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Celebrating Christian Centenaries

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## EDITORIAL

In the previous issue published this calendar year we noted, “2025 is a most significant year of anniversaries for Christians more broadly, for Baptists generally, and for Southern Baptists in particular.”<sup>1</sup> The significance of this year of anniversaries continues to dwell upon our minds and hearts. We thus collected seven essays under the issue title “Celebrating Christian Centenaries.”

On the 17<sup>th</sup> centenary, or 1,700th anniversary, of the Council of Nicaea, which proffered the orthodox doctrines of Trinity and Christology in response to the challenges of the deceptive heresies taught by Arius (and Marcellus, Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eunomius), we offer yet two more essays. The first, delivered during Southwestern Seminary’s chapel celebration of that important council, exegetes a single verse from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church of Colossae to demonstrate how the New Testament compelled the early church toward Nicene conclusions. The final essay of this issue borrows a passage from a new popular-level book on the first ecumenical council, which was co-written by one of our Texas College faculty, Coleman M. Ford. Beginning and ending this issue with Nicaea is an intentional reminder that orthodox doctrines about God and Christ are *sine qua non* in the tradition of this Seminary.

Next, three essays celebrate the 500th anniversary, or fifth centenary, of two significant events that occurred during the Protestant Reformation. In the first place, Benjamin Hawkins, a PhD graduate of Southwestern Seminary and the Editor of the official news journal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, reminds us of an important contribution by William Tyndale. In 1525, Tyndale penned the prologue to his New Testament, a book that fundamentally transformed the English-speaking world by making the Word of God available to the common person in his or her own language. Hawkins explains the translation philosophy of the martyr in his context and concludes that Tyndale’s principles still hold for us today.

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<sup>1</sup>David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Editorial,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 67.2 (2025): 5.

In the second place, the year 1525 witnessed the advent of the Anabaptist movement on the European continent. Michael Wilkinson, a PhD graduate of as well as an academic administrator for and a systematic and historical theologian at Southwestern Seminary, explores the biblical and orthodox Christology of one leading Evangelical Anabaptist theologian, Pilgram Marpeck. Next, Mac Brunson, a PhD graduate of Southwestern Seminary and the Pastor of Valleydale Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, outlines the biblical hermeneutical principles of the Anabaptist tradition by focusing on the work of Balthasar Hübmaier. Drs. Wilkinson and Brunson manifest an appreciation for the Anabaptists that has continually characterized Southwestern Seminary from its earliest years.

Two other essays celebrate the first centenary of the confession and cooperation of the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1925, as we saw in the previous issue, Southwestern Seminary helped craft the *Baptist Faith and Message* and helped establish the Cooperative Program that has been an important component in fueling the missionary and educational efforts of the Southern Baptist churches. In this issue, we make available for the first time the Presidential Inaugural Address of Robert E. Naylor, as introduced by our Provost and the Dean of the School of Theology, W. Madison Grace II. While Naylor became President in 1958, he clearly saw his efforts as building on the foundation laid by Benajah Harvey Carroll and Lee Rutland Scarborough, even as he reminds us of the immortality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also publish herein an appreciation by Anthony Wolfe for the seminal contribution to the Cooperative Program of Scarborough, the second and longest-serving President of Southwestern Seminary. Dr. Wolfe, Executive Director-Treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, argues persuasively with Scarborough that cooperation between congregations is based on a theological obligation that provides a spiritual impulse toward working with others. The editors add their voices to this chorus for cooperation sung by Scarborough and Wolfe.

Finally, this issue includes book reviews from the disciplines of biblical studies to theological studies and concludes with the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Book of the Year Awards. These awards were chosen by the Faculty of our Seminary, who again congratulate the various authors for

their excellent efforts to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with their writings.

David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III



## FROM COLOSSAE TO NICAEA: Paul's Witness to Christ's Deity

Malcolm B. Yarnell III\*

The creedal achievement of Nicaea has been challenged by liberal scholars who deem the key term, *homoousios*, both unnecessary and contradictory.<sup>1</sup> Challenges, alas, come not only from the left. Polls taken in recent years repeatedly demonstrate evangelicals today must seek to recover Nicene orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we may describe widespread confusion over the doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and truth as “the crisis in evangelical theology today.”<sup>3</sup> Thank you to David S. Dockery, president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, for crafting this formal celebration of the Council of Nicaea, which met 1,700 years ago to exalt God the Trinity and discipline theological error.<sup>4</sup>

### WHY DO WE NEED THE NICENE CREED?

#### We Were Warned

In the early fourth century, the church suffered severely what our Lord and his apostles foretold: Jesus warned “false prophets” and “false christs” would arise to lead astray, if possible, the elect (Matt. 24:24). His apostles warned that “false prophets” (1 John 4:1), “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13), and “false teachers” (2 Pet 2:1) would come, evil men who “exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Pet 2:3).

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Michael Goulder, “Jesus, the Man of Universal Destiny,” in John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (SCM Press, 1977), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Baptists Who Confess the Nicene Faith,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 67.2 (2025): 20-22.

<sup>3</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Identifying the Crisis in Evangelical Theology Today,” LifeWay Research (November 2025).

<sup>4</sup>“A Celebration of Nicaea,” September 10, 2025, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Chapel, Fort Worth, TX.

Jude said their goal is to deny our Lord Jesus Christ and distort the redemption only our Master can offer. “For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord” (Jude 4).

Peter agreed, “They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves” (2 Pet 2:1b). Heretics deny the Lord Jesus. But God promises the heretic he or she risks imminent destruction.<sup>5</sup>

### Providence Governs Heresy

Jude said God “designated” heretics “long ago” for judgment. Paul said God providentially uses them for good. “Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions (Greek *haireseis*; lit. “heresies”) among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). In other words, God offers a megaphone to orthodoxy by allowing error to be its sounding board. Satanic heresy provides a dark backdrop against which truth may shine. It is providentially decreed that Christ will be honored by faithful proclamation of his Person and work, although true believers may suffer in the process.

A little over two centuries after the apostles exposed various heretics, the church confronted the greatest heretic in history. It was the early fathers’ privilege to be used by God to craft a disciplinary creed at a lake-side basilica in northwest Asia Minor. We celebrate today their biblical exegesis, which exalts Jesus Christ and the Trinity. We recognize their courage to acknowledge, call out, and condemn Arius of Alexandria and other false teachers.

### Baptists Who Confess the Nicene Faith

I originally wrote “Baptists Who Confess the Nicene Faith,” published in the most recent issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, for presentation on this occasion.<sup>6</sup> It shows our pastors, faculty, and students how theologians of the Southwest, from B. H. Carroll and L. R. Scarborough to W. A. Criswell and James Leo Garrett Jr. to David S. Dockery, long advocated Nicene orthodoxy. However, while I must refer you to that

<sup>5</sup>Yes, as with men, Scripture commends women who are true teachers (e.g., Acts 18:26), and condemns women who are false teachers (e.g., Rev 2:20).

<sup>6</sup>Yarnell, “Baptists Who Confess the Nicene Faith” (also available at <https://equipthecalled.com/swjt-journal-article/baptists-who-confess-the-nicene-faith/>).

piece, the Lord impressed me just to share my heart. And because a right heart belongs to his Word, we must exposit the Bible.

Many ask, “Why did you and other Southern Baptist theologians propose the Convention add the Nicene Creed to *The Baptist Faith and Message*?”<sup>7</sup> Why require it of the academy? I do not advocate Nicaea for the sake of upholding tradition. Nor to refute errant anthropologies. Nor to offend the weak who decry subscription. I advocate Nicene orthodoxy because I love Jesus and want his church to glorify him. I echo Paul’s letter to the Colossians:

For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery—Christ. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:1-3).

Love and knowledge. Our end is not to protect biblical anthropology. Nor to promote orthodox scholars. Nor to preserve unity with the universal church. Good and right as those are, they are not our goal. Rather, we offer God’s people the knowledge of God’s mystery, the Person of Jesus Christ, because the complete measure of theological wisdom is found entirely “in him.”

### WHO IS CHRIST?

The eternal mystery withheld by the Father until the appointed time is key to all reality. This mystery, “God’s mystery,” is “Christ.” In Colossians 2:6, Paul reminded the Christians in a small city 200 miles south of Nicaea they had “received Christ Jesus as Lord.” The language of reception is important. Through gospel proclamation, our faith is transmitted from one disciple and received by another. The Spirit-led transmission of the

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<sup>7</sup>Steven A. McKinion and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “FIRST PERSON: For Baptist Confessionalism,” Baptist Press (January 4, 2024; <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-for-baptist-confessionalism/>); Andrew Brown, Stephen Lorange, Steven McKinion, and Malcolm Yarnell, “Commentary: Why Add Nicene Creed to Our Confession,” Baptist Standard (June 5, 2025; <https://baptiststandard.com/opinion/other-opinions/commentary-why-add-nicene-creed-to-our-confession/>); “Article XIX: The Nicene Creed,” Pro Gloria Christi (May 28, 2024; <https://www.malcolmyarnell.com/2024/05/article-xix-creed.html>).

Word constitutes true tradition.

In the dogmatic half of Colossians (1:3-3:4), Paul uses a diverse taxonomy to describe the eternal truth of Jesus Christ conveyed by orthodox tradition in propositional summary. Paul calls it “your faith” or “the faith” (1:4; 2:3; 2:5, 7); “the word of truth” or “the Word of God” (1:5; 2:5); “the gospel” (1:5, 23); “the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” or “the knowledge of God” (1:9, 10; cf. 2:3); “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints,” “this mystery,” or “God’s mystery” (1:26, 27; 2:2); our confession “in baptism” (2:12); and “the things above” (3:1, 2). Succinctly, Paul uses the title of the incarnate Word’s human office, “Christ,” to compass his Person and his work (1:26; 2:8, 17).

The answer to the question, “Who is Christ?” is so mysterious that only God the Father can reveal it, so profound that only God the Son can verbalize it, so deep only God the Spirit can illumine it, and so important that your eternal state depends upon your correct answer. “But you, who do you say that I am?” is the existential question Jesus poses to every man.

### THE BASE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION

The base Christian confession, first vocalized by Peter outside Caesarea, was lauded by our Lord, then taught by all the apostles. According to Paul, every human being who wants to be saved must confess, “Jesus is Lord” (Rom. 10:9-10). We make this confession only by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). And everyone will so confess in the end (Phil 2:9).

There is so much in the base Christian creed! The New Testament is an inspired commentary on it. In Colossians 2:6, Paul confesses the truth about the Truth (cf. John 14:6) under three names, each indicating a major fact about him:

“Christ” indicates his office as Prophet, Priest, and King;  
 “Jesus” indicates his true humanity; “Lord” indicates his  
 transcendent reality as bearer of the divine name.

By his human name and office, we confess his humanity. By his divine name, we confess his deity. We proclaim Christ is one real Person with two full natures, divine and human. Two verses later Paul clearly affirms

our Lord's deity. But first he addresses "the cruelty of heresy."<sup>8</sup>

### THE CRUELTY OF HERESY

I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable. . . . Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ (Col 2:4, 8).

Jesus said false teachers come "in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt 7:15). His brother called them "dangerous reefs," "without reverence," "shepherds who only look after themselves," "waterless clouds carried along by winds; trees in late autumn—fruitless, twice dead and uprooted," "wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameful deeds; wandering stars for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever" (Jude 12-13). Paul said they "do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve" (Rom 16:18). Heretics pretend civility but present cruelty.

What heresy troubled the church of Colossae? Scholars detect a variety of religions in the area: from polytheistic paganism to monotheistic Judaism, as well as the mystery religions, Hellenistic philosophies, and Jewish philosophy. The internal evidence suggests either a syncretistic soup or a *mélange* salad. Whatever its form, it sounded reasonable. Paul used the term, *pithanologia*, "persuasive reasoning," pithy analogies (Col 2:10).

Most commentators believe the Colossian heresy "made room, officially, for Jesus Christ, within its system."<sup>9</sup> But that is the problem, folks! If you assign Jesus an inferior place, you dishonor him. Paul tells us to take care we are not taken captive by "philosophy," deceived by "human tradition" (2:10, cf. v. 22), ruled by "regulations" (vv. 20, 22). Old Testament "festivals," even the "Sabbath day," are "a shadow of what was to come, the substance is Christ" (vv. 16-17). Ignore those who harp on, "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch" (v. 22). Rules for man guarantee no relation with the divine Ruler.

Paul also blasted those who elevate angels and theologize from their

<sup>8</sup>C. Fitzsimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Morehouse, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1986), 28.

imagination (v. 18). Undue fascination with angelic and human hierarchies reached a high point with the speculations of Pseudo-Dionysius in the sixth century.<sup>10</sup> However, the rabbis were long before dabbling in it under Persian influence.<sup>11</sup> Jesus warned his disciples against importing pagan hierarchies into the church (Matt 20:24-28). Paul repeatedly undermined Colossae's fetish for *arche kai exousia*, "rule and authority" (Col 1:16; 2:10). He taught that, in Christ God "disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him" (2:15).

The word translated "elements" in Colossians 2:8 and 20, *stoicheia*, may indicate doctrines, spirits, or world principles.<sup>12</sup> We likely require all three meanings: Fallen angels take the basic life principles by which the world works and create new doctrines to deceive and captivate the unwary. Their goal to dishonor Christ succeeds when they distract Christians into obsessing over creaturely hierarchies. But Paul calls us back to honor Christ (cf. John 5:23).

### CHRIST'S DIVINE ONTOLOGY

Paul explains the basic Christian creed with the highest ontological confession of Christ in his epistles, a confession that compels us to embrace Nicaea's high Christology. It is comparable to Peter's revealed confession that Jesus is "the Christ the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:15-16); to John's sublime confession that Jesus is the Word who is "with God," "God," and "became flesh" (John 1:1, 14); to Thomas's stunning confession that the resurrected man before him is "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28); and to the apostles' example as they "worshiped" Jesus, receiving his Great Commission (Matt. 28:16). Paul wrote,

For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in

<sup>10</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Celestial Hierarchy," and "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," in *The Complete Works*, transl. Paul Rorem, Classics of Western Spirituality (Paulist Press, 1987), 143-89, 193-259.

<sup>11</sup>On the intertestamental literature, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015), 15-16. Regarding Persian influence on the development of rabbinic angelic hierarchy, see J. M. Wilson, "Angels," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1979), 126. Cf. Wojciech Kosior, "The Angelized Rabbis and the Rabbinized Angels: The Reworked Motif of the Angelic Progeny in the Babylonian Talmud (bShabb 112b)," *Verbum Vitae*, 41.2 (2023): 411-427; Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Zondervan, 2014), 121-22.

<sup>12</sup>Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 2018), 226-28.

Christ, and you have been filled by him, who is the head over every ruler and authority (Col 2:9-10).

He begins with Christ's divine reality. Christ possesses *tes theotetos*, a rare noun which means, "Godhead" (Wycliffe, Tyndale, KJV),<sup>13</sup> "the Deity" (NIV; cf. ESV), "God's nature" (CSB), or "the essence of deity" (ISV). John Chrysostom argued that Christ's Godhead means he is "consubstantial" with the Father;<sup>14</sup> to Martin Luther, *theotes* means "*der Gottheit*;" to John Calvin, he possesses the Godhead entirely.<sup>15</sup> The founder of Southwestern Seminary explains,

Observe (1) "Godhead." The Greek *theotes* means "deity,"—not the weaker word "divinity," the natural force of which may be evaded, or shaded down. The expression is even stronger than John's "the Word was God (*Theos*)."<sup>16</sup>

Paul leaves no room for a negative qualification. Instead, he buttresses the noun for divine being with at least a double positive, *pan to pleroma*. Christ has "divine being." Christ has "the fullness" (*to pleroma*). Christ has it "all" (*pan*). A. T. Robertson approved: "all the pleroma of the Godhead,' not just certain aspects, dwells in Christ."<sup>17</sup> Christ is God absolutely! According to N. T. Wright, this forestalls the Arian hermeneutic,

The man Jesus Christ, now exalted, is not one of a hierarchy of intermediary beings, angelic or (in some sense) "divine." He is, uniquely, God's presence and his very self. . . . Christ is not a second, different Deity: he is the embodiment and full expression of the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, "*Theotes*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1965), 119.

<sup>14</sup>John Chrysostom, *Homilies*, ed. Phillip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 13 (1889; Hendrickson, 1994), 285.

<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, transl. John Pringle (Baker, [n.d.]), 182.

<sup>16</sup>B. H. Carroll, *Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews, An Interpretation of the English Bible*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Broadman Press, 1948), 49.

<sup>17</sup>Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul, Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Broadman Press, 1931), 491.

<sup>18</sup>Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 103.

The last term in Paul's statement on Christological ontology, *somatikos*, may be interpreted in two ways, either of which furthers orthodoxy. *Somatikos* can be translated, in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, "bodily" or "substantially." If we take the first interpretation, with Robertson, it "asserts plainly the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ in corporeal form."<sup>19</sup> This was Chrysostom's understanding. Likewise, Scot McKnight.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation prompts us to confess Christ with the fourth ecumenical council, through the Formula of Chalcedon, that Christ is one Person, truly God, truly man; God–Man.

If we take the second interpretation with Calvin, *somatikos* means "substantially" or "essentially."<sup>21</sup> The second interpretation reinforces in a fourth way the high Christological claim of the later Nicene tradition that Jesus Christ is, in essence, God. Paul drags us invariably into ascribing unqualified divine ontology to Christ in the way Nicaea concluded:

- (1) In Christ dwells *the Godhead*.
- (2) In Christ dwells *the fullness of the Godhead*.
- (3) In Christ dwells *all the fullness of the Godhead*.
- (4) In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead *essentially*.

Nicaea's claim that Christ is *homoousios*, "of the same essence," as the Father, is grounded, as with the entire creed, in the biblical text. The Nicene Creed makes no addition to the biblical text. Rather, the Nicene Creed offers a summation of the biblical text.

Whichever interpretation of *somatikos* you prefer, Wright concludes rightly, "We should not, however, drive a wedge between the two."<sup>22</sup> Christ is the Lord God by nature, and Christ is the man Jesus by nature. You must maintain the truth of his one Person with two natures. You may never divide his Person, nor diminish his deity, nor distort his humanity.

Alas, Christological heresies constantly challenge the church. Every heresy and error began by insulting the being or act of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the triune God.

<sup>19</sup>Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, 491.

<sup>20</sup>Adopting the ecclesiastical interpretation of *somatikos*, though taught elsewhere in Paul's epistles (e.g., 1 Cor 12), detracts from Paul's unwavering Christological emphasis here (Col. 2:3). McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 229-30.

<sup>21</sup>Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 183.

<sup>22</sup>Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 103.

### CHRIST'S DIVINE AUTHORITY

Returning to the base Christian confession cited in verse 6, note the import of the third name, “Lord.” The base Hebrew confession, the Shema, requires unique devotion to the one “LORD” (Hebrew *Yahweh*) “God” (Hebrew *Elohim*) (Deut 6:4-5). In the Septuagint, the Greek *kyrios* translated the Hebrew name, *Yahweh*, and the Hebrew title for Lord, *Adonai*.<sup>23</sup> The Jews honored the covenant name of God, “LORD,” by always substituting the title, “Lord,” when speaking. “The Lord” is “the LORD God.” In the New Testament, “Lord” was applied to Jesus to indicate the perfection of his deity and his authority.<sup>24</sup>

This helps us understand why Paul stresses the authority of Christ in verse 10: Christ “is the head over every ruler and authority.” Christ in himself as eternal God, who became man, is the *kephale* of every creaturely rule and authority. This includes every angelic and human office and power. “Every” (Greek *pas*) carries no qualification when applied to God. We must ascribe both his divine nature and his human nature to his one Person without diminution.

Christ retains perfect headship by virtue of his eternal deity (Ps 110:1), even as he receives this lordship in his humanity (Matt 28:18). As eternal God, he always reigns from his eternal throne; as he who assumed our humanity, died, and arose, he ascended to his eternal throne.

Nicene Christians become scandalized by the modern errors of Kenoticism<sup>25</sup> and “eternal functional subordination,” because we detect challenges to Christ’s deity.<sup>26</sup> Jesus said, “everything the Father has is mine” (John 16:15). “Everything” (Greek *pas*) excludes nothing. We must affirm Christ’s perfect deity and Christ’s eternal sovereignty, for God promised David (2 Sam 7:16) and Daniel (Dan 7:14) his kingdom has no end. We must reject Marcellianism, condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381. Marcellus said the Son returns his authority to the Father, ending Christ’s kingdom. But the Nicene Creed replied, “of his Kingdom there is no end.”<sup>27</sup>

Either we confess with the apostles, “Jesus is Lord”—simply, absolutely,

<sup>23</sup>Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, rev. ed., vol. 2 (Zondervan, 2014), 769.

<sup>24</sup>Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2:775-77.

<sup>25</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Word*, vol. 2, *Theology for Every Person* (B&H Publishing, forthcoming 2026), 352-56.

<sup>26</sup>Yarnell, *Word*, 358-61.

<sup>27</sup>Yarnell, *Word*, 86-87.

without qualification—or we descend into heresy and error by dishonoring Christ’s Person, diminishing his deity, distorting his humanity.

Christ descended to become man to ascend again with our humanity. God became a man that men might be united with God. The Lord took to himself humanity so that we could be granted eternal life with him; and he never compromised his perfect deity to do so. Jesus Christ is Lord—fully, absolutely, unqualifiedly, truly. If you believe this about Christ, Paul writes, “you have been filled by him” (Col 2:8).

The dogmatic section of Colossians began with a hymn of Christological exaltation and concluded with a call to hope in Christ’s eternal headship. These texts remind us of the preeminent authority by which Christ perfectly rules everything forever from his eternal throne:

In Colossians 1:15-17, we learn Christ is preeminent over his *creation*; in 1:18-20, we learn Christ is preeminent over the *redemption*; and in 3:1-4, we learn Christ is preeminent over the *consummation*.

Note how Christ is before, after, above, and under everything. The creation, the redemption, and the consummation come from him and exist by and for him. Christ is the eternal God—King.

### **First, Christ is preeminent over his Creation**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together (Col 1:15-17).

### **Then, Christ is preeminent over the Redemption**

He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things

in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:18-20).

### **Finally, Christ is preeminent over the Consummation**

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Col 3:1-4).

We could keep on exalting Christ, calling believers to look up to him, asking false teachers to stop reducing him to earthly principles; but we must now call to faith. We have learned Christ is the reality from whom, to whom, and by whom the whole movement of the universe in creation, redemption, and consummation is determined. Christ is the reality whom the entire canon reveals. Christ possesses absolute lordship. For Jesus is God!

### **WILL YOU RECEIVE CHRIST?**

In Colossians 2:11, Paul corrected the Judaizers, who wanted Gentiles circumcised. But Christ already provided spiritual circumcision through his death and resurrection. Paul then recalled our seminal confession in baptism:

You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Col 2:12).

This is the gospel: Christ died. Christ arose. We enter union with him by the personal faith we confess in baptism. In verse 13, Paul reminded us it is by faith in the mediating work of Christ we are saved, and in no other way.

Finally, in verses 14 and 15, Paul rehearsed the wondrous exchange worked by Christ: On his cross, Christ paid the price for our sin debt. In his resurrection, Christ disarmed every authority. Taking his body to the throne he always inhabits, Christ declared victory.

Jesus Christ is eternal King. He requires not our power to make him what he is.<sup>28</sup> Instead, God requires men to receive Christ by grace through the Spirit's gift of faith. Christ reveals himself through our proclamation of his gospel. This gospel, and the Nicene Creed which centers on the gospel, affirms the divine reality of Jesus and the saving work of Jesus: In Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells substantially. God became man; he died; he arose; he ascended; he reigns over all eternally.

The critical question is, "Do you believe in him?"

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<sup>28</sup>Must men "make Christ king" through establishing some petty hierarchy over a nation? No, that was the false faith of the Arian emperors. George Huntston Williams, "Christology and Church-State Relations in the Fourth Century," [two parts] *Church History* 20.3 (1951): 3–33, and 20.4 (1951): 3–26.





## A “TENDENTIOUS TRANSLATION”? An Appraisal of William Tyndale’s English New Testament After 500 Years

Benjamin Hawkins\*

The causes that moved me to translate / y thought better that  
other shulde ymagion / then that y shulde rehearce them.  
Moreover y supposed yt superfluous / for who ys so blynde  
to axe why lyght shulde be shewed to them that walke in  
dercknes / where they cannot but stumble / and where to  
stumble ys the daunger of eternall dammacion....<sup>1</sup>

Five hundred years ago, in 1525, William Tyndale penned these words for the prologue of what would become the first chapters of the English New Testament in print—translated directly from the Greek, rather than from the Latin translation of the church father, Jerome. More than a century earlier, all translation of Scripture into English had been banned, apart from express ecclesiastical permission. This ban came as a response to the manuscript translation of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, associated with fourteenth-century theologian John Wyclif and his followers.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Tyndale no doubt realized some would attack his work and try to snuff out the light of the vernacular Scriptures. This realization, in fact, influenced his decision in 1524 to leave his homeland and labor to print the English Bible from exile on the European

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<sup>1</sup>*The New Testament: Cologne Fragment*, transl. by William Tyndale (Cologne: P. Quentell?, 1525; *STC* 2823), A2r.

<sup>2</sup>David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 66-110.

continent.<sup>3</sup>

The attack on Tyndale’s English New Testament came suddenly, perhaps more suddenly than Tyndale expected. In 1525, with his translation work complete, Tyndale made his first attempt to print his New Testament in Cologne, Germany. But, even before the Gospel of Matthew had completed its press run, authorities raided the print shop, forcing Tyndale to halt his work and flee the city. The extant copy of this first attempt, known today as the “Cologne Fragment,” contains his prologue and nearly twenty-one chapters of Matthew’s Gospel. Hounded by his enemies, Tyndale fled to Worms, Germany, where in 1526 he printed the first English edition of the New Testament to be translated directly from the Greek. Despite its historic significance and generally high quality, the edition showed signs of haste. The first twenty-one chapters of the Gospel of Matthew were practically identical with what appeared in the “Cologne Fragment,” but the 1526 edition was a bare text, except for a brief afterword. It lacked Tyndale’s prologue, as well as his extensive marginal notes. Nonetheless, this 1526 edition was a landmark achievement in biblical translation and English prose alike.<sup>4</sup>

In following years, Tyndale went on also to translate from the Hebrew Old Testament, printing the full English Pentateuch (1530) and a separate translation of Jonah (*ca.* 1531). In 1534, he then printed a newly revised edition of his New Testament, as well as a revision of Genesis. He also continued laboring in the Hebrew Old Testament—very likely, completing translations, in manuscript only, of the Old Testament historical

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<sup>3</sup>Among the best biographies on Tyndale are: J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: SPCK, 1937); David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Brian Moynahan, *God’s Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003); and David Teems, *Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012). Among the best analyses of Tyndale’s theology are: Carl R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Michael S. Whiting, *Luther in English: The Influence of His Theology of Law and Gospel on Early English Evangelicals (1525-35)*, Princeton Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010); *William Tyndale (1491-1536): Reformatorische Theologie als kontextuelle Schriftauslegung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); and Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H), 327-376.

<sup>4</sup>*The New Testament: A Facsimile of the 1526 Edition Translated by William Tyndale with an Introduction by David Daniell* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). It is also worth listening to the audio edition of the 1526 version of Matthew’s Gospel, read in a carefully reconstructed sixteenth-century dialect. See *Tyndale’s Bible: Saint Matthew’s Gospel: Read in the Original Pronunciation by David Crystal* (London: The British Library, 2014).

books, from Joshua to 2 Chronicles.<sup>5</sup> Before he could bring these translations to print, however, he was betrayed and arrested in Antwerp then imprisoned in Vilvorde castle (in modern-day Belgium). Nonetheless, his one desire to make God's Word available in the English tongue never wavered, as displayed in an extant prison letter, in Tyndale's hand, written in Latin to his captors. In it, he begs to be given his "Hebrew bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study."<sup>6</sup>

When, on October 6, 1536, Tyndale was strangled to death and burned at the stake as a heretic, he prayed that God would open the English king's eyes, so that English Christians could finally read and hear the Bible in their own language. Even so, the king authorized an English Bible in 1537—containing, without obvious recognition, Tyndale's own Old and New Testament translations. Indeed, his translations formed the foundation for nearly all early modern English translations of the Bible, including the Authorized (King James) Version of 1611, and his work continues to shape the nature of English Bible translation even five centuries later.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the success of Tyndale's translation, we should not too quickly forget the criticism it received in his day. Soon after its printing in 1526, it was consigned to the flames by English church authorities—a threat of worse things to come for Tyndale, as he recognized.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, his New Testament was attacked in massive tomes by Thomas More, who was Lord Chancellor of England from 1529 to 1532. More deemed, in 1529, that Tyndale's New Testament translation was worthy to be burned for malicious errors as numerous as drops of "water in the sea."<sup>9</sup> According to More, certain translation errors were exemplary for the harm they would do. These alleged errors included: his use of "senior" (and later, "elder"), instead of "priest," to translate the Greek *πρεσβύτερος*; "congregation" instead of "church" for *ἐκκλησία*; "love" instead of "charity" for *ἀγάπη*; "favor" instead of "grace" for *χάρις*; "acknowledge" instead of "confess" for *ἐξομολογέω*; "repentance" instead of "penance" for *μετάνοια*; and

<sup>5</sup>For Tyndale's Old Testament translations and prologues, see *Tyndale's Old Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). For his 1534 New Testament, see *Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup>Mozley, *William Tyndale*, 334.

<sup>7</sup>Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 111-499.

<sup>8</sup>Tyndale, "The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," in *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: University Press, 1848), 43-44.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, vol. 6, parts I-II of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, eds. Thomas M.C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard C. Marius (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 285.

“troubled of heart” instead of “contrite of heart” for συντετριμμένους τὴν καρδίαν.<sup>10</sup> In more recent decades, Stanley Maveety likewise argued that Tyndale’s translation was “tendentious.” As if Tyndale were also intellectually dishonest, Maveety writes,

That interpretation preceded translation might seem reasonable were it not that the vernacular Bible was sometimes described as the opening at long last of the barred door to impartial Truth. Beyond doubt, that was the view of the Reformation translators; but, as we have seen, before unlocking the door they took the pains to arrange the exhibit.<sup>11</sup>

These allegations, however, do not do justice either to Tyndale’s translation philosophy or practice.

Maveety’s claim minimizes the complexities Tyndale faced in conveying in English the form and meaning, letter and spirit, clarity and ambiguity of the Greek New Testament. These are complexities that every Bible translator must face. As Moisés Silva writes, “faithfulness’ in translation is neither a simple concept to define nor an easy goal to achieve,” and even the most “literal English versions of the Bible” cannot avoid drawing some interpretive conclusions in translation.<sup>12</sup> At least, as Leland Ryken notes in a helpful clarification, no translator can avoid the practice of “*lexical* or *linguistic* interpretation. That is, translators must decide what English word or phrase most closely corresponds to a given word [or phrase] of the original text.” This may not best be called “interpretation,” but it is a “‘judgment call’ . . . *akin* to interpretation.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this “judgment call” is required of every translator striving to find the best English rendering of various Greek terms—for example, ἐκκλησία and the other terms More mentioned in his criticism of Tyndale. This level of interpretive work, of course, cannot be equated intrinsically with tendentiousness. If

<sup>10</sup>Regarding συντετριμμένους τὴν καρδίαν: Ironically, this phrase is omitted from Luke 4:18 in modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament, as reflected also in many modern translations.

<sup>11</sup>Stanley Maveety, “Doctrine in Tyndale’s New Testament: Translation as a Tendentious Art,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 6 (1966), 158.

<sup>12</sup>Moisés Silva, “Are Translators Traitors? Some Personal Reflections,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 37-50.

<sup>13</sup>Leland Ryken, *Understanding English Bible Translation: The Case for an Essentially Literal Approach* (Crossway, 2009), 23-24.

such an intrinsic equation can be made, all translators are tendentious, and any bare allegation of tendentiousness would be irrelevant.

In any case, it is not clear at all that More and Maveety are correct in their assessment of Tyndale. Gerald Snare has argued, by contrast, that Tyndale “resists making his source-text his own,” and that “his reformist conceptions . . . did not determine how he translated.” Instead, Tyndale “aims at the vulgar equivalent of the Greek, and not at the original Greek metamorphosed through the Latin.”<sup>14</sup> As the following analysis of Tyndale’s translation philosophy and practice will show, Tyndale aimed with his groundbreaking English New Testament to set out faithfully and plainly for his readers both the structure and meaning of the biblical text. As a result, Christians for the past five centuries have found “spirituall edyfyinge / consolacion / and solas” (i.e., solace) in the reading of God’s Word in English.<sup>15</sup>

### “THE PROCESS, ORDER, AND MEANING OF THE TEXT”

Nearly half a decade after publishing his first English New Testament, Tyndale reflected once again on his motivation for leaving his homeland and devoting his life to rendering God’s Word into the English language. In a prefatory note to the reader of his 1530 English Pentateuch, he describes how the “malicious and wily hypocrites” who opposed the English New Testament would rather have a thousand tracts “put forth against their abominable doings and doctrine, than that the scripture should come to light.” While Scripture “hath but one simple literal sense whose light the owls cannot abide,” these critics of Tyndale’s translations prefer spiritual darkness for the “unlearned lay people” of England. With “allegories” and “subtle riddles,” they wrest “scripture unto their own purpose clean contrary unto the *process, order and meaning* of the text.” They achieve their ends by making use of the “apparent reasons of sophistry, and traditions of their own making, founded without ground of Scripture” and by “juggling with the text, expounding it in such a sense as is impossible to gather of the text, if thou see the *process, order, and meaning* thereof.” For this reason, Tyndale felt compelled to translate the Bible into English. He writes,

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<sup>14</sup>Gerald Snare, “Translation and Transmutation in William Tyndale and Thomas Watson,” *Translation and Literature* 12 (2003), 189-92.

<sup>15</sup>*The New Testament: Cologne Fragment* (1525), A2r.

Which thing only moved me to translate the new testament. Because I had perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, *that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.*<sup>16</sup>

Tyndale's words here do not merely comprise a biographical note, nor do they consist of mere polemical attacks against sophisticated English ecclesiastics. Rather, these words go far in revealing his philosophy of translation.

Consider Tyndale's phrase, "the process, order, and meaning of the text," along with a synonymous term, "circumstance," which will be seen below. These expressions, common in Tyndale's writings, are shorthand for a hermeneutical method derived ultimately from classical writers like Cicero, tailored for biblical interpretation by Augustine of Hippo—especially via his *De Doctrina Christiana*—and passed along to sixteenth-century writers by humanists like Desiderius Erasmus. Tyndale would have been familiar with Erasmus's *Ratio*, a prefatory section that appeared in his 1519 Greek New Testament, which served (alongside the 1522 revision of this text) as the basis for the English translator's rendering of the New Testament. In it, Erasmus endorses this contextual hermeneutic:

Accordingly, whoever wishes to use the Scriptures rightly should not think it enough to have picked out four or five little words without considering rather the context from which the words arise. Frequently the sense of this or that passage depends upon what has preceded. He should weigh carefully by whom the words are said, to whom, the time, the occasion, the words, the intent, what has preceded, what follows. For it is from gathering and weighing these things that one grasps the meaning of what is said.<sup>17</sup>

In multiple passages throughout his corpus, Tyndale expresses similar hermeneutical convictions by using some combination of the terms,

<sup>16</sup>William Tyndale, "W.T. to the Reader," in *Tyndale's Old Testament*, 4. Italics mine.

<sup>17</sup>Desiderius Erasmus, "A System or Method of Arriving by a Short Cut at True Theology," trans. Robert D. Sider, in *Collected Works of Erasmus: The New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2019), 680. See also "Reading Tyndale's Bible," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), 294-98.

“process,” “order,” “meaning,” or “circumstance.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, one of the clearest summaries of this conviction appears in the prologue to his *Obedience of a Christian Man*:

... and when I allege any scripture, look thou on the text, whether I interpret it right which thou shalt easily perceive, *by the circumstance and process of them*, if thou make Christ the foundation and ground and build all on him and referrest all to him, and findest also that the exposition agreeth unto the common articles of the faith and open scriptures. And God the father of mercy ... give thee his spirit to judge what is righteous in his eyes.<sup>19</sup>

Tyndale calls readers to consider biblical passages within their immediate literary contexts (i.e., “the circumstance and process of them”), as well as within the broader contexts of a Christ-centered faith, the “common articles of the faith,” the biblical canon, and the Holy Spirit’s testimony to biblical truth. These represent much of what we find in the contextual hermeneutic Tyndale inherited. Working from such assumptions, Tyndale believed English-speaking Christians needed to hear and see for themselves the clear structure, context, and meaning of Scripture. Tyndale’s English translation, therefore, needed to convey accurately the “process, order, and meaning of the text.” Any translation that failed to do this would fall short of his aim.

### **“THE PROFESSION OF OUR BAPTISM OR COVENANTS”**

The sixteenth-century martyrologist John Foxe hands down to us a well-known account that helps us understand something more of Tyndale’s passion and motivation for translating the Bible into English. Before leaving England, Tyndale had a theological dispute with a “learned manne” who claimed it would be better to set Scripture aside than to lose the pope’s

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<sup>18</sup>In the collected volumes of Tyndale’s works edited by Henry Walter, see the following: *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1848), 25, 46, 96-97, 115, 118, 146, 147, 156, 167, 215, 305, 307-08, 393-94, 469, 499, 505, 510, 513, 525; *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures Together with the Practice of Prelates*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1849), 97, 143, 136-44, 282-83; *An Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue, The Supper of the Lord after the True Meaning of John VI. And 1 Cor. XI., and WM. Tracy’s Testament Expounded*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1850), 12, 15, 21.

<sup>19</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 30. Italics mine.

law.<sup>20</sup> Tyndale responded with what C.S. Lewis calls his "vaunt"<sup>21</sup>—indeed, his declaration of purpose in life from that moment onward: "I defie the Pope and all his lawes," Tyndale responds, "and . . . if God spare my lyfe ere many yeares, I wyl cause a boye that dryueth ye plough, shall knowe more of the scripture then thou dost."<sup>22</sup>

Tyndale's mention of the plowman most likely alludes to the preface to Erasmus's New Testament, "Paraclesis," in which he encourages the vernacular translation of Scripture, with the result that "the farmer [would] sing some portion of them at the plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveler lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind!"<sup>23</sup> Tyndale would have taken note of Erasmus's statement, especially since, around this time, he also translated the humanist's devotional treatise, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*.<sup>24</sup> Tyndale was also familiar with Erasmus's paraphrase on the Gospel of Matthew at least by 1528, when he mentioned it by name, alongside the "Paraclesis."<sup>25</sup> All three Erasmian treatises emphasize the common baptismal profession of Christians. Significantly, "Paraclesis" and the paraphrase on Matthew's Gospel offered Tyndale an ecclesiological motivation for his vocation as a translator, convincing him that all Englishmen needed Scripture in the vernacular because, *by* baptism, they were all members of Christ's body and needed to understand and live according to the profession they made to God *in* baptism. Apart from an English Bible, how could they truly

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<sup>20</sup>John Foxe, *Acts and monuments of these latter and perilous dayes touching matters of the Church*, etc. (London: John Day, 1563), 513-14.

<sup>21</sup>C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 182.

<sup>22</sup>Foxe, *Acts and monuments* (1563), 513-14.

<sup>23</sup>Desiderius Erasmus, "Paraclesis," in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus*, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 101.

<sup>24</sup>A copy of the long-lost manuscript of Tyndale's translation of the *Enchiridion* turned up in 2015 in the Duke of Northumberland's collection, but scholars have long had access also to two print editions of 1533 and 1534 that originated from Tyndale's translation. See Brian Cummings, "William Tyndale and Erasmus on How to Read the Bible: A Newly Discovered Manuscript of the English *Enchiridion*," *Reformation* (23:1), 29-52. See also Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 70-74; Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani: An English Version*, edited by Anne M. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press), xlix-liii.

<sup>25</sup>William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 25.

understand their baptismal profession?<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1530s, Tyndale's thought crystalized around his theology of covenant, which, according to Michael Whiting, "is grounded in his interpretation and theology of baptism."<sup>27</sup> In his exposition on 1 John, Tyndale establishes the connection between baptism, covenant, and the interpretation of Scripture. According to Carl Trueman, it is in this work that Tyndale "makes his first reference to an arrangement between God and man which approximates to that which he later describes with the term covenant."<sup>28</sup> For Tyndale, the Christian people have been deprived of God's Word not merely because it does not exist in the common tongue, but also because the Christian has not been taught the "professione of his baptyme."<sup>29</sup> He writes,

The hole & some then of al to gether is this[.] If our hertes wer taught thappoynmēt made between god & vs in Christes bloud when we wer baptized / we had the kay to open the scripture / & light to se & perceyue the true meaning of it / [and] the scripture shulde be easy to understonde. And because we be not taght that profession / is the cause which

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<sup>26</sup>See Erasmus, "Paraclesis," 101: "Why do we restrict a profession common to all to a few? For it is not fitting, since baptism is common in an equal degree to all Christians, wherein there is the first profession of Christian philosophy, and since the other sacraments and at length the reward of immortality belong equally to all, that doctrines alone should be reserved for those very few whom today the crowd call theologians or monks. . . ." Erasmus writes this immediately after calling for the translation of Scripture into the vernacular languages, so that even the ploughboy could understand it. Also, see Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Matthew*, trans. Dean Simpson (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 19-20: In this work, Erasmus alludes to the "Paraclesis," again expressing his wish that—through vernacular translation—"the ploughman" would be able to "chant in his own language something from the mystic Psalms." He then suggests that "a summary of Christian faith and teaching" be "propounded annually to the Christian people." Moreover, he writes, "In fact, I think the following idea would in no small measure serve the end I have in view: if those who were baptized as children upon reaching adolescence were asked to attend sermons in which it would be clearly shown to them what the profession of baptism involves."

<sup>27</sup>Whiting, *Luther in English*, 209. See also Robert J.D. Wainwright, "William Tyndale on Covenant and Justification," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 13 (2011), 369, who rightly describes this shift in Tyndale's thought "as an organization rather than a legalization of Tyndale's theology since he did not seek to depart from the gracious basis of justification exhibited in his earlier writings." Also, see Snare, "Reading Tyndale's Bible," 310-19.

<sup>28</sup>Trueman, *Luther's Legacy*, 111. Additionally, see Tyndale, *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon* (Antwerp: M. deKeyser, 1531; STC 24443, N 3990), B3v, C5v.

<sup>29</sup>Tyndale, *fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon*, A2r, A5v.

the scripture is so darke / & so fare passinge our capacitye.<sup>30</sup>

This covenantal profession in baptism involves "knowledge of the lawe of God" and of "the promises of mercie which ar in oure sauioure Cryste."<sup>31</sup> The common baptismal profession, as Erasmus argued, provides a theological basis for translating Scripture. Now, inverting this argument, Tyndale insists upon the importance of teaching this baptismal profession so that Scripture might be understood aright.

Significantly, according to Tyndale, this baptismal profession should be internalized, written on the heart. Bible-reading involved an interpretive process and context; however, biblical authority and perspicuity was not *ultimately*—to borrow a useful expression—"a product of the reasoning reader."<sup>32</sup> According to Tyndale, the person who reads Scripture aright does not act upon the biblical text; instead, Scripture acts upon the reader by the power of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Anthony Thiselton describes Tyndale as a proto-speech-act theoretician. According to Thiselton, Tyndale insists that Scripture "performs actions: it wounds, heals, drives to despair, liberates, commands and above all promises. He is clear that this focus on action stands at the heart of the matter."<sup>33</sup> Individuals do not judge Scripture. On the contrary, Scripture is the "twithestone" (i.e., touchstone) used to "examen/ judge and trie" every doctrine and every preacher.<sup>34</sup>

For the wayward reader, however, Scripture is merely an object of interpretation, rather than a subject that "interprets its readers."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, while Tyndale sees correct biblical interpretation as Scripture acting by the power of the Spirit upon a person's heart, he consistently describes incorrect interpretation as a result of the reader's action: False preachers "feign

<sup>30</sup>Tyndale, *fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon*, A2r, A5v; c.f. Tyndale, "W. T. unto the Reader," in *The newe Testament dilygently corrected and compared with the Greke* (Antwerp: M. deKeyser, 1534; STC 2826. N 2487), \*2v.

<sup>31</sup>Tyndale, *fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon*, A2r, A5v; See also Tyndale, "W. T. unto the Reader," in *The newe Testament* (1534), fol. \*3.

<sup>32</sup>Though from a source unconnected to Tyndale studies, this phrase describes well Tyndale's view that, while responsible reasoning has a place, reason alone cannot guarantee the right reading of Scripture. T.D.F. Maddox, "Scripture, Perspicuity, and Postmodernity," *Review & Expositor* 100 (2003), 555; see also James P. Callahan, "Claritas Scripturae: The Role of Perspicuity in Protestant Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996), 353-72.

<sup>33</sup>Anthony Thiselton, "Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 97.

<sup>34</sup>Tyndale, *fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon*, F2v.

<sup>35</sup>George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 341.

allegories” with their imaginations and impose their glosses upon God’s Word, hiding its light as a cloud hides the light of the sun.<sup>36</sup> If Scripture contradicts their doctrines, they “make it a nose of waxe and wrest it this waye and that waye till it agree.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Tyndale argues that More and his allies resist his English translation for one reason alone: namely, that because of his translation “they haue lost theyr iuglinge termes,” that is, their Latin and philosophical jargon, imposed on Scripture.<sup>38</sup> They fashion Scripture and work upon it, rather than letting it work upon them according to the “process, order and meaning of the text.”

### TYNDALE’S TRANSLATION PRACTICE

New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce praised the quality of Tyndale’s Greek scholarship, noting that his “rendering is in general closer to the Greek text than” is the German translation of Martin Luther. “On the other hand, there is nothing pedantic about Tyndale’s translation; he turns the Greek text into good English, not into a painfully literal rendering of the original idiom.”<sup>39</sup> According to J.F. Mozley, Tyndale “varies his renderings” of a Greek term “constantly.”<sup>40</sup> For example, he depicts the semantic range of the common, yet significant, Greek term λόγος, by translating it variously as: “word” (Matt 12:32, John 1:1); “communication” (Matt 5:37); “accounts” (Matt 18:23, Luke 16:2); “question” (Matt 21:24); “saying” (Matt 28:15, Mark 8:32, John 21:23); “deed” (Mark 1:45); “thing” (Mark 11:29); “preaching” (Luke 4:32); “rumour” (Luke 7:17); “treatise” (Acts 1:1); “preacher” (Acts 14:12); “complaint” (Acts 19:38); and “exhortations” (Acts 20:2). Tyndale’s translation of λόγος is neither stilted nor monotonous; rather, it is generally sensitive to and makes apparent the “process, order, and meaning” of the Greek text, even though later translators sometimes improved upon his rendering. On the other hand, David Norton observes, “Tyndale did not always provide variety where it might be thought possible and desirable, and, as Hammond points out, ‘he did take care to recreate the original’s repetitiveness where it had either

<sup>36</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 175, and *fyrste Epistle of seynt Ihon*, A7.

<sup>37</sup>Tyndale, *An exposicion vppon the .x.vi.vii*, fol. 89v.

<sup>38</sup>Tyndale, *An Answere vnto Sir Thomas Mores dialogue* (Antwerp: S. Cock, 1531; STC 24437. N 3988.), B3v.

<sup>39</sup>F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the Earliest English Versions to the New English Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1970), 36.

<sup>40</sup>Mozley, *William Tyndale*, 101.

semantic or stylistic importance."<sup>41</sup>

As for rendering Greek syntax, Mozley notes that Tyndale is "very free in his treatment of connecting particles, such as *therefore, but, and.*" He "often omits them" in the 1526 translation, but he restored many of them in 1534.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Tyndale could be free with other issues of syntax and word order. For example, in the 1526 edition of 1 John 1:1-3, Tyndale clarifies the syntax by inserting a verbal clause ("declare we unto you") in verse 1, which doesn't appear in the Greek, or in the Authorized Version, until verse 3. In 1534, however, he removes the verbal clause from verse 1.<sup>43</sup>

In 1526, Tyndale rendered the genitive construction in Romans 5:8 with syntactical clarity ("the love that god hath unto us"), yet he revised the translation in 1534, making it more syntactically ambiguous ("love of God"). However, he retains clumsy renderings of the genitive constructions, *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* and *ἡ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ*, in Romans 3:21-31. In verse 21, he reasonably translates *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* as "the rightewesnes that cōmeth of God" (c.f., Rom 1:17), but he varied his translation of the Greek phrase in the verses that follow: "the rightewesnes no dout which ys goode before God" (v. 22); "the rightewesnes which before hym is of valoure" (v. 25); and "the rightewesnes that is alowed off hym" (v. 26). Likewise, he translated *ἡ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ* as "the prayse that is off valoure before God" (v. 23). Tyndale's renderings here may have been influenced by Luther's German, though Tyndale significantly does not insert "alone" (German: *allein*) into Rom 3:28, as Luther did.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Tyndale struggled, in 1526, with the syntax of John 1:1: "In the begynnynge was that worde ād that worde was with god: and god was that worde."<sup>45</sup> In 1534, however, Tyndale corrected this faulty translation, handing down to later generations the now classic rendering of the passage: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God." Ironically, in making this correction, Tyndale may have

<sup>41</sup>David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 25. See also Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), 36.

<sup>42</sup>Mozley, *William Tyndale*, 88.

<sup>43</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 295r; and *Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 338.

<sup>44</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 202. See the helpful discussion in Morna Hooker, "Tyndale as Translator" (accessed online, 29 August 2025): <https://www.tyndale.org/journals/tsj22/hooker.html>.

<sup>45</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 119r.

been following More's advice.<sup>46</sup>

### TYNDALE'S CONTROVERSIAL WORDS: "LOVE," "CONGREGATION," AND "ELDER"

What, then, may be said of More's claim that Tyndale tendentiously translated particular words in the New Testament, such as "love" instead of "charity" for ἀγάπη, "congregation" instead of "church" for ἐκκλησία, and "senior"/"elder" instead of "priest" for πρεσβύτερος?

In the first case, More resisted the broad connotations of the term, "love," when used in place of "charity" as a translation for ἀγάπη. "For though charyte be alway loue/ yet is not ye wote well loue allway charyte," he writes; after all, "love" could refer to erotic love—a connotation he refused to attach to ἀγάπη.<sup>47</sup> Modern readers may suspect he has a point. After all, ἀγάπη was clearly used in the context of New Testament theology to describe divine love poured out among the people of God.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, in the story of Christ's renewal of Peter in John 21:15-19, Tyndale's use of the single verb, "love," has the apparent disadvantage of showing no distinction between two Greek terms used in the passage: ἀγαπάω and φιλέω. In part, this is because English has only one verb to describe the concept of love; moreover, as Tyndale notes, "charity" does not have a verb form.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, one may question the premise that ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω is always a uniquely divine or Christian form of love, regardless of context and considered purely from the perspective of historical linguistics.<sup>50</sup> In any case, Tyndale questioned this premise, describing ἀγάπη as a general term—that is, as "comen unto all loues." As such, he felt the more generic English term, "love," should be preferred to "charity" in his New Testament, although he admitted to rendering it this way "in spite of mine herte often tymes."<sup>51</sup> For Tyndale, therefore, the definition of ἀγάπη/

<sup>46</sup>Tyndale's *New Testament* (1534), 133. See also Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature*, 25.

<sup>47</sup>More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 286-87.

<sup>48</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *God*, vol. 1, *Theology for Every Person* (Brentwood: B&H, 2024), 117-21.

<sup>49</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, B3r

<sup>50</sup>Throughout the Gospel of John, the author uses ἀγαπάω and φιλέω interchangeably, and in a unique instance in the Septuagint ἀγαπάω is also used to describe Amnon's apparently erotic love for his half-sister, Tamar, which leads him to rape her. See David A. Croteau, *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 85-90; and Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 96-97.

<sup>51</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, B3r.

ἀγαπάω is "based on the context the word is in"<sup>52</sup>—that is, as Tyndale might put it, based on the "process and order" of the text.

More also objected to Tyndale's translation of ἐκκλησία, arguing that not every "congregation" is a Christian congregation; in fact, the term could refer as easily to a Muslim or heretical congregation.<sup>53</sup> Tyndale responds, in the first place, that even the Greek term is used to refer to non-Christian assemblies and that "the *circumstance* doeth ever tell what congregacyon ys ment."<sup>54</sup> Jamie Ferguson has correctly suggested that Tyndale was concerned with the "denotation" of the biblical terms discussed here, but it is incorrect to conclude from this that Tyndale is unconcerned with "connotation" and "usage." Rather, his concern is for the connotations that arise out of the biblical context. Thus, "congregation" is used to translate the same Greek term in both Acts 19 and in Ephesians 5, and context distinguishes the varied connotations: In the former, the term refers once to a confused Gentile mob (vs. 32) and then again to a lawful civic gathering (vs. 39); however, in Ephesians 5, it refers to the Christian congregation, the bride of Christ.<sup>55</sup> Significantly, Acts 19 also uses the term "churches" in verse 37, in reference to pagan temples. Tyndale notes that, among its "diverse significations," the term "church" refers to a "place."<sup>56</sup> With more than a hint of mockery, he adds that More is wrong in thinking that "congregation" has broader connotations than "church": "For whersoever I maye saye a congregacyon / there maye I saye a church also[,] as the church of the deuell / the church of sathan / the church of wretches / the church of wekedmen / the church of lyers and a church of turkes therto."<sup>57</sup> The King James translators in 1611 must not have dismissed Tyndale's philological reasoning outright, since they follow his translation in Acts 19:37.

In defending his translation of the Greek, πρεσβύτερος, as "senior" (1526) and "elder" (1534), Tyndale noted that the Latin Vulgate itself does not use More's preferred term, "priest"; instead, it often transliterates the Greek into Latin script and sometimes even uses the Latin equivalent

<sup>52</sup>Croteau, *Urban Legends of the New Testament*, 88.

<sup>53</sup>More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 286.

<sup>54</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, Fol. vii. Italics mine.

<sup>55</sup>See Jamie Harmon Ferguson, "Faith in the Language: Reformation Biblical Translation and Vernacular Poetics" (Ph.D. diss.: Indiana University, 2007), 17-90.

<sup>56</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, A5r. See also Acts 14:13, where Tyndale's translation speaks of the "church porch" of Jupiter's temple in the city of Lystra. The KJV did not retain this rendering.

<sup>57</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, A7r.

of Tyndale's "senior" (e.g., "*seniores*" in 1 Pet 5:1; "*senior*" in 2 John 1). Therefore, in condemning Tyndale's translation, More "condemneþ their awn olde latine text of heresy also."<sup>58</sup> Now, Tyndale's preferred translation of *πρεσβύτερος* carried connotations in sixteenth-century England, where there were elders in the manor, village or township—many of whom took up official responsibilities in the community. The "elder" was a "person singled out because of wisdom and experience to minister to the local congregation," that is, to the parish community.<sup>59</sup> Putting a negative spin on the English connotations of the term, More protests that the word signifies a city alderman rather than a priest.<sup>60</sup> Though he failed to do so in this instance, Tyndale would have been right to remind More, once again, that the "circumstances" of the biblical text clarify its meaning.

In challenging the broad English connotations for these words, More shows that, when isolated from their contexts, these terms have far too many connotations in the English language. In other words, Tyndale did not allow the theological interpretation that More preferred to force its way into the text of Scripture. And this is exactly the point, as Snare suggests:

[O]ne can make an exposition of key terms, one can explicate accrued meanings, but one cannot make them *in* the translation of the text of scripture. The 'significations,' the interpretations, are not to shoulder their way into the text whenever, as Tyndale says, a passage 'seemeth at the first chop hard to be understood.'<sup>61</sup>

Tyndale challenges readers—both friend and foe alike—to determine the meaning of biblical terms like "congregation," "elder," and "love" by considering "the process, order, and meaning of the text."

Take, for instance, the "process" and "order" of Acts 14:23. At first glance, Tyndale's translation of this verse appears to challenge the late medieval practice of priestly ordination. It reads: "And when they had ordered them seniours by eleccion in every cōngregation/after they had

<sup>58</sup>Tyndale, *Answere vnto Mores dialogue*, A8r.

<sup>59</sup>Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 17. This implies that the term, "elder," did not refer merely to old age in English usage, but sometimes also to authority or office; however, this term did not have the mediatorial connotations associated with the English, "priest," or the Greek, *ιερεὺς*.

<sup>60</sup>More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 286.

<sup>61</sup>Snare, "Translation and Transmutation," 195.

prayd ād fasted/they commended them to god on whom they beleved."<sup>62</sup> Upon closer examination, one notices first of all that the passage contains two words that More disliked—namely “senior” and “congregation.” However, the real threat to ecclesiastical practice appears in the statement, “they had ordened ... by eleccion,” which in the Greek is a single verb (χειροτονήσαντες). This phrase may imply that the members of each “congregation” should ordain their elders by a vote. Even if Tyndale were to prefer such an interpretation, his inclusion of the concept of “election” in his rendering of the Greek verb, χειροτονέω, is reasonable on philological grounds.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, his translation does not require this interpretation, since readers could also argue that “they” in Acts 14:23 refers to the Apostle Paul and his companions, who also “preached” and “taught” and “returned” and “strengthe[ne]d the disciples soules” in the previous verses.<sup>64</sup> Thus, although Tyndale’s translation of this verse at first glance appears tendentious, it is actually an accurate rendering of the Greek, which leaves open a variety of possible interpretations, insofar as the “process and order of the text” allows.

In many New Testament passages relevant to the Reformation debates of the sixteenth century, Tyndale leaves open the possibility of various interpretations. Take Matthew 16:18-19 as a prime example:

And I saye also unto the/that thou arte Peter. And upon this  
roocke I wyll bylde my congregaciō. And the gates off hell  
shall nott prevayle ageynst it. And I wyll yeve unto the/the  
keyes of the kyngdō of heven/ād whatsoever thou byndest  
uppō erth/yt shall be bounde in heven. And whatsoever  
thou lowsest on erthe/yt shalbe lowsed in heven.<sup>65</sup>

In his polemical works, Tyndale makes it clear that faith is the foundational rock of the church,<sup>66</sup> yet his translation retains the possibility, at

<sup>62</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 176r. See also Maveety, “Doctrine in Tyndale’s New Testament,” 153.

<sup>63</sup>See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 483.

<sup>64</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 176r. Indeed, this is the interpretation of Bock, *Acts*, 483; c.f., TDNT, s.f., χειροτονέω. Everett Ferguson suggests that, in his rendering of Acts 14:23, Tyndale was trying to “compromise between the ecclesiastical rendering and the proper meaning” of the text. See Ferguson, “William Tyndale and the Bible in English,” *Restoration Quarterly* 14 (1971), 129-41.

<sup>65</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 23r.

<sup>66</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 171.

least, of other interpretations.

The same could be said for another passage relevant to papal authority—namely, Luke 22:35-38. In the passage, Jesus addresses his disciples on the night of his arrest. Here is the passage, as translated by Tyndale in 1526:

And he sayde vnto thē: when I sent you with out wallet/  
ād scrippe/ād shoues/lacked ye eny thyng: And they sayd/  
nothyng. And he sayde to them: But nowe he that hath  
a wallet let him take itt / and lykewyse his scrippe. And  
he that hath noo swearde / let hym sell his coote and bye  
won. I saye vnto you that yet/ that which is written must be  
performed in me (Even with the wicked was he nombred)  
for those thyngs which are written of me have an ende. And  
they sayd: Lorde/ beholde here are two swerdes. And he  
sayde vnto them: it is ynough.<sup>67</sup>

Tyndale's translation of this passage is notable at first glance only insofar as it leaves open the possibility of an interpretation favorable to the papacy. Speaking of the purported papal reading of this passage, Tyndale writes, "The disciples said unto Christ (Luke 22), Lo here be two swords. And Christ answered two is enough. Lo, say they, the Pope hath two swords, the spiritual sword and the temporal sword. And therefore is it lawful for him to fight and make war."<sup>68</sup> Tyndale despised such allegorical readings of Scripture. Nevertheless, his translation does not prevent an allegorical reading; instead, the passage remains open to various interpretations, even though Tyndale could have privileged his own interpretation through the act of translation. One modern translation, in fact, has done just that, interpreting Jesus's statement, "it is enough," as an expression of his frustration with the disciples' continued dullness. Thus, this translation renders Jesus's statement as "Enough of that!"<sup>69</sup> Tyndale would have applauded this interpretation of the passage: "And Christ," he writes in the *Obedience*, "to make an end of such babbling answered two is enough."<sup>70</sup> But he refused to resolve his problem through translation. Rather, he lets the passage speak for itself, within its own context.

<sup>67</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 113v.

<sup>68</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 175.

<sup>69</sup>Luke 22:38, *Holy Bible: The Old & New Testaments*, Holman Christian Standard Bible [HCSB] (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004).

<sup>70</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 175.

Some passages of the Greek New Testament, however, are more difficult to translate without interpretive considerations. To explore these questions, one may consider his nuanced translation of Galatians 4. Now, Tyndale criticizes the four-fold sense of Scripture, which allowed his opponents to present the "two swerdes" in Luke 22 as a defense of papal power. But for Tyndale, allegory is not repudiated absolutely, but reallocated and redefined. He notes that "allegory is as much to say as strange speaking or borrowed speech."<sup>71</sup> Scripture uses "proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do, but that which the proverb, similitude, riddles or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seek out diligently."<sup>72</sup> Tyndale defines allegory as a rhetorical trope, in much the same way that it is defined within rhetorical handbooks of the period.<sup>73</sup>

In Galatians 4:21-31, where Paul builds an allegory based on the wives of Abraham, the apostle also notes that the bondmaid, Hagar, persecuted the son of the free woman, Sarah. Considering this biblical passage, Tyndale writes that he follows Paul's example by borrowing "likenesses or allegories of the scripture, as of Pharaoh and Herod and of the scribes and Pharisees, to express our miserable captivity and persecution under Antichrist the Pope."<sup>74</sup>

Thus, Tyndale finds support for his understanding and rhetorical use of allegory from Galatians 4, and his translation bears witness to this fact. Alongside his stated position on allegory, Tyndale's translation of Galatians 4 implies that he understood Paul's allegory as a didactic tool that reinforced—rather than proved—the doctrinal truths discussed earlier in Galatians. The essential portion of Tyndale's translation reads as follows:

For it is writte that Abraham had two sonnes/ the one by  
a bonde mayde/ the wother by a fre woman. Yee and he

<sup>71</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 156.

<sup>72</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 156. Tyndale's view here was not unprecedented. See G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50; Daniel J. Treier, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? *Sic Et Non*," *Trinity Journal* 24 (2003), 99; George L. Scheper, "Reformation Attitudes toward Allegory and the Song of Songs," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 89 (1974), 552-54; Mary Jane Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays*, eds. John T. Day, Eric Lund, Anne M. O'Donnell (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 63-73.

<sup>73</sup>For example, see Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas (De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia)*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963), 30, 87.

<sup>74</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 159.

which was of the bonde woman/ was borne after the flesshe:  
 but he which was of the fre woman/ was borne by promes.  
 Which thyngs betoken mistery. For these wemen are two  
 testaments/ the one from mounte Sina/ which gendreth  
 unto bondage/ which is Agar (For mounte Sina is called  
 Agar in Arabia/ and bordreth apon the citie which is nowe  
 Jerusalem) and is in bondage with her Children.<sup>75</sup>

Three elements in this translation stand out. The first element is, “which thyngs betoken mistery,” a statement that Tyndale uses to translate the Greek, ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα.<sup>76</sup> Jerome translates this phrase into the Latin, “quae sunt per allegoriam dicta,” which is rendered similarly into English by the Douay-Rheims version, “Which things are said by an allegory.” In contrast to this translation, Tyndale’s rendering suggests a hesitance to provide apostolic legitimacy for the outlandish allegorical interpretations of Scripture that he so often criticized. Nevertheless, unlike one modern translation’s use of the term, “illustrations,”<sup>77</sup> Tyndale’s rendering, “mystery,” is not free from the suggestion of allegory; indeed, even in notes to the Douay-Rheims New Testament, the related adjective, “mystical,” could refer to Scripture’s “hidden,” spiritual sense.<sup>78</sup>

The second element in this passage is the term, “Agar” [Hagar], which Tyndale ties to Mount Sinai by interpreting it as the Arabic name for the holy mountain: “For mounte Sina is called Agar in Arabia.”<sup>79</sup> The third

<sup>75</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 251.

<sup>76</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the Greek texts consulted here are Desiderius Erasmus, *Novum Instrumentum* (Basil: Johann Froben, 1516), and *The Greek New Testament*, eds. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, 4th edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).

<sup>77</sup>Gal 4:24 (HCSB); Compare also to Luther’s German translation, which is simple and without the canonical/theological resonances of Tyndale’s translation: “die wort bedeuten etwas.” Compare Tyndale’s version to the 1543 Spanish New Testament of Francisco de Enzinas, as well: “Las quales [*sic*] cosas son dichas por otro sentido.” See also Maveety, “Doctrine in Tyndale’s New Testament,” 156.

<sup>78</sup>A 1530 mention of the “mysticall sense,” in relation to levirate marriage, is cited in Bruce Boehrer, “Tyndale’s Practyse of Prelates: Reformation Doctrine and the Royal Supremacy,” *Renaissance et Reforme* (August 1986), 257-276. The term “mystical” refers to the spiritual sense of Scripture multiple times in the 1582 Douay-Rheims edition. See especially, the “Annotations” to Revelation 1, in *The New Testament of Iesvs Christ, Translated Faithfully into English out of the authencal Latin ...: In the English Colledge of Rhemes* (Rhemes: Iohn Fogny, 1582), 650.

<sup>79</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 251; see also Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 41 (Nashville: Word, Inc., 1990), 197-219.

element is the term, “bordreth,” which is Tyndale’s geographical translation of the difficult Greek word, συστοιχέω. The Greek term has the basic meaning of “to be in a series with,” thus showing a correspondence of *some* kind between Mount Sinai and the old Jerusalem—hence, the difficulty of determining what kind of correspondence this was. By translating these terms geographically, Tyndale clarifies the nature of this correspondence.<sup>80</sup>

The significance of Tyndale’s translation is highlighted by a discussion of this passage in Martin Luther’s commentary on Galatians. Like Tyndale, Luther writes that he sees Paul’s allegory as decoration, helpful in the explanation of truth but invalid as a doctrinal proof. This, he argues, is what Paul has done in Galatians 4. He then writes,

For the same mountain that the Jews call Sinai—a name it seems to have because of its thickets and brambles—the Arabs call ‘Hagar’ in their language, as not only Paul but also Ptolemy and the scholia of the Greeks indicate. [...] I imagine that *this similarity of names gave Paul the idea and opportunity to pursue this allegory.*<sup>81</sup>

It is therefore likely that Tyndale also understood the two terms mentioned above—i.e., “Agar” and “bordreth”—as providing Paul with the connections needed to create his allegory. Paul saw an opportunity to build upon the correspondence between the Arabic name for Mt. Sinai (“Hagar”), the old Jerusalem, and the Old Testament narrative of Sarah and Hagar, and he did so to “root ... in the heart” those truths that he

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<sup>80</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 251; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 212-13; and Gerhard Delling, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich [TDNT] (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), s.v. “συστοιχέω.” Following the Vulgate, the Douay-Rheims edition translates this passage as, “For Sina is a mountain in Arabia, which hath affinity to that Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children” (vs. 25). It thus leaves the “affinity” between Sinai and Jerusalem largely unexplained. Also, in contrast to Tyndale’s translation, it removes any mention of Hagar—even though the Greek text mentions Hagar in the same sentence. However, compare to the 1543 Spanish of Francisco de Enzinas, which is similar to Tyndale: “... por que Agar es un monte de Syna [*sic*] en Arabia, y esta çerca de aquella que agora [*sic*] se llama Hierusalem.”

<sup>81</sup>Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), in *Luther’s Works [LW]*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (vols. 1-30) and Helmut T. Lehmann (vols. 31-55), vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians (1535): Chapters 1-4*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1963), 435-38; italics added. See also similar views expressed in Desiderius Erasmus, Paraphrase on Galatians (*In epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas paraphrasis*) in the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. Robert D. Sider, vol. 42, *New Testament Scholarship: Paraphrases on Romans and Galatians*, trans. John B. Payne, Albert Rabil Jr., and Warren S. Smith Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

had plainly expressed earlier in the epistle.<sup>82</sup>

Therefore, Tyndale's translation of this difficult passage is shaped by his understanding of allegory and by his understanding of the text. But one could hardly blame Tyndale for this, since Galatians 4 would have been obscure—if not incomprehensible—to readers had he not clarified some of its conceptual difficulties in translation. Despite the unavoidable interpretive work that lies behind his rendering of this passage, the theological significance of the translation is still under-determined. Utilized within a certain polemical context and read through a particular theological filter, Tyndale's opponents could very well have defended their own views of allegory with this English translation.

### GEORGE JOYE AND THE DEBATE OVER "RESURRECTION"

In his 1534 New Testament, Tyndale entered directly and publicly into debate with fellow evangelical George Joye regarding the resurrection and the intermediate state of the dead. He built his argument against Joye on the same premise that he had defended in his debate with Thomas More: namely, the need for a plain translation of Scripture, free from "juggling terms" and foreign theological connotations introduced into the text by the translator. Rather than twisting Scripture in this way, Tyndale advised putting glosses in the margin of the New Testament—although his 1534 marginal glosses in Matthew are notably fewer and more restrained than those of 1525.<sup>83</sup> "Howbeit in many places, me thinketh it better to put a declaration in the margin, than to run too far from the text," he writes. "And in many places, where the text seemeth at the first chop hard to be understood, yet the *circumstances* before and after, and often reading together, maketh it plain enough."<sup>84</sup> Instead of changing the text, he refers the reader to the context of the passage, to the "process and order" of the text.

The debate between Tyndale and Joye is fraught with miscommunications, hurt feelings, injured pride, and hasty accusations. As Gergely Juhász notes, Tyndale is either unjust or misinformed in his representation of Joye's beliefs—as when he suggests that Joye denied the bodily resurrection of the dead and encouraged others to do the same.<sup>85</sup> In fact,

<sup>82</sup>Tyndale, *Obedience*, 159.

<sup>83</sup>Snare, "Reading Tyndale's Bible," 307.

<sup>84</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 3. Italics mine.

<sup>85</sup>Gergely M. Juhász, *Translating Resurrection: The Debate between William Tyndale and George Joye in Its Historical and Theological Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 336.

Joye makes no such denial. Although he removed the term "resurrection" from 22 passages of Scripture in his revision of Tyndale's translation, he nevertheless retained "resurrection" or a synonymous expression—e.g., "ryse agayne" or "rysing from deeth"—in the other 45 cases.<sup>86</sup> However, Tyndale highlighted the 22 passages where Joye amended the translation, replacing the term "resurrection" with phrases like "very life" or "the lyfe after this."<sup>87</sup>

According to Tyndale, translations of this sort imply that a biblical passage refers to "the state of the souls after their departing from their bodies," rather than to the bodily resurrection. If Joye believes this to be the true "sense and meaning of those scriptures," he writes, "I answer it is sooner said than proved."<sup>88</sup> He continues,

But though it were the very meaning of the scripture: yet if it were lawful after his example to every man to play boo peep with the translations that are before him, and to put out the words of the text at his pleasure and to put in everywhere his meaning: or what he thought the meaning were, that were the next way to stablish all heresies and to destroy the ground wherewith we should improve them.<sup>89</sup>

Tyndale claims that Joye had juggled with the text, introducing his own interpretation into the translation and thereby clouding the plain and open Scriptures. Joye's "false gloss" has become "the text," preventing Bible readers from being able to "correct false doctrine and defend Christ's flock from false opinions."<sup>90</sup> All such interpretive glosses should remain outside of the translation itself. "If the text be left uncorrupt," Tyndale writes, "it will purge herself of all manner false glosses, how subtle soever they be feigned, as a seething pot casteth up her scum."<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, just as More had once censured Tyndale for his tendentious translations, even so Tyndale now criticizes Joye for his tendentious

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<sup>86</sup>Juhász, *Translating Resurrection*, 335; see also Juhász, "Translating Resurrection: The Importance of the Sadducees' Belief in the Tyndale–Joye Controversy," in *Resurrection in the New Testament: Festschrift J. Lambrecht*, ed. R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Lataire (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 109.

<sup>87</sup>Juhász, *Translating Resurrection*, 335.

<sup>88</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 14.

<sup>89</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 14.

<sup>90</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 14.

<sup>91</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 14.

translation. Some scholars have noted this as an apparent hypocrisy; however, the cases are not wholly equivalent. More defended theological connotations that Tyndale *removed* by means of his translation, connotations that Tyndale believed were foreign to the original Greek terms. But, in his debate with Joye, Tyndale is attempting to defend the denotation of the text, criticizing Joye for allegedly changing terms to *add* theological connotations into his translation. So, in both situations, Tyndale stakes his argument on the same translation philosophy. However, even after granting the consistency of Tyndale's translation philosophy, one must face some significant difficulties that it seems Tyndale failed to recognize.

The specific terms and passages discussed in the Tyndale–Joye debate highlight some of the difficulties inherent in putting Tyndale's translation philosophy into practice. The problem is suggested by the following question: Theoretically speaking, what if no single English term can carry the varied connotations of a particular Greek term in Scripture? On the one hand, for example, the advantage of Tyndale's use of the term, "congregation," to translate ἐκκλησία is that the English term represents the denotative meaning of the Greek term—namely, an assembly or gathering. At the same time, however, the English term also has enough flexibility to carry the various connotations required by diverse contexts throughout Scripture—in some cases, an assembly or congregation of unbelieving Jews or Gentiles; in other cases, a Christian congregation.

However, a *potential* problem arises if there is an incongruence between the English and Greek terms. What if the Greek terms ἐγείρω/ἀνίστημι and related nouns were flexible enough to carry connotations foreign to or contrary to the English term, "resurrection"? What if, in certain contexts, these Greek terms could refer to the intermediate state of the dead rather than the bodily resurrection? If this is the case, the translation, "resurrection," would be inadequate because "resurrection" prohibits the very connotation that the immediate context requires of the Greek term—a connotation that the Greek term, *potentially*, is flexible enough to bear.<sup>92</sup>

This, it would seem, is the issue that Joye was trying to resolve when he amended some passages in Tyndale's translation. Take, for example,

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<sup>92</sup>In discussing this issue, it must be emphasized that this is only a *potential* problem. There will be no attempt in this essay to determine whether Joye was correct in broadening the connotations of the Greek words that were central to the controversy. The primary point in this section is to show the consistency of Tyndale's translation philosophy. Additionally, the subject matter involved in the Tyndale–Joye debate continues among New Testament scholars today, as noted by Juhász, "Translating Resurrection," 119–20.

Mark 12:18a, which Tyndale translated in 1526 with these words: "And the saduces cam vnto hym / which saye / there is no resurrection [ἀνάστασιν]."<sup>93</sup> By contrast, Joye translates ἀνάστασιν instead as "lyfe after thys."<sup>94</sup> It is significant that this passage deals with Jesus's confrontation with the Sadducees and their disbelief in the ἀνάστασιν. According to Juhász, "three quarters of all those instances where Joye changed Tyndale's translation of *resurreccion* refer to the belief denied by the Sadducees."<sup>95</sup> In this context, the Tyndale–Joye debate became a controversy about the various connotations that the Greek term could have carried within first-century Judaism. If, within its semantic domain, the term could refer to the intermediate state of the soul, then Joye might be justified in his translation. This would especially be the case if the context of Mark 12:18a required the term to carry such a connotation.

As Joye rightly pointed out during this controversy, Tyndale claims that, during the first century, the doctrine of the soul's immortality had not come into existence. As such, Tyndale could by no means accept Joye's view that ἀνάστασιν refers to the soul's immortality or active existence in the intermediate state (i.e., the "lyfe after thys"). According to Tyndale, the Sadducees simply rejected the bodily resurrection of the dead.<sup>96</sup> By contrast, Joye argued that the Sadducees rejected the soul's life apart from the body during the intermediate state. As other Reformation commentators also had done, he supported his case by proposing a Semitic background to the Greek terms at issue.<sup>97</sup> This is interesting because, in the prefatory letter to his 1534 New Testament, Tyndale himself notes the significance of this background for translation, although his comment is limited primarily to grammatical—rather than semantic—issues.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Joye correctly cites Josephus's testimony that, according to the Sadducees, "the soule of man was mortal and dyed with the bodie," and argued that Josephus' testimony corresponded well with the biblical evidence about

<sup>93</sup>*New Testament* (1526), fol. 63r. In full, the Greek reads, "Καὶ ἔρχονται Σαδδουκαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν, οἵτινεζλέγουσιν ἀνάστασιν μὴ εἶναι."

<sup>94</sup>George Joye, ed., *The new Testament as it was written/ and caused to be written/ by them which herde yt: Whom also oure Saueoure Christ Iesus commanded that they shulde preach it vnto al creatures*, trans. William Tyndale (Antwerpe: By me wydowe of Cristoffel of Endhouen, In the yere of oure Lorde. M.CCCCC. and xxxiiij. in August; *STC* 2825), sig. K8r.

<sup>95</sup>Juhász, "Translating Resurrection," 112.

<sup>96</sup>Tyndale, *Answer vnto Mores dialogue*, fol. 72v.

<sup>97</sup>Juhász, *Translating Resurrection*, 394-95.

<sup>98</sup>*Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), 3.

the Sadducees' beliefs.<sup>99</sup> Informed by this historical context, Joye argues that ἀνάστασιν had a wider semantic domain than Tyndale allowed; therefore, the English term "resurrection" did not suffice in all contexts.

Some scholars contend that Tyndale's criticism of Joye reveals a tendency to domineer over others' interpretations of Scripture; at least, one might suggest, Tyndale appears hypocritical, attacking Joye with the same criticism that he had received from More. It seems he wants no glosses in the translation, unless they are his own glosses.<sup>100</sup> But this would be the wrong conclusion to draw from the Tyndale–Joye debate. In fact, Tyndale remains consistent in his desire to make Scripture accessible to the Christian congregation, shorn of all glosses put into the translation itself. He criticizes Joye precisely because he believes Joye has clouded the text of Scripture with interpretive renderings foreign to the Greek. However, at least with regard to the Bible passages central to his debate with Joye, Tyndale fails to acknowledge any *potential* complexity in bridging the linguistic divide between Greek and English expressions related to the afterlife and resurrection.

### "A THING BEGUN, RATHER THAN FINISHED"

So, was Tyndale "tendentious" in his translation of the text? In his volume on sixteenth-century English literature, C.S. Lewis considered this question, suggesting that both Tyndale and More had strong theological convictions that lay behind their preferred translations for various Greek terms. Lewis wrote:

[The renderings suggested by both men] are equally tendentious in the sense that each presupposes a belief. In that sense all translations of scripture are tendentious: translation, by its very nature, is a continuous implicit commentary. It can become less tendentious only by becoming less of a translation. Hence when Bishop Gardiner in the Convocation of 1542 tried to stem the tide of Protestant translation he found himself driven by the logic of his position to demand that in all future versions nearly a hundred Latin words ...

<sup>99</sup>Juhász, "Translating Resurrection," 114.

<sup>100</sup>E.g., Juhász, "Some Neglected Aspects of the Exegetical Debate on Resurrection and the Immortality of the Soul between William Tyndale and George Joye in Antwerp (1534-1523)," *Reformation* 14 (2009), 10; cf., Snare, "Reading Tyndale's Bible," 301-302.

should be left Latin or only morphologically "Englished."<sup>101</sup>

Lewis concludes that "Tyndale's renderings are not Protestant dishonesty." Rather, the interpretive decisions he makes "follow from the nature of translation."<sup>102</sup> His observation is valid, though we should add that Tyndale often resisted the interpretive aspects of his task. Now, he was not perfect as a translator. As even one of his greatest recent admirers, the late David Daniell, admits: "By modern standards, Tyndale got things wrong."<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, his translation represents an honest attempt to faithfully render the New Testament into English—that is, to find the English words and phrases that best correspond with the Greek. In 1533, writing to his imprisoned son in the faith, John Frith, he declared, "For I call to God to record . . . that I never altered one syllable of God's word against my conscience."<sup>104</sup>

When dealing with theologically loaded words, Tyndale aimed to use English words that conveyed accurately the denotation of the Greek, while also having connotations that were both broad enough and flexible enough to respond to the "process and order" of the biblical context. In translating some biblical passages, such as Gal 4:21-31, Tyndale found it more difficult to untangle translation from the interpretive process, yet even here he often left the text open to various interpretations, including those he would have opposed. Tyndale held definite theological convictions, but the temptation to force these convictions onto the text was restrained by one overriding conviction—namely, his belief "that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, *that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.*"<sup>105</sup> Scripture was for Tyndale the source and plumbline of true doctrine, and he wanted the Christians of England to see for themselves the same textual structure and meaning that the apostolic authors intended them to see.

Finally, it is worth remembering these words, written by Tyndale about his 1526 English New Testament: "Count it as a thyng not hauynge his full shape/ but as it were borne afore hys tyme/ even as a thig begunne rather then

<sup>101</sup>Lewis, *English Literature*, 206.

<sup>102</sup>Lewis, *English Literature*, 206.

<sup>103</sup>Daniell, ed., *Tyndale's New Testament* (1534), xx.

<sup>104</sup>These letters are included in N.T. Wright, ed., *The Works of John Frith*, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics (Oxford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978), 494-95.

<sup>105</sup>Tyndale, "W.T. to the Reader," in *Tyndale's Old Testament*, 4. Italics mine.

fynnesshed. . . . In tyme to come (yf god have apoynted us there unto) we will geve it his full shape.”<sup>106</sup> Did Tyndale think his 1534 edition had finally given the English New Testament its “full shape”? If not, what would its “full shape” have looked like? How much nearer the original Greek may it have become, and how much less open to the accusation of tendentiousness? Since his life was cut short, we will never know. In any case, the task he began 500 years ago continues to this day. May modern Bible translators learn from his example, aiming in their own efforts to display, as clearly as possible, “the process, order and meaning of the text,” that men and women may be established firmly in its truth.

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<sup>106</sup>*New Testament* (1526), sig. Tt2v.



## PILGRAM MARPECK: Theologian of the Incarnation

Michael D. Wilkinson\*

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin.... (The Symbol of Chalcedon, 451)<sup>1</sup>

In July 1546 the Schmalkald War broke out between the imperial forces of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and the Schmalkald League, a group led by the Protestant princes of Germany, most notably by John Frederick, elector of Saxony, and Philipp of Hesse. Charles sought, by force of arms, to restore religious unity to the Holy Roman Empire by bringing the Protestants back into the Catholic fold.<sup>2</sup> The Protestants, by force of arms, sought to resist this effort. Though the conflict began well for the Protestant forces, poor leadership proved to be its undoing and by the end of 1546, the tide had turned, and Charles V was on his way to victory. On 24 April 1547 the Battle of Mühlberg secured Charles's victory; the Protestant forces were overwhelmingly defeated. On 23 July 1547 a victorious Charles rode into Augsburg in grand fashion, accompanied by

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Schaff, ed., "The Symbol of Chalcedon," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds*, 6th edition, revised by David S. Schaff. (1931; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 62.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Guilmartin, "The Schmalkald War," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 4, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15-16.

a large entourage of soldiers and nobles.<sup>3</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, leader of the Anabaptist community, likely witnessed this event.

In February 1547, five months before Charles V rode into Augsburg, Marpeck wrote “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” to the Swiss Brethren in the Grisons, Appenzell, St. Gall, and Alsace to seek unity with them. The Schmalkald conflict served not only as the background, but also as an example of the cause of the hostility and disunity that existed in Europe at the time. From Marpeck’s perspective, the problem was caused by both groups attempting to coerce the faith of the citizens. Despite the claims by both Protestants and Catholics alike that they were acting in the name of Christ, their un-Christlike behavior revealed a deep-seated misunderstanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both groups failed to understand the deep humility of Christ in His incarnation

Christology is the heart of Pilgram Marpeck’s theology. As Neal Blough points out, “Marpeck came to the conviction that the key to thinking and speaking about God (theology) was to understand Christ (Christology). The notion of the incarnation—consciously formulated in trinitarian categories—thus became the hermeneutical key to Scripture for Marpeck . . . .”<sup>4</sup> William Klassen and Walter Klaassen agree, stating that while “Marpeck never developed a comprehensive theological system, it is generally agreed that Christology formed the center of his concern. In respect to his doctrine of Christ he laid emphasis on the humanity of Christ and its implications for church order.”<sup>5</sup> Marpeck’s Christology is prominent in most of his writings.<sup>6</sup> To get a snapshot of Marpeck’s Christology, priority will be given to “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” one of Marpeck’s later letters. Theology for Pilgram Marpeck is not an abstract intellectual discipline; rather, it is integrally connected to the Christian life, both individually and corporately. As the survey of “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” will show, Marpeck moves smoothly from a strongly orthodox

<sup>3</sup>Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 44 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008), 290-91.

<sup>4</sup>Neal Blough, *Christ in Our Midst: Incarnation, Church, and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck*, Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, no. 8 (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>5</sup>Pilgram Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, vol. 2, Classics of the Radical Reformation (1978; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 507.

<sup>6</sup>The best text for a full treatment of Marpeck’s Christology and its implications is Neal Blough’s *Christ in Our Midst*. This excellent work takes a historical theology approach as it traces the developments of Marpeck’s Christology from his earliest writings through his final letters.

Trinitarian Christology to the Christian life and the church. Marpeck's Christology, particularly Christ's humanity and humiliation, determines the focus of the faith, the nature of the Christian life, and the ministry and mission of the church.

### SUMMARY OF "CONCERNING THE LOWLINESS OF CHRIST"

Marpeck greets the Swiss Brethren and expresses his desire to come to them and share their mutual "delight in the love and truth of the gospel of Christ."<sup>7</sup> The centrality of Christology shows up immediately in this letter. This gospel message is none other than Christ Himself, "the costliest and most esteemed treasure," in whom "are hidden all the treasures of the secret will and pleasure of the Father . . ."<sup>8</sup> Marpeck references John 1:18 to assert that no one has seen the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father who sent him. The importance of Christ's humanity, then, is crucial because the "Son reveals [His Father] in his holy, external teaching. And the miracle and power of His works on earth are the Father's testimony to His teaching."<sup>9</sup> Marpeck clearly operates on the foundation of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Second, the reference to Christ's "external" teaching refers to his teaching "in the body," clearly a reference to his teaching during his incarnation.<sup>10</sup> Marpeck continues that Christ the Son was "born to the Father from the race of man . . . to liberate man from the power of the devil, sin, death, and hell, that is from the guilt of Adam into all men have come."<sup>11</sup> The problem of humanity's sin means that each person is under the wrath of God and outside of Christ. This, however, did not stop the Father from acting for our salvation; in fact, the Father did not spare His Son, but "delivered Him into the suffering and pain of death, even condemnation, as a salvation for men."<sup>12</sup> As a result, the Holy Spirit can now dwell in the one who believes in Christ

<sup>7</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 429.

<sup>8</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 429.

<sup>9</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 429.

<sup>10</sup>The German word used is "leipliche" (modern spelling "leiblich"), meaning "bodily, of the body, corporal." See Pilgram Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck an die Gemeinden in Graubünden, Appenzell, St. Gallen und im Elsaß: Von der Tiefe Christi," in *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer 1527-1555: Das "Kunstbuch" des Jörg Probst Rotenfelder gen. Maler*, herausgeg. Heinold Fast, Martin Rothkegel, and Gotfried Seebaß, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, bd. XVII, im Auftrag des Vereins für Reformationgeschichte, bd. 78 (Heidelberg: Gutersloher Verlaghaus, 2007), 559 (hereafter cited as *Kunstbuch*). Klaassen and Klassen (*The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*) note that the meaning is "bodily, physical," 582.

<sup>11</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 429.

<sup>12</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 430.

and “then [transfer them] from the earthly to the heavenly.”<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that from the outset, Marpeck’s orthodox Trinitarianism serves as a foundation for Marpeck’s theology.

The Anabaptist leader turns his focus to the importance of Christ’s humanity by describing Christ’s body as the ark of the covenant in which are hidden all the treasures and gifts from the Father. “This ark He destroyed on the cross, and then He pried it open, which was the finishing of His work.”<sup>14</sup> During his life on earth, Christ the Son visibly, physically taught and revealed the Father; in his suffering and death on the cross Christ finished his work and opened the treasures of his grace to humanity. However, Marpeck does not simply move from Christ’s death on the cross to his resurrection. His death on the cross may have finished his work on earth, but it did not mean the end of his humiliation. Marpeck states that Christ then had to make his descent into hell to complete his payment for sin. He asserts that “on earth and in the Pit, Christ was proclaimed. In the depth of death and in the abyss of hell, the Lord of both life and death proclaimed the Word to the dead. Here, the soul of Christ preached the gospel. On earth, Christ’s physical suffering and death proclaimed the Word to men living in the body.”<sup>15</sup> Christ had to go to the full depths of hell to pay completely the guilt of humanity’s sin. Furthermore, Christ did not descend into hell in triumph, but in full humiliation in order to pay for sin.

Neal Blough points out the importance of Christ’s descent into the abyss in Marpeck’s thinking: “The descent into hell is the prolongation of his death and humiliation and is understood within a historical framework, since it occurs ‘chronologically’ between Christ’s death and resurrection.”<sup>16</sup> While Marpeck is following the historical order of the events of Christ’s suffering and resurrection, the descent into hell bears much significance. It means, first, that Christ had to pay the entire price for sin. Marpeck explains, “In His human poverty, the payer of the debt, the true warrantor, went into the depths of hell with our sins, and yet without any sin of His own, through His torment on earth in order to make payment.”<sup>17</sup> Note the language of sacrifice, substitution, and payment in Marpeck’s language. But he goes on to describe that Christ, in descending into hell to make

<sup>13</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 430.

<sup>14</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 431.

<sup>15</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 432.

<sup>16</sup>Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 199.

<sup>17</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 433.

the full payment for sin, has taken the power of pain and death away from the devil. Here, Marpeck utilizes the language of victory. Both images of satisfaction and *Christus Victor* serve Marpeck's theology.

Marpeck also describes a second purpose for Christ's descent into the Pit; namely, to bring salvation to those Old Covenant prisoners in hell who had been waiting for their salvation; "He took life back again out of the midst of death, together with all who have hoped for the Lord and for His salvation."<sup>18</sup> Marpeck believed that until Christ's resurrection, no one was in heaven; heaven was locked until the victorious resurrected Christ opened it and brought in the saints who had died in hope of their salvation. "Thus, death has been swallowed up in victory, and Christ has emerged from death to life with all His chosen ones."<sup>19</sup> Marpeck explains that this is only possible through Jesus's descent into hell, subsequent resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand. The true light, Christ, who has the fullest right to shine, did not assert this power, but humbled himself; however, Christ, the true light, broke out of the darkness "of the devil, death, sin, and hell, through the brilliance of His light and clarity and returned alive from death."<sup>20</sup> In victory, Christ took back his rightful place with the Father and the "eternal, preexistent glory" he shared with the Father since before the world's creation. By tracing the historical order of events, Blough observes that Marpeck understands the resurrection and ascension of Christ as concrete victory over evil in the here and now of human history, rather than some abstract sense as "only in the inner person or in the eschatological future."<sup>21</sup>

Christ's death, burial, descent, and resurrection occur in history which inspires Marpeck immediately to describe its significance for the believer. For, "All the saints of God must learn the depths of Christ, these same depths of humility and damnation, into which the leaven of our sin brought Christ."<sup>22</sup> No one can experience the height of Christ's glory without first being condemned with Christ in the depths of his suffering. For Marpeck, like Leonhard Schiemer and Hans Schlaffer before him, most people miss salvation because they want to focus on Christ's deity and glory while avoiding his humanity and its accompanying painful, humiliating suffering. The Christian life, then, is a life of affliction and humility—this

<sup>18</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 433.

<sup>19</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 433.

<sup>20</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 434.

<sup>21</sup>Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 201.

<sup>22</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 434.

is the reality of Christ's life in his incarnation; it is, therefore, the life of Christ's disciple. Baptism illustrates this truth. "Baptism is a secret, severe water which drives all reason down into the depth to die with Christ and be buried with Him."<sup>23</sup> Only after dying with Christ can one rise with Christ and partake of Christ's gifts, the treasures of his kingdom. What makes this possible? Christ's humanity. In no way does Marpeck denigrate the importance of Christ's deity. Far from it, only the divine Son can make the Father known, and only the Father can make known the divine Son—but the vehicle which makes this happen is the Son's humanity. To borrow from Anselm, Christ must be the God-Man. Furthermore, the salvation that we receive from the Son for the Father's glory results in the Son sealing us with the Holy Spirit, establishing eternal peace in our hearts. Consequently, we have great assurance for our salvation since "no disaster may come eternally near the dwelling which is God and man eternally, Jesus Christ Himself, in whom all believers dwell and He in them."<sup>24</sup> Again, notice the underlying Trinitarian orthodoxy and the focus on Christ's humanity to make salvation possible. Notice also that Jesus's suffering, humiliation, death, and resurrection victory become the pattern for the believer's life.

Marpeck follows with a word about the faithful having their dwelling place in the Temple of Christ's body. After Christ's body had been broken on the cross and in the humiliation of his descent into hell, Christ raised it up on the third day; subsequently, the "hearts of all the faithful ascended with Him, and their hearts were made temples and dwellings of God, in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live, govern, and reign in righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, and truth, from now until eternity."<sup>25</sup> Drawing on John 4:23-24, Marpeck writes that the faithful dwell in the temple of Christ's body; it is here in "this eternal, sublime, and holiest place" that God may be understood and experienced. Here, in the temple of Christ's body is pardon, rest, and everything needed for life. Here are found all the treasures of God has given us, which had been hidden in Christ, but now are opened to us since Christ's body was broken on the cross.

Referencing Isaiah 61:2 Marpeck expounds on these treasures. These gifts are given to us for two reasons: to know God our Creator and Father and to serve each other. This is a lesson learned from the incarnate life

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<sup>23</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 435.

<sup>24</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 435.

<sup>25</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 436.

of Christ: he came to serve, not to rule. Marpeck applies the example of Christ by pointing out that we are to practice “with unwavering faith and certain hope, love toward our neighbor, and thus prove our love of God;” to do this is our greatest joy.<sup>26</sup> This pattern of knowing God and loving service for neighbor has its foundation in the humanity of Christ, both in its provision and in its practice. Christ in his incarnate life on earth has revealed the Father and has given his disciples the pattern of a life of service.

The first gift, or treasure, mentioned by Marpeck is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given for indwelling the disciple and making it possible to know the Father, as well as making it possible to accomplish our mission. The reference to Isaiah 61:2 speaks not only of the Lord, but of his “servants, messengers, and ambassadors and their office, and what they are to accomplish in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> In the power of the Spirit Christ’s disciples, like the Lord in Isaiah 61, are to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’s favor, proclaiming the gospel to the captives, healing wounded hearts, and comforting those who mourn.

Effectively proclaiming the “acceptable year” of the Lord’s favor means that Christ has given his servants “a happy anointing instead of a stench, a beautiful garment instead of a heavy heart.”<sup>28</sup> This “garment” is an innocence of sin, which is another of Christ’s treasures opened for us. The innocence for sin would not describe life before becoming Christ’s disciple, but it should describe the disciple’s life after faith in Christ since Christ has paid for and pardoned sin. The disciple’s life now is one of obedience to Christ’s commands and following Christ’s example. The service as Christ’s ambassadors means that “all the chosen of God must strive to follow the pattern and example given to us by the Lord Himself.”<sup>29</sup> The disciple is not above his master; and since Christ’s life has proven the validity of this life, the disciple must follow Jesus’s example as proof of being his servant.

A third treasure of Christ opened to us is the Scriptures. “Through His divine skill, He has unlocked and released the Scripture, the most sublime and learned old and new treasure, written for Himself by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> All of the Old Testament Scriptures—the law, the prophets, and the writings—point to Jesus, who fulfills and makes clear its meaning. Christ’s humanity unlocks the meaning of the Scriptures. Marpeck fully

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<sup>26</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 437.

<sup>27</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 438.

<sup>28</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 438.

<sup>29</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 438.

<sup>30</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 439.

embraces the deity of Christ, but this can only be revealed and known through his humanity. Quoting Colossians 2:9, “according to the fullness of understanding and knowledge of the Father, the fullness of Godhead appeared bodily in Christ Himself.”<sup>31</sup> In doing so, Jesus clarifies the difference between the old and the new treasures. The old treasure was given because of sin and pointed Israel to the future grace which came in Jesus Christ. The law, the prophets, and John the Baptist pointed forward to Christ who, as the Lamb of God, would take away the sin of the world. This was fulfilled on the cross of Christ. Now that the old has been completed, the new treasure of grace and truth has come with Christ. The old treasure still ministers to those who are in Adam because they still live under sin. But, for those who repent and believe in Christ, the new treasure is offered. Marpeck spells this out in much greater detail in “Preface to the ‘Explanation of the Testaments’” in which he distinguishes the testaments as “yesterday” (the Old Testament) and “today” (the New Testament), “promise” (OT) and “fulfillment” (NT).<sup>32</sup>

Another treasure which the humanity of Christ gives is Christ’s indwelling in his people. As Marpeck describes it, “He fills His servants with His skill, wisdom, and understanding in order that they may administer in the right manner, according to time, measure, and appointment, His treasures and wealth.”<sup>33</sup> What makes this possible is the fact that Christ himself is the “true treasure.” More specifically, “His body and true humanity are, moreover, the genuine temple and treasure-house, the true dwelling and abode of God.”<sup>34</sup> As mentioned previously, for Marpeck the humanity of Christ is the key to revealing God because the fulness of deity dwells bodily in Christ (Colossians 2:9). But that revelation does not remain outside the believer. Marpeck moves immediately from God’s dwelling in Christ’s body to Christ indwelling his people. “As true dwellings, treasure-houses, and temples of God, in which the Father and the Son themselves, the most sublime treasures, live and remain in the power of the Spirit, the hearts of all the faithful are prepared and built up by Him [for the enjoyment of] these treasures.”<sup>35</sup>

Next, Marpeck spells out the significance of Christ’s indwelling by

<sup>31</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 439.

<sup>32</sup>Pilgram Marpeck, “Preface to the ‘Explanation of the Testaments,’” in *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, 555-66.

<sup>33</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 440.

<sup>34</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 440.

<sup>35</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 440.

asserting that Christ, as High Priest, by taking up residence in the hearts of his faithful, makes them fellow priests. Priests have a responsibility to minister, and they must do so in a particular way. Christ has been given to us in our own “earthen vessels” that require great care since they can be easily damaged. Thus, we must give careful attention to our body and soul that we are not “exposed to offense.” Marpeck explains that this means that we “should allow ourselves neither to be offended nor scandalized by anything.”<sup>36</sup> The believer is not to attack a neighbor, fight in the arrogance of the flesh, nor give any place to the lust of the flesh; to do any of these things would damage one’s own life and, possibly, the neighbor’s life. Christ’s indwelling constrains the disciple so that his freedom in Christ does not permit him to act in ways that damage the name of Christ or the neighbor. To act with conceit, cunning, or sinful vices is to abuse Christ’s love, slandering Christ’s name, and destroying his treasures and gifts. Thus, Christ’s indwelling of his people will mean a life of holiness and virtue. To summarize, Christ’s indwelling his people equips them for all they need to serve as his fellow priests; the behavior of Christ’s people should reflect his character. As Marpeck explains it, “Therefore, my beloved ones, let us be aware of the High Priest Christ in our hearts, and of His anointment of us, with the oil of gladness, comfort, and peace. This anointing gives us all learning, wisdom, understanding, and comprehension, and then we may understand what is best and most pleasing to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup> The treasure of Christ’s indwelling is the gift of equipping for service, with a transformed character.

Another treasure that the ark of Christ’s body provides is spiritual gifts. Christ has bestowed spiritual gifts on every believer for building up the body of Christ. These spiritual gifts represent the “adornment and finery” of the Holy Spirit. Marpeck asserts that there “can be no unendowed member who has not been given something of the treasures of Christ, such as virtues and the fruit of the Holy Spirit on the body of Christ.”<sup>38</sup> These treasures are given by the Father only to the sanctified. Holiness is a key issue with spiritual gifts. Marpeck explains, “His holiness is the pearls, treasures, precious stones, and gems with which He has sanctified Himself for His own.”<sup>39</sup> These treasures, which extend from Christ himself, are the

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<sup>36</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 441.

<sup>37</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 442.

<sup>38</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 442.

<sup>39</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 442.

means through which God's people serve and sanctify one another "with all the virtues and gifts" of Christ. Three things should be noted here. First, the section on spiritual gifts reveals Marpeck's inherent Trinitarianism. Second, the spiritual gifts come to the believer only because Christ gives what he himself possessed, not only as the divine Son of God, but also as the human Son of Man. Third, spiritual gifts provide the perfect segue to his view of the church.

At this point in the letter, the Anabaptist pastor switches metaphors for the church from Christ's body to that of Christ's bride. This he does in order to emphasize the importance of serving above ruling. Marpeck asserts that the church as the bride of Christ nurtures God's children in sanctification. "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ desires and expects the mother, the bride of Christ and sanctified by Christ, to nourish, raise, and preserve the children for the Father in all sanctification, adornment, and ornament."<sup>40</sup> This "housekeeping," as Marpeck refers to it, is demanded of Christ's disciples as children of Christ's bride. Thus, the church and its members are to humble themselves in service. To serve, rather than rule, is to imitate Christ, to do as he did "in the time of His human life." Marpeck adds that those who serve out of pride, and those who refuse to serve, relate to Christ as the unbelieving world does, seeking to rule and not serve. In seeking to rule rather than serve, one imitates the devil and the outcast angels. To follow Jesus Christ is to humble oneself and serve others, not rule over others.

To understand God's purpose for the church, one must see Christ in the humility of his humanity. For the church to fulfill its calling to serve means being adorned with the same garments as Christ himself. It is with these "treasures, gems, and ornaments, the fullness of grace and truth, with which He Himself has adorned the temple of His body . . ." <sup>41</sup> Marpeck explains that this adornment refers to the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the same virtues and gifts with which the Father "clad" the Son. Thus, as Christ's fellow priests, his people should be "clad" with the same clothes as Christ himself. The Anabaptist leader argues that these virtues and gifts are more splendid than the garments of the priests in the Old Testament. However, he adds one crucial point: the means by which these virtues are developed in the believer occurs through tribulation. Through

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<sup>40</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 442-43.

<sup>41</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 444.

the fire of suffering the believer is purified, cleansed, and made constant.<sup>42</sup> Only through the tribulation of the cross does God write the commandments of Christ on the broken hearts of Christ's disciples. Consequently, one is not adorned with earthly gold, but with spiritual gold by the finger of God on the human heart, so that it will endure forever.

Humility is how we see Christ the Son of Man adorned; we do not see his innate eternal, preexistent heavenly glory, but his adornment of the Spirit by God the Father during his earthly life. Though the eternal Son of God possessed these virtues inherently as God, it is in the course of history that we see the Father clothe Jesus the Son of Man with these virtues through the Holy Spirit. It is crucial that the identical virtues that clothed Jesus Christ should also clothe his followers, involving the same agency and the same process: from God the Father by the agency of the Holy Spirit through the process of tribulation. As a result, the members of the church serve having been clothed with Christ's virtues, i.e., the fruit of the Spirit: "love, faith, hope, patience, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, kindness, gentleness, purity, etc."<sup>43</sup> This should be the church's character, formed by the triune God based upon Christ's humanity.

Marpeck next specifically highlights two of these virtues: holiness and patience. Holiness begins with understanding that our "apparel is justification and chastisement: it is the grace of our heavenly Father, who does not allow His own to appear in the shame of nakedness."<sup>44</sup> He explains that we are to keep "our priestly garments" clean and unsoiled so that we not be ashamed by having them removed from us. Since everything about us belongs to the priestly office and the temple of God in which he dwells, everything about us should be holy. Note that for Marpeck, justification is not used strictly in the forensic sense of Luther's thought, but in a broader sense that would include a transformational sense in addition to the legal sense. He includes it with "chastisement," which would refer to

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<sup>42</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 445.

<sup>43</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 445.

<sup>44</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 445.

the process of purging sin through suffering and affliction.<sup>45</sup> This brings the focus back to the importance of holiness in the church.

Marpeck argues strongly that no priest serving in the temple is ever justified in using unholy utensils; to use an unholy instrument brings disastrous consequences. “Whenever so-called Christians do use unclean utensils, and it happens today, God’s anger flares.”<sup>46</sup> Marpeck indicates that once unholy utensils are used, the Holy Spirit withdraws his gifts from the church, leaving the people terribly damaged. He indicates that such was happening in the churches in his day. One would presume he is thinking of both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches since he references the deception that was occurring “with the figurative treasures, temple, and priests.” Marpeck adds “In and for His wrath, God uses such unclean and unholy vessels outside of the house. But in the house and temple of the Father, our High Priest uses only pure, holy vessels in all holiness.”<sup>47</sup> What “utensils” is Marpeck referencing? Based on where his argument takes him next, it is likely a reference to the use of the sword and the practice of coercing faith that is used by both the Protestant princes and the Catholic emperor. The historical context of the Schmalkald War certainly fits this scenario. The sword is for the civil government—it is what God uses outside the church—but not for the church. The holy “utensils” used by the church are the fruit of the Spirit, the very character of Christ himself: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, patience, and self-control. Holiness means the true church of Christ serves as Jesus did; it does not seek to rule, as the world outside the church seeks to do.

Not only should holiness be the attire of the church, but patience should be the fruit of such holiness. Indeed, patience is the ark of the new covenant. “The ark or coffer of the new covenant or testament is the Christ and the patience of faithful saints, who are prepared for the Father’s

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<sup>45</sup>Marpeck most likely heard the preaching, and read the writings, of Leonhard Schiemer during December 1527 to January 1528. It seems highly likely that Marpeck was influenced by Schiemer, hence Schiemer’s inclusion in the “Marpeck Circle” of *Das Kunstbuch*. For Schiemer, the suffering of Christ’s cross inwardly is God’s means of purging sin from the believer to form a pure love for God alone. See Leonhard Schiemer, “Letter to the Church of God at Rattenberg, Written in 1527. Found in the Scripture of the Old and New Testament is the three-fold grace (as it is called),” in *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*, trans. Walter Klaassen, Frank Friesen, and Werner O. Packull, ed. C. Arnold Snyder, vol. 10, *Classics of the Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press), 76.

<sup>46</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 446.

<sup>47</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 446.

praise in all patience.<sup>48</sup> Patience is the only way to guard and maintain the treasures of Christ. Marpeck seems to make an application in light of the then contemporary Schmalkald War. Though both the forces of Charles V and the German princes are battling to determine which faith will be the faith of the empire, Marpeck faults them both for completely missing Jesus Christ and the purpose of his coming in the flesh. They sought to impose faith; however, such a policy can never achieve its goal. Marpeck contends that impatience actually destroys the ark of the covenant—it does not open the ark’s treasure for humanity’s benefit and salvation, but rather, “all the treasures of our temple, that is, of our hearts, are lost, pillaged, and stolen, and the temple of God is destroyed and broken down.”<sup>49</sup> Comparing the Holy Roman emperor and the German princes (and their respective forces) to Philistines, these worldly forces have no place for patience: “The ark of the New Testament is not compatible with the Philistines, I mean the world. The impatience of the Philistines opposes the true patience of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Those who think they are fighting for the Christian faith are actually fighting against Christ.

Referencing 1 Samuel 6, Marpeck summarizes what was happening in this battle between the Catholic emperor and the Lutheran princes. Because the ark of the New Testament is always accompanied by tribulation, both groups rejected the ark of God and sent it away since they want nothing to do with the affliction of Christ’s cross. As Marpeck states it, “In their secret parts, the tribulation of Christ is a plague and a shame to them.”<sup>51</sup> Despite appearances to the contrary, many who allegedly accept the Gospel show themselves impatient because they refuse to accept the suffering that the Gospel truly brings; they want Christ’s glory, but not his humility. Thus, these “Philistines” send the ark away, refusing to trust Christ’s way, but instead they trust in human power, seeking to coerce the faith of the populace. Such a course of action is contrary to Christ, who does not don armor and sword to draw people to himself. In their rejection of the way of Christ, those who seek to enforce faith do not realize that they are actually destroying the people’s faith. Thus, “all who support a human, forcibly imposed faith and all who claim the Word of faith, but who trust and depend upon human coercion and power; like Peter, they

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<sup>48</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 446.

<sup>49</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 446-47.

<sup>50</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 448.

<sup>51</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 448.

will be driven to a denial.”<sup>52</sup> To use arms to impose faith is to know Christ only after the flesh, only being concerned with temporal aid and saving earthly life and property. Such an approach knows nothing of the Holy Spirit’s gifts and treasures. In fact, they are like Judas who betray Christ “for the price of shame.” What motivates the enforcers of faith? Envy, hatred, and vain honor. These are not the treasures of the ark of Christ’s new covenant. Those who hold to an enforced faith cannot produce true Christian fruit.<sup>53</sup> Marpeck was perceptive; he saw only too well the reality of impatience with Christ’s way. Both emperor and princes completely missed the point of Christ’s incarnation. Their faulty Christology led to their downfall.

What have the teachers of the coerced faith to show for themselves? According to Marpeck, nothing of value. Indeed, they are teachers appointed by violence for carnal gain, operating under the protection of men, having stolen their teachings (“human sophistry of Scripture”) from stagnant water to build churches with crumbling mortar.<sup>54</sup> The result is buildings that collapse, destroyed by the very violence that built these churches in the first place. This is quite an indictment. The current situation, as Marpeck viewed it, was that these crumbling edifices were failing because of God’s judgment on them. The Holy Spirit has judged their unbelief and cast them down with the righteousness of Christ. However, the true church should not worry, for “all the household furnishings of God, the treasures, virtues, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, are safely kept and locked away from the enemies of God.”<sup>55</sup> The world’s violence and aggression can never destroy the ark, which is the patience of Christ. Drawing on Hebrews 10:35-37 Marpeck encourages his readers to arm their souls with patience in order to preserve the treasures of the ark.

Because the Holy Spirit safely preserves Christ’s treasures, the church is prepared to serve in such a way that the kingdom of God truly expands. As Marpeck explains, “Therefore, all external service of Christ, and of those who belong to Him in the time of this mortal life, serves and prepares the way for the Holy Spirit.”<sup>56</sup> These externals include preaching the Gospel, teaching, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, foot washing, miracles, and church discipline. All of these things prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to do

<sup>52</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 448-49.

<sup>53</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 450.

<sup>54</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 452.

<sup>55</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 446.

<sup>56</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 453.

his work. According to Marpeck, both the preparation for the Spirit and the Spirit's work result from Christ's humiliation. First, "In the time of His mortal life, Christ did not rule; He served. Thus, He sent His own to serve, not to rule. Man is to be served by Christ and His own, and man is to be prepared for the Holy Spirit"<sup>57</sup> The externals of preaching, teaching, baptism, Supper, and church discipline are the means of preparing people for the Holy Spirit: "But wherever this service of Christ is not carried out in all its provisions, there the Holy Spirit cannot do His work."<sup>58</sup> Contrary to what some believe, namely the Spiritualists, the external practices of the church are essential as they provide the preparatory tools the Holy Spirit uses to bring the truth of the Gospel to a person inwardly. These things are also a Christ-commanded service. As these are done according to Jesus's instruction, "the Holy Spirit, as true God with Father and Son, can move where He will, namely, in those whom the Father draws to Christ, to the same apostolic church and bodily service, preaching and teaching, baptism, foot washing, and the Lord's Supper."<sup>59</sup> The Spirit works through these externals of the apostolic church to regenerate those who have submitted to Christ in faith. As the true church faithfully carries out its service as Christ commanded, it "prepares, cultivates, fertilizes and, as God's helper, breaks again the hearts of men."<sup>60</sup> Referencing 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, Marpeck states the church plants the seed of the word of truth within the heart where it is believed, then watered with baptism. As the church members serve, the Spirit works through the external service of the church to increase and grow the church as He wills.<sup>61</sup> The mission of the church is accomplished as it takes the Gospel to all peoples. Thus, the externals of the church also serve an evangelistic role. Note that the essential element is the connection to Christ's humanity and humiliation. The apostolic church must practice the outward elements of service to prepare the human heart for the Spirit's regenerating work, resulting in the growth of the church and expansion of Christ's kingdom. The foundation, then, for the church's mission and growth is the humanity and humility of Christ. Christ came to serve, not rule; therefore, his servants are to serve, not rule. Appropriately, the church's mission and evangelism are based on Christ's own mission as he took on human flesh to save all who believe

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<sup>57</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 454.

<sup>58</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 454.

<sup>59</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 454.

<sup>60</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 454-55.

<sup>61</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 455.

in him. His mission is our mission; therefore, it is proper that his people carry out that mission in the same manner that Christ did.

Writing in the context of Catholic and Protestant forces opposing one another in armed conflict in order to enforce the faith, Marpeck points out that both err regarding the true church. A coerced faith is no faith at all. An external, coerced faith deceives people into thinking that Christ is found “here or there,” that is, with whichever group has the power to enforce their religion. However, since “the earthly and true service of Christ did not come into force in the hearts of the apostles without the moving of the Holy Spirit, how can the forced and coerced faith, or the faith based on the old custom, stand before God?”<sup>62</sup> In a word, it cannot. The way of Jesus Christ was not coercion, but humble service. Christ came not in glory, but in humiliation. Therefore, the way of the church in this world is serving not ruling, humility not glory. Glory comes at Jesus’s return; now is the time of humiliation and service.

### PILGRIM MARPECK’S CHRISTOLOGY

Pilgrim Marpeck did not write a systematic theology. His writings are occasional and contained an assumed theology in addressing particular theological, ecclesiastical, and inter-personal issues. It will help to draw out the theology inherent in Marpeck’s writings to present his Christology in more systematic terms. While the primary source will be “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” other works will be consulted for added depth and clarification.

#### God as Trinity

As the summary above indicates, Pilgrim Marpeck focused heavily on the humanity of Jesus Christ in his incarnation. It bears repeating that Marpeck wrote in trinitarian categories with Christ’s incarnation serving as the hermeneutical key to Scripture.<sup>63</sup> While Marpeck’s hermeneutical key may be the incarnate Christ, the belief in God as Trinity undergirds it. Marpeck develops several pastoral and theological insights, and in doing so he demonstrates the foundational importance of God as Trinity for all of them. Marpeck is a pastor and church leader, not a university professor. Thus, congregations and individuals comprise his audience. Consequently, Marpeck’s writing about the triune God is not academic or speculative.

<sup>62</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 456.

<sup>63</sup>Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 19.

He is not concerned to expound on the inter-Trinitarian relationships, nor does he make any distinction between the imminent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Instead, he assumes historical orthodoxy regarding the Trinity in order to explain the Christian faith and the ministry of the church. In doing so, Marpeck provides an outstanding example of pastoral theology which relates the triune God to the everyday life and ministry of the church.

One does not get far into the letter to discover the importance of trinitarian orthodoxy. Christ, the Lord himself, is the treasure in whom are “hidden all the treasures of the secret will and pleasure of the Father,” thus revealing the Father. Alluding to John 1:18, Marpeck notes that Father and Son are mutually glorified as Christ the Son reveals the Father and the Father reveals that “Christ is the Son of the living God.”<sup>64</sup> Not only in revelation about God and Christ, but also for the believer’s security in the midst of a hostile world, the “faithful have their dwelling and safety in the temple of Christ’s body. Thus, the Father and the Son, after the manner of deity, have their dwelling in the hearts of all the faithful through the action of the Spirit.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the hearts of “all the faithful ascended with Him and their hearts were made temples and dwellings of God, in which God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live, govern, and reign in righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, and truth, from now until eternity.”<sup>66</sup> The triune God is not distant or abstract, but dwells among believers as they dwell in Christ. The indwelling Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are actively ruling, transforming, and working through the disciple. Marpeck states that since no one can call Christ “Lord” except by the Holy Spirit and one cannot do the Father’s will apart from the Son, it “follows that those who are in Christ do not themselves live, but Christ lives in them (Gal. 2:[20]).”<sup>67</sup> Note the way Marpeck describes the Spirit’s work. “Without the artistry and teaching of the Holy Spirit, who pours out the love, which is God, into the hearts of all the faithful, which surpasses all reason and understanding, everything is in vain.”<sup>68</sup> Such artistry, Marpeck explains, comes from the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and Son, bearing witness to Father and Son in the heart of the believer.

Furthermore, all of the gifts and treasures that adorn the new temple of

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<sup>64</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 429 and 435.

<sup>65</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 435.

<sup>66</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 436.

<sup>67</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 457.

<sup>68</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 458.

Christ's body are given to Christ the Son and his fellow priests (the faithful) by the Father through the working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>69</sup> This temple is cleansed and purified by the blood of Christ, and the "washing, cleansing, and purifying in baptism are the basis of faith in the forgiveness of sins."<sup>70</sup> Marpeck adds that this bears witness to belief in the Holy Spirit and the Father's truth. Thus, the establishment of the new covenant, with Christ serving as High Priest, is founded on the reality of the triune God. What follows is that the true church is not simply the place where the externals of the Christian faith are practiced, but where they are practiced according to Christ's instructions and example along with the Holy Spirit's inner witness. Thus, the church must be indwelt and empowered by the triune God, which is essential for the church's identity and service.

Obviously, much more could be written about Marpeck's understanding of the Trinity, but a few key points need to be highlighted. First, he is fully orthodox in his understanding of God. Marpeck's understanding of the Trinity is in full compliance with the ancient creeds and with the Catholic and Protestant churches. Second, Marpeck's language is clearly biblical; he utilizes clear and exact biblical language in his references to God as triune. Third, Marpeck's focus is more pastoral than academic. This is not to suggest his understanding is shallow—it certainly is not. As a pastor writing occasional letters to address needs of churches and individuals, his focus is on the church and its needs. In his pastoral theology, Marpeck presents the triune God as essential and active. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together to reveal God, to prove salvation, to indwell the believer and the church, to give security, to empower his people and church to remain faithful, and to gift the church with the treasures of Christ to serve as Christ served. For Marpeck, the doctrine of the Trinity was not a doctrine that made God unrelatable, difficult to comprehend, or distant, but a doctrine showing that God is active, near to hand—indeed indwelling church and individual—and very relatable to believers.

### **The Deity of Christ**

Marpeck's trinitarianism leads him to the heart of his theology: Christology. This in itself is not out of the ordinary, for many of the sixteenth century reformers did the same, including Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli. What is different about Marpeck, though, is the intense

<sup>69</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 445.

<sup>70</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 445.

focus he placed on the incarnation of Christ. Though Marpeck focuses on Christ's incarnation, his Christology is fully orthodox and certainly affirms the Christology of the creeds. For example, in "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," in pointing out the mutual revealing of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, Marpeck affirms that "Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God."<sup>71</sup> As Marpeck describes Christ as the Father's gift to us, he affirms that Jesus is the "same Lord, King, and true God" who has given himself with all his treasures in his work of atonement. Though one may wish for Marpeck to expound on these statements of Christ's deity, it is enough for his purposes simply to state it as the underlying reality that makes both revelation and the atonement possible. Furthermore, following his descent into hell, Christ himself took back his life by means of his glory, dominion, and power. Marpeck adds that Christ, as the true light, broke the power of darkness and returned to life by his own power. Having taken his life back, "He ascended, and seated Himself to the right of the majesty of God the Father and in the glorification of the Father, with that eternal, preexistent glory which He had with the Father before the foundations of the world were laid."<sup>72</sup> If Marpeck's Christology were not orthodox, he would not have affirmed Christ's preexistence with the Father, or his power to take his life back.

In a later letter, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," Marpeck offers insights into Christ's humanity and some advice for the Christian life. Marpeck begins with a brief explanation of Christ's humanity, focusing on Christ as the Son of Man whose humanity "is taken up into God the Father and God the Father into the Son, who from eternity has been one essence, Spirit, and God."<sup>73</sup> Marpeck then explains that in Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily which leads directly to believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, no one can say anything unless Christ, as Son of God and Son of Man, works and rules in them. Though Marpeck is addressing the meaning of Christ's humanity for the Christian life, his affirmation that Jesus Christ is both Son of God and one essence with God is clear. Pilgrim Marpeck's Christology is fully orthodox, affirming the Son's deity, his oneness with the Father (and the Spirit), his preexistence with the Father (and the Spirit), and his distinction in terms of person from the Father (and the Spirit). Marpeck may have focused his

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<sup>71</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 429.

<sup>72</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 433-34.

<sup>73</sup>Pilgrim Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, 508.

attention on Christ's humanity, but he clearly affirmed Christ's deity along orthodox lines.

### The Humanity and Work of Christ

Marpeck's emphasis on the humanity of Christ stands as one of his most significant theological traits, highlighting Christ's work along with it. Before dealing with Christ's work, it must be noted that Marpeck is very clear and precise about the nature of Christ's humanity. He is insistent that Christ's human flesh must be the same as all of humanity. Marpeck unwaveringly rejects the idea of Christ's "Celestial Flesh" as espoused by Melchior Hoffman and others. Marpeck is adamant that Jesus Christ's flesh is the same as our human flesh. Early on "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," the Anabaptist leader states that Christ "was born to the Father from the race of man, for the sake of man."<sup>74</sup> A few pages later, he affirms that Christ "was born of the virgin from the generation of the fathers."<sup>75</sup> Both phrases, "from the race of man" and "from the generation of the fathers," are intended to affirm that Jesus's body was of the same kind as every other human being. Marpeck understands the importance of this for Christ's atonement. "This bread [Christ's body] [is] His broken or prepared flesh and blood, given up for our life. The pure flesh and blood of the virgin Mary prepared His flesh and blood for us, and this heavenly bread, which the Word made flesh, raises us from death to life."<sup>76</sup> Marpeck insists that the body of Christ received its flesh from Mary and from Mary's ancestors; thus, Christ's flesh is not celestial in origin, but earthly. Marpeck is consistent in his conviction that Christ assumed the same flesh as all of humanity. In "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," written eight years after "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," Marpeck proclaims that Jesus Christ is the way, truth, and life "in true humanity by nature and kind born of the generation of men in and of Mary, the pure virgin, a true, pure immutable Man."<sup>77</sup> In terms of Christ's divine nature, he is without beginning and the everlasting God from eternity. But in terms of his human nature, Christ "was not newly created [i.e. of heavenly flesh] but was born of pre-created flesh of human generation in the body of Mary."<sup>78</sup> To answer the objection that Christ's humanity

<sup>74</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 428.

<sup>75</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 431.

<sup>76</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 447.

<sup>77</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," 508.

<sup>78</sup>Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's *Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld's Judgment*," 126.

requires a human father, Marpeck responds that just as the first, figurative Adam had no father but God who created him and the lifeless earth for a mother, so the essential, last Adam has no Father but God and the “earth of the living, that is, human creaturely generation” in the person of Mary as his mother.<sup>79</sup>

Marpeck also understands that Christ’s having the same flesh as the rest of humanity is essential for our salvation. He takes issue with Caspar Schwenckfeld’s view of Christ’s heavenly flesh, overall, and about the idea that Christ has cast aside his humanity since he has finished his earthly work. Marpeck sees serious implications regarding salvation in Schwenckfeld’s position.

In the above citations Schwenckfeld attests clearly that the flesh of Christ was not creaturely before his death. Therefore, it could not be called “a new creature” after his resurrection since it never was one before his death. The flesh that died with Christ was also raised with him; it was restored and transfigured and glorified—it and none other. It has a relationship with the mortal flesh of all other Christians; through Christ it is and will be restored and be a new creature in the sense of the text which was quoted [Heb. 1]. Otherwise, it would follow that God did not take our old, mortal flesh as the medium of restoration. It means that the same flesh was not brought to life for everlasting glory or suffering but that God created a new and different flesh. That is a vast, terrible, and destructive error.<sup>80</sup>

He adds that it is a great comfort for the believer to know our human flesh, which is Christ’s humanity, now sits at the Father’s right hand. Though he does not quote Gregory of Nazianzus, Marpeck is certainly in line with Gregory’s famous statement, “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.”<sup>81</sup> It is the very earthly flesh of humanity that is united to the Godhead in Christ, and as a result, is honored in Christ. Consequently,

<sup>79</sup>Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck’s *Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s Judgment*,” 126.

<sup>80</sup>Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck’s *Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s Judgment*,” 124-25.

<sup>81</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius (Ep. CI),” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (1894; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 440.

Jesus Christ is honored as Son of God and as Son of Man.<sup>82</sup> To summarize, Marpeck understands the importance of Christ's physical flesh being of the exact nature as the rest of humanity. If his flesh is different, as is the case with the "Celestial Flesh" idea, then Christ is not one with us, cannot atone for human sin, and is not qualified to be our Savior. Furthermore, Christ could not serve as our example, for we could not follow one whose humanity is not like ours. Thus, human salvation, reconciliation with God, and a life of discipleship hinges on Christ's sharing our human nature.

Having clarified the nature of Christ's humanity, Marpeck integrally links Christ's work to his humanity. Marpeck understood that, while Christ may be glorified now that he has been resurrected and has ascended to the Father's right hand, we have not yet experienced this. We still live in the "in between," in the present world dominated by sin and opposition to Christ. Because of this, the pattern for the believer and for Christ's church is not Christ in glory, but Christ in humility during his incarnation. Marpeck lists several reasons for the importance of Christ's humanity. First, without Christ's coming in the flesh, there is no revelation of the Father. Marpeck insists that "without the revelation of the Son no creature in heaven or on earth can recognize the Father's work (Matt. 11; John 5). . . . For that reason the Son assumed human nature, to do human, bodily works—speaking words and doing deeds."<sup>83</sup> Seeing Jesus physically, being the embodiment of the Godhead in human form, watching him work miracles and interact with people, and hearing him speak audibly was the only certain way of revealing the Father.

Second, the Son of God had to assume human flesh to accomplish the other major purpose: "He was born to the Father [as Son of Man] from the race of man, for the sake of man. He was born to liberate man from the power of the devil, sin, death, and hell, that is, from the guilt of Adam into which all men have come."<sup>84</sup> In describing Christ's atoning work, Marpeck utilizes both substitution language and victory language. He asserts that the Father "has given Him [Christ] for the sake of man, and delivered Him into the suffering and pain of death, even to condemnation,

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<sup>82</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," 509.

<sup>83</sup>Pilgram Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld's Judgment" in *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and his Circle*, vol. 1, trans. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel, Anabaptist Texts in Translation (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1999), 82. See also, Marpeck, "Concerning the Humility of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 429.

<sup>84</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 429.

as a salvation for men.”<sup>85</sup> Marpeck adds that there would be no need for Christ’s suffering had Adam not sinned, but that once sin entered the picture Christ’s suffering became a necessity for our sakes—clear substitution language. Shortly thereafter, Marpeck explains that the Lord Jesus Christ has “liberated His people from their eternal burden”—clear victory language—by putting “it on His own shoulders and fastened it to the cross.”<sup>86</sup>

Regarding the descent into hell, both motifs of substitution and victory appear. Christ descended into hell to complete his humiliation, remaining “in death and hell until He completely paid, for our sake, the guilt of sin.” In describing the reason for the *descensus ad inferno*, Marpeck explains that the Father had locked the guilt of sin in death and hell. As a result, Christ in his “human poverty” has assumed the responsibility for us, becoming “the payer of the debt, the true warrantor” who descended into the depths of hell with our sins, having no sin of his own.<sup>87</sup> A few lines later, Marpeck describes how Christ victoriously took his life back again in his resurrection. In discussing the difference between the “old treasure” of the law of Moses with the “new treasure” through Christ, Marpeck states that the new treasure came on the cross as “His death and blood, offered up for the remission and forgiveness of sin, fulfilled grace and truth.”<sup>88</sup> Again, there is no missing Marpeck’s use of the language of substitution and sacrifice. There is also no missing his language of victory. Marpeck understood the atoning work of Christ within the traditional historical terms of orthodoxy, using all that Scripture had to offer to explain it. He made use of both satisfaction and *Christus Victor* terms. He did not lock himself into one category or another. Marpeck serves as a good example that substitution and victory belong together for securing salvation. His style of biblicism serves as a model for the task of theology because we meet in Marpeck a pastor who is writing theology for the church.

Not only did Christ’s humanity reveal the Father and make salvation possible, but it defines the Christian life. Christ in his incarnation is the ark of the new covenant that had to be burst open at the cross to give to us God’s treasures. These gifts include the sending of the Holy Spirit, victory over sin and the devil, and the unlocking of the true meaning of

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<sup>85</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 430.

<sup>86</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 431.

<sup>87</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 433.

<sup>88</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 439.

Scripture. All of this “has been revealed and learned first through His holy humanity.”<sup>89</sup> First, Jesus’s life on earth has provided us with the example of how to live life while we await glorification, which is essential as he has chosen us as his ambassadors to serve in this present world. As Christ’s ambassadors, we are to live by the same principles of Jesus himself. This will involve a life of suffering, as was Jesus’s pattern during his incarnation. As Marpeck states, “taking upon ourselves the cross and affliction to which Christ calls us and to follow him in it, that is the narrow gate and the small way (Matt. 7, 10, 16).”<sup>90</sup> The humanity of Christ that makes salvation possible also brings with it the reality that the believer must be condemned with and in Christ.<sup>91</sup> The ark of Christ’s body could bring the blessing of God’s treasures only through Christ’s tribulation; in the same way, Christ’s disciples have to expect that the reception of the new covenant is accompanied by tribulation.<sup>92</sup> Marpeck understands the Christian life in the same terms as other Anabaptists at this time—it a cross-life, a life of suffering and affliction, the same pattern set by Christ’s humanity during his incarnation. Despite the call to a life of the cross, Christ’s humanity has provided the treasures needed to endure the affliction. “He fills His servants with His skill, wisdom, and understanding in order that they may administer in the right manner, according to time, measure, and appointment, His treasures and wealth.”<sup>93</sup> This makes it possible for the disciple to live a holy life, one avoiding sin and anything that would scandalize the name of Christ. The humanity of Christ also provides Christ’s followers to receive spiritual gifts for service. These include the virtues of Christ and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This service and these gifts are to be practiced within the community of the church and for its mission.

Every member of the church is endowed with some giftedness for service. However, this is not simply an individual issue; God’s people can only bear the character of Christ if the church as the mother of believers and as the bride of Christ does her job of nourishing, rearing, and preserving “the Father’s children in all sanctification, adornment, and ornament.”<sup>94</sup> Such “housekeeping” matters, as Marpeck refers to them, are demanded of “the mother and bride of Christ herself,” but must be done through the

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<sup>89</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 435.

<sup>90</sup>Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck’s *Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s Judgment*,” 83.

<sup>91</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 434.

<sup>92</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 448.

<sup>93</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 440.

<sup>94</sup>Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 443.

church members themselves. It is worth noting that Marpeck also views the church as a continuation of Christ's incarnation since the church is the body of Christ on earth. Neal Blough has observed that "Pilgram Marpeck's Trinitarian Christology points to an understanding of the church as 'sacramental,' i.e. a visible manifestation of an invisible reality."<sup>95</sup> Thus, the church should be clad in the same garments as Christ himself, namely, with the virtues and the gifts of the Spirit, because they are all Christ's fellow priests.<sup>96</sup> Also, Christ's mission is now carried out by the church. As Christ carried out the mission as a servant, not a ruler, so the church should emulate Jesus in its mission: serve, not rule, and definitely not coerce faith. Such was the practice of both Protestants and Catholics during Marpeck's time. The church should be adorned as the incarnate Christ was adorned, coming down from heaven and humbling himself, writing the Father's commandments on broken hearts of flesh, adorned with the spiritual gold of love. Likewise, the church should serve in humility, with a purged, purified, and persistent love for God and for others.

## CONCLUSION

Pilgram Marpeck could easily earn the title "Theologian of the Incarnation." As a pastor who is concerned that his congregation live faithfully during the contentious times in which they lived, this Anabaptist pastor effectively charts a theological course that makes this possible. By focusing on the humanity of Christ in his incarnation, and on Christ's humility in accomplishing the triune God's mission, Marpeck establishes a pattern for the Christian faith. The humanity and humility of Christ allows us to embrace a life of discipleship, which includes tribulation and suffering. It also guides us in understanding that the Christian life, lived corporately as the church, is a life of service, not a life of ruling. Serving, not ruling, is what it means to imitate Christ, which is significant for the believer's faithfulness and for the church's mission. Contemporary Christianity would do well to learn and practice this truth.

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<sup>95</sup>Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 245. Blough brings out much more on this point.

<sup>96</sup>Marpeck, "Concerning the Lowliness of Christ," 444.



## THE ANABAPTISTS AND THEIR HERMENEUTIC

Mac Brunson\*

Anabaptism was “born in the bosom of Zwinglianism in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525.”<sup>1</sup> Huldrych Zwingli began his ministry at the Grossmünster in Zurich, under great opposition in 1518. He announced that he would no longer read the prescribed lectionary passages selected for each Sunday but would preach through the Gospel of Matthew straight from the Greek text.<sup>2</sup> Zwingli’s courageous departure from this tradition birthed the genesis of the Swiss Anabaptists. Out of Zwingli’s biblical preaching arose several men who were radically changed and convicted by the Word. In the congregation were young, radical reformers hungry to learn and apply the Scriptures. Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, Simon Stumpf, Andreas Castleberg (Castleberger), and others formed a small group of Bible students. Zwingli introduced them to the Greek New Testament, and they could not get enough of it. In fact, Grebel continued his studies in Greek<sup>3</sup> and clearly emerged as the leader of this circle of rising radicals.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest Anabaptists held such a staunch commitment to the Word of God that no other doctrine seemed to reach the pinnacle to that which they placed on Scripture. It became the foundation of every argument, every sermon, every aspect of their ecclesiology. “Most Anabaptists would never have questioned the reliability of Scripture in any instance.”<sup>5</sup>

On January 21, 1525, in the Zurich home of Felix Manz, a group of men who studied God’s Word together were convicted of the New Testament pattern of believer’s baptism. On that historic day, Conrad Grebel baptized

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<sup>1</sup>Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Waterford, Ireland: CrossReach Publications, 2018), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 82.

<sup>3</sup>William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

<sup>4</sup>Michael G. Baylor, ed., *The Radical Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 262.

<sup>5</sup>Paige Patterson, “What Contemporary Baptists Can Learn from the Anabaptists,” *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. Malcolm Yarnell (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 14.

George Blaurock. Afterwards, Blaurock baptized the others in attendance. That very moment “Anabaptism was born. With this first baptism, the earliest church of the Swiss Brethren was constituted.”<sup>6</sup> As the baptismal waters of affusion flowed, this movement swept over a growing multitude of various classes—priest and pauper, the learned and the ignorant. Each of them longed for the Word of God.

### ANABAPTIST THEOLOGIAN BALTHASAR HÜBMAIER

Balthasar Hübmaier studied under the most celebrated Roman Catholic theologian of the day, Johann Eck, better known as Eck of Ingolstadt. Eck, tall and solidly built, possessed (as one observer put it) the meaty face of a butcher and the lungs of a town crier. Known for his quick wit, overbearing manner, and prodigious memory, he could quote with equal facility from the Bible and the church fathers, as well as the *Sentences and the decretals*. Eck’s chief asset was his win-at-any-cost mentality. He could create diversions, twist opponents’ arguments, even adopt their positions as his own when it suited him.<sup>7</sup>

He held tremendous influence over the thinking and performance of Hübmaier. No doubt Hübmaier’s ability as a formidable debater should be credited to Eck’s investment in him. “It would be quite surprising if he (Eck) had not had a significant influence on Hübmaier’s theological development.”<sup>8</sup> Eck was a student of the *via moderna*. Bergsten states that Hübmaier would have received his training along the same line.<sup>9</sup> Hübmaier exchanged a commitment to use debate to win arguments for a conviction to use the Word to make his arguments after he embraced the evangelical faith. However, he had been extremely effective as a Romanist preacher and theologian. The year 1522 became what Estep calls, “the year of decision.”<sup>10</sup> Of it, he writes,

Sometime before, perhaps more than a year earlier, he [Hübmaier] had begun to study the Scriptures, paying special attention to the Pauline epistles. In June 1522 he

<sup>6</sup>Estep, *Anabaptist Story*, 14.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Massing, *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 360.

<sup>8</sup>Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, ed. W. R. Estep (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 51.

<sup>9</sup>Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 51.

<sup>10</sup>William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 207.

journeyed to Basel, where he made the acquaintance of Erasmus and Glarean, Conrad Grebel's old teacher. . . . After visiting other Swiss cities and noting the progress of the Reformation, he returned to Waldshut, becoming more intent than ever on a study of the New Testament, which was increasingly the source book of his theology.<sup>11</sup>

In the same year he began to attend a Bible study led by Hans Blabhans, a devoted follower of Martin Luther. This growing circle of evangelicals exercised a profound impact on Hübmaier, who had already begun to preach through the Gospel of Luke. Concerning his experiences Hübmaier exclaimed, "Christ was beginning to sprout in me."<sup>12</sup>

Out of this study of Scripture, Hübmaier came to the realization that "the Catholic Church had departed, in doctrine, and practice, from the teachings of the apostles." Hübmaier also came to the conscious knowledge that he needed to be saved "and sought personal salvation from Christ himself, and not from the Church and its sacraments."<sup>13</sup>

In March 1523 Hübmaier would travel to Zurich and meet with Zwingli, where the two would discuss a wide range of theological topics. During these meetings he drew up his first reformatory writings called, "The Eighteen Articles of April 1524." In these articles, designed to engage the clergy in Waldshut, he discussed topics that ranged from the nature of salvation to baptism, as well as who should pay the pastor.<sup>14</sup>

The work of the Reformation in Waldshut expanded. During these days Hübmaier looked for ways to agree with and carry out the work of Zwingli. However, his endeavors would undergo a more radical and expansive change. On Easter Saturday, April 15, 1525, Hübmaier, along with sixty others, was baptized by Wilhelm Reublin; after which Hübmaier then baptized three hundred others over that Easter weekend. After the baptisms, they celebrated what they called "a mass" but was really a simple memorial meal. What actually occurred is that Hübmaier transitioned from the Magisterial Reformers to become a Radical Reformer, founding

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<sup>11</sup>Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 207.

<sup>12</sup>Christof Windhorst, "Balthasar Hübmaier: Professor, Preacher, Politician," in *Profiles of Radical Reformers*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982), 147.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Clay Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier* (1905; repr., Columbia, SC: The Perfect Library, 2020), 28.

<sup>14</sup>Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 208.

within Catholic Austria a region that would be home to the Anabaptists.<sup>15</sup> In the midst of his spiritual transition, he was having to adjust, amend, and adapt personal hermeneutics. Hübmaier followed the rules for a historical, grammatical, contextual method, which later would be called exegetical interpretation, or even a text-driven message.<sup>16</sup> He traversed through various hermeneutical options—from a Roman Catholic, to Magisterial Reformer, to Anabaptist. The conclusion of these hermeneutical jumps led him to assert the Bible as “the only norm for Christian faith and practice.”<sup>17</sup> Something very “Baptistic sounding” resonates with that statement.

### HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

The natural place to begin with the discovery of an Anabaptist hermeneutic would be with their commitment to Scripture. The Anabaptist hermeneutic, whether in the form of apocalyptic gymnastics or a literalism that defied logic, required that their interpretations all ran through Scripture. The mainstream Anabaptists were deeply committed to the Word of God and saw it as the very utterance of God written by Holy Spirit-led men. This assertion does not discount the Magisterial Reformers’ regard for Scripture, rather it simply highlights the Radical Reformers’ commitment to the Word of God. Hübmaier and the Swiss Brethren were suspicious that a formal education clouded the plain simple meaning of Scripture. They believed that the Scriptures were plain, clear, and understandable even to the most uneducated person—“a position also held at various times by Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli early in the Reformation.”<sup>18</sup> While they did not employ the word *inerrant*, “they would have never questioned the reliability of Scripture.”<sup>19</sup>

Within the Reformation no group took more seriously the principle of *sola Scriptura* in matters of doctrine and discipline than did the Anabaptists. In this regard the Reformation stance of the Anabaptists is unequivocal. The authoritative position of the Scriptures among the sixteenth-century

<sup>15</sup>Windhorst, “Hübmaier: Professor, Preacher, Politician,” 150.

<sup>16</sup>Graeme R. Chatfield, *Balthasar Hübmaier and the Clarity of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 213), 111.

<sup>17</sup>John D. Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgrim Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993), 57.

<sup>18</sup>Chatfield, *Hübmaier and the Clarity of Scripture*, 57.

<sup>19</sup>Patterson, “What Contemporary Baptists Can Learn from the Anabaptists,” 14.

Anabaptists was apparent from the beginning. The Bible became and remained for them the supreme judicature by which all human opinions were to be tried.<sup>20</sup>

For Hübmaier, a proper and biblical hermeneutic employed the clear, plain, simple meaning of a passage.<sup>21</sup> He, along with other Anabaptists, saw a difference between their understanding of *sola scriptura* and the way the Magisterial Reformers viewed *sola scriptura*. The Anabaptists believed that Scripture must be “free to challenge all other authorities.”<sup>22</sup> They saw evidence that the Reformers compromised too much with the early church fathers. As Murray contends:

Anabaptist[s] believed *sola Scriptura* meant that Scripture must be free to challenge all authorities . . . . In particular, they were firm that the authority and adequacy of Scripture not be compromised by too much deference to doctrinal beliefs and traditional interpretations.<sup>23</sup>

The Anabaptists were not opposed to studying the early church fathers. In fact, Hübmaier and other Anabaptists commonly quoted them. Their concern, however, was that the Reformers held that the writings of the church fathers were equal in authority to the Scriptures. As Murray explains, “The Reformers referred frequently to patristic interpretations to support their own conclusions. Anabaptists were much less inclined to do so. They quoted from authorities on occasion, but usually with the proviso that patristic opinions were interesting rather than authoritative and not on the level with Scripture.”<sup>24</sup>

Over-emphasizing the authority Anabaptists placed on Scripture is nearly impossible. From the learned to the average uneducated, Anabaptist housewife, they not only believed the Word of God, but they knew it:

An inquisitor rebuked an Anabaptist woman, Claesken, in

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<sup>20</sup>Estep, *Anabaptist Story*, 190.

<sup>21</sup>H. Wayne Pipkin and John Yoder, eds., *Balthasar Hübmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 111-113.

<sup>22</sup>Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>23</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 45.

<sup>24</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 45.

1559 with this question: “Do you know better than the holy fathers fifteen hundred years ago? You should think that you are simple.” Her reply is typical of Anabaptists’ confidence that scholarship, learning, and theological reputation were not the keys to correct hermeneutics: “Though I am simple before men, I am not simple in the knowledge of the Lord. Do you not know that the Lord thanked His Father, that He had hid these things from the wise and prudent, and had revealed them to the simple and unto babes?”<sup>25</sup>

Most Baptists today would have very little reason to argue with the Anabaptists over their high, authoritative view of Scripture. In fact, their high view of the Word of God served as the basis for their hermeneutics, just as the majority of contemporary Baptists acclaim today.

### CONTEXT

The Anabaptists utilized the biblical context of a passage in order to understand and interpret Scripture. Its use proved central to Hübmaier’s hermeneutic:

The Bible also interprets itself in that any passage must be viewed in the context of what precedes and what follows. The crucial passage, if torn out of context, will admit to all kinds of interpretations, but if placed in the light of the context will be quite clear and plain.<sup>26</sup>

Hübmaier cautioned Anabaptists against what he called, “patchwork with Scriptures.” He insisted that they “compare opposing Scriptures and unite both into a whole judgement.”<sup>27</sup> This contention was not only Hübmaier’s understanding and practice; Dirk Philips also grasped this hermeneutic principle—that is, that a text had to be understood in its immediate context, but also in the context of the Scripture as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

The Magisterial Reformers followed a different path, all the while claiming they adhered to interpreting Scripture in its appropriate context.

<sup>25</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 46-47.

<sup>26</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 61.

<sup>27</sup>Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 428.

<sup>28</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 61.

However, they followed a more Augustinian process of “combining theology and biblical interpretation . . . . They argued Scripture must be understood in light of certain fundamental doctrines.”<sup>29</sup> The Anabaptists rejected this hermeneutic because to them, it set doctrine above Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Once again, like their concern over the early church fathers, the Anabaptists were very cautious that no human hand taint the Scriptures.

## GRAMMAR

The Anabaptist commitment to biblical context did not mean they did not labor with interpreting texts. In his work on the Eucharist, *Einfältiger*, which means “simple,” Hübmaier proposed several hermeneutical principles. In it, he rejected his Roman Catholic hermeneutic, even the Reformed interpretation, for a uniquely, Anabaptist understanding. For Hübmaier the word *sacrament* became redefined, not as salvific but as an expression of commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. He viewed baptism and the Lord’s Supper “not [as] means of grace but [as] responses to grace.”<sup>31</sup> In his argument for the bread and the wine to be seen as elements and not sacerdotal, he turned to the grammar of the little verb *est* (that is, “is”). The argument Hübmaier addressed dealt with the phrase “this is My body,” (cf. Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24).

Andreas Karlstadt, influenced by his mysticism, claimed that “this is My body” referred not to the bread, but to Jesus himself.<sup>32</sup> Zwingli, according to Hübmaier, claimed that this statement “signifies” Christ’s body.<sup>33</sup> Here, the Anabaptist theologian concerns himself with the tropological exegesis of the passage. He interpreted “this is My body” to mean that the bread refers to the body of Christ in memory, not in some reality. He also stated that the body of Christ is positioned at the right hand of the Father, therefore he could not reside in the broken bread. Hübmaier contended that the bread was simply bread, and the wine was simply wine.<sup>34</sup>

Hübmaier used three hermeneutical principles in his argument. His first principle taught that one must “interpret an obscure passage in light

<sup>29</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 47.

<sup>30</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 47.

<sup>31</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 48.

<sup>32</sup>Andreas Karlstadt followed Martin Luther’s reformation for a period of time, then became an Anabaptist. He left Anabaptism and went back to the Magisterial Reformers. He was mystical, or a Spiritualist, which is where Hübmaier parted with him. This difference can be seen in Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 192-195.

<sup>33</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 59.

<sup>34</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 58-59.

of a plain one.”<sup>35</sup> Luke and Paul both expressed Jesus’s words with the phrase, “Do this in remembrance of me,” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). On this principle he based his position that the bread and wine simply serve as a remembrance.

Hübmaier’s second principle gets to the issue of the syntactical or structural exegesis of the text. It asserted that “Preceding words should be understood in relation to those that follow them.”<sup>36</sup> The bread could only be Christ’s body in symbol because it—the bread—was not crucified for us. His third hermeneutical principle suggests that challenging texts should be compared to texts with similar forms of speech.<sup>37</sup>

### TEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hübmaier demonstrated his grasp of a textual hermeneutic, that is, that the text dictates the interpretation. In his defense, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, he deals with Mark 1:4-5:

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Hübmaier addressed two theological beliefs that this text teaches. He identified two principal verbs—baptízwn and khrússwn—which describe the heart of the pericope. He stated in his argument:

Here the opponent cries, “Do you see that here baptism precedes preaching?” Answer: *Deo gratie*. Do you also see that preaching is followed by baptism? For Luke says, “And they all let themselves be baptized by him [Luke 3:21].” Away with quarreling for ourselves, so that we do not confuse anybody with strange glosses. It is the following: John was in the wilderness and baptized with water, undoubtedly

<sup>35</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 59.

<sup>36</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 59.

<sup>37</sup>Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 59. Hübmaier lists five criticisms of the Anabaptists position and then refutes them by the use of his hermeneutical principles. Rempel walks the reader through each one of these and shows how Hübmaier resolves the issue with these hermeneutical principles.

nobody but those to whom he had preached beforehand and led to the recognition of their sins. Set the above-mentioned passages alongside this passage as one must do for the interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>38</sup>

He demonstrated not only a textual hermeneutic, but a grasp of the textual and the contextual when he used Matthew 21:25 in the same argument: “Whence was the baptism of John?’ Christ asked the high priests. ‘Was it from God, or from men?’” Here, Hübmaier confronted the issue of the word, *baptism*, with the Reformers. Hübmaier did not contest that the meaning referred to the water baptism of John, but that was not the question Jesus asked. “He, Christ, only wants to know whether John baptized—yes, in water—by the command of God or of men. There the high scholars got stuck and were unable to answer. Therefore, let this passage stay with its simple meaning as long as neither the preceding nor succeeding words compel or lead us differently.”<sup>39</sup>

## LANGUAGES

For Hübmaier, knowledge of the biblical languages proved extremely important. Trained in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he used the languages. One such evidence of this linguistic hermeneutic lay in the agreement between Luther and Hübmaier on Matthew 16:16-19. They both agreed on the masculine singular of Pétros for the proper noun Peter used with the feminine singular pétra for *rock*. This interpretation gives the understanding of the words of Christ to mean that Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ, “not that Peter himself, constituted the antecedent of ‘rock.’”<sup>40</sup> Kirk MacGregor goes on to say, “Luther would concur with the radical’s following exegesis of the 1516 *Greek New Testament*: Christ says, ‘You are Peter, and on this rock (in other words, that which you confess) I will build my church’ . . . the Christian church [is] built . . . on the oral confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>41</sup>

He further used the language of the New Testament and the verb tense in this passage from Matthew 16:19, where Jesus stated, “I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Hübmaier sees a difference in the

<sup>38</sup>Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 109.

<sup>39</sup>Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 114.

<sup>40</sup>Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Central European Synthesis of Radical and Magisterial Reform* (New York: University Press of America, 2006), 28-29.

<sup>41</sup>MacGregor, *Central European Synthesis*, 29.

singular use of “you” and the plural use of the pronoun in this passage. Of Hübmaier’s view, Mabry wrote,

The use of the singular “you” referred to the unity of the church, in the sense that all members constitute the one “you.” When Christ used the “you” in the plural sense, it meant for Hübmaier all of the many people who were to be in this unity. The point is, that for Hübmaier, the “you” was always to be understood in this particular passage as referring to the whole church.<sup>42</sup>

In his treatise, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, Hübmaier states his position on languages and his caution, “Although I do not reject tongues or languages for the exposition of dark passages, still for sun-clear words one needs neither tongues nor lungs.”<sup>43</sup>

Believer’s baptism is the primary, outstanding distinctive most people consider when they think of the Anabaptists. However, as this examination has demonstrated, hermeneutics was also a notable contribution of these radical expositors.

### CHRISTOCENTRIC HERMENEUTIC

For the Anabaptists, Christ occupied the center of everything. He especially was positioned at the center of the Christian life, as well as the center of Scripture, itself. Because Jesus was the center of their lives, community, and interpretation, many Anabaptists employed a Christocentric hermeneutic. Like nearly everything else, their use of such a hermeneutic was misunderstood by the Reformers. This misunderstanding was not all the fault of the Magisterial Reformers, because agreement varied among the Anabaptists themselves as to what they meant by a Christocentric hermeneutic.

The Anabaptists held the life of Christ as an example to follow, which was critical for their understanding of Scripture. As Murray described of their Christocentric hermeneutic, “Not only must the historical Jesus be central to the text, but the Christ of faith must be central to the life-experience of the interpreter.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Eddie Mabry, *Balthasar Hübmaier’s Doctrine of the Church* (New York: University Press of America, 1994), 78.

<sup>43</sup>Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 99.

<sup>44</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 79.

This Christocentric hermeneutic was called by the Reformers a literalistic view of Scripture, or a legalistic view of Jesus's teachings. However, the Anabaptists saw in Christ's teaching, suffering, and ministry the key not only to how they were to live the Christian life, but the way they were to interpret Scripture. Jesus was fundamental, not only for salvation but for living out their salvation; therefore, the living Word of God became the means for interpreting the written Word of God. When examining their background, the fact that they were being hunted, arrested, tried, and executed by everyone who called themselves by the name Christian makes it understandable that they would find in Jesus everything for their faith, practice, and interpretation.

Both groups, the Magisterial Reformers and the Radical Reformers, would agree that Jesus Christ was the supreme revelation of God to mankind. The Reformers, however, emphasized Jesus in the doctrines of salvation and justification, that is, soteriologically. The Anabaptists radically differed in the focus of their hermeneutic. They were tied more to the humanity of Jesus. Luther said:

Now because much more depends upon the word than upon the works and deeds of Christ, and because if we had to do without one or the other, it would be better to lack the works and the history than the words and the doctrine, it is fair to give the highest praise to those books which deal more with the doctrine and the words of the Lord Christ.<sup>45</sup>

The Anabaptists would assess that statement as diminishing Jesus and His life. "They feared the Reformers had lost sight of Jesus as a person and were left only with a theological principle."<sup>46</sup>

Anabaptist hermeneutics have been downgraded at best, and ignored in the least, over the past five-hundred years of preaching history. For a multiplicity of reasons, Anabaptists have been relegated to the church ash heap and forgotten by most. However, they had a hermeneutic much like the Reformers—grammatical, linguistical, and contextual. At times in their short history, they rivaled the greatest theological minds of their day. After Hübmaier and Zwingli came into fierce disagreement over baptism, "Zwingli, in replying to Hübmaier's treatise on Infant Baptism,

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<sup>45</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther* (London: Collins, 1972), 131.

<sup>46</sup>Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85.

uses many hard words as usual, but shows great respect for his abilities. He calls Hübmaier, 'that distinguished Doctor,' and admits in a passage that he has a greater faculty for speaking than himself.<sup>47</sup>

These hermeneutical principles have found their way into the study life of most Southern Baptist preachers. One by one we find Baptist preachers marked by the Anabaptist hermeneutic, not even realizing from where their principles of interpretation came or to whom they owe thanks.

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<sup>47</sup>John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (1893; repr., Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 130.





## **“OUR GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP”: The Presidential Inaugural Address of Robert E. Naylor**

W. Madison Grace II\*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Robert Andrew Baker’s history of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, *Tell the Generations Following*, relates much about its founding, difficulties, and growth.<sup>1</sup> Baker covers the history of the Seminary through 1983, but makes claims about the Southern Baptist Convention’s Seminary in Fort Worth that remain accurate years later. One of those claims is found in the title of the chapter on the years under Naylor’s presidency, “Unprecedented Growth.” This period of Southwestern Seminary’s history is one of great growth numerically, financially, educationally, and spiritually.

The birth of the Seminary in 1908 and the birth of its fifth President came not far apart. Born January 24, 1909, in Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Robert Ernest Naylor was a man whose calling and determined work led him to graduate college and matriculate at the Seminary by the age of 19, having received special permission to enter at such a young age. He would go on to pastor and lead a variety of churches, including Fort Worth’s own Travis Avenue Baptist Church. Having served on the Board of Trustees of Southwestern Seminary when the search committee was seeking a candidate, the Board looked to Naylor to fill the role leading Texas’s Baptist Seminary into the future.

For twenty years Naylor cast his vision for the Seminary and its three schools, leading to great growth in all areas. For instance, the teaching faculty grew from 53 employees to 125 by the end of his tenure in 1978. Similarly, the budget grew from \$1,349,846 to \$6,396,434; all salaries at the institution quadrupled; buildings were built and remodeled; the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 1908–1983* (rev. Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2020).

endowment grew; and most of all, student enrollment increased from 2,395 students to 4,136. This work was accomplished with many across the campus, including John Earl Seelig, Jesse James Northcut, Huber Leland Drumright, John Paul Newport, and Florence M. "Floy" Barnard. But the visionary leadership and strong work ethic of Robert Naylor arguably vaulted Southwestern Seminary forward during this time.

At the end of his career Naylor would summarize the two decades of his work as aimed at his commitment, with the trustees, to "faithfully follow Him [the Lord] and that we would adhere to the authoritative revelation of God in Christ Jesus set forth in the one book."<sup>2</sup> Baker's assessment was that Naylor remained consistent: "From his inaugural address to his last word to the trustees, he magnified the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need to take it to every person."<sup>3</sup>

What follows is an edited transcript of the address that Naylor delivered on November 25, 1958, to mark his inauguration as President of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Here one can see the leadership that led Southwestern Seminary to become one of the largest seminaries in the world. Naylor had a vision not just for teaching students but for all Southern Baptists to cooperate as one body for Kingdom Advance and Great Commission work.

The biblical text he chose for his address is Roman 1:16, an apt exposition for the simple necessity of the gospel. For Naylor, that gospel is the singular idea that ties all Southwesterners together, from Benajah Harvey Carroll in our beginning to the numerous graduates serving to the uttermost ends of the earth today. As Naylor unpacks the biblical text and the Christian gospel, in more than a periodic expositional style, we hear from a visionary leader who saw where Southwestern Seminary needed to go.

Naylor knew the cost for him and for his students. Some would even pay the ultimate price. Yet our fifth president declared, "Let us not be afraid of the price that is demanded." The gospel provides the content of the fellowship that binds the seminary and the center from which it must go forward. The gospel brings unity but also "demands a Seminary." More than anything, Robert Naylor knew at the beginning of his leadership that this gospel fellowship "promises a victory."

The inaugural address of Robert E. Naylor as the fifth President of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, originally presented in

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<sup>2</sup>Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 405.

<sup>3</sup>Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 354.

1958, is published here as a means of encouraging faithful reflection upon the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ for Southwesterners yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

### **“OUR GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP”**

Edited by Malcolm B. Yarnell III

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

Is there a single word that can tie together the first year of this Seminary’s life with this year and the last year? That can include the germ years in the womb of a new continent when the light of the gospel was often but a single ray in the darkness? A word that includes the change in a man which is the new birth and at once the change in a world by the witness of changed men? A word that can call forth names that ought to be called upon such an occasion: Boyce, Broadus, Carroll, Scarborough, Head, and Williams?<sup>4</sup> A word that can make the events of this day here a part of the bloodstream of the kingdom of God?

There is! There is a single word that includes the founding fathers of this institution; the faculties and administration—past, present, future; the students who have become alumni and changed the course of this present world; the men and women yet to be trained; the great army of men and women that have believed in Southwestern, befriended it, made contribution to it and through it, willed their estates to its ministry.

### **THE WORD IS GOSPEL**

The word is *Gospel*. Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” Seventy-two times it is the *Kerygma*, the Proclamation, the Message. One hundred and twenty-nine times it is the “evangelism” (evangelion), the good news. This gospel is the least common denominator for all believers.

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<sup>4</sup>James P. Boyce and John A. Broadus were early presidents of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which was established in Greenville, South Carolina, then relocated to Louisville, Kentucky. B. H. Carroll, L. R. Scarborough, E. D. Head, and J. Howard Williams were, respectively, the first four presidents of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

It is the common ground on which we stand. It is the point at which our ministries are met.

The gospel was the ministry of Jesus. Matthew writes, "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt. 4:23). Mark begins his gospel, "The beginnings of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Paul speaks of "fellowship in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5), "defense and confirmation of the gospel" (v. 7), "furtherance of the gospel" (v. 12), "glorious gospel" (2 Cor. 4:4).

C. H. Dodd describes the unity of the Scriptures at this point. It lies in what the New Testament itself calls "the proclamation," "the message," "the *Kerygma*."<sup>5</sup> And again, "With all the diversity of the New Testament writings, they form a unity in their proclamation of the one gospel."<sup>6</sup> This unity wrought by the gospel, recognized by other scholars, is not only the basic wonder of the Scriptures but it is the marvel of kingdom *fellowship*. We are *gospel* preachers, teachers, students, witnesses. The meaning of our ministries and the unity in our diversities is the gospel.

What is this gospel, you ask? Paul states the hard core of it, the irreducible minimum that is in it, in First Corinthians 15:3-4, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." He declares that this was a gospel which he had received. It had been committed to him from other lips and lives. It was the gospel formula preached by the apostles and by the disciples scattered abroad by persecution. Anything less than this is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Not only did Paul receive this gospel but he delivered it unto these Corinthians. The receiving and the delivering are properly tied together. As we shall see, this is the inevitable sequence of the true gospel.

### A FACTUAL GOSPEL

First of all, this is a *factual gospel*. It is not first an emotion nor an ideal, but there are certain historical facts which lie at the very heart of the gospel. These facts are three: Christ died, he was buried, and he rose again the third day. These matters are historically attested. You do not

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Harold Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 7.

<sup>6</sup>Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 74.

believe the gospel, nor can you be said to preach the gospel if you do not believe and preach these basic facts.

Christ really died. Need there be any insistence upon the reality of His death? Are there any who would question the fact that he is dead when those around the cross pronounced Him dead? The Scriptures insist upon the reality of the death of the Son of God. Jesus, the Messiah, went to the cross and died in the same sense that we die. The expressions used of his death are the same: "He was killed" (Acts 2:23) or "slain" (Rev. 13:8), the Scriptures say. "He expired" (Luke 23:46); "he breathed out his soul" (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46); "he gave up the ghost" (John 19:30). Jesus really died (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; etc.)

There is a tendency on the part of some to think that there was some divine illusion about the death of Jesus. There are those who would spare him the agony, the separation, the emptying, the struggle, which are all a part of death. Yet the gospel we preach declares that Jesus really died on the cross of Calvary.

The fact that he was buried is but to put the seal of finality upon his death. It does not require the hollow echo of the rock as it is rolled against the tomb to prove his death. But the very fact that he is laid away in this borrowed tomb is to declare to the world that the finality of the death of Jesus is surely once for all.

The third fact is that he arose again on the third day. The grave did not hold him. The resurrection is a reality. He is Lord of life and Lord of death (John 6:68; Rom. 14:9), Lord of time and Lord of eternity (Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). It was a generally accepted fact for twenty-five years after its occurring that Jesus arose from the dead.

The interpretation which ties these facts together to give them life, to make them a gospel, to make them *the gospel*, is that Christ died for our sins. Upon the cross of Calvary, he actually bore the guilt of the responsibility for my sins. Peter said, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). The "once" is *once for all* (cf. Rom. 6:10; Heb. 10:10-14). His atoning sacrifice was a sufficient, adequate, total, final sacrifice of God for our sins.

Paul said, he "gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). No wonder then that there is hope in the good tidings. No wonder then that "hope springs eternal."<sup>7</sup> No wonder that this is the great unifying tie of our ministries, this gospel

<sup>7</sup>Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man in Four Epistles* (Glasgow, 1750), 4.

that Christ died for our sins.

All of this, his death and his resurrection, was "according to the Scriptures." This must be in the formula. This is a part of the gospel. He came in the fullness of time, not ahead of time, not behind time, but in God's time. He came as it had been prophesied. He came according to the divine love and purpose of God. This is the fulfillment of God's redeeming love.

That the Scripture was so fulfilled is to declare not only that Jesus is the Saviour but that he is Lord. It promises the judgment of God upon this world. It indicates the intercession of Jesus, "whoever lives to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). It offers the promise of the world to come.

This is not an exposition of the gospel but simply a laying bare of the heart of our fellowship. Here in the Good News is our tie. On this ground every Christian stands.

### A FELLOWSHIP OF APPROPRIATION

We have then the *fellowship of appropriation in our acceptance of the gospel*. Brunner, in his book, *Man in Revolt*, says, "Faith in Jesus Christ is not an interpretation of the world but it is participation in an event; in something which has happened, which is happening, and which is going to happen."<sup>8</sup> This gospel can only be individually accepted because it is the individual offer of the redemption of God in Christ Jesus. Each one of us must face Him with our sins and receive Jesus as our Saviour.

This is the supreme crisis in life, when we hear the gospel. It is not simply the meeting place with the written word, but it is a personal encounter with Jesus. James Stewart says, "The very proclamation constituted for the hearers a divine invasion crisis."<sup>9</sup>

That is what happened to Pilate when he said, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called the Christ?" (Matt. 27:22). In spite of the fact that he was surrounded by a mob crying for the blood of Jesus, there came a moment when Pilate was made personally responsible. He seemed to realize that there was a decision which he alone could make. This is the inevitable crisis of a life that faces the gospel and therein faces Jesus.

Our fellowship then lies in the fact that we are all forgiven sinners. We stand on even ground. There are no ruling classes; there is no superior

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<sup>8</sup>Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, transl. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 494.

<sup>9</sup>James S. Stewart, *A Faith to Proclaim* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 43.

race; there is no room for individual boasting; but we are all alike men and women of grace, saved by our Lord Jesus.

### A FELLOWSHIP OF IDENTIFICATION

There is a wonderful result of this new life. We now have the *fellowship of identification with the gospel enterprise* by our acceptance of it. We face the supreme crisis of our sin when we hear the gospel and resolve it when we accept Jesus. With the acceptance of Christ the crisis has become a compulsion. The gospel immediately “puts you in business” when you receive it. You become a man or woman responsible with a new demand living within you.

Paul said, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). He is not talking about some outside authority. He does not speak of some proposed judgment upon his delinquency. He speaks of an inner love, a drive, that will not be denied, a dedication which the gospel works in the life that believes it.

Kierkegaard said,

There is something quite definite I have to say and I have it so much upon my conscience that (as I feel) I dare not die without having uttered it. For the instant I die and thus leave this world (so I understand it) I shall in the very same second be infinitely far away in a different place, where still within the same second the question will be put to me: “Hast thou uttered the definite message quite definitely?” and if I have not done so what then?<sup>10</sup>

The Student in the Seminary says, “I have believed. Therefore, by the will and special call of God I must preach the gospel.” So, this one turns away from a professional study to the Seminary. This one turns away with his engineering degree to the things of theology. The compulsion becomes *primary in life*.

The Teacher says, “I have believed the gospel. Therefore, I must teach the gospel in this Seminary. Teaching is more than a profession or vocation; it is the handling of the word of life.”

The Administration says, “I have believed. Therefore, under His will

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<sup>10</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom”*, transl. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), ii.

I must lead in training the ministers, sending missionaries, building a school, dreaming dreams."

The Layman, the Trustee, the friend of the institution, says, "Having believed, I must help in training the called of God. I will give direction and advice, build a building, give money to endow a chair of teaching in this institution, preach the gospel through thousands of lives."

The Denomination says, "Our fellowship of faith and cooperation demands that we must train these men and women called of God to preach. These thirty thousand new preaching stations will have for them men and women whom God has chosen. These we must train."

What a mighty compulsion is at the heart of our fellowship. The gospel received, accepted, living, demanding, loving, calls us to our task. We are bound together in this compulsion.

### A FELLOWSHIP OF TRANSFORMATION

There is a *fellowship of transformation* found in our proclamation of this gospel. To handle the gospel, to teach the gospel, to preach the gospel, to participate in the preaching of the gospel, is to partake of the gospel qualities. You cannot handle the Word of Life and ever be the same again. The dimensions of the gospel will become the dimensions of your own life.

In our state we were recently startled by the headline news of a young man that had handled radium. He did it deliberately, having stolen it from a hospital in which he worked. Having handled it, he became contaminated by it.<sup>11</sup> He actually partook of the qualities of the radium to his own harm.

In admiration for a life, we are apt to miss the fact that the dimensions of the life are established either by something that is without or something that is unseen or unmeasured. That Saul of Tarsus was a man of intellect, personality, inner drive, many talents, none of us would deny. It is a temptation to overstate the attractiveness of his personality. The only adequate explanation of his life, however, the life of Paul the preacher, the leader of New Testament church-building in the first century, is the gospel that he preached. He was used of the Holy Spirit to write a great portion of the Scriptures. His dimensions are gospel dimensions.

Grace is marvelous and instantaneous. The change in the life of this man was abrupt and sudden. The new birth is exactly that. The development of his life was equally marvelous. As he accepted the responsibilities of his gospel call, his stature became larger and larger.

<sup>11</sup>See "Medicine: Spilled Radium," *Time* (December 1, 1958).

It was so with Peter. You can make a long list of his personal characteristics, good and bad. You may give proper credit to his place of leadership with his fishing fellows. But if you want to explain adequately the life of Peter you have to do it in terms of the message that he preached. The wonder of Pentecost is not the power of his persuasion, but it is the Spirit-powered quality of the gospel that he preached (Acts 2). Truly, “the gospel is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

B. H. Carroll, the founder of this Seminary, was a mighty man. Have you read the story of his beginnings? There was no hint of greatness in that Arkansas lad who became a member of a Baptist church without an experience with Jesus. There was no greatness in those dark days of struggle in his young manhood, knowing the hypocrisy which his church membership represented. See him as he came back from war, broken in body, desolate in spirit, struggling in his soul against the knowledge of his sins. I have wept with him many times in his descriptions of his desolation of soul as he hobbled home on his crutches. I have wept for joy in the faith that came to him and the new birth that God gave him. This message is no place for his biography, but you will discover the dimensions of B. H. Carroll in the fact that he was a steward of the gospel.<sup>12</sup>

What about Lee Scarborough? Meet this attractive, forceful, gifted, intellectual, young lawyer-to-be as he goes to Yale. Meet him again when his life belongs to the hands of the Lord Jesus. Be warmed by the fire that was the fellowship of Lee Scarborough with his Lord. You can only explain his stature in terms of the gospel to which he was dedicated and in which he met Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

Look around these buildings on this campus. There are names written on these stones. There is the name of Cowden on Cowden Hall. You will find the name in the early minutes of the Seminary, the records of its beginnings. There is no question in my mind that this man, Cowden,

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<sup>12</sup>For the most recent treatment of Carroll, see David S. Dockery, “Benajah Harvey Carroll: A Founding Theology,” in David S. Dockery, W. Madison Grace II, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, eds., *Shapers of the Southwestern Theological Tradition* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2025), 9-22.

<sup>13</sup>For the most recent treatment of Scarborough, see Carl Bradford, “Lee Rutland Scarborough and Roy J. Fish: A Theology of Evangelism,” in Dockery, Grace, and Yarnell, eds., *Shapers of the Southwestern Theological Tradition*, 37-43, 46.

partook of the gospel which he furthered by his contribution.<sup>14</sup>

There are living names that could be called, names identified with this institution by their generosity, their stewardship, their compassion. And there are the names of people who have been blessed and magnified to whom God has given stature because they participate in the gospel.

If we are faithful in this gospel, it will transform us. If we share in its furtherance, if we give ourselves to its handling, it will work a miracle in our own lives in terms of Christian growth. This is a place for personal testimony. In the positions that we occupy and the service that we render there are those who do us honor and express gratitude. In their presence I want to say, as Peter said, "Stand up, for I also am a man" (Acts 10:26). Yet I know they are doing honor to the gospel which I preach, wherein I live. Words cannot describe my debt to this gospel in its application of grace and then in the continuing, unfolding of life which it affords.

### A FELLOWSHIP OF IMMORTALITY

We would not want to miss the fact that there is an *immortality in our gospel fellowship*. This gospel has in it the eternity of the Godhead. The facts which it presents, like the Person that it exalts, have significance before time and after time through all eternity.

To link your life to the gospel is to live forever. To identify yourself with gospel enterprise is to bring immortality into your being. Jesus said, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel is the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). Paul said, in writing to young Timothy, "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). This gospel is a beacon-light of immortality.

As Jesus sat in the house of Simon the leper, there came in a woman with an alabaster box of spikenard, precious perfume, with which she anointed the Saviour. There was murmuring among the disciples. Someone was bold enough to say, "Why this waste?" Jesus came instantly to her defense. He commanded them to let her alone, insisting that she had wrought a good work, and then he said, "Where so ever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole earth, this also that she hath done will

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<sup>14</sup>Mrs. George E. Cowden gave \$150,000 in 1925 toward the construction of a building for the music faculty. See Hannah Williams, "History of the School of Church Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary," Texas State Historical Association (Dec. 11, 2006; <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/southwestern-baptist-theological-seminary-school-of-church-music>).

be spoken of as a memorial of her” (Matt. 26:6-13). It is not this woman’s deathless devotion that immortalizes her. Neither is it the selfless sacrifice of her anointing. Rather is it the fact that Jesus now links that which she did with this living gospel and she too will live.

What a priceless privilege is this Seminary ministry of ours, this thing we share in this inaugural service. In every degree that you participate in the training of these men and women called of God you participate in the spreading of the gospel and its proclamation. To share in such proclamation is to become immortal under the promise of God.

There is a sober consideration in the conclusion of this message. Men have died in the proclamation of this gospel. They have been beaten with many stripes, stoned with many stones, suffered unspeakable indignities, paid an unbelievable price that they might be faithful to the gospel. From these very halls there have gone out men and women to die in strange lands and to be buried in foreign soil. They have fallen victim to disease, to tragedy, to accident, and even to martyrdom.<sup>15</sup> Yet you will not find in the lives of these or any who have been called upon to pay such a price any note of complaint. Rather is there a note of joy, a note of compulsion, the note that was in Paul when he said, “This I must do” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Let us not be afraid of the price that is demanded. Let us be sure that the rewards are beyond our computation. The diversities of our ministries are evident. More remarkable is the unity of our devotion. This Seminary has no right to live without the gospel. The teachers’ ambition is meaningless without the gospel. The staunch friends and stewards of this cause are but mourners at the bier of a dead hope if there be no gospel. The administrator leads a forlorn and lost cause without the gospel.

But we have a tie, a oneness that is strange as the mystery of the identity with Christ, the vine and its branches. It is the gospel. To train those called of God, to proclaim it, we will commit our lives, make investment of our money, provide our facilities, knowing that the kingdom of God is come.

The gospel brings hope, creates a fellowship, explains a church, defines

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<sup>15</sup>Five alumni from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary were identified as martyrs in 2017. Alex Sibley, “Walkway Honors Southern Baptists Who Gave Their Lives for Christ,” *Southwestern News* (October 20, 2017; <https://swbts.edu/news/walkway-honors-southern-baptists-who-gave-their-lives-for-christ/>).

a ministry, constructs an institution, demands a Seminary, and promises a victory.

Robert E. Naylor  
November 25, 1958<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Robert E. Naylor, "Our Gospel Fellowship," The Robert E. Naylor Collection, Archives, Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX.





## **“IRRESISTIBLE COOPERATION”: Intercongregational Financial Cooperation as a Spiritual Impulse and Theological Obligation according to Lee Rutland Scarborough**

Anthony Wolfe\*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Perhaps as much as any other person, Lee Rutland Scarborough, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1914 to 1942, was influential and instrumental in the organization of the Cooperative Program and in the proliferation of the theology behind it during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Through his leadership in the \$75 Million Campaign (1919–24), Southern Baptists discovered both a new denominational consciousness and a burgeoning ambition for missiological effectiveness. Through his prolific writing on the doctrine of cooperation and his leadership in innovative Baptist mechanisms of missions funding, he captured the spirit of cooperation among Baptists in the South while empowering them with new language, and new urgency, for inter-congregational financial cooperation.

His work in the five-year campaign and in the articulation of the doctrine of cooperation became the fertile soil in which the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program was officially planted May 13, 1925, in Memphis, Tennessee. But is the doctrine of cooperation—specifically the component of intercongregational financial cooperation—a binding obligation upon Baptist churches? Is the Cooperative Program merely a Southern Baptist mechanism of pragmatic efficiency, or is it the denominational outworking of something more innate, more entrenched within the Christian consciousness? For one-hundred and eighty years, Southern Baptists have relished the opportunity to associate and cooperate based on shared biblical

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convictions. For the last one-hundred years, they have found an efficient mechanism for this shared, sacred effort in the Cooperative Program. But from where does the Baptist impulse toward intercongregational financial cooperation stem?

Scarborough saw the Acts 2 Pentecost as an "epochal event," a "pivot" on which turn "prophetic, dynamic, and mighty things."<sup>1</sup> He devoted much of his life and scholarship to articulating the biblical doctrine of cooperation which, he believed, began in the Spirit-filled Great Commission movement on the day of Pentecost. "The holy bonds of their cooperation" were cemented among Christ's gathered disciples, in that very moment in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church.<sup>2</sup> Among these cementing bonds Scarborough saw what he labeled "an irresistible cooperation" that was brought about by "the strong hand of [God's] omnipotence" as "he incorporated them into a spiritual unity and gave them a driving force."<sup>3</sup> For Scarborough, Great Commission cooperation was something God did within and among Christ followers upon the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Cooperation would not be a matter of salvation, but it was "a condition of acceptable obedience to Christ's will in our service to Him."<sup>4</sup>

Full-throttled, intercongregational cooperation for missions was, at least in some manner, "irresistible" for Scarborough. Whether cooperation is truly "irresistible" in the same sense as the Reformation doctrine of irresistible grace (as many Baptists have understood it throughout history) is likely beside the point. Scarborough's emphasis was on the cooperative impulse—the inherent desire and drive—for working together within churches and between churches under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the advancement of the gospel. From Pentecost forward, Christians would hold a Holy Spirit-empowered impulse and a biblically grounded theological obligation to cooperate with one another relationally and financially, within Christ's churches and between them, for the advancement of the gospel. This spiritual impulse, this theological obligation, is still the driving force behind the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program today.

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<sup>1</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1934), 41.

<sup>2</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 91.

<sup>3</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 92.

<sup>4</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, "Article 19 On Co-Operation," The L. R. Scarborough Digital Materials Collection (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, <http://cdm16969.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16969coll11/id/1133>).

## THE SPIRITUAL IMPULSE OF INTERCONGREGATIONAL FINANCIAL COOPERATION

When Pentecost came, the disciples were all together in one place (Acts 2:1), but the emphasis is not on their physical location as much as on their “concerted activity or unity.”<sup>5</sup> Scarborough interprets this as a precursor to effective, Spirit-empowered evangelistic cooperation.<sup>6</sup> They were “all together” in the sense that they were of one mind and one purpose—the purpose of the Great Commission. Adam Dodds sees their Spirit-filled togetherness as an expression of *koinonia* (“fellowship,” 2:42), evidenced not only in their relational and spiritual togetherness but also in their outward-facing fellowship, which in some way mirrors the *koinonia* of God’s own triunity. Their Spirit-filled oneness in the *missio ecclesiae* specifically revolves around the task of evangelism—the communication of the gospel—as a reflection of God’s own triune cooperation in the task.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of Luke’s account, Acts 2:1 set the missiological situation within the context of the disciples’ physical and spiritual togetherness, owning a shared, gospel-focused single-mindedness. Scarborough imagines this unified togetherness to be the imprint of a church that “majored on God’s big ‘together.’” “Spite and death thrive in divisions,” he writes, while “pentecosts grow in unities.”<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Spirit’s empowerment loosed the tongues of the disciples that day to declare with all the power and authority of heaven the “magnificent acts of God” in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:11).<sup>9</sup> At Pentecost and in every generation, to be Spirit-filled is to be gospel-fluent. Nonetheless, each was not declaring the gospel alone, but they worked cooperatively. Scarborough believed that Peter’s sermon in 2:14–40 was an expanded, formal demonstration of what all the Spirit-filled disciples were doing in 2:4, 6–8, and 11. “All went afield,” he notes, and “the tread of a mighty spiritual army of evangelists was heard in Jerusalem.”<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther elaborates: “Not only Peter preached on Pentecost Day, but . . . all the disciples, as well as the eleven apostles. All of this happened at the moment when

<sup>5</sup>Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1:795.

<sup>6</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 75, 91.

<sup>7</sup>Adam Dodds, “The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission of the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 2 (2011): 212, 216.

<sup>8</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 74–75.

<sup>9</sup>For “magnificent acts of God” as gospel proclamation, see Anthony D. Wolfe, “Confessionalism and Cooperation in the Baptist Movement, 1609–1925,” PhD diss. (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 199–202.

<sup>10</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 99.

they were set afire by the Holy Spirit."<sup>11</sup> Alan J. Thompson argues for an eschatological shift here in God's delegated authority from the temple leadership to the leadership of the apostles (more specifically, the message of the apostles) on the basis of Peter standing "with the Eleven" in 2:14 and the crowd's response to Peter "and to the rest of the apostles" in 2:37.<sup>12</sup> What they were doing, they were doing together. What they accomplished, they accomplished together.

Scarborough understood the Pentecost to not only be an eschatological inauguration, but also a perennial paradigm of cooperative, Spirit-filled evangelism for local churches.<sup>13</sup> In Acts 2:1–14, he saw "a demonstration of gospel team work," showing the disciples "how to work together under the leadership of Christ's vice-regent, the Holy Spirit."<sup>14</sup> Pentecost stands in church history not only as an eschatological marker, but as an epochal evangelistic example for Christ's churches in every generation. Scarborough believed that "the two major practical doctrines" of the day of Pentecost were the doctrines of worldwide missions and of the voluntary, organized cooperation between individual Christians and between autonomous churches.<sup>15</sup> It was there that God himself commenced "his organized campaign" for perennial, cooperative, Great Commission success in every generation.<sup>16</sup> The apostles never forgot the impact of Pentecost; it formed within them a thirst for more organized and ever-expanding Great Commission cooperation. This spiritual impulse, deeply engrained in the Christian conscience on the day of Pentecost, included what quickly became the regular practice of intercongregational financial cooperation.

According to Chad Brand and David Hankins, the Antioch church's collection for a benevolent need in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27–30) was evidence that churches throughout the region regularly participated in intercongregational financial giving and receiving.<sup>17</sup> The pooling and sending of financial resources was a spiritual impulse for Spirit-filled, gospel-focused churches.

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "Holy Pentecost: First Sermon," in *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, trans. by Eugene F. A. Klug, Erwin W. Koehlinger, James Lanning, Everette W. Meier, Dorothy Schoknecht, and Allen Schuldheiss, ed. by Eugene F. A. Klug, 6:151–65 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 153.

<sup>12</sup>Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 179.

<sup>13</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 28.

<sup>14</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 32. See also 88–89.

<sup>15</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 82.

<sup>16</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 68.

<sup>17</sup>Chad Brand and David Hankins, *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: B & H, 2005), 67–71.

As the gospel spread, the pattern continued, the impulse grew, and the organization expanded. Paul's ministry in Corinth was initially funded by his own tent-making efforts, but when Timothy and Silas joined him, they brought funding with them from the churches in Macedonia (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor 11:9). Paul did not receive missionary funding from the Corinthians for his Corinthian ministry. Instead, the cooperative funding of Macedonian churches subsidized the cooperative missions work in Corinth. Roland Allen sees a biblical paradigm of intercongregational missionary funding in this passage as applicable for all generations.<sup>18</sup> Andreas Köstenberger roots this specific instance in the Corinthian context uniquely.<sup>19</sup> Either way, the biblical evidence of burgeoning, intercongregational financial cooperation is as undeniable as is the supernatural Christian impulse that secured it on the day of Pentecost.

In Philippians 1:5 and 4:15–20, the Philippian church is praised and prayed for by the missionary apostle because of their ongoing “partnership/fellowship in the gospel” since the day he first came to them up until the time of his writing. What is in view here is the Philippian church's ongoing financial subsidization of Paul's missionary work.<sup>20</sup> Philippians 4 provides what is considered by some to be the most substantial evidence for ongoing, intercongregational financial cooperation in mission work. Robertson noted that while Paul's bookkeeping with the Philippian church was unique, the Philippians were later joined in like manner by the churches in Thessalonica and Berea.<sup>21</sup> The biblical record is clear that the Philippian church pooled its resources with other Macedonian churches to fund evangelistic and missionary work in the first-century Near East. This intercongregational financial cooperation was a biblical pattern, built upon the spiritual impulse that fell from heaven and filled the disciples on Pentecost, setting fire to the co-working Great Commission relationship of early Christ followers.

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<sup>18</sup>Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces* (London: Robert Scott, 1912), 84.

<sup>19</sup>Andreas Köstenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 167.

<sup>20</sup>Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles, Word Pictures in the New Testament* vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 436. See also Andreas Köstenberger, “Women in the Pauline Mission,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 233; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul and the Early Church*, vol. 2 of *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1159. These authors and more see the koinonia of Philippians 1:5 in light of not only spiritual and relational reciprocity but ongoing financial investment in the mission work of Paul.

<sup>21</sup>Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 462.

### THE THEOLOGICAL OBLIGATION

Scarborough's contemporary and the chair of the *Baptist Faith and Message* committee, E. Y. Mullins, acknowledged the New Testament pattern of intercongregational cooperation as a "clearly revealed principle of the gospel. . . . Paul gathered funds in European churches for the poor in Jerusalem. Christians scattered abroad were enjoined to cooperate with missionaries and laborers in the Kingdom . . . The duty of cooperation for great common ends is . . . clear."<sup>22</sup> Mullins understood cooperative funding between churches not merely as an opportunity, but as a biblically sanctioned "duty." Later, Scarborough became even more emphatic, writing that "no church has a right" to consume all its revenue for its own ministries.<sup>23</sup> The doctrine of cooperation included financial obligations in addition to relational ones. Scarborough's tone and content in this aspect of the doctrine of cooperation is an echo of Baptist confessional sentiment from the earliest days of the movement 5,000 miles away and three centuries removed.<sup>24</sup> Intercongregational financial cooperation for the purpose of Great Commission advance knows both biblical and Baptist historical precedent.

If intercongregational financial cooperation is truly a deep-seated spiritual impulse with demonstrable biblical precedent, then can a church refuse such cooperation and still abide in the will of Christ? The answer to this question, for Scarborough, was an emphatic "No." Less than one month after the Convention's adoption of the Cooperative Program, Scarborough rebutted objections in a short article in Texas Baptists' *Baptist Standard*, suggesting that refusal "to co-operate in doing the work" would be nothing short of a betrayal of the gospel, including the theological obligation of individual Baptists and Baptist churches to financially work together to "put on the budget."<sup>25</sup> Instead, "full-fledged, uncritical, co-operative, constructive promotion of our Southern Baptist co-operative plan" is obligatory within the Southern Baptist fellowship, and such cooperation

<sup>22</sup>Edgar Y. Mullins, "Doctrinal Statement," E. Y. Mullins Papers (Box 39, Folder 17), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

<sup>23</sup>Scarborough, *Products of Pentecost*, 119.

<sup>24</sup>A doctrine of intercongregational financial cooperation was evident in the Separatists' *A True Confession* (1596) to which John Smyth alluded while in Amsterdam, and upon which the first *London Baptist Confession* (1644) was built. See Wolfe, "Confessionalism and Cooperation in the Baptist Movement, 1609–1925," 80–81.

<sup>25</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, "A Three-Fold Betrayal of the Truth," *Baptist Standard*, June 11, 1925, 8.

“will bring Baptists to the top of the Gospel hill.”<sup>26</sup> Scarborough’s timely rebuttal was not a boyish whiplash in defensive posture. In 1921, he had published his provocative article “The Heresy of Non-Cooperation” in the same Baptist paper; its content was as incriminatory as its title was provocative.<sup>27</sup>

Scarborough was not alone in his position. Nor was he first. In his 1900 book, *The Training of the Twelve*, Alexander Bruce of the Free Church of Scotland connected the perpetual “operations” of Christ’s Great Commission plan and the “capacities and idiosyncrasies of the agents” to the power they received together on the day of Pentecost—a power that carries with it a “moral” obligation for all Christians and all churches in generations to come.<sup>28</sup> In America, the conversation surrounding Southern Baptist confessional cooperation was well primed by May of 1922 when Scarborough’s companion article “Is Co-operation a New Testament Doctrine” circulated in several Baptist papers in the South.<sup>29</sup> The editor of *The Baptist Advance* commented that he had been

saying for a long time that a Baptist has no more right to refuse to co-operate in Baptist work than he has to get drunk or to commit adultery. . . . If a new Baptist confession of faith is to be formulated (as it seems that there will be) we believe an article on co-operation should be included in the confession. We believe no Baptist should be considered sound or in good standing if he refuses to co-operate in the work of Baptists.<sup>30</sup>

In the October 19, 1922, issue of Texas’s *Baptist Standard*, Pastor Ervin F. Lyon of First Baptist Church San Angelo, Texas, published the seventeenth in his series of eighteen articles on “Who the Baptists Are.” These articles would delineate distinctively Baptist doctrines and principles on which Southern Baptists should be clear and of which they should be

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<sup>26</sup>Scarborough, “A Three-Fold Betrayal of the Truth,” 8.

<sup>27</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, “The Heresy of Non-Cooperation,” *Baptist Standard*, November 24, 1921, 6, 14.

<sup>28</sup>Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1900), 35–42.

<sup>29</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, “Is Cooperation a New Testament Doctrine?,” *Alabama Baptist*, May 18, 1922, 5; “Is Cooperation a New Testament Doctrine?,” *Baptist and Reflector*, May 11, 1922, 4–5; “Is Cooperation a New Testament Doctrine?,” *Baptist Message*, May 4, 1922, 4.

<sup>30</sup>J. S. Compere, untitled editorial, *Baptist Advance*, February 23, 1922, 4.

unapologetically proud.<sup>31</sup> The seventeenth installment in his series of Baptist doctrines was titled, "Baptists and Co-Operation." Lyon asserted, "All of our associations and conventions are founded upon the principle of wholesome and in the main, harmonious co-operation." He further insisted that churches which refuse to cooperate with their sister churches for evangelistic, educational, and missional endeavors, if they do not "die because of their own inactivity," will eventually "drift into heretical organizations" and "break with the denomination."<sup>32</sup>

That the cooperative obligation is theological in nature is not to be lost on the Southern Baptist conscience. Along with the birth of the Cooperative Program in 1925, the Convention adopted its first official confession of faith. Scarbrough himself was among its authors. The confession included Article 22 on "Co-Operation," which declares the Baptist theological position to be one "most surely held among" those gathered that day (as it was among those gathered to revise and re-confess in two confessional revisions since, in 1963 and 2000).<sup>33</sup> On the same day that Scarborough's "Three-Fold" defense appeared in the *Baptist Standard*, a longer article by him appeared in South Carolina's *Baptist Courier*. In no uncertain terms, he rebuked those in the Convention who would advocate for doctrinal purity while refusing to financially cooperate with the work of the Convention. Such an argumentative non-cooperant has "no right" to engage in doctrinal debates within the Convention: "They are obsessed. They have a brain spasm."<sup>34</sup>

Intercongregational financial cooperation, according to the Convention's unified financial plan to underwrite their shared mission, was not merely a spiritual impulse. For Scarborough, it was a theological obligation planted deeply in the Baptist conscience, and at least conceptually, it was a prerequisite for rightful participation in the Convention's doctrinal and organizational work. The matter of cooperative funding for missions is one of theological substance, an obligatory participation for churches who convene to make decisions and set the course for the realization of their shared mission.

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<sup>31</sup>E. F. Lyon, "What Baptists Believe," *Baptist Standard*, June 22, 1922, 7.

<sup>32</sup>E. F. Lyon, "What Baptists Believe: XVII Baptists and Co-Operation," *Baptist Standard*, October 19, 1922, 15, 17.

<sup>33</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message*, Preamble.

<sup>34</sup>Lee Rutland Scarborough, "Southern Baptists Lift Up a Great Doctrinal Standard," *Baptist Courier*, June 11, 1925, 7.

## CONCLUSION

According to L. R. Scarborough, and many Baptists before and since, financial cooperation between Spirit-filled, gospel-focused churches is both a spiritual impulse and a theological obligation. The spiritual impulse is a shared Pentecostal enduement, and the theological obligation is a shared doctrinal commitment. If the Convention is to thrive in the generations ahead, advancing the Great Commission to the ends of the earth, Southern Baptists in the third decade of the twenty-first century must rediscover the irresistibility of sacrificial cooperation, both relationally and financially. The commitment to Spirit-filled gospel single-mindedness and the hunger for a powerful, cooperative advancement of the Great Commission must awaken within us and between us again.

Southern Baptists are not lacking in financial resources. Neither are we lacking in denominational organization. What fades among us and between us in the Cooperative Program's one hundredth year is the joyfully sacrificial and faithfully expectant cooperative commitment that falls like fire from heaven upon those who long for nothing more. The following three propositions are offered in conclusion toward that end.

1. *Southern Baptists must recover their spiritual hunger for a sweeping, global movement of the gospel.* Pentecostal enduement cannot be separated from Great Commission injunction. The power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1–4 was given for the express purpose of local and global gospel saturation in 1:4–8. Southern Baptists are a Great Commission people. Nothing will unite us or propel us forward together like our shared commitment to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. When we allow our theological obligations and spiritual impulses to stir this cooperative evangelistic hunger within us and among us, we are at our best. When anything else is stirred within us and among us, we are not.

2. *Southern Baptists must recover the Pentecostal spiritual impulse that awakens and ignites cooperative gospel single-mindedness in every generation.* On the day of Pentecost, spiritual power for the accomplishment of the shared mission was poured out from heaven on a unified, praying church. In fact, every “pentecost” in the book of Acts fell upon churches in the context of prayerful expectation, gospel single-mindedness, and unified togetherness (Acts 2:1–4; 8:14–18; 10:1–11:17; 19:1–7). If it is power from on high that awakens and ignites cooperative Great Commission commitment within and among Christ's people, Southern Baptists need to become again a people who are marked by desperately focused prayerfulness, eager

spiritual togetherness, and relentless gospel single-mindedness.

3. *Southern Baptists must recover the joyful theological obligation of sacrificial commitment to their shared mission.* An obligation only becomes a burden when duty is divorced from joy, but obligation and joy are not mutually exclusive. Every church in the SBC could consume one hundred percent of its own financial resources; there is always another building to build, another staff member to hire, or more technology to upgrade. But localized plans must not supersede Great Commission obligation. A church financially turned inward, minimizing its cooperative missions giving, is one that will eventually experience the "shame" of self-centeredness (2 Cor 9:4). But the church financially turned outward, sacrificing its own financial comfort especially through seasons of hardship, will know the enduring "joy" of cooperative gospel single-mindedness (2 Cor 8:2).

Let Southern Baptists recommit to their Cooperative Program in its one hundredth year. Let the joy of spiritual togetherness in the Great Commission reignite our passion for global gospel advance. Let the Pentecostal impulse of intercongregational cooperation, both relational and financial, awaken us to greater sacrifice. And let the theological obligation of the same become the enduring joy of the churches as the gospel narrative unfolds in our generation.





## “FOR US HUMANS AND FOR OUR SALVATION”: The Beauty of Salvation in Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzus<sup>1</sup>

Coleman M. Ford\*

### INTRODUCTION

We are familiar with trophies in our society. Tokens of victory and effort in sports and spelling bees adorn our bedrooms and school hallways. One fourth-century church father, Athanasius of Alexandria, described another kind of trophy. This trophy was not a shiny medal or plaque, but a sweat-drenched, blood-soaked cross. What was to many the decisive sign of defeat eventually became the ultimate sign of victory. Jesus, in his life and crucifixion, obtained a triumph unlike any before, and his defeat of sin and Satan ushered in a new era of glory for humanity. Jesus Christ showed that he was victorious over death itself.

The beauty of the Word made flesh is the pivotal moment securing God’s redemption of humanity. After Mary gave birth to the incarnate Son, the world was never the same. Romans 5:6 confirms this, saying, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.”<sup>2</sup> Salvation is displayed in the victory of Christ’s work *for* us, as well as the beauty of Christ’s work displayed *in* us. Salvation is a multi-pronged event in Scripture, and the Fathers held that it comprised the incarnation, death and burial, resurrection, and glorification of the Son. The “trophy” of Christ is beauty itself and the basis of our salvation and transformation. The death and resurrection of the Word made flesh secured for us what no one else could: complete salvation.

The Fathers who gathered at Nicaea in 325, and again in Constantinople in 380, were concerned about many things, even beyond the creedal formulation we know today as the Nicene Creed. Although one aspect of

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<sup>2</sup>Translations of Scripture are from the CSB unless otherwise noted.

the conversation primarily focused on the Son's nature and relationship to the Father, Christian salvation is closely tied to the discussion about the Son and salvation. What is needed for salvation? How does the person and work of the Son fit into the equation? If we misunderstand the Son, we will misunderstand salvation. The Fathers recognized and affirmed that salvation is a cosmic event, the effects of which begin to unfold now and extend into eternity. Christ's redemption is a mystery of wonder, amazement, and beauty.

Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of Nazianzus defended the theological foundations established at Nicaea and expanded upon them in the following decades of the fourth century. Specifically, Athanasius argues against Arian theology in *On the Incarnation* and *Four Discourses Against the Arians*. Gregory provides his thoughts on the subject in *The Five Theological Orations*. Both men emphasize that salvation is only possible through a Nicene understanding of the gospel, since deviating from the Son as "true God from true God" has eternal consequences.

### ATHANASIUS ON THE BEAUTY OF SALVATION

As a young deacon, Athanasius accompanied his bishop, Alexander, to the Council of Nicaea. Soon after the council, Athanasius was ordained bishop of Alexandria in 328, though his election was contested because he was too young for this position. He held his pastoral office for forty-six years, punctuated by five periods of exile due to the fluctuating popularity of the Nicene party. His seasons of exile proved providential, allowing him to cultivate relationships with like-minded leaders in the West and learn from ascetics in the Egyptian desert. The latter experience put him in contact with the famous Antony, and Athanasius later wrote his biography, *The Life of Antony*. Over time, the theology of Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, Basil the Great of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, became touchpoints of Nicene orthodoxy.

*On the Incarnation* provides Athanasius's pastoral argument for the necessity of Christ's incarnation: adding full humanity to his full divinity. Athanasius called this explanation of the incarnation and its centrality to the Christian faith "an elementary instruction and an outline of the faith in Christ and his divine manifestation to us."<sup>3</sup> The incarnation of Christ is fundamental to gospel belief, and nothing is more vital and transformative

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<sup>3</sup>*On the Incarnation* 56 in St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

than that God made flesh. The eternal Word made flesh, through whom God created all things and in whom all things hold together, is the center of our faith (John 1:1–3). Christ’s work of salvation had to occur through the incarnation, for our decaying humanity needed redemption through both his humanity *and* divinity.<sup>4</sup> David Gwynn notes, “For Athanasius . . . the full significance of the Incarnation lay in bridging the gulf that separated God and creation and enabling humanity to ‘become divine.’”<sup>5</sup> Our salvation by Christ’s incarnation is not merely pragmatic; instead, it reshapes the vision of our life in the flesh and our future life in glory. Having received the redemption of our souls, we will also see the redemption of our bodies in eternity. Christ in his full humanity and divinity is the only one capable of accomplishing this feat. Jesus died knowing the greater good he achieved by being the true life himself. Athanasius explains, “So something wonderful and marvelous happened: that ignominious death which they thought to inflict, this was the trophy of his victory over death.”<sup>6</sup> The ignominy of the crucifixion, indeed the worst form of death conjured by man, was entirely overturned and reconstituted. Once a seat of shame, the cross is now a symbol of victory. Once only torture for the subjugated, the cross is now the token of the liberated. It defines salvation and fuels discipleship. As the writer of Hebrews instructs, “Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1b–2). In similar words, Athanasius asserted, “For we were the purpose of his embodiment, and for our salvation he so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body.”<sup>7</sup>

The Creed contends, and Athanasius affirmed, that salvation requires Christ’s full humanity and full divinity. Though the language of this two-nature Christology was not fully articulated until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, we ought to consider this mystery as necessary for our salvation. The Creed affirms that “for us humans and for our salvation, he descended . . . and [he] became incarnate.” Let that sink in: “For us

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<sup>4</sup>For a helpful summary of Athanasius’s logic of salvation based on Christ’s incarnation, see Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 43–46.

<sup>5</sup>David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, *Christian Theology in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66.

<sup>6</sup>*On the Incarnation* 24.

<sup>7</sup>*On the Incarnation* 4.

humans and for our salvation." Salvation begins with the incarnation. Evangelicals typically equate salvation with atonement, which is undoubtedly a significant and crucial element, but redemption includes salvation *and* a transformed life. Often, our Reformation reflexes began to fire at the notion including our own work and virtuous acts in salvation. If we say that our works add to the salvation of God, then we are in trouble. Yet, early Christian thinkers found it impossible to talk about a salvation lacking the fruit of salvation also present in the believer's life. What we distinguish as a doctrine of sanctification, the early church rolled into the entire conversation about salvation. This explains what Athanasius says near the end of *On the Incarnation*: "But in addition to the study and true knowledge of the scriptures, there is needed a good life and a pure soul and the virtue which is according to Christ, so that the mind, guided by it, may be able to attain and comprehend what it desires, as far as it is possible for human nature to learn about the God Word."<sup>8</sup> The beauty of salvation is based on the object of our faith and the fruit of our faith.

Athanasius reflected on the glorious nature of our salvation through the Son in his work *Against the Arians*. This work, composed of four discourses, sought to dismantle Arians and Arian-like ideas. According to Athanasius, the Arians are to be scorned as "neither having studied Scripture, nor understanding Christianity at all, and the faith which it contains."<sup>9</sup> He understood that the scriptural language required an interpretation based on the *regula fidei*, or rule of faith. This rule, used by Christians from the earliest generations, simply affirms the Trinity and the biblical story of redemption. By recognizing the basic biblical narrative of God, Christ, the Spirit, and salvation, we can better interpret individual Scripture passages within this scope. Consider two critical biblical texts in Athanasius's discourse and learn how he maintains an orthodox framework.

The first important text Athanasius interprets is Proverbs 8:22–23: "The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways for his works; before the current age, in the beginning, before he made the world, he established me."<sup>10</sup> The Septuagint rendering in English is necessary to grasp the weight of the issue. While modern English translations avoid this issue by using the Masoretic (Hebrew) text, the fourth-century Fathers wrestled over these words as read in the Greek OT. The Greek verb *ktizō*

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<sup>8</sup>*On the Incarnation* 57.

<sup>9</sup>Prov 8:22–23 LXX (translation by author).

<sup>10</sup>Prov 8:22–23 LXX (translation by author).

(“to create”) did not bother Athanasius. He was careful to maintain that the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs was not equivalent to Christ being called the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). Athanasius contended that “this mere term ‘He created’ does not necessarily signify the essence or the generation but indicates something else as coming to pass in Him of whom it speaks, and not simply that He who is said to be created, is at once in His Nature and Essence a creature.”<sup>11</sup> Solomon recognized, in some incipient way, the Wisdom of God, which was finally revealed in Christ; he certainly did not make an ontological statement.<sup>12</sup> Athanasius affirms that Christ “says not, ‘Before the world He founded me as Word or Son,’ but simply, ‘He founded me,’ to show again, as I have said, that not for His own sake but for those who are built upon Him does He here also speak, after the way of proverbs.”<sup>13</sup> The terms “created,” “formed,” and “founded” correspond to language used to describe eternal generation and the incarnation, both of which are distinct from God’s creative activity of the world. We can look to Proverbs and other OT texts, Athanasius believed, to find ways of talking about Christ, but we should never make illegitimate assertions about his nature.<sup>14</sup>

Next, Athanasius considered Philippians 2:9–10: “For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” On the surface of this text, Arians may seem to have a point. The Son appears to be subordinate to the Father, and though Jesus will be the object of devotion “in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” the Father is still at the top, and Christ is his created agent. Thus, the Father gave the Son an exalted name, so the Arians argue, as a grace. Athanasius, on the other hand, had none of that: “For if He was not, or was indeed, but afterwards was promoted, how were all things made by Him,

<sup>11</sup> *Against the Arians* 2.19, 45 in St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald Robertson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, ed. Philip Shaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892).

<sup>12</sup> For more on Athanasius’s reading of Prov 8 in *de Decretis* (i.e., Athanasius’s defense of the Creed), see Amy Brown Hughes and Shawn J. Wilhite, “The Beginnings of a Pro-Nicene Trinitarian Vision: Athanasius of Alexandria on the Activity of the Son and the Spirit,” in *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024).

<sup>13</sup> *Against the Arians* 2.22, 74.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this idea as it relates to Prov 8, Athanasius, and partitive exegesis, see Shawn J. Wilhite, *Cyril of Alexandria’s Christological Exegesis: Explorations of Partitive Exegesis in the Dialogues on the Trinity*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 70 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2026).

or how in Him, were He not perfect, did the Father delight?"<sup>15</sup> Athanasius identified here a major interpretive issue with Arius's thought. Perfection requires full divinity, and the acts attributed to Christ are impossible if he did not possess a perfect and unalterable divinity in his nature.

Thus, the truth of the Son's divinity is the opposite of what Arius claimed. Athanasius makes the case:

Therefore, if, even before the world was made, the Son had that glory, and was Lord of glory and the Highest, and descended from heaven, and is ever to be worshipped, it follows that He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son and God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man.<sup>16</sup>

Athanasius read the text with the priority of Christ's full divinity and humanity in mind. This is not "eisegesis" but a theological reading that corresponds to the economy of God's salvation while actively engaging with the text of Scripture. We ought to bring basic orthodox presuppositions to the text to read it correctly. This does not bend the text to an external agenda but confirms and makes sense of what the text already declares: The eternal Son is Christ the Lord.

### **Becoming Divine**

The incarnation, for Athanasius, has the effect of *divinizing humanity*—yes, you read that correctly. A necessary component of salvation is that humankind is divinized. Athanasius declared, "For he was incarnate that we might be made god."<sup>17</sup> The doctrine that has come to be called *theosis*,

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<sup>15</sup>*Against the Arians* 1.11, 38.

<sup>16</sup>*Against the Arians* 1.11, 38.

<sup>17</sup>*On the Incarnation* 54.

or *deification*, derives from this related idea of the Fathers.<sup>18</sup> While this manner of speaking about salvation does not seem typical to Protestants, the basic notion pertains much more to our doctrine of sanctification.

Because of Christ's work on our behalf, we are more than saved from punishment (as amazing as that is); we are now mysteriously dwelling in the life of God. This is what the apostle Peter was aiming at when he said, "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Pet 1:3). Peter highlights all the ways Christians ought to grow in holiness and virtue by nature of being in the life of God through Christ. Whatever might be meant by *theosis* in Athanasius's thought, the mystery of sharing in the divine nature is best captured in our understanding of *sanctification*. We grow in holiness and virtue because of God's work of bringing us into his life through Jesus Christ. We indeed are made *god-like*, divinized, not equal to God as he is in his nature, but connected to his life through Christ. Athanasius also aligns with this understanding: "[Christ] manifested himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured the insults of human beings, that we might inherit incorruptibility."<sup>19</sup>

### GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS ON THE BEAUTY OF SALVATION

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390) possessed a well-educated, academic mind and studied in Athens, where he met Basil of Caesarea. Along with his studies, he desired monastic spiritual reflection, though his father prompted him to instead pursue pastoral ministry. Having finally accepted the pastoral call, he famously left the pastoral office, only to reluctantly return. He took his subsequent ministry post at the request of his friend Basil and became the bishop of the small provincial town of Sasima (near modern-day Hasanköy, Turkey) before eventually taking on Constantinople's bishopric for a short time.

We consider Gregory's orations because they provide a thoroughly biblical, profoundly logical, and refreshingly spiritual reflection on God,

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<sup>18</sup>For a summary of deification, see C. M. Ford, "Deification," ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022). For a good one-volume work on deification in Greek patristic thought, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For an assessment of deification in Latin Christianity, see Jared Ortiz, ed. *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

<sup>19</sup>*On the Incarnation* 54.

salvation, and the hope of humanity. When reading Gregory's sermons, one must consider the Eunomian heresy coloring the background: Eunomians were generally sympathetic to "Arian" ideas, eventually rejecting the full divinity of Christ.<sup>20</sup> In the first of these five orations (*Oration 27*), Gregory addressed those who "have undermined every approach to true religion by their complete obsession with setting and solving conundrums."<sup>21</sup> Gregory addresses the problematic overindulgence in speculation that suppresses the mystery of God. While we can know God through his Word and work, the Eunomians and others divided the godhead, thereby overlooking his glory. Gregory asserts that our knowledge on this side of eternity is incomplete, though we ought to grow through Spirit-led biblical exploration. In his *Oration 28*, the second of the five, Gregory assesses the doctrine of God, while noting his own "frailty" in undertaking such a task. Remarking on the beauty and order of creation, Gregory draws a helpful comparison: "No one seeing a beautifully elaborated lyre with its harmonious, orderly arrangement, and hearing the lyre's music will fail to form a notion of its craftsman-player, to recur to him in thought though ignorant of him by sight. In this way the creative power, which moves and safeguards its objects, is clear to us, though it be not grasped by the understanding."<sup>22</sup> Clearly, "dissolution is utterly alien to God the prime nature . . . [and] no dissolution means no division; no division means no conflict; no conflict means no composition, and hence no body involving composition."<sup>23</sup>

The otherworldly cosmic redemption guaranteed by Christ's life, death, and resurrection makes salvation beautiful in the Christian perspective. The Incorruptible One secured what we corrupted ones could not. In Christ, God's created image bearers move away from disintegration and back toward oneness with God.

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<sup>20</sup>Eunomius was an *anomoian* ("not of same substance") teacher in Cappadocia, consistently asserting the Son was not of the same nature as the Father. Both Basil and then his brother Gregory of Nyssa wrote against his teaching. A defrocked bishop, he led several people to form a schismatic community until his death in 394. For a summary of the controversy, see Saint Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 3–55.

<sup>21</sup>*Oration 27.2* in St Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, ed. John Behr, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, *Popular Patristics Series* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>22</sup>*Oration 28.6*.

<sup>23</sup>*Oration 28.7*.

### NO "BECAUSE" REQUIRED

Later in his *Oration 28*, Gregory describes the task of theology in terms of a massive building project using the smallest of tools. Inviting his hearers to consider the entirety of creation, Gregory explains the intricacies of animal and plant life. Why do this? Gregory addresses our finite nature and challenges our ability to comprehend even the basics of the created order, not to mention the mysterious nature of God and redemption. If we have trouble wrapping our minds around biology, how can we even begin to comprehend the grand schemes of the Creator? God's salvation cannot be fathomed with the mind and senses alone; it must be received by faith in the deep recesses of our hearts. When confronted with the majesty and mystery of God, all we can do is either accept it with humility or reject it with utter pride. While wondering at the immensity of the sea, consider the awe of God who created it and set all things in motion, including the work of salvation in Christ. Gregory ended his sermon pondering: "[I have] been engaged in a struggle to prove that even the nature of beings on the second level is too much for our minds, let alone God's primal and unique, not to say all-transcending nature."<sup>24</sup>

While *Oration 28* does not directly mention the work of salvation, its implications are clear: finite man cannot comprehend God's plans. In *Orations 29* and *30*, Gregory argues for the necessity of Christ and the work of the Son in accomplishing redemption. After discussing the eternal generation of the Son, Gregory implores his hearers to consider the biblical reality of Christ's divinity and humanity, mainly referencing NT passages. What seems to be a series of contradictions, or textual ammunition for heretics, is, in fact, a necessary description to articulate the beautiful union of Christ's humanity with his divinity. Both exist in exquisite harmony, for "[he] remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed. No 'because' is required for his existence in the beginning, for what could account for the existence of God."<sup>25</sup> For Gregory, the harmony of Christ's human and divine nature was not only a matter of faith, but of awe-inspiring worship.

### BIBLICAL CONNECTIONS

As with nearly every early church father, both Athanasius and Gregory supported their positions by closely reading Scripture, with the Bible open

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<sup>24</sup>*Oration 28.9.*

<sup>25</sup>*Oration 29.19.*

in front of them. In light of this example, we marvel at the rich spiritual truth contained in John 1:1–14. “In the beginning,” as John witnesses in John 1:1, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John makes both a biblical assertion and a philosophical connection. The Word is eternal (i.e., before the beginning), is God (as whatever God is by nature, so is the Word), and with God (united with God the Father and Spirit). The Word, or *Logos*, is the operating agent of all wisdom and reality. The Word is simultaneously an instrument of the Father and himself God; though an instrument, we should never assume the Son is less in divinity and glory. In becoming human, the Word made flesh became the light for creation (John 1:5, 9).

Colin Kruse observes, “To *receive* him means, as this verse indicates, to believe in his name. To believe in a person’s name is to believe in the person, because the name stands for the person. Receiving him involves accepting the teaching and revelation of God (the ‘light’) he brought.”<sup>26</sup> To believe in Christ is to place one’s complete trust and allegiance to God’s light! This only makes sense if he is worthy of such confidence. Christ, being both God and man, truly deserves our fidelity and loving obedience. The truth that the eternal Son took on flesh for our salvation is core to the gospel proclamation. The Fathers at Nicaea understood this, and thus, to mitigate or jettison this conviction leads to a compromise in the gospel message. D. A. Carson adds, “This is the supreme revelation. If we are to know God, neither rationalism nor irrational mysticism will suffice: the former reduces God to mere object, and the latter abandons all controls.”<sup>27</sup> Special revelation in the form of Christ’s incarnation is the content of our salvation. Only a humble and Spirit-wrought acceptance of Christ as the incarnate Lord constitutes saving faith.

John’s opening declaration of Christ’s incarnation also points to the glory of the Son. John and others were witnesses to the glory of Christ. Beauty is a less-recognized synonym for glory. The apostles looked on the cosmic beauty of God in the incarnation, including in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This glory, or beauty, “the glory of the one and only Son from the Father,” is not a mere grace given to the Son as a divine creature, as Arian thought describes. God’s glory cannot be replicated, for he declares, “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory

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<sup>26</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 61, emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 127.

I give to no other” (Isa 42:8 ESV). Pure beauty from the divine nature is fully present in and manifested by the Son, in whom we are now united. Our salvation is possible only through the glorious Son. We echo what Carson notes: “The glory displayed in the incarnate Word is the kind of glory a father grants to his one and only, best-loved Son—and this ‘father’ is God himself. Thus, it is nothing less than God’s glory that John and his friends witnessed in the Word-made-flesh.”<sup>28</sup> John and the NT resound with this simple yet life-altering truth: no incarnation, no salvation.

### CONCLUSION

While trying to capture the wondrous beauty of the incarnation and its effects, Athanasius expressed, “Therefore it is better not to seek to speak of the whole, of which one cannot even speak of a part, but rather to recall one thing, and leave the whole for you to marvel at. For all are equally marvelous, and wherever one looks, seeing there the divinity of the Word, one is struck with exceeding awe.”<sup>29</sup> Like one who gazes “at the expanse of the sea” and attempts to count the waves, Christians cannot even begin to “comprehend the achievements of Christ in the body.”<sup>30</sup> The problem with the Arian and Eunomian vision of God, according to Athanasius and Gregory, is its narrowness. When we purge the mystery of God, we are left with a God unworthy of worship. The beauty and majesty of salvation through Christ fuels our worship and permits us to revel in God’s extraordinary but inexplicable love and mercy. Nicaea and its pro-Nicene defenders wished to ensure that Christians maintained this proper view of salvation so that they would gaze at the splendor of the triune God and be transformed as a result.

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<sup>28</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 128.

<sup>29</sup>*On the Incarnation* 54.

<sup>30</sup>*On the Incarnation* 54.



## BOOK REVIEWS

***The Destruction of the Canaanites: God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation.* By Charlie Trimm. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022, 127 pp., \$14.99.**

Trimm has provided a balanced and methodical survey of what he calls “the ethical problem of the destruction of the Canaanites” (2). The book is divided into two parts, the first of which provides prerequisite discussions on the nature of warfare in the ancient Near East (hereafter ANE), definitions of genocide, and the identity of and ancient perspectives on the Canaanites. This first half of the book establishes the appropriate working knowledge on these general topics and the parameters within which questions about the biblical testimony, the nature of God, and the interpretive options may be addressed, which is the focus of part two. Throughout the book, Trimm is fair and open-minded in his syntheses and analyses. His surveys of background information are appropriately nuanced, thorough, and sufficiently granular without being overwhelming for the non-specialist.

Trimm begins part one with a survey of warfare in the ANE, which he functionally delimits as the geographical regions between Egypt and Mesopotamia from approximately 2000 to 500 BCE. His maturity on this issue is illustrated by his regular reminders of the non-monolithic nature of ANE cultures, despite the modern researchers need to synthesize on some level. In the second chapter, he moves into a discussion of how genocide has been defined, leaning heavily into the understanding adopted by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. He also helpfully addresses whether any of the recorded events from the ANE outside of the Bible may be classified as genocide, ultimately concluding that the cultural gulf between modernity and antiquity should restrict the use of the term to modern events so as to avoid misunderstanding and imprecise analyses. In the third and final

chapter of part one, Trimm, drawing upon the work of Anson Rainey, helpfully synthesizes the ANE data related to the identity of the Canaanites; this chapter concludes with an insightful, clear, and succinct review of the instructions given to the Israelites regarding the Canaanites, with special attention to the idea of *herem*.

With the contextual background of part one properly addressed, Trimm pivots in part two to identify the options available to the exegete for addressing “the problem of the destruction of the Canaanites” (50). If clarity, balance, and succinctness are the primary descriptors of Trimm’s writing for part one, then logical and systematic are the best modifiers of his work in part two. Trimm organizes the second half of the book around four statements that, according to Trimm, cannot all be true collectively: 1) God is good and compassionate; 2) the Old Testament is a faithful record of God’s dealings with humanity and favorably portrays YHWH’s actions; 3) the Old Testament describes events that are similar to genocide; and 4) mass killings are always evil. The positions described in each chapter of part two reject or adjust at least one of these statements in order to assuage the moral injury inflicted by the seemingly genocidal nature of the scriptural account.

Trimm acknowledges that the rejection of monotheism and a moral deity quickly alleviates the ethical dilemmas associated with the destruction of the Canaanites but introduces other social and existential problems. He is charitable in his presentation of views that reject the historicity, divine authority, or ethical standing of the Old Testament text, but also critiques the limited nature of these strategies for those who still want to give some relevance to these Scriptures. One might expect Trimm to be more favorable to one or both of the final two strategies—interpreting the texts in ways that dissociate it from genocide or preserving the justness of the deity’s violent destruction of the Canaanites *en masse*. However, Trimm does not shy away from critiquing these positions as well. He highlights the potential inconsistency and special pleading associated with those views that interpret the relevant passages non-lethally, hyperbolically, or in a spiritualized manner. Likewise, he calls out the cavalier attitude of this strategy toward YHWH’s reputation and the precedent that it has set for acts in the name of God in the more recent past.

Overall, Trimm has provided a well-written volume, largely free of typos and grammatical errors. His style is a model for clarity and succinct writing; there are no wasted words in this book. He has organized the

material logically and in ways that anticipate the reader's next question. His posture is humble; his tone is fair and balanced; and the work is void of any straw man arguments. What may be the only two weaknesses of the book proceed out of these strengths.

First, Trimm's representation of the works that he associates with the various views, although charitable and equitable, sometimes lacks contextualization and at times may critique the works by criteria outside the primary purposes of the authors. For example, Rick Hess has written in multiple publications on the battle of Jericho and Ai. However, in the work cited by Trimm, he did not write to address the ethical problem of the Canaanite destruction, even if his work has bearing on and relevance for this discussion. Thus, to critique his work on these standards seems a bit out of place (73–74). Perhaps the intent was to critique those who may appeal to Hess's work to address this question, but this does not come across clearly. Having said this, I believe any resultant weakness should be attributed to the succinct nature of the book alone.

Second, in his effort to remain fair and balanced and in line with the survey nature of this book, Trimm opts not to identify his preferred view, which in turn means that no view was defended above the others. Although, he clearly states in his introduction that his goal is not to provide a "correct answer" to the problem, the reader is left feeling rather flat at the conclusion of the book without even a hint of guidance from the expert author.

In the end, Trimm has produced a fine survey on the topic of the Canaanite destruction. His review of the various background topics and his organization of the possible views on the subject are an excellent introduction to this matter. Also, his posture and tone are a model for writers in our divisive and polarized era. This book would serve as an excellent supplemental textbook in an undergraduate or graduate course on religion or Old Testament studies. It would also be a useful volume for personal study by educated parishioners who are interested in this subject or wrestling with its ethical, moral, and theological implications.

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***The State of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research.*  
By H. H. Hardy II and M. Daniel Carroll R. Grand Rapids: Baker  
Academic, 2024, 512 pp., \$44.99.**

*The State of Old Testament Studies* has taken its inspiration from the well-known antecedent volume, twenty-five years its senior, *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*. However, as the editors state, this volume is more than an update to the former (xxi). In many ways, it is an expansion and modernization of the former work. The current volume is broader and more diversified in its treatment of the field, as is evident from its thirty-two chapters, compared to the sixteen of its predecessor. This is at least in part a mirror of the greater segmentation of Old Testament studies itself. Likewise, many of the areas of study treated by Hardy and Carroll have developed only since the publication of *The Face of Old Testament Studies*. Thus, the book truly stands on its own as a snapshot of the field today.

The chapters are evenly written, but not uniformly structured. Some chapters may focus more on overcoming objections or clarifying the intent of a given method. Others may explicitly trace the development of and recent advances within a subject. Still others may be dominated by an introduction to the subject. Even with this diverse texture, the chapters in their own ways outline the heritage and development of the subdiscipline; synthesize the most current foci, trends, and research questions of the practitioners; forecast how the area may develop in the future; and provide an embedded bibliography by way of the footnotes for the interested reader.

The editors have arranged the concise chapters into three main divisions, which roughly correspond to contextual and background studies, the study of the scriptural books/collections themselves, and distinct methodological approaches and aims. The chapters represent great breadth across the Christian tradition, diverse methodological values and interests, and fair handed evaluations and writing. The volume is ideally suited for an academically minded and intellectually stimulated reader. However, the breadth of perspective and method may result in the content of some chapters evoking questions or critique from one end or the other of the confessional or methodological spectrums. Thus, this volume is not for the doctrinaire scholar. It is also worth noting that while the academic nature of the volume places it out of reach for the casual Bible reader, several of the chapters seek to demonstrate the value of their discipline for fostering

devotion to and love for God. Thus, the balance of the work is admirable.

The invited authors possess specialized expertise in their respective sub-disciplines, and this is evident in the quality of each chapter. However, as with any edited volume, the strengths of the respective chapters vary. Some chapters such as “Old Testament Canons,” “Theological Interpretation,” or “Old Testament Theology” provide especially careful and concise synthetic work. Other chapters such as “Chronicles” or “Archaeology and History: Iron Age II,” allow the reader to come up to speed within the subdiscipline, skillfully interrelating the various strands and debates of the subdiscipline. Still other chapters, such as “Qumran and the Scrolls from the Judean Desert” or “Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” require serious specialization, involve technical work, or have proven to be rather dynamic, and yet the authors were able to present an accessible and jargon-free assessment for non-specialists.

Some areas that I might have expected to receive a more prominent focus in one or more of the chapters include the process of textual instantiation (143–44), reception history of Old Testament traditions in later Old Testament texts and early Jewish literature (198–201, 211–13, 433–37), the role of scribes and scribalism (42–43, 369–70), the impact of scribal and cultural memory (196–97, 211–13), scholarship on (or assuming) the unity of the Pentateuch, and the place of textual materiality in the text–critical enterprise. However, it should be noted that the editors themselves acknowledged the impossibility of giving proper treatment to every warranted aspect of Old Testament studies (xxiii). Also, some of these research trends were addressed within chapters in the volume, as I have tried to indicate for the reader in the parentheticals above.

Overall, the book is a valuable read for the uninitiated seminary student eager to find their way through the field or the seasoned scholar who has maintained mastery over their own areas of research but is looking for a guide to help him or her come up to speed in adjacent specialties. The ongoing segmentation of every field, the resultant hyper-specialization of researchers, and the proliferation of literature all add to the high value of a resource like this one. Just as we were grateful to Baker and Arnold for providing a lay of the land in 1999, we are now indebted to Hardy and

Carroll for offering a trustworthy guide for the next twenty-five years.

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***Galatians and Ephesians through Old Testament Eyes: A Background and Application Commentary.* By Gary M. Burge. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2025, 320 pp., \$28.99.**

In this commentary, Gary Burge takes the reader on a journey through Galatians and Ephesians with constant reference to the Old Testament. He brings into the conversation numerous Old Testament characters, images, phrases, concepts, and themes. The introduction to the commentary reveals a great deal about how Burge understands these biblical books and how he will explain them. In the introduction, he describes a late ancient Jewish synagogue found at Beit Alpha. The sanctuary contains a mosaic floor which has been recovered. On the mosaic's perimeter, one finds familiar Jewish symbols, but the largest part of the floor depicts the sun god with a chariot surrounded by signs of the zodiac. This image appears out of place to most contemporary visitors who hold certain expectations for a Jewish synagogue. The meaning or significance of the image within a Jewish synagogue has been lost due to historical and cultural distance. Burge compares the books of Galatians and Ephesians to this strange image. Burge argues that just as the distance (historical, geographic, cultural, intellectual, etc.) between the synagogue building and today's context creates barriers to understand the original meaning of the mosaic so also the distance between the biblical books and today's context creates barriers to understand the original meaning of these books even though much of what they present may seem familiar to us.

As a result, Burge spends most of his time explaining the biblical books by addressing the original context in which they were written, especially for Galatians. Part of this original context includes the Old Testament backdrop to Paul and those early churches. Burge maintains almost constant contact with Old Testament images and themes with two notable features. First, he characterizes Paul as free "to find meanings in these scriptures that were not originally intended in order to apply them in fresh contexts and give them to Jesus where we'd least expect it" (159). Second,

Burge often moves beyond the Old Testament itself, addressing Second Temple Judaism and the religious and cultural developments that took place between the events of the Old Testament and those of the New (for an excellent example see the discussion regarding Jews and Gentiles in Christ, 200–201).

This interpretive and cultural backdrop influences Burge's interpretation, especially regarding Paul, Judaism, the law, grace, and the church. Burge is quite familiar with recent scholarly conversations, influencing his understanding in significant ways as the following examples demonstrate. First, regarding the problem of the Judaizers in Galatians, he states that they are not teaching that law-keeping (e.g., circumcision) is necessary for salvation, but that law-keeping (e.g., circumcision) is a necessary entailment of salvation, marking the law-keepers as true believers (36). Second, regarding the nature of grace, he follows Barclay's work *Paul and the Gift*, understanding grace as a gift freely extended, but also one that brings obligations for the one who accepts it; therefore, "God's mercy and grace is balanced by his justice and expectations" (78). Third, because of the public political powers of imperial cult and the local temple cult as well as the deeply held beliefs about "malevolent spiritual powers" associated with mystery religions, Paul emphasizes the power of God over all authorities (164–5). Fourth, regarding the ordering of the community, Burge interprets many of Paul's admonitions as either upending or subverting expectations of Roman hierarchy.

Burge does not limit his commentary just to comments about the historical, however. He also addresses theological formulations and contemporary applications. As far as theological formulations are concerned, he cautions against over-interpreting the biblical language. For instance, when explaining Ephesians 1:5, he addresses the term translated "predestined" by warning that it "should not be over-interpreted" (173). He continues that it is "not a finely worked out determinism but a decision from the start to bring men and women into his [God's] family to participate in this plan" (173). As far as contemporary applications are concerned, Burge often takes aim at certain aspects of conservative evangelicalism. He criticizes certain forms of support for modern Israel, certain views of immigration policy, and patriarchal authority. Because of the subject matters of Galatians and Ephesians, his egalitarian views regarding church and family show up fairly often in the commentary.

Biblical commentary is an interesting genre. On the one hand,

commentaries resemble reference works like dictionaries or encyclopedias. They often provide immediate help for a question regarding a specific passage. On the other hand, commentaries resemble standard monographs with a thesis and an argument running through the entire volume. This commentary resembles the latter more. It succeeds at providing a commentary of the New Testament in constant contact with the Old Testament. At the same time, the commentary's perspective is not limited to the Old Testament. It draws heavily on the historical and cultural background of the New Testament period, often linking aspects of the early Jewish background to the Old Testament. In line with the author's purpose, the commentary resembles a journey through an ancient site, sometimes familiar and other times strange. Furthermore, what it does best is give a tour through these books against this backdrop.

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***Engaging the New Testament: A Short Introduction for Students and Ministers.* By Miguel G. Echevarría. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024, 240 pp., \$17.49.**

Miguel Echevarría's *Engaging the New Testament* offers a fresh approach to New Testament introductions. Rather than emphasizing traditional critical issues, Echevarría prioritizes the message and content of the biblical texts. He does not ignore critical concerns but relegates them to sidebars, focusing instead on what the final form of the text communicates. His canonical approach—highlighting the significance of the New Testament's final order—serves this purpose well, guiding readers toward understanding each book's theological message.

The book follows the canonical sequence of the New Testament but begins with two key foundations: the importance of the canon and the hermeneutics of the New Testament authors. Per Echevarría, reading the sixty-six books of the Bible in order surmounts to a riveting and coherent narrative (7). Thus, knowing the thematic elements of the Old Testament helps in understanding how the New Testament fits in the larger context of Scripture (8), and Echevarría briefly sketches themes such as Abrahamic promises, the Exodus story, Davidic promises, exile, and the expectation

of the Messiah that find fulfillment in the New Testament. However, this overview spans only six pages and lacks deeper engagement or guidance for further exploration, and one wonders whether this is adequate enough to bring about his intended goal of situating the New Testament in the overall context of Scripture. More important for Echevarría is the formation of the New Testament canon and its function. He makes a bold statement when he claims that the function of a book within the biblical canon is more important than the author's historical intention (20) and that the placement of a book within the canon has more hermeneutical significance than the book's historical context (21). While the canonical shape certainly matters, it is debatable whether it should override the significance of historical context—especially for the intended audience of students and ministers new to biblical studies. The risk here is diminishing the value of the original setting and authorial purpose, which are essential tools for sound interpretation.

Similar caution can be given for Echevarría's discussion of the hermeneutics of the New Testament authors (chapter three). This chapter is essentially an introduction to how the New Testament uses the Old Testament, with a focus on typology. This is important for Echevarría since focusing on how the Old Testament passages function within the New Testament will broaden an interpreter's understanding beyond the immediate historical context of a given passage (39–40). The nature of typology, which “necessitates that readers interpret Scripture ‘backwards’ to grasp connections between Old Testament types and New Testament antitypes” (33), actually broadens one's comprehension of the biblical text by placing it within the divine, timeless framework of the canon—reflecting what God intended to reveal across all sixty-six books of Scripture. All of this is certainly good and necessary for proper exegesis, but Echevarría approaches a problematic area when he encourages readers to follow Jesus's and Paul's interpretive methods and to make typological connections not explicitly stated in Scripture (36–40). This is not something one would typically encourage a novice Bible reader to do as it risks leading them into speculative or unwarranted interpretations.

In chapters four through seven, Echevarría delves into the core of his argument, examining New Testament books from Matthew to Revelation in their canonical order. The analysis follows a largely consistent format across all twenty-seven New Testament books. Echevarría begins by summarizing the book's content, followed by its canonical role, and then

addresses traditional topics like authorship and date. His focus on the canonical order becomes especially evident in his treatment of Hebrews, where he attributes authorship to Paul (152–53). According to Echevarría, significant manuscripts include Hebrews within the Pauline letter collection, and “In its current location, Hebrews functions as an appropriate conclusion to the Pauline corpus before one encounters the Catholic epistles” (149). However, his application of the canonical method is not always consistent. For instance, he affirms the shorter ending of Mark (59), which seems to contradict his commitment to the final form of the canon. Furthermore, while he highlights the importance of each book’s canonical function, these sections are often too brief to fully realize that aim.

Nevertheless, Echevarría’s book offers a fresh perspective on New Testament introductions and succeeds in its goal of providing a concise overview for students and Bible ministers, including those with no formal theological training. Echevarría’s emphasis on the canonical approach and his effort to place each New Testament book within the broader context of Scripture is a commendable contribution. Taking the noted cautions into consideration, this book proves to be a helpful resource for those embarking on the study and interpretation of the New Testament.

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***Reading Galatians.* By John Anthony Dunne. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2025, 180 pp., \$25.00.**

The influence of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians casts a long shadow over the landscape of Christian theology and Biblical interpretation. Akin to its longer cousin Romans, Galatians has captured the minds and hearts of those who have read and studied its contents for the past two millennia. Because of Galatians’ massive impact upon the Christian tradition, many Christians have a sure understanding of the letter’s content—justification by faith in Christ instead of works of law. Yet, at the same time, many are less sure-footed on the particulars of the letter: how Paul’s arguments unfold and the circumstances around its composition.

In *Reading Galatians*, John Anthony Dunne, associate professor of New Testament at Bethel University, seeks to provide a more confident

readership to Paul's dynamic and peculiar letter. Dunne's aim in the work is to provide a guide, distilling scholarship to propel further study and reflection on the letter (ix). The book's outline supports the reader with a grid for thinking about the letter.

The first two chapters outline the letter's structure (chapter 1, 1–17), and how Galatians has been interpreted historically, outlining the major trends in scholarship (chapter 2, 18–37). Dunne summarizes these approaches fairly, usually noting the major works associated with each approach and how they rightly highlight emphases of the letter. The sole caveat to this trend is his engagement with “Lutheran/Reformational” readings of Paul. Dunne's approach is eclectic and encourages his reader to take a similar approach (37).

Chapters three through eight address the circumstances of the letter and its content from a chronological perspective, beginning with Paul's initial visit to the Galatians in conversation with the book of Acts (chapter 3). Here, Dunne draws from Galatians the texts concerning Paul's suffering in his ministry to the Galatians (4:14–16; 1:8–9, 13–14; 5:21). One aspect of this chapter I found insightful was Dunne's use of relevance theory to address why Paul refers to this initial visit so elliptically (47). Dunne argues for a southern Galatian audience written before the Jerusalem council (52–60).

Chapter four focuses on the crisis in Galatia after Paul left and introduces the issues of mirror reading the letter. Dunne identifies the opponents as Jewish Christians (70) and suggests the pressures leading to their actions involved the prevalence of the imperial cult in provinces of Galatia and Asia (73). In this reading of the crisis, the Mosaic law and Judaism are historically respected ancient traditions within Roman Hellenism, and therefore, Jews were often exempt from the festivals and rituals involved in imperial cult worship.

Chapters five through seven focus on Paul's response to the crisis in Galatia in his letter (82–124). In chapter five (83–93), Dunne focuses on the purpose of chapters 1–2 in Paul's argument. Is Paul confronting false information about him provided by the agitators or presenting himself as an example for the Galatians to follow? Dunne suggests Paul's use of Isaianic quotations indicative of his participation in and his continuation of the Messiah's (Christos) mission and activity (Gal 1:15–16// LXX Isa 49:1b; Gal 1:24// LXX Isa 49:3; Gal 2:2// LXX Isa 49:4a). Paul is both inviting the Galatians to see him as a paradigm for how Jews and Gentiles

relate to God through union with and faith in Christ (esp. 2:16–21), and to address the accusations from the agitators that Paul is dependent upon the Jerusalem apostles for his Gentile mission. Dunne also helpfully points out that Paul’s preaching in Acts within the cities that composed his Galatian audience also refers to Isaiah 49 (Acts 13:47// LXX Isa 49:6). In this chapter Dunne briefly addresses the debates of the meaning of *pistis christou* “faith in/faithfulness of Christ” and opts, I think correctly, for the “faith in Christ” interpretation of the phrase (91).

Chapter six (94–107) addresses the promise to Abraham and the function of the law in Galatians 3–4. Dunne quickly outlines the patristic, traditional Lutheran, new perspective, apocalyptic, and Paul within Judaism understandings of the function of the law in Galatians (94–95). Dunne states that the law should not apply to the Galatians because it did not determine their reception of the Spirit or justification by faith and therefore does not indicate who is adopted into Abraham’s family (96), as Galatians 3:6–14, 15–29, and 4:1–7 suggest (96–103). These are difficult passages to interpret, and I quibble with Dunne on a few points of interpretation. Overall, his emphasis on the reception of the Spirit and faith in Christ as means of the Abrahamic inheritance, so making the law not binding for Jews and Gentiles, is helpful. In Dunne’s interpretation of Galatians 4:21–5:1, he connects Paul’s reading of LXX Isaiah 54:1 cited in Galatians 4:27 with the Isaianic servant’s (i.e. Christ) suffering to make the realities of Isaiah 54 possible. Paul’s Galatians, like the Messiah and himself, share in these messianic sufferings, demonstrating they are truly Abraham’s heirs (4:29; cf. Gal 3:4; 4:6).

Chapter seven (108–24) focuses on the function of the Spirit in the argument of the letter. The Messiah’s Spirit provides the life the law identifies but cannot itself offer in Galatians 3:21 (108–110). The Spirit’s connection with eschatological life by the Son’s resurrection (see Gal 1:1; 2:19–20) is prominent throughout the rest of the letter (Gal 3:21; 6:8, 14). The reason the law is no longer binding on Jews and Gentiles in Christ is that the law is only binding until death (e.g., Gal 2:19; cf. Rom 7:1–5). Thus, as Paul says in Gal 5:18, “those led by the Spirit are no longer under the law”. Jews and Gentiles in Christ effectively live within a new reality because Christ and the Spirit have come, demonstrating there is a “new creation” that is no longer bound to the requirements of the law’s authority, no longer experience its judgement because they are led by Christ and the Spirit (5:18; 6:2), and have for Paul become a new community empowered by

God's spirit (5:24–6:10).

Chapters eight and nine focus on what the Galatians did with the letter (chapter 8) and how we should apply the letter's insights today (chapter 9). Paul is gravely concerned for the Galatians' eschatological state (Gal 4:19; cf. 2:2). He anticipates divine judgement upon the opponents (1:6–9; 5:10, 12) and is motivated by their future eschatological prospects if they reject his message (e.g., Gal 1:4; 5:21; 6:8–10). While some like J. Louis Martyn have argued Paul's ministry in Galatia was a failure, we see a glimmer of hope in 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 where Paul mentions the Galatians in his collection for the Saints in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Tim 3:10–12).

Dunne makes two general observations for application. First, Paul's rejection of circumcision as the means of Abrahamic inheritance and blessing indicates that the blessings of Paul's gospel is available to all. Second, in terms of the rejection of circumcision and the gift of the Spirit, Christians today can make similar leaps of judgment of cultural prerequisites for admission into Christian churches that are even on less sure biblical grounds than Paul's opponents. Dunne applies insights from John Barclay's work on grace as a gift in Paul, in ways that hold the two sides of divine action and human response in Galatians together. Namely, God's divine action in grace obligates the recipient to an appropriate ethical response, which Paul defines as life in the Spirit (Gal 5:13–6:10). Strikingly, for Paul, God's grace not only obligates the recipient but also empowers them to live accordingly to this gift (5:26).

As Dunne observes, Galatians has had a prized place within the Christian tradition and modern scholarship because "the way that Galatians has inspired so many different kinds of theological projects speaks to its generativity, if not its ambiguity..." (136). Dunne's guided reading of the letter provides a helpful starting point for readers starting their journey.

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***Alvin Plantinga.* By Greg Welty. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023, 208 pp., \$15.99.**

Author Greg Welty is a professor of philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This book is in the series of Great Thinkers edited

by Nathan D. Shannon. Bill Davis, a professor of philosophy at Covenant College and a doctoral student of Plantinga provides a Foreword. From his observation, Davis testifies that Plantinga's Christian faith is deep and genuine. He thinks Plantinga is a "great thinker" because of his impact on the professional world of philosophy. Welty, in his preface, mentions that although he was a student of British philosopher Swinburne, he appreciated Plantinga and defended him before his British audience.

This book has eight chapters. It gives a very good summary of many of Plantinga's works. In the first chapter, "Why Another Book on Plantinga," Welty discusses Plantinga's significance, his personal background, and the purpose of writing this book. Plantinga attended Harvard for one semester, then returned to Calvin College. Later in his intellectual biography, he commented, "There is no such thing as a serious, substantial, and relatively complete intellectual endeavor that is religiously neutral." Plantinga taught at Wayne State University (1958-63), Calvin College (1963-82), and the University of Notre Dame (1982-2010).

Chapter two, "Plantinga on Faith and Reason," explains his faculty-based approach to faith and reason. He proposes that faith and reason are two different ways of knowing. Faith is based on the *sensus divinitatis* which is similar to reason's empirical perception. Plantinga provided a unified theory of how the information obtained by either sense can be counted as warranted true belief and as knowledge, hence there is a similarity between faith and reason. His approach is called "Reformed epistemology." Plantinga also shows that classical foundationalism, which is based on logical positivism, is false and incoherent.

The third chapter describes the free will defense proposed by Plantinga to deal with the problem of evil. To defeat the logical problem of evil, he finds a possible world in which God and evil could coexist. In his argument, he assumes that human beings have libertarian (true) free will. To counter the evidential problem of evil (where evil is evidence against God's existence), he adapts the free will defense to show there is no possible world that God could have created that has a better balance of moral good to moral evil.

Plantinga's view on theistic arguments is the subject of the fourth chapter. Welty summarizes in two sections: belief in God isn't proved false by argument, and belief in God is proved rationally permissible by argument. Plantinga uses the parity argument from other minds to show that believing in God is reasonable. He even revives the modal ontological argument for the existence of God, first proposed by Anselm. He also resorts to natural

theology to provide “two dozen theistic arguments.”

“Plantinga on the Divine Attributes” is the title of the fifth chapter. Could God be metaphysically simple? His answer is no. Could God have foreknowledge while we remain free? His answer is yes based on Molinistic theory of divine providence. Could God know everything despite various paradoxes about the infinite? His answer upholds the omniscience of God. Could God’s transcendence preclude our knowing anything about Him? His answer is no.

Plantinga’s view on religion and science is the subject of the sixth chapter. In his book, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Plantinga defuses any alleged conflict between science and religion and points out that a real conflict exists between science and the theory of evolution if naturalism is assumed. He argues that if not assuming metaphysical naturalism, then biological evolution does not undermine the doctrine of divine creation, physics does not undermine the doctrine of divine providence and miracles, and evolutionary psychology does not undermine the truth of Christian belief.

Chapter 7 is a reflection on Plantinga’s philosophical method. He proposes five methodological principles and four activities: Christian apologetics, philosophical theology, Christian philosophical criticism, and constructive Christian philosophy. Welty expands Christian apologetics into five ways: transcendent truth, proof, support, rational acceptability, and coherence. He faults Plantinga for lacking any work in the first two ways of Christian apologetics: take Christian truth as a premise and provide proof of distinctive Christian claims. He points out that Plantinga’s work mostly concerns theism, instead of specific Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement.

In the last chapter, Welty evaluates Plantinga’s work from the Reformed perspective. He concludes that Plantinga’s appeal to libertarian free will and Molinism does conflict with the Reformed position, but matters like effectual calling, classical natural theology, Van Til’s transcendental argument, and classical theism can be added to Plantinga’s positions.

Welty provides a sympathetic, accessible, yet serious overview and commentary on Plantinga’s work. It combines philosophical accuracy with theological evaluation and guides a student to appreciate and understand Plantinga’s major works. This book is a good introductory text for pastors and theological students; it can serve as a supplemental reading in seminary courses on apologetics and the philosophy of religion. It ends with a Glossary, References, Recommended Reading, and an Index of

Subjects and Names.

One would wonder why Plantinga did not do the offensive apologetics by taking Christian truth as a premise and providing proof of distinctive Christian claims. One answer was provided by James Beilby in his essay on Plantinga in *The History of Apologetics*, 2020 (696-711). Beilby points out that Plantinga's experience at Wayne State formed his apologetic methodology in a highly defensive and minimalist direction.

Regarding Reformed epistemology, it seems *sensus divinitatis* can only provide broad direction but not give detailed specifics precisely. This could be due to human fall.

There is one area not mentioned by Welty. Plantinga thinks there is no serious scholarly work that can be religiously neutral, he even argues that science can involve religious belief or commitment, so he is against methodological naturalism. Does this apply to all areas of science? This reviewer was a mathematics major in college and finds that methodological naturalism works well in mathematics and physical sciences, which could be due to the lesser impact of human fall.

Plantinga is the main contributor in changing the professional philosophy world to become hospitable to the Christian worldview. From the Christian point of view, he is a great thinker by his influence. His contribution was mentioned by John Laing in a special *SWJT* issue on new atheism (*SWJT*, 54, no. 1, Fall 2011, pp. 6-12).

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***Systematic Philosophical Theology: Prolegomena, on Scripture, on Faith. Vol 1.* By William Lane Craig. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2025, 368 pp., \$65.00.**

William Lane Craig is one of the most noted and published evangelical philosophers of the last half-century. He has published philosophical works on wide-ranging topics, to say nothing of his myriad apologetics books. This corpus gives him both the depth and breadth of expertise needed to write a systematic treatment of philosophical theology. At the same time, he has taken positions in the last decade that have made many Evangelicals uneasy, such as his views on the incarnation and on the implications

of Genesis 1–11 for human history. Nevertheless, the mere fact that he has collated his views and interactions with other scholars' views makes *Systematic Philosophical Theology* a project worthy of attention.

A few caveats are in order before diving into the content of this volume. First, this review only concerns volume 1 of what is currently a three-volume work. Volumes 2a and 2b take up the attributes of God and natural theology, respectively, while volume 3 considers creation and humanity. At the writing of this review, only volumes 1 and 2a have been released. Second, Craig states in his preface the importance in philosophical theology of dealing with contemporary voices shaping the last several decades of conversations. In Craig's view, "contemporary philosophers have not only advanced far beyond the figures of the past but have in many respects profited from and corrected their mistakes" (xvi). Thus, he deals extensively with contributors over the past century and less with ancient views. Third, Craig's philosophical peccadillos come through regularly in the book, though he does not always give a background for them. Readers will encounter his anti-realist position on abstract objects, his Molinism, and other presuppositions he puts to use in his arguments.

Volume 1 of *Systematic Philosophical Theology* is broken into three sections. First, Craig deals with prolegomena, mainly focused on the resurgence of Christian philosophy in the twentieth century and with the differences between various philosophical disciplines overlapping and adjacent to philosophical theology. He also gives a short treatment of truth in which he defends correspondence as the valid definition for theological inquiry. The second section (Locus I) concerns the philosophy of revelation and scriptural inspiration. Here, Craig defines and defends a counterfactual theory as the best explanation for verbal plenary inspiration and for inerrancy. He also defends Christians' ability to justifiably believe the scriptures are accurate testimonies of the events they describe. Finally, section three (Locus II) concerns philosophical definitions of beliefs and faith, especially focused on the propositional content of beliefs. The section concludes by considering various philosophical reasons why Christians can be rational in having faith.

Craig should be commended for his work in several ways. Each locus in the book begins with a thorough biblical interaction, grounding the book's discussions in theological issues arising from biblical data. Counter to the works of systematic philosophical theologians like Paul Tillich, Craig desires to remain faithful to the broadly evangelical perspective about

the normativity of Scripture. Craig's interactions with biblical passages provide grounding for the book's topics, and they set boundaries on what conclusions the discussions can properly find. Further, Craig interacts with other scholars in a mostly productive manner, allowing them to speak for themselves before critiquing or supporting their conclusions. He helpfully leaves his most technical interactions to the footnotes, which allows a broader audience to read the main text and profit from it. The historical review in his prolegomena section sets is especially helpful because it gives those outside the philosophical guild a window into the changes that have occurred over the last century and lends support to the resurgent fidelity that many Christian philosophers have toward Scripture and orthodoxy.

The volume has its limitations amidst its strengths. At times, Craig too quickly narrows the conversation to the position he considers correct. Alternative (and more popular) positions, therefore, sometimes receive less consideration than they deserve. A case study in this tendency occurs as part of his discussion about scriptural inspiration in a subsection unsubtly titled, "The Solution: A Molinist Theory of Inspiration" (134). Molinism, it should be noted, is not the majority position among theologians, philosophical or otherwise. Craig essentially neglects other theories on the coherence of verbal plenary inspiration, preferring his own view as the only legitimate option. Similar instances are not prevalent, but they are present. Craig takes several non-theological philosophical positions that place him in a minority among philosophers, and correspondingly favors several theories that are in the minority among philosophical theologians. Pastorally, the main drawback of the book is its steep learning curve. While Craig endeavors to keep the level of required background knowledge low, *Systematic Philosophical Theology* nevertheless is a work of philosophy, and analytic philosophy at that. Readers lacking the toolkit for analytic philosophy may find Craig's lines of thinking difficult to follow. Still, the issues that Craig raises help evangelical readers gain a sense that difficult philosophical questions have good and trustworthy answers, serving a much-needed apologetic purpose.

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***Living Martyrs in Late Antiquity and Beyond: Surviving Martyrdom.***  
**By Diane Shane Fruchtman. London: Routledge, 2023, xiii+280 pp.,**  
**\$190.00.**

Martyrs are people that die bearing witness to their faith, right? To many that seems a self-evident fact. One might as well ask: “Is the pope Catholic?” or “Does a cat have climbing gear?” There is even a distinction in church history between martyrs (i.e., those who die for their faith) and confessors (i.e., those who experience persecution for their faith and survive). Yet, Diane Shane Fruchtman challenges this simple characterization with the aid of leading Christian thinkers from Late Antiquity who classified some survivors of persecution as martyrs. Through her detailed analysis of the works of Prudentius, Paulinus of Nola, and Augustine of Hippo, Fruchtman demonstrates the surprising plasticity of the conception of “martyrdom” in Late Antiquity.

Fruchtman has a bold argument that is sure to impact martyrdom studies. She argues, “not only that scholars *can* include martyrs who do not die in our definition of martyrdom, but also that we *must* do so if we are to glean from our sources a full, accurate, and fruitful understanding of what martyrdom is and has meant to Christians throughout Christian history” (2). Fruchtman calls three witnesses to her cause. She begins with the late ancient Christian poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens.

Fruchtman divides her analysis of Prudentius in two chapters. Chapter one examines three poems from Prudentius’s *Peristephanon* that feature five martyrs. Among these martyrs are both those who perish in persecution and those who survive. This chapter shows Prudentius’s destabilization of the necessity of death in the definition of martyrdom. In chapter two, Fruchtman analyzes Prudentius’s grounding of martyrdom in witness rather than death. She identifies “the notion of witness...as the signal and central feature of martyrdom” for Prudentius (51). She lays out a tripartite division of witness: observing witness, testifying witness, and enacting witness. These three forms of witness guide analysis of living martyrs’ witness for the rest of the work.

After Prudentius, Fruchtman next calls upon Paulinus of Nola to give evidence for the role of living martyrs. Paulinus too receives two chapters’ worth of analysis. She investigates Paulinus’s advocacy for the veneration of St. Felix of Nola as a martyr, although Felix died peacefully. Fruchtman asserts that in his devotion to Felix, “Paulinus sought to encourage more

Christians to aspire to martyrdom, to help them identify with the martyrs, and to model their expressions of Christianity on the martyrial life as exemplified by living martyrs” (96). She argues well for her thesis in this chapter, and Paulinus’s writings demonstrate the late ancient categorization of living martyrs. This chapter, however, could have used more contextual exposition. Specifically, more information on the rise of veneration of saints, including animal sacrifices at the shrine of St. Felix, would have been helpful for non-specialists. It may be that specialists are the assumed readership as this is published in Routledge’s *Studies in the Early Christian World* series. In chapter four, Fruchtman argues that Paulinus sought to transform his hearers into living martyrs through imitation of lives of witness.

Fruchtman saves her strongest supporter for last: Augustine of Hippo. Chapter five centers Augustine’s teaching on living martyrs on his assertion: *non poena sed causa martyrem facit* (it is not the punishment but the cause that makes a martyr). This chapter draws from fourteen of Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum* where Augustine time and time again afforded martyr status to any Christian who avoided worldly temptations. Fruchtman writes, “martyrdom without death was a longstanding and perennially foregrounded idea for Augustine” (162). Fruchtman examines Augustine’s praise of “sickbed martyrs” who refused pagan amulets and potions and entrusted their lives to God. Chapter five ably demonstrates Augustine’s usage of “martyr” for living Christians. Chapter six considers Augustine’s conception of living martyrdom and “the persuasive means that Augustine employed to help his audiences achieve the martyrdom he described” (214). Fruchtman’s rhetorical analysis of Augustine’s sermons is thorough, and she argues well for the necessity of taking seriously the conception of living martyrdom.

Fruchtman concludes this work with a call to modern historians and scholars of religion to take seriously historical usages of “martyr” and “martyrdom” that do not fit into modern definitions. She argues well that for many “late ancient authors, martyrdom meant a way of life rather than an experience of death” (249). While the categories of martyr and confessor remain useful, Fruchtman provides a helpful corrective to modern readings of late ancient sources. Scholars must not assume universal definitions for even such seemingly straightforward words as “martyr.” This is a narrow but impactful thesis, which is sure to affect studies of martyrdom in Late Antiquity and beyond.

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***The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written.* By Kevin DeYoung. Wheaton: Crossway, 2025, 96 pp., \$12.99.**

Kevin L. DeYoung, an associate professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, serves as senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina. As the title bespeaks, the Nicene Creed is universally considered as “the most important creed ever written” due to its being the first ecumenical creed in church history, which signifies it is “officially adopted with the express purpose that it should be binding on every church everywhere” (9, 23).

The three-fold method laying out the book, i.e., historical, theological, and devotional, brings the appropriate structure enough to draw attention as an introductory resource of the Nicene Creed (10). Forming seven chapters with each wording sourced from the Creed itself, the author makes specific emphases on what the readers need to be reminded in terms of the phrases.

The starting phrase of the Creed, “We believe,” implies from the early church era the gravity of the Christian creeds and confessions, which is, according to Jaroslav Pelikan cited by the author, “the utter seriousness with which they treat the issues of Christian doctrine as, quite literally, a matter of life and death, both here in time and hereafter in eternity” (33). The natural consequence of this conceptual and practical thought of ‘gravity’ developed the formation of the Nicene Creed, through which the author follows unfolding the succession of the theological flow of the Creed.

Defending consubstantiality among the three divine persons in the Godhead has prerequisite; that is, to nail firmly down the divine status and eternal authority of the second person of the Trinity, the “only begotten Son.” Up against Arius’s unreasonable, illogical, and distorted comprehension of monotheistic God, which argued the Son, “timelessly begotten by the Father,” was “created and established before all ages” and “did not exist prior to his begetting,” the Creed affirms categorically that the Son is “God of God,” “God from God,” “Light of Light,” and “the very God of very God” (38–40).

An interesting point of considerations dealing with the “esoteric formulas” like *homoousios* and *hypostatic* union, comes from the question, “Why not just stick to the language of the Bible?” (45). Among three responses suggested by the author, the third is fair to be mentioned, though the first two also make sense: “We need nonbiblical words to summarize and protect biblical truth” (46). “Clarifying rather than obscuring” the biblical teaching by using non-biblical terms helps Christians be more focused on “what Scripture actually teaches,” not just having arguments about the words themselves, according to Athanasius (47).

The theological thought of the “gravity” of the Creed flows to man’s salvation totally relying on the person of Christ because “only a Savior who is true God of true God can save us from our God-defying sin” (53). Explaining two categories of the work of Christ, the author gives three overarching observations that are directly related to the salvific gospel in and through Jesus Christ. In particular, the author brings one of the crucial statements from Gregory of Nazianzus, “the unassumed is the unhealed” (58). It means Christ “cannot save human beings if he has a rational soul that is of the same ‘stuff’ as the Logos instead of the same ‘stuff’ as man,” which was targeting the heresy of Apollinarianism which denied Christ’s human mind (57–59).

Finally, the “gravity” of the Creed reaches the full deity of the Holy Spirit who is called “the Lord,” “giver of life,” and being equal to the Father and the Son in rank and then, reaches the “four adjectives” of “church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,” which “is connected to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit” (62, 71–72). Though having a different interpretational understanding with the reviewer regarding the *Filioque* and baptism, the author provides a theological reflection and reasoning based upon the historical consideration.

As an introduction to the first ecumenical creed, this book, published in a timely manner, is recommended for those who are looking for a general guide to the theological journey into the fourth century.

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***Are We Living in the Last Days? Four Views of the Hope We Share about Revelation and Christ's Return.* By Bryan Chapell. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2024, 256 pp., \$22.99.**

Chapell is the President Emeritus of Covenant Theological Seminary and Pastor Emeritus of the historic Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois. The book was written after some members of the author's church asked him whether he believed that Jesus is coming back. Chapell was deeply hurt when that accusation happened. He decided to write this book to explain that different views about the millennium are all legitimate interpretations of Revelation, and Christians need to understand them and accept diverse perspectives because all of them acknowledge the second coming of Jesus Christ. Also, Chapell was involved in designing the lessons on the Book of Revelation together with Mark Bailey and Walt Kaiser for Bible Study Fellowship. Their discussion formed the basis of this book.

Chapter 1 is entitled "Are We Living in the Last Days?" Various ways of understanding the Book of Revelation were listed and discussed. The near view (Preterist), the long view (Historicist), the future view (Futurist), the symbolic view (Idealist), and the mixed view, which combines elements from the above four views to form an eclectic view. All these views agree that we are living in the last days. According to the biblical definition, the end time began with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ's second coming is imminent, even though there are different theories about what must happen before Christ returns.

Jesus's Olivet Discourse in Mathew 24, wars and rumors of wars, the Antichrist, and the rebirth of Israel were discussed in chapter 2, "Expectations for the End Times." Chapter 3, "Views of Previous Times," introduces four views of the millennium: dispensational premillennial, historic premillennial, amillennial, and postmillennial. Chapell follows up with six chapters to provide key features of each view.

The dispensational premillennial view is explained in chapters 4 and 5. They insist that the promises in the Old Testament should be fulfilled to the Jewish people and use Daniel 9 for the prediction of the end time, and claim that there is a church age between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the last week. Traditional dispensationalists insist the church should not be confused with Israel. They believe in the pre-tribulational rapture. They accept the plain chronology from Revelation 19

to 20, the second coming of Christ is before the literal millennial kingdom mentioned in 20:1-3. Chapell goes on to describe the progressive dispensationalists, like Blaising and Bock, who propose to eliminate the distinction between Israel and the church and to see redemption as one plan that encompasses all people.

Chapters 6 and 7 cover the historical premillennial view. Most church fathers in the early church, under Roman persecution, held this view. Their difference with the dispensationalists is the interpretation method. They think the authors of the New Testament already understood the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies through the church and Christ. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Scripture anticipated the future blessings of the church. They do not insist on the pre-tribulational rapture.

The amillennial view is explained in chapter 8. They believe the spiritual realities of the millennium kingdom are already present, i.e., a “now” millennium. Christ already inaugurated his kingdom with his cross and resurrection and will consummate it when he returns. The church’s view about the millennium changed from historic premillennialism to amillennialism after the Christian faith conquered the Roman Empire. Following the lead in the Book of Hebrews, amillennialists interpret the Old Testament prophecies as shadows that point to the realities fulfilled in the church. They consider Christians to be the true Israel of God. They believe that the rapture will occur simultaneously with the second coming of Christ. They do not emphasize the seven-year tribulation and view the tribulation of the present afflictions and persecutions as normal. They interpret the Book of Revelation as progressive parallelism, seven acts of similar end-time drama; hence, Revelation 20 does not chronologically follow Revelation 19. They do not think ten verses in Revelation 20 can support a physical thousand-year reign on earth after Christ returns.

Chapter 9 explains the postmillennial view. This view began around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Protestant mission works around the world started. At the turn of the twentieth century, Western Christendom was very optimistic about the future of the world. Missionaries were in Asia and Africa to convert millions. It seems that the twentieth century will become a Christian century. Even after the First and Second World Wars and the Spanish flu epidemic, some theologians still hold the view that the world is getting better and Christ will return after the progress of missions and science. They believe there is strong biblical support for their claim of end-time optimism, especially the worldwide

success of the Great Commission.

After describing these four views about millennialism, in chapter 10, Chapell asks which view one should believe. He mentions several factors to consider. Is the method of interpretation literal or spiritual? How to interpret Old Testament promises and prophecies? How to understand Daniel 9 and Revelation 19-20? Is there a future for Israel? Finally, Chapell says that no matter which view one takes, one can joyfully declare the hope that all Christians share about the end time. Then chapters 11 and 12 spell out the hope. There are 15 aspects of the hope all Christians share. Chapell prays it will generate a spirit that encourages Bible-believing Christians to love and respect each other to accomplish Christ's mission in the world. In the final chapter (13) the glorious future of the new heaven and new earth is described.

This book includes several appendices: a section "Digging Deeper" with summaries and resources for understanding major millennial views; questions for each chapter for review and discussion; and charts of millennial views.

Overall, Chapell provides a very good summary of four views about the millennium and gives a fair comparison and assessment. He espouses a "mere" biblical eschatology and encourages mutual love and respect among Christians with different views. In some sense, this book is similar to Millard Erickson's *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (1977); Clouse (ed), *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (1977); Bock (ed), *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999). It can serve as a supplemental reading in courses on the Book of Revelation and the subject of eschatology. The only place this reviewer wants to quibble about is the Battle of Armageddon, which could happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ (84, 168; Rev 19:11–21) and also after the millennial kingdom (99, Figure 6.1) and at the release of Satan (119; Rev 20:7–10).

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***Preaching from the Cross: Paul's Theology of Proclamation.* By Frank J. Matera. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025, 131 pp., \$22.99.**

Frank J. Matera is professor emeritus of The Catholic University of America. He recently served as pastor at St. Mary's Church in Simsbury, Connecticut. Matera has published works on Pauline theology, New Testament theology, and Christology, along with commentaries on New Testament books, such as Romans, Galatians, and 2 Corinthians. His latest edition is *Preaching from the Cross*, which focuses on Paul's theology of proclamation—an often-neglected topic (xi). Matera writes, "As readers will discover, this book is no mere academic work but a study addressed to contemporary preachers seeking a fuller understanding of the meaning and purpose of their ministry to proclaim God's word" (xi).

The book has five chapters, enveloped by an Introduction and a Conclusion. The first three chapters explore the questions why, what, and how Paul preached, respectively. In chapter 1, Matera discusses Paul's conversion/call, which is foundational to Paul's understanding of his proclamation. In fact, Paul's call is the reason why he preaches. As Matera observes, "That moment, more than any other, defined Paul, his preaching, and the message he proclaimed" (15). In chapter 2, Matera demonstrates that the content of Paul's preaching is the gospel (31), which Matera defines as "God's own good news of what God accomplished in Jesus Christ" (32). In chapter 3, Matera analyzes how Paul preaches, though he clarifies that Paul's rhetoric is not the main concern of the chapter (54). He contends that "how Paul preached was defined by the gospel of the crucified Christ that he received" (54). Chapter 4 places preaching under the context of the new covenant (see 2 Cor 2:14–7:4). Unlike old covenant ministry where God's glory is veiled, this new covenant ministry (i.e., preaching) unveils the glory of God in Christ (72, 80). In other words, "To preach, then, is to remove the veil so that those who hear the word can understand the spiritual meaning of the old covenant that points to Christ" (79). Chapter 5 offers seven theses about Paul's preaching: "These theses deal with the mystery of Christ, God, the Spirit, God's saving grace, our new life in Christ, the church, and the paschal mystery" (95).

Three notable features of the book can be observed. First, Matera writes in a clear and accessible manner. He helpfully avoids technical jargons in his discussions of Greek phrases (cf. the "obedience of faith" in Rom. 1:5 [9n7], the "revelation about/from Jesus Christ" in Gal. 1:11–12 [21n6],

the “righteousness of God” in Rom. 1:7 [99n3]). Matera also takes time to explain terms that may be unfamiliar to lay people, such as, “apostle” (31n1), the “God-fearers” (34n8), and the “Areopagus” (36n11). Second, the Scripture Index makes the book convenient for research. Third, Matera’s reflections on contemporary preaching at the end of each chapter is insightful. My favorite is his consideration of preaching with integrity. Matera cautions, “To preach the death and resurrection of Jesus without living a life conformed to Jesus Christ is a perversion of the gospel” (69). He thus concludes, “In a word, *how* we preach is intimately related to the life we live in Jesus Christ” (69, emphasis his). Indeed, these are good reminders for preachers.

Meanwhile, I have two areas of concern regarding Matera’s treatment of Pauline proclamation. First, his position on the authorship of the Pauline letters may have methodologically weakened his case. Though he considers all thirteen letters to be canonical, he doubts that some were written by Paul (cf. 10n9, 25n12, 49n17). As he defends, “Even if some letters were not written by Paul, they still provide us with an insight into the content of his preaching” (25n12). I remain unconvinced because all thirteen letters claim Pauline authorship. Moreover, if someone pretended to be Paul, how would we know what the person said about Paul is reliable? Related to the issue of authorship, Matera denies Isaianic authorship of Isaiah 40, claiming that the chapter was written after Isaiah’s death (7n4). Second, even though Matera grants that justification by faith is “one of the most distinctive aspects” of Paul’s theology (35n10), he denies that Paul preached justification by faith in first sermons (cf. Acts 13:39 [35n10]; 1 Cor 1:18–25 [42–43]; Gal 2:15–16 [40]). This conjecture remains speculative and violates a clear reading of the text. Overall, Matera has produced a lucid analysis of Pauline proclamation. At the very least, his study may prompt readers to consult the suggested readings on pp. 121–22.

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## ***SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY*** **BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

The faculty of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary honor each of the following books with a 2025 *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Book Award, commending both authors and publishers for their excellent contributions to Christian scholarship.

### **THE BOOK OF THE YEAR**

*Paul, Apostle of Grace*, by Frank Thielman (Eerdmans)

### **BIBLE REFERENCE/BIBLICAL BACKGROUNDS**

*Archaeology and the World of Jesus: A Visual Guide, and Archaeology and the Ministry of Paul: A Visual Guide*, by David A. DeSilva (Baker Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Jesus and the Law of Moses*, by Paul T. Sloan (Baker Academic)

*Understanding Biblical Law: Skills for Thinking with and through Torah*, by Dru Johnson (Baker Academic)

### **BIBLICAL STUDIES**

*Reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey*, by Mark S. Gignilliat and Heath A. Thomas (Baker Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Understanding Jeremiah*, by Duane Garrett (Kregel)

*The Theology of the Letter to the Galatians*, by Bruce W. Longenecker (Cambridge)

## **THEOLOGICAL STUDIES**

*Union with Christ and the Life of Faith*, by Fred Sanders (Baker Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Christian Life*, by Kelly M. Kapic (Zondervan Academic)

*A Theology of Revelation*, by J. Scott Duvall (Zondervan Academic)

## **CHURCH HISTORY/HISTORICAL THEOLOGY/BIOGRAPHY**

*Nicaea for Today: Why an Ancient Creed (Still) Matters*, by Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite (B&H Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*, by Stephen O. Presley (Baker Academic)

*The Story of the Trinity: Controversy, Crisis, and the Creation of the Nicene Creed*, by Bryan M. Litfin (Baker)

## **BAPTIST STUDIES**

*The Baptist Vision: Faith and Practice for a Believers' Church*, by Matthew Y. Emerson and R. Lucas Stamps (B&H Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*A Unity of Purpose: 100 Years of the SBC Cooperative Program*, co-edited by W. Madison Grace II and Tony Wolfe (B&H)

*Shapers of the Southwestern Theological Tradition*, co-edited by David S. Dockery, W. Madison Grace II, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Seminary Hill Press)

## **APOLOGETICS/WORLDVIEW**

*The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics*, co-edited by Collin Hansen, Skyler R. Flowers, and Ivan Mesa (Zondervan Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*The Steadfast Love of the Lord: Experiencing the Life-Changing Power of God's Unchanging Attention*, by Sam Storms (Crossway)

*The Devil Reads Nietzsche: A Public Theology for the Post-Christian Age*, by Michael McEwen (B&H Academic)

## **DISCIPLESHIP/SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

*Drawn by Beauty: Awe and Wonder in the Christian Life*, by Matthew Z. Capps (B&H)

Honorable Mentions:

*Remember Heaven: Meditations on the World to Come for Life in the Meantime*, by Matthew McCullough (Crossway)

*Scrolling Ourselves to Death*, co-edited by Brett McCracken and Ivan Mesa (Crossway)

## WORSHIP/CHURCH MUSIC

*The Sing! Hymnal*, created by Keith Getty and Krysten Getty, co-edited by John Martin, Doug Kreider, Douglas Sean O'Donnell (Crossway)

Honorable Mentions:

*The New and Living Way: Invitation to Biblical Worship and A Worship Reader: Short Studies & Reflections on Biblical Worship*, by Ron Man (Cascade)

*Ponder Anew What the Almighty Can Do: 160 Years of Change in Worship Leader Training at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, by Marcus W. Brown (Wipf & Stock)

## APPLIED THEOLOGY/ETHICS

*Complementarity: Dignity, Difference, and Interdependence*, by Gregg R. Allison (B&H Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Religious Freedom: A Conservative Primer*, by John D. Wilsey (Eerdmans)

*In Defense of Christian Patriotism*, by Daniel Darling (Broadside)

## PREACHING/MINISTRY/LEADERSHIP

*A Life of Listening: Discerning God's Voice and Discovering Our Own – A Memoir* by Leighton Ford, by Leighton Ford (InterVarsity)

Honorable Mentions:

*Accessible Church: A Gospel-Centered Vision for Including People with Disabilities and Their Families*, by Sandra Peoples (Crossway)

*Preaching in a Post-Truth World: Recentering the Pulpit in a Chaotic World*, by Mike Glenn (B&H)

## **EVANGELISM/MISSIONS/GLOBAL CHURCH**

*Understanding Evangelism: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, by J. D. Payne (Baker Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Prioritizing the Church in Missions*, by John Folmar and Scott Logsdon (Crossway)

*From the Rising of the Sun: A Journey of Worship around the World*, by Tim Challies and Tim Keese (Zondervan Academic)

## **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/COUNSELING/ YOUTH AND CHILDREN**

*Children & Salvation: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Considerations*, co-edited by Karen Kennemur, Kelly A. King, Shelly Melia, and Donna B. Peavey (B&H Academic)

Honorable Mentions:

*Mission-Driven Colleges: Keeping First Things First in Christian Higher Education*, by Richard Langer and Scott B. Rae (B&H)

*Understanding Trauma: A Biblical Introduction to Church Care*, by Steve Midgley (Good Book)

