; Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 55–57; Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 151; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 161–67. However, such characterizations of substitutionary views of the atonement have begun to emerge in so-called "evangelical" writings. A firestorm erupted with the publication of Steve Chalke's *The Lost Message of Jesus*, largely because he suggested that the penal substitutionary view of the atonement is like "cosmic child abuse," and is devoid of love. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 182. Others in the emergent church movement (e.g., Brian McLaren and Rob Bell, among others) have made similar suggestions.



arguments, we should take care to analyze the theological implications of the arguments used, lest we present a misleading or blatantly false vision of the holy God we serve. While the desire to make arguments accessible to all is laudable, care must be taken to retain the theological substance and subtlety where needed, so that our defenses of the faith truly protect the integrity of our theology and our presentations of the gospel lead people to the one true Lord, one true God, and one true faith (Eph 4:5). The process of refining arguments will help the believer in his own theological reflection and devotional life by focusing his attention on the meaning of Scripture and the nature of God and will aid in evangelistic efforts with unbelievers by properly representing the good news.

### **Apologetics, New Atheism, and Spirituality**

Third, we must remember that while apologetics is an exercise of the mind, spiritual forces are at work; as the Apostle Paul says, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but rather against “rulers,” “authorities,” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Eph 6:12). This spiritual aspect of the new atheist assault on traditional religious belief (notably, Christianity) can be most readily seen in the ferocity with which it is undertaken and the vitriol used by its proponents. But apart from the seemingly self-evident nature of its ungodly and demonic basis, some rather clear examples of the new atheism’s spiritual component can be given, and this has implications for how we understand and address the movement. I will outline three here, two from popular culture and one from the academy.

Recent news stories featuring atheist complaints about the supposed preference for religion in American culture abound. From legal challenges to the inclusion of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance to complaints about prayers offered at public events and ceremonies, atheists are protesting more loudly than ever. Along with the more vocal approach to their position, many in this new generation of atheists are taking a more religious approach to their unbelief. There appears to be a burgeoning movement among atheists for a spirituality of their own. Consider the titles of two recent publications, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, and *The Good Book: A Humanist Bible*. Both attempt to address the need of the non-religious to have a religious life, the former by explaining the meaning of spirituality for those who deny God’s existence, the latter by feeding such a spirituality through the offering of writings similar in style and genre to those found in holy writ, but which have been mined from the works of secular philosophers.<sup>20</sup>

One rather curious development among the new generation of atheists is the rising popularity of the practice of “debaptizing,” in which atheists

<sup>20</sup>Andre Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, trans. Nancy Huston (New York: Penguin, 2007); A.C. Grayling, *The Good Book: A Humanist Bible* (New York: Walker & Co., 2011).



utilize a hair dryer to symbolically remove the holy waters of baptisms past. The seriousness with which persons participate in these activities is hard to gauge. While it is clear that some do so in jest, viewing the activity as something of a party-joke, many others seem to view it as helpful and even liberating. The most famous leader in the movement, American Atheists' legal director, Edwin Kagin, performs the debaptism ceremony with all the pomp and circumstance of a full-blown religious ritual, complete with monk-style robe and mock-Latin incantations. He does so with something of a wry smile, but also recognizes that for some, he is performing a deeply spiritual service. Lest we think this is all done in order to make fun of Christians with no real spiritual aspect for the atheists involved, we should pause to consider the numbers of Brits who actually paid money (£3 each) in order to receive de-baptism certificates from the website of the London-based National Secular Society (NSS) and petitioned to have their names removed from the Church of England rolls. According to NSS sources, over 100,000 debaptism certificates have been purchased, and the numbers are increasing. Said NSS President Terry Sanderson, "The growing amount of interest in the concept of de-baptism indicates that people are not just indifferent to religion—which has been the traditional British approach—but are actually becoming quite hostile to it."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the use of quasi-religious rites and ceremonies in order to express their (lack of) faith, some atheists have even sought positions of anti-religious spiritual leadership. Recent headlines told of a petition from some atheist groups to have an atheist commissioned chaplain in the United States Army. The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), working in cooperation with the Humanist Society, has asked each of the military service branches to consider allowing humanist chaplains to serve alongside their more traditional religious counterparts. According to the MAAF website, the humanist chaplains would function in much the same way and provide many of the same services that chaplains already provide; they would just do so as Humanists, rather than as Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists. Humanist chaplains would advise commanders on religious accommodation and religious issues in the area of operations that could impact mission success, organize secular alternatives to traditional worship services, provide counsel to service members, and serve as leaders at ceremonial events (e.g., weddings and funerals) for those service members who are not religious.<sup>22</sup> While some may balk at the suggestion of atheist chaplains, it should be noted that such already exist.

Harvard University has a Humanist Chaplain, Greg Epstein, and this fact alone illustrates the need of some atheists for transcendence and meaning beyond the pure naturalism of science. Commenting on the cover story in *Wired Magazine* entitled, "The New Atheism: No Heaven. No Hell. Just

<sup>21</sup><http://www.secularism.org.uk/debaptise-yourself.html> (Accessed 2 September 2011).

<sup>22</sup><http://www.militaryatheists.org/chaplain.html> (Accessed 22 September 2011).

Science,” Epstein notes, “But ‘Just Science’? Such language raises concern that the new atheism is cut off from emotion, from intuition, and from a spirit of generosity toward those who see the world differently. . . . Books on science . . . can less often say important things about what we ought to value most in life, or why. Science can teach us a great deal, like what medicine to give to patients in a hospital. But science won’t come and visit us in the hospital.”<sup>23</sup> Epstein hopes to offer a humanism that moves beyond the cold nature of a fact-based natural science, and the philosophical argumentation of the new atheist wars against religion. Following Humanist rabbi Sherwin Wine as his example, he hopes to convince both religious and non-religious alike that life can have meaning and people can have good reasons for being moral, even if there is no god.

What is of particular interest in these discussions is the religious nature that Humanism has taken on for so many. MAAF President, former Army Captain Jason Torpy, says, “Humanism fills the same role for atheists that Christianity does for Christians and Judaism does for Jews. It answers questions of ultimate concern; it directs our values.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Epstein notes that humanists, atheists, and secularists have held their own in the worldview arena and in debates with religionists, but have only produced an intellectual movement. This, he complains, misses a fundamental human need for community, love, and ultimately, transcendence:

We have articulated positions on a number of crucial issues, and defended those positions against all manner of unfair attacks. But now we need to sing and to build. We need to acknowledge that as nonreligious people, we may not need God or miracles, but we are human and we do need the experiential things—the heart—that religion provides: some form of ritual, culture, and community.<sup>25</sup>

To be fair, Epstein is not considered a “new atheist” insofar as he is much more congenial in his presentation, and he is even critical of many in the movement (or at least of the spirit in which they undertake their work). However, what I find interesting is the seeming new trend among atheists to express their spirituality, a trend that is also found among some of the key players in the new atheist movement.

Perhaps the clearest example is Sam Harris, one of the celebrated and self-proclaimed “four horsemen” of the new atheist movement. A neurobiologist by trade, he has written extensively about transcendence and spiritual experience, and has even suggested that atheists should develop something

<sup>23</sup>Greg M. Epstein, *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), xvi.

<sup>24</sup>“Atheists Seek Chaplain Role in the Military” *New York Times*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/us/27atheists.html> (Accessed 10 September 2011).

<sup>25</sup>Epstein, *Good without God*, 175.

akin to a humanist religion in order to meet this fundamental human need. I have noted elsewhere that this suggestion may be viewed as proof of humanity's need for life beyond itself and as contrary to the naturalistic worldview implied by atheism.<sup>26</sup> As a Christian, I see it as confirmation of the Bible's claim that humans have an innate need not only for self-transcendence, but for communion with God.

On his blog, Harris responds to some questions fellow atheists have had about his endorsement of atheist spirituality.<sup>27</sup> He recognizes that many religious people have had transcendent experiences and view them as confirmation of their beliefs, and many atheists have failed to have such experiences—some after having tried to do so in earnest—and see this as another reason to reject religion, but he believes there is a middle road. He argues that these experiences speak to the qualitative character of the human mind. What he seems to have in mind is this: transcendent experiences (which, curiously enough, may be reached through something akin to Buddhist-style meditation practices, among other activities) can have a profound effect on one's happiness, morality, self-awareness, and even understanding of psychology and neurobiology, and point to the nature of humanity.<sup>28</sup>

He questions the prevailing assumption among scientists that the total explanation of the human soul or consciousness is to be found in the physical operations of the brain (a view known as "physicalism"), pointing out that science is ill equipped to speak definitively about the nature of human consciousness. He sees spiritual disciplines like those utilized in most of the world's religions as attempts to understand and/or manipulate the consciousness, and views the scientific study of these practices as the best prospect for understanding this aspect of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

Harris notes that most, if not all, persons believe that they are more than a body; that the "I" (or self) is distinct from the body, and he contends that the recognition of this dualism by individuals is the source of virtually all problems humanity has faced. He proposes a spirituality which undermines this dualism, but which excludes traditional beliefs about religion and God.<sup>30</sup> He offers the Eastern practices of meditation as "a rational enterprise" by which destructive dualism may be undone, and suggests that it may be

<sup>26</sup>John D. Laing, review of *Letter to a Christian Nation*, by Sam Harris, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 51.1 (2008): 91–94.

<sup>27</sup>Sam Harris, "What's the Point of Transcendence?" 1 July 2011, <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/whats-the-point-of-transcendence> (Accessed 8 September 2011).

<sup>28</sup>He writes, "Our spiritual traditions suggest that we have considerable room here to change our relationship to the contents of consciousness, and thereby to transform our experience of the world. . . . It is also clear that nothing need be believed on insufficient evidence [i.e., religious faith and dogma] for us to look into this possibility with an open mind." Harris, *The End of Faith*, 207.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 208–10.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

studied by science and thereby incorporated into a total scientific picture of the human person.<sup>31</sup>

Harris' final paragraph of a chapter devoted to exploring the relationship between human consciousness, spirituality, and rationality is worth quoting at length:

A kernel of truth lurks at the heart of religion, because spiritual experience, ethical behavior, and strong communities are essential for human happiness. And yet our religious traditions are intellectually defunct and politically ruinous. While spiritual experience is clearly a natural propensity of the human mind, we need not believe anything on insufficient evidence to actualize it. Clearly, it must be possible to bring reason, spirituality, and ethics together in our thinking about the world. This would be the beginning of a rational approach to our deepest personal concerns. It would also be the end of faith.<sup>32</sup>

We can agree with his claim that humans have an innate need for transcendence and that a purely naturalistic worldview (represented by physicalism) is inadequate to fully capture this fact, but also disagree that his atheist spirituality offers a truly viable and rationally consistent and coherent alternative to the religious worldview. Nevertheless, we should take care lest we use this as merely an entrée to debate, for at the end of the day, Harris' appeal to transcendence, along with the other examples of atheist spirituality referenced, points to the spiritual nature of the new atheism, and this should spur us to address the movement not only on intellectual, but also on spiritual grounds.

### Conclusion

In this article, I have noted the importance of remaining positively engaged with the atheist critique as it is an increasingly important intellectual and spiritual force in our culture. In the section discussing apologetics as both academic and redemptive act, I noted that apologetics must be relevant to the populace, and therefore, ought to address the underlying concerns of the atheist argument as well as its details. It is no mere intellectual exercise, and the Christian apologist should not seek to simply win the debate on the finer points of argumentation. The discussion of Pascal's Wager emphasized that apologetic interactions must be theologically sound and sophisticated. It is imperative that the apologist concern himself with teasing out theological ramifications of his arguments. The examples of debaptism ceremonies, atheist chaplains, and Harris' atheist spirituality remind us that spiritual forces—both

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

positive and negative—are at work in the new atheism. A comprehensive Christian response should include prayer as well as argumentation.

Each of these issues speaks to approach, goal, and motive in apologetics. Our apologetic work ought to be both practically relevant and theologically responsible; we must answer the objections to religion generally, or Christianity specifically, at the scholarly as well as popular levels, and must do so with a view to a positive end. The goal should not be to win the argument alone, but rather to present the truth of the gospel in a way that is compelling, convicting, and transformative. In order to meet this goal, we must take pains to ensure that our motives are pure and that we do not divorce our apologetic endeavor from our theological reflection and evangelistic efforts. Perhaps an illustration will clarify this point.

Upon reading Epstein's defense of atheist morality and spirituality, my first inclination as a philosopher of religion and Christian apologist was to develop an argument which could be used to convince him that belief in God is a necessary component of a coherent morality, that his own desires for community, transcendence, morality, and service are really grounded in a subconscious belief in God (inherent in all human beings, but also instilled in him as a young boy growing up in a Jewish family). A corollary to this line of argumentation is that claim that atheist humanist morality is incoherent because it has no foundation and actually runs afoul of the Darwinist ideology normally at its base.

But it seemed to me that if I were to adopt this approach to engagement with Epstein and were successful at convincing him of this philosophical point, I may not achieve the desired effect. While I would like his realization that spirituality must be grounded in God to lead him to faith, it could have a very different outcome. Rather than turning to the LORD, he could simply acknowledge the logic of my argument and then cease his activities in helping others! He could say, "John, I see your point. A consistent atheist ought not care about the welfare of others—at least those with whom he is not already related and concerned—and since I am convinced that no god exists, I will live my life for myself; I'll simply look out for Number One, and the rest of the world be damned, metaphorically speaking of course!"

While I doubt that Epstein would actually respond this way—he strikes me as the kind of person who would rather live with the tension than abandon morality and service to others—the point still stands that any given atheist could respond this way to the moral argument for God's existence when it is used to question the validity of atheist morality and spirituality. The point I hope to make is this: it would be tragic for the result of my apologetic efforts to be someone's abandonment of charitable work.<sup>33</sup> I applaud

<sup>33</sup>I acknowledge that some may question this assertion on the grounds that Epstein's work is not grounded in Christ and therefore, improperly based, or on the grounds that my support of his work somehow affirms his false beliefs. However, it seems to me that if a secular organization gives food to the hungry and thereby prevents a child from starving to death, it does a good thing, even if the motives are not entirely pure. In one sense, no works are good

Epstein's (and others') efforts to offer solace and comfort to those who are hurting or need shelter, even if I disagree with the substance of his answers (since true solace, peace, and comfort are found in Christ). Here my motives must be checked. If my engagement with him is driven by my desire to see him come to Christ, then it is rightly focused. I am then obliged to choose my approach based on what will be most effective to that end. However, if my goal is simply to win the argument under the guise of evangelism, then I ought to rethink my use of apologetics. Apologetics is both an intellectual and spiritual exercise and should always begin with prayer born out of love for the lost. Even when engaged in defensive apologetics where we respond to attacks on the faith, our goal should be clarification of our beliefs with a view to strengthening believers and reaching the lost. The earliest Christian apologists recognized this connection between apologetics, theology, and evangelism, and saw the real enemy as Satan, not the humans with whom they contended and by whom they were persecuted. May our examination of the new atheism drive us to a greater depth of knowledge of God and the Scriptures and more robust prayer life so that we grow in holiness and increase in evangelistic effectiveness.

because of the wickedness of the human heart, but in another sense, it is a good thing to feed the hungry and care for the weak.



## *Should We Fear That We Are Deluded?* *Comments on Dawkins' The God Delusion*

*John B. Howell III*  
*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*  
*Fort Worth, Texas*  
*jhowell@swbts.edu*

### **Introduction**

The website for The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science offers the following mission statement:

MISSION: Support scientific education, critical thinking and evidence-based understanding of the natural world in the quest to overcome religious fundamentalism, superstition, intolerance and human suffering.<sup>1</sup>

While at first glance this statement seems rather innocuous, in fact Dawkins identifies virtually all religious belief with fundamentalism and sees it as mutually exclusive of the type of critical thinking he supports. In the mission statement, Dawkins is being uncharacteristically subtle. He campaigns against faith in all of its forms because “the teachings of ‘moderate’ religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism.”<sup>2</sup>

The most famous and well-read of Dawkins’ expressions of these ideas is his 2006 book *The God Delusion*. Since in many ways Dawkins serves as the spokesperson of the new atheism, in many ways *The God Delusion* serves as its manifesto. Dawkins is an eloquent writer when the subject is science, but although it contains scientific elements,<sup>3</sup> *The God Delusion* is not a scientific work. It is better classified as an attempt at theology or philosophy or ethics or an amalgam of all three, but as scholarship in these areas it is an abject

<sup>1</sup><http://richarddawkins.net/> (Accessed 23 August 2011).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 306. Further references will appear parenthetically. I doubt that I or any of my colleagues at Southwestern would fall into the “moderate” category on Dawkins’ definition. As with all terminology of this sort, the user of the language becomes the measure—thus Alvin Plantinga’s rather humorous treatment of the pejorative use of “fundamentalist” in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 244–45.

<sup>3</sup>Dawkins’ description of why moths will fly into open flames is eloquent and borders on beautiful. See Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 172–74.

failure. Dawkins' tone is so vitriolic that it will distract most readers who do not already agree with him from the argument he attempts to make, and this despite his hope that "religious readers who open [the book] will be atheists when they put it down" (5).<sup>4</sup> In fact, in places it seems that Dawkins is aiming more at inflammation than argumentation. This style of writing, however, is right in line with one of the major points of the book, namely that religious belief deserves no respect. Consider Dawkins' comparison of theology with mythology and the scholarly study of fairy stories:

The notion that religion is a proper *field*, in which one might claim *expertise*, is one that should not go unquestioned. That clergyman [a particular one interacting with Einstein] presumably would not have deferred to the expertise of a claimed "fairyologist" on the exact shape and colour of fairy wings (16).

Thanks in no small part to *The God Delusion*, Dawkins is a public figure, and a culturally influential one at that. Thus it behooves Christians and pastors in particular to be aware of the arguments found in the book (since no doubt they will hear these arguments from the culture and the individuals within that culture to whom they seek to minister), as well as to have some idea of how to respond. To provide the readers of this journal with both of these abilities is the purpose of this essay.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dawkins' Failure to Comprehend the Religious Mind**

One of the reasons that Dawkins' attempted assassination of religious belief, and Christianity in particular, should not be successful is his complete lack of understanding of religious belief. What Dawkins presents as true of religious believers *en masse*, and particularly Christians, is a straw man of which the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* would be proud. One way to respond to Dawkins' work is simply to clarify the Christian position and point out his mischaracterizations. The purpose of this approach is not to convince the skeptic, but rather the much more modest task of illuminating Dawkins' missteps in order to make clear the positions Christians in fact do hold. The fact is, Dawkins' mind and the Christian mind operate quite differently, and the way in which we think makes as little sense to him as the way he thinks makes to us. And, incidentally, this should not surprise us. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, fallen humanity cannot, apart from a work of the Holy Spirit, understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). We should not

<sup>4</sup>Perhaps Dawkins makes this comment tongue in cheek. He recognizes that to convert the religious is boundless optimism, given that "dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads are immune to argument" thanks to practices of indoctrination developed over centuries.

<sup>5</sup>For a book length treatment of *The God Delusion*, see John Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2007).

expect Dawkins (or anyone else outside of the faith) rightly to characterize Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

### “The God Hypothesis”

Dawkins defines the God Hypothesis, not in terms of any particular religious faith (all of which he finds absurd) but in more general terms which are “more” defensible, though only slightly: “there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.” Dawkins in turn says he will advocate a different view: “any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution” (31). While Dawkins’ definition of the God Hypothesis is a generally accurate description of theism, he fails to use it consistently. In fact, his characterization of the God Hypothesis as “a scientific hypothesis *about the universe*, which should be analysed as sceptically as any other” (my emphasis), is flawed because it fails to take into account the transcendence of God. Dawkins’ arguments are directed at belief in a god who is a part of the universe, not the transcendent God who is responsible for the very existence of the universe.

The problem here is Dawkins’ limited ability to think metaphysically. For Dawkins, all that exists is matter—his metaphysic is naturalistic and materialistic through and through, so the only god Dawkins can conceive of is one that would have to exist within the confines of the natural universe, and thus be subject to its laws and parameters just as we are.<sup>7</sup> In short, he cannot

<sup>6</sup>I am not suggesting that there is no type of evidence or argument that can bridge this epistemological gap, nor certainly that we should give up on an evidential apologetic. God can work through reason and evidence as well as through any other means. The work of William Dembski and others in the Intelligent Design (ID) movement is indicative of this type of effort. But as the reaction to ID of Dawkins and his colleagues shows, bridging this gap is quite difficult. Argument and evidence work best in confirming the truth of the gospel, not in establishing it. Dembski is referred to exactly once in *The God Delusion*, when Dawkins quotes Daniel Dennett, who calls Dembski simply “the American propagandist” (68). Certainly Dembski’s qualifications and accomplishments merit more respect than this, but this recognition will not be forthcoming from the new atheist camp, providing further confirmation of the gap of which Paul writes. On the role of evidence in apologetics, see Dembski’s “How to Debate an Atheist—If You Must” in this volume. See also William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells, *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* (Dallas: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2008); Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009); and Susan Mazur, *The Altenberg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry* (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>In an attempt to mock the sophistry of theology, Dawkins describes Arius’ denial of Jesus’ consubstantiality with the Father (Dawkins says God, but I will correct his imprecision for the sake of clarity) and queries, “What on earth could that possibly mean, you are probably asking? Substance? What ‘substance’? What exactly do you mean by ‘essence’? ‘Very little’ seems the only reasonable reply” (33). There are two possibilities here. First, Dawkins could be completely ignorant of the entire history of philosophy and metaphysics, such that the very language of “substance” makes no sense to him. For the sake of charity I will assume that this is not the case. The other possibility is that Dawkins cannot conceive of the possibility of

conceive of a transcendent being, and thus cannot conceive of God. But as Jesus informed the woman at the well, God is Spirit (John 4:24). Unfortunately, Dawkins never gives reasons to accept his metaphysical assumptions, and thus, his arguments against religious belief only make sense if one begins with the assumption that the God Hypothesis is false. Dawkins' claim that the God Hypothesis is monumentally improbable not only depends upon a misconstrual of the God Hypothesis, but relies heavily on his metaphysical assumptions, which rule out the truth of the God Hypothesis as a matter of course. This is a classic form of begging the question—Dawkins cannot reasonably expect us to accept his arguments if he includes his conclusion as one of the philosophical foundations of his premises.

No doubt Dawkins at this point would appeal to empirical data and evidence for his metaphysical presuppositions. But, putting aside the question of whether or not we have empirical evidence for the God Hypothesis or substances other than matter,<sup>8</sup> such an appeal again begs the question, this time in favor of a certain epistemology. For Dawkins, the only way human beings can know anything seems to be by inference from empirical evidence. At least this is the view of knowledge acquisition that appears to be an unquestioned assumption of *The God Delusion*. But this perspective simply assumes a strict empirical evidentialism without argument.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Dawkins seems to ignore a whole range of epistemological positions which depend upon the proper functioning or general reliability of a host of cognitive faculties in addition to that which evaluates evidence. Many of these externalist epistemologies (so-called because the necessary conditions for knowledge are primarily external to one's awareness) make a distinction between first and second order knowledge (knowing as opposed to knowing

divine substance, or Spirit. Now Dawkins is not the first to have trouble conceiving of Spirit as substance—there are no doubt materialists who are materialists because no other types of substances make sense to them. But Dawkins offers no argument for his materialism. Instead, he seems to take it as obvious that there is no substance other than matter. Unfortunately for him, those of us to whom the notion of Spirit does make sense have been given no reason to doubt our intuitions.

<sup>8</sup>Dawkins considers the testimony of religious experience, and dismisses it out of hand as either personal or mass hallucination (87–92). But he gives little argument for this improbable explanation other than his metaphysical presuppositions (if nothing exists but matter, if there is no God, then one cannot have experience of him), and believers in God have no reason whatsoever to accept them.

<sup>9</sup>Dawkins' nearsighted preference for evidentialism above all other epistemological options is nowhere more evident than in his visceral reaction to Richard Swinburne's statement that "There is quite a lot of evidence anyway of God's existence, and too much might not be good for us." Dawkins replies, "Read it again. *Too much evidence might not be good for us*. Richard Swinburne is the recently retired holder of one of Britain's most prestigious professorships of theology, and is a Fellow of the British Academy. If it's a theologian you want, they don't come much more distinguished. Perhaps you don't want a theologian" (65). Dawkins fails of course to recognize the value of anything but evidence, especially ignoring the value of faith (he instead views faith as an evil and misunderstands it as belief without good reason). Dawkins likely is able to make no sense of Jesus' declaration to Thomas that "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

that one knows). No doubt evidential evaluations are particularly helpful when it comes to confirming what one knows, but that does not mean that they are always necessary for knowledge *simpliciter*. For example, perhaps I am just constructed in such a way that upon viewing the grandeur of the Alps or Victoria Falls I simply find myself believing the God Hypothesis to be true.<sup>10</sup> If these epistemologies are plausible, then the one who accepts the God Hypothesis can appeal to these means independent of or in connection with any evidence he may possess. Dawkins appears to ignore blindly these epistemological possibilities, and insofar as the believer rejects his strict evidentialist epistemology, he has reason to reject Dawkins' metaphysical assumptions as well.

Furthermore, the believer has reason to reject Dawkins' contention that the God Hypothesis is merely a scientific hypothesis to be tested like any other. For while one may view the God Hypothesis in this way and test the validity of belief in it by means of evidence alone, unless Dawkins is correct about the acquisition of knowledge being so narrow, one does not have to do this. The way in which human beings actually acquire knowledge may belie Dawkins' assertion that "there is no reason to regard God as immune from consideration along the spectrum of probabilities" (54). Again, this does not preclude the believer from claiming that God does in fact serve as an explanation for much if not all of the natural phenomena observed by science in his capacity as Creator and providential Sustainer of the natural order. But one's belief in God does not have to be dependent upon the explanatory power of the God Hypothesis, for one has other avenues, other cognitive faculties which produce that belief, a belief which, if true, will satisfy the conditions for knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Dawkins contends that "in any of its forms the God Hypothesis is unnecessary" (46). While I think Dawkins is deluded about this, even if he were right, I would hardly be troubled, for the God Hypothesis being explanatorily necessary has little to do with its being true. I suspect that very few of those who claim to believe in God also would claim that they do so because the hypothesis of God best explains some set of data. Instead, the vast majority of testimonies concerning religious belief appeal not to the explanatory

<sup>10</sup>John Calvin calls this belief producing faculty the *sensus divinitatis*. For accounts of the production of religious belief of this sort, see Alvin Plantinga's aforementioned *Warranted Christian Belief*, as well as his *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For similar epistemological accounts, see C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), and William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), among others. This, again, is not to say that one cannot know the God Hypothesis on the basis of evidence—but it may be the case that one need not know the God Hypothesis on the basis of evidence. That is, there may be other avenues for arriving at this knowledge. Belief in God may be over determined. Appeals to evidence are no doubt particularly helpful in apologetics, but unnecessary in the grounding of belief.

<sup>11</sup>For the Christian, these faculties will produce beliefs above and beyond the God Hypothesis, including belief in the Trinity, the incarnation, and the atonement. Here things like Scripture, faith, and the work of the Holy Spirit come into play epistemologically.

power of the God Hypothesis, but to a particular experience of God Himself, and an experience that is usually linked to the work of the Spirit and the revelation of God contained in Scripture. This appeal is only problematic if one assumes a strict evidential epistemology as Dawkins does—such an assumption creates a necessary and exclusive connection between explanatory power and truth which religious believers should not allow to go unquestioned. While those of us who believe in God think that the idea of God is in fact explanatorily powerful, likely few of us believe in Him because of the explanatory power of the idea of Him. Instead, the explanatory power serves as a confirmation of our belief acquired by other means.

### Arguments for God's Existence

While the believer in the God Hypothesis may appeal to evidence for his belief, he need not do so in order to be justified in believing. But if one wishes to appeal to evidence in support of the God Hypothesis in order to justify his belief to others, the traditional arguments for God's existence are a good place to begin. Dawkins dismisses all of Aquinas' Five Ways and Anselm's famous ontological argument in a total of nine pages. He dismisses any argument from Scripture in five pages, concluding with the claim that the Gospels are religious fiction. I do not have the space to deal with all of Dawkins' "arguments" in detail, but I do feel compelled to say a few things about his treatment of Anselm, Scripture, and Pascal's Wager.<sup>12</sup>

**Anselm's Ontological Argument.** Unfortunately, about the only thing Dawkins gets right about Anselm's famous ontological argument is Anselm's name, the phrase by which one usually refers to the argument, and the date of publication of the *Proslogion*, the work in which one finds the various formulations of the argument. Dawkins commits a major gaffe in providing the context of the argument. He writes, "An odd aspect of Anselm's argument is that it was originally addressed not to humans but to God himself, in the form of a prayer (you'd think that any entity capable of listening to a prayer would need no convincing of his own existence)" (80). Dawkins does not seem to be writing tongue-in-cheek, and, most disconcertingly, no doubt many of his readers simply take this characterization as the gospel truth. While the context of the argument is indeed a prayer to God (a fact often overlooked in study of the ontological argument, and unfortunately so), Anselm's purpose is not to convince God that He exists (which would of course be absurd); in fact, the purpose is not even to convince Anselm or anyone else that God exists (although the argument could do this). Instead, Anselm follows closely the medieval program of philosophical theology: faith seeking understanding. Anselm believes and knows God exists, but wants a deeper knowledge and understanding of God, and so prays and asks God for illumination, for a single argument that will teach him not only more about God's existence, but

<sup>12</sup>For those particularly interested in the Cosmological or Design Arguments, I commend Dembski's work mentioned above, as well as William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument: From Plato to Leibniz* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1980).



about his nature and attributes. In an attempt to find this argument, Anselm adopts “the role of someone trying to raise his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes.”<sup>13</sup>

Anselm’s argument is an a priori argument, one which does not depend upon experience or empirical observation in its premises. From the idea of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” Anselm concludes that God must exist. For when someone hears the phrase “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” uttered, he understands what it means and that thing exists in his understanding simply because he understands it. But a perfect being could not exist only in the understanding, for one can easily conceive of that perfect being existing in the real world as well, which would be a being greater than the one existing in the understanding. So the being existing in the understanding would not qualify as the greatest conceivable being. Anselm’s argument has earned the respect even of many who reject it.<sup>14</sup>

As to the argument itself, Dawkins describes it as “infantile” and “aesthetically offensive.” These comments, along with a restatement of his commitment to an empirical evidentialism (he notes his response is “an automatic, deep suspicion of any line of reasoning that reached such a significant conclusion without feeding in a single piece of data from the real world”) (82), serve as his major responses to the argument. This suspicion, he also notes, “Perhaps . . . indicates no more than that I am a scientist rather than a philosopher” (82). So once again, Dawkins’ major concern is the absence of empiricism, evidentialism, and the application of the scientific method. But for those of us who are more theologically or philosophically minded, this concern holds little weight.

To be fair, Dawkins does mention, in a single paragraph, the criticisms of Hume and Kant. But he treats these criticisms as obviously decisive. Even if Kant’s and Hume’s criticisms do apply to the version of Anselm’s argument mentioned above (which is debatable), they may not apply to another version, which depends upon the concept of necessary existence, not existence, as a perfection. In fact, it is this modal version of the ontological argument that is most discussed in contemporary philosophy of religion. Dawkins fails to recognize (or perhaps appreciate) this distinction. He describes one instance (he has forgotten the details) when he “piqued a gathering of theologians and philosophers by adapting the ontological argument to prove that

<sup>13</sup>Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 93.

<sup>14</sup>William L. Rowe, himself an atheist, thinks the argument fails, but still hails it as “one of the high achievements of the human intellect.” See his *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), 51. Dawkins does quote Bertrand Russell, who was convinced by the argument in his early life, and famously noted that “It is easier to feel convinced that [the ontological argument] must be fallacious than it is to find out precisely where the fallacy lies” (81). Of course he also insults Russell by noting that he was “over-eager to be disillusioned if logic seemed to require it” (82). This comment again indicates Dawkins’ rejection of the possibility of any access to knowledge outside of empirical evidence.

pigs can fly. They felt the need to resort to Modal Logic to prove that I was wrong” (85). This statement further indicates Dawkins’ extreme arrogance, an arrogance that goes far beyond the question of God’s existence and into the value of any number of academic disciplines other than the hard sciences. Almost any philosopher (or probably mathematician or theoretical physicist, for that matter) would be shocked to learn that Modal Logic is something one “resorts to.” This accusation would be akin to faulting a molecular biologist for “resorting to” the use of a microscope.

**The Argument from Scripture.** Not surprisingly, when it comes to Scripture Dawkins swallows the historical critical method entirely, and particularly its most liberal conclusions. He does this of course without providing any argument for that method or any of its philosophical presuppositions. Thus we are told authoritatively by Dawkins that Jesus never claimed to be divine, that the Gospels should not be read as history and are historically unreliable (theological agendas being all-corrupting), and that no serious sophisticated “Christian” takes them as such. Furthermore, the Gospels in the canon were chosen “more or less arbitrarily” out of a dozen or so legitimate possibilities.

For Dawkins there is no chance that historical accuracy or eyewitness testimony transmission had anything to do with the formation of the canon, although he does argue that “the gospels that didn’t make it were omitted by those ecclesiastics perhaps because they included stories that were even more embarrassingly implausible than those in the four canonical ones” (96). So while there was some concern for plausibility, there was not enough to motivate Christians to give up the entire “embarrassingly implausible” charade. Perhaps by this time Christians were “pot-committed” as poker players would say—they had committed so much to this world-changing bluff that they might as well stay in the hand and hope the bluff paid off. Of course, this does not explain why, for example, the apostles committed themselves in this way. The Apostle Paul, for instance, inexplicably gave up a promising Pharisaical career persecuting Christians to become one of their most famous spokesmen. Of course, as many other writers and students of Scripture have noted, one of the more plausible explanations for the apostles’ behavior after the death of Jesus and into the founding of the church is that Jesus indeed was raised from the dead, and thus they realized that rather than bluffing, they were holding an unbeatable hand. Such possibilities go unmentioned by Dawkins.

If the resurrection is an historical event and the accounts of it in the Gospels can be trusted, it seems very likely that the rest of the Gospel accounts are accurate as well. There is not space in an essay of this length to go into a detailed historical examination of the accuracy of the Gospels. But thankfully in Dawkins’ case this is not necessary. All of Dawkins’ treatments of Scripture, as I mentioned above, are dependent upon a view of biblical scholarship of

which orthodox, Bible-believing Christians should be suspicious.<sup>15</sup> Most historical critics begin with philosophical and metaphysical assumptions which make the historical accuracy of Scripture impossible. For example, if one begins with the assumption that because of the physical laws of the universe dead men do not come back to life, in one's historical scholarship one will conclude that the resurrection accounts cannot be historically accurate.<sup>16</sup> Once again, this strategy amounts to nothing more than a question-begging assertion of the superiority of the modern scientific mind and the limited epistemological perspicacity associated with it.

**Pascal's Wager.** The French mathematician Blaise Pascal argues that it can be rational for one to believe in God absent any evidence.<sup>17</sup> He begins by noting that reason alone cannot decide whether one should believe in God or not: "Let us then examine this point, and let us say: 'Either God is or he is not.' But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. . . . Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong."<sup>18</sup> But Pascal further argues that the choice is forced: one cannot abstain, for abstaining is tantamount to making a choice. For example, if, say, Jesus is the only name on earth by which men are saved, then making no decision about God's existence is equivalent to believing that God does not exist. Given this, Pascal says, let us consider which bet is in one's best interest.<sup>19</sup> If one bets that God exists and one is right, one wins everything (eternal salvation). Given that the payoff of betting on God is infinite, one should risk everything on God's existence since the odds of his existing are above zero.

<sup>15</sup>I am not of course saying that the historical critical method cannot deliver anything of worth in biblical studies. But I am saying that with this method, as with any, one should be aware of the philosophical and theological presuppositions with which it begins, and evaluate its efficacy in light of those presuppositions.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed philosophical defense of the historicity of the incarnational narrative, see Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*. For Evans' treatment of historical biblical scholarship, see 170–202. On this theme, see also Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374–421, where Plantinga argues that the deliverances of historical biblical scholarship, like those referenced by Dawkins, do not serve as defeaters for orthodox Christian belief. Note also Peter van Inwagen, "Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament," in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup>For the purpose of his argument, Pascal emphasizes God's uniqueness and transcendence, comparing him to infinite number, the nature of which we can know little about. This does not mean Pascal rejects revelation as a source of knowledge about God (when asked "is there no way of seeing the cards" he responds, "yes, Scripture and the rest")—he is simply considering what we can know about God from pure human reason alone. Pascal agrees with Dawkins that natural theology is a failure (and in this I think he proves a bit shortsighted), but disagrees with Dawkins that there are no other means by which one might know God exists, thus avoiding the dogmatic evidentialism which plagues Dawkins.

<sup>18</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1995), 122.

<sup>19</sup>Pascal's choice of a betting metaphor is important given the context of his life and writing. Pascal lived in the midst of seventeenth century French libertinism, and his peers were all intelligent and wealthy French aristocrats who spent most of their time drinking, gambling, and chasing women. Failing to find a compelling argument for belief in God in the realms of drinking and chasing women, he turned to a gambling metaphor.

The odds of course are much better than that—since reason cannot decide the issue, Pascal puts them at fifty-fifty. Given the infinite payoff, then, and the even odds, only a fool would bet that God did not exist. Add to this the possibility of hell if one bets that God does not exist and one is wrong and the force of the argument becomes that much greater.<sup>20</sup> Pascal argues that given the equal probability of theism and atheism and the associated rewards and punishments, the rational thing to do is bet that God exists.

Dawkins' criticisms of Pascal are in line with those often offered, but generally miss the point. First, Dawkins notes that one cannot force oneself to believe anything, and so one may swear repeatedly that one believes in God, but no amount of swearing will make one believe when one does not. Thus, "Pascal's wager could only ever be an argument for *feigning* belief in God. And the God that you claim to believe in had better not be of the omniscient kind or he'd see through the deception" (104). Fair enough. At this point there does seem to be something disingenuous about the Wager, as if one is trying to put one over on God, not to mention making the decision purely out of self-interest. But Pascal does not stop there. Instead, he interacts with an imagined interlocutor who objects that he "is so made that [he] cannot believe." Here Pascal draws a distinction between reason and the passions, and argues that oftentimes our passions are what get in the way of belief even when our reason is convinced. In cases of this sort, the solution is not simply to lie and act as one believes when one does not. Instead, Pascal recommends that one seek to reduce the influence of the offending passions. The way one does this is by pursuing spiritual disciplines even before one comes to believe:

You want to find faith and you do not know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began.<sup>21</sup>

For the one who is convinced by the Wager but is unable to believe, Pascal recommends immersing oneself in Christian community. Attend worship and try to worship, read Scripture, and fellowship with those who do believe, and try to pray. These activities can be done genuinely, without deception, and Pascal thinks, over time, these practices will be blessed by God and result in the diminution of one's rebellious passions, and thus one will believe. Although Dawkins would probably just refer to this as brain-washing or indoctrination, the point holds: Pascal is not arguing one should feign belief when true belief is not present.

<sup>20</sup>Pascal, *Pensées*, 123–24.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 124–25.

Dawkins also clearly misrepresents the argument when he claims that Pascal “wasn’t claiming that his wager enjoyed anything but very long odds” (104). But as noted above, Pascal puts the odds around fifty-fifty if one considers the deliverances of human reason and nothing else. What he does say is that because of the reward of believing in God, even if the odds were very long in favor of God’s existence, belief would still be the correct bet. Dawkins further makes what is known as the “Many Gods Objection”: “Doesn’t the sheer number of potential gods and goddesses on whom one might bet vitiate Pascal’s logic? Pascal was probably joking when he promoted his wager, just as I am joking in my dismissal of it.”<sup>22</sup> Again, fair enough. There are many religions which promise a heaven, and many gods at the head of those religions. But this objection fails to take into account the context of the Wager.<sup>23</sup> Pascal designed his Wager as a convincing argument for a particular group of people in a particular historical context.<sup>24</sup> He never intended it as an argument to convince all people in all places in all situations. For that matter, it is not really an argument for God’s existence; instead, it is an argument that one should believe in God’s existence. And for people in a certain situation, those who are struggling between theism and atheism, the Wager still has something significant to say.

### “The Big One”: Dawkins’ Argument from Improbability

Even many of the positive arguments Dawkins makes for the conclusion that God does not exist suffer from a misunderstanding and mischaracterization of the theistic or Christian position. This is even true of what Dawkins refers to as “The Big One”: his argument from improbability. This argument, according to Dawkins, “comes close to proving that God does *not* exist” (113). In order to make this argument, one must understand natural selection and its power: “Natural selection not only explains the whole of life; it also raises our consciousness to the power of science to explain how organized complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without any deliberate guidance” (116).<sup>25</sup> Natural selection defeats Intelligent Design according to Dawkins because only natural selection offers an explanation for the statistical improbability associated with life—Intelligent Design only compounds

<sup>22</sup>By this last comment, Dawkins means that he is somewhat joking about the seriousness of Pascal’s argument by even taking the time to mention it. Pascal undoubtedly was not joking in his proposal, just as he was not joking in the remainder of the *Pensées*, which are a collection of notes that Pascal was going to use to write a mammoth Christian apologetic. Unfortunately for us all, he died before he was able to do so. Perhaps Dawkins wishes Pascal was joking given his impressive intellectual credentials, and Dawkins’ insistence that no really intelligent people believe in God.

<sup>23</sup>For a more detailed treatment of this objection, see the piece by John Laing in this volume.

<sup>24</sup>See footnote 20

<sup>25</sup>Here one finds another example of Dawkins’ lack of precision. Later on he will admit that natural selection cannot explain “the whole of life”; in particular, it cannot explain the origin of life.

the problem by offering up an incredibly complex form of life (God) for which there is no explanation. The existence of God “immediately raises the bigger problem of his own origin” (120). I would like to elaborate upon the argument for The Big One which Dawkins offers, but unfortunately, there just is not much to elaborate upon. Dawkins’ grand argument which is supposed to prove God’s existence to be so improbable that it almost proves He does not exist is simply the assertion that a being who designed the universe would be very complex and would therefore need an explanation himself.

Here Dawkins continues to demonstrate that he is indeed a scientist and not a philosopher or theologian. The Big One is only going to be convincing if I accept as a precursor Dawkins’ metaphysical (naturalism) and epistemological (empirical evidentialism) view of the world. Furthermore, it will only be persuasive if one has allowed Dawkins to ignore transcendence in his naturalistic perversion of the God Hypothesis. Thomas Nagel, himself no great friend to religious belief, recognizes the category mistake in Dawkins’ thinking in his review of *The God Delusion*:

But God, whatever he may be, is not a complex physical inhabitant of the natural world. The explanation of his existence as a chance concatenation of atoms is not a possibility for which we must find an alternative, because that is not what anybody means by God. If the God hypothesis makes sense at all, it offers a different kind of explanation from those of physical science: purpose or intention of a mind without a body, capable nevertheless of creating and forming the entire physical world.<sup>26</sup>

Dawkins’ big argument begs the question again by assuming exactly what he is trying to prove: that nothing exists but matter, and that knowledge comes only by way of evidence derived from empirical observation. But, as Nagel, points out, no one means by “God” the kind of natural entity in need of explanation assumed by Dawkins. That said, traditionally there has been an explanation of God’s existence offered by theologians.

Anselm considers the possibility of an explanation for God’s existence, and in doing so explicates the doctrine of aseity—the idea that God’s existence is dependent upon himself, within his own nature, and not on anything else. Anselm argues that everything must have an explanation (a point with which Dawkins would agree), but that God cannot be explained by something outside of himself (for then he would owe his existence to that thing and thus be inferior to it), so that his existence must be explained by himself. Understanding how this could be so is difficult, but Anselm provides an analogy: consider a rock near a campfire. If one were to ask for an explanation of the rock’s being warm, it would be ridiculous to answer that the explanation comes from within the rock itself (obviously the fire has made

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Nagel, “The Fear of Religion,” *The New Republic* (23 October 2006), <http://www.tnr.com/article/the-fear-religion> (Accessed 6 September 2011).



the rock warm). But if one were to ask the same question about the fire, such an answer would not seem ridiculous—it simply is the nature of fire to be warm, and it simply is the nature of God to exist.<sup>27</sup> Such is the traditional explanation of God’s existence.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Dawkins fails in his own right to consider seriously the need for explanation when it suits him. He makes much use of the anthropic principle in explaining the few statistical improbabilities beyond the reach of natural selection: the origin of life (both on our planet and in the universe as a whole), the eukaryotic cell, and consciousness. The anthropic principle simply states that despite the statistical improbability of life arising on this planet in particular, “however small the minority of planets with just the right conditions for life may be, we necessarily have to be on one of that minority, because here we are thinking about it.” But this of course is no more an explanation of why life arose here or at all than is claiming the fact that I won the lottery explains why I won the lottery. Nagel similarly recognizes this response as explanatorily unhelpful hand-waving:

But the problem that originally prompted the argument from design—the overwhelming improbability of such a thing coming into existence by chance, simply through the purposeless laws of physics—remains just as real for this case. Yet this time we cannot replace chance with natural selection. Dawkins recognizes the problem, but his response to it is pure hand-waving. . . . But at this point the origin of life remains . . . a mystery—an event that could not have occurred by chance and to which no significant probability can be assigned. . . . Yet we know that it happened. That is why the argument from design is still alive.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, 11–13. Note that Anselm’s analogy is not an argument but an explanation of what it might mean for God’s existence to depend upon Himself, and thus a way of making the coherence of the idea evident.

<sup>28</sup>Another potential response, which there is no room to explore here, would be that God is not a complex being, but a simple one, and thus needs no explanation according to Dawkins’ criteria. Dawkins simply assumes that God must be complex because he cannot conceive of God being simple (he offers no real argument here). But many theologians have thought the opposite. The doctrine of divine simplicity has a long and complicated history, which is why I only mention this solution in passing. For other dismissals of Dawkins’ Big One along the lines of Nagel, see the review of *The God Delusion* by Antony Flew, *Philosophia Christi* 10.2 (2008): 473–75 (Flew’s review is centered around the charge that in the book Dawkins has proved himself “a secularist bigot” unconcerned with the truth); Gregory E. Ganssle, “Dawkins’s Best Argument: The Case against God in *The God Delusion*,” *Philosophia Christi* 10.1 (2008): 39–56 (it turns out Dawkins’ Big One is not his best argument—here Ganssle is extremely charitable); and Erik Wielenberg, “Dawkins’s Gambit, Hume’s Aroma, and God’s Simplicity,” *Philosophia Christi* 11.1 (2009): 111–25 (Wielenberg, himself an atheist, argues that Dawkins’ argument fails rather spectacularly, but offers what he thinks is a stronger Humean atheistic argument in its place).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

Two points need to be made here. First, on Dawkins' understanding of explanation, the anthropic principle is no more an explanation than God is. Second, one might think that the anthropic principle itself cries out for an explanation (thus the so-called fine-tuning argument for God's existence). Of course, Dawkins could just insist that the anthropic principle is a brute fact without explanation—but then he is in no better position than the defender of the God Hypothesis (who is free to do the same thing), and that by his own lights. If God needs an explanation as Dawkins insists He does, then so does the anthropic principle.

### Conclusion

At this point I have said something about just over half of *The God Delusion*. Dawkins' Darwinian explanation for the existence of religious belief (chapter 5), his discussion of the roots of morality and his excoriation of biblical ethics (chapters 6 and 7),<sup>30</sup> his description of the societal dangers of religion (chapter 8), and his characterization of religious education as a form of child abuse (chapter 9) have not been addressed. But many of the implications he draws in the second half of the book depend upon the arguments offered in the first half, which are dependent upon a question-begging and reductionistic view that Christians have no reason to accept. So, in conclusion, I would like to point out something I find odd about Dawkins' epistemological conclusions given naturalism and natural selection, and then re-emphasize a point made at the beginning regarding the difference between Dawkins' perspective and that of the Christian.

First, that which I find odd. Alvin Plantinga has famously argued that naturalistic evolution is epistemologically self-defeating: that is, if naturalistic evolution is true, then we have good reason to doubt the reliability of our cognitive faculties generally, and thus good reason to doubt our ability to produce true beliefs, including our belief in the truth of naturalistic evolution. So, if naturalistic evolution is true, we should be Humean skeptics, doubting all of our beliefs, including our belief in naturalistic evolution (and even our skepticism).<sup>31</sup> Generally the response to this argument has been to pan it with something like, "But we know naturalistic evolution is true, so our belief in it proves to be reliable." The problem with this response of course is that according to Plantinga's argument, if naturalistic evolution is true, it is that very fact which imperils the reliability of our cognitive faculties, and

<sup>30</sup>Dawkins is thoroughly utilitarian, although he seems to misunderstand certain key points of utilitarian moral theory and, for that matter, moral theory in general. Commentary on Dawkins' thoughts on morality would deserve an essay in its own right.

<sup>31</sup>This is just what I take to be the very basic gist of the argument. For the full treatment see Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 194–237 and Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 217–40. Plantinga also briefly makes the argument in his review of *The God Delusion*, "The Dawkins Confusion: Naturalism 'ad Absurdum,'" <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2007/marapr/1.21.html> (Accessed 6 September 2011).

thus prevents our belief in naturalistic evolution from meeting the criteria for knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

What I find odd is that Dawkins' book contains multiple admissions that on a naturalistic evolutionary view, there are whole chunks of our beliefs which turn out to be false. All of our beliefs in religion, for example, are explained as by-products of a naturalistic evolutionary process, but are still unreliable. Dawkins readily admits that the whole world appears to be designed, and that one of the glories of naturalistic evolution is that it can create this grand illusion. So, naturalistic evolution has, on Dawkins' view, developed us in such a way that we perceive design throughout nature where in fact no design is present. These false beliefs (along with the false ascription of intention) contribute to our survival (and even deeper understanding of the natural world), and thus the goal of naturalistic evolution (181–13). Of course, that naturalistic evolution produces such significant false beliefs, and that these false beliefs contribute to survival, serves as a kind of empirical confirmation of Plantinga's argument, and thus should perhaps lead us to mistrust many if not all of our other beliefs, including a belief in naturalistic evolution. This point is routinely missed by Dawkins and his ilk. Of course, if theism is true, then we can rest easier. The reason we perceive design in the natural world is because there is in fact a designer: design is not a grand illusion perpetrated upon us by an unguided master to give us an evolutionary advantage.

Finally, recall the point made earlier in this essay about the difference in ways of thinking between Dawkins and the Christian. Dawkins' view can be viewed as a movement toward a society where scientists are our clergy and nature is our god, where all of our consciousnesses have been raised by natural selection. Dawkins says throughout that "a universe with a supernaturally intelligent creator is a very different kind of universe from one without" (58). No doubt he is right about this, but since we can only perceive the actual universe, we cannot make the comparison. What is obvious is that we see the universe very differently than Richard Dawkins. Where he finds comfort and purpose in the idea that his life is an almost immeasurable speck and nothing more in the vastness of time and space, I find despair and nihilism. And although Dawkins would not like it, the Christian has an explanation for this difference: sin. Paul describes the process through which fallen humans abandon God the Creator for an idolatrous naturalism in Romans 1:18–25.<sup>33</sup> Dawkins admits something of what Paul is talking about when he notes that "a quasi-mystical response to nature and the universe is common among

<sup>32</sup>While Dawkins and many others do not argue that the production of true beliefs is necessary for survival and thus seem to miss the point of Plantinga's argument, others do not make this mistake. See James Beilby, ed., *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). For additional criticism in the context of Plantinga's epistemology, see James Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>33</sup>Dembski's treatment of this passage in "How to Debate an Atheist—If You Must" is commended to the reader.

scientists and rationalists. It has no connection with supernatural belief” (11). As a personal statement, Dawkins is correct—his response to nature has no connection to God. But as a statement of fact, Dawkins here reveals the delusion that comes as a result of sin. Because, like all of us, he is fallen and rebellious, he rejects the obvious connection between that which has been created and the One who created it. Our response, unlike some people whose letters he prints, should not be to revel in the thought of Dawkins burning in hell. Instead, our response should be to defend our faith against his attacks and pray that he will come to understand the truth not just of Romans 1, but of Romans 5 as well. Until then, as I hope this essay has argued well, we have no reason to fear the delusions of Richard Dawkins and his new atheist brethren.

## *The “Tergiversation” of Antony Flew: A Review and Assessment of There Is a God*

*John D. Wilsey*

*J. Dalton Harvard School for Theological Studies*

*Houston, Texas*

*jwilsey@swbts.edu*

Antony Flew (1923–2010) was one of the most important English speaking philosophers of the twentieth century. Over the course of his long career, Flew taught at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele, and Reading, and lectured all over the world. He authored dozens of works, including “Theology and Falsification,” *God and Philosophy*, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, *Darwinian Evolution*, *The Presumption of Atheism*, and *God: A Critical Inquiry*. Flew’s philosophical interests were varied, but his career is widely known to be dedicated to the articulation and defense of atheism. Flew was a committed atheist for over fifty years, arguing that religious language was essentially meaningless. Theistic claims suffered from the need for qualifications to a fatal extent. Moreover, the problem of evil did not fit into the traditional theistic system in which God was all powerful and all loving. Further, Flew had followed English common law tradition by arguing that the atheist makes a negative assertion (no God exists), and thus does not carry the burden of proof. The burden of proof instead is borne by the theist, who is making a positive assertion (God exists). Therefore, Flew had claimed that the responsibility for providing justification for belief falls on the theist, while the atheist holds the default position.

Recently, however, Flew abandoned atheism and adopted a deistic form of theistic belief. After years of considering the philosophical question of the existence of God through teaching, writing, lecturing, and debating, Flew confided to Gary Habermas of Liberty University in 2003 that he was an atheist “with big questions.”<sup>1</sup> This, of course, was welcome news for Habermas, a Christian philosopher and apologist who had developed a friendship with Flew after many years of debating the issue of the resurrection of Jesus with him. Later, in January 2004, Flew told Habermas that he had indeed changed his mind and become a theist. Still, Habermas reported that Flew “quickly [added], however, that he was ‘not the revelatory kind’ of believer.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gary Habermas, “Antony Flew’s Deism Revisited: A Review Essay on *There Is a God*,” *Philosophia Christi* 9.2 (2007): 431.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

That is, Flew was clear from the beginning that he was not converting to Christianity. Instead, he was affirming deism, accepting the attribute of divine transcendence while rejecting divine immanence.

Flew began giving interviews describing his move from atheism to theism, including one to Habermas which appeared in *Philosophia Christi* in 2004 and to James A. Beverly of *Christianity Today* in 2005.<sup>3</sup> His *There Is a God* appeared in 2007 and serves as a comprehensive statement of Flew's journey from atheism to theism. Along with Flew's description of how he became a theist, the work includes a preface penned by Roy Abraham Varghese. The preface briefly describes Varghese's association with Flew followed by a short account of atheist responses to Flew. The book closes with two appendices, one written by Varghese and the other by N.T. Wright. Varghese's appendix is a critique of "new atheism" and a defense of theistic belief. N.T. Wright's appendix is a defense of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. While these essays are not directly related to the account of Flew's move from atheism to theism, both appendices were included in the work at Flew's request because he believed they would complement his stated reasons for turning away from atheism. He stated, "I included both appendices in this book because they are both examples of the kind of reasoning that led me to change my mind about God's existence" (160).

In the preface to *There Is a God*, Varghese noted that Richard Dawkins wrote disparaging remarks about Flew's shift of belief and even seemed to attack him personally. Dawkins used the term "tergiversation" to describe Flew's abandonment of atheism and attributed Flew's actions to his age.<sup>4</sup> Dawkins was not the only person in the atheist camp to react this way to Flew. Atheist critiques of Flew are numerous, considering Flew's undeniable influence on the intellectual advancement of atheism. There was also a significant response from the believing community. What is it exactly that Flew claimed in his book? How has Flew's book been received? What is the significance and value of this work? These questions will be addressed in the following paragraphs. Flew's work is valuable in that it underscores the importance of honestly asking and answering the right questions on the appropriate basis. Contrary to how some believers may wish to see it, Flew's work does not represent the triumph of theistic over atheistic arguments, nor does it represent any triumph of Christianity over secularism. But it does explain what occurs in one atheist's mind when the starting point for the question of the universe's origins is no longer the material universe itself.

<sup>3</sup>See Antony Flew and Gary R. Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: A Discussion Between Antony Flew and Gary R. Habermas," *Philosophia Christi* 6.2 (2004): 197–212; James A. Beverly, "Thinking Straighter: Why the World's Most Famous Atheist Now Believes in God," *Christianity Today*, 8 April 2005, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/april/29.80.html> (Accessed 28 September 2011).

<sup>4</sup>Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 82. "Tergiversation" refers to turning one's back or apostatizing.



In the ten chapters of *There Is a God*, Flew addressed five broad issues: 1) the content of his belief at the time of writing; 2) the content of his prior beliefs; 3) the reasons for changing those beliefs; 4) the specific aspects of theism that he accepted; and 5) the extent to which he was willing to develop his theism. First, Flew declared at the outset, "I now believe there is a God" (1). Following this clear and concise statement of belief, Flew stressed that he was neither losing his mind, nor was he experiencing a "deathbed conversion" nor "placing Pascalian bets" (2). In an effort to give an answer to those wondering what happened to the philosopher Flew of years past, he maintained that he did not accept the idea of an afterlife and noted that he had changed his mind before on other topics. For example, he had once been a Marxist as well as a determinist, but changed those beliefs upon further consideration. His most recent change of mind from belief in atheism to theism was driven by the Socratic admonition to follow the argument wherever it leads.

Flew began the book by describing his atheism and what influenced him to come to this belief. He felt it was important to provide some context for the abandonment of atheism which he held and defended for so long. He wrote, "Since this is a book about why I changed my mind about the existence of God, an obvious question would be what I believed before the 'change' and why" (3). In describing how he became an atheist, Flew explained his upbringing in the home of a Methodist minister in England in the 1920s and 30s. It was not until he was fifteen that he settled on atheism, largely because he could not reconcile the evil in the world with an all powerful and all loving God. He kept his atheism a secret for as long as he could, but as often happens, his secret became known. Word of his beliefs managed to get to his family by the time he was twenty-three. He went on to describe key experiences and influences in his early career, such as how he discovered Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language at Oxford and his visits to the Socratic Club, presided over by C.S. Lewis. It was at the Socratic Club that Flew first attempted to critique theism by presenting his paper, "Theology and Falsification" in 1950, a paper which was influenced by the new philosophy of language.

In that paper, Flew set out to question the linguistic basis for the claim that God exists. When a theist makes a claim for the existence of a non-corporeal being, that claim cannot be verified or falsified. When theists claim that this non-corporeal being loves each person individually, they are again making a claim that cannot be demonstrated in observable reality. Flew wrote of any claim affirming God's existence, "It effectively becomes empty. I concluded that a 'fine, brash hypothesis may thus be killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications'" (44). At this point, he was not making any categorical statements about the truth or falsity of theistic claims. He was simply attempting to compel believers to show how their theistic claims could make sense in the observable world.

By 1966, Flew had written *God and Philosophy*, a work which sought to question the coherence of theism. How could God be identified? In what

way could God be described meaningfully in human language? How are the attributes of God reconciled with facts of the universe that seem to count against them? Of further challenge to theism, how could God actually be separate from the universe which He is said to have created? And how could God as an immutable entity, separate from his creation, be actively involved in the space-time continuum? Flew was convinced that these were intractable problems for theists. Flew wrote that, “drawing on David Hume and other like-minded thinkers, I argued that the design, cosmological, and moral arguments for God’s existence are invalid. I also tried to show that it was impossible validly to infer from a particular religious experience that it had as its object a transcendent divine being” (49).

While Flew’s earlier works were influential, perhaps his most important defense of atheism was *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976). In this work, he argued that the burden of proof for the question on God’s existence lay squarely with the theist. In this, Flew claimed to be following in English common law tradition and the presumption of innocence. A positive claim of guilt in common law carries the burden of proof, while the negative claim of innocence does not. Similarly, the positive claim of theism—that God exists—carries the burden to present reasonable grounds for the claim while the negative claim of atheism—that no God exists—corresponds with a claim of innocence in an English court. It is the default position, and thus does not carry the burden of proof. Since he was convinced that theism could produce no sufficient grounds for belief, it failed to carry its burden and was thus unpersuasive.

It was in the course of debates Flew conducted with Christian theists from 1950 to 1998 that he slowly but surely experienced a shift in belief as the arguments led him toward theism. For example, in a 1985 debate with Terry Miethe of the Oxford Study Center, Miethe presented a form of the cosmological argument that, as Flew described it, “rested not on the principle of sufficient reason, which I rejected, but on the principle of existential causality” (71). Flew conceded that this form of the cosmological argument was helpful in explaining the big bang, which would require a finite universe with a definite beginning. This was an idea that Flew had earlier rejected, believing instead that the universe had no beginning.

By the time of his 1998 debate with William Lane Craig, Flew had come to the conclusion that humans possessed moral freedom. He believed that this fact was contradictory to what he viewed as a central tenet of a theistic system, namely predestination. His understanding of predestination was “that God predestines the damnation of most human beings” and he was thus “repulsed” by it (73). Flew seemed surprised by Craig’s position on predestination, since Craig seemed to deny its necessity to theism. Flew wrote, “An important feature of this debate was Craig’s rejection of traditional predestinarian ideas and his defense of libertarian free will. Craig held that God acts directly on effects and not on the secondary agents, and thus it was impossible for God to create a world of genuinely libertarian creatures who

always do the right thing" (73).<sup>5</sup> This position seemed helpful in explaining the coherence of theism in the context of the problem of evil. Flew also seemed taken by Craig's stated view, namely that God desired that all should be saved. The fact that this understanding of human freedom and divine sovereignty was consistent with the Methodist understanding doubtless was not lost on Flew, having been reared in a Methodist home.

By the time he presented himself at his next debate six years later with Gerald Schroeder and John Haldane, Flew had abandoned atheism. Flew made the announcement of his departure from atheism at this debate in May 2004. It is unclear from the book how much of an influence the 1998 debate had on Flew's shift, but his experience there seems to have been important. What is clear is that Flew was deeply impressed with the complexity demonstrated within the system of the DNA molecule and the apparent intelligence required by such a system. He asserted that science has shown at least three sufficient grounds for theism: 1) nature obeys laws; 2) life is understood in terms of *telos*; and 3) the very existence of nature.

Still, Flew stressed at this point, that as convincing as science was, science alone was not sufficient to persuade him to change his beliefs. He wrote, "I have also been helped by a renewed study of the classical philosophical arguments" (89). Philosophy explains the meaning of the facts that science uncovers. In asking the questions related to the origin of the laws of nature, of life, and of the universe, Flew realized that to reach satisfactory conclusions he would have to think as a philosopher. He said that his concern was not ultimately with "this or that fact of chemistry or genetics, but with the fundamental question of what it means for something to be alive and how this relates to the body of chemical and genetic facts viewed as a whole" (90). He would have to go beyond the facts of science to answer such questions. So, Flew changed his starting point, which in turn, changed his answers to the question of origins. As an atheist, Flew's starting point for the question of origins was the material universe itself. Later as a theist, his starting point became "the God of the monotheistic religions" (92). Again, as an atheist, Flew was willing to allow for non-life to generate life spontaneously from random processes because he was starting from the non-living, material universe. But later he realized the absurdity of such a notion. Flew asked the question, "How can a universe of mindless matter produce beings with intrinsic ends, self-replication capabilities, and 'coded chemistry'?" (124). Flew understood that science apart from philosophy, specifically theistic belief, cannot meaningfully answer a question like that.

In abandoning atheism in favor of theism, just what species of theism was Flew adopting? That is, perhaps, the most important question in

<sup>5</sup>Flew seemed to mean that Craig does not hold to a determinist or Calvinist view of predestination. However, this is not to say that Craig does not hold to *any* view of predestination. Craig has repeatedly affirmed that divine foreknowledge and human (libertarian) freedom are compatible. See, for example, William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

the mind of theists. First, Flew accepted the reality of a transcendent, non-corporeal Being willfully acting upon a world from which he was separate and distinct. While Flew had earlier rejected such a notion as incoherent, later he accepted it. As Flew described it, this Being can act “as an agent outside space and time that uniquely executes its intentions in the spatio-temporal continuum” (153–54). Second, Flew’s theism is arrived at solely by reason, and not through faith. Flew wrote that reason “has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being” (155). In other words, Flew was persuaded by scientific and philosophical arguments to theistic belief, not by traditional religious means such as special revelation. Third, Flew’s conception of God is an Aristotelian one, the God of deism. This God is not immanent. God’s relationship to and activity in the universe is transcendent. This is not to say that Flew claimed it was impossible for God to communicate on a personal, self-revelatory level, but only that, as best he could tell, God has not done so. Such communication would remain a distinct possibility for Flew, because it was not precluded by reason.

How has the secular community reacted to Flew’s change of mind? Described simply, the reaction has been strenuous and vociferous. There are a few noteworthy aspects that recur in several pieces responding to Flew, including 1) assertions that Flew’s advanced age has handicapped his mental acuity; 2) Flew was manipulated by various Christians including Habermas, John Haldane, Gerald Schroeder, Richard Swinburne, Varghese, and even Biola University—most of whom supposedly feigned friendship for Flew while possessing nefarious intentions; 3) Flew did not actually write any of *There Is a God*, and possibly did not even know what it contained upon publication; and 4) Flew appealed to a God-of-the-gaps argument, thereby committing the *argumentum ad ignorantiam* fallacy.

Points one, two, and three each amount to *ad hominem* attacks. Examples for these kinds of statements are found in Dawkins’ work *God Delusion*, but also in an article by Mark Oppenheimer, which appeared in *The New York Times* on 4 November 2007. Oppenheimer’s piece is an attempt to discredit *There Is a God* by postulating sinister motives on the part of Habermas, Schroeder, Haldane, and Varghese. These men are presented as scholars in name only, who manipulated Flew—a mere shell of the great thinker he once was—into abandoning a lifelong career of responsible atheistic philosophy and embracing what amounted to a simpleton’s worldview which relies on superstition and fairy tales to explain cosmology. Oppenheimer cited Dawkins and Paul Kurtz: “‘He once was a great philosopher,’ Richard Dawkins . . . told a Virginia audience last year. ‘It’s very sad.’ Paul Kurtz of Prometheus Books says he thinks Flew is being exploited. ‘They’re misusing him,’ Kurtz says, referring to the Christians. ‘They’re worried about atheists, and they’re trying to find an atheist to be on their side.’ They found one, and with less

difficulty than atheists would have guessed.”<sup>6</sup> Describing a video produced in May of 2004 in which Flew appeared with Schroeder and Haldane, Oppenheimer wrote,

Under their prodding, Flew concedes that the Big Bang could be described in Genesis; that the complexity of DNA strongly points to an “intelligence”; and that the existence of evil is not an insurmountable problem for the existence of God. In short, Flew retracts decades’ worth of conclusions on which he built his career. At one point, Haldane is noticeably smiling, embarrassed (or pleased) by Flew’s acquiescence.<sup>7</sup>

Gottlieb Anthony is another writer who called Flew’s lucidity into question, as well as the virtue of Varghese’s intentions, and his credibility as a scholar. Anthony dismissed Varghese’s earlier published works, *The Wonder of the World* and *God Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary* as “wondrous apparitions and the Sci Fi Channel”<sup>8</sup> and asserted that Varghese was the true author of *There Is a God*, with Flew having nothing substantial to do with the project. He wrote, “Instead of trying to construct a coherent chain of reasoning in Flew’s own words, the authors present a case that often consists of an assemblage of reassuring sound bites excerpted from the writings of scientists, popularizers of science and philosophers.”<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, neither Oppenheimer nor Anthony offered much substantive critique of Flew’s arguments. Their only critiques of Flew’s justification for his theism appear in the form of generalizations made about the book’s structure, the aesthetics of its form and prose, and the dismay at the change in Flew’s conclusions about atheism. The bulk of their work seems to be aimed at discrediting those Christians who helped with the project, Christians who were associates and friends of Flew, and even Flew himself. It is as if they meant to destroy the reputations of anyone coming to the conclusion that God is a rational explanation for reality.

Kenneth Grubbs also speculated on the motives and credibility of Varghese and others in the production of Flew’s work. To his credit, Grubbs did question the relevance of such speculation but then went on to indulge in a substantial amount of that which he called irrelevant. The thrust of his critique is that Flew inappropriately appealed to a God-of-the-gaps argument. Flew’s wonder at the structure and function of the DNA molecule, the apparent purpose inherent in life forms, and the fine tuning of the universe

<sup>6</sup>Mark Oppenheimer, “The Turning of an Atheist,” *The New York Times*, 4 November 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/magazine/04Flew-t.html> (Accessed 3 October 2011).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Gottlieb Anthony, “I’m A Believer,” *The New York Times Book Review*, 23 December 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/books/review/Gottlieb-t.html> (Accessed 29 September 2011).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

each pointing to a transcendent God are all descriptors of the way things are, not evidence leading to a conclusion, according to Grubbs. He wrote, “the unspoken conclusion we are to infer is, *what else could it be, but God?* . . . The logic proffered fails as an argument because it requires us to accept the lack of knowledge as knowledge, and the lack of evidence as evidence. This is *Argumentum ad Ignorantiam*, or, appeal to ignorance. . . . This argument is invalid.”<sup>10</sup>

On the surface, this critique seems strong. But it must be remembered that Flew’s justification for his belief in God, while drawing on science, does not rely on science without philosophy. The questions of the origin of the laws of nature, of life, and of the universe are of a different order than questions of their composition. Flew recognized this important fact, and this is what accounts for Flew’s abandonment of atheism—not an appeal to God-of-the-gaps.

Even if Flew did make this appeal, there is no necessary error in doing so when dealing with the question of origins. Certainly, appealing to God-of-the-gaps out of sheer laziness would be irrational. However, it appears that Grubbs’ critique of Flew and rejection of the design argument was based on an a priori commitment to naturalism. Grubbs asserted that “So desperate are we to understand the universe . . . that for untold centuries we have refused to accept any ‘gap’ in that understanding.”<sup>11</sup> But according to William Dembski, it is not necessary to reject completely appeals to God-of-the-gaps as explanations of reality. Dembski wrote,

There is no compelling reason why . . . we should in every instance be able, even in principle, to tell a gapless naturalistic narrative. Nor is it the case that the God-of-the-gaps always constitutes a fallacy. Indeed the fallacy arises only if an ordinary explanation suffices where an extraordinary explanation was previously invoked. But that ordinary explanations should *always* have this capacity cannot be justified. Whether an extraordinary explanation is appropriate depends on the event that needs to be explained and the circumstances surrounding the event.<sup>12</sup>

Grubbs’ critique fails in its goal of defeating Flew’s inference of God from the complexity of the universe because he has refused to be open to any supernatural explanation, even if that is the best explanation. Dembski wrote, “to suppose that all the gaps in extraordinary explanations must be fillable by natural causes cannot be justified.”<sup>13</sup> The point here is not to open the

<sup>10</sup>Kenneth Grubbs, “Antony Flew, 1923–2010: The Remarkable Story of Professor Antony Flew—The World’s Most Notorious Atheist Who Changed His Mind,” *Skeptic Magazine* 16.1 (2010): 34–35. Italics are in the original.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>12</sup>William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999): 241.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 245.



door to appealing to God-of-the-gaps arguments on questions of nature's composition. For these kinds of questions, naturalistic explanations are to be expected. But as Flew recognized, questions of origins are of a metaphysical nature, and there is no possible way naturalistic methods will suffice to explain the existing gaps in knowledge. Here is where the explanation of God does suffice and indeed, is the only viable explanation.

The debate over the existence of God has not been closed by Flew's book. While assertions are made by theists and atheists alike, there will always be responses to those assertions. Some of those assertions and responses will be fair and intelligent, others not so. Taking this reality into account, what is the value of Flew's book?

First, examine how his approach to the question of the origin of the universe and the existence of God developed and matured over time. For most of his career, Flew approached the question as every atheist must. His starting point for answering the question was the universe itself. Flew would have been in agreement with Victor Stenger, who in his 2005 critique of Flew wrote, "There is no reason why the physical universe cannot be it's [*sic*] own first cause."<sup>14</sup> When using the universe as the starting point for answering the question of origins and the existence of God, certainly the atheistic argument that there is no God is valid. If the universe is truly all that there is, if matter comprises the sum of reality, if naturalism is the only logical explanation for existence, and if the mind is merely the brain, then atheism is a viable option. What if, however, the starting point for answering the question of origins and God's existence were not the universe itself, but something or Someone transcending the universe? This is exactly Flew's point in his parable of the satellite phone found by native islanders in chapter four of his work. The confused scientists of the primitive island civilization were all perplexed by the voices coming from the phone, and believed that the voices were part of its physical workings. The lone sage challenged the scientists to use a different starting point when trying to account for the voices. Rather than start with the actual phone to ascertain what these voices actually were, why not start from the notion that the voices were not part of the phone at all, but consisted in a reality separate from the phone, and could actually be contacted? That is the contribution Flew has made to the conversation about origins and God's existence. When approaching this question, one must not rule out supernatural explanations from a naturalistic a priori commitment. One must follow Flew's lead, as he followed where the evidence led him.

One final word of warning to evangelical Christians prior to becoming too enamored with Flew. It must be remembered that Flew's theism is weak. Flew defined his position as deism, and it is an anemic version of deism at that. Flew did not claim that God was active and involved in daily events. Furthermore, this God was not concerned in the least with morality

<sup>14</sup>Victor J. Stenger, "Flew's Flawed Science," *Free Inquiry* 25.2 (2005), [http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/stenger\\_25\\_2.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/stenger_25_2.html) (Accessed 3 October 2011).

or obedience on the part of humanity. This ought to be of concern to evangelicals. William Schweiker of the University of Chicago reminded his readers that Flew's newfound theism is nothing more than a philosophical postulate. The result of Flew's brand of theism is a baptized atheism, a theism that has zero practical relevance. Schweiker wrote, "the equation of God just with intelligent purpose might in fact strip the idea of God of any genuine religious significance."<sup>15</sup> Schweiker's point is that Flew's belief in God's existence, at least as he articulated it in Aristotelian terms, may merely be atheism in "another guise."<sup>16</sup>

Still, Flew's theism was the result of his being guided by reason, so we see in his change of mind a successful effort of natural theology and apologetic argumentation in bringing a person to belief in God, so to speak. For this, we evangelicals can be thankful. Flew's stated move from atheism to theism based on the evidence of design and purpose in the universe is powerful as evinced by the force of the atheist critique of his newfound theism. This does not, however, represent the intellectual triumph of Christianity over secularism or even of deism over atheism. Schweiker's warnings are well taken here. A triumph of Christianity in Flew's life would have resulted in his coming to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, by faith in his death, burial, and resurrection. This step of faith is precisely what Flew explicitly denied had occurred. Flew's God was not the God of Scripture. Yet Flew's God did not stand against the God of Scripture. To be sure, Flew's God and the God of the Bible are both, as he claimed, "self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient" (155). Flew was an honest man, who had honest motives, who was engaged in diligent study, and was characterized by careful consideration, and benefitted from the sincere friendship of believers, abandoned atheism and adopted theistic belief. Flew's story teaches us that similar results can be counted on to occur under similar circumstances, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, belief in Christ and the subsequent salvation from sin and death may be produced. We evangelicals can be encouraged to continue to engage our unbelieving friends, neighbors, and associates in open discussion and continue to study to show ourselves approved so that we are ready to give an account for the hope which lies within us when the opportunities to do so present themselves (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 3:15).

<sup>15</sup>William Schweiker, "Thinkpiece: The Varieties and Revisions of Atheism," *Zygon* 40.2 (2005): 273.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

## *How to Debate an Atheist—If You Must*

*William A. Dembski*  
*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*  
*Fort Worth, Texas*  
*wdembski@swbts.edu*

We live in an increasingly secular culture, and as followers of Christ we have little choice but to debate atheists.<sup>1</sup> Atheism is on the rise, and atheists cannot be avoided. Because we are, as Jude 3 urges, to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints, silence in the face of atheism is not a Christian option. Much of what I write about atheism in this paper will not be new to students of Christian apologetics. Yet, I hope here to tie together certain key strands in the present debate between Christians and the new atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, etc.) as we seek to advance the truth of Christ to the wider culture.

Let me therefore begin with what the Bible says about atheism. Among the Bible's 150 psalms, only one is repeated: Psalm 14, which appears also as Psalm 53. Verse for verse, Psalms 14 and 53 match up, saying the same thing, only at places using slightly different wording. For those, like me, who see the Bible as God's inspired and unerring Word, this repetition cannot be accidental. Repetition stresses importance. It says, "Listen up, pay attention."

What, then, is so important about Psalm 14 that it bears repeating? This psalm gives the Bible's most penetrating insight into human corruption and wickedness. Indeed, when the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, needed to underscore the universality of human sin, the first Old Testament text that he quoted was this psalm. Thus, to prove that all, both Jews and Gentiles, are, as he puts it, "under sin," Paul writes, "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom 3:10–12).

But what is this passage from Romans except an edited version of the first three verses of Psalm 14? Everything in Romans 3:10–12 is drawn from Psalm 14. And yet, not everything in the first three verses of Psalm 14 appears in Romans 3. In particular, Paul omits the very opening of this psalm. Not that Paul is quoting the psalm out of context. In chapter 3 of Romans,

<sup>1</sup>This paper closely follows the commencement talk that I gave at Southern Evangelical Seminary on 7 May 2011. An abridged version was presented in chapel at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on 7 September 2011. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for extensive helpful comment.

Paul is intent on demonstrating the universality of human sinfulness; he is less concerned with analyzing its root. To get at the root of human sinfulness, we need to consider the opening of Psalm 14. The full first three verses of Psalm 14 read as follows:

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Note the opening words, “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” This start of Psalm 14 is remarkable for its brevity, simplicity, and profundity. “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” All the wickedness of humanity described subsequently in Psalm 14 and expanded on by Paul in his letter to the Romans flows from this brief statement. I want in what follows to analyze this statement and show how it applies to twenty-first century western Christians as we engage an increasingly hostile secular culture.

Does it seem odd in our age for this psalm to refer to those who deny God’s existence as fools? Atheism, in our secular culture, is regarded as courageous and intelligent. Weak-kneed people who need God as a crutch, so we are told, are the fools. They believe in God against all evidence and hang on to that belief because they lack the courage to face the stark, bleak reality of an impersonal universe that is winding down and will ultimately consign all human aspirations to oblivion. Again, so we are told.<sup>2</sup>

The mother of a boy I grew up with, though not herself an atheist, remarked that her son was too intelligent to believe in God.<sup>3</sup> In Hollywood films, children who confidently doubt or, better yet, boldly deny God’s existence are portrayed as thoughtful, precocious, and admirable (take, for

<sup>2</sup>Consider, for instance, Bertrand Russell’s famous remark, “That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.” Quoted from Russell’s 1903 essay “A Free Man’s Worship,” <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/russell1.htm> (Accessed 15 August 2011). Compare the attempt of Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett to rebrand atheism by referring to atheists as “brights,” see <http://www.the-brights.net> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Compare the title of the following piece, dated 11 June 2008, in *The Telegraph*: Graeme Paton, “Intelligent People ‘Less Likely to Believe in God’,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2111174/Intelligent-people-less-likely-to-believe-in-God.html> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

instance, the twelve-year old Christian Bale character in Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*). When I was applying for secular jobs in philosophy two decades ago, a prominent philosopher of science suggested I remove from my curriculum vitae all mention of my work on intelligent design because, as he remarked, "All the analytic philosophers are atheists and don't want to see that stuff." Please note, he meant this for my own good so that I could land a job—he was not trying to be unkind or disrespectful.

The evidence of science and history, we are told, shows that God probably does not exist and, in any case, need not exist. Polling numbers confirm that this is the conventional wisdom among our cultural elites. Among America's top scientists—those who belong to the National Academy of Sciences—only seven percent admit to any belief in God.<sup>4</sup> In a 2007 survey of 149 evolutionary biologists, only two admitted belief in God.<sup>5</sup> When Francis Collins, an evangelical, was appointed to head the National Institutes of Health, mainstream scientists cited his Christian belief as reason to deny his appointment because it would prevent him from being objective.<sup>6</sup> Most of the media thought this concern entirely legitimate.

It would seem, then, that all the smart people are atheists and that Psalm 14 got it wrong about only fools saying in their hearts there is no God. But in fact, the Bible got it right. These atheists may be smart, but they are smart fools. Nor is this to suggest that Christian believers are necessarily pious imbeciles. Up until the twentieth century, most prominent scientists were utterly convinced of God's existence and said so unapologetically. Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Boyle, Euler, Faraday, Maxwell, and Kelvin all spring readily to mind.

But that raises the question, Why has there been such a great falling away from belief in God by the "smart" people? Smart people who deny that God exists are fools because, as Phillip Johnson notes in *Reason in the Balance*, they are ignoring the most important aspect of reality.<sup>7</sup> Imagine going

<sup>4</sup>Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, "Leading Scientists Still Reject God," *Nature* 394.6691 (23 July 1998): 313.

<sup>5</sup>See Gregory W. Graffin and William B. Provine, "Evolution, Religion and Free Will," *American Scientist* 95.4 (2007): 294. They found that out of 149 prominent evolutionists polled, 78 percent were pure naturalists (atheists) and only two were clearly theists (holding to a traditional conception of God). <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/id.3747,y.0,no.,content.true,page.1,css.print/issue.aspx> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

<sup>6</sup>Consider this from the *New York Times* at the time of Collins' appointment: "There are two basic objections to Dr. Collins. The first is his very public embrace of religion. He wrote a book called 'The Language of God,' and he has given many talks and interviews in which he described his conversion to Christianity as a 27-year-old medical student. Religion and genetic research have long had a fraught relationship, and some in the field complain about what they see as Dr. Collins's evangelism." Quoted from Gardiner Harris, "Pick to Lead Health Agency Draws Praise and Some Concern," *New York Times* (8 July 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/health/policy/09nih.html> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

<sup>7</sup>See Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995). In this book Johnson proposed his idea of "theistic realism," according to which precisely because God is the most important aspect of reality, any worldview that ignores God is shooting itself in the foot. To this day, Johnson regards this as his most important book, even though *Darwin*

to a football game and paying attention only to the concessions stand or to the pattern on the referees' uniforms. Imagine going to a play, ignoring the actors, and attending only to the furniture on stage. God is the main attraction. He is the lead actor, the primary agent in the world—a world that He has created. To miss God is to miss everything. As Maximus the Confessor, the great seventh century theologian, put it,

If all things have been made by God and for his sake, then God is better than what has been made by Him. The one who forsakes the better and is engrossed in inferior things shows that he prefers the things made by God to God himself. . . . If the soul is better than the body and God incomparably better than the world which He created, the one who prefers the body to the soul and the world to the God who created it is no different from idolaters.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the atheist is a fool because he is an idolater. It is not that he worships nothing. It is rather that he worships everything except the one true God.

In analyzing the opening of Psalm 14, let us consider next in exactly what sense the fool denies God's existence. Notice that this verse does not say that the fool "believes" in his heart there is no God. Rather, it says that the fool "says" in his heart there is no God. This is significant. In all my encounters with atheists—and I have had many—I am not convinced any of them truly disbelieve in God's existence. A fact about language is that words can be arranged in any order whatsoever and then given utterance. Most such arrangements are complete nonsense. Of those that remain, most are false. Aristotle could just as well have been referring to our speech acts when he wrote, "it is possible to fail in many ways, . . . while to succeed is possible only in one way."<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, just because people say something does not mean they believe it. In fact, there is good reason to think no real atheists exist (real atheists being those who believe deep down in their hearts that there is no God). Why do I think that atheism describes an empty set, something like married bachelors? For one, Paul in Romans 1:18–20 characterizes all human attempts to deny God as vain. To be sure, humans move their lips and utter words that deny God, but such speech acts, according to Paul, do not reflect what is really going on in their hearts. Paul writes in that passage:

*on Trial* is far and away his best-selling book.

<sup>8</sup>Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, I:5 and I:7, in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>9</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1106.



The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

This passage is so rich that whole books could be (and indeed have been)<sup>10</sup> written on it, but I call your attention to two points: (1) Humans have been given plenty of evidence to believe in God, notably from the world God has created, a world that reflects his glory. (2) When humans fail to acknowledge such evidence for God, their failure is not intellectual but moral in that they willfully suppress that evidence.

Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell, when asked what he would say if on dying and meeting God he were asked why he had not believed in God during his tenure on earth, is reputed to have replied, “Not enough evidence.”<sup>11</sup> But this reply, which contemporary atheists repeat endlessly, going even further by claiming that there is no evidence whatsoever for God, is a sham. To see this, we need to consider the nature of evidence.

The problem with evidence is that what constitutes evidence is not self-evident. Simply put, what counts as evidence is not, and indeed cannot be, decided by evidence. Evidence—that is, what makes a claim evident to us—depends on what we are predisposed to take as evidence.<sup>12</sup> I recall lecturing at the University of Kansas on intelligent design some years back, showing the marvelous intricacy and technological sophistication inside cellular life and being asked, during the Q&A, when I was finally going to present some real evidence for design. I thought the question was a joke—is not that

<sup>10</sup>The entire literature of natural theology, from Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* to William Paley’s *Natural Theology* to contemporary attempts to read the divine wisdom off of nature, as in the work of Hugh Ross, constitutes an extended footnote to this passage from Paul. Moreover, all the reactions by theologians against this passage, as when they argue that nature is a poor vehicle for any meaningful divine revelation, are nonetheless keying off of this passage from Paul. Cf. Karl Barth’s view, stated in the early parts of his *Church Dogmatics*, that natural theology is impious and that God is revealed through no intermediates but only by direct encounter with God.

<sup>11</sup>This quote is widely available on the Internet, and Richard Dawkins attributes it to Russell in *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 104. But neither Dawkins nor the Internet sources I have found that list the quote provide a reference to Russell’s actual writings. Still, we can well imagine Russell saying just this.

<sup>12</sup>As Michael Rea puts it, “True inquiry is a process in which we try to revise our beliefs on the basis of what we take to be evidence.” He continues, “But this means that, in order to inquire into anything, we must *already* be disposed to take some things as evidence. In order even to begin inquiry, we must already have various dispositions to trust at least some of our cognitive faculties as sources of evidence and to take certain kinds of experiences and arguments to be evidence. Such dispositions (let’s call them *methodological dispositions*) may be reflectively and deliberately acquired.” Michael C. Rea, *World without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

what I had been doing the last hour and a half of my lecture? But the questioner was, apparently, serious. Suffice it to say that a human heart intent on turning away from God is ready to invalidate any evidence that might point to God.

The testimony of Scripture, especially Romans 1, argues convincingly against the existence of real atheists, that is, atheists who believe deep down in their hearts that there is no God. The irony here is worth underscoring: atheists argue that God does not exist; God's Word argues that no real atheists exist. But we need not stop with Scripture. If we look outside of Scripture, it seems that there is also good reason to doubt the existence of real atheists. I have had occasion to debate and interact with many atheists, the most prominent being Christopher Hitchens.<sup>13</sup> Invariably, I find their atheism to be a pose. The more virulent atheists might better be called "antitheists." They not only deny that God exists but also hate Him. Yet whence this hatred of a nonexistent entity? "There is no God and I hate Him" seems a strange position to take. Why get so bent out of shape about a being that does not exist?

When confronted with this charge, atheists reply that their hatred is directed not at a non-existent entity but at a false belief in such an entity and the horrific consequences of that belief. But this defense rings hollow. To be sure, so-called Christians have committed horrific acts in the name of God. But others have built orphanages, overturned slavery, and composed magnificent music, all in the name of God. Conversely, there is no shortage of atheists who, in the name of a godless universe, have felt no compunction about killing vast numbers of people to refashion society in their own image (the atrocities of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, as committed Marxists, can hardly be attributed to belief in God).

Why are antitheists so selective in their use of evidence, focusing exclusively on the worst that is associated with belief in God and ignoring the worst that is associated with disbelief in God? And why does hatred of God invariably bleed through in their rhetoric? It would be one thing to argue, calmly, that belief in God has negative consequences that outweigh any positive effects.<sup>14</sup> But why do the present crop of atheists go out of his way to malign the Judeo-Christian God? For instance, Richard Dawkins writes not just as an atheist but as an antitheist when he describes the Judeo-Christian God as "arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction. Jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic-cleanser; a misogynistic homophobic racist, infanticidal,

<sup>13</sup>The debate took place at Prestonwood Christian Academy in Plano, Texas on 18 November 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIKLp1UnfG8> (Accessed 15 August 2011). For my prepared remarks in this debate, go to <http://www.uncommondescent.com/darwinism/prepared-comments-for-the-dembski-hitchens-debate> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

<sup>14</sup>In fact, the better argument can be made for belief in God having positive consequences that outweigh any negative effects. See, for instance, Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great about Christianity* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2007).

genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”<sup>15</sup> Dawkins and his fellow antitheists are protesting less an idea than a person—a person they claim is fictional and yet are treating as very real. That person is God.

The actual arguments such atheists use to deny God’s existence are less than convincing. Most tether their atheism to Darwinian evolution.<sup>16</sup> Richard Dawkins puts it this way: “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”<sup>17</sup> It is no coincidence that Dawkins, the world’s best known atheist, is also an evolutionary biologist. Atheists, like everyone else, need a creation story. Without God in the picture, something like Darwinian evolution must be true.

But Darwinian evolution is in deep trouble. If you doubt this, look at my book *The Design of Life*, Stephen Meyer’s *Signature in the Cell*, or Susan Mazur’s *The Altenberg 16*.<sup>18</sup> The latter, subtitled *An Exposé of the Evolution Industry*, is by a secular journalist. It shows how secular biologists are finding Darwinian theory so full of unresolved conceptual difficulties that they are conceding that the field is in disarray and needs a new theoretical underpinning.

But what about milder atheists—those who do not go out of their way to deny God’s existence but find that they seem to get on quite well without him? God, to them, seems irrelevant. Ironically, such atheists might provide stronger evidence for real atheism than overly reactive antitheists like Dawkins or Hitchens, who protest too much against God. Notwithstanding, milder atheists are not real atheists either. Milder atheists do not so much disbelieve in God’s existence as ignore Him. But turning your back on something or ignoring it does not make it go away, and at some level milder atheists realize that they are merely sidestepping the God question. The world has presented them with many distractions, and they are happy, for the moment, to forget God.

I have described hard-bitten atheists, who are vitriolic or even violent in their denials of God and may appropriately be called antitheists. And I have just described milder atheists, who, if pressed, will deny God’s existence but prefer simply to sidestep the God question in their daily lives. But where does that leave more thoughtful atheists such as Bertrand Russell or David Hume or A.J. Ayer or J.L. Mackie, who provide sustained critiques of theism?

<sup>15</sup>Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31.

<sup>16</sup>Christopher Hitchens, for instance, even goes so far as to devote a whole chapter to refuting design in biology, basing his argument on Darwin and evolution. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), ch. 6.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986), 6.

<sup>18</sup>William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells, *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* (Dallas: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2008); Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009); Susan Mazur, *The Altenberg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry* (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2010).

Even here, reading between the lines, I never find a fully convinced atheist. I find in them a reactivity against theism, a desire for no afterlife, a lack of peace about their position. For such reasons, I am not inclined to take them at their word.

Go back far enough in time, and atheism was a term of abuse. Go back further, and those branded as atheists were burned at the stake. It is only in recent times that atheists, in the sense of those willing to be publicly identified as denying God's existence, have felt at liberty to come out of the closet. For much of the last 60 years, Gallup polling data have shown a steady rise in atheism in the United States, starting at around two percent in 1948 and rising gradually to thirteen percent in 2009.<sup>19</sup> Although this rise is significant, the vast majority of Americans continue to eschew the label "atheist." Most Americans remain, and are happy to be called, theists. Is that good news? Let me suggest that we not pat ourselves on the back.

Whenever Richard Dawkins is interviewed on radio or television, he attempts to soften atheism by suggesting that we are all atheists about most of the gods that humans have ever worshipped—Isis, Thor, Zeus, etc.—so all he is proposing is that we get rid of one more god, the God of Christianity. He is trying to be overly clever here, but in a mistaken way he has a point. All of us, at places in our lives, forget God. All of us have acted in ways that implicitly deny God, that pretend God is not watching and that no one will hold us to account. In other words, all of us have been atheists not just about Isis and Thor and Zeus but also about the one true God.

Christian atheism may seem like an oxymoron, but, as I am using it, it is not. I have argued that there are no real atheists in the sense of people who believe deep down that there is no God. But plenty of people are willing to say that there is no God. These are the people we typically identify as atheists. Yet plenty more are willing to say that there is a God, even the Christian God, but then act as though this affirmation meant nothing. Barna polling group has found that, in category after category of moral failure, born-again Christians do no better, and in some cases worse, than atheists and agnostics.

Paul speaks to this problem in Titus 1:16. Many, according to Paul, "profess that they know God. But in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." In Mark 7:6, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." The language that Paul and Jesus use here is very strong. Fortunately, we serve a God of grace who gives us space to repent and return from our backslidden ways. But many never do.

Christian atheism, in which we deny God in our actions even though our lips seem to affirm him, is widespread. Consider the Barna polling data on marriage. Those who call themselves atheists and agnostics actually have,

<sup>19</sup>See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124793/This-Christmas-78-Americans-Identify-Christian.aspx> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

percentage-wise, fewer divorces than born-again Christians.<sup>20</sup> Yet, if asked, born-again Christians would say that they not only believe in God but also regard marriage as sacred. To be sure, there are legitimate grounds for dissolving marriage, but the statistics here suggest that many Christian marriages dissolve for illegitimate reasons. For a popular account of how widespread moral failure is among Christians and how our secular counterparts, statistically speaking, often do no worse in this regard, see Ron Sider's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*.<sup>21</sup> Sider is not my favorite author, but he is right that we need to do better.

The difference, then, between Christian atheists and secular atheists is this: Christians who act as though God does not exist are hypocrites because, if asked whether God exists, they will affirm that He does. On the other hand, atheists who publicly identify themselves as atheists are liars because, deep down, they know that God exists. In denying God, we can be hypocrites or liars, but we can not be real. In Daniel 5:23, Daniel tells Belshazzar, "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Our very life, moment by moment, depends on God. We are made in the divine image. God is closer to us than any created thing. Sometimes we miss something not because it is too far but because it is too near. Thus, we may forget that we are wearing glasses or a hat, or that we have a nose. God's very nearness is the atheists' excuse for denying Him.

To say that God is near is not to say that God can not also be far away. God is near to each of us in that He is the source of our being—every breath we take, we take in Him. Ontologically speaking, God is as close to us as close can be. But morally speaking, God can be quite distant. Thus, when it comes to our personal relationship with God, the distance between God and us can be great. Isaiah 59:1–2 reads, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that He will not hear." In many of the psalms, the psalmist pleads that God not be far from him. Sin puts a moral or relational distance between us and God. But it leaves untouched our ontological closeness to God.

Our challenge in confronting atheism is therefore this: to bring those who deny God to repentance and faith, thereby closing the moral gap between them and God. In the end, such moral transformation will always be the work of the Holy Spirit, who imparts God's grace to our lives and thereby leads us to salvation. But note, every act of divine grace presupposes the means of grace by which God makes that grace real to us. And that

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, The Barna Group, "Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians," 8 September 2004, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

<sup>21</sup>Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

brings us back to the title of this paper, “How to Debate an Atheist—If You Must.” Christian apologetics, in which we not only defend Christianity from the challenges of atheism but also challenge atheism with evidence of God’s existence, is one such means of grace.

Because it is a means of divine grace, apologetics must not be dismissed as something Christians can safely ignore. Indeed, throughout the New Testament, Christians are enjoined to defend the faith through rational argument. Thus, Peter urged, “Always be ready to make your defense [*apologia*] to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). Likewise, Paul understood his own ministry as constituting a “defense [*apologia*] and confirmation [*bebaiosis*] of the gospel” (Phil 1:7). The Greek *apologia* denotes a legal defense, and the Greek *bebaiosis* means verification or proof.<sup>22</sup>

Rational argument used to be an ally of the Christian faith. It was thought that sound arguments and powerful evidence supported the key claims of the Christian faith. If people rejected the teachings of Christianity, it was because they were not thinking clearly, and not, as is now commonly supposed, because our heads are telling us one thing and our hearts another. It is worth remembering that until 200 years ago, most people in the West saw the resurrection of Jesus in historically the same light as the other events of antiquity, such as Julius Caesar’s crossing the Rubicon. Christ’s resurrection and Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon were both regarded as equally factual and historical.

Unfortunately, in the 200 years since the Enlightenment, Christians have steadily retreated from seeing their faith as rationally compelling. Instead of being apologists for the faith, we have become apologetic about it. We tend to think that the reasons for rejecting Christianity are at least as strong as those for accepting it. After all, so many “smart” people now reject the faith. Moreover, these “smart” people have developed a veritable arsenal for dismantling the Christian faith, everything from biblical criticism, which purports to show that the Bible cannot be trusted, to advances in modern science, which purport to show that God’s role in nature is dispensable.

The Roman statesman Seneca observed, “If you want a man to keep his head when crisis comes, you must give him some training before it comes.”<sup>23</sup> Our secular culture breeds many a crisis of faith. It is common for young people who are enthusiastic about serving God to leave home, attend college, get exposed to faulty teaching, lose their heads, and turn away from the truth of Christianity.<sup>24</sup> People need to be equipped to handle the assaults on heart

<sup>22</sup>For more in this vein, see the introduction of William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>23</sup>Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell (New York: Penguin, 1969), 67.

<sup>24</sup>Frank Turek, at [Crossexamined.org](http://Crossexamined.org), tracks the loss of faith among evangelical young people who are churched throughout high school and then go off to college, only to lose their faith. He puts the incidence of loss of faith at 75 percent. Others come up with similar



and mind that they encounter at school, in the workplace, on television, and just about everywhere they look. This is why seminaries must teach apologetics, and this is why I commend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

All that has been said in this paper till now has been stage-setting, defining the problem of atheism and noting Christian apologetics' pivotal role in redressing it. But what does all this mean practically? How, in real life, are we to engage in the debate over atheism? Atheists speak to us and we must speak to them. They attempt to convince us that no God exists. Or, more precisely, since there is good reason to think no real atheists exist, they attempt to convince us to play their atheist language games, in which we are encouraged to talk as though no God exists even though deep down we all know that He does. Atheism thus attempts to undermine theology in its most fundamental sense. The very word "theology" comes from two Greek roots: *theos*, meaning God, and *logos*, meaning speech act or word. Theology is speaking about God—God talk. Apologetics keeps theology honest by insisting it speak rightly about God. This is the task of apologetics in confronting atheism, to preserve sound Christian theology.

I have debated many atheists over the years—one-on-one, in small groups, before large audiences, via radio and television, and on the Internet. Atheists raise four main challenges against Christian theism: the challenge of science, the challenge of history, the challenge of evil, and the challenge of divine presence. With regard to science, evolution is supposed to show that no intelligence was required to build biological organisms, thus rendering God unnecessary. With regard to history, biblical criticism is supposed to show that the Bible is replete with fanciful tales, thereby ruling out key events in salvation history such as the resurrection of Christ. With regard to evil, the existence of a good, all-powerful God is supposed to be incompatible with the existence of evil in the world. And finally, with regard to divine presence: Where is God? If God is the primary fact of reality, why is it so hard to see him? Why is it so hard to discern his presence?

The challenges of science, history, and evil, though serious, have in my view been answered successfully by Christian apologists. A good first place to look is a recent anthology entitled *Evidence for God*.<sup>25</sup> Anyone with a serious interest in Christian apologetics will have reflected at length on these three challenges in the course of their study. I want, therefore, to focus in what remains of this paper on the fourth challenge, which concerns divine presence. This, to me, is the greatest stumbling block for atheists, and the one that keeps them entrenched in their atheism. This challenge often fails to be

numbers (usually between 70 and 80 percent). See, for instance, Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It* (Green Forest, AR: Master, 2009).

<sup>25</sup>William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona, *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010). For the problem of evil, see my *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009).

articulated, so it is worth exploring even with expert apologists (such as the presumed readers of this paper).

To understand the challenge of divine presence, consider some remarks by Richard Dawkins regarding his visit to Lourdes as seen in his 2006 BBC production *The Root of All Evil?* Lourdes is a Catholic shrine in France where many pilgrims claim to have received miraculous physical healing. Dawkins denies that any miracles of healing have in fact ever occurred at Lourdes. What is interesting is how he denies the miraculous at Lourdes. He finds at Lourdes many crutches left behind by people who claim to have been healed of infirmities in their legs. This, it would seem, ought to provide some evidence (even if inconclusive) of miraculous healing and thus of a divine (or at least supernatural) presence at Lourdes. But not for Dawkins. Following the nineteenth century French atheist Anatole France, Dawkins asks why only crutches were left behind but not wooden legs.

Many have asked this same question. Indeed, an entire website with domain name [whywontgodhealamputees.com](http://whywontgodhealamputees.com) is devoted to it. On this website, one reads,

Does god heal amputees? The Bible clearly promises that God answers prayers. For example, in Mark 11:24 Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." And billions of Christians believe these promises. You can find thousands of books, magazine articles and websites talking about the power of prayer. According to believers, God is answering millions of their prayers every day. So what should happen if we pray to God to restore amputated limbs? Clearly, if God is real, limbs should regenerate through prayer. In reality, they do not. Why not? Because God is imaginary.<sup>26</sup>

Though mistaken in its conclusion, this statement raises an interesting point about the obviousness of divine action in the world. Even in the ministry of Jesus, we find no persons with missing limbs or missing body parts who get them miraculously replaced. In every instance, however diseased or misshapen, what Jesus heals is there already.

Since all things are possible with God, why does He not make Himself more obvious, as in restoring limbs to amputees? And since He does not make Himself more obvious, is not [whywontgodhealamputees.com](http://whywontgodhealamputees.com) right in concluding that God does not exist at all? What are we to make of this challenge? The problem is that obviousness is not an adequate criterion of divine presence. We can see this by going back to France's original criticism of the miraculous at Lourdes. Many contemporary atheists, in citing France, suggest that if miracles at Lourdes were real, we would see not just crutches but

<sup>26</sup>See <http://whywontgodhealamputees.com/important.htm> (Accessed 15 August 2011).

also wooden legs. Yet France considered what would happen if we actually did find wooden legs at Lourdes. He wrote:

Happening to be at Lourdes, in August, I paid a visit to the grotto where innumerable crutches were hung up in token of a cure. My companion pointed to these trophies of the sick-room and hospital ward, and whispered in my ear: "One wooden leg would be more to the point." It was the word of a man of sense; but speaking philosophically, the wooden leg would be no whit more convincing than a crutch. If an observer of a genuinely scientific spirit were called upon to verify that a man's leg, after amputation, had suddenly grown again as before, whether in a miraculous pool or anywhere else, he would not cry: "Lo! a miracle." He would say this: "An observation, so far unique, points us to a presumption that under conditions still undetermined, the tissues of a human leg have the property of reorganizing themselves like a crab's or lobster's claws and a lizard's tail, but much more rapidly. Here we have a fact of nature in apparent contradiction with several other facts of the like sort. The contradiction arises from our ignorance, and clearly shows that the science of animal physiology must be reconstituted, or to speak more accurately, that it has never yet been properly constituted."<sup>27</sup>

This is an amazing statement and one that contemporary atheists rarely quote in full (I have not found it at [whywontgodhealamputees.com](http://whywontgodhealamputees.com)). It shows that no evidence could ever get a hardcore atheist to admit that God exists. In every case, atheists will cite the possibility of alternative naturalistic explanations. Indeed, even if no such explanation is on hand, they will rationalize that no actual miracle has occurred, simply asserting that we are ignorant of the underlying naturalistic causes. Their faith in the power of nature knows no bounds.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the miracles that atheists often claim would lead them to acknowledge God, if they were to happen, would still not engender faith.

<sup>27</sup>Anatole France, *The Garden of Epicurus*, trans. Alfred Allinson (New York: John Lane, 1908), 176–77.

<sup>28</sup>Note that France's appeal to naturalistic explanations in this passage is not methodological. He is not saying that the method of science requires naturalistic explanations, and thus if we should see an amputee with a restored limb, science would necessarily be required to continue seeking naturalistic explanations because that is just the nature of scientific inquiry. Such an approach would allow the possibility of miracles, simply removing them from the purview of science. France's appeal to naturalistic explanations is much stronger. He is saying that if we should see an amputee with a restored limb, there would have to exist an explanation consistent with a naturalistic understanding of science. He is thus committed to nature operating by unbroken natural causes even if he is ignorant of their precise character. Accordingly, France is endorsing a metaphysical and not merely a methodological naturalism. For more on this distinction and why even this weaker form of naturalism (i.e., methodological naturalism) is unwise, see Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*.

Indeed, how could such events engender faith? The atheist will constantly move the bar higher and higher. As soon as God renders his presence more obvious, it will not be obvious enough—a new level of obviousness will be required. Signs and wonders indicating the divine presence are addictive. Witness the children of Israel in the desert after leaving Egypt. They experienced all the obviousness of divine presence one could ever desire, and still they failed to trust God. That is why, when the Pharisees demanded of Jesus a sign from heaven, Jesus refused to give it (Mark 8:11).

In Luke 16, Jesus tells of a rich man who ends up in Hades and wants desperately to spare his brothers that same fate. If only someone will rise from the dead and appear to his brothers, urging them to repent, this rich man pleads, then they will get their acts together and escape the torments he is now experiencing. What is the response to the rich man's plea? Luke 16:31, the final verse of the story, reads: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Perhaps that's why Jesus only appeared to 500 of his followers after his resurrection and not to the Pharisees, Sadducees, and mob that had him killed.

I've often mused why, in the wisdom of God, Jesus' resurrection occurred before the advent of video-recording technology. Would it not be great if we could have a video of Jesus' resurrection and his post-resurrection appearances? In fact, with Photoshop, animation software, and video-editing, anyone can be made to rise from the dead—at least so it could be made to appear. We may be on surer ground believing the Resurrection on the basis of eyewitness testimony by disciples who gave their lives for holding that testimony than on the basis of video-recording technology.

But surely, a flamboyant enough miracle would convince even the most hardened atheist of God's existence, would it not? Consider the miracle that would have convinced the atheist philosopher Norwood Russell Hanson to become a theist:

Suppose, however, next Tuesday morning, just after breakfast, all of us in this one world are knocked to our knees by a percussive and ear-shattering thunderclap. Snow swirls, leaves drop from trees, the earth heaves and buckles, buildings topple and towers tumble. The sky is ablaze with an eerie silvery light, and just then, as all of the people of this world look up, the heavens open, and the clouds pull apart, revealing an unbelievably radiant and immense Zeus-like figure towering over us like a hundred Everests. He frowns darkly as lightning plays over the features of his Michelangeloid face, and then he points down, *at me*, and explains for every man, woman and child to hear: "I've had quite enough of your too-clever logic chopping and word-watching in matters

of theology. Be assured N.R. Hanson, that I do most certainly exist!"<sup>29</sup>

Would that do it? Could God, if He fulfilled requests like Hanson's, turn all of us into compulsory theists? Hanson is asking God to prove Himself by becoming a special-effects artist. But special effects can never purchase theism. Fallen humanity is insatiable. Give us one special effect and we will need another even more dazzling to maintain our interest. We imagine that we would believe if only we could see something dazzling enough. What sort of God would this be who uses spectacle to convince us that He exists?

Certainly, a being who could perform Hanson's miracle would be smarter and stronger than we are. But would such a being be the transcendent God of Christian theism? Occam's razor, that principle of parsimony in science that advises us to go with the simplest explanation that adequately accounts for some phenomenon, would suggest that we explain Hanson's miracle by looking not to the Christian God but to technologically advanced aliens who enjoy subjecting lesser civilizations to cosmic freak shows. As with Anatole France, who would not be convinced of God even if amputees had their limbs restored, even Hanson would, I submit, backpedal and deny the Christian God if he witnessed a flamboyant miracle.

In this vein, consider Jesus' response to the Pharisees when asked about the coming of the Kingdom of God. In Luke 17:20–21 we read: "And when he [Jesus] was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Because we are made in the image of God, God is closer than close to each of us. We commune with God not through created intermediaries but through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is God himself, who woos and admonishes the unbeliever, and who is the most precious gift of every follower of Christ. All miracles involve manipulations of created material things. To the unregenerate heart, these can never, by themselves, lead to God. Only God can lead to God.

That said, a key means of grace by which God leads to God is apologetics. Thus, in debating atheists, we must learn as much as we can about the challenges atheists raise against Christian theism and learn what are the best

<sup>29</sup>N.R. Hanson, *What I Do Not Believe and Other Essays*, ed. S. Toulmin and H. Woolf (New York: Springer, 1971), 313–14. Hanson apparently drew inspiration for this challenge from David Hume, in whose *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1989), 37, he has Cleanthes remark: "Suppose, therefore, that an articulate voice were heard in the clouds, much louder and more melodious than any which human art could ever reach: Suppose, that this voice were extended in the same instant over all nations, and spoke to each nation in its own language and dialect: Suppose, that the words delivered not only contain a just sense and meaning, but convey some instruction altogether worthy of a benevolent Being, superior to mankind: Could you possibly hesitate a moment concerning the cause of this voice? and must you not instantly ascribe it to some design or purpose?"

apologetic arguments in reply.<sup>30</sup> We also need to sharpen our critical thinking and rhetorical skills, using all legitimate means at our disposal to advance the truth of God's Kingdom. But we must do so in love. It is vital ever to bear in mind that the problem with atheism is not the head but the heart. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."

God has already given atheists all that they need to believe in Him—if only their hearts did not lead them astray. God therefore refuses to indulge in flamboyant displays—signs and wonders—to convince atheists of his existence. It is a truism of counseling psychology that the presenting problem is never the real problem. The various challenges that atheists raise against Christian theism are, in the end, not the real problem. Instead, the real problem is that atheists have, for whatever reason, chosen to deny God and, short of God's grace acting on their lives, are looking for excuses to continue to deny God.

Our attitude as Christian apologists in debating atheists needs, therefore, to follow Paul's example in 2 Timothy 2:24–26:

The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

May God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us the grace to take these words to heart so that as we engage atheists with the truth of God's Word, they encounter not only the wisdom of God but also the love of God. Amen.

<sup>30</sup>For a thorough account of key apologetic arguments supporting Christian theism, I recommend Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).



## *Book Reviews*

### **Biblical Studies**

***Joshua.* By Robert L. Hubbard Jr. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 656 pages. Hardcover, \$34.99.**

This commentary is part of the Old Testament Series for the NIV Application Commentary. As this commentary series is now commonplace and known to scholars, the review will focus on broad impressions of the author's contributions.

The NIV Application Commentary is designed to "make the journey from our world back to the world of the Bible." The main goal is not only to explain the original meaning, but also to explore the contemporary significance. The authors keep to the structure and format of the series. The passages are dealt with in broad chunks—usually a chapter or a series of chapters. Each passage is discussed in three sections: Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance. The commentaries published so far in the Old Testament Series are excellent and the new Joshua commentary continues this tradition. The commentary series is written for pastors and expositors. Nevertheless, in spite of their emphasis on contemporary applications and accessibility, there is a scholarly undergirding. The authors address current critical issues in biblical studies, while still maintaining the authority of the text.

Hubbard takes on the unique task of guiding the reader from the original context of Joshua to applying the principles to modern day society. This is especially challenging since the contents of the book are for a specific time period in Iron Age Palestine and a particular period in the history of the Israelites. There are many cultural and theological questions (e.g. holy war, the ban, inheritance, Israel's right to the land, etc.) that are difficult to make a direct correspondence between text and life, an expositional goal that is primary to most evangelicals. Hubbard does an admirable job of staying true to the historical context and providing insights for using the book of Joshua as a guide to Christian living.

The commentary first discusses basic issues concerning the text of Joshua. It includes an introduction, outline, and selected bibliography. The introduction discusses the Israelite Conquest as an historical event, some theological issues such as Yahweh the warrior, holy war, and who does the promise land belong to today. While these discussions are brief, Hubbard demonstrates a depth of knowledge of the scholarly debate, particularly recent discussions of the historicity of the conquest. Most of the topics in the introduction are more fully discussed in the commentary. After the introduction, the exposition of the text follows according to the plan of the series format. At the end are four indices: Scripture, subject, author, and Hebrew words (transliterated).

One of the strengths of the commentary is the discussion of the various issues such as holy war, inheritance, and the Holy Land. Perhaps the best illustration is the application of the various inheritance and geographical data in the second part of Joshua that is usually avoided in the pulpit and personal Bible reading. Hubbard

skillfully introduces the reader to the ancient context of the biblical text, which is particularly insightful coming from someone familiar with the geography and land.

Hubbard does an excellent job of addressing archaeological issues as they are pertinent to the text (i.e., the destruction of Jericho and Ai, Hazor, etc.). As with most non-specialists, there is a disjuncture in the discussion of archaeology. For example, the archaeological discussion of Jericho and Ai focus on a fifteenth century dating of the Exodus while the discussion of Hazor is based on a thirteenth century dating. Most biblical archaeologists associate the hundreds of Iron Age I settlements with the conquest and settlement. These are not highlighted in the text, nor is there a discussion of the Late Bronze Age archaeology for the fifteenth century background. However, this disjuncture does not take away from the commentary nor the exegesis and insights from the text of Joshua. Hubbard does provide an excellent overview of theories of Israelite settlement in the introductory comments. A hidden gem is his solution and discussion of the problem of the archaeology of Ai.

One of the features of this commentary series is to discuss the text in large sections, usually complete chapters or series of chapters. There are pros and cons to this approach. A pastor or student will find it difficult to turn to a particular text or pericope and glean information or background data for that particular text, making it a challenge for the expositor to prepare an exegesis of the text. On the other hand, Old Testament narrative was not written for the twenty-first century expository sermon “text bites,” and the commentary on the texts needs to discuss the narrative in its entirety. This commentary is not valuable as a “quick reference.” I highly recommend that this be read in its entirety before any sustained study or preaching from the book of Joshua. Hubbard’s command of the text and its application for today brings difficult texts that are avoided by students of Scripture to the forefront. While the reader might disagree with some contemporary applications, Hubbard does an excellent job of making Joshua—with all of its battles and long lists of geographical terms—a useful book for the church’s edification and application.

Steven M. Ortiz  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Hebrews.* By David L. Allen. *The New American Commentary* 35. Nashville: B&H, 2010. 671 pages. Hardcover, \$32.99.**

David Allen is the Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He wrote his dissertation on the Lukan authorship of Hebrews. An edited version of it has also recently been published. Allen is a sound expository preacher who shows in this commentary the sound exegetical work that lies behind his sermons on Hebrews. He states in his preface that “painstaking exegetical spade work” must precede “theological analysis” (10). Allen therefore follows his exegetical work on each unit of the epistle with a section called “theological implications.” He intends for his theological sections to synthesize the results of his exegetical work and bring out the theological significance of each unit of Hebrews. He generally executes his plan successfully. The reader may find it helpful to read the theological sections first.

Allen provides more syntactical observations than one generally finds in other volumes of the *New American Commentary*. He shows his own attentiveness to the Greek text and therefore encourages the reader to engage the Greek text as well. If you do not know Greek, his observations are not overly technical or hard

to understand. The commentary is well-footnoted and interacts with a variety of sources, including the standard commentaries, significant articles, and theological works. Such interaction shows his commitment to work from text to theology. He is obviously looking for sources that are trying to do the same thing that he is trying to do.

In terms of his theological emphases, Allen spends a lot of time on Hebrews 6, especially 6:4–6. These are some of the most difficult verses in the New Testament and Allen decides to engage them rather than to skirt them. His engagement is extensive. He brought to my attention a number of recent attempts to deal with these difficult verses. In short, Hebrews 6:4–6 says that it is impossible for those who “fall away” to repent. Allen spends a lot of time clarifying what it means for believers to “fall away.” He concludes that falling away does not mean apostasy, that is, a turning away from the Lord and return to the state of unbelief. Rather, falling away involves “willful disobedience to God” (377). “Genuine believers” who fall away are “forfeiting some new covenant blessings in this life as well as rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ” (377). Allen calls this the “Loss of Rewards” view. Even if one does not end up agreeing with his view, his discussion in this section is quite helpful and will prompt further discussion of the knotty issues in these verses.

Overall, Allen’s commentary is a worthwhile investment for anyone who is serious about studying the Bible. I am especially hopeful, given his position as a preaching professor, that the volume will encourage preachers to do more “painstaking exegetical spade work,” as well as more careful “theological analysis” (10). Allen’s sermons on Hebrews show the benefits of both. Readers of this commentary should access some of his sermons and find encouragement there in terms of how to preach the message of Hebrews. In the preface, Allen makes a few observations on how to preach Hebrews. He finds Hebrews to be a model for expository preachers, “In Hebrews we find all the ingredients necessary for solid expository preaching: careful but creative exegesis, theological reflection and reasoning, a balance of exhortation and encouragement, pungent illustration of truth, and practical application—all creatively constructed into a masterful sermon that makes use of rhetorical techniques for maximum effect on the hearers” (12). He exhorts us, saying, “We who preach should learn from this great expositor” (12). Amen.

Paul M. Hoskins  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament.* By Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009. 896 + xxi pages. Hardcover, \$59.99.**

The primary question on most people’s minds when they see a new New Testament introduction being published could be summarized as “What sets this particular introduction apart from the others?” In other words, “Why is this book necessary?” This question is more acute regarding conservative evangelical introductions which generally reach similar historical conclusions. Do the authors break any new ground?

*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown (TCCC)* shares deep affinities with its popular evangelical predecessors (Carson and Moo, Guthrie) in regard to the traditional questions of New Testament introduction (authorship, date, provenance, and destination). Traditional authorship is defended, pseudonymity is rejected, and

early dates, within the New Testament authors' lifetimes, are defended. Beyond these similarities, there are several distinctive features of *TCCC* that set it apart as a unique contribution to pedagogy.

Apart from a few introductory and concluding chapters, each chapter in *TCCC* holds to a tripartite structure with the main headings History, Literature, and Theology. The section on history covers the traditional questions of New Testament introductions. The section on literature discusses the genre of the book, proposes an outline, and discusses the contents of the book. The section on theology analyses the primary theological themes of the book and its distinctive contribution to the New Testament canon. The authors begin in chapter one with a discussion of the nature and scope of Scripture, covering the formation of the canon, the transmission and translation of the New Testament, and inspiration and inerrancy. In chapter two the authors examine the Second Temple period as the background of the New Testament in terms of its history, literature, and theology. The books of the New Testament are studied in canonical order except for Paul's letters, which are studied chronologically, and Jude, which is grouped with the Petrine epistles. The authors close the book in chapter twenty-one with a discussion of the unity and diversity of the New Testament.

The emphasis on the theology of the New Testament, evident from the space devoted to the theology section in each chapter and the closing chapter on unity and diversity, goes beyond general New Testament introductions. This blend of New Testament introduction with New Testament theology, although adding to the length of the book, will be important for students who are able to take a New Testament survey class, but never have the opportunity for an advanced class on New Testament theology.

As should be expected, the chapters and bibliographies are up-to-date with recent scholarship (including works published in 2009), with extensive interaction with the new perspective on Paul. The student friendliness of the textbook is accentuated by helpful maps, sidebars, and an extensive glossary of terms at the end of the book. The study questions at the end of each chapter are generally well thought out and would be suitable for small group discussions in class, homework assignments, or short answer exam questions.

In addition to the first chapter on the nature of Scripture, where the authors set forth the basis of their hermeneutical presuppositions, the devotional sidebars throughout the text entitled "Something to Think About" evidence their evangelical stance. The intent of these sections, focused primarily on personal application, reflects the intent of the original authors of the New Testament, who wrote in order to produce life transformation in their readers and not simply detached, historical analysis (cf. John 20:31). While this feature will undoubtedly limit the textbook's reception in non-confessional institutions, the authors' historical arguments are based on publicly accessible historical data, and apart from the authors' rejection of methodological naturalism they employ widely agreed upon historical methodology.

Although it is only a minor complaint, chapters eleven (on 1 and 2 Thess) and twelve (on 1 and 2 Cor) would have been better if the books were treated consecutively in their entirety instead of moving back and forth between them. It is easier for a student to stay focused on the details of an individual book if they are discussed one at a time (as in chapter eighteen on the Petrine epistles and Jude).

*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* is as a solid contribution to evangelical scholarship that deserves the attention of professors and students alike. The amount

of space devoted to the theology of the documents, almost producing a New Testament Introduction/New Testament Theology hybrid, and the emphasis on the hermeneutical significance of Second Temple Judaism as the background of the New Testament are welcome distinctive contributions.

Alexander Stewart  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

***James.* By Dan G. McCartney. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 335+ xx pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

Dan McCartney contributes to the Baker Exegetical series with his commentary on James. The Baker series targets a wide audience, from the pastor seeking clear expositions, to the scholar seeking depth and precision (ix). McCartney's work accomplishes and surpasses these goals. Students and pastors will find the text direct and to the point, yet without any "dumbing down" of the material. At the same time, scholars will appreciate the extensive, up-to-date works cited as well as McCartney's thorough interaction with the most pressing issues of interpretation and text criticism.

In dealing with the text, McCartney recognizes the merits of some structural approaches but places greater value on central themes. These themes are recognized by length of discussion, structure within smaller textual units, and the interrelatedness of identified themes (62–63). Using this method, McCartney proposes that genuine faith is the controlling theme of James and that each issue is rooted in this idea. Thus, James 1 should be understood as an overview of the life of faith, and James 2 as a discourse about counterfeit faith. James 3 warns about the tongue's ability to portray genuine faith, while the strife in chapter 4 reveals a lack of faith. The merchants and landlords in 4:13–5:6 are "paradigms of unbelief" and "foils in contrast to the life of faith" (223). Finally, believers are encouraged to look in faith to God (5:7–18). McCartney's focused interpretation centered on faith makes his commentary an important contribution to the study of James. He convincingly writes, "The Epistle of James is properly seen as the epistle of genuine faith, not the epistle of works" (271).

Beyond his insight into the importance of themes, McCartney effectively demonstrates the relationship and cohesion of smaller text units. For example, exegetes often struggle to explain why the command against oaths (5:12) is sandwiched between the discussion about patience (5:7–10) and prayer (5:13–18). McCartney points out that people of faith resolve their problems by turning to God in prayer, rather than by impatiently making oaths. This is merely one example of how McCartney views James as a logical whole and finds connection between the various parts.

Yet, despite McCartney's ability to identify structure in James, it was here that I found the commentary's most glaring weakness. McCartney, following the suggestion of Bauckham, argues that proverbial statements are crucial and may even be a key to the structure of James (65). These statements (labeled apophthegms) are identified as short, memorable wisdom sayings in the third person indicative. Only seven verses in James, however, adhere to these parameters. In response, McCartney alters the definition to include verses which lack brevity and catchiness, yet still seem proverbial, and verses with verbs in the imperative. There are several problems with

such an approach. First, a rule with so many exceptions seems to be of questionable value. One wonders if the text is being forced to fit a mold. Furthermore, there are inconsistencies in the rule's application. Three out of the seven verses which fit the original definition are not used to mark transitions in McCartney's outline, but occur in the middle of a discourse. Subjectivity and the interpreter's need for a logical outline appear to reign in this paradigm. After all, verses considered pithy and proverbial by McCartney—verses such as “human wrath does not work God's justice” (1:20) or “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (4:4)—may strike other readers simply as matter-of-fact speech. McCartney would have done well, before relying so heavily on the role of proverbs in James, to develop a stronger definition and grounds for using this methodology.

This critique should not cause readers to avoid McCartney's commentary. The book's strengths far outweigh its weakness. McCartney deals skillfully with the text, avoiding unnecessary digression so as to keep the argument and thought flow in focus (e.g., 162). This is particularly evident in chapter two, the highly debated section on faith and works. McCartney devotes a section of the introduction as well as an excursus to the issue of James/Paul and faith/works so that his exegesis of chapter two can focus on the text. Elsewhere, McCartney acknowledges where adequate discussion has been achieved by other writers and refers readers accordingly (e.g., 157n8). McCartney shows his willingness to think independently by arriving at sometimes unpopular conclusions (171–72n39). He is careful in arriving at his conclusions, and does so only after presenting all sides of the issue (e.g., 214). Readers wanting a better understanding of the structure and message of James will do well to make use of McCartney's excellent commentary.

Andrew Bowden

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology.* By Thomas R. Schreiner Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 272 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.**

In 2008, Thomas Schreiner published *New Testament Theology*, a comprehensive analysis of the theological message of the New Testament. For this volume, Schreiner has pared down that larger work in an attempt to make his central message more palatable to a broad audience. Though both are aimed at pastors and students, this volume is designed to appeal to those wanting to work through a book with a less daunting page count. For this abbreviated edition, Schreiner explains that he has “eliminated virtually all footnotes” and points readers to his “larger work for more in-depth discussion” (9). Consequently, for many potential readers, this volume will relegate Schreiner's *New Testament Theology* to the reference shelf.

In comparing the two works, Schreiner has essentially reversed the order of his title and subtitle, highlighting more directly his thesis about the theology of the New Testament. Schreiner parses “magnifying God in Christ” by stating that “NT theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated” (19). His work seeks to expose “the centrality of God in Christ in the concrete and specific witness of the NT as it unfolds God's saving work in history” (19). In other words, Schreiner argues that the thrust of the New Testament demonstrates that “God will receive all the glory for his work in Christ by the Spirit as he works out his purpose in redemptive history” (19). His goal is to demonstrate this reality inductively at the level of the individual books as well as on the level of the whole of the New Testament.



Those who own Schreiner's previous volume will not need to obtain this one, as it is functionally an abridgement of that work. However, Schreiner does add a brief "pastoral reflection" to the end of each chapter where he very quickly points to possible areas of application. For instance, in the reflection after the first chapter, Schreiner asks, "Does the already-not yet emphasis of the NT make any difference in Christian life and ministry?" (36). He argues that this framework can guard against "political utopian schemes" and the illusion that perfection can be achieved this side of Christ's return. This reality can remind believers that they are not yet free from the effects of sin, encourage spouses to treat one another with grace, keep parents from demanding perfection from their children, and protect individuals from debilitating guilt about how imperfectly they strive for holiness. This type of reflection is helpful, though some of the other sections are not quite as developed (e.g., 57, 77).

Schreiner has refashioned a valuable and edifying resource that will be especially useful to those who share his evangelical convictions regarding Scripture. As stated above, Schreiner's intended audience is "pastors and students" (9). Evangelical pastors will appreciate his interaction with critical issues and his able defense of many conservative positions. His central thesis is also encouraging for those in the church looking for an energetic articulation of what the New Testament is really all about. Students who have read other New Testament theologies will benefit from exposure to a thematic and inductive approach with a sustained thesis throughout. The size of this version might also better suit the book to New Testament courses at the undergraduate level or in a church setting.

As an entry point into Schreiner's theological reflections on New Testament theology, this streamlined version will be a welcome contribution for those looking for a manageable treatment of the subject.

Ched Spellman  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation.* By Christopher Seitz. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 136 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

For interpreters wishing to engage in canonical interpretation, the specific issue of the ordering of the biblical books often poses a problem. Is there any logic at work in the writings themselves apart from the handling of post-biblical redactors or the decisions of church councils? In this volume, Seitz takes up this type of question by examining the unique character of the prophetic division in the Hebrew Scriptures. The content of the book represents an edited form of public lectures given at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia in 2007. In these lectures, Seitz argues that "the implications of canon formation are deeply imbedded in the processes of the Bible's coming to be" (12). For him, the prophetic corpus in the Hebrew Bible shows signs of interrelation at a fundamental level. His chief task in the book is to demonstrate that this association found in the formation of the canon is a unique achievement with considerable significance.

Seitz makes his case in four main parts. The first two chapters set the stage for his discussion and outline the contours of current canon research. Here Seitz stresses the need to recognize the integral role of the Old Testament in the formation of the Christian canon as a whole, the significance of stable groupings (e.g., the Book of the Twelve) within larger Old Testament divisions, and that later lists and orders are

rooted in prior canonical realities. Seitz then addresses the specific challenge of order and arrangement in standard Old Testament studies. The discussion regarding these matters is often mired by differing definitions of “canon.” Some hold that canon only signifies a collection that is “stable, closed” and “in fixed order” (52). Conversely, Seitz argues that there is significant stability and affiliation present within the writings themselves prior to final consolidation within a given community. For him, “early ‘canon formation’ means that it is possible to conceive of canon and scriptural authority in phases prior to closure” (54). These writings were viewed from their inception as the “word of God,” a trait that represents “Scripture’s inner nerve” (55). Because typical treatments of the prophets do not take questions of ordering and association into account, they often fail to recognize the internal relationships present in the biblical material.

In the last two chapters, Seitz contributes his own understanding of the way the major units of the canon formed. In the prophetic corpus, a unique achievement of “association” has taken place. Through intentional textual links, the former prophets are directly connected to the Law, the latter prophets are joined to the former, and the Twelve are associated with the three major prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. As a combined whole, these writings form a kind of conceptual grammar of “Law-Prophets” (33). For Seitz, this ordering and association involves more than serendipitous contextual relationships. The fact that certain books migrate toward each other entails something internal and intrinsic to the writings themselves. As the prophetic books were being produced, they were quickly viewed in light of each other. The prophetic history of Israel (the former prophets) is positioned as the framework in which the prophetic discourse (the latter prophets) is to be read. Seitz’s concern is to trace out the way this “prophetic division of the Hebrew Bible was a canonical achievement of the first order.” He shows that “this achievement did not come at the closing phases but was there from the very beginning” (44). Thus, the shaping of the prophetic corpus begins with the writers associating their works with other prophetic works and continues as those who receive these writings do the same.

Chapter four then demonstrates the accomplishment of the Writings division in the Hebrew Bible. Seitz argues that the Writings are associated with the Law by means of a different logic than the one at work in the Prophets. Whereas the Prophets as a unit are associated with the Law, the individual documents that make up the Writings connect to the Law independent of one another as discrete witnesses. For Seitz, these other writings exist alongside the “Law-Prophets” canonical core. This loose association explains why individual writings from this division show up in various places in later orderings (e.g., the movement of Ruth or Daniel). Because these books were associated with the Law and Prophets independently, they could migrate to different positions. The Writings division, then, is a “library of books” directly related to elements of the Law and the Prophets but not necessarily linked to one another. Due to the nature of these writings, they do not need to be fixed in order to recognize the prevailing “canonical” function of a previously established Law-Prophets entity. The Writings along with the subsequent New Testament documents respond to and are shaped by that foundational witness.

One immediate benefit of Seitz’s work is that it furthers the discussion regarding the ordering of the biblical books in the Christian canon. His research enables an interpreter who is interested in doing canonical interpretation to account for various lists and orderings found in the extant manuscripts. For Seitz, if one understands the

logic of association between books that occurs during the composition/canonization phase of canon formation, the varying sequences can be better understood. Many of the divergent orders can be identified as departures or modifications of a stable three-part Hebrew canon of Law, Prophets, and Writings. The presence of rival orders does not trivialize or negate these earlier theological associations. As long as the function of the Law and the Prophets is recognized, then differing orders, be they ancient or contemporary, can be accepted and understood.

Seitz's discussion of the difference between two main understandings of "canon" is also instructive. For Seitz, limiting the concept of canon to the idea of "closure" or "list" is reductionistic and causes a misinterpretation of early manuscript evidence. If there was in fact a stable witness known as "Law-Prophets" that was formative for the rest of canonized Scripture, then the fact that a third division of Writings was not completely set at the time of the New Testament does not entail an entirely destabilized Old Testament canon. This possibility is particularly significant, as the status of the Old Testament at the time of the New Testament is a watershed issue in the canon debate. In his analysis, Seitz demonstrates the importance of carefully defining the terms used to describe canon formation and also the implications of those definitional decisions.

One repeated theme of Seitz's analysis is the foundational role of the Old Testament canon. For Seitz, the Old Testament sets the theological horizons that the New Testament writers conform to in their writings (50). What is more, the precedent of a stable Old Testament canonical witness of the Law and Prophets supplies the canonical concept and impetus for the formation of a New Testament canon (102). In other words, not only did the Old Testament shape the theology of the New Testament authors, but it also influenced the material shaping of the New Testament canon. For example, the Twelve could serve as a precedent for a Pauline Corpus of epistles written in varying contexts brought together to serve a larger audience (12). A stable Old Testament witness helps explain the motivation and impetus for the formation of a New Testament canon. In this regard, Seitz shows that the Rule of Faith was also dependent on the Old Testament and was deeply exegetical (21–23). This emphasis has the potential of shedding significant light on the nature of the development of the Christian canon as a whole.

One possible area for further reflection relates to Seitz's treatment of association in the Writings. In order to account for a perceived lack of stability in ordering, Seitz stresses that the members of the Writings were not intentionally associated with one another. However, in making this case, Seitz might minimize the association that is in fact present among these documents. Seitz himself concedes that there is a measure of stability at least among the grouping known as the Megilloth. One might ask if these writings were intentionally associated with one another, albeit with a different principle of association. The interconnections that are present in the Writings seem to be based on verbal links between books and similarity of genre. Thus, recognizing and defining the various types of association in the different corpora more directly would be helpful. Also, showing in more detail how the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are interconnected with each other in addition to the way they connect with the former Prophets might strengthen Seitz's arguments for a tightly interrelated prophetic corpus. More generally, a clearer delineation of just what is involved in a book being "associated" with another would help readers evaluate the various claims Seitz makes.

Throughout this volume, Seitz draws on the work he has done on the book

of the Twelve in his previously published *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*. His work here also serves as a precursor to his forthcoming volume in Baker's Studies in Theological Interpretation series entitled *The Character of Christian Scripture: Canon and the Rule of Faith*. There, Seitz will continue the discussion broached in the present work and connect it to a broader treatment of Christian Scripture (10–11). Thus, as an independent monograph, there may be areas of Seitz's important project in need of additional development. However, as a brief yet substantive blueprint for further constructive work on the canon, this volume represents a valuable and engaging contribution.

Ched Spellman

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Reading the Bible Intertextually*. Edited by Richard Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy Huizenga. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009. 334 pages. Hardcover, \$49.95.**

No text is an island. Books are not written in complete isolation from other texts, authors, or communities. Both explicitly and implicitly, authors often draw upon other texts in their own compositions. These assertions form the core of the concept of intertextuality. In order to understand the way biblical writers use Scripture, scholars and critics have engaged in intertextual studies and reflected on the methods of intertextual approaches. However, it is not always clear how the term and concept are being used. In *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, editors Stefan Alkier, Richard Hays, and Leroy Huizenga acknowledge these matters and seek to facilitate dialogue between various approaches to intertextual theory. The book itself consists of a collection of fourteen essays originally presented at the "Die Bibel im Dialog der Schriften" conference at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany.

The editors divide the book into four main parts. Part I serves as the introduction to the book and sets the theoretical framework in which the rest of the essays will function. Part II contains six essays that provide examples of an intertextual interpretation of biblical texts. This section focuses mostly on the New Testament's use of Old Testament texts but also contains a few examples of the Old Testament's use of the Old Testament itself. After these biblical examples, Part III has five essays that investigate intertextual interpretation outside the boundaries of the canon. The textual possibilities here include ancient literary works as well as historical narratives from other periods. Part IV concludes the volume with further theoretical reflection on intertextuality and New Testament studies.

Because the purpose of the book is concerned with intertextual readings, many of the contributors define and defend the concept. In his two essays that bookend the work, Stefan Alkier grounds intertextuality in the linguistic discipline of semiotics. A semiotic approach views texts as "relational objects composed of signs" (3). Alkier specifically defines a "text" according to semiotic theory as "a complex verbal sign . . . that corresponds to a given expectation of reality" (7). In this model "texts *have* no meaning but rather enable the production of meaning in the act of reading" (3). This reading event involves unavoidable associations with other texts. For Alkier, intertextuality is not an addition to texts but rather "an intrinsic characteristic of textuality" (3). The result of this phenomenon is the "decentering and pluralizing of textual meaning" (3). Acknowledging this multiplicity, the pressing concern becomes the formation of criteria for discerning which textual connections are legitimate. In

ordering these criteria, there are both limited and unlimited concepts of intertextuality. Most intertextual approaches lean toward one of these two options.

In laying out a methodological framework, Alkier contrasts his approach with the other relevant models of meaning in the field of linguistics. He argues for a categorical semiotics in contrast to structuralist or post-structuralist semiotics. Structuralism viewed a text as a closed system of signs that could be discerned with reference solely to the object of study. In reaction to this model, post-structuralism shifted the focus to the limitless possibilities of meaning derived from elements outside of a text. Alternatively, Alkier argues for a model of categorical semiotics that seeks to encompass the concerns of the other two approaches. Categorical semiotics examines texts with the categories of *intratextual*, *intertextual*, and *extratextual* analysis. Intratextuality investigates the text itself as an independent entity in its own context. Intertextuality then examines the relationship a text has with one or more other texts. Extratextuality describes the way external and foreign elements interact with the text. These types of analysis build on each other and are ideally to be done in sequence.

In this scheme, the category of intertextuality can be approached from three perspectives. The production-oriented perspective investigates the intertextual connections that are “produced” by the author of a text. These connections are somehow marked in the text and are part of the “intertextual potential” of the original composition. These intentional or circumstantial “markings” serve as pointers to intertextual references. This perspective represents a narrow/limited conception of intertextuality. Alternatively, the reception-oriented perspective investigates the intertextual connections generated by the working context of the reader. This reception-oriented reading inquires about the “interweaving” of two texts either “in historically verifiable readings” or in “historically possible readings even if historical evidence is lacking” (10). The former angle on this perspective is tied to a limited conception of intertextual and the latter to an unlimited one. Finally, the experimental perspective examines the reading of two or more texts together without concern for whether or not they have any organic connection with each other (10). The example Alkier gives for this perspective is a study done on the “intertextual” relationship between *2 Kings*, *Revelation*, and *Gone with the Wind* (10–11). These categories of intertextuality make up the technical vocabulary that the rest of the contributors will use in articulating the type of intertextual analysis they employ.

Another important concept used throughout is the “universe of discourse” and the “model reader.” The universe of discourse is a phrase that denotes the contextual world in the mind of the reader. This universe is also referred to as an “encyclopedia” (8, 35–37). An encyclopedia is “the cultural framework in which the text is situated and from which the gaps of the text are filled” (8). The model reader is similar to the implied reader. An author of a text assumes a model reader who has a certain universe of discourse. This shared context allows for the production of meaning. Because much of intertextual study depends in some degree on the reception of texts by readers, these two concepts play a pivotal role in the overall discussion.

In addition to these methodological distinctions, the contributors in Part II also provide New Testament examples of intertextual connections with the Old Testament. Michael Schneider gives an intertextual reading of 1 Corinthians 10 by investigating how the words, images, and themes from the Pentateuch broaden and enhance Paul’s meaning. Eckart Reinmuth shows how the “narrative abbreviations” of the Adam story from Genesis function in the book of Romans. Leroy Huizenga



uses the Isaac narratives and its reception history in Jewish exegesis to highlight the Isaac/Jesus typology in the book of Matthew. Florian Wilk examines the way Paul uses, interprets, and reads the book of Isaiah as evidenced in his epistles. Richard Hays argues that Luke employs “intertextual narration” by drawing on an array of Old Testament texts and images in order to present Christ and the Church as the fulfillment and continuation of God’s plan for Israel. Finally, Marianne Grohmann shows the intertextual connections between the Song of Hannah and Psalm 113, and how Mary’s Magnificat in Luke alludes to both of them.

One of the primary strengths of this volume is the window it provides into the dialogue regarding intertextuality in the European context. As evidenced by these diverse essays, the international conversation is interdisciplinary, ecumenical, and rooted in linguistic analysis. This collection allows readers quickly to recognize these emphases and become aware of a broader perspective. Additionally, the discussion helps clarify the concept of intertextuality itself. For instance, Alkier’s formulations noted above provide a helpful guide to the spectrum of interpretive options and divergent understandings of the concept. This larger frame of reference will enable biblical interpreters to nuance the way they speak of the nature of intertextual relationships between texts. The practice of carefully attending to the widening layers of context (i.e., intratextual, intertextual, extratextual) in proper sequence is also a helpful reminder of the importance of a holistic textual interpretation.

The range of essays in the book also demonstrates what is at stake in the difference between a limited and an unlimited conception of intertextuality. As each contributor usually outlines his or her understanding of intertextuality, readers can quickly note the various ways in which texts are handled. Moreover, the essays show that one’s theory of intertextuality depends on one’s theory of textuality (42). For instance, if one views texts as fundamentally open and fluid, he or she will probably favor an unlimited conception of intertextuality. Recognizing this facet of the discussion should compel interpreters to think through their working definitions of text and textuality in a more comprehensive manner. These methodological elements have the potential of enhancing sound exegetical practice among biblical interpreters.

Alongside these strengths, there are also a few concerns and places for further reflection. Some elements of this dialogue might make hermeneutically conservative interpreters nervous. One example is the repeated assumption that the act of reading produces “limitless possibilities” for meaning. Though some criteria are given in the larger semiotic framework, they primarily deal with the aims of interpretation rather than with controls and restraints on divergent interpretive tendencies (237–39). Consequently, the general consensus in the book is definitely inclined toward a reader-oriented approach (43, 242–43). Indeed, an open conception of intertextuality requires the reader to be integrally involved in the generation of meaning. For instance, Alkier asserts that the meaning of a text “will change in every new act of reading and in every new combination of texts” (12).

There is also a strong ecumenical motivation in arguing for a plurality of meaning (e.g., 224). In parts of the book, there is an underlying assumption that a plurality of meaning necessarily contributes to an inclusive social order, and that a more narrow conception of meaning necessarily lends itself toward myopic authoritarianism. Some will question the viability of this correlation, as a plurality of meanings is nonetheless capable of producing close-minded fundamentalism. Conversely, a robust, multi-faceted understanding of the literal sense is also able to produce and



encourage gracious cultural/ideological interactions.

Because much of this discussion works from the vantage point of an expansive model of “meaning making,” entire sections of the book focus solely on extrabiblical material. As noted above, Part III is devoted to “intertextual interpretation outside the boundaries of the canon” (138). For example, Peter Möllendorff discusses the “mimetic potential” related to Lucian’s *True History* and Thomas Schmitz offers a comparison of two works by the Greek writer Nonnus. Though intriguing, these case studies have little to do with the interpretation of biblical texts. Further, in Parts I, III, and IV, the Old Testament is just another text in the “universe of discourse” and does not usually merit an interpretive priority. This feature resonates with the implicit tendency toward extratextual analysis in parts of the book. In this type of investigation, written texts are viewed as only a subset of a larger constellation of signs. Hans-Günter Heimbrock’s essay expands the notion of “text” in phenomenological terms (212–20). In this approach, there is no privileging of texts over even archeological objects. Thus, one can assert that “stones, coins, and apparatuses do not possess less sign character than writings” (247). This type of analysis is not in itself unprofitable. However, those who are interested in “reading *the Bible* intertextually” or who hold to a chastened view of intertextuality will find these elements less compelling.

One concluding reflection involves the possible role of the canon in the intertextual conversation. The concept of “canon” might constructively aid the process of forming controls for the limitless possibilities of meaning. An intentional recognition of canonical boundaries would limit and exclude many intertextual connections. However, a closed canon would actually produce and generate intertextual possibilities as well. (Schnieder raises this possibility in his essay [46]. George Aichele’s essay “Canon as Intertext: Restraint or Liberation?” treats this issue as well, albeit in a different manner [139–56]). By creating contextual relationships between a diverse set of texts, the canon provides a space where intertextual connections are realized. In this model, intertextual connections function within the atmosphere provided by the canon and do not need to journey into the outer space of extratextuality in order to generate fruitful meaning. This conception of intertextuality works within the framework of an author’s intention by means of a confessional-canonical starting point rather than a historical-critical one. Accordingly, readers who adopt a narrow view of intertextuality and are concerned with the communicative intention of authors will see the canon as a more constructive place for the generation of textual meaning than is often allowed for by the contributors.

These concerns aside, the editors achieve their purpose of providing access to a lively dialogue regarding intertextual theory and praxis. Biblical interpreters will benefit from thinking through intertextuality alongside these learned conversation partners.

Ched Spellman  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### Theological Studies

***Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology.* Edited by Gary T. Meadors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. Softcover, \$19.99.**

Few events can be more confusing or discouraging to new Christians than to hear two individuals declaring that the Bible teaches opposing positions, or that the

Bible does not address an issue at all. Many Christians have realized that the Bible can be treated “like a dummy in the hands of a ventriloquist” (7). Consequently, there has been growing interest in the question not of what the Bible teaches, but of how the Bible teaches. *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* presents answers to the latter question in the popular Counterpoint format. Influenced by I. Howard Marshall’s *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), this book is unique in the Counterpoint series in that the positions discussed are by no means fixed representatives—the field is still developing. Howard’s own principled model makes an appearance, but the diversity of the field is made evident in that editor Gary Meadors invited three additional scholars to reflect on the given views, and those scholars presented additional views.

In order to appreciate these various views more clearly, the reader should know that “beyond” does not imply the insufficiency of Scripture. As Meadors notes, when a church member greets a friend with a handshake rather than a holy kiss, he or she has moved beyond the Bible. Any time a pastor preaches a text of Scripture, he has moved beyond the Bible. These authors agree about the authority of the text; they disagree about how the Bible applies to contemporary issues. Most importantly, they disagree about the fundamental nature of Scripture: is it a reference manual for life or spirituality? a script? a roadmap? an enculturated story? The four contributors engage in a very lively (and valuable) debate over this important question.

#### **“A Principializing Model,” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Reviewed by Chris Johnson**

Walter Kaiser presents the first view, the “principalizing model,” which reflects similar sentiments expressed in his well-known *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. In order to detail his basic approach, Kaiser first defines principalization: “To ‘principalize’ is to [re]state the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church” (22). He is quick to distinguish principalization, which derives its conclusions from a careful study of the text, from allegorizing or spiritualizing. Following this explanation, Kaiser outlines how an interpreter would implement his method.

First, the interpreter must determine the subject of the passage in question (22). Second, the interpreter must determine the emphasis of the passage and also note any connections between its words, phrases, and clauses (23). Following this, the passage can be expressed as a propositional principle, regardless of genre. Kaiser offers a “Ladder of Abstraction” as a paradigm for moving from a specific biblical example to a general principle and then to a specific contemporary application. The text of Scripture provides the general principles. From the general principle the interpreter is able to draw out the underlying theological or moral principle and finally apply this to a specific contemporary situation. Kaiser demonstrates how his proposal functions by working through questions including euthanasia, the role of women in the church, homosexuality, and slavery, as well as abortion and stem cell research.

Kaiser closes his chapter with a brief interaction with I. Howard Marshall’s *Beyond the Bible*. Kaiser rejects Marshall’s conclusions by arguing that the biblical writers and early Christians really did not go beyond the text. Kaiser points to the idea of progressive revelation (but not the destructive forms of it) as a key to understanding what takes place between the Old and New Testaments. Kaiser argues that what some might call development and human discovery is actually the perfection

of God's revealed truth (47).

Kaiser's contribution is helpful in that he seeks to anchor theology firmly in Scripture. Although addressed indirectly, Kaiser's approach reveals a high view of Scripture. He wholeheartedly rejects the notion that the Bible is insufficient to address the complexity of modern ethical problems. He acknowledges that many modern dilemmas do not receive direct treatment in Scripture while also affirming that interpreters should not consider God's Word silent on these concerns.

In spite of his positive contributions, Kaiser's work does have some limitations. First, Kaiser devotes the bulk of his essay to test cases of his method. While he ought to be commended for showing how his proposal functions practically, one example would have been sufficient. In his preoccupation with the practical results of his method, Kaiser shifts the focus of the essay too closely upon the contemporary issues, while his conclusions on some of the issues are also particularly unsatisfying. For example, Kaiser's discussion on women and the church does illustrate an application of his principalizing approach, but he undermines his position with the brevity of his treatment. His conclusions on the role of women in the church satisfy his own convictions, but another interpreter could just as easily argue for the opposite viewpoint using Kaiser's method. One's conclusions then depend on the principles chosen.

Another weakness of Kaiser's work is that his approach tends to downplay any differences between the various genres of Scripture. To be fair, Kaiser seems to make an effort to avoid doing this. He distinguishes between the various genres and there is no doubt that he understands the differences. Yet his approach tends to reduce a passage to a rigid summary statement. This is not to argue against propositions but only to say that Kaiser's approach might lead an interpreter to miss unique aspects of the various genres in an effort to principalize a given passage.

Kaiser's proposal lends much to commend itself. His use of specific examples of how his method works in practice is helpful for anyone wishing to adopt his method in their own exegetical work. His approach offers the preacher a constructive way to avoid the moralizing and allegory that can often appear when working through the narrative passages of Scripture (especially Old Testament narrative). Kaiser's proposal also helps the interpreter engage other passages of the Old Testament that he might otherwise ignore. All in all, Kaiser's work in this chapter is quite a useful tool for any exegete.

**“A Redemptive-Historical Model,” Daniel M. Doriani. Reviewed by Billy Marsh**

Daniel Doriani, senior pastor of Central Presbyterian Church and adjunct professor of New Testament at Covenant Seminary, presents doing theology in a “redemptive-historical model” (RHM) (75–76). In his first section, “Foundations for a Redemptive-Historical Interpretation,” Doriani situates the RHM within classical evangelicalism surveying its scriptural presuppositions concerning the authority, sufficiency, and clarity of Scripture. In addition, he envisions the task of biblical interpretation and application as one of “technical skill, art, and personal commitment” (76).

Section two, “The Redemptive-Historical Method and its Way Beyond the Sacred Page,” provides steps for doing theology beginning with exegesis and moving into theological interpretation and application. For Doriani, the interpreter seeks first the authorial intent with priority given to the writer's main point. Second, his

task is to synthesize the biblical data into a holistic theological reading of the Bible (84–85). Third, Doriani suggests that all Christian application should be understood through “the imitation of God/imitation of Christ motif” (86). And fourth, by highlighting the use of biblical narratives, he argues that these narratives ought to be viewed as paradigms for daily Christian living (87–88).

In his third section dedicated to surveying alternative approaches for going “beyond the sacred page,” Doriani does little more than briefly interact with the methodological fruits of the methods of I. H. Marshall and proponents of a trajectory or movement view of Scripture. Doriani’s fourth section entitled, “Going Beyond the Sacred Page through Casuistry,” encourages the use of “casuistry” for carefully moving beyond Scripture for constructing theology. He acknowledges the potential pitfalls of “casuistry”; nonetheless, Doriani sees the term’s appeal to a higher principle as beneficial for guidance through complex issues not directly addressed in Scripture.

In his final section, “Going Beyond the Sacred Page by Asking the Right Questions,” Doriani proffers four “questions the Bible endorses” to ask when applying Scripture’s teachings to everyday life: “What is my duty?” “What are the marks of a good character?” “What goals are worthy of my life energy?” “How can I gain a biblical worldview?” (102–03). For the remainder of his chapter, Doriani applies his “right” questions and his interpretive methodology to two controversial life-issues: gambling and women in the ministry.

Doriani’s contribution, although basic and orthodox in its presentation, affords instances that require critical evaluation. For example, within his first section, Doriani fails to give any real explanation of the distinctives of his model. In particular, the emphasis on “history” in his method’s title is never fully discussed. He does delve into the role of paradigmatic narratives for Christian application, but he does not clarify what he means by “redemptive-history” as the preferred way to perceive the Bible as canon. Doriani neglects to expound upon this fundamental feature in sufficient detail.

Doriani’s narrative approach is welcomed as a means of appropriating the character of Scripture, but weakened by his search for patterns within the biblical narratives. The discovery of patterns is helpful, but Doriani does not specify what constitutes a pattern. Moreover, is a series of patterns necessary to produce a norm or is a single occurrence sufficient (89)? Vanhoozer notes rightly in his response that here Doriani shifts from “prudence” into principalizing (130). Furthermore, when suggesting “casuistry” as another means of moving from the Bible to theology, Doriani’s appeal to higher principles seemed to depart from his narrative intent. With respect to his commitment to “the imitation of God/Christ motif,” “casuistry” needs to be brought into congruence with this form of application which Doriani identifies as the standard and goal of Christian character formation (86).

In conclusion, Doriani’s proposal is exactly what he says it is: “a call to return to diligent exegesis and the orthodoxies of interpretation” (118). One should respect Doriani’s commitment to a classical evangelical approach to Scripture, but the RHM itself finds insufficient treatment. The essay leaves the reader unsure as to why he or she ought to adopt the RHM in particular, notwithstanding the value of his theory of narrative for Christian ethics, which is not, however, reserved for Doriani’s approach alone. As a chapter in a Counterpoint book where one’s position is meant to achieve superiority and approval over other options, Doriani’s falls short of its potential to present a strong nuanced method, which is demonstrated by the fact

that both Kaiser and Vanhoozer spend more time agreeing with him than not.

**“A Drama-of-Redemption Model,” Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Reviewed by Michael Economidis**

The title of Vanhoozer’s contribution to Gary Meador’s *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* is apt. As in his *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer, Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, is greatly interested in the analogy of theater to Bible interpretation and Christian life and the relatedness of speech to act. He sets the stage, so to speak, by noting the dramatic quality of the Christian faith and relating the various aspects of theological work to aspects of the theater (155–62). From there, he discusses the viability of considering interpretative functions as a subset of performance. He wants to affirm this viability and understand “the criterion for normative appropriation [as] a function of what I shall term the implied canonical reader,” i.e., a disciple (169). The goal of this appropriation is the Theodramatic Vision, or reading a passage wisely, which is a “demonstration of theodramatic understanding, . . . not to apply but to appropriate [the Bible’s] message” (170). It requires creativity on the part of the performer, and Vanhoozer provides measuring rods to protect against poor theological improvisation: the canon sense, the catholic sensibility, and the rule of love (179–84). He then offers two case studies, Mary and transsexuality, and sums up the entirety of his essay and method with the acronym AAA (attend, appraise, advance) (198).

Vanhoozer’s concept and method here have much to commend them. The theater analogy seems particularly helpful in that it emphasizes the great need on the part of believers and of the world as a whole for those believers to play their part in the ongoing drama of redemption (160). It should also be mentioned that Vanhoozer’s vision of a grand drama in which all believers participate and into which they may also be led by appropriating the world “in front of” the text (166) is quite appealing. One might take issue, though, with the apparent false dichotomy between what Vanhoozer calls “abstract truth” and “concrete wisdom-in-fact” (159, cf. 178, 203). Yet, to neglect the attainment of knowledge, “abstract (propositional) truth,” is to neglect an important aspect of interpretation, which is still a vital area of life the neglect of which can only hinder the “performative” variety of interpretation.

With this dichotomy of “mental” and “performative” interpretation in mind, one might also note that perhaps the philosophy of interpretation might be reversed and augmented in Vanhoozer such that performance and mentation could be viewed as species of the genus interpretation (165). Doriani rightly notes that Scripture offers examples of believers being taught worldviews and propositions. Such a view would result in a much broader, arguably more functional method that would better define the relationship between doctrine and ethics.

A second issue concerns Vanhoozer’s statement to the effect that, “*Sacra pagina* is profitable for *sacra doctrina*, which in turn is profitable for *sacra vita* (holy living)” (154). It seems that Vanhoozer reverses the final two in theory, yet his practice seems to reflect the order of the quote. To focus on the appropriation of the world in front of the text (158, 166, 170) would be to focus on *sacra vita*, would it not? Thereby, one’s focus in reading and interpreting would decidedly not be on *sacra doctrina* primarily. This all assumes, though, that “doctrine” is not doctrine in the formulaic sense but in the sense of principle-by-which-to-live. To live by Scripture, to appropriate the drama into one’s own life, necessitates “concrete” guides (principles?), to incorporate. One does not simply appropriate godly living by osmosis through



reading. One reads, finds an example of how to live (principle), and incorporates (appropriates) that example into his life (159, 166–70, 172, 178–84, 198). Thus, ethical norms, as opposed to doctrines (formulas of belief), are the presuppositions of ethics. Yet, Vanhoozer does not distinguish between doctrines as ethical norms and doctrines as formulas of belief, so one wonders as to how Vanhoozer understands the process of interpretation correctly to function in light of his stated order and his practical usage.

One cannot, however, fault Vanhoozer's correct emphasis on the interpretive acting-out of the believer's faith. And, above all else in his essay, the call for appropriation of the text should bring his readers' focus back to a genre of interpretation that is often simply assumed, namely that interpretation demands submission on the part of the interpreter to immersion in the world of the text and to the authority thereby represented. Vanhoozer offers a complement to much of modern Bible study, yet it needs the steady, propositional support of traditional Bible study to provide anchorage.

**“A Redemptive-Movement Model,” William J. Webb. Reviewed by Jonathan Wood**

William J. Webb, known for his book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, presents the Redemptive-Movement Model for moving from Scripture to theology. His contributions in *Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* stands as a phrase of response in the conversation generated by his previous methodological assertions. This response comes to the reader's attention in the section, “Correcting Misconceptions,” which may be summarized as Webb's defense against the claims of his opponents that his approach endangers the verbal-plenary doctrine of revelation.

Webb argues that the task of the theologian is to go beyond the concrete specificity of the Bible lest he warrant accusation of stopping where the Bible stops. Webb's model for moving beyond the Bible depends upon simultaneously understanding the text from the perspectives of the original culture, the reader's culture, and the ultimate ethic projected by the spirit of the text. An essential part of Webb's model is that the spirit of the text produces incremental movement from the cultural ethic toward the ultimate ethic. Biblical study should seek to discern this “movement meaning,” which in turn should “tug at our heartstrings and beckon us to go further” (217). The hermeneutic Webb employs rests upon a strong idea of accommodation in which God met individuals at the point they could comprehend incremental moral progress.

Webb rightly draws attention to the limitation of a mindset which operates under the rubric of going only where the Bible goes and stopping only where the Bible stops. He views this method as inadequate for developing theology in cultures subsequent to the formation of the canon. His arguments provide emphasis to the inherent necessity of thinking beyond the words of the Bible in the task of theological formation. Additionally, Webb's approach rightly values cultural and historical context. However, this chapter raises several concerns.

First, it appears that Webb does not think that Scripture provides an ultimate ethic. Webb claims that the interpreter must look to the redemptive movement of the text to discover the trajectory on which one must continue to find the ultimate ethic. However, the definition of the redemptive movement in Scripture suffers from a vagueness that prevents the necessary boundaries by which trajectories springing from Scripture may be evaluated. The consequence of leaning so heavily on the



redemptive trajectory of Scripture is compromising the biblical canon as final and closed revelation. Webb defends himself on this point by affirming the New Testament as God's final revelation, yet he still perceives a distinction between the revelation of the New Testament and the implications of the redemptive-movement spirit of the text. The danger created is that such a hermeneutic for discerning the redemptive-movement element lacks interaction with the text as authoritative guide.

One manifestation of this is Webb's dependence upon the authority of extra-biblical sources instead of the text of Scripture itself to bear out the trajectory. For example, the movement of slavery texts toward an ultimate ethic of abolition depends upon discerning ancient Near Eastern context. Similarly, the development of corporal punishment texts away from the primitivism of spanking rides on non-inspired cultural law codes. Webb's method hinges on cultural artifacts for discerning the moral trajectories of Scripture. Perhaps the most significant consequence of Webb's approach is that the biblical text does not contain the ultimate ethic.

A final mention of Webb's method focuses on the scope of the theology produced by his method. A weakness of his contribution to the book, and perhaps his method in general, is overemphasis on the area of moral theology to the exclusion of other areas of theology. He does not discuss in what way the redemptive-movement elements of Scripture relate to the formulation of doctrine outside of moral theology. Perhaps looking at Webb's proposal in the light of the history of doctrinal development would reveal that many crucial doctrinal developments in areas such as Christology were not settled so much on the basis of a movement behind the text, but more so as a result of meditation upon the concrete particulars on the page.

### **Conclusion and Summary**

The variety of methods of biblical interpretation and application—and the impact of that variety—cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the reviewers noted valuable aspects of each. The principlizing model correctly identifies objective revealed truth in Scripture. The redemptive-historical model correctly notes that the Bible centrally bears witness to God's eternal plan to redeem humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ. The drama-of-redemption model correctly emphasizes that the Bible is not merely to be read, but to be lived. The redemptive-movement model rightly recognizes that God gave the Bible at a particular nexus of history and culture which cannot be ignored in hermeneutics. Some of the authors recognize the complementary nature of their views, but each maintains a sense of tension between them. Readers will find themselves agreeing and disagreeing with elements of each of the views, underscoring the potential of this subject to generate growth as well as division.

Interestingly, Meadors brings in three additional scholars to present further reflections on the four views presented. Mark Strauss teaches New Testament at Bethel Seminary. He emphasizes the subjectivity of biblical interpretation and consequently minimizes the goal of discovering objective principles rather than practices. He sees value in affirming the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, but insists that a Bible reader cannot stay completely in the text, so to speak. He recognizes the huge limitations of Vanhoozer's drama metaphor and Webb's search for a so-called trajectory of the Spirit. He then proposes in their stead a model of the Bible as a bridge or a journey which, he admits, runs into those same limitations. Al Wolters teaches philosophy and Old Testament at Redeemer University College. He points out how each view falls short in the most challenging texts, especially those about child discipline, slavery, and gender subordination. Instead, he proposes that the

Bible does actually teach offensive positions to those in an enlightened Western context. In place of the four views, he offers general revelation (“creation revelation”) as the key to unlocking the Bible; it is the real context for the drama of humanity (to use Vanhoozer’s term) and it cannot be separated from historical conditioning. Christopher Wright directs Langham Partnership International. He sees elements of truth in each of the views presented and offers the case study of unclean meat to prove his claim. But rather than pick apart their weaknesses, he focuses on the need for a unifying, intentional approach to Scripture, whatever it may be. He proposes the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation as that approach, emphasizing its missional perspective. In essence, Wright simply replaces the views with a missional hermeneutic, elegant (and very limited) in its simplicity.

Each of the three additional authors points out the unintended discrepancies and parallels in the four views. For example, where Vanhoozer would emphasize living out the story of forgiveness in the parable of the prodigal son, Kaiser would focus on the principle of forgiveness. But in what ways are these approaches really different? How can they be separated? When Doriani synthesizes Scripture into ethical statements, how is this different from the principlizing model? Yet when Doriani and Kaiser come to opposing conclusions about issues such as gender roles, how do they determine which is wrong? Clearly, often each of the contributors simply talk past one another. The diverse reactions of the additional contributors underscore just how difficult this debate is. Readers may not agree with the views, but they will learn a great deal.

Matthew W. Ward

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of the Every Person Who Ever Lived.* By Rob Bell. New York: HarperCollins, 2011. 202 + xi pages. Softcover, \$22.99.**

Rob Bell, long-time pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, and provocateur extraordinaire, provides another controversial, popular-level book in the vein of *Velvet Elvis* (2006) and *Sex God* (2008). Ever the deconstructionist, Bell continues his usual approach, begun in *Velvet Elvis*, of thought-provoking questioning. However, Bell is no religious anarchist. Rather, as he writes in the first chapter, “this isn’t just a book of questions. It’s a book of responses to these questions” (19). For this, he is to be commended. Rather than hiding his own certitude behind the veneer of “just asking questions,” Bell is an honest deconstructionist, signaling his intention to reconstruct, replacing what he is convinced is false with what he is certain is true. Specifically, he contends that the story of Jesus’ love triumphs over all other stories and that the oft-told stories of God’s judgment are misguided.

Surprisingly, there is much good in Bell’s book, as he raises some excellent questions, pressing evangelicalism in some areas in which fidelity to the Scriptures is often lacking. Pastorally, in an ecclesiological culture poor in Kingdom language and understanding, Bell repeatedly emphasizes Jesus’ words about its nearness, refusing (as did Jesus) to relegate it to a coming age; evangelicals would do well to heed his call to the message of the present reality and availability of the Kingdom. In a Baptist ecclesiological paradigm where a vote is considered a right, many lose sight of that fact, thinking that it is their Kingdom. Further, in bringing the Kingdom approach to bear on the individual level, Bell reminds us that eternal life, as depicted

in the Scriptures, is not simply life that lasts forever, but is also a state of life lived with the God the Eternal One. He writes, “Eternal life doesn’t start when we die; it starts now. It’s not about a life that begins at death; it’s about experiencing the kind of life now that can endure and survive even death” (59). This proper emphasis brings eternity to bear on everyday life where marriage, and parenting, and neighbors exist, which is exactly what Jesus intended when he inaugurated the Kingdom. Scripturally, a relationship with Christ is not about punching a ticket to “get to heaven” (cf. 178–79) but about life with Christ. Bell also properly situates ethics within the context of these eschatological realities (46), noting that our understanding of what the Kingdom is will drive how we live in the world, something the people of Heritage Park Baptist Church hear weekly. Finally, Bell is right that people—both individually and corporately—create living hells in this life through abuse (7), genocide (70), human trafficking (78), and other evils that human beings perpetuate against each other. In addition, by the choices they make many “choose to live in their own hells all the time” (114). In all these cases, Bell accurately portrays the scriptural realities regarding the kingdom, eternal life, and living hells.

But Bell only gets these things half right as he curiously falls into a sort of Ramist logic which insists on either-or, precluding the sort of both-and approach that fans of the postmodern epistemological move like Bell ostensibly embrace. For Bell, it seems that kingdom here-and-now precludes looking towards a greater kingdom that is coming, eternal life here-and-now excludes the greater eternal life that is coming, and hells of our own making as a result of sin preclude a greater hell that is coming. His commitment to this sort of logic shows up again in chapter seven, “The Good News Is Better Than That.” There, Bell is unwilling to hold in tension that God both judges sin and rescues us from His judgment of sin through the work of Christ “so that He might be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). If true, it can be said, contra Bell, that Jesus rescues us from God (182). In other words, in orthodox thought, God rescues us from God. This may be untenable in a strictly Ramist logic, but in a world in which the paradoxical incarnation of the Word of God turns all such logics on their head, it is true, nonetheless. Further, in this process, Bell rejects the historic orthodox understanding of divine simplicity—that God’s essence cannot be reduced to any one thing or attribute—and instead embraces the rather recent understanding of God as essentially love (177), a concept that grew out of nineteenth-century, European Protestant Liberalism.

Bell’s argument is also troubled by two general methodological problems: his selective use of history and his atomizing hermeneutical approach. First, Bell confidently and consistently posits that there are those in the mainstream of Christian history who have held to his views. In chapter four, “Does God Get What God Wants?,” he writes, “At the center of the Christian tradition since the first church have been a number who insist that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God” (109). He points to Origen, whose apokatastasis—the restoration of all things, and thus universal salvation—was a perspective that was influential in the East, being picked up in whole or part by the Cappadocian fathers, but was ultimately condemned (even in the East) at the fifth ecumenical council, Constantinople II (553 AD). He also curiously lines up Jerome, Augustine, and Luther as supportive of his view that in order for God to “get what God wants,” everyone will be saved (106, 107). Here, Bell selectively appropriates historical figures (some wrongly) in order to garner support for his particular position.

Bell's approach to Scripture is comparably selective. In fact, his atomistic approach to the Scriptures ignores context, which should be the greatest determiner of meaning. A few examples should suffice. First, he takes multiple Old Testament texts that promise restoration to Israel and decontextualizes them, applying them to all people. Whatever "Israel" means, that question is paramount in understanding these texts. Second, in keeping with his embrace of apokatastasis, based on Ezekiel 16 and Matthew 11, he offers that there's still hope for Sodom and Gomorrah. In this particular instance, Bell claims that since Jesus condemns Capernaum, there must be hope for Sodom (83–85). But, in a passage about judgment, Jesus' intent is pretty clear: it will be worse for Capernaum on judgment day than it has been for Sodom, precisely because they reject Him. In other words, what they know about Him and do with what they know about Him matters quite a bit. Third, in what amounts to proof-texting, Bell lifts many verses from the gospels, including John 6, 10, and 12, in order to persuade his readers that all people will be saved through Jesus Christ. He specifically employs John 12:48 in order to persuade us to embrace nonjudgmental attitudes about the eternal destiny of people because "Jesus says, he 'did not come to judge the world, but to save the world'" (160). Although Bell is right that Christians are not judges, the theological argument of the book is muted by the very next verse that indicates that judgment is, indeed, coming: "The Word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day (John 12:48)." Fourth, decontextualization allows Bell to argue for a broadness in salvation that amounts to Christian pluralism, an "exclusivity on the other side of inclusivity" (155). Taking John 14:6 as his starting point, he writes "what [Jesus] doesn't say is how, or when, or in what manner the mechanism functions that gets people to God through him" (154). In this, he once again ignores context, for in the same chapter Jesus Himself gives faith as the "how" by which people come to God through Him. Overall, the broader context of John, informed by such verses as John 3:18 and 3:36, which indicate that salvation comes to those who believe, while judgment "remains" upon all who do not believe in Christ, is ignored. The common thread in all these examples is Bell's refusal to embrace a God that judges sin, which is not surprising considering that his burden from the beginning is to re-tell the "Jesus story" in such a way that "Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy" can be heard anew (viii). Without a doubt, this is a noble goal. However, if getting to "God's retelling of our story" (173), requires the fragmenting of the Scripture—an ironically modern approach—in order to retell it, then many Christians will reject it, choosing instead to read the Scripture with the pre-commitments of the early church, which believed that the Scriptures must be taken as a whole, a whole whose story teaches both that Christ came "because of our salvation" and that He would come again "to judge the living and the dead." Bell's story is different.

Trent Henderson  
Pastor, Heritage Park Baptist Church, Webster, Texas

Miles S. Mullin II  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***The Message of the Holy Spirit.* By Keith Warrington. Edited by Alec Motyer and John Stott. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. 288 pages. Paperback, \$18.00.**

Keith Warrington is the Vice-Principal and Director of Doctoral Studies at Regents Theological College in Cheshire, England. His background in missions work with Operation Mobilisation and pastoral experience at Ilkeston, Derbyshire and Bootle, Merseyside, as well as his self-proclaimed Pentecostal position are evident in this work in the Bible Speaks Today series (13).

Warrington claims that “the primary focus of this book is not the development of a dogmatic theology of the Spirit,” but rather “a theological exploration, practical, and biblically based,” which challenges readers to “apply” the “practical relevance” of the material (12–14, 245, 249). While at first glance the book appears to be a study of the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, it is actually arranged topically as well as biblically such that, “each chapter is a separate exploration of an issue relating to” the Spirit (14). In each issue, Warrington emphasizes some combination of three characteristics of the Spirit: (1) the inexplicability of the Spirit, (2) personal encounters with the Spirit, and (3) the Spirit’s affirmation of the believer’s soteriological status as more important than His empowerment (12, 245). The idea of “inexplicability” seems to be that believers are invited to explore the Spirit but can never completely know Him (12, 16–17, 29, 249). These issues and characteristics are explored in four sections, including the Spirit in the: Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. As a major theme of the book, Warrington argues that since the Spirit leads believers into suffering as part of the fulfillment of their commission to preach the gospel, then they should look for His support to endure rather than remove suffering (76–84, 127–28, 169–70, 174).

The major contribution that Warrington makes to studies on the Spirit is his practical application of the material. In addition, pastors and teachers will appreciate his illustrations, some of which are from the internet in the late 1990’s to early 2000’s (174, 225–26), and others that are original (188, 243, 246). Another contribution of his work to the field of pneumatology is his biblically based discussion of the major pneumatological controversies from a conservative Pentecostal perspective that seems corrective of earlier and more radical interpretations. For example, in his discussions of tongues and spiritual gifts, he claims respectively that “the Spirit is interested in inclusion” (141) and “manifestation of ‘spiritual gifts’ does not indicate a superior spirituality” (180), which seems corrective of the exclusive two-tiered spirituality that still exists in some churches as a result of the doctrine of subsequence. His exegesis is nontechnical so that pastors and laypeople can easily understand it, yet still insightful so that academics can benefit from it.

The book’s bibliography (10) seems selective and is necessarily supplemented by numerous other sources in the work’s footnotes (cf. esp. 13–14). Following his Pentecostal position, Warrington’s sources seem weighted toward the Pentecostal-Charismatic view (10), but are counterbalanced by the numerous footnotes in the text referring to other views (87, 179, 189, 210). His bibliography and book are disproportionately focused on the New Testament with approximately only seventeen pages given to the Spirit in the Old Testament (20–22, 35–48) and with Matthew, Mark, and the General Epistles excluded from the study. His qualification of conducting a topical study may excuse these exclusions (14). However, attention to the works of Congar, Warfield, and Montague would help to round out his bibliography and expand his section on the Spirit in the Old Testament. Perhaps attention to



James Hamilton's *God's Indwelling Presence* may contribute to Warrington's study of John (chapters 7–9), since he touches on all three of Hamilton's main passages, John 7:39; 14:17; 16:7 (10, 85–117).

While Warrington's work is a good source for discovering Pentecostal theology, non-Pentecostals and non-Charismatics will find some of his conclusions troubling. In his discussion of spiritual gifts, Warrington, like Wayne Grudem, takes the "mediating position" that "a gift of the Spirit may be a natural gift that has been invested with supernatural energy by God," but some non-Pentecostal and non-Charismatics will find this view difficult since they seem to maintain a clearer distinction between spiritual gifts and natural abilities (48, 181–82). In his discussion of the Spirit's guidance (prophecy), Warrington attempts to preserve the Zwingli-Calvin Word-Spirit correlation (which was explicitly formulated to counteract the teachings of the enthusiasts of their time) but ultimately violates it by claiming that the Spirit reveals information not present in the Word and does so even after the close of the canon to the present (143–47). Many non-Pentecostal and non-Charismatics will be troubled by this view, as some believe it violates at least the sufficiency, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, just after making the claim for "extrabiblical revelation" Warrington appears to deny inerrancy by claiming that the Spirit "provided particular *guidance* to local churches that *differed* from messages *offered to others*" (emphasis added, 147–48).

At the end of the book, Warrington provides a study guide with good application questions that also serves as a helpful summary overview of each chapter.

Ronald M. Rothenberg  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach.* By Kenneth Keathley. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 232 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.**

In *Salvation and Sovereignty*, Kenneth Keathley seeks to provide an account of salvation which is faithful to the biblical witness, taking into account both the sovereign work of God's grace and a robust conception of human freedom. In order to accomplish this task Keathley appeals to the work of Luis Molina (1535–1600), a familiar figure to those aware of the debates about human freedom and divine foreknowledge in philosophy of religion. Molinism, says Keathley, forms an unlikely and radical "compatibilism" between "a Calvinist view of divine sovereignty and an Arminian view of human freedom," and does this by way of the doctrine of God's middle knowledge (5). God's "middle knowledge" is so called because it is found in the second of three logical moments of God's knowledge, between his natural knowledge and his free knowledge. God's natural knowledge is his knowledge of all possibilities, says Keathley, the knowledge of everything that *could* happen. God's free knowledge is his perfect knowledge of this world that he chose to create. This knowledge is referred to as free by Molina because it is a result of God's free choice to create this world rather than any of the other infinite possible worlds He could have created. So God's free knowledge is his knowledge of what *will* happen. God's middle knowledge, on the other hand, is his knowledge of what *would* happen; that is, it is God's knowledge of what any free creature would freely choose to do in any given circumstance. So, says Molina, God can use his middle knowledge (his knowledge of what are called counterfactuals of creaturely freedom) to engineer circumstances in



such a way that He can exercise sovereign control over his creation without violating the freedom of human beings. Molinism is not simply a philosophical system, but according to Keathley, has decisive biblical support (19–38).

Having established his Molinist framework in chapter one, Keathley begins to apply it to the doctrine of salvation. In chapter two he considers the question “Does God desire the salvation of all?” and answers in the affirmative. This answer, of course, creates another problem. If God desires all be saved, why are some damned? Keathley considers a number of options, and argues for a distinction between the antecedent and consequent wills of God. Antecedently, God wills that all be saved, and consequently he wills that faith be the condition for salvation. This position, Keathley argues, “seems to be the clear teaching of Scripture” (58).

In chapters three through seven, Keathley lays out a case for a soteriology that also makes use of the Molinist framework. As Keathley notes on the first page, his work is directed primarily at the Christian who finds himself “convinced of certain central tenets of Calvinism but not its corollaries.” Keathley himself finds the biblical evidence compelling for three of the points of TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, and perseverance of the saints, but refashions these concepts in his own language. As to the others, Keathley rejects them out of hand, arguing that “[l]imited atonement and irresistible grace cannot be found in the Scriptures unless one first puts them there” (2). And so Keathley proceeds by replacing the TULIP acronym with the ROSES acronym suggested by Timothy George, and structuring the remainder of the book along those lines. Chapter three is devoted to Radical depravity, chapter four to Overcoming grace, chapter five to Sovereign election, chapter six to Eternal life, and chapter seven to Singular redemption. It is thus in chapters four and seven that Keathley mounts arguments against the TULIP points of irresistible grace and limited atonement for which he finds no support in Scripture. In chapter four he argues instead for a monergistic view of grace (one according to which God accomplishes our salvation without our cooperation) which is resistible, and in chapter seven he argues that Christ’s atoning work is sufficient for each and every individual (Christ died for each and every person in particular), but efficient only for those who believe (faith is a condition for salvation). It is worth noting that while Keathley most clearly opposes his position to Calvinism, his arguments serve equally well as responses to certain Arminian doctrines.

Keathley’s application of Molinism to the question of soteriology is both extensive and timely. Most impressive is the mere number of biblical references in the work. Keathley makes sure that his arguments are supported by the authority of the biblical text. In addition, Keathley is to be commended for tackling passages which appear to contradict his position. Keathley does not shy away from texts commonly used by Calvinists as support for their views (he spends several pages on Rom 9), and while his interpretation of these passages undoubtedly will remain a matter of dispute, Keathley makes his case with consistency and clarity. That said, there are a couple of statements whose ambiguity could be problematic. On page 116, Keathley writes, “there is nothing in the graciousness of salvation that entails (i.e., logically requires) that the opportunity to believe be withheld from all but the elect. In fact, *the overwhelming preponderance of Scripture* teaches the very opposite” (emphasis added). While I do not think this is what Keathley means, one could read this last statement as pointing to a conflict within the witness of Scripture. If “the overwhelming preponderance of Scripture” testifies to one thing, say, that the opportunity to believe is not withheld from all but the elect, one might infer

that there is in fact testimony in Scripture, albeit a significant minority, that the opportunity to believe is withheld from all but the elect. And thus there would be found a division in the testimony of the Word of God concerning a significant soteriological point. Here Keathley's work would benefit from a bit more clarity.

But such clarity is one of the strongest characteristics of Keathley's work on the whole. Although he is dealing with complicated philosophical and theological issues, Keathley is able to make them accessible to all, whether professional academic or not. Keathley achieves this clarity with language and style that is communicative, pleasant to read, and not overly technical. In certain places, this style of writing may hamper his argument somewhat. For instance, those familiar with the philosophical debates surrounding Molinism may find his explication of that doctrine a bit simplistic—but not to the degree that his understanding of the doctrine could not be defended on a more technical level. In addition, the structure of each chapter contributes greatly to understanding for readers of all levels. Keathley is comprehensive in his discussion of the various positions on each and every point, and summary charts help assist the reader in keeping all of the information organized. For these reasons, Keathley's work will make a significant contribution to anyone's library. Even those who disagree wholeheartedly with his conclusions will find great benefit in this work as a reference tool for the relevant positions and biblical passages.

For the most part, I agree with Paige Patterson's evaluation in the foreword when he says that Keathley "has a philosopher's reasoning, a theologian's grasp of Scripture, and a preacher's clarity" (x). But particularly as a philosopher, there is one point that I wish Keathley had argued with more vigor. In the course of explaining why he embraces soft libertarianism, Keathley explains the principle of alternative possibilities, a key component of any libertarian view of freedom. As Keathley writes, "A necessary component for liability is that, at a significant point in the chain of events, the ability to choose or refrain from choosing had to be genuinely available" (75). Here, as elsewhere, Keathley connects responsibility with alternative possibilities and a biblical understanding of freedom. According to Keathley, the Bible argues that we have freedom of responsibility, which requires agent causation, "the ability to be the originator of a decision, choice, or action" (77). The main argument offered here is that since humans are created in the image of God and since God is a causal agent, human beings are causal agents and thus possess some libertarian freedom (e.g., 8, 72). And since libertarian freedom entails responsibility (I know of no one who would argue otherwise), humans are responsible as well as free.

All of this is well and good, but Keathley's argument would be considerably strengthened if he moved in the other direction as well. Many Calvinists will dispute Keathley's claim that Scripture teaches that humans possess some libertarian freedom, nor will they find his appeal to the *imago dei* convincing. But no Calvinist would deny that Scripture clearly teaches that humans are responsible. If Keathley could provide a good argument that responsibility requires libertarian freedom, he would go a long way in helping his case. Unfortunately, Keathley seems to simply assume that human responsibility requires alternative possibilities and thus some form of libertarian freedom rather than argue for this point. From a philosophical standpoint, Keathley would need to respond to the work of Harry Frankfurt and John Martin Fischer, who have argued vehemently that humans can be responsible without having alternative possibilities and thus libertarian freedom. Keathley consults numerous philosophers, but the work of Frankfurt and Fischer cannot be found in his bibliography. Even if responding to these philosophers would be too technical

a task for this work (and thus obscure the argument rather than contribute to it), Keathley would be well served to argue the connection between libertarian freedom and human responsibility from both sides. Had he done so, he would have strengthened what is already an impressive piece of philosophical and biblical theology.

John B. Howell, III  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship.* Edited by Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. 262 pages. Softcover, \$26.00.**

This work is a three-part collection of selected essays from the 2008 Wheaton College Theology Conference: “Scripture: The Bible and the Triune Economy,” “Community: The Trinity and Society,” and “Worship: Church Practices and the Triune Mission.” Due to the nature of this collection, one would not be able to find a single theme that penetrates throughout this work. However, that does not undermine the value of this book. Even one might be surprised with some of the varying positions concerning an identical issue or theologian. Nevertheless, such a theological disagreement among contributors makes this book more attractive because its readers would have a rare opportunity to compare opposite views from responsible scholars.

In the first section, “Scripture: The Bible and the Triune Economy,” Vanhoozer wrote the best and most provocative article in this book. When reading the Bible, argues Vanhoozer, its readers do not merely study the past report of God but they actually “can listen directly to the Divine voice itself speaking immediately in the Scripture word” (35). Vanhoozer’s trinitarian doctrine of the Bible is a synthesis of Barth’s theology of the Word and Wolterstorff’s “analytic philosophy” of divine speech (45). In opposition to extremely rationalized propositionalists, Vanhoozer reminds us of Barth’s theology of the Word, a theology that points to the necessity of listening to the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ who freely speaks the will of the Father through the Holy Spirit in the Bible. On the other hand, Vanhoozer rejects Barth’s anti-propositional position. Following Wolterstorff’s analysis of speech, Vanhoozer declares that a divine speech makes a divine action the revelation of God by assigning a specific meaning to that action. Barth’s disjunction between a divine action and human speech is meaningless because the Son of God speaks human words, both oral and written, as divine revelation. Therefore, Christians must accept biblical inerrancy. Again, however, biblical inerrancy should not be an excuse of ignoring the illuminating role of the Holy Spirit who witnesses to the living Christ, the Word of the Father. Edith M. Humphry establishes that the eternal functional subordination of the Son is essential to a biblical understanding of the Trinity. Humphry vigorously refutes reading *perichoresis* as “a round dance,” which theologically refuses any functional subordination of any divine Person within the Trinity. Etymologically, *perichoresis* does not derive from “*chora* (meaning ‘place’),” or “*chorus* (dance)” and, therefore, it means that the three divine Persons share the same place through mutual indwelling and interpenetration (95). Humphry accurately asserts that Augustine never denied the monarchy of the Father when defending the *filioque*.

In the second section, “Community: The Trinity and Society?,” John R. Franke praises the Cappadocian Fathers and Richard of St. Victor who opened a social

trinitarianism and saw community, not substance, as the divine nature of the Trinity. In Franke's view, Augustine is responsible for creating a psychological analogy of the Trinity—being, knowledge, and will—that fails to demonstrate the Godhead in terms of personhood. However, this reviewer challenges Franke to reread Augustine in *De Trinitate*, who was fully aware of a social analogy of persons like that of the Cappadocian Fathers. Augustine did not choose such a social analogy of plural persons because of the danger of tritheism. In fact, Richard did not suggest his exegesis of the communal nature of charity as an alternative to Augustine's trinitarianism. Augustine had already explained the interrelationship of the divine Persons in the immanent Trinity in light of the communal love of the Father (the lover), the Son (the beloved one), and the Holy Spirit (the mutual love between the Father and the Son). Unfortunately, Franke does not reflect recent scholarship led by Ayres and Barnes on Augustinian trinitarianism that attests considerable theological congruence between the Latin Church and the Greek Church regarding the Trinity.

In contrast to Franke, Mark Husbands is very critical of contemporary social trinitarians such as Volf. According to Husbands, Volf's social trinitarianism comes from his misreading of Gregory of Nyssa who never taught social and anthropological implications of the immanent Trinity for a human relationship. Husbands rightly warns of the "overrealized" eschatological orientation of social trinitarians who argue as if Christians could and should achieve the perfect *perichoresis*, the mutually dependent and interpenetrating life shared by the divine Persons of the Trinity, on earth (126). The Bible presents Jesus Christ as the sole realization of the perfect communion between God and man. Therefore, even the church and any Christian organization cannot manifest the perfect communal life within the triune God. Keith E. Johnson also points out the theological dangers of a utilitarian approach to the doctrine of the Trinity in the way that delineates the ontological distinction between the triune community of God and the creaturely community of humans. Johnson shows from the Bible that the divine commandment to imitate God is to imitate the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, in the economy, not the intertrinitarian life of God in eternity. Therefore, Christians should defy any attempt to justify religious pluralism or to weaken the uniqueness of God's redemptive work only found in Jesus Christ. Unlike Franke, Johnson commends Augustine's trinitarianism because of its ultimate goal to enjoy and honor the triune God, not to use the Trinity as a social model. Johnson suggests Augustine's *De Trinitate* as a good theological antidote for contemporary theologians' "functionalizing" of the doctrine of the Trinity in supporting egalitarianism and communal responsibility versus extreme individualism (160).

In the third section, "Worship: Church Practices and the Triune Mission," Gordon T. Smith notes that Christians often take baptism and the Lord's Supper as an encounter with the Father and the Son. He urges his readers to be open to the Holy Spirit who leads them to the fellowship of the triune God. Smith's thesis is commendable, and his critique is legitimate; however, most evangelical readers need to be alert to his strong sacramentalism that Catholics and Lutherans would appreciate more. Philip W. Butin's argument concerning prayers for the illumination of the Holy Spirit before reading and preaching the Bible deserves every contemporary preachers' attention. Unlike Vanhoozer, Butin fails to be critical of Barth's anti-propositional view on the inspiration of the Bible. Leanne Van Dyk presents the church's proclamation of the gospel as a way of participating in the triune God's mission. Interestingly, Dyk pays attention to not only worship and preaching but also to common daily things such as work and marriage as channels through which

one could participate in the triune community of God, for the gospel of salvation should certainly be visible outside the church.

This book would not be a textbook on the Trinity or helpful for lay people who want to understand the basic elements of the Trinity. Rather, this work is for advanced M. Div. students and could be useful as a book review for an elective class on the Trinity.

Dongsun Cho  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### Historical Studies

***Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety.* By Adriaan C. Neele. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 320 pages. Hardcover, \$138.00.**

In a letter to his ministerial student and friend, Joseph Bellamy, Jonathan Edwards recommends him to the work(s) of Petrus van Mastricht, saying, “take Mastricht for divinity in general, doctrine, practice, and controversy; or as an universal system of divinity; and it is much better than [Francis] Turretin, or any other book in the world, excepting the Bible, in my opinion” (11). Cotton Mather, another formidable New England theologian, likewise directs his ministerial candidates, saying, “I hope you will next unto the Sacred Scripture make Mastricht the storehouse to which you may resort continually, for in it the minister will find everything” (10). Lamentably, despite Mastricht’s formative influence(s) on early New England theological developments, few contemporary theologians even know his name.

Adriaan C. Neele’s, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety*, is the first ever monograph, exclusively devoted to the life and work of the German-Dutch theologian, Peter van Mastricht. A highly significant contribution to the field of post-Reformation studies, Neele’s work sets out “to demonstrate the relationship between exegesis, doctrine, elenctic, and *praxis* in the doctrine of God of Mastricht’s *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*” (vii). In demonstrating this relationship, Neele topples certain lopsided caricatures of Protestant Scholastic theologians as erudite, theologically myopic, and philosophically heavy-handed individuals by presenting Mastricht as an example of one concerned as much for the theory as for the practice of theology.

Following an illuminating introduction to the state of research in post-Reformation studies, Neele’s work proceeds in four main parts to a conclusion: (Part I) “The life and work of Petrus van Mastricht in the context of his time,” (Part II) “The premises of the *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*,” (Part III) “A cross-section the study of the doctrine of God,” and (Part IV) “An in-depth study of the doctrine of God” (v–vi).

In Part I (chs. 1–2), Neele provides the reader with extensive biography of Mastricht. He establishes Mastricht as a Reformed pastor, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, church historian, systematic theologian, philologist, and anti-Cartesian philosopher. A consideration of Mastricht’s life and work, Neele argues, is critical to a proper understanding of post-Reformation theological sensibilities. He says, Mastricht’s “[consolidation] and codification of post-Reformation Reformed theology: exegesis, doctrine, elenctic, and *praxis*” into his *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, provides the clearest indication of post-Reformation sensibilities of the relationship between theology and piety (281).



In Part II (chs. 3–4), Neele examines two premises to Mastricht’s *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*: (1) theological prolegomena and (2) faith. With respect to the former, Neele lays out Mastricht’s argument for the necessity of an “orderly” theological method (85–86). Beginning with Scripture, the so-called *norma normans* (the supreme authority) of the theological task, Mastricht argues for a number of subordinate norms (*norma normata*) that fulfill his methodological criterion. Ordered by their authoritative weight, these norms include: the first seven ecumenical creeds, Patristic fathers, Medieval doctors, and sixteenth century Reformers, as well as logic and a chastened philosophical (i.e. metaphysical) speculation (84). Neele describes how Mastricht’s theological method issues in a number of constructive (and quite compelling) doctrinal innovations, for example, his mediating account of the divine decrees (7–9). With respect to the second premise, Neele underscores the exceptional nature of faith to Mastricht’s doctrinal scheme. “[Resembling] more the earlier Reformed theology than [that] of his own time” (280), Neele shows Mastricht’s careful treatment of the doctrine faith as the essential link between theology as a science of the intellect, and theology as the practical “art of living to God” (93–95). The great value of Part II can hardly be overstated as a key to much of the remainder of Neele’s work.

Part III (chs. 5–8) consists of a highly instructive and detailed assessment of Mastricht’s theological method in four parts: exegesis, doctrine, elenctic (i.e., polemic), and *praxis*. In chapter 5, Neele demonstrates Mastricht’s historical-grammatical exegesis, emphasis on the original biblical languages, and use of comparative philology for the development of doctrine in chapter 6. Chapter 7 exhibits his use of a scholastic *quaestio* method of questions and answers whereby Mastricht defends his doctrinal formulations against foreseeable objections and counter-arguments (especially against Roman Catholicism, Socinianism, and Cartesianism). Chapter 8 reveals the force of Mastricht’s methodological effort, namely, the development a distinct theological structure that serves the Christian practice of piety, consisting chiefly in the exercise of faith, which he defines as love to God (201–02). Despite the rigor and great detail of these chapters, Neele’s primary interest is an exposition of the mechanics of Mastricht’s four-fold method, not a detailed exposition of the content of his doctrine.

In Part IV (chs. 9–11), Neele lays out Mastricht’s doctrine of God in even greater detail, setting the context for it in chapter 9 by assessing its expression in such Reformed Orthodox figures as William Ames, Johannes Cocceius, Wilhelmus a Brakel, and Herman Witsius. Chapters 10 and 11 serve as a sort of methodological road test, whereby Neele shows the implications of Mastricht’s four-fold theological structure, first for his account of “divine spirituality and simplicity” (221), and then “the Holy Trinity” (245).

Neele’s work concludes with a number of observations about Mastricht’s uniqueness within his own tradition, and his overall contribution to the development of post-Reformation Protestant scholastic theology. Broaching the disciplines of historical, biblical, systematic, and philosophical theology, Neele’s work is a formidable contribution to this ever-growing body of secondary literature.

Of the many virtues of Neele’s work, it is marked most by its clarity and precision. However, its chief virtue may for some also prove to be its chief vice, as such technical rigor may deter a wide readership, even amongst some professional theologians. Indeed, this is a work primarily for the trained technician—one familiar with Latin, Greek and Hebrew (as well as some Dutch and German)—and has



at least some advanced knowledge of systematic theology and seventeenth-century European philosophical developments. Though Neele's work is a steep steady climb, its contents and lucidity will surely not disappoint the patient and pensive reader.

S. Mark Hamilton  
University of Bristol

***The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 26: Catalogues of Books.* Edited by Peter J. Thuesen. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 496 + x pages. Hardcover, \$95.00.**

***Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005.* M.X. Lesser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 691 + xii pages. Hardcover, \$145.00.**

Similar in nature, yet different in content, these two volumes bring together two sets of bibliographies related to Jonathan Edwards studies. The first work, Edwards' *Catalogues of Books* edited by Peter Thuesen, compiles the numerous book lists Edwards kept, lists which reflected his reading interests, including books he wanted to obtain, books in his personal library, and books he commended to others for reading. In short, this volume comprises what Thuesen calls Edwards's own "bibliographic universe" (2). The second work, *Reading Jonathan Edwards* by M.X. Lesser, provides an annotated bibliography of all the works related to Jonathan Edwards studies since the eighteenth century, and represents the best existing volume summarizing the history of scholarship on "America's Augustine." Both works are for serious students of Jonathan Edwards.

*Catalogues of Books* represents the final volume (vol 26) of Yale University Press's critical edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Since the inaugural volume appeared in 1957 (on the *Freedom of the Will*), Edwards specialists have labored by compiling and editing both Edwards' published and private writings, including his treatises, notebooks, and sermons. Many of the introductory essays to the volumes have been groundbreaking contributions to the field. With the appearance of the final volume, the completed *Works of Jonathan Edwards* will likely be the critical edition of Edwards' writings for the next century. Voracious readers who want more Edwards will be pleased to find out that the remaining unpublished materials (mostly sermons) are now available online in volumes 27–73 at The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University ([edwards.yale.edu](http://edwards.yale.edu)).

By focusing on lists of books that Edwards kept, *Catalogues of Books* might at first appear to be an odd selection for inclusion in the *Works*. Yet when we take into account the fact that one of the great difficulties in Edwards scholarship has been identifying prominent influences in his thought, the importance of this volume becomes apparent. Two main lists occupy most of this volume's pages, Edwards' "Catalogue," which was his running list of books he hoped to obtain, and his "Account Book," a list of books that Edwards lent out of his personal library to others. Edwards was a voracious reader, and throughout his life he sought to keep abreast of the prominent trends in European intellectual life, especially theological trends. As a pastor in central and western Massachusetts, his access to the latest works in theology was minimal at best, thus forcing him to rely upon book notices, ads, and reviews printed in English and Boston newspapers. Upon learning of a book that piqued his interest, he would note it in his "Catalogue" and have to wait

sometimes for years before he could gain access to it (if ever). We know from his later “Miscellanies” notebooks that whenever he would gain temporary access to a book (often borrowed from other ministers or from the small library of his local ministerial association), he would sometimes copy pages out of that work to have for later reference. The portrait emerging from these lists is one of an intensely inquisitive pastor-theologian struggling to survive in the midst of a bibliographic desert.

Thuesen’s editing is remarkable for its meticulous detail. While the 116-page introductory essay admirably introduces the reader to the various regions of Edwards’ bibliographic interests, the real editorial work can be found in the “Catalogue” and “Account” lists. For each of the hundreds of entries referred to in the volume, Thuesen found the bibliographic information of the actual edition to which Edwards most likely referred. Anyone who has compiled a bibliography can appreciate why it is that this work took years to complete.

Edwards’ reading habits and interests may be described as “eclectic.” While he shows an interest in Calvinist writings, Thuesen indicates that the “Catalogue” was “not a roster of unimpeachable Calvinist classics” (15). In fact Calvin is not even mentioned in Edwards’s lists found in this volume, and works in Reformed divinity only account for a fifth of the works entered into the “Catalogue” and 40 percent in his “Account” book. Reformed writers like Matthew Henry, John Gill, Thomas Manton, John Owen, Isaac Watts, and Philip Doddridge appear, a point that reflects his keen interest in the Reformed and Puritan traditions which he saw himself defending. Yet we also find a wider circle of theological interests: works by non-Calvinist Anglican writers (John Tillotson and Samuel Clarke), Cambridge Platonists (Ralph Cudworth), Arminians (Jean Le Clerc), Catholics (Fénelon, Pascal, and numerous Jansenists), Patristic writers (Cyprian, Chrysostom, Augustine), those involved in both sides of the English trinitarian controversies of the turn of the century (Samuel Clarke, John Jackson, Daniel Waterland, and George Bull), and a wide range of spiritual writings (Catholic Quietism, Lutheran Pietism, and the Jewish mystical *Cabbala*). Beyond theology Edwards showed interests in philosophical, scientific, historical, and political works, as well as some novels. Together, the book lists presented in this volume reveal that Edwards was not a parochial Reformed revival-preacher who tuned out the increasing anti-Calvinism and anti-Christian currents of his day. Rather, he was (or sought to be) a full participant in the theological and intellectual literature of the age, one who attempted to respond to the increasing secularization of the world with the best intellectual and philosophical tools available to him.

M.X. Lesser’s volume, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005*, provides us with another “bibliographic universe,” the vast universe of secondary studies related to Edwards. Since his pastorate at Northampton, Jonathan Edwards has attracted the attention of critics and admirers, theologians and historians, as well as philosophers and English professors, who together have generated over 3,300 bibliographic entries on the man, his ministry, and his theology. This volume brings together all these works in one handy reference volume. The work is actually three books in one. Prior to this volume, Lesser, longtime professor of English at Northeastern University and editor of volume 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, published two earlier annotated bibliographies on Edwards scholarship (1729–1978 and 1979–1993). Here he unites those two volumes (updated with 140 new entries not published in the first editions) with a third section on Edwards scholarship from 1994–2005 which contains over 700

entries. The bibliography is structured chronologically, listing works that appeared by their year, then by the author's last name. Each entry is annotated, providing a succinct (3 to 8 line) description of aim, purpose, and argument of the entry. More important entries have lengthy annotations which sometimes reach over a page in length, a feature which enables junior Edwards scholars to come up to speed quickly on the important writings of any given Edwardsean sub-specialty. In addition, there are the three lengthy introductory essays that Lesser wrote for each part. These essays, totaling almost ninety pages, survey the prominent trends in Edwards scholarship over the last two centuries and serve as an excellent introduction to the history of Edwards scholarship. Any serious student of Jonathan Edwards, either academic writer or pastor-theologian who has adopted Edwards as a life-long theological companion, would benefit from this book.

These two volumes are definitely for Edwards specialists which is probably their one main drawback. They will not be of interest to readers who seek to read Edwards for theological and spiritual inspiration. If you are student or scholar who seeks to make academic contributions to Edwards studies, I would definitely encourage you to obtain both of these works. If you are a pastor who enjoys reading Edwards and would like to enter into the wider discussion on him made by other writers, I would encourage you to obtain *Reading Jonathan Edwards*. You will find it to be a resource that you will consult for years to come.

Robert W. Caldwell III  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian.* By Paul Brewster. Baptist Thought and Life. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 224 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.**

In his new book, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, Paul Brewster contributes to the ongoing revival of Andrew Fuller studies. This developing interest in Fuller (an eighteenth-century English Particular Baptist) should warrant a hearty welcome from Baptists (and other free church traditions) because of his influential role in the recapturing of indiscriminate gospel proclamation and missionary endeavor among the eighteenth-century Particular Baptists. Fuller's significance as a theologian was great, and yet, the practical implications of his doctrinal convictions were no less noteworthy. Fuller tirelessly labored as the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) and as a local pastor. And this brings us to the thesis of Brewster's new book: Fuller's theological vision was in no way a mere theoretical enterprise; rather, his theology animated his pastoral duties, and, for this reason, Fuller is a model for ministers today who are concerned about the connection between theology and practice.

Brewster begins this task by providing the reader with the historical context—Fuller's biographical data in particular. A review of Fuller's family background and early childhood is presented, leading up to his Christian conversion in his teenage years. This is important ground to cover since Fuller was raised under the shadow of hyper-Calvinism and, as a result, was hindered in his embrace of the gospel. Hyper-Calvinism argued that one cannot simply approach the cross of Christ. Individuals who maintained this "false" Calvinism (as Fuller called it) insisted that one must have a "warrant" of faith in order to come to the cross. Such a "warrant" as this was essentially an inner acknowledgment that one was among the elect. Fuller overcame, through the work of the Holy Spirit, this theological impediment and was converted

in 1769. Brewster goes on to examine Fuller's call to vocational ministry, his experiences as a pastor, and his service to the BMS leading up to his death.

Chapter two investigates Fuller's theological method. Though his theological education was informal, Fuller was a well informed and well grounded theologian. Brewster highlights several aspects of his doctrinal method. First, Fuller maintained the need for a system. Even though Scripture itself is not a systematic presentation of theology, a system is nonetheless a tool for the Christian, to be used as an aid in understanding sacred truth. Second, the Bible was primary and central in Fuller's theological process. For Fuller, no doctrinal system could supersede the role of Scripture. Brewster also discusses the role of personal experience and accountability as discernable characteristics in Fuller's theological method.

Brewster's third chapter analyzes Fuller's soteriological orientation. This theological exposition of Fuller's doctrine of salvation is carried out through the template of the five Dortian soteriological markers (TULIP). Essentially, Brewster (like Thomas Nettles) seems to affirm Fuller's faithfulness to all five points of Dortian Calvinism. Others have interpreted Fuller's soteriology differently over the years. James Leo Garrett, for example, has previously asserted that Fuller only maintained two points of Calvinism—though Garrett has recently reconsidered his position, affirming that Fuller was certainly in closer adherence to Dortian Calvinism than he had previously stated.

Brewster is also careful to include in this chapter a discussion on the various modifications in Fuller's Calvinistic soteriology. For instance, while maintaining an association with the doctrine of limited atonement, Fuller, argues Brewster, flirted with governmental language, though never abandoning the atonement as substitutionary. And, of course, Brewster highlights Fuller's commitment to an evangelical Calvinism—a Calvinism in which indiscriminate gospel proclamation is a key and prominent feature.

What impact did this theology have upon Fuller in a practical sense? Chapter four tackles this very question. Brewster explores Fuller's many and varied gospel labors. Fuller's role as a pastor, for example, is discussed here. He not only preached earnestly to his home congregation, but he also engaged in village preaching—laboring for the souls of lost humanity. And of course, Brewster examines Fuller's key involvement in the BMS as an administrator and a defender of missions. Brewster also rightly includes here a section on Fuller's role as an apologist for Christian truth. This section surveys Fuller's efforts against such ideologies as: Deism, Socinianism, Universalism, Sandemanianism, and Antinomianism. Brewster's book is concluded in chapter five and two helpful appendices are also included for the interested reader: a transcription of Fuller's confession of faith (appendix 1), and an article Fuller contributed to a theological dictionary on Calvinism (appendix 2).

One minor critique is in order here before Brewster's well deserved accolades begin. Brewster's interchangeable use of the terms "high-Calvinism" and "hyper-Calvinism" lacks precision, given the discernable differences between these two groups historically. Peter Toon, in *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, has argued convincingly that there are clear distinctions between high and hyper-Calvinism. High-Calvinism is a subtle hardening of John Calvin's theology beginning with Beza and later articulated at the Synod of Dort. Hyper-Calvinism is a further development in which (among other things) justification resides in eternity rather than in time and space (eternal justification), there are no offers of grace, and the moral law is not acknowledged as an aid in sanctification (antinomianism).

If this categorical template is valid, then it seems as though Fuller's role in developing evangelical Calvinism was a move away from hyper-Calvinism more so than high-Calvinism. This may be observed in Fuller's description of his childhood pastor. According to Fuller, Pastor Eve's ministry had little or nothing to say to the unbeliever. Brewster, as a result, describes Eve as having "shortcomings as an evangelist" (12). However, the real problem with Pastor Eve (and others who were oriented in this way) was not that he had shortcomings as an evangelist, but that he was no evangelist at all. And so, hyper-Calvinism seems to be the most accurate description for this theological distinction that Fuller spent much of his life combating. It should be noted, however, that Brewster's conflation of these two terms was an attempt to use the language that Fuller and others used in that day.

Regardless of this trifling criticism, Brewster's work on Fuller must surely be regarded as a gem. First, Brewster provides the reader with a meaningful introduction to the life and ministry of Andrew Fuller—and in doing so has reminded contemporary readers how a moderate or evangelical Calvinistic soteriology (Fullerism) is a viable option for Baptists today. Second, in the process of analyzing Fuller's doctrine and practice, Brewster directly engages Fuller's writings with great frequency, thus making this book a valuable resource to students of Baptist history, since a number of the quotes used are not available in Fuller's published works. Finally, Brewster's work is a success because it touches on an important facet in the Christian life, namely, that theology must never be a solely intellectual endeavor; rather, it must ever be connected to one's devotional and practical life. Andrew Fuller has been convincingly portrayed, by Paul Brewster, as an appropriate example of this important intersection between doctrine and practice.

A. Chadwick Mauldin  
The Free University of Amsterdam

***Baptist Autographs in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1741–1845.* Edited by Timothy D. Whelan. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009. 522 + xxxvii pages. Hardcover, \$55.00.**

"The discovery of these Baptist letters within the autograph albums of the Thomas Raffles Collection and the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands Library of Manchester came about largely by accident" (xxi). So begins editor Timothy Whelan's volume of treasures collected and published for the benefit of all who take interest in English Baptist heritage. What started as the search for a single letter resulted in the discovery of more than 330 Baptist related letters, most of which were undocumented.

Whelan, associate professor in the department of literature and philosophy at Georgia Southern University, recounts in his introduction how Thomas Raffles (1788–1863), the longtime pastor of Great George Street Chapel in Liverpool, amassed a collection of letters and portraits. Upon his death, Raffles' collection was first given to the Lancashire Independent College and then later purchased and placed in the John Rylands Library. Whelan notes that "Raffles owned the largest private collection of Baptist letters from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ever assembled" (xxviii). Of particular interest for Raffles was the correspondence of John Sutcliff, William Carey, and Andrew Fuller. In 1844, Joseph Angus, secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) and president of Regent's Park College, made arrangements with Raffles for the donation of two volumes of



letters related to the BMS to come upon Raffles' death. While this took place in 1863, several other volumes remained in Manchester largely untouched and unnoticed. With the arrival of Whelan's work, "now, after more than a century, a full accounting can be made of all the Baptist letters originally collected by Thomas Raffles and his son" (xxxix).

In addition to the Raffles Collection, Whelan also discovered a significant number of Baptist letters by John Gill, Robert Hall, Samuel Pearce and others contained within the Methodist Archives, a collection that came to the John Rylands Library only in 1977. All these findings leads Whelan to conclude that the Rylands Library "stands as one of the more significant depositories of Baptist archival materials in the United Kingdom" (xxxvii). Thankfully, through the editorial labors of Whelan, a portion of that depository is now available to a wider audience.

Whelan organizes his transcriptions of 267 letters into seven parts. The reader will appreciate the abundance of detailed footnotes that help provide context to each letter as well as establish connections between the authors, recipients, or other persons mentioned. One additional value to Whelan's volume is his 126 page "biographical index." This carefully prepared index provides a short description of each person referenced in the letters as well as further related documentation. Additional indices allow the reader to locate with ease specific individuals.

As one reads through this volume it is evident that the letters themselves are indeed treasures. Consider the 11 May 1792 entry from William Carey to John Sutcliff prior to the Northamptonshire Baptist Association meeting where Carey would preach his famous sermon that would lead to the formation of the BMS. Carey writes, "I have sent you 25 Copies of my *Enquiry*. Accept one yourself—and sell as many as you can—I hope to see you as you go to the Association" (60). Or consider the 6 August 1794 letter from Andrew Fuller to John Rippon stating that "for the first time I rec[eived] a Letter from each of our Brethren in India that are all well and as happy as can be expected" (68). Fuller here refers to the first report he received from Carey after Carey's departure in April 1793. Finally, consider the candid report from Carey to his sister, Ann Hobson, on 27 Nov 1798, "No one expects me to write about experience, or any of the common topics of Religion; nor to say anything about the Doctrines of the Gospel, but News, and continual accounts of marvelous things are expected from me. I have however no news to send, and as every thing here is the same, no Marvels" (92).

*Baptist Autographs in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1741–1845* presents both the historian and churchman with a resource worthy of mining for historical verification, personal anecdotes, insight into the lives of great men and women, and examples of piety in adversity and blessing. Aside from the opportunity to search for other previously undiscovered letters in Manchester, the reader will no doubt appreciate the privilege of reading the treasures provided at the result of the labors of Timothy D. Whelan.

Jason G. Duesing  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009.* By Gregory A. Wills. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 566 pages. Hardcover, \$35.00.**

The sesquicentennial of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is a significant milestone in Baptist history. Wills, one of its professors of church history, has



labored prodigiously to produce a sesquicentennial history.

Like many institutional histories, the book is organized around the nine presidencies (Boyce, Broadus, Whitsitt, Mullins, Sampey, Fuller, McCall, Honeycutt, and Mohler). Three chapters are devoted to Boyce with one being shared with Broadus. Two chapters each are given to Mullins, McCall, and Honeycutt. Sampey and Fuller share a chapter, and Whitsitt and Mohler have one.

To a large extent the volume is based on ground-breaking use of unpublished letters by and to Southern Seminary leaders. Trustee minutes and Baptist state papers are also utilized, but not the three histories of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Predominating attention is given to doctrinal controversy. Teaching methods (such as the long used recitation method), publications by faculty members, student life, and the ministries of alumni (pastors, church staff members, teachers, missionaries, chaplains, et al) receive scant attention.

Certain questions and omissions call for answers. (1) Despite the high degree of faculty participation in governance, the exercise of presidential authority became an issue as early as the Mullins administration (286). Why? (2) Wills gives little attention to the policy of faculty inbreeding, which—for the School of Theology—extended from C.H. Toy (1869) to William A. Mueller (1948) and Eric C. Rust (1953) (350). (3) Although carefully reporting in great detail the 1958–1959 controversy (McCall vs. 13 professors) (357–404), the author passes over the rebuilding of the faculty as if it were automatic or incidental and posits instead the dubious theory of a “Prague Spring” of Southern Baptist liberalism (405–07). Absent is treatment of the significant work of Penrose St. Amant, Ray Summers, and Wayne E. Oates in saving the accreditation and restoring confidence. (4) Can Wills’ tracing of the anti-segregation stance implied in Southern’s invitation to Martin Luther King, Jr., to deliver the Gay Lectures (1962) as being an expression of “progressivism” (i.e., theological liberalism) (413–17) be compatible with the later stance against racism taken by Richard Land and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission? (5) Since Southern was not the only SBC seminary after 1925, does not the relationship among the SBC seminaries deserve more attention, especially the struggles over Cooperative Program allocations and curriculum development?

A.T. Robertson’s publications and scholarship are indeed acknowledged, and the writings of C.H. Toy, E.Y. Mullins, W.O. Carver, Harold W. Tribble, J.B. Weatherspoon, and Dale Moody are treated, perhaps because they were/are controversial, but authors such as E.C. Dargan, W.J. McGlothlin, Gaines S. Dobbins, E.A. McDowell, H.H. Barnette, Rust, and Oates lack coverage.

Wills’ book is more thoroughly researched and more theological than Mueller’s *A History of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (1959), is less adequate as to curriculum and alumni than Mueller’s *The School of Providence and Prayer: A History of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary* (1969), and is more theological and less complete as to seminary personnel than Robert A. Baker’s *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1908–1983* (1983).

Baptists are indebted to Wills for providing a detailed and readable examination of the theological history of Southern Seminary from its heroic founders—Boyce, Broadus, Manly, and Williams—with their struggles during and after the Civil War to its first decade of the 21st century as “an evangelical and Southern Baptist seminary” (536) with an all-time high enrollment (546).

But it is difficult to avoid what seems to be the unstated but permeating and

governing thesis of the book, namely, that Southern was on the right track, despite financial hardships, for its first forty years but from 1899 to 1994 was going in the wrong direction (being subject to the dangers of the authority of experience, historical criticism of the Bible, and liberalism/modernism [treated as synonyms]) until it was restored to its true foundation (biblical inerrancy, Dortian Calvinism, and gender complementarianism). Those who accept that thesis will likely find this volume to be more than sufficient, whereas those who do not will continue to look for the rest of the story.

James Leo Garrett, Jr.  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***W.H. Whitsitt: The Man and the Controversy.* By James H. Slatton. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009. 348 + xx pages. Hardcover, \$40.00.**

James Slatton has produced a biography of William H. Whitsitt (1841–1911) worth reading. Granted permission by Whitsitt’s granddaughter, Slatton uses Whitsitt’s previously (and still currently) sealed diaries to provide a firsthand account of Whitsitt’s life and trials. Limited by the fact that the diaries recount only the events of 1885–1899, Slatton fills in the gaps to present a complete biography. When Slatton lets the diaries speak, and he does so with freedom and clarity, Whitsitt portrays a largely bitter and elitist temperament. However, when the diaries are silent, Slatton paints the picture of a heroic Whitsitt “hounded from office for his discovery of ‘an inconvenient truth’” (x). Thankfully, the reader gains enough access not only to draw his own conclusions but also to understand from where Slatton comes.

Slatton begins the volume in 1862 with the interruption of Whitsitt’s first pastorate by the Civil War. The War not only takes Whitsitt away from the Mill Creek Baptist Church in Nashville for a time, but also gives Whitsitt cause to leave his commitments to Landmarkism. Reared in a home that regularly read the *Tennessee Baptist* during the days of Landmark ascendancy, Whitsitt would have a front row seat as the movement grew in popularity and followed the writings of J.R. Graves, A.C. Dayton, and J.M. Pendleton. In fact, Graves would preach Whitsitt’s ordination sermon.

Slatton describes how several imprisonments during the war would provide Whitsitt the opportunity to associate with other Baptists throughout the country. Instead of finding them half-hearted and erroneous as he had been taught, Whitsitt found that these non-Landmark Baptists “often excelled me in the graces of the spirit” (14). Such experiences led Whitsitt to question his commitments and change his outlook leading him to altogether abandoning Landmarkism. By 1866, Whitsitt left Nashville and enrolled at the University of Virginia where his “conversion from Landmarkism was highly supported” (25). There he met John A. Broadus and eventually followed him to study at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary then located in Greenville, South Carolina. His time at the seminary led to further studies in Germany followed by a pastorate in Virginia until the seminary called him to join the faculty in 1872.

Slatton shows that during Whitsitt’s early years at Southern, he “developed into a gentlemen of considerable refinement as well as scholarship” (53). As Whitsitt took on more elite status he began to question his commitment to the Baptist tradition. He writes in his journal, “I am greatly oppressed by the fact that the spirit of

my people is foreign from my spirit; that they are far more narrow & pharisaical & sectarian than accounts with my conception of Christianity" (53). Whitsitt's decision to remain Baptist appears more of a decision based on practical considerations and a commitment to tradition than to any real doctrinal conviction. In fact, Slatton states that Whitsitt even "considered writing an article arguing that the New Testament model of church government as Baptists interpreted it was not suited to the present needs of the church" (55).

Crawford H. Toy became Whitsitt's closest friend and colleague at Southern. Toy, the nephew of R.B.C. Howell, also had studied in Germany after the war and came to hold a prominent position at Southern that garnered great popularity. However, the revelation of Toy's embrace of higher criticism led to Toy's dismissal from the seminary in 1879. Slatton depicts how Toy's departure stirred Whitsitt to embitterment toward both Boyce, the school's president, and Broadus, though he only expressed it in the pages of his diary. During the summer of 1880 Whitsitt traveled to London to pursue research to disprove the Landmark theory of Baptist origins and to show that Baptists began in 1641 as a part of the English Separatist movement. So enthralled with his discovery, Whitsitt determined to publish his findings anonymously through four articles in the New York *Independent*. Whitsitt would later regret posing as a non-Baptist in a pedobaptist publication. For all the controversy that surrounded Whitsitt in the years ahead, his momentary decision to publish in the *Independent* made all the difference for the outcome of his tenure at the seminary.

In 1885, Whitsitt began keeping the diary that Slatton describes as reflecting "his candid—and often uncomplimentary—opinions about his fellow professors" and thus part of the reason why he instructed it remained sealed for one hundred years (104). Slatton reprints several surprising statements from the diaries including Whitsitt's prediction that "the time must inevitably come when the Baptists shall give up the practice of immersion .... To surrender close communion will be a prelude to the surrender of immersion. Neither of them is consistent with other practices of the Baptists; the sooner they can be abolished the better" (113). In 1893, Whitsitt published his views on the origins of Baptists, this time under his own name, in *Johnson's Universal Cyclopedia*. This led to further skirmishes with the Landmarkers though these did not prevent Whitsitt's election as president of the seminary in 1895 after the death of Broadus. The challenges from the Landmarkers did continue, however, and when the revelation came that Whitsitt penned the 1880 articles in the *Independent* the smell of blood permeated the water.

Slatton pieces together all the intricacies of the Whitsitt controversy with helpful care. As an example, he shows that Whitsitt's choice to refer to the start of the practice of immersion by the English Baptists in 1641 as an "invention" rather than a "restoration" was no small mistake. For Whitsitt to imply that immersion was a practice foreign even to the early Christians of the New Testament and that the English Baptists were the first to institute the practice, drew ire from many. Whitsitt would later retract his statement affirming that John the Baptist did, in fact, practice immersion, but by then the opposition had mounted. Soon there came cause to believe that Whitsitt had authored other anonymous articles in the *Independent* advocating pedobaptism, and the result brought Whitsitt before the seminary Board of Trustees to read a statement of apology and retraction. At this point Slatton shows that Whitsitt and his supporters attempted to interpret the controversy as one concerning academic freedom and the right of Whitsitt to pursue research as he saw

fit. Whitsitt's supporters urged him not to resign and to continue to fight for "the freedom of research and the right of free speech in the Seminary" (244). However, it appears that they were overlooking Whitsitt's confessed dishonesty regarding the articles in the *Independent* as well as his stated commitment to adhere to the confession of faith of the seminary, the Abstract of Principles.

Eventually, Whitsitt would resign under pressure from both his allies and adversaries, though he would quickly come to regret that decision. Slatton rightly notes that Whitsitt's removal only served as a Landmark victory in part, as the next president did not share their views and Whitsitt's conclusions regarding Baptist origins would go on to serve as the dominate view among Baptists in the twentieth century. Slatton attempts to link the Whitsitt controversy with the "moderate-fundamentalist controversy" among Southern Baptists in the 1980s and 1990s by opining the merits of an academic freedom tethered to the priesthood of the believer. Slatton amazingly argues that merely to cite "freedom within the bounds of the institution's articles of faith" fails to accomplish the goal of ensuring that the "opinions of the masses" are "reflected in the teaching of the professors" (322–23). Slatton believes that "assemblies of the people—local and state associations and the national convention—were not really competent or feasible venues for adjudicating questions of fact, or science, or doctrine" (322). He concludes, in fact, that the Whitsitt controversy "evokes a haunting sense of *déjà vu*" for those who experienced the controversy among Southern Baptists in the late twentieth century.

Slatton's biography of Whitsitt captures and presents well a previously untold portion of Whitsitt's life and thought as recorded in Whitsitt's private diaries. Slatton's attention to detail, care for his subject matter, and desire to honor the family who gave him privileged access to the sealed materials comes through in a thoughtful, well organized, and engaging presentation. However, when Slatton leaves his primary task and attempts to make comparisons to Southern Baptist controversies of the immediate past, he skews the storyline and muddies the water of an otherwise helpful history.

Jason G. Duesing  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Seminary in Crisis: The Strategic Response of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the SBC Controversy.* By William E. Hull. Atlanta: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2009.**

In the heat of the Southern Baptist controversy some years ago, William E. Hull published his own brief assessment of the wrangle, which, as he described it, focused on the difference in how two contending factions in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) "do church." Though hardly a thorough analysis of the etiology of the conflict or a prognosis for the future, the insights garnered were often accurate and always stimulating. Those articles and his recent small monograph, *Seminary In Crisis*, demonstrate why Hull has always been my favorite liberal Southern Baptist commentator. While I sometimes think that Hull gets it wrong, he is always a thinker, attempting to make sense of the whole and seemingly never deliberately trying to mislead.

For example, in the preface of this slender but provocative volume, Hull assesses with candor most of the moderate (i.e., "liberal") attempts to evaluate the SBC landscape. Hull observes,

Now that the SBC Controversy is largely settled except for antagonisms at state and local levels, with the warring factions either off the scene or settled in new routines, it is time for moderates to begin investigating why they lost the denominational leadership that they had enjoyed for years. Some early accounts written in the pain of defeat were largely jeremiads against conservative perfidy, which may have provided therapy for the wounded but were ignored by conservatives who did not bother to read or respond. What we need now is neither finger-pointing nor breast-beating but a more rigorously self-critical look at how moderates discharged their leadership responsibilities in the thick of battle, not to blame but to understand why conservatives found it easier to win than they had ever imagined would be the case (ix).

In one prescient sentence Hull dismisses most of the moderate historiographical kitsch and pleads for rigorous analysis. Taking a sliver of the pie, Hull examines the responses of two successive presidents at Southern Seminary to the Conservative Renaissance in the Southern Baptist Convention as it impacted the life of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

The “protagonists,” as Hull describes them, are Duke K. McCall and Roy L. Honeycutt. McCall, who served as president at Southern from 1981 to 1993, was at one time arguably the most powerful single figure in the SBC. He served as president of two seminaries and had a stint as the Executive Director of the Executive Committee of the SBC. He was a theological pragmatist, a politician, and a sometimes ruthless competitor. Now in his nineties, he was able to read and essentially approve Hull’s manuscript. Honeycutt (1926–2004) was a professor with a life lived largely in the academy, a gentle spirit for the most part. Hull’s thesis is that their personalities, as well as their personal histories, influenced and maybe even determined their opposite responses to the crisis they faced.

Hull introduces the issue at hand with a brief assessment of the origin of Southern Seminary. James P. Boyce is pictured as a classically educated elitist attempting to distill a modicum of learning in the “plainest” of ministers, placing these relatively untutored men side by side with those fortunate enough to have attended college. At this point Hull provides another motive for Boyce’s determination, one seldom admitted by moderates with less integrity than Hull.

Already, however, the challenge of the German model to confessional constraints had precipitated fierce conflict with the religious establishment on the Continent. To counter that reaction among his constituency in America, Boyce proposed that every professor subscribe to an agreed-upon declaration of doctrine that would assure the churches of the institution’s theological integrity (2).

Hull even admits that the tough sledding for the idea of a Southern Baptist seminary related to the constituency’s legitimate concern about one matter. “Finally, could a constituency already troubled by theological conflict be convinced that a faculty fully abreast of international scholarship would not compromise the most cherished convictions of the faith as some seminaries in the North had already begun to do?” (3).

The former provost at Southern concludes this introductory chapter with the observation that Southern has been a seminary wracked by controversy at regular

intervals since its inception. He refers to the Toy controversy (1879), the Whitsitt controversy (1896–99), the Mullins controversy (1925–28), the McCall controversy (1958–59) and the “one that has dominated the last thirty years (1979–2009).” He does not mention that each of these, with only one exception, was a doctrinal controversy, and even that one had its doctrinal component. In a nutshell, Hull proves that the original concern of many in the convention was well taken.

Turning to the real point of the book, Hull evaluates not only the men, McCall and Honeycutt, but also their presidencies. Hull paints McCall as a seasoned veteran of denominational politics, who saw clearly and early the threat of the Conservative Renaissance. In response, McCall developed numerous lines of defense including clever intellectual ways of discussing the nature of the Bible while carefully avoiding specific and divisive words. As a final position, McCall intended to exercise an obscure clause in Southern Seminary’s governance documents that would enable existing trustees to refuse to seat the newly elected trustees sent by the SBC. Once again, gratitude must be offered to Hull for admitting the existence and intent of this plan, which, at the time, was vigorously denied by moderates.

McCall’s “one clear, simple strategy” to risk everything on this idea is in contrast to the diverse, almost experimental, responses that were characteristic of Honeycutt. Hull presents Honeycutt as the faculty scholar thrust into an unwanted role as president of the seminary. There is no mention in the book of the widely circulated rumor that Hull himself wanted the presidency, but he certainly did have his supporters. To Hull’s way of thinking, Honeycutt’s attempts “to cooperate”—culminating in his signing of the Glorieta Statement, in which the presidents of the six SBC seminaries affirmed to the inerrancy of Scripture, igniting strong reactions from faculties at Southern, Southeastern and Midwestern—were indecisive and naive.

Little is said by Hull about contemporary Southern Seminary. That would fall outside the purview of his work. Clearly, the present posture of Southern would not encompass Hull’s dream. But, there is recognition that the seminary has flourished under Al Mohler and the conservative board of trustees.

By way of summation, Hull’s assessment of presidents McCall and Honeycutt is precise, colorful, and helpful. His understanding of the life of Southern during these two eras is that of an insider who knew what transpired. On the other hand, there is ample reason to suspect that Hull misrepresents Boyce. His general thesis that Boyce would not have sided with SBC conservatives seems flawed based on the handling of the Crawford Toy incident alone. Reading the theology of Boyce and the perspectives of Al Mohler suggests that the former would most probably rejoice that the latter had restored the Boyce legacy. Whatever the case, if you are a history buff or a Southern Baptist, Hull’s style and insights must not be missed. If you are a conservative, enjoy a book from the opposition that tends toward objectivity and inadvertently establishes the rightness of the conservative cause.

Paige Patterson  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



### Philosophical Studies

***God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible.* Edited by William Lane Craig and Chad Meister. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 272 pages. Softcover, \$19.00.**

Theism has been attacked over and over again throughout human history. Sometimes the attacks are subtle and almost passive in nature. Sometimes the attacks are fierce and draw blood. Within our own day, the new atheists are the latest attack upon theism and faith in general. Thus, *God is Great, God is Good* was written as a defense of theism against the new atheists' attacks. Giants of the Christian philosophical and theological world such as William Lane Craig (Professor of Philosophy at Talbot), Alister McGrath (Professor of Theology at King's College London), Chad Meister (Professor of Philosophy at Bethel College), Michael Murray (Professor of Humanities and Philosophy at Franklin and Marshall), Alvin Plantinga (former Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame), and more, write to engage the new atheists' objections to theism head on. Additionally, the editors also include a dialogue between former atheistic philosopher Antony Flew and Christian philosopher Gary Habermas. All rally together to give the Christian thinker answers to the new atheists' arguments. As the editors note in the introduction "Our primary objective in compiling this book is to answer challenges advanced by the New Atheists and others raising objections to belief in God and the Christian faith" (9).

Within a review such as this, it would be beneficial to explain exactly who these new atheists are. The leaders of the movement are Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens (*God is Great, God is Good* seems to directly counter Hitchens' book title *God Is Not Great*). Their "new-ness" has nothing to do with their beliefs about God; after all, atheists have been around for centuries, and though their arguments may vary some, their positions never do. These atheists were first classified "New Atheist" by WIRED magazine. They advance a simple and direct slogan: "No heaven. No hell. Just science" (7). So, it is not their beliefs or arguments that are new; rather, it is the aggressive nature in which they propagate their message—they are direct, combative, belittling, and disseminate their information on a popular level. Essentially, the contributors of *God is Great, God is Good* explain the new atheists viewpoint as this: one is either an atheistic evolutionist or one is an anti-intellectual that is philosophically and scientifically antiquated.

The book is divided into four parts. Each part takes an issue that is addressed by the new atheists and counters their arguments with sound, theistic arguments. Part 1 focuses on the existence of God. William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland, and Paul Moser each take a chapter to show that there are valid and sound arguments for God's existence, and that it is not anti-intellectual or juvenile to believe in a divine, omnipotent Being who created all and sustains all. The overall aim in the section is to give the reader classical arguments which show that being a believer in a supernatural Being is not a sophistical or juvenile ideology, but is logical and coherent to sound philosophical and scientific reasoning.

Part 2 tackles issues in philosophy of science. John Polkinghorne, Michael J. Behe, and Michael J. Murray use the fine-tuning argument to show the necessity of there being a God. The fine-tuning argument states, simplistically, that life within the universe can only exist within precise (finely tuned) and exact characteristics; so precise and exact that it must have been created by an Intelligent Designer. In other

words, the parameters of existence are so narrow that the best explanation of such a universe is an Intelligent Designer.

Part 3 addresses one of the oldest and best arguments against theism—the problem of evil. Chad Meister, Alister McGrath, Paul Copan, and Jerry L. Walls show that God is omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient—yet, evil still exists. Chad Meister writes, “There is no logical contradiction between the two claims (that evil exists and God exists), for it could be the case that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnibenevolent God has good reason for allowing evil to exist and persist—perhaps, for example, for the greater good of one or more persons” (108). The authors highlight the moral argument for the existence of God; it makes no logical sense to claim God does not exist *and* claim that evil exists. Moral objectivism can only be true, the contributors reason, if there is a moral Law-Giver.

Part 4 focuses specifically on Christian belief. The section submits that the arguments against theism affect Christianity directly. Charles Taliaferro, Scot McKnight, Gary Habermas, and Mark Mittelberg show that the belief in Christ and his work is not an outdated stance that should be relegated to the Medieval era, but rather Christ’s work and life is historically verifiable and spiritually necessary. Additionally, the authors explain that special revelation is needed for one to know God personally.

*God is Great, God is Good* is a book written on a popular level. One does not need a philosophical background to understand the essays or arguments. Granted, the book is written for an educated crowd, but one need not have a degree in philosophy, biology, physics, or theology to understand the depth and precision of the arguments. The authors do a stellar job at making their essays readable and beneficial to modern theist. My only complaint is one does not get to see the new atheists’ response.

Chad Meeks  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***An Introduction to Nietzsche.* By Lucy Huskinson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009. 106 pages. Softcover, \$14.99.**

Friedrich Nietzsche is much maligned in Christian circles and most often criticism of him is justified. It is thus somewhat surprising and most certainly unique that anyone would attempt to approach Nietzsche’s thoughts as being relevant to Christians. Huskinson has commendably succeeded in displaying Nietzsche’s relevance to a complacent Christian church.

How is it possible that a philosopher who proclaimed a “death of God” movement be significant to the Christian church? Is it imaginable that this man whose writings are deeply controversial can have anything to say to the future of Christian discipleship? Perhaps more so than the so-called “new atheists,” Nietzsche may have unveiled something noteworthy, albeit not overwhelmingly profound, as to how Christians ought to be and act. Yet as Huskinson herself admits one cannot take this too far. After all, Nietzsche’s ideas cannot be seen to support Christianity since “Nietzsche rejects Christ” (80).

Many have tried to rationalize the thoughts of Nietzsche. However, because his ideas lack systematic cohesion, such attempts usually have mixed results. In addition, such attempts to bring order to a philosopher who would have shunned such a label, has led to wildly differing assessments as to Nietzsche’s motivations, priorities

as well as his train of thought.

As such, while Huskinson has a definite purpose in writing this work, she does not pretend that she has successfully solved the enigma surrounding the philosopher's many and controversial ideas. Her sole purpose seems to be to highlight "Nietzsche's search for, and explanation of authentic divinity" via the reevaluation of Christian values and the emphasis of what he regards to be an "affirmation of life" (xiii–xiv).

There are various key aspects of Nietzsche's thoughts that Huskinson helpfully highlights. One of these aspects is the concept of the "will to power" and its contrast with the "will to truth." The will to power has the purpose of accepting a "tension and creative dialogue between opposites [and in doing so emphasizes] human growth . . . in terms of infinite possibility and perspective, whereby we continually shape and reshape who we are" (4–5). In sharp contradistinction to the will to power, the will to truth is (for Nietzsche), where life is "lived according to a perceived fixed ideal" (6). Nietzsche views Christianity as a prime example of such a perceived fixed ideal.

In doing so, Nietzsche also believes that Christianity is the very embodiment of what many have (justifiably) accused Nietzsche of promoting—Nihilism. Huskinson is careful to point out that the philosopher is of the view that Christianity does not affirm life but rather "negates the meaningfulness of human life" (7). Christianity, he insists, treasures the use of reason that leads to objective truth, instead of prizing the emotions and instincts (8, 60).

Another problem with Christianity, according to Nietzsche is that it promotes what is termed a "slave morality" that included aspects that are undesirable, including "sin, guilt, pity, cruelty, good and evil," (11) as well as bad conscience and resentment (16–25). In contrast to this Huskinson mentions that Nietzsche's "master morality," is more fluid and hence varies according to different circumstances (13), affirms the self (14), and does not thrive on resentment of others (15).

For Nietzsche, Christianity has no use and no worth (42) and so when Nietzsche talks about his "death of God," Huskinson astutely indicates he is not so much attempting to pronounce a metaphysical assertion regarding God but merely indicating the changing of the times and the values of society (51); and perhaps he is also indicating the maturing of humanity from a pessimistic nihilism (as illustrated by Christian beliefs) to an active nihilism that is optimistic, free from fetters, and able to formulate new values creatively (35–54).

Nietzsche's ultimate man is the so-called *Übermensch*, frequently translated as 'superman.' Such a man is not ruled by reason but rules in chaos and his instincts (60). He creates out of his whim what he wishes in a child-like innocence without recourse to conscience and tradition and he constantly seeks to overcome himself in whatever way necessary (61–74). All in all, in all except the final chapter, Huskinson paints a portrait of Nietzsche's philosophy that seems (a) not only impossible to reconcile with Christianity but also (b) so inconsistent with the Christian faith that it is difficult to see much use for it.

However, the thrust or whole point of Huskinson's argument is revealed in the final chapter. She contends that what we can learn from Nietzsche is similar to what we can learn from Bonhoeffer (83). Christians must allow and invite test of their faith (82) in order to prove that their faith is not only genuine but worthy to be a way of life that an individual may embrace (84). Since Nietzsche not only did not find Christians in his surrounding who were willing to do that but also did not believe

that any Christian who had their faith tested who choose to remain in their faith, he viewed it as an unworthy way of life. Huskinson believes that this can be a “wake-up call for lazy Christians today” (89) and so she encourages followers of Christ to challenge themselves and question their prejudices as well as indulge in continual self-criticism in order to distill their faith into a purer version (92).

Suresh Vythylingam  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Time and Eternity.* By Brian Leftow. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009. 377 pages. Softcover, \$36.95**

Perhaps Augustine described man’s bafflement with time best: “What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled” (Augustine, *Confessions* [New York: Penguin, 1961], 264). For centuries mankind has contemplated the ontology of time. In conjunction, theists have contemplated God’s relation to time. Many questions have been asked in light of these pursuits, such as: Does God exist outside of time? If God is eternal, how does He relate to temporally bound creatures? If God is temporal, how does He remain immutable? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each position? Brian Leftow, professor of philosophy at Oxford, seeks to answer these questions in his seminal book *Time and Eternity*.

Leftow details and defends divine timelessness. He claims that God is eternal (or outside of time), and that this ontological status entails his sovereignty, omniscience, and immutability. Leftow states that the aim of the book is “to articulate and defend the claim that God is in no way in time. If God is not in time . . . one must wonder what his relation to time is. Thus my second aim is to clarify the relations between a timeless being and temporal beings: between time and eternity” (3). He defends his thesis by adopting an Anselmian approach to God and time. Anselm held that “God is simultaneously present at discrete, non-simultaneous times . . . in other words, God is present at different times at once” (183). So the Anselmian view of God and time claims that God is eternal or non-temporal. He sees all time at once, yet time and existence continue on in temporal succession. The advantage of the Anselmian view of eternity, according to Leftow, is that one can hold a robust view of God’s omniscience, divine simplicity, and sovereignty while still maintaining a libertarian view of free will.

There are two intriguing aspects of Leftow’s book. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Time and Eternity* is how Leftow details the views Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm had on God and his relation to time. In this way, Leftow branches contemporary and classical philosophical theology, noting how past thinkers have handled this topic, and how their solutions can help thinkers today. Interesting enough, Leftow argues that these ancient thinkers structured exceptional theories that have benefited contemporary philosophers in their pursuit of understanding God’s relation to time

A second intriguing aspect is that Leftow does not assume any particular theory of time. In most treatises on God’s relation to time, the author will first state his/her own view of time. For example, the author will construct their philosophy of time by taking a tensed or tenseless view, and then explain God’s relation to the said theory. From this point, the author will seek to show that their philosophy of time

is essential in his or her position of God's relation to time. Leftow, however, does not defend or propagate any philosophy of time. In fact, he seeks to show that both A- and B-theories of time will work in harmony with his view of Anselmian divine eternity. (He does seem to favor a tensed [or A-theory] view of time; however, he argues without assuming any particular theory of time.) Whether the reader will find this a benefit or hindrance depends on the reader's understanding and acceptance of Leftow's arguments. Either way, Leftow's stellar work and argumentation are easy to admire.

One disparaging feature of Leftow's book is his claim that eternity is some sort of "time" itself. God's eternity is a separate time series from our time series; but, it is a series which has not time, which he designates "null time." (51). This proposition seems obscure and inchoate. Leftow never really describes what it means to claim eternity can be classified as its own "time." This is not to say that Leftow does not attempt to describe what a "no time time" is; yet, this reviewer holds he was ultimately unsuccessful at dispelling any mystification. To be sure, the thought sounds fascinating, but ultimately it is underdeveloped. (It should be noted that this confusing taxonomy does not seem to weaken Leftow's overall argument.)

There is no mistaking that Leftow has contributed a significant work to the topic of divine timelessness. His work is detailed and thought-provoking. Even if one was opposed to a timeless view of God, this work should not and cannot be ignored. Anyone who is interested in further study and understanding of divine timelessness would be well served in reading this book. If one is just interested in quick arguments on divine timelessness, Leftow supplies a chapter titled "A Case for God's Timelessness," which would satisfy that interest. Many sections are very readable and stimulating for theologians and philosophers alike, although having a background in philosophical discourse and logic would help one better understand Leftow's ideals and arguments.

Chad Meeks  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church.* By Merold Westphal. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 160 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

Postmodernism poses, well, a poser for the Church. On the one hand, post-modern critiques of modernity have revealed that the emperor in fact has no clothes, that an imperialistic human reason guided by a scientific methodology cannot deliver what it has promised. Reason and method alone cannot deliver to us an unquestioned objectivity which systematically delivers all knowledge and truth. Postmodernism has reminded us that we are not God. On the other hand, after destroying the obelisks of modern epistemology, postmodernism has threatened to leave nothing but ruins in their place. Faith in human reason is replaced with despair. Everything is called into question, including our ability to communicate through speaking and writing, our access to knowledge of any sort, and the very existence of truth. Of particular concern to the church is the threat posed to the authority of Scripture. If texts cannot communicate meaning, if we have no access to truth, then the Word of God cannot be the Word of God for the church. In his brief but incisive *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, Merold Westphal seeks to sail biblical hermeneutics through the Scylla of deified reason and the Charybdis of postmodern relativism.

Westphal's main concern is to apply the hermeneutical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* to the church's reading of Scripture in such a way that Christians will recognize the influence of their tradition and community on their hermeneutic, but will not be left with an "anything goes" view of biblical interpretation. The first five chapters provide preparation for this task by placing Gadamer's work in both historical and contemporary context. Chapters six through nine familiarize the reader with Gadamer's theory, and the final three chapters explore the implications of that theory for biblical interpretation within the context of the church. This last point cannot be overemphasized, for Westphal recognizes the unique character of Scripture as the Word of God, which means that interpreting it is different from interpreting any other text. For example, Westphal notes that one cannot rightly interpret Scripture within the context of the church without taking into account "the witness of the Holy Spirit, not only in attesting to the Bible as divine revelation but also in teaching us what it means" (14).

While *Whose Community?* deals with complicated philosophical issues, it is not overly technical and should be accessible to the average reader. This accessibility is by design, as Westphal notes that all Christians are theologians who read and interpret Scripture, whether they do it in an academic, pastoral, or lay setting. Whether the Christian is writing academically, proclaiming the Word from the pulpit, or reading devotionally, he is involved in biblical interpretation. And because Christians live together in community, the ways in which individual Christians interpret Scripture are also the ways in which the church interprets Scripture. So Westphal rightly addresses his work to the individual Christians who make up the church, and keeps this individual/ecclesiastical dynamic in mind throughout.

Even if one finds oneself disagreeing with Westphal's conclusions, *Whose Community?* is worth the short read for the first nine chapters alone. After arguing for the necessity of interpretation in chapter one, Westphal provides a clear and concise summary of nineteenth- and twentieth-century hermeneutics, focusing on Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and then Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. In doing so, Westphal argues against the "romantic" hermeneutic of the nineteenth century, characterized by psychologism (which views texts as insights into the minds of their authors as opposed to vehicles of communication about certain subjects) and objectivism (which takes a view of interpretation akin to the natural sciences, and thus intends to produce a single reading with universal validity). But he also rejects a thoroughly relativistic twentieth-century postmodern hermeneutic according in which no limit is imposed upon legitimate interpretations. Against both of these extreme views Westphal places Gadamer, whose hermeneutic he thinks can assist in the rehabilitation of tradition.

In the final chapters, Westphal seeks to apply Gadamerian hermeneutics for the benefit of the church by developing a model based on political liberalism (read here classical liberalism, not liberal as opposed to conservative), characterized by the notions of individual rights and limited government, and communitarianism, which provides an account of the good and a comprehensive list of virtues embedded in specific communities and their traditions. From liberalism one receives the concept of an overlapping consensus, while from communitarianism one gets values and practices within the context of a particular community. For, say, a Southern Baptist, the liberalism aspect of the model will provide what one might call the essentials of Christian faith, while the communitarian aspect will provide Baptist identity. Of course, the problem (which Westphal does not address directly) is in specifying



where the lines between the liberal and communitarian goals are to be drawn. But Westphal is optimistic that if the church adopts some general virtues (primarily humility, listening, and friendship) such problems can be resolved. Whatever one thinks of the potential for success in these matters, Westphal's book is a helpful read for any Christian interested in the essential practice of biblical interpretation.

John B. Howell III  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Hermeneutics: An Introduction.* By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 424 pages. Softcover, \$30.00.**

*Hermeneutics: An Introduction* by Anthony C. Thiselton accomplishes what the title states. Thiselton's previous publications on the subject of hermeneutics—*New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, *The Two Horizons*, and the related *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*—all serve both the breadth and depth of this book. Thiselton is qualified to write an introductory work on hermeneutics not only as a result of the monographs previously mentioned, but also for his scholarship in the fields of New Testament studies and philosophy. This brings richness to Thiselton's perspective on hermeneutics by involving each of these fields in his summary and analysis of the field.

The book begins with three that define hermeneutics, offer explanation of its value, and set forth a methodological framework. Particularly noteworthy is Thiselton's definition of hermeneutics, his clarification of the differences between philosophical hermeneutics and traditional hermeneutics, and his perspective on presuppositions. Additionally, worthy of mention in these preliminary chapters is his description of the intersection of biblical studies, philosophy, and literary theory on the issue of interpretation. This description serves as an introduction to the categories that will be analyzed in historical order in the subsequent chapters. Thiselton offers an example of how the hermeneutical methods he discusses may be applied with the parables of Jesus, providing opportunity for illustration.

Following these initial chapters, Thiselton devotes the remainder of the book to analyzing, chapter by chapter, major historical movements in hermeneutics. Several chapters make notable contributions by providing an entry level analysis of the significant thinkers in hermeneutics. Chapter four provides an overview of the genesis of Christian hermeneutics as it developed out of a blended Jewish and Greek background. Beginning in this chapter, the book propels forward into a discussion of the characteristics of hermeneutics during the early church through the fourth century. Uniquely valuable contributions of the book, notable for their distillation of influential ideas overlooked by most, are found in chapters eleven and twelve. These chapters interact with the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur respectively. The historical analysis rounds out with chapters on the Reformation, Enlightenment, Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Barth, and postmodern hermeneutics in addition to others left unmentioned.

The book contains a set of features which make it a manageable introduction composing its greatest asset for those not already immersed in the field. First among these features is the brief list of books recommended for further reading appended to each chapter. Thiselton's characteristically encyclopedic style is made attainable by the definition of concepts which would perhaps be missed by those with no prior exposure. Additionally, the significant writers he discusses are introduced with

biographical material, and their major writings provide the outline for Thiselton's analysis. This tool prevents the necessity for the reader to be conversant with these writers before making use of this book.

This book demonstrates hermeneutics' status as a multidisciplinary enterprise where the reader must be critical, yet open. Thiselton's characteristic even-handed analysis comes to bear on the divergent influences on hermeneutics. The reader may find ample grounds for disagreement within the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Rorty, Jauss, Gadamer, Derrida and the others included in the book. Thiselton provides a model for evaluating the ideas of these writers as his interaction offers critique of their errors while also modeling how one may be instructed by the grain of truth, that may be found in many of the worst faults.

The element many readers will find missing is a constructive outline for biblical hermeneutics. The analysis in the book was written with an orientation to provide an historical overview of the field, as opposed to offering a detailed instructive hermeneutic. While the volume possesses no lack of evaluation from Thiselton, this book on its own is not intended to produce a complete framework for the reader. An added value of the book is that it addresses a lacuna of a few hermeneutical ideas. In order to make the book a more comprehensive introduction, one would hope to see chapters on the contemporary move toward theological interpretation, a discussion on the post-liberal approach, and a discussion on the historical-grammatical mindset which has dominated American evangelicalism. With these points stated, the broad scope accomplished in 355 readable pages is an impressive strength which makes it difficult to offer critique on this point. This book achieves the status of a competent introduction to hermeneutics and presents it as a valuable tool for students of hermeneutics and those seeking to bring cohesiveness to the many tributaries that relate to the field.

Jon Wood

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### Studies in Ethics

***Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living.* By Nick Spencer, Robert White, and Virginia Vroblesky. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009. 288 pages. \$16.99.**

*Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living* concentrates on the issue of climate change and responds to it from a Christian perspective. The book consists of three parts dealing with science, theology, and practice. The purpose of the book is to study the relationship of Christian faith to climate change and "sustainable living" (4). As a consequence of this exploration, the authors encourage readers "to understand" the reality of climate change—its causes and effects, "to envision the solution," and "to take their responsibilities seriously" (8).

The book is appreciated for two unique contributions. First, chapter 4 offers a study of ecology based on Isaiah 40–66, which is not so much a "substitute for the modern concept of sustainability, but an inspiring vision of what sustainable living could look like" (115). Few volumes intensively relate sustainable living with Isaiah 40–66 as this book does. Second, in chapter 6, the authors envisage a sustainable society in the future. Based upon the principles presented in previous chapters, the authors draw a vision of what sustainable living might look like if we lived according to the principles which they explore and explain.

This book is helpful in three ways. First, the book is very practical, offering its readers detailed “know-how” for living an ecologically well-balanced life, specifically in chapter 7. Second, the authors properly point out the spirituality that lies behind the issue of the global growth of greenhouse gases. Third, the book provides considerable helpful resources for further study of the environment.

Despite these profitable achievements, *Christianity, Climate Change, and Sustainable Living* needs three areas of improvement. First, the authors do not discuss opposing viewpoints. For example, providing scientific data, scholars in other evangelical circles assert that the current climate change is natural and is not the consequence of human activities. It would be better for the authors to have argued against those scholars with whom they disagree instead of simply noting that there is “spreading misinformation” (24). Second, in many cases, the authors have negative views about human culture and humans themselves. Of course, humans are corrupted because of the Fall; however, they and their cultures still have positive aspects. Third, the book has not contributed a thoroughly exegetical work of the Scriptures that are used for their arguments.

This book was written for a Western audience, especially for people who live in high-income industrialized nations (159). Nevertheless, this is helpful for those who are looking for a source which presents today’s trend in the evangelical camp on the issue of climate change.

Dae Jung Kim  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament, Vol. I. The Individual Witnesses.* By Ben Witherington. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. 856 pages. Hardcover, \$50.00.**

Ben Witherington is a prolific writer, but this time he surpassed his former efforts by producing a two volume epic presentation on the theology and ethics of the New Testament, both of which are over 800 pages in length. Volume One focuses on the various ways that each of the contributory writers of the New Testament presented their witness of what Jesus Christ said and did to create a new God “image” through the words and actions of the gospel, with its resulting message and world shaping impact.

There are some interesting contributions that this volume brings to the discussion of the theological and ethical message of the New Testament. First, is that theology and ethics are not to be separated, but rather to be taken as a whole. Ethics is not seen as a derivative of theology, but rather the natural completion of its meaning. For instance, Witherington repeatedly underscores that salvation is not a completed act just by believing the message. There has to be a resulting life change and pattern for salvation to be a reality. In fact, he insists throughout this first tome that salvation can be lost when one does not live by the essence of the salvation type of life. It is interesting that he teaches in a Methodist Seminary (Asbury), because he seems well fitted for teaching in that theological context. The security of the believer was even disparaged in some of his interpretations. He rarely even explores and explains the passages that present that foundational theological concept. Nevertheless, his interpretation puts a heightened importance on the value of consistent Christian living out what one professes to believe about Christ and the moral life.

A second area of contribution is that of creating a type of biblical commentary

on the whole New Testament, through a fairly thorough exploration of the contribution which each New Testament author made to the theological and ethical content of the Christian message. There is a thoroughness and almost exhaustive dimension to the exploration of details of numerous passages of Scripture, along with comparisons and contrasts to other passages, as well as current literature of the biblical period. Witherington also makes an evangelical response to a considerable number of controversial issues of interpretation of various New Testament texts. He often engaged in giving extensive response to the writings of other current authors on those controversial issues, and at times his responses consumed so much space that it distracted the reader from Witherington's assessment of the biblical content itself. Nevertheless, the "subject index" at the end of the book is a useful tool for reviewing the various issues which are treated in this valuable volume. Also, it is instructive to note that Volume Two of this set of works by Witherington focuses on a considerable number of the theological and ethical issues in the New Testament. For anyone interested in having a thorough analysis of the theological and ethical content of the New Testament, these two volumes are a must read.

William E. Goff

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament. Vol. II. The Collective Witness.* By Ben Witherington III. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010. 838 pages. Hardcover, \$50.00.**

This second volume of New Testament studies by Ben Witherington follows a course of exploring the theological and ethical issues found within the corpus of the whole New Testament text. This work begins with connecting it to the first volume, as well as creating a "Prolegomena" question of whether it is possible to really find and develop a consistent theological and ethical trajectory within the New Testament. The solution to that dilemma is found in the ethical frame cast by Jesus himself. That frame is that of a cruciform image, one of sacrificial love to be understood and followed in the light of the new eschatological situation created by Christ (30–32; cf. 492). Witherington in his stylistic manner captures the uniqueness of the "symbolic universe" of Jesus and his impact on the theology and ethics of the New Testament writers:

Jesus sees himself as the straw that stirs the drink. He is the game-changing performer. He is the kingdom-bringer. He is the Son of Man savior figure meant to establish dominion on earth forever. The events that will change the eons and history as well stand before him, whereas for all the New Testament authors these first eschatological events stand behind them, and they have the benefit of hindsight and retrospective analysis.

In this second volume Witherington seems to create three sets of groupings on the issues presented, although he does not subdivide them in that distinct manner. The first section (Chapters 1 to 3) deals with interpretive orientations on the symbolic universe, or thought world of Jesus and the New Testament writers. The second section (Chapters 4 to 7), in contrast to Witherington's insistence that theology and ethics should be held together, is an exploration of what he calls "the census of the consensus" of theological themes in the New Testament. It is fair to recognize

that Witherington does make a conscious effort to blend ethical application into his theological discussions, and ethical explorations are customarily shown to have a theological formation and basis for action. The third section is five chapters (8 to 12) on Christian ethics in which he creates an analysis of a unique grouping of all of the books of the New Testament. These five chapters on ethics analyze groups of books, each of which reflects a unique symbolic world perspective. After a chapter of overview of ethical orientations (chapter 8), the author sets forth a chapter on the ethics of Jesus and his moral influence over his followers. He then groups 10 books (Matthew, John, James, Jude, Hebrews, 1–3 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation) in a study of ethics for Jewish Christians, followed by two chapters on ethics for Gentile Christians, including Paul's writings as well as Mark, Luke and 2 Peter. His final chapter is an effort to demonstrate that there is a "matrix of meaning" or a commonality in all of the theology and ethics of the New Testament, which is that Jesus Christ has a unique role in creating a lasting "indelible image" of God, his kingdom, and his eternal presence in the world.

The thoroughness of this second text and its organization in exploring the theological and ethical themes of the New Testament presents a challenging, and yet fruitful, exercise for any pastor or theology student. There is ample evidence that Witherington has the conviction that the New Testament is a collection of God inspired writings, which have an undeniable and unavoidable importance for those who would be serious followers of Jesus Christ.

William E. Goff  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

***Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship beyond an Age of Individualism.* By Dale S. Kuehne. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 235 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

The author is the professor of politics and executive director of the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at Saint Anselm College and pastor of the Emmanuel Covenant Church in Nashua, New Hampshire. His work serves as an analysis of why our western culture has left its traditional moorings (what he calls the "t world") and sailed boldly and belligerently into the turbulent and destructive seas of individualism ("i world"). His goal is to give guidance for how westerners, including Christians, can reorient themselves so that they can move onto the more solid ground of building and maintaining stable human relationships, as well as one with God (what he calls the "r world"). His effort is to reengineer a worldview that will guide westerners toward a livable and sustainable future.

He does not limit his focus to Christians, but attempts to project the need for and the philosophy to guide a relationship-based lifestyle that encompasses a larger, pluralistic audience. His approach is to invite any who will to enter the conversation on weighing significant values (relying often, but not exclusively on biblical values) and reasonable systems of human, family, and societal engagement. Although he invites all to join the conversation about the way to develop the relational life, he has a decided evangelical presentation in Part 2 of the book, in which he explains the role of having a healthy relationship with God, thus creating a sense of self-identity and worth for having a foundation for all the other relationships in life. His chapter 7, "From Hole Hearted to Whole Hearted: A Love Story," is a winsome and convincing appeal to postmodern thinkers to consider the potential of experiencing a redeeming relationship with God.

Throughout the book Kuehne challenges the postmoderns to reflect seriously on the weaknesses of individualistic freedom in contemporary sexual conduct. Then, in chapter 8, the author moves to the relationship side of the theme that is suggested in the introduction of the book—r sex: a treatment of how post moderns can reorient their private lives toward creating a stable and dynamically functional set of interpersonal skills that endure and endear them with others for all of life.

William E. Goff

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### Pastoral Ministries

***Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting.* By William P. Farley. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009. 233 pages. Softcover, \$12.99.**

William Farley has written an excellent book about the centrality of the gospel in Christian parenting. The thesis of the book states that, “Effective application of the gospel empowers parents to reach their children’s hearts” (40). With that in mind, Farley believes that the gospel provides everything a parent needs in order to succeed. Three experiences in his own life led him to this conclusion, the reading of the Bible, the influence of other couples in his church, and Reformed Theology, particularly the writings of Jonathan Edwards.

Farley begins the book by establishing five presuppositions the reader must adopt in order to apply his teaching. First, parenting is not easy. Parents need the grace of God during every stage of parenting. Second, parenting requires an understanding of both God’s Sovereignty and the parent’s responsibility to reach the child for Christ. Third, parenting that is effective involves an offensive approach. Fourth, Christian parents must have a clear grasp on the concept of new birth. To be born again is to experience a radical change and a new direction in life (28). Fifth, Christian parents center their lives around God, not their children.

The greatest strength in Farley’s book is its deep theological framework. Throughout the book the author avoids presenting parenting techniques. Instead he asserts that the fear of the Lord is at the heart of gospel-powered parenting. The fear of God, according to the author, unleashes the blessing and favor of God upon the family. He defines the fear of God as the realization that sin “always has consequences” (60). After establishing the fear of God as a firm foundation, Farley presents a theological explanation of the holiness of God, the wrath of God, and the infinitely offensive nature of sin (93). He also explores in detail the gracious gift of God offered through faith in Christ. Farley concludes this section by explaining the costly price God paid to redeem human kind from a helpless state. The remainder of the book addresses principles of leadership, fatherhood, discipline, spiritual training, and love.

The first principle is leading by example. Farley believes that modeling a godly marriage is the most powerful example a parent can offer the child. The greatest obstacle to becoming a godly example, on the other hand, is pride. The second principle highlighted by the author is the prominent role of the father. Throughout the book Farley emphasizes that “Christianity is a patriarchal religion” (125). Therefore the chief parent is the father. The third principle is discipline. The author encourages parents to adopt the following steps, expect obedience on the first command, put



discipline in the context of love, reference scripture, break the child's self-will, hold the child until he stops crying, rehearse the gospel, and invite the child to express repentance. The fourth principle is spiritual training which Farley compares to feeding the child a good spiritual diet. The author believes that teaching must be formal after the age of six. The last principle is love. Farley firmly believes that in order to love children biblically, the parent must always love God more. The love and fear of God compel the parent to love the child selflessly and sacrificially.

Toward the end of the book Farley also addresses the importance of affection in the Christian home. "Unless children feel their parents' love and acceptance, they will probably not internalize the lessons" the parent is trying to teach (205). The hallmarks of affection are focused attention (spending quality time with each child), eye contact, physical contact such as hugs and holding, and words of affirmation and encouragement. Farley concludes the book with a message of hope and comfort for parents. He asserts that the task of raising godly children is impossible without the grace of God. Mistakes and failures according to the author, are unavoidable, therefore the gospel is once again the parent's secure anchor. The guidance and forgiveness every parent needs are available at the cross.

Farley presents a strong argument for gospel-powered parenting. His focus is on a biblical philosophy of parenting, rather than on a series of steps to follow. However, he does offer some practical suggestions. He successfully defends his thesis with a strong theological foundation and a solid biblical understanding. He triumphs at communicating his deep fear of God, his love for his family and his desire to encourage parents to do likewise.

Sudi Kate Gliebe  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary