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The Doctrine of the Church and Her Mission

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Unio cum Christo celebrates and encourages the visible union believers possess in Christ when they confess the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, the body of Christ. Thus, its mission is (1) to be an international scholarly and practical journal for the global Reformed community—churches, seminaries, theologians, and pastors; (2) to encourage deeper fellowship, understanding, and growth in faith, hope, and love in the Reformed community at large; and (3) to support small and isolated Reformed witnesses in minority missional situations. It will seek to do so by the publication and dissemination of scholarly contributions of a biblical, theological, and practical nature by Reformed leaders world-wide—including leading theologians, developing scholars, practicing missionaries, pastors, and evangelists.

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Jl. Industri Blok B14 Kav. 1
Jakarta Pusat, 10720, Indonesia

uniocc.com
info@uniocc.com

Submissions

For questions regarding submission of articles, contact Paul Wells at pwuniochristo@gmail.com or Bernard Aubert at baubert@wts.edu. Guidelines of style can be found at our website: uniocc.com.

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The Church's Challenge and Opportunity

PAUL WELLS

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Dutch Academic of Sciences and Humanities in 1958, Herman Dooyeweerd gave a speech on "The Criteria of Progressive and Reactionary Tendencies in History." As was often the case, he put his finger on the pulse of modern culture.[1] Progress can hide regression and a loss of moral compass.

Progress is the rhetorical button politicians press. Not doing so would endanger political credibility and survival. I do not think I've ever heard any of their breed warn of its dangers, apart from perhaps Enoch Powell in the pre-Thatcher UK. Ordinary people can be more critical of progress, or more fearful of it, in a way the élites aren't, because it often threatens their livelihood, and they are not "normies" strung along by media narratives.

The Christian church has often stood against progress in the past, sometimes wrongly and with sad consequences. To do so now is considered bigoted and reactionary. Consequently, clerics adopt the progressive rhetoric of politicians on all subjects, from gender issues to globalization. The present archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is a front-runner, with Pope Francis a close second. Both seem to have lost critical distance from current ideologies. They adopt progressive rhetoric on any social justice subject. Passed through progressive filters, the Christian faith comes out as watered-down wokeism.

[1] Herman Dooyeweerd, "The Criteria of Progressive and Reactionary Tendencies in History," 1958, Internet Archive, https://web.archive.org/web/20221113042439/https://reformationaldl.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/the-criteria-of-progressive-and-reactionary-tendencies-in-history.pdf.

The Christian church is challenged by a trinity of liberty, equality, and tolerance, which are the drivers of progress. The equality advocated by social progressivism is an idea, and facts are made to fit in with it.

Nobody has ever pinned down what equality means, and it is simply taken for granted. Nearly all of Dooyeweerd's modal aspects serve to indicate the rich diversity of reality, but for the sake of social progress, the illusion that all things are equal has to be believed and promoted in all realms. It is one of the notions deconstructionists use to undermine authority structures, including the Christian tradition and the family.

An unspoken dynamic is at play: freedom opposes vested privilege and injustices by promoting the acceptance of everything, with the interest of equality as the end. When freedom sets aside considerations based on race, class, religion, and tradition, equality is thought to be the outcome.

However, nature is the reef on which egalitarianism is shipwrecked because the natural world, as God created, ordered, and structured it, is an ocean of diversity. It is hard to erase the fact that male and female are complementary ways of being human, differing from each other in physical capacity, mental and psychological makeup, and bodily attributes from head to toe! Adults and children, the healthy and those suffering from terrible infirmities or illnesses, are not equal. Human beings, like animals and inanimate objects, are vastly unequal. This is not unique to Judeo-Christianity. All religions and cultures seem to have recognized it. As a system of thought, Taoism even made diversity fundamental by proposing that reality is ultimately not unipolar but bipolar, as different as mountains and valleys.

In some areas, real equality should and does exist, but in a precise way. Equality of opportunity is recognized in public spaces, education, and the workplace, which is a good thing. Yet, who would want to promote equality by putting a top footballer in charge of a nuclear power plant? Equality before the law is also a fundamental right, as everyone, including the privileged and the powerful, is subject to the requirements of the law.

However, apart from these precise and widely recognized spheres, equality is, above all, a mathematical concept of weights and measures for which precision is essential. One Euro is worth 0.85 pound sterling at a given moment, but not necessarily a week later. An apple is not an orange, a person with an IQ of 90 is not equal to a person with one of 150, and a baggage handler is not equal to an airline pilot. Applying equality outside the areas where it is evidently justified is a mistake at best, ideology at worst. And yet, it is spoken of as if it were self-evident in many spheres where it is not. Even feminists like Germaine Greer have become critical of its incoherencies and its dangers for women.

In Western society, we are becoming aware that we have reached a watershed where programs are promoted because of hidden agendas and not because they are morally justified. At bottom, the postmodern pursuit of equality is an attempt to solve the problems of sin and injustice without God. This is perhaps why debates on questions of equality quickly become poisonous. Those who promote them have a pseudoreligious motivation that arouses bitter zeal against those who do not agree. In the final analysis, the desire for equality is an illusion. Equality has never been, never is, and never will be something belonging to created reality, except in a limited technical sense. However, businesses strut their global certifications for gender equality and parade their diversity and inclusion awards. Christians can be justifiably critical of the utopic dreams of the social justice warriors and wary of the virtue signaling of global corporations that adopt their agendas to promote their own interests.

The Christian faith is founded on the fact that God and man are profoundly different and unequal. No idea is more unpalatable to the natural individual than God's sovereignty and kingship. Yet three fundamental forms of equality do exist in Christianity: the first is in God in the perfect Trinitarian communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: "The three Persons [of the Trinity are] not confused, but distinct, and yet not separate, but of the same essence, equal in eternity and power."[2]

A second strange form of equality arises from the rebellion of human beings who idolatrously crave equality with the Creator. "God created man" to "live with him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify him," but by "the fall … our nature became so corrupt that we are *all* conceived and born in sin," and "by nature we are prone to hate God and [our] neighbor."[3] Sinners are one in their rebellion and hatred of God; born in sin, they live and die in it as a consequence of their rebellion (cf. Rom 5:12). They are equal in injustice; all will be justly judged as such by divine justice. The fate of all is death, which knows no discrimination.

The third form of equality exists in the spiritual unity of believers who, united with Christ, are one in him: "There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:22b–24 ESV). True equality is restored for human beings through regeneration in Jesus

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[2] The French Confession of Faith (1559) 1.6, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3: *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, revised by David S. Schaff (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 363.

[3] Heidelberg Catechism (1563) 5–7, in Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:309–10 (emphasis added).

Christ, who "create[s] in himself one new man … so making peace, and … reconcil[es] to God all in one body through the cross," for "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:15–16; Gal 3:28). The restoration of equality in the body of Christ is the work of his Spirit, respecting human nature as created nature, the first glimmer of the dawn of the coming kingdom of God.

These three biblical forms of equality are *spiritual*, not material, but they are more coherent than the utopianism of humanly engineered social equality. It is these spiritual values that the church is called to promote in the gospel because they lay the foundation in the struggle for true equality against inequality and injustice among human beings. This is the real issue in the West, and everywhere where intersectional ideologies of equality seek to promote it globally through freedom and progress.

This is no easy task, particularly as the postmodern deconstruction of formerly accepted values reaches its endgame, which will make professing the Christian faith dangerous, with jobs and even basic human freedoms under threat. This is part of the ongoing spiritual conflict for the Christian faith that Abraham Kuyper highlighted in his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton:

> Voltaire's mad cry, "Down with the scoundrel [*A bas l'infâme*; lit., Down with the infamous]," was aimed at Christ himself, but this cry was merely the expression of the most hidden thought from which the French Revolution sprang. The fanatic outcry of another philosopher, "We no more need a God," and the odious shibboleth, "No God, no Master [*Ni Dieu, ni Maître*]," of the Convention;—these were the sacrilegious watchwords which at that time heralded the liberation of man as an emancipation from all Divine Authority. And if, in His impenetrable wisdom, God employed the Revolution as a means to overthrow the royal tyranny of the Bourbons, and to bring a judgment on the princes who abused *His* nations as *their* footstool, nevertheless the principle of that Revolution remains thoroughly *anti-Christian*, and has since spread like a cancer, dissolving and undermining all that stood firm and consistent before our Christian faith.
>
> There is no doubt that Christianity is imperilled by great and serious danger. Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the "Christian Heritage." This is *the* struggle in Europe, this is *the* struggle in America.[4]

[4] Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898) (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 10–11. When Kuyper speaks of America and Europe, he is referring to the places where he lectured, Princeton, and where he came from, the Netherlands.

The Church as a Creation of the Gospel

BILLY KRISTANTO

Abstract

There have been many discussions about the nature of the church—what makes a church a church. Drawing from Reformational insights, this article engages with this question from a soteriological perspective. The Reformed soteriological story begins with creation. Creation was, however, disturbed by the fall. God offers the story of redemption for the whole creation. Finally, God's work of redemption culminates in the beatific vision of his glory, which can already be beheld and tasted here and now. I will follow this framework (creation, fall, redemption, glorification) to present a proposal for a Reformed ecclesiology developed from Reformed soteriology. Though written from an Indonesian perspective, this article tries to bring together voices from both global hemispheres in an irenic dialogue.

Keywords

Soteriological ecclesiology, evangelical ecclesiology, Gospel-centered ecclesiology, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Stephen Tong

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The ancient church taught that the church has four attributes: unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The Reformation expounded on the true marks of the church, namely, the pure preaching of the gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. This article focuses on the

inseparable relationship between the church and the gospel as a distinctive mark drawn from the Reformational understanding of the church. In the same tenor, after starting with the work of the Triune God, the World Reformed Fellowship Statement on Ecclesiology declares that the church "is established as a result of the gospel and follows necessarily as an implication of the gospel."[1] The church does not establish herself; she is created by the Triune God through the power of the word. Without the word, a church can hardly be considered a true church. The word not only creates the church, it also reveals the sinfulness of the present church through the preaching of the law. However, the demand of the law is not the last word. The church lives in the power of the comfort of the gospel. Finally, a gospel-centered church brings her members to see the glory of God.

Within this classical framework, this article addresses the following questions. What does it mean for the church to be a creation of the word? Can we talk not only about the sinfulness of humankind but also about the sinfulness of the church? What is the church's only comfort in the midst of the world's fallenness? What ought to be the *telos* of the church in her eschatological hope?

I. *A Creation of the Word*

The notion that the church is a creation of the word comes from Martin Luther, who said, "For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a church."[2] The church does not create herself; she is created by God by his word. The humble confession of the Nicene Creed, "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible," should include the creation of the church. When the author of Colossians wrote that by Christ "all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities" (Col 1:16), he made a distinction between the visible and invisible realms.

We want to argue that this realm includes the church in both her visible and invisible aspects, the earthly and the heavenly. Regarding the structure of the hymn in Colossians 1:15–20, one of the proposals is to divide it into

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[1] "The World Reformed Fellowship Statement on Ecclesiology," World Reformed Fellowship, Orlando, October 28, 2022, 1, https://wrf.global/assembly/ga-2022-promotional-material-2.

[2] Martin Luther, "Concerning the Ministry," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 37.

two stanzas: verses 15–17 and verses 18–20.[3] With this reading, one can notice the shift from creation to the church.[4] By Christ all things, visible and invisible, were created (v. 16), whereas Christ is also the head of the body, the church (v. 18). This division permits us to extend the creation of all visible and invisible things to the creation of the earthly and heavenly church. Christians already partake of the heavenly realm while here on earth. Their lives are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). Consistent with this, we can say that the life of the earthly church is also hidden above in the heavenly, where Christ is.

The creation of the church is described in the story of the calling of Abram, the forefather of the people of God (Gen 12:1–9). Unlike the story of the Tower of Babel, the genesis of the people of Israel was not self-initiated (cf. Gen 11:3–4) but a calling by God (cf. Gen 12:1–3). In the beginning of the universe, "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1); in the beginning of Israel, God created "a great nation" (12:2) out of nothing by calling Abram out of the sinful descendants of Shem. The existence of the people of God is contingent on God's calling. When the church tried to "make a name" for herself (Gen 11:4), rather than her name being made great by God (12:2), she failed to live up to the story of Abram's calling. A self-created "church" (an oxymoron!) will be dispersed by God (11:9), while the church created by God will be a blessing for all the families of the earth (12:2–3).

Later, Abram failed to be a blessing in Egypt, even though this occasion was an opportunity to bless another family of the earth. His failure was caused by his forgetfulness regarding his calling. Instead of remembering God's creation of the new nation, Abram was concerned with self-preservation. John Calvin aptly comments,

> But while he reflected that the hope of salvation was centered in *himself*, that *he* was the fountain of the Church of Gods that unless *he* lived, the benediction promised to him, and to his seed, was vain; he did not estimate his own life according to the private affection of the flesh; but inasmuch as he did not wish the effect of the divine vocation to perish through his death, he was so affected with concern for the preservation of his own life, that he overlooked everything besides.[5]

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[3] Cf. Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1,15–20*, WUNT 2.131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 86–94.

[4] Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 115.

[5] John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, Calvin's Commentaries 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 359 (on Gen 12:11).

The church can be faithful to the story of her calling or, like Abram in Egypt, concerned with her own self-preservation. The people of God are called not to preserve their own lives but to receive, enjoy, and reflect "the benediction promised" to them. The promised benediction is no other than the true treasure of the church, namely, the gospel. "In order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, he [God] deposited this treasure in the church."[6] Here, Calvin is in full agreement with Luther, who insisted, "The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."[7] Confessing the gospel as the most valuable treasure of the church for the Reformation meant rejecting the "treasury of the saints."[8] In our contemporary context, this could mean relativizing the importance of charismatic or celebrity preachers, wealthy church members, church assets, or the church's accommodation to the state.

Living up to the story of her divine creation through the power of the gospel, the church is called to unleash her creative power. The gospel is not controlled by the church; rather, the church is a result and implication of the gospel.[9] Paul's gospel message was not so much in words of wisdom as in the demonstration of the power of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:4). For Calvin, it is this gospel power that protects church ministers from both exaggerated dignity and a lack of it.[10] On the one hand, there are those who do not adequately distinguish between God and external help and on the other, those who do not adequately emphasize the real benefits from the ministry of preaching. Church ministers should preach the gospel authoritatively, "for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16). At the same time, they should do it humbly, for "we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7).

II. *Addressing Fallenness*

Reformed ecclesiology is characterized by the courage to exercise healthy self-criticism, for it presupposes the imperfection of the earthly church. Far from advocating a low view of the church, it offers theological realism in its

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[6] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 2:1011–12 (4.1.1).

[7] Martin Luther, *Ninety-Five Theses*, 62, www.Luther.de, KDG Wittenberg, 1997, https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html.

[8] In Luther's time, the "treasury of the church" was described by Catholic theology as the spiritual goods both established through the redeeming work of Christ and made accessible in the communion of the saints, whose treasury included the prayers and good works of the blessed virgin Mary and all the saints.

[9] Cf. "World Reformed Fellowship Statement on Ecclesiology," 1.

[10] Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.6.

understanding of the church. Its high view of the church is determined not by the confession of her infallibility or sinlessness but by her confession of the power of the gospel as her most glorious treasure. One of the most difficult issues in ecumenical dialogue lies in the relation between the church's holiness and human sin: Is the church sinless since, "being the body of the sinless Christ, it cannot sin," or is it "appropriate to refer to the Church as sinning, since sin may become systemic so as to affect the institution of the Church itself"?[11] The Reformed ecclesiological tradition advocates an affirmative answer to the latter.

Avoiding the discussion of the sinfulness of the church runs contrary to the theological reality that while on earth, the church is still imperfect and in a growing process. The "already" aspect should not cancel the "not yet" aspect. Ecclesiology is inseparable not only from Christology but also from anthropology—that is, the doctrine of humanity *and sin*. Unlike Eastern Orthodox teachings, Reformed ecclesiology carefully distinguishes between the two wills of Christ and the two wills of the church, between the will or operation of church office-bearers and the will of God, thus rejecting the concept of the infallibility of the church.[12] If the church is not infallible, for she consists of *simul iustus et peccator*, then we need to engage with constructive religious critique (*Religionskritik*) for the sanctification of the church.

The Old Testament prophets were, first, and foremost, critics of religion. They were sent by God to rebuke the sins of God's people. We are referring to the major and minor prophets' criticisms of the cult and society. The underlying assumption of such religious critiques is the imperfection and even sinfulness of the people of God. In contrast to false prophets, true prophets are characterized by the courage to rebuke the sins of God's people (cf. Ezek 13:8–16). Jesus himself was a critic of religion par excellence. For instance, Jesus told a self-justifying lawyer the parable of the good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25–37) and the Pharisees and the scribes the three parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:1–32) and the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (cf. Matt 20:1–16); he cleansed the temple as a sign of judgment (cf. Matt 21:12–17; Luke 19:45–48); he told the parable of the wicked tenants against the chief priests and the scribes (cf. Matt 21:33–46; Luke 20:9–18); he pronounced seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matt 23:1–36).

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[11] *The Church towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), III.35, 22.

[12] Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), 187; see also Billy Kristanto, *Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 22.

Unless her sinfulness is addressed, the church will fall into complacency or self-righteousness. The true purpose of God's critique of religion is to express not hatred but God's loving care for his church. "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline," says the Son of God, who wants his church to "be zealous and repent" (Rev 3:19). The church should not "be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb 12:5–6). Within the context of divine discipline and chastisement, the church should welcome and be grateful that God sends religious critics. The failure to receive humbly God's corrections and warnings through such prophetic ministers only further confirms the sinfulness of a church. As long as she is on earth, the church is always in need of a healthy religious critique against her own sinfulness.

In a similar tone, Nicholas Healy also proposes a practical-prophetic ecclesiology against what he calls "blueprint ecclesiologies."[13] A blueprint ecclesiology dismisses a church's concrete sinfulness by presenting the church as an idealized model. A practical-prophetic ecclesiology, on the contrary, will allow a church to critique itself so it can maintain its faithfulness to the gospel:

> The church is a body that must struggle to understand its role, in part because Christianity is an essentially contested concept, and in part because it must continually purge itself of anti-Christ elements and appropriate, modify or reject non-church elements as it seeks to witness faithfully to the gospel. Such intraecclesial conflict should not be avoided by enforcing unity, for it may frequently be fruitful.[14]

Conflict is sometimes necessary for the flourishing of the church according to the will of God. On the other hand, false unity, a mere human gathering that suppresses self-critique, can hinder the church's fruitfulness.

Instead of avoiding the discussion of the church's problems in Corinth, Paul addressed her concrete sinfulness in practical ways. He proclaimed prophetically Christ crucified against the Corinthians' boasting in human wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 2:1–5). He instructed the right administration of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor 11:17–34), and despite his warning about their divisions (cf. 1 Cor 1:10–13), Paul saw factions among the Corinthians as intended by God to show who is genuine and who is not (cf. 1 Cor 11:18–19). In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul fought against the false teachers who taught a different gospel and rebuked the Galatians for their deviation from the

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[13] Cf. Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25–51.

[14] Ibid., 70.

doctrine of grace (cf. Gal 1:6–9). In his letter to the churches in Asia Minor, John sharply criticized those who denied the true humanity of Christ (cf. 1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). Far from presenting an idealized model of the church, Paul and John chose to address the concrete sinfulness or danger in the church of God.

In the light of the gospel, the church of God is invited again and again to depart from her sinfulness. Along with this invitation, God sends his prophetic messengers to rebuke the sinfulness of the church. The church under the gospel has the courage to confess her sins and keeps repenting and returning to the way of the Lord.

III. *The Church Redeemed*

Addressing the sinfulness of the church is surely not the last word in Reformed ecclesiology. The church lives under the power of the gospel, which offers comfort and forgiveness for repentant sinners. The portrayal of concrete sinfulness is not to embarrass the church but rather to invite to always come and return to the most holy gospel of grace and glory. Through the preaching of the law, the church comes to the knowledge of her sinfulness (cf. Rom 3:20). Through the preaching of the gospel, the church finds her true comfort in the reality that she belongs to Jesus Christ. Luther's dialectic between law and gospel is true not only for an individual believer but also for every church. In his *Heidelberg Disputation*, he postulates:

> For this reason we are so instructed—for this reason the law makes us aware of sin so that, having recognized our sin, we may seek and receive grace. Thus God "gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5), and "whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). The law humbles, grace exalts. The law effects fear and wrath, grace effects hope and mercy. Through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), through knowledge of sin, however, comes humility, and through humility grace is acquired.[15]

In the history of revival, the church always comes to a deeper awareness of her sinfulness before a holy God and deeper amazement at the sweetness of divine grace. Not satisfied with external confession, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen insisted on the importance of the Spirit's conviction of a sinner's sinful state so that the sinner "is driven out of himself to the sovereign grace of God in Christ for reconciliation, pardon, sanctification, and

[15] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), 16, BookOfConcord.Org, 1998–2023, https://bookofconcord.org/other-resources/sources-and-context/heidelberg-disputation/#16.

salvation."[16] True spiritual revival does not change but heightens normal Christianity.[17] There is nothing new when the church is revived by the Holy Spirit. What the Spirit bestows are deeper conviction of sin and deeper comfort in the gospel of grace. When the Spirit revives, the church does not merely assent intellectually to the gospel but lives in the power of the gospel. The Spirit's work of redemption will be clearly manifested in the harvest of spiritual regeneration and spiritual growth in greater measure.

The church under the power of the gospel devotes herself to apostolic teaching, table fellowship, frequent administration of sacraments, prayers, awesome wonder, generosity, joy, and worship (cf. Acts 2:42–47). Only then does God give and add new believers to the church. The problem with our contemporary church is that she is obsessed with numbers and influence but cares little or not at all for walking in the power of the gospel.[18] The spiritual substance of the church redeemed is her faithfulness to the story of the gospel amid the stories of worldly empires. When God revives his church, he will empower the church to be courageous in her confession before the world.

Regarding how one can be said to truly receive the Holy Spirit, Stephen Tong teaches that the gift of the Holy Spirit is related to the preaching of the gospel:

> The Holy Spirit, which is given to obedient people, also bears witness about the gospel. The Holy Spirit is given to those who are obedient to the preaching of the gospel. The word that is heard, the word that is preached demands obedience. Whoever obeys, and preaches the gospel, he will be accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.[19]

This is not to say that the Spirit's empowerment is initiated by human obedience. Rather, it is a warning that when the Spirit moves the church to share the gospel, the church ought not quench his movement. For Tong, the importance of the office of evangelists in the church cannot be

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[16] Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, "The Poor and Contrite God's Temple," in *Forerunner of the Great Awakening: Sermons by Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, 1691–1747*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 16.

[17] Cf. Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 23; see also Joel R. Beeke, "The Age of the Spirit and Revival," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2.2 (2010): 37.

[18] Commenting on the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, Grant Osborne aptly warns our modern church, "The current preoccupation of the modern church with numbers and influence must be reexamined. It is more important to be faithful than to be powerful." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 129.

[19] Stephen Tong, *Roh Kudus, Doa, dan Kebangunan* (Surabaya: Momentum, 2013), 68.

overemphasized. He bemoans the condition in which many churches are not concerned with evangelism. He emphatically writes,

> Even sadder, many young people who give themselves up to preach the gospel, after finishing theological study, do not want to evangelize anymore. Many theological schools are factories that extinguish the spirit of evangelism. This is a great sin of theological schools.[20]

Churches are willing to allocate much money and facilities for pastors, but not for evangelists; Tong considers this the reason for the lack of evangelists in the church. In the end, the church does not have enough evangelists who faithfully preach the gospel. Far from separating from each other the offices of evangelist, pastor, and teacher (cf. Eph 4:11), Tong also emphasizes the importance of a servant of God to do all three, although one may have a certain emphasis in one's calling.

When Calvin wrote that, along with the offices of apostle and prophet, the office of evangelist was not established permanently, he understood the office of evangelist as a very particular calling for certain people who were responsible for the establishment of the church "where none existed before."[21] Therefore, Calvin also wrote in his Ephesians commentary, "Where religion has fallen into decay … evangelists are raised up in an extraordinary manner, to restore the pure doctrine which had been lost."[22] This is not an inconsistency or a shift within Calvin's thought; rather, he understood the office of evangelist differently from how it is understood today. By no means did Calvin discourage the importance of the preaching of the gospel, for it is the Lord's own arrangement "to govern his church, to maintain its existence, and ultimately to secure its highest perfection."[23]

IV. *The Gospel and the Glory of God*

Finally, the church as a creation of the gospel shall find her *telos* in the glory of God. The belief of the church in free justification through the gospel of Christ should find her application in doxology. The glory of God "should stand undiminished" through the church's testimony to the power of the gospel.[24] As long as the church glories in herself by forgetting that Christ is

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[20] Stephen Tong, *Kerajaan Allah, Gereja, dan Pelayanan* (Surabaya: Momentum, 2014), 86.

[21] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.3.4 (2:1057).

[22] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 280 (on Eph 4:11).

[23] Ibid., 277 (on Eph 4:11–14).

[24] Calvin, *Institutes* 3.13.1 (1:763).

our righteousness and redemption, she fails to glory in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 1:30–31). A church that is truly satisfied by the gospel of grace truly and restfully glories in the Lord.[25]

The church will be glorified with Christ, provided the church also suffers with him (cf. Rom 8:17). Just as the origin of the church was not by her own self-creative power, the *telos* of the church is not achieved by her self-glorification. The church will *be glorified*. Just as the danger exists of a church falling into self-preservation, so can she also fall into self-glorification.[26] A self-glorifying church fails to maintain the distinction between herself and Christ.

Although the church should wait for her final glorification with Christ, that does not mean that she cannot be glorified at all here and now, while still on earth. While Luke understood the relation between suffering and glory in sequential order—that is, suffering should precede (eschatological) glory (cf. Luke 24:26; Acts 14:22)—John viewed suffering and glory in a paradoxical tension: when Jesus was crucified, he was lifted up (cf. John 3:14; 12:32, 34). Following John's theological profile, we can say that the church, while still here on earth, may already be glorified with Christ when she is persecuted for Christ's sake.

Calling the Holy Spirit the Spirit of glory, Tong writes:

> This attribute is particularly associated with the persecution the church faces. When the church is persecuted, they manifest the Spirit of the glory of the Lord God; meaning that when they are humiliated, God glorifies those who are being humiliated. When the church is persecuted, when Christians are persecuted, when their right to believe is taken away by others, when they are tortured, that is when God's glory is upon them.[27]

Note that here the church is glorified not when she appears in all her splendor, but under persecution. Asserting the glory of the church without suffering and persecution will lead to a triumphalist ecclesiology opposed to the theology of the cross.

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[25] On glorying in the Lord, Calvin comments, "If therefore a man has his mind regulated in such a manner that, claiming no merit to himself, he desires that God alone be exalted; if he rests with satisfaction on his grace, and places his entire happiness in his fatherly love, and, in fine, is satisfied with God alone, that man *truly* 'glories in the Lord.'" (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries 20 [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005], 95 [on 1 Cor 1:31]).

[26] Cf. Edmund Schlink, *Der kommende Christus und die kirchlichen Traditionen. Nach dem Konzil*, vol. 1 of *Schriften zu Ökumene und Bekenntnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 103.

[27] Tong, *Roh Kudus, Doa, dan Kebangunan*, 18–19.

In his *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther argues for the theology of the cross—that is, true knowledge of God should be based not on the "glorious" invisible attributes of God but rather on the manifest and visible things of God, which are humanity, weakness, and foolishness.[28] True knowledge of God is based not on the theology of glory but on the theology of shame: "Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."[29] An evangelical ecclesiology may apply Luther's theology of the cross to the glory of the church. The true glory of the church is not to be witnessed in a visible glory that can be recognized and admired by the world; rather, her true glory lies in her fellowship with Christ's sufferings, in her humility and shame for Christ's sake.

The church is glorious when, because of her faithfulness to the gospel of Christ, she suffers in this world. We should not glorify suffering; rather, true union with Christ, who "suffered …, was crucified, died, and [was] buried" (cf. the Apostles' Creed), surely includes fellowship with his sufferings (cf. Phil 3:10). Suffering is not accidental for those in union with Christ. The suffering church (*ecclesia dolens*) is not a church that grieves for her sins in purgatory while expecting the redemptive effect of suffering, for the church is redeemed not by her suffering but by the suffering Christ. On the contrary, suffering on earth is a mark of the true church, for she is in union with Christ. Those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with Christ. The suffering church will be the glorified church.

While on earth, the church is called to reflect God's glory, despite imperfection. First, in her constant testimony, the church is not self-created but created by God in the power of the gospel. Celebrating the givenness of the church reflects the glory of God. Second, the church reflects God's glory in the humble confession of sinfulness and imperfection. For Calvin, confession of sin is a doxology, for by confessing our sins, we give glory to God that he alone is righteous (cf. Ps 51:4).[30] Third, the church reflects God's glory when she gives embodied testimony to the redemptive power of the gospel. We refer here to the deliverance of the church from the bondage of the ideologies of worldly empires, table fellowship, acts of love, healing, devotion, acceptance, the search for righteousness and truth, and the realization of the presence of the risen Christ in her midst.[31]

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[28] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, 20.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.13.1–2; see also Billy Kristanto, *Sola Dei Gloria: The Glory of God in the Thought of John Calvin* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011), 106, 118.

[31] Cf. Michael Welker, "Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung," in *Die Wirklichkeit der*

Finally, the eschatological glory of the church will be perfected when the church is in perfect union with Christ in his heavenly glory. Since the fullness of all good things is to be found in God alone, "nothing beyond him is to be sought by those who strive after the highest good and all the elements of happiness."[32] The eschatological hope of the church in the future glory should encourage the church to be satisfied with the dim vision in a mirror on the one hand and to long for the full knowledge of the face-to-face vision on the other (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).[33] An eschatology-based vision of the glory of God will help the church to avoid the dangers of an idealist ecclesiology that leads to disappointment and a pessimist ecclesiology that robs the church of her blessed hope.

Conclusion

As a creation of the word, the church should always remember that her true power belongs to God, who gives the treasure of the holy gospel in jars of clay (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). The church should always be critical of the temptation of self-creative power, which runs contrary to her origin. However, humbly confessing her createdness and limitedness does not mean we have a low view of the church. The church is the body of Christ, his fullness, because to the church God gave Christ as head over all things (cf. Eph 1:22–23). The church as a creation of the word is called to reflect and depend on the creative power of the word, which is always fresh and new every morning.

The preaching of the gospel presupposes the preaching of the law in the Reformation tradition. The preaching of both law and gospel is directed not only at the society "outside" but also internally to the church. When the preaching of the law and the gospel addresses the church, it will lead the church to true self-knowledge—that is, the knowledge of her own sinfulness. The church is *simul iustus et peccator*: eschatologically, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3), yet still struggling against sinfulness in the progressive sanctification to become "holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). The church under grace has the courage to exercise healthy self-criticism while avoiding the danger of self-righteousness.

The only comfort of the church in the midst of the world's fallenness is that the church is not her own but belongs to her faithful Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. Heidelberg Catechism 1). As the property of Christ, the church

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Auferstehung, ed Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 320.

[32] Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.10 (2:1005).

[33] Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.11.

enjoys and testifies to the story of redemption. The enjoyment and witness can differ in degree from time to time. At the time of revival, the Holy Spirit reveals awareness of the church's sinfulness and the true divine comfort in the gospel of grace in greater depth. Waiting for true revival, the church should faithfully use the ordinary means of grace, that is, to persevere in preaching the law and the gospel. If the church is not to quench the Holy Spirit, she will learn to esteem the importance of the office of evangelist. This commitment to evangelism faithfully continues one of the Reformation's marks of the church, namely, the pure preaching of the gospel.

Finally, the church as a creation of the gospel is the church glorifying Christ and will be the church being glorified with Christ. There is always a constant temptation to live an ecclesiology of glory rather than the ecclesiology of the cross. An ecclesiology of glory boasts in the visible glory of worldly kingdoms (cf. Matt 4:8), while the ecclesiology of the cross testifies to true glory through faithfully bearing humiliation and shame for Christ's sake. God glorifies the church in his Son especially when the church is humiliated and persecuted for righteousness's sake. Far from glorifying persecution, the church sees glory in persecution in the revelation of the glory of Christ, who first suffered before being glorified (cf. 1 Pet 4:13). The grieving church will be the rejoicing church (cf. John 16:20). The church's eschatological glory gives us contentment and hope in both the present dimness of our knowledge and the future perfection of the beatific vision face to face.

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Matthias Grünewald: Meeting of St. Erasm and St. Maurice, ca. 1520-ca. 1524. Collection Alte Pinakothek, München. From Wikimedia Commons

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Church and Kingdom: Not Putting Asunder What Christ Brought Together

A. CRAIG TROXEL

Abstract

The fundamental question in ecclesiology is that of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The answers—historical and theological—have wavered between those who want to keep the two isolated and those who want to make the two identical. This article proposes a christological connection between church and kingdom via two texts (Eph 1:20–23 and 1 Cor 15:22–25) that share similar phrasing and agendas.

Keywords

Ecclesiology, head, church, kingdom of God, redemption, power, authority, enemies of God

Introduction

The first and most fundamental question of ecclesiology is this: What is the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God?[1] The literature on this question is vast, and the positions that are taken run from one extreme to the other (from separation to identification). This study will not venture into that

[1] The other questions answer what the relationship is between the church and (in this order) the family, the state, and the world. The questions are outward-working concentric circles,

fray, except to examine the common elements found in two Pauline passages, Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:22–25, which shed light on this key question. The former passage brings the perspective of Christ's relationship to the church as the exalted head, while the latter brings the perspective of Christ's relationship to the kingdom that he will deliver to the Father in "the end." The goal here is to show how these pericopes display a significant common cause—one that impacts the question of how one relates the church to the kingdom of God.

I. *The Exalted Christ and His Church (Eph 1:20–23)*[2]

> … and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:19–23 ESV)

1. *Christ Is Exalted in Authority and Power as Head*

Few passages detail the relationship between the exalted Christ and his church more expressly than Ephesians 1:20–23. It offers insight into the church's pride of place in the sweep of Christ's all-encompassing agenda. The passage is nestled amid a flourish of heartening declarations of what Christ has secured for his church by his incomparable greatness. To wit, the context of Ephesians 1:15–23 provides an assortment of Greek synonyms for "power," as Paul extols the supreme rule of Christ at the right hand of majesty.[3] The prayer begins with thanksgiving and then quickly merges into petition, requesting that the Ephesians know three things: the hope of God's calling, the riches of God's inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God's power. This last request permeates the following verses, as Paul

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moving from identity toward mission. This order guards the theocentric nature of the kingdom and the christocentric nature of the church. See Edmund P. Clowney, *The Doctrine of the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 9; John Murray, "The Church and Mission," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1, *The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 245.

[2] The first half of this article utilizes content from A. Craig Troxel, "The World Is Not Enough: The Priority of the Church in Christ's Cosmic Headship," in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 337–65. It is used with the permission of The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

[3] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 60.

wants his readers to know that this power, which is given to them for their benefit, is the very same power that raised Christ from the grave and exalted him to the right hand of God (vv. 19–20): "… and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places." Their salvation is a display of the greatness of God's grace and the greatness of God's power—which is exhibited in the present exaltation of the risen Christ. This power is at work *in* them and at work *for* them because Christ is their "head" (*kephalē*, κεφαλή).

The title "head" appears in Ephesians 1:22 to underline the authority and power of Christ (consistent with the predominant theme and tone in which it is enveloped).[4] He is not merely organically connected to his body; he is its master and Lord.[5] Several factors support this. First, Paul's choice of vocabulary loudly proclaims Christ's exalted status and ruling might (v. 19: "power, great might"; v. 20: "raised, seated, right hand, heavenly places"; v. 21: "above all rule, authority, power, dominion, every name"; v. 22: "all things, under his feet, head, over all things, him who fills all in all"). In particular, the prepositions "over" and "under" graphically accent Christ's relationship to "all things" and their relationship to him as defined by rank.[6] The fundamental theological point of Christ's being exalted to the "right hand" of God in majesty is, from beginning to end, about authority. This is true whether it pertains to his headship over all things or over the church.

Secondly, when Paul states, "And he put all things under his feet" (v. 22), he is quoting from Psalm 8:6 ("You have given him dominion over the

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[4] Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5.21–33* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 146; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 368–69; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 378, 381; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 201), 166–67. This is consistent with one way that the Septuagint often renders the Hebrew word (*ro'sh*, רֹאשׁ) with (*kephalē*, κεφαλή), namely, to imply a superior (see Deut 28:13, 44; Judg 10:18; 11:8–9, 11; 2 Sam 22:44; 1 Kgs 8:1; Ps 17 [18]; Lam 1:5; Isa 7:8–9; 9:14–16; and Jer 31:7). Heinrich Schlier, "κεφαλή," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3:674–76; "Head," in Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 158; "κεφαλή," in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 430.

[5] Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 154.

[6] The preposition *hyper* (ὑπέρ) with the accusative, means that which "surpasses over and above," or what "excels beyond." "ὑπέρ," in Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 839.

works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet") and alluding to Psalm 110:1 ("The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'") because he sees their fulfillment in Christ's session at the "right hand of God."[7] As is true in the Old Testament, the phrase "right hand" signifies the supreme position of favor, honor, victory, and power held by Christ and, thus, "his sovereignty."[8] This phraseology—"seated," "under his feet," and "footstool"—expresses both Christ's session and his headship. Although "head" represents a title of Christ and "session" refers to a stage of Christ's exaltation, they converge upon common territory. They refer to the same reality. Christ is not merely exalted to the right hand in his sessional glory. He is exalted to the right hand as "head."[9]

Accordingly, the New Testament never uses the word "head" metaphorically to address Christ in his state of humiliation, only in his exaltation.[10] Scripture says Christ *is*, not *was*, the head of the church. Christ has obtained something unique that he did not have before he ascended to his heavenly seat. To be sure, he possesses all authority as Creator of all things and fundamentally by right of his full divinity as the eternal Son (Col 1:15–19). But he has advanced to a new stage of exaltation, one in which he is praised as "inheriting" or being "given" the name that is above all names and "becoming a Son" (Phil 2:9; Heb 1:3–5).[11] Among every "name" and accolade that is given to the exalted Lord is that of "head."

Moreover, when Scripture acclaims Christ as "head," it does not mean to suggest he is merely promoted to a title or only to a place of honor. Christ has obtained a position of power from which he is actively exercising dominion over everything to its final conquest and all to the glory of God. Christ has been positioned at the right hand of God to execute his almighty rule. As the Scottish Presbyterian James Bannerman noted, with the title "head"

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[7] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 233. Psalm 110 is similarly cited or alluded to for its messianic import elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 5:31; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22).

[8] Peter T. O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 109; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62.

[9] Other titles are used in association with Christ's exaltation as head in his session: "Son of Man" (Acts 7:56), "Lord" (Matt 22:44), "prince and Savior" (Acts 5:31), "high priest" (Heb 8:1), the "author and perfector" of our faith (Heb 12:2), and "Christ" (1 Pet 3:22).

[10] The exceptions are: 1) literal references to Jesus's physical head (e.g., Matt 27:29, 37) and 2) metaphorical references to Jesus as the "head of the corner" (Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7).

[11] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 98–114, 117–19.

Christ is not simply seen as the *founding* head of the church; he is also designated as the *presiding* head of the church—her present "source of life and influence, of ordinance and blessing, of law and authority, of word and doctrine."[12] Thus, the "first unambiguous" use of "head" in the book of Ephesians appears in 1:22 and refers to Christ's status of supreme authority and power.[13] As has been observed, understanding "head" here as "source" would be "inappropriate, indeed inexplicable." There is only one kind of "mere and absolute power," and it belongs to Christ the head, which he has reserved for himself, and he will not transfer it to any other (Second Helvetic Confession 18).

2. *Scope: Christ, as Head, Is Exalted over "All Things"*

Paul intensifies his thought by pointing to the utter expansiveness of Christ's exalted status as it relates to all dimensions of space and time. First, Paul extols the unparalleled *height* of Christ's exaltation in comparison to every conceivable province and entity. He is raised and seated at God's right hand "in the heavenly places" (v. 20), "far above" all rule, authority, power, and dominion and every name that can be named (v. 21). With regard to "all things," he is either "over" them or they are "under" him (v. 22). There is nothing that is not subject to Christ's sovereign control, even if it is not yet apparent to the human eye (Heb 2:8; Ps 8:6). Paul also stresses the *extent* of Christ's exaltation in time and space. He lauds Christ for his exaltation "not only in the present age" but also "in the one to come." His reign has begun because the "fullness of time" is already underway (Eph 1:10; Gal 4:4), and that rule will continue for all time (1 Cor 15:24). Paul also acclaims the *realm* of Christ's exaltation, namely, "all things." He is above "all" rule, authority, power, dominion, and "every" title that can be given. God has placed "all things" under his feet, and he is head over "all things" for the church. He is the one who fills "all things." Christ rises above every known reality, and his exaltation is without restriction as to time or sphere.[14]

Throughout Paul's letters and preaching, the idea of authority has particular reference to cosmic spiritual powers.[15] Since Christ is ensconced above

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[12] James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 2 vols. (1868; repr., New York: Westminster Publishing House, 2002), 1:194.

[13] Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 138; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 146.

[14] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 12.

[15] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89.

every power, this implicitly subsumes both good and evil authorities (Heb 2:8–9; Eph 6:10). Christ's reception of "every name that can be named" (v. 21) is akin to his receiving "the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). In Ephesians, Paul's specific point is that Christ's name is above the name of any (false) god that can be spoken and worshiped. All accolades, honors, or titles of praise have been attributed to the one who has ascended to a position of absolute supremacy—one that towers over all those who are in authority. His entitlement is due to the reality of his awesome power, which he is exerting over all things, including all false gods and real enemies.[16]

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds the believer that the struggle is not against "flesh and blood" but rather against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." In Ephesians 3:10, Paul states that God has made known his wisdom through the church to the (presumably) hostile "rulers and authorities." These repeated references to spiritual authorities illustrate the scope of Christ's victory over the defeated cosmic powers.[17] While Ephesians 6:12 affirms that these authorities are opposed to Christ, Ephesians 1:22 emphasizes that these authorities are in subjection to Christ.[18] Paul puts Christ's exalted headship into context—by placing it into relationship with all opposing parties and with the redeemed body of his church. There is no authority that is not presently in subjugation to Christ's supremacy, including all spiritual authorities and powers. At the same time, these opposing parties subserve the higher and greater purposes that Christ has reserved for his church.

3. *Purpose: Christ, as Head, Is Exalted over All Things for the Church*

> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things for the church. (Eph 1:22)[19]

In this passage, "head" designates Christ's rule over "all things" *and* his relationship to the church (Eph 1:10; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:10, 19).[20] There

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[16] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 65.

[17] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 388; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 52, 64.

[18] Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 180.

[19] Translation mine.

[20] Christ already rules over all things by virtue of his creating "all things" (Col 1:15–20). Ridderbos states, "Both in virtue of creation and in virtue of the restoration of the lost coherence of all things in him he forms the great point of integration for all that is in heaven and on

is a "strong disjunction" between these two spheres of rule, and Paul draws them into a relationship of priority in Ephesians 1:22.[21] Paul overlaps the headship of Christ over all things and the church for the express purpose of showing the consequences of Christ's cosmic rule on behalf of the church.[22] His headship over the cosmos is subordinated to God's purpose in Christ for the church.[23] However, does the grammar of Ephesians 1:22 lend itself to this interpretation?

The interpretive problem in this passage is in trying to unravel the knotted relationship between the different words in the phrase "and gave him as head over all things to the church." The grammatical elements appear straightforward: God is the understood subject in verse 17 and in the Greek verb; "him," that is, Christ, is the direct object; "the church" is the indirect object; and "head" is the predicate accusative.[24] Yet, how should the words "the church" be translated? With its dative construction, it would ordinarily be translated "to the church," as it often is (ESV, KJV, ASV, NASB). Such a translation also best corresponds to the way Paul ordinarily uses *didōmi* (δίδωμι) in Ephesians, namely, "to give" (Eph 1:17, 22; 3:2, 7–8, 16; 4:7–8, 11, 27, 29; 6:19), rather than "to appoint," "to install," or "to make."[25] In that case, the phrase would be rendered "God has given Christ, who is head over all things, to the church."

However, there is much to be said for the translation "for the church," as the NIV renders it.[26] First, grammarians recognize the legitimacy of translating *didōmi* as "make," "appoint," or "install" in this passage.[27] Second, a survey of Paul's use of *didōmi* in his other letters reveals that occasionally Paul wishes to convey the idea that the gift is given for the advantage of the

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earth." Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89. "This superiority, which has been conferred on Christ by God in his exaltation (Eph 1:20), is closely bound up with the significance with respect to 'all things' that he had already at the creation of the world (Col 1:15ff), and which, in accordance with the divine good pleasure regarding the fullness of the times, has taken effect anew (Eph 1:9, 10)." Ibid., 387–88.

[21] Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 141.

[22] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 387–88.

[23] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 70.

[24] A further challenge is discerning the syntactical relationship between "head" (*kephalē*, κεφαλή) and "over all things" (*hyper panta*, ὑπὲρ πάντα) which are grammatically parallel. The issue is whether "over all things" is in an appositional or attributive relationship to "head." See the discussion in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 287–89.

[25] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 289; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 66.

[26] Grammarians entitle this use the "dative of advantage" or "dative of interest." Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 142.

[27] Bauer, "δίδωμι," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 193; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 423.

recipient; he does this by employing prepositional phrases instead of using the dative, yet this sense is latent in his thought. For example, in 2 Corinthians 10:8, Paul says, "The Lord *gave* [authority] for building you up"; the same is seen in Galatians 1:4, where Paul writes, Christ "*gave* himself for our sins to deliver us." The idea is quite pronounced in 1 Timothy 2:6: "… who gave himself as a ransom for all" and in Titus 2:14, "… who gave himself for us to redeem us." The verb "to give" is used in these verses to convey the purpose or *telos* (τέλος) of the gift. This idea seems to be similarly present in Ephesians 1:22. Third, using *didōmi* in this way is consistent with Paul's flow of thought in the passage, particularly in a striking parallel between verse 19 and verse 22. In verse 19, Paul states that the power of God revealed in Christ is given to and *for* us who believe; and in verse 22, Paul states that the cosmic headship revealed in Christ is given to and *for* us who believe. The overall flow of Paul's contextual thought would encourage us to understand the phrase in question to mean God "made him head over all things *for* the church" because Paul is emphasizing the priority of the church in Christ's headship.

All of Paul's statements with respect to Christ's headship in this passage come to their climactic and emphatic expression with the last words of the clause, "for the church," which in turn function as a transition that leads us into the further descriptions to follow.[28] These ascriptions further accentuate Paul's focus on the universal authority of Christ, which is exercised on behalf of his treasured possession, the church. Although Christ is head over all things, the church alone is his "body" and his "fullness."[29] For example, Paul generally uses the metaphors "head" and "body" for distinctive purposes. While the title "head" conveys Christ's authority over all things and the church (Eph 1:10; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:10, 19), "body" suggests the inseparable union and communion between Christ and his church and the union her members have with one another (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12–20, 22–25; Eph 4:12, 16). This metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is not simply one metaphor among many; rather, it is "a dominant concept," perhaps even "the greatest metaphor" in the New Testament.[30] It is reserved to assure the church of the inseparable, eternal, and intimate bond that God

[28] O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 145.

[29] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 72, 80; Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 141. The idea of seeing the universe as an enormous "body" is present in Platonism, Stoicism, and Gnosticism, but such thinking is foreign to Paul's thought in this passage. Heinrich Schlier and Ernst Käsemann's belief that Paul has employed language from Gnosticism's Redeemer myth has been widely criticized, if not discredited. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 70; Best, *Ephesians*, 191, n. 48.

[30] O'Brien, "Church," 105; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 1206.

has established between Christ and his church. Also, Paul affirms that Christ's headship reaches outward as he "fills all things" in heaven and earth with his mighty presence (Jer 23:24). But the church is his "fullness" (Eph 1:23; cf. Eph 3:19; 4:7–9; Col 2:10).[31] What this means is that, though Christ fills all things, only the church is his fullness in the special sense. It is "the domain filled and ever increasingly to be filled by him."[32] There are two types of "filling"—each reflecting the difference between Christ's headship over "all things" on the one hand and that of the church on the other. The first bespeaks power and containment; the second, benefits and gifts. The church should be far from being overawed by any other power, as though she did not possess in Christ everything necessary for her perfecting. On the other hand, Paul urges the church to seek her fullness in the fullness of her head.[33] The church must place her confidence in Christ because the universe is his and he alone "fills all things."[34] The church is the church of him who is the head over all things. This represents a twofold shift in redemptive history. Just as Christ enters into a new stage of his Messiahship upon his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand, so also the kingdom of God enters into a new form as the church, the body of Christ as a result of the exaltation of her head.[35]

As far as her own existence and conduct are concerned, the church must see all that is in heaven and on earth from the vantage point of the "all-embracing and all-transcending power" of her head.[36] The center of gravity for the people of God is no longer on earth, nor is her potency to be measured in comparison to earthly powers. Instead, her epicenter and power are seated in heavenly glory at the right hand of majesty, with everything at his disposal.[37] This same rationale guides Paul's thought in Colossians 3:1–4, where he exhorts the believer to set his or her mind on "things that are above" because that is "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." The core reality for every believer—who is raised and seated with Christ—is above. The church's head, center, charter, and security are all derived from the right hand of majesty in the world above, from the one whose reign "is not of this world" (John 18:36).

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[31] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 391.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 389; see Jeremiah 23:24.
[35] Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (1903; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 85–86.
[36] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 391.
[37] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 62.

Even if these considerations are not sufficiently weighty in the eyes of some to translate *didōmi* as "appointed," "installed," or "made," they do demonstrate that Paul's grammar should not be overstated to constrict Paul's thought. Even scholars who would prefer to translate *didōmi* as "give" concede that Paul is placing emphasis on the priority of the church in relation to all things and interpret Ephesians 1:22 accordingly. They affirm that Christ's supreme dominion over the cosmos is "for the benefit of his believers," "for the benefit of his people," "on behalf of the Church," and for "the Church's welfare."[38] Christ's lordship over all things is subordinated to Christ's regard for his church, which is truly the focus of his presence and rule in the cosmos.[39]

We may conclude, then, that Paul's words were meant to encourage believers as they looked in faith to the head of the church, Jesus Christ. With confidence they could know that his transcendent authority over every power and authority was focused supremely on his glorious purposes in and for the church. Nothing else possesses a higher role and significance for the purposes of God.[40] Contemplated from eternity in the mind of God as the object of his all-wise plan, the church is uniquely "the *very means* by which her glorious Head accomplishes His purposes in the world."[41] His headship over all things subserves his sovereign and wise aim for the church. She is the medium of Christ's presence and rule in the cosmos, and she is the community in which the consummation of Christ's rule is anticipated. She need not fear that her power is insufficient to accomplish the vocation entrusted to her by her head. All things are his and at his disposal. Christ is head over all things, filling all things and directing all things in the supremacy of his headship, and he does so for his church, which is his body.[42] She stands at the pinnacle and climax of redemptive history and as the guardian of the long-hidden mystery of the gospel, which she is to carry into all the world (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 10:11; Eph 3:3, 6, 9).[43]

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[38] O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 145, 147, 152; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 67, 70.

[39] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 67, 77.

[40] O'Brien, "Church," 110, 113.

[41] James H. Thornwell, "The Argument for Church-Boards Answered," *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 4 vols. (1875; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 4:210.

[42] O'Brien, *Ephesians*,151.

[43] Christ's headship, which is cosmic in scope, yet churchly in priority, merely recapitulates what the Old Testament teaches about God's sovereign rule over all things. He rules all nations, the heavens and the earth, and all authorities and dominions for the sake of his treasured possession, Israel. God utilizes all creation and creatures to deliver, bless, exalt, enrich, and discipline Israel, and to glorify his name through her. Now these same purposes are operative in Christ's headship over all things for the church (see Deut 7:6; Josh 10:12–13; Exod 15; Gen 19:24; Dan 6; Exod 10:12–13; 8:16–19, 21–23; Job 1:6; Dan 10:13).

II. *Application*

1. *The Church as the Object of Christ's Redemption*

One way to illustrate the priority of the church for Christ in relation to that of the world is to consider the biblical doctrine of redemption. The eternal Son took on human nature so that he might "give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45).[44] Christ has secured this redemption for his people by receiving the curse of their sin, giving himself up unto death (Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12, 15; Gal 3:13). With only a few exceptions, the language of "ransom" and "redemption" is reserved in Scripture for God's elect, those whose salvation has been purchased by the riches of God's grace in Christ, so that they might become a people for "his own possession" (Titus 2:14). [45] The idea of payment is the reason for the existence of the entire *lytron* (λύτρον) word group, and the concept is soteric to the core.[46] Christ has thus delivered them from their bondage under the law and their former sinful ways and has won their justification and their adoption as sons (1 Pet 1:18; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Gal 4:5; Rom 3:24). The New Testament authors purposely employed the "ransom" and "redemption" vocabulary to express the personal effectiveness of Christ's death and not to express some form of abstract deliverance. Furthermore, the consummation of this salvation for believers is their anticipated "day of redemption," on which they will experience a final deliverance from this world and receive an inheritance in the world to come (Luke 21:28; Eph 1:14; 4:30). On that day, all who trust in Christ will receive the fullness of their adoption with the final redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23).

There is only one redemptive institution or community that Christ has established, and it is the church (Matt 16:18).[47] Christ builds his church by growing her intensively and extensively.[48] The former speaks to her

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[44] The teaching of Jesus assumes that the kingdom of God is fundamentally about salvation, e.g., when he stipulated that a person will not enter the kingdom unless they repent and believe (Mark 1:14–15; Matt 4:17). David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 24–25; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 385.

[45] The exceptions for the nonsoteric use of "ransom" and "redemption" are Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, both of which teach we should "make the best use" of our time. In the Old Testament, the Mosaic Covenant provided for the redemption of property, such as land and animals (Exod 34:20; Lev 25:19).

[46] Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 12; as cited in Carolyn J. Lex, "The Meaning of the New Testament Ransom Language: Evidence for the Limited Atonement" (unpublished paper, 1988), 2.

[47] David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 102.

[48] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 431, 435.

maturity and the latter to her immensity. To maintain her mission to the world, the church must resist being conformed to the world. One such temptation is to bring forward into "this age" what belongs to the one to come, particularly its "shalom."[49] The emphasis of Scripture is that we *enter, seek, announce, receive, come into, inherit, are given, brought into, testify about, pray for*, and *by faith belong to* the kingdom. But nowhere does Scripture say that we are to create it or usher it in.[50] But is it true that the language of "redemption" should not be applied to all things? One way to answer this question is by examining the vocabulary of the word "world."

2. *The World ("All Things") Is Not the Object of Christ's Redemption (in This Age)*

When the words for "world," *kosmos* (κόσμος) and *aiōn* (αἰών), are used in Scripture, they can refer to either the created suborder or the sinful moral order.[51] With regard to the first, the "world" may designate all creatures and all of creation. In relation to this, some would say that God does have "redeeming purposes toward creation" or that the gospel conveys a "saving, reconciling grace" to creation or that the kingdom of God is the "renewal of the whole world."[52]

It is true that the kingdom of God "is not only oriented to the redemption of God's people, but to the self-assertion of God in *all* his works," including all of creation.[53]

All creation longs for redemption from its bondage, and God's rule comprehends the "regeneration of this cosmos," the "consummation of all things," and the "renewal of the world."[54] In fact, the goal of all history is

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[49] William D. Dennison, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.2 (June 1999): 271–91; C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 7–8; see also, C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 156.

[50] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 49.

[51] For example, for Paul's use, see Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 4:9; Eph 1:4; Col 1:6; 1 Tim 6:7; for John, see John 3:19; 8:26; 13:1; 1 John 4:1; Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 14.

[52] Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 52–53; Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor … and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 31–48; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); see the "Introduction" in VanDrunen's *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 11–32.

[53] Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 23.

[54] Wells, *Person of Christ*, 24–25, 27; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 23, 56; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 231; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 6; Vos, *Kingdom and Church*, 102.

the universal acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, the triumph of his righteousness, and the establishment of his peace so that the glory of God will be fully vindicated.[55] Nevertheless, there are several problems with applying the soteric vocabulary of "redemption" to the world—understood as the created suborder—in this age.

The Bible does not speak of the created world as something in the *process* of being redeemed. For example, Romans 8:23 states, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage." Even so, the context of Romans 8 teaches that the liberation of the created order will take place along with the revealing (*apokalypsis*, ἀποκάλυψις) of the sons of God at their glorification (vv. 19, 23). This renewal of creation will happen when it undergoes a purging by fire and when the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in at the close of this age (2 Pet 3:12–13). This takes place not as a process but on the "day of the Lord" (2 Pet 3:10). Second, this will take place not through human efforts to "save the planet" but by the mighty hand of God, who alone will accomplish the rebirth of the heavens and the earth with fire, just as he once deluged the creation with water (2 Pet 3:6–7). Also, it is biblically untenable to consider a form of redemption that bypasses the cross and is brought about by the good works of humanity.[56] We typically associate the vocabulary of atonement, repentance, faith, and forgiveness with redemption, but how do we construe the church as a "co-redeemer" in the world?[57] It was B. B. Warfield who warned of "rhetorical excess" and who asked in wonder whether we really think that we can understand "redemption" and "Redeemer" to refer to whatever benefit we happen to think it means—no matter how loose or superfluous that meaning is?[58] It is premature to apply redemption to the creation before the dawn of the new heavens and the new earth.

The second use of the word "world" in Scripture refers to the sinful moral order of "this age." As a rule, the Greek idioms for "this age" and "this world" are "apt to call up evil associations."[59] These phrases refer to all that exists "as an evil-complexioned … system opposed to God, and therefore

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[55] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 20; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 46–47.

[56] Calvin P. Van Reken, "Christians in This World: Pilgrims or Settlers?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43.2 (November 2008): 242.

[57] DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 49; Van Reken, "Pilgrims or Settlers?," 242.

[58] B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), 346.

[59] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 12–13. Notable exceptions are passages like 1 Timothy 6:17 and Titus 2:12, which "are more neutral from an ethical point of view."

doomed to pass away."[60] For example, the "god of this world [age]" or the "ruler of this world" is Satan, as it lies presently under his power (2 Cor 4:4; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19). Consequently, the church's relationship to this world is to be marked by a sober watchfulness, lest she fall to its temptations, desires, deceit, corruption, and conform to its pattern—all of which are "passing away along with its desires."[61] It is from this present evil age that Jesus has delivered the church (Gal 1:4). The church and the world are in direct conflict with one another—with competing allegiances and being wed to separate ages.[62] The church wages war against principalities and powers in heavenly places and this world, which are "already vanquished" but have "not yet become harmless."[63]

The reason the world hates the church is because the world first hated Christ (John 15:18–20). This principle is a matter of fundamental identity. Christians are of the seed of the woman, not of the serpent, and citizens of the city of God, not just the city of man. Christians are *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:11, 14; 15:19). The church does not belong to this world any more than Christ did (John 8:23; 17:14). She is a people in exile, pilgrims and sojourners who are passing through (1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13). The church understands that she has become an "inhabitant and participator" of the world above and the world to come.[64] The "fatherland is not here and now."[65] It is essential to appreciate the vital temporal element in this second conception of the "world" as it is expressed in Scripture.[66] Inherent in the phrase "this age" (Rom 12:2) is the "belief in a fixed nature and a temporal duration of the present order of things."[67] The "things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:18). The contemporary reader of Scripture must resist imputing too much spatial, and not enough temporal, thought into the terminology of the "world." Nowhere else in all of Paul's thought is this explicitly expressed with greater clarity than it is in Ephesians 1:21, where he says, "… not only in this age but also in the one to come."[68]

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[60] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 17.

[61] First John 2:15–17; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 2:8; James 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4.

[62] Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967).

[63] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 392.

[64] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 47.

[65] Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," 8.

[66] As to this meaning, the terms "world" and "age" are virtually interchangeable in the New Testament, and translations have treated them accordingly.

[67] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 17.

[68] Ibid., 12. As Vos notes, this contrast is also implicit elsewhere (e.g., Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Tim 6:17).

Thus, "this world," in its moral complexion—that is, fallen and in opposition to God—ought to be viewed as something that will pass away and simply cannot be redeemed. It is evil and therefore transitory.[69] It is not the world but the people enslaved to it that need to be redeemed. When the New Testament speaks of redemption, this is what it speaks to most often—lost sinners who have been ransomed by what Christ accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection.

It is true that God kindly cares for all things in his creation. In his general providence, he feeds humankind and all creatures, and they "live and move and have [their] being" in his generous care (Acts 14:15; 17:28). He extends his kindness to those who neither love him nor thank him (Matt 5:43–47; Luke 6:35). God's goodness is showered upon the world, both as a created suborder and as a fallen moral order. God loves the world and proves it by freely offering to it the gospel of his Son (John 3:16; Matt 22:14; Ezek 33:11). So also, Christians are to love their neighbors as did the "good Samaritan" and even love their enemies as does their heavenly Father (Luke 10:29–37; Matt 5:44, 48). But God's general love and common grace for the world do not compare to his saving love and special grace, which he shows to his church. When it comes to the church, God's love is special, not ordinary; his calling is effectual, not general; and his providence is particularly gracious, not common. On the eve of his passion, when Christ prayed, "I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me" (John 17:9), he was praying for the "people of his own possession" (1 Pet 2:9), those for whom he would soon intercede on the cross and for whom he presently intercedes at the right hand of majesty (Heb 7:25), those who are a "holy nation" gathered by his Spirit out of all the nations of the world, those for whom he would give his flesh and blood (John 6:51; 1 Pet 1:19), his saving love (Eph 5:25), his cleansing (Eph 5:26), his Spirit (Acts 2:38), his promises (2 Pet 1:4; Gal 3:16), and eternal life (John 6:54). These gifts do not belong to the world at large. They are for Christ's body. Jesus was not praying for the world but for those chosen ones in the world, upon whom his eternal love was fixed. In the expansiveness of "all things," and in the "fullness of time," God blesses the church in a way that transcends his ordinary benevolence in the world.

Thus, Christ being exalted over all things for the church expresses Christ's twofold relationship—to both the redeemed party and the hostile party.

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[69] Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology in the New Testament," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 28.

All rule, authority, power, and dominion answer to Christ's higher purposes for this church. This is the great *telos* of his headship, both sovereignly and redemptively.

III. *The Exalted Christ and His Kingdom (1 Cor 15:22–28)*

> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:22–28 ESV)

1. *Scope: Christ Conquers All Things (Comparing 1 Cor 15:22–28 with Eph 1:20–23)*

When Christ ascended to God's right hand, his spiritual adversaries became subject to him, but when Christ delivers the kingdom into the Father's hands, they are vanquished by him. The two events function as bookends of the final epoch in redemptive history. Christ's session announced the inauguration of his heavenly reign over all authorities, and Christ's coming appearance will transpose his present reign into consummate glory—seen in the devastation of all that opposes him. Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:23–28 are twin reflections upon the inception and conclusion of the same era. The common phrasing that links these passages indicates their shared agenda, even if from different perspectives.

Ephesians 1:21–22	**1 Corinthians 15:24, 27**
21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion …	24 … after destroying every rule and every authority and power.
22 And he put all things under his feet …	27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."

Ephesians 1:20–23 casts Christ's headship into a relationship of superiority over "all rule and authority and power and dominion." First Corinthians 15:23–28 does the same. Here Paul uses the same language and quotes the same verse from Psalm 8, then he asserts that nothing of Christ's reign over these powers will ever diminish. There is no spiritual principality that

escapes Christ's dominion during his session, and there is none that will escape his devastation at his appearing. What was his to subdue will be his to destroy. The Corinthian passage substantiates that when Paul refers to these spiritual authorities, he has adversarial powers in view (e.g., Eph 6:12).[70] Both passages focus on "all things" in Psalm 8:6 to make their case.[71] But Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 15:27 how "all things" provides the source of "destroying *all* rule and *all* authority and power." Paul uses the same Greek adjective *panta* (πάντα) throughout 1 Corinthians 15:24–25, 27 and Ephesians 1:21–23, just as the Septuagint does in Psalm 8:6. For Paul, the "all things" includes (and draws attention to) every adversarial form of spiritual rule, authority, and power. The Messiah has fulfilled what the psalmist had prophesied, which is more than his simply being exalted. It means that Christ will catastrophically tread all of God's enemies, including death, under his feet. He led captivity captive when he ascended (Eph 4:8). When he appears in glory, he will condemn it, just as the psalmist said he would.

2. *Purpose: The Kingdom of Those That Christ Has Redeemed*

In 1 Corinthians 15:22–28, Paul looks at the summit of redemption through the doctrinal lens of the resurrection of Christ, who is the "firstfruits" of all who will rise with him on that day. Or, as Paul puts it, the Son will deliver the kingdom to the Father. What Romans 8:23 explains as the believer's anticipated glorification (the redemption of body and soul at the final resurrection), 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 extols as the aim of the messianic work given by the Father to his Son (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4). It is the "end" (*telos*) that Christ had in view, all along, in the covenant of redemption (John 17:4–5). God's ultimate goal in saving believers and Christ's ultimate messianic task are the same. At the second coming of Christ, the redemptive and the regal will converge. These events do not merely compose the final scene. They represent the intended climax of all that preceded. Paul gives center stage to the culminating transaction between God the Son and God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). In this deliverance of the kingdom, Christ exhibits the final proof (and fruit) of his triumphant victory over his enemies (death in particular), but he does so on behalf of "those who belong to Christ." In other words, Christ's appearance at the end-time proceedings entails two parties, his subdued enemies and his redeemed people. When he finally conquers all kingdoms (*katargēsē pasan archēn*, καταργήσῃ πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν), all kingdoms will be involved, but this whole conquest favors his kingdom (cf.

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[70] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 89.

[71] Taken from *kol* (כֹּל): the whole, all, any, every.

Ps 2:8; Dan 7:14; Rev 11:15). The "when," "then," and "after" do not mark time; rather, they signal an inseparable relationship between what Christ destroys and what Christ delivers (1 Cor 15:23–24, 27–28).[72] This was true in Christ's session, and it will be true at his glorious appearance.

As was the case in Ephesians 1:20–23, so it is in 1 Corinthians 15:23–28. Paul places Christ's headship into not only a relationship of duality but also one of priority. Just as Christ's headship over all things is subordinated to his purposes for his church, so also Christ's final destruction of all his adversaries is to deliver to the Father the kingdom—that is, all "those who belong to Christ." Given the contextual theme of the resurrection, Christ is understandably introduced as the "firstfruits." He is the first among all those who will receive their glorification, the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). Christ will present himself to God as the representative pledge of the full harvest to come.[73] The image assumes an organic and inseparable unity between Christ and those who belong to him.[74] What is striking is that the same organic union, which is communicated by the head-body metaphor in Ephesians 1:23, is similarly suggested by the firstfruits metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:23.[75] Both passages highlight the inseparable bond between Christ and those who receive the benefits of his work.

It seems plausible to conclude that if Paul is describing the final redemption of all "those who belong to Christ" (who will accompany him at his appearing), then the "kingdom" that the Son delivers to the Father in "the end" is his church. This context does not consider the kingdom in abstraction. This is about its constituency. The *telos* of the kingdom is the *telos* of the church, the glorified body of Christ. What the Son delivers to the Father is nothing less than the consummation of the covenant of redemption, which is what comes to the fore in 1 Corinthians 15. It is "the conclusion of the economy of redemption carried out by Christ"—it is his attaining the purpose for which he was sent by God.[76] The Son will give back to the Father *those whom* the Father had given to him beforehand (John 17:2, 9, 11–12, 22, 24). In Christ's high priestly prayer, he stated the goal of his work: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the

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[72] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 753–54.

[73] Gaffin, *Resurrection*, 34

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 39.

[76] Ridderbos, *Paul*, 560–61.

foundation of the world" (John 17:4). His desire was to deliver to the Father all those who belong to him. As Herman Ridderbos suggests, the ideas of kingdom, Messiah, and the church (*ekklēsia*) form an "integrated unity," and they are "never separable in the preaching of the Kingdom."[77] It was always the expectation that the prophesied Messiah would shoulder a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Isa 9:6–7; Dan 2:34, 44–45).[78] Yet, equally linked to the Messiah, and his kingdom, is its corporate dimension.[79] The one evokes thoughts of the other. Christ was never pictured "as a lone figure ruling in solitary majesty, but always with corporate qualities. He rules over people; he calls people to his rule."[80] It is not possible to have Christ without a people.[81]

Conclusion

Alfred Loisy's well-known statement, "Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came," could be easily dismissed as too extreme.[82] However, its candor captures the reticence to identify the kingdom of God with the church, even when it is expressed more moderately by others. For example, George Ladd writes,

> In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. … The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus' disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is the society of men.[83]
>
> The church is the people of the Kingdom, never the Kingdom itself. Therefore it is not helpful even to say that the church is a "part of the Kingdom," or that in the eschatological consummation the church and Kingdom become synonymous.[84]

On the other hand, some would rejoin that Augustine, the Reformers (like Martin Luther and John Calvin), and the Reformed tradition represent

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[77] Herman N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia, 1982), 22–23.

[78] Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 28; cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate About the Messianic Consciousness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954),73; Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 215.

[79] Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 227.

[80] Ibid., 219.

[81] Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 60.

[82] Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, ed. Bernard B. Scott, trans. Christopher Home (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 166.

[83] Georg Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110.

[84] Ibid., 113.

the other extreme by identifying the kingdom of God and the church too closely.[85]

It is beyond the scope of this study to negotiate the continuum of viewpoints on the issue of relating the church to the kingdom of God. Moreover, it is beyond such a narrowly focused study to articulate a position with sufficient nuance. Instead, the intent has been to shed light on the question in the light of a comparison between Ephesians 1:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 and their common cause. These passages seem reminiscent of Matthew 16:18–19 , which leads us to believe that as far as membership is concerned, we may identify the kingdom and the church.

To put it more plainly, the two pericopes underline the inseparable relationship between the church and the kingdom and encourage us to bring them into a strong association with one another.[86] It is difficult to conceive of being in the one without being in the other,[87] and it is even more difficult to put distance between them. It seems incredible to think of the church as a mere "society of men" in light of Christ's promise, "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18).

The two passages are nuanced, and they do see redemptive history from distinct vantage points. However, they are looking at the same thing. The kingdom that belongs distinctively to Christ in this age, his body, will be delivered over to Father in the end. Ephesians 1:20–23 asserts that Christ is given as head over every opposing principality on behalf of his church. First Corinthians 15:22–28 teaches that those same spiritual authorities will be destroyed at Christ's appearing on behalf of his kingdom, the same kingdom that he will deliver to the Father. Both moments encompass one triumphant reign, which is accomplished on behalf of all "those who belong to Christ." Until then, that kingdom could be called "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ," and it could be reasonably identified with the church (Westminster Confession of Faith 25:2). This is to admit that "our Lord looked upon the visible church as a veritable embodiment of his kingdom."[88] In the end, the kingdom of Christ will become the kingdom of the Father. When Christ proclaims, "It is done!" the kingdom of glory will exhibit the co-reign of the Father and the Son, along with all who will reign with Christ

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[85] Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 105; Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 104; Raymond O. Zorn, *Christ Triumphant: Biblical Perspectives on His Church and Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 66. Calvin saw the Reformation church as the visible image of Christ's kingdom. Tadataka Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology: A Study in the History of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 436.

[86] Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 355.

[87] Vos, *Kingdom and Church*, 86.

[88] Ibid., 87

(Rom 8:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:12; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 11:15; 12:10; 20:4; 21:6). Then, what Christ promised his disciples will become true: "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). Christ makes that same promise to all who belong to him—whether we regard them as his church or his kingdom. Until this author stakes out a sufficiently refined position on the exact relationship between the church and the kingdom of God, he is content not to put asunder what Christ has brought together.

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Presbyterians and Their Elders

STEVEN M. GRANT

Abstract

Biblical elders are spiritually mature disciples of Jesus who exercise authority over a congregation of God's people in the manner of shepherds who exemplify the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. The leadership of elders, as described in Scripture, is essential to the life of the church. Teaching and ruling elders are to be carefully selected based on their discipleship. Rather than providing a list of duties, the Bible describes the character of elders because who they are will determine what they do and how they do it. Elders must also be fully trained to fulfill their noble task. Given the qualities of their discipleship, elders would provide an effective voice for the church in the public square.

Keywords

Biblical elders, elder training, elders in public square, elders' character, elders' importance

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There was a time in America when serving as an elder in the Presbyterian Church was held in the highest esteem, at least in the hearts of some. Of President Benjamin Harrison it is said that "he had many honors which he held dear and to which he tried to be true, but of them all none could be rated higher than his position as a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church."[1] President

[1] Cleland Boyd McAfee, *The Ruling Elder* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1951), 2.

Harrison made this same remark at one time in the presence of the great merchant, John Wanamaker. Mr. Wanamaker replied to President Harrison, "And you feel that too? I have felt and said the same thing for years."[2]

Presbyterian churches are part of a historic movement known as the Reformed tradition that came out of the Protestant Reformation and that can be traced back to the church in Geneva led by John Calvin. Queen Elizabeth I of England is given credit for coining the name Reformed when she reportedly remarked that the Swiss were "more Reformed" than the Lutherans.[3] Presbyterian theology is known as Reformed theology, but, as the name implies, the organizational structure is that of a church governed by elders. This is to be distinguished from an episcopal model that utilizes bishops. In the episcopal model, authority comes down to the local church from higher authorities, whereas in the Presbyterian model, authority begins at the local church level. The congregation elects its ruling and teaching elders, who in turn represent the church in the higher judicatories in Presbyterian and Reformed denominations, such as presbytery, synod (whenever they exist), and General Assembly.

The Bible describes the significance of serving as an elder or overseer. The apostle Paul declares, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1 ESV). Paul goes on to say, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17). This passage also reveals two types of elders: those who rule and those who preach and teach. Reformed churches include both ruling and teaching elders.

In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, the apostle Paul describes the kind of person an overseer should be, and in Titus 1:5–9, he describes the kind of people Titus should have been looking for in choosing elders. These verses describe leaders whose character clearly shows that they have grown to such a mature level in their discipleship to Jesus Christ that they are tailor-made to represent their Savior not only in the church but also in the world. Paul states in Romans 8:28–29 that God uses all things for good. He does not say that all things *are* good but that God *uses* all things "for good." God uses things we consider bad, as well as things we consider good, for good. In verse 29, Paul reveals what that good is: "to be conformed to the image of his Son." This is the goal of discipleship: to be more and more in the likeness of Jesus. As Paul describes overseers, or elders, they are the ones who have reached that exemplary level and so can be entrusted with leadership.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 20.

This leadership does not have to be confined to the church. As Jesus calls us to be in the world though not of it (John 17:13–19) and to be "salt and light" (Matt 5:13–16), it is clear that the mission of the Christian leader is not limited to working in a given church congregation, working only behind church walls; rather, it includes being engaged in the world all around us. There seems to be a growing consensus in America that due to the principle of separation of church and state, the faith community should not engage in public discourse or address public issues. However, not only is there a precedent in American history for the participation of elder leadership in public matters, but there is also ample biblical evidence of God's people being engaged in the public arena. At the same time, public discourse can often become very contentious and divisive, so a Christlike voice would be most helpful.

Abraham Kuyper writes, "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence of which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"[4] This is to say that if we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, if all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him (Matt 28:18), then nothing exists outside the realm of his sovereignty or is exempt from the authority of his word. The church then has a responsibility to bring that truth to the public arena just as much as it has the call to bring the authority of the word to church congregations. The following is a helpful definition of what we might call "public theology":

> [Public theology is the] application of a Christian community's theological commitments to the cultural issues that confront the Public Square, and the culture itself as well as the church. It is not politics or partisan activity. Rather, it is the attempt to apply the fruits of biblical thinking to the heartfelt concerns that shape the watching world as well as the life of those who walk with Christ so that both communities might be challenged, shaped, and blessed by the wisdom of God.[5]

The church must be careful and intentional in how it engages secular culture. The question is: How has Jesus taught us to participate in that public conversation and activity? The church ensures that the people who would presume to enter that public arena are mature enough in their faith and discipleship that they can represent the faith community's witness in a Christlike manner. The faith community's participation in expressing

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[4] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in Abraham Kuyper, *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

[5] Peter Lillback, *The Public Theology Initiative* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2015), 2–3.

public theology, and expressing that theology publicly, must be done in a manner that conforms to Jesus's likeness. The character of the leadership of the faith community must be consistent with the character of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The first clue that elders would be good candidates for this is Paul's requirement that they "must be well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim 3:7). This presents the possibility of an easier entry point into the conversation because the elder already has a good reputation and the respect of the community. All of this is to say that elders, carefully chosen and properly trained, are the people most fit not only for church leadership but also for representing the church in the public arena.

A hymn often used during ordination services is "Here I Am, Lord."[6] At the end of each stanza, a line leads into the refrain with the question, "Whom shall I send?" Then, the refrain declares, "Here I am, Lord." This answer is based on Isaiah 6:8, "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" It is my contention that elders, ruling as well as teaching elders, are the perfect candidates to send into this public discourse if, first, and foremost, they exemplify the character of the elders that Paul describes to Timothy and are properly educated in the history of their specific national context as well as the current issues that impact that context. If elders truly are of the character described by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, they are the best ones to engage the secular culture in a reasonable conversation about public issues from the faith perspective. Serving in the public arena is not something we should consider mandatory for ruling elders, nor would it be a ministry exclusively reserved for elders, as there are certainly others in the faith community not serving the church as elders who possess the character described in 1 Timothy 3:1–7; however, I would advocate that those character traits are essential to those who do speak for the church and that the pool of "First Timothy elders" is a vital source of faithful servants suited and needed for work in public theology.

It may come as a surprise to some that John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest, of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians as their leaders."[7] This statement may seem to contradict the principle of

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[6] Daniel L. Schutte, "Here I Am, Lord," in *Worship & Rejoice* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 2001), 559.

[7] John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, ed. Henry P. Johnson, (New York: Burt Johnson, 1970), 393, as quoted in Benjamin F. Morris, *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States* (1864; repr., Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007), 186.

separation of church and state. However, Mr. Jay was not advocating the creation of a theocracy, nor did he envision the church governing the nation. Rather, he knew that this country needed leaders with a solid moral foundation. Leaders are not limited to those who hold public office, though it includes them, and perhaps that is what Mr. Jay had in mind. However, a person can be a leader in a community in a variety of ways, even if he or she does not hold an elected position. I advocate that among those involved in the public discourse there be included those with a faith foundation and the character of an elder described in 1 Timothy 3. Also, there is ample precedent in American history for clergy participation in the public arena, especially in New England, and there is biblical support as well.

I. *Elders in the Bible*

Presbyterians believe that church government by elders is biblical. There is ample evidence in the New Testament that Paul organized churches in this way. Paul instructed Titus, "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). While Paul and Barnabas traveled through Asia Minor, they appointed elders as well. "And when they had appointed elders in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23). In 1 Timothy 5, Paul gives very specific qualifications for who should serve as elders. Several times in Acts, elders are mentioned as a given in church leadership (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4; 20:17–38; 21:18). In the Old Testament, there were elders. They are mentioned mainly in the Pentateuch (excluding Genesis), Joshua, Judges, both books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. In the broadest sense, the Old Testament reveals elders as giving leadership at the subtribal, tribal, territorial, and settlement levels.[8] The role of elders was deeply rooted in the patriarchal and tribal Israelite society.[9] Some have argued that the apostle Paul modeled the organization of the churches he helped plant on the role of elders he knew from the synagogue.[10] The New Testament describes elders of the church in much greater detail, which suggests that the New Testament elder is unique and to be distinguished to some degree from his Old Testament predecessors.

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[8] Hanoch Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 8.

[9] Ibid., 9.

[10] Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder* (1832; repr., Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987), 49.

Three terms in the New Testament describe elders. The first is *presbyteros*, which is most often translated in our English Bibles as "elder." The second term used to describe this office is *episkopos*, translated as "overseer" and sometimes "bishop." The third is *poimēn* which is translated as "shepherd." Luke, Paul, and Peter use these three terms to describe elders. In Acts 20, as the apostle Paul was taking his leave of the Ephesian church after two years of ministering there, Luke records in verse 17 that Paul met with the *presbyterous*. During his final encouragements and exhortations, Paul indicated to these men in verse 28 that the Holy Spirit had made them *episkopous*. These leaders have been given oversight of the local church. Based on Titus 1:5–7, we see that Paul uses both terms to refer to the same people. Paul reminds Titus that the reason he left Titus in Crete was to appoint elders (*presbyterous*). Paul then goes on to explain that these overseers (*episkopoi*) must have certain qualities. I submit that the two words are used to convey a richer understanding of the character of the person chosen for this great responsibility. *Presbyteros* refers to a person's spiritual maturity; *episkopos* affirms authority.[11] The third word, *poimēn* becomes relevant when Peter as an apostle uses both a verb (*poimainō*, to act as a shepherd to) and a noun (*poimnion*, flock) to exhort his fellow elders (*presbyterous*): "Shepherd [*poimanate*] God's flock [*poimnion*]" (1 Pet 5:1–3).

It would appear, then, that elders are spiritually mature Christians who exercise authority over a congregation of God's people in the manner of shepherds who exemplify our chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Clearly, this is a much greater calling than merely serving on a church board.

In 1 Timothy and Titus, the apostle Paul describes the characteristics of these overseers. In 1 Timothy, Paul lists fifteen qualities Timothy should look for when choosing overseers. Thirteen of these requirements have to do with character; only two refer to what an overseer is to do. This suggests that, for Paul, the character of an overseer is of more importance than a list of tasks. The examination of a person's character is indeed the best place to begin in searching for potential elders because character will determine what the overseer does and how he does it. This should have a significant impact on how a church goes about selecting its elders. The selection process should be much more comprehensive than merely finding people willing to serve on a church board to fulfill certain tasks. The church should be looking for committed disciples of Jesus who possess the level of spiritual maturity that reflects Paul's description because that will determine how a person goes about shepherding the people of God.

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[11] W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. Merrill F. Unger and William White Jr. (Nashville: Nelson, 1996), 67, 195.

Paul does not include a detailed description of the tasks to be done in his exhortation to find people to fulfill the tasks. Rather, he describes the character and qualities of the people needed to lead the church, who will then, based on their spiritual maturity and Christian character, be trusted to discern God's leading in what to do and where to lead God's people. This is not dependent on any vocation, status in society, or area of expertise but rather on who the prospective elder is in Christ.

Since the ministry of elders is biblical, it is essential for the church to fully embrace the biblical vision of eldership; this will maximize the effectiveness of church leadership to further the mission of the church in the world. One can only imagine what spiritual power would be unleashed if Peter's and Paul's requirements were truly taken to heart.

Leadership in the Presbyterian church, the office of overseer, elder, and shepherd, is a calling that is distinctly different from any other in the church. Not only is the church called to lift up the full extent of this office, but the church also desperately needs elders to function as the Bible describes. For example, I firmly believe that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), my own denomination, is declining in part due to the failure of the shepherds of the church, both teaching and ruling elders. The church must regain a sense of urgency to recapture for the church what God has called us to be and to do.

II. *Crisis in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in turmoil. Debates over biblical authority, absolute truth, moral and ethical issues, the sovereignty of God in the church and the public square, mission and evangelism, sexual identity and the nature of marriage and family, and even the question of whether Jesus is *one* way to salvation or *the* way to salvation are dividing the body of Christ. I should say that the church is *again* in turmoil, as the history of Presbyterianism in America has been marred by division on several occasions. The formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), to name a few, are dramatic examples of how the body of Christ has been rent asunder in the twentieth century alone. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were divisions also; however, those have been, in part, the result of cataclysmic events that transformed the landscape of America, namely, the two Great Awakenings and the American Civil War.

In more recent times, the cause of division has been subtler but no less cataclysmic, perhaps even more so. For over a hundred years there has been

a gradual erosion of biblical authority in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in my lifetime the office of elder has been compromised and is thus unable to assist the resistance against this trend away from biblical standards. This trend is even more puzzling, given the focus of the Presbyterian form of government on elders. Elders, as spiritual shepherds of the church, are called to protect the purity of the church. Teaching elders (or pastors) have the responsibility to feed God's people his word, and the ruling elders are to see that this is fulfilled faithfully and that church discipline is maintained.

The Presbyterian approach to church government is the form of church government I believe in and the context within which I have committed to exercising my ministry. I further contend that those serving as elders are the people best suited to represent the church in the public arena. An unswerving commitment to God's word is essential if one is going to be an effective instrument of God to communicate both redeeming and common grace. If an elder's witness is not firmly grounded in God's word, then anything he advocates is undercut by sinking sand. As Thabiti Anyabwile observed, "A man may have a gift [of teaching] but the gift must be informed by appropriate content."[12] I pray that churches around the world will observe and learn from our struggles here in the United States.

III. *Elders as Shepherds*

The apostle Peter exhorts elders in his first letter to shepherd the flock of God. Timothy Witmer identifies the character of shepherd leadership in terms of *knowing*, *feeding*, *leading*, and *protecting* the sheep. He describes a comprehensive matrix on shepherding[13] and makes the case that effective ministry flows first from the ministry of the word, then to prayer, then to a "micro" or personal ministry to individuals, and finally to a "macro" or corporate congregational ministry. A session that sees itself as a board of directors will do this in reverse order, concentrating mostly on "macro" level ministry.

Knowing: In a large church, it is not reasonable to expect that all elders are going to know all the people associated with that church. However, there needs to be a structure in which elders are expected to intentionally know even a portion of the congregation beyond the small number of friends

[12] Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 81.

[13] Timothy Witmer, "Shepherding: A Comprehensive Matrix for the Work of the Elder" (lecture, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, August 16, 2011), 107–87.

and acquaintances they would get to know anyway by being a member of the church. While personal contact is essential for getting to know a person, the visitation of members or some form of regular contact must be lifted up as part of the elders' shepherding duties. It would be wise to devise an effective plan for systematic contact. At the very least, everyone in the congregation must know who their elders are. In addition, elders are the ones to be called first in times of need. James wrote, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jas 5:14).

Feeding: Elders are to provide and be involved in various ministries of the church that intentionally nurture discipleship. The session provides for worship, trusts the pastors to preach and teach, makes sure Christian education and other meaningful programs are happening, and provides a schedule for the celebration of the sacraments.

Leading: Together with the pastors, elders discern God's calling for mission, purpose, and vision for the ministry of their churches and continue to develop strategies for carrying it out. Leading also includes elders' roles as examples (cf. Acts 20:17–35; 1 Pet 5:3). Elders must hold themselves accountable regarding worship attendance, participation in new member classes, prayer life, devotion to the study of God's word, and their manner of living outside the church walls. They should be those to whom church members should be looking for their examples. As Paul exhorts the Philippians 3:17, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

Protecting: Though there is an awareness of cultural trends that are upsetting, it is still left to the pastors to address these things publicly, and this is where elders involved with public theology will be of help (cf. Acts 20:29). More immediate, though, is the elders' call to nurture the congregation in maintaining a biblical worldview, Christlike behavior, and life choices. This is when exercising church discipline is vital.

No one wants to be accused of being judgmental. As a result, I have observed a great reticence to confront, hold accountable, or give personal admonishments or warnings within the church. Ezekiel chapters 33 and 34 give us a very compelling description of the responsibility of the leadership of God's people in being "watchmen" to give warnings when the enemy is approaching and the consequences of failing. By contrast, in our own day, there is a desire not to be "holier than thou," and some leaders do not have an answer when asked, "Who are you to tell me?" If they understood the role of an elder and had already established a relationship with members who thus questioned them, they would know who they were. Unless the

elders understand that the Christian lives of their sheep are their responsibility, they will not make it their business to become personally involved. This is why it is essential that nominating committees look for people who have a passion for God's people as potential elders.

Of all the characteristics of a faithful shepherd of God's people—all of them, that is, except for having a saving faith of one's own—one aspect that must be established first. He must have such a clear understanding of Christ's love for him that he will be able to relate to his sheep with the *agapē* love Jesus commands us to have for each other (cf. John 10:11; 21:15–19). Elders must have a Christlike, biblical worldview. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love [*agapate*] one another: just as I have loved [*ēgapēsa*] you, you also are to love [*agapate*] one another" (John 13:34). *Agapē* love is that unconditional, self-sacrificing love that Jesus has for us. The sheep do not always make themselves lovable, but we must remember how God first loved us. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). If the shepherd does not fully embrace the truth of the cross and constantly remind himself of Jesus's sacrificial love for him, it will be too easy for him to lose touch with his dedication to the needs of the sheep. We are to be not only recipients of grace but also conduits of grace. To possess true *agapē* love is a work of the Spirit, but we will more likely avail ourselves of the power of the Spirit if we regularly meditate and rediscover Jesus's amazing love for us. In so doing, we will be better equipped to share that same love with others. This has been my experience, and I believe that everything we do as shepherds must be done in *agapē* love. Jesus said, "By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love [*agapēn*] for one another" (John 13:35).

I believe that when Jesus told Peter, "Tend my sheep" (John 21:16) and "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17), the tending and feeding included feeding them the word of life. When Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20, he included "teaching them all that I have commanded you." Likewise, it would be difficult to "make disciples of all nations" and to baptize unless the people heard God's truth. Paul, in his review of his ministry among the Ephesians, reminded the Ephesian elders that he "did not shrink from declaring to [them] the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, specifies that God's commands were to be on the people's hearts, that they should be taught to the children, discussed in their homes and throughout the day, and even affixing them on their bodies and their doorposts. It is as if sharing the word of God is one of the greatest gifts one could give to another and a significant means of fulfilling God's call to care for others. Through Bible studies, preaching,

worship, the administration of the sacraments, classroom sessions and small group meetings, counseling sessions, and discipleship programs, the word of God is fed to the people. The Bible is the infallible rule of faith and practice, so all the activities in the life of the church must be done under the authority of the word. Church leadership must never miss an opportunity to teach the word.

The first order of business to fulfill the call for a biblical worldview is to put all of life in the context of the sovereignty of God. As Paul declares, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to him" (2 Cor 5:9). When did God actually say that he was pleased? It was at Jesus's baptism, when God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17). It would seem that the most direct way to please God is to be as much like Jesus as we can! But that would require us to make Jesus the Lord of our lives. To be willing to acknowledge him as Lord of our lives and to devote ourselves to him to that extent, we must have a saving faith in Christ. A shepherd's first duty is to be sure his sheep have a saving faith. Paul defines what saving faith means in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Only God knows for sure what is in a person's heart, but the shepherd should make it his greatest concern to ensure that all those under his care have that faith. Otherwise, he should faithfully labor to rectify that deficiency.

It is essential that the would-be shepherds of the sheep must also have experienced this transformation in their own spiritual lives. The shepherds must first have embraced a biblical worldview, been shaped by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, and be sure they have a saving faith that they can explain and testify to from their own experience. If they are to be the examples to the flock (1 Tim 4:12), this transformation must be readily apparent, not as an act or facade, but as an authentic result of new life in Jesus Christ. David Dickson reports a comment made by one person about another: "He's a good man, but somehow he never reminds me of Jesus."[14] This is not the kind of person one would consider a potential elder. By contrast, in more ancient times, Polycarp wrote to the church at Philippi,

> Also the presbyters must be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, looking after the sick, not neglecting widow or orphan or one that is poor; but always taking thought for what is honorable in the sight of God and of

[14] David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work* (1883), ed. George Kennedy McFarland and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 34.

> men, refraining from all anger, partiality, unjust judgment, keeping far from all love of money, not hastily believing evil of anyone, nor being severe in judgment, knowing that we all owe the debt of sin. (Polycarp, *Phil.* 6.1)[15]

This ministry includes seeking out those who at first seemed to be a committed part of the flock. Life in a fallen world, however, can cause all kinds of circumstances that may lead a person to wander away, not only by their lack of presence with the faith community but also by their lifestyle habits and the weakening of their confidence in the truth of the Christian faith. This can happen even while they are attending worship and other church activities. Whether they are absenting themselves from the fellowship or still attending, at the first signs of this, the shepherd must give attention to it. Luke 15 gives parables of a lost sheep and a lost coin, followed by the story of a lost son. In each case, something greatly valued was lost (cf. Luke 19:10). In the cases of the sheep and the coin, all-out searches for them were conducted until they were found. In all three stories, a great celebration was held when what was lost was found. Lost people matter to God; they should matter to us. It is a tremendously exciting ministry because God will bring his elect to faith, and he gives us the privilege of being a part of what he is accomplishing. An elder may or may not be the one fortunate enough to be in prayer with a person at the moment that person gives his life to Christ, but regardless, we can trust that God uses the ministry of the elders to plant seeds along the path of a person's journey or to water the seeds planted by others so that God can reap his harvest.

"The office and work being spiritual, it is necessary that elders be spiritual men."[16] This principle certainly includes that elders must be people of prayer. People with a significant prayer life are more likely to engage in prayer readily when in the company of others.

Churches today often need to be educated on these matters. There must be a significant cultural shift in how elders relate to congregations. More and more churches today consist of people from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds or no background at all. With this wide spectrum of faith communities represented in churches, from Roman Catholicism to the most independent of Protestant groups, many of our people have little or no experience with Presbyterian denominations, history, or way of doing things. If there is little experience with Presbyterianism, there is no

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[15] "Letter of Polycarp," in *Early Church Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 133–34.

[16] McAfee, *The Ruling Elder*, 7.

expectation that new members will look to their ruling elders for shepherding or even know who they are. They are naturally drawn to the teaching elders for this, but the role of the ruling elders in their spiritual lives might remain ambiguous. The role of the ruling elder may even be unclear to candidates when they are asked to accept nomination, other than that they will be required to attend meetings and serve on committees.

It should be noted that the Bible does not give any directive as to the optimum number of elders for a given church at any given time, only that there be a plurality. For example, 1 Timothy 4:14 refers to the "council of elders." Witmer writes, "In the inspired writings of both Paul and Peter it is clear that the work of the elder is shepherding and that the work is to be shared by a plurality of elders in a particular location."[17] So, given this absence of a particular number, each church must decide for itself what that optimum number should be. We should resist a process of simply filling seats rather than discerning those whom God has called. What we should be striving for is quality, not mere quantity.

Nor does the Bible prescribe a specific length of term. In churches where there are specified terms designated for service on the session, we say, "Once an elder, always an elder." This little phrase means more than the fact that an ordained person is eligible to serve again without needing to be ordained a second time. It is a matter of identity and calling. While there may be circumstances that warrant an elder being removed from this office or the necessity of his resignation, elders are ordained with the intent of permanent tenure and exercise of office. This means that no matter where elders are or what they are doing, they are still elders of the church. They are not elders at church events only, nor are they restricted to a certain length of time for service. Even as elders rotate off the session at the completion of their specified terms, if their church has such a process, they are still elders of the church and are an invaluable resource of leadership that can and hopefully will be utilized in some way.

IV. *Training Elders*

The office of elder is so unique and critical to the life of the church that a comprehensive training program is essential. Such a program would also help identify those who are truly called to serve as elders, because only those with that sense of call would be willing to submit to such training.

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[17] Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 46.

Those who do not feel that they have time for such spiritual focus reveal the difference between *being* an elder and merely serving on a board. The level of commitment it takes to be a shepherd of the flock makes a training program necessary. Those with a true sense of call would welcome the opportunity to grow in the Lord at such a deep level, while those who are merely willing to serve on the session but do not have the sense of call may find the time commitment an obstacle. This is a good thing because we should not be looking for many people to serve; we should be looking for those God has called to serve, however few. D. Martin Lloyd Jones, in his writings concerning preachers, makes an observation about deacons that can easily be applied to elders as well:

> What do you look for? Well, you remember how in Acts 6, even in the matter of appointing deacons, who were simply to handle a financial problem, a charitable matter of feeding widows, it was insisted upon that they should be men "filled with the Spirit." That is the first and the greatest qualification. You are entitled to look for an unusual degree of spirituality, and this must come first because of the nature of the task.[18]

I propose that if a person discerns a call to serve as an elder, either from his own awareness of the Spirit's prompting or by the encouragement of others, and at best a combination of both, such a person would participate in a comprehensive Christian leadership training program *before* he is considered for the office and certainly before he is elected by the congregation. This training program would be taught by the pastoral staff and others so designated and would include basic foundational teaching in Bible content and basic Reformed theology, discipleship, polity, and church discipline with case study examples; mission, worship, and the sacraments; and Presbyterian church history, prayer, and congregational shepherding. In addition, for the sake of raising up people who may sense a call to be the church's witnesses in matters of public theology, further training in issues of national concern, national history, and historic precedents, particularly regarding the role of the church in our national life and how to engage the culture, would be included in the training. In the future, such a leadership program would not necessarily need to be offered exclusively to people considering eldership. Anyone interested in a Christian leadership program could be invited. People who wish to participate in the life of the church in ways other than eldership could find it helpful for their sphere of ministry. In any case, this program should take place before prospective elder candidates

[18] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 109.

are presented to the session for examination and certainly before they are presented to the congregation for election. In my own church, we have begun to implement a more comprehensive elder training program, and while this is still a work in progress, we are already seeing growth in our elders' biblical sense of call and effectiveness.

While this list of topics may seem like a great deal of ground to cover, the training program does not have to be a theological seminary–level program. It can provide, at a basic level, what would equip a person to determine whether being an elder is God's calling. And yes, it would take time. The office of elder is important enough to require such time.

After the person completes the program and still senses a call to be an elder, then and only then is the person recommended to the session for examination and to the congregation for election. Once the session is satisfied and the person is nominated to the congregation for their vote, a forum would be arranged for each candidate to give his personal testimony, perhaps even at the congregational meeting at which the vote will take place. Having heard the testimony and knowing that the candidate has submitted to sufficient training, the congregation would then be able to vote with confidence and assurance that the person nominated is suited to be an elder. The nominated candidates would have a much higher standing since the congregation would have the opportunity to hear the candidates, to know that they participated in training that took a significant level of commitment, and that they have taken spiritual growth seriously.

The apostle Paul begins his description of overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1 with the words, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer." This implies that it is acceptable to aspire to this office. In my experience, it has been discouraged to consider people who have expressed a desire to be an elder for fear that such a person might have an agenda and an undue desire for power and influence. While this is a valid concern, it is also contradictory to our requirements for teaching elders. We expect candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament to discern a call from God, which is then confirmed by the community of believers. It would seem that we would have the same expectations for those who would serve as ruling elders, especially given Paul's statement and the true nature of being an elder.

Do members of our congregation even know they can aspire to this office? I do not believe that many have even thought about it. Do we provide a means for people to explore this sense of calling? I believe it is essential that elders participate in a comprehensive training and discipleship program before they are considered for ordination to allow them to discern this potential or lack thereof. The future of the church depends on it.

I believe that given the crucial role that elders are to play both in the life of the church and in the public arena, such an approach is warranted and greatly needed, especially in Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches. Elders who have gone through a process such as this would be better prepared not only for their own ministry but also to impact the church. They could better prevent the church from drifting away from her biblical and Reformed roots, and they could contribute the faith community's voice to debates that shape our national life. Elders need to be able to tell the difference between orthodoxy and heresy, between truth and untruth. They need to be able to hold pastors accountable when they err in preaching. Titus 1:9 says,

> [An elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and *also rebuke those who contradict it.* (Emphasis added)

This includes teaching elders when they preach and teach unbiblically! Elders need to be able to hold up to a higher standard the candidates coming out of seminary, thus communicating to the seminaries that the church will not tolerate unbelief in their pulpits. Elders need to ably represent their churches at presbytery and at the general assembly sessions more faithfully to prevent the church from reflecting the culture rather than affirming God's revelation to the world. Elders need to be informed about the world around them and possess the grace to communicate God's truth in a way that impacts the larger community for good. Most importantly, elders must be equipped to know, lead, feed, and protect God's flock.

Christian Community and Constructive Ministry in Violent Contexts: A Reformed Proposal

PHILIP TACHIN

Abstract

Humanity has always had to deal with wars and violence, which throw millions of people into crisis. While this is a critical problem for Christian and non-Christian intervention agencies due to the need to expend resources and the risks associated with such expenditures, it also creates an opportunity for the gospel. The Reformed tradition has a history of charity ministry. However, as dangerous crises are multiplying, with security implications for interventions and the involvement of a huge amount of resources, the question turns on what basic principles should be followed and what is the most effective strategy for ministry in such contexts. This article explores the harmony between war and grace and constructs strategies that can effectively impact ministry and resilience to victims of war or small-scale violence.

Keywords

War and violence, charity, remaking worlds, christocentric, ministry, resilience

Introduction

Humanity is bedeviled by war and destruction. While we can make efforts to reduce wars and violence in the world, we cannot totally do away with them because sinful human nature combusts at the slightest provocation. God originally called humans in the cultural mandate to govern the entire universe and be accountable in every situation (cf. Gen 1:26–28; 2:15), and he now accuses them of breaking his everlasting covenant, both originally in Adam and in the present by their actions (Isa 24:5).

Humans are imbued by nature with empathy toward others, so the problem of war and other forms of violence has elicited responses from well-meaning groups, Christian and non-Christian. While non-Christian groups try to respond to victims of violence in laudable ways, the difference for Christians lies in their motive and ultimate goal. The question that believers must face is how to respond in a way that is uniquely transformative in affecting the whole person (body, soul, and spirit) and not just the physical or material aspects. What is the most effective way of ministering Christ to these victims with an enduring impact?

Our goal in this article is to help victims of violence or war develop resilience and be able to stand strong in difficult times. Many researchers have written on the concept of resilience, focusing primarily on African situations,[1] defining it as "a process of adapting successfully in the context of a threatening situation" or "the ability to bounce back and learn from an adverse experience to such an extent that the ability is gained to reach out to others in adverse experiences and comfort them to deal with their challenges in a positive way facilitating forgiveness, reconciliation and healing"[2] or a "process of adjusting well to major challenges commonly associated with negative outcomes."[3] These definitions emphasize one important reality,

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[1] Linda C. Theron, "The Resilience Processes of Black South African Young People: A Contextualised Perspective," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience*, ed. Updesh Kumar (Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2017): 136–47; Laura May Ward and Carola Eyber, "Resiliency of Children in Child-Headed Households in Rwanda Intervention: Implications for Community-Based Psychosocial Interventions," *War Trauma Foundation* 7.1 (2009): 17–33; P. J. Buys, "Building Resilient Communities in the Midst of Shame, Guilt, Fear, Witchcraft, and HIV/AIDS," *KOERS—Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 85.1 (2020), doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.85.1.2464.

[2] Stefan E. Germann, "I Am a Hero—Orphans in Child-Headed Households and Resilience," *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 3.2 (2005): 42, https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC30853.

[3] Linda C. Theron, "Resilience Research with South African Youth: Caveats and Ethical Complexities," *South African Journal of Psychology* 42.3 (2012): 333, doi:10.1177/008124631204200305.

which is to help victims overcome their traumatic emotional, physical, and social experiences. The Christian perspective aligns with these views especially well. Paul writes,

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3–4 ESV)

Here, God is the foundation of all resilience as he comforts and strengthens his people to overcome, and he gives a ministry to those he strengthens so they in turn can help others struggling in their various conditions. Elsewhere, Paul teaches what a resilient life looks like: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8). This is a deliberate attitude of seeing things beyond the uncomfortable experiences in the hope that God will bring victory and refreshing times in believers' lives to confirm that even "the poor have hope" (Job 5:16) on account of divine sovereignty.

I. *The Humanitarianism of Practical Humanism?*

Recently, Roxani Krystalli and Philipp Schulz conducted an elaborate study on interventions in war contexts for the purpose of "remaking a world" for the victims "in the wake of violence."[4] This study builds on research that draws on the work of specialists such as psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, and ethnographers for the purpose of helping victims of violence to rise up with new hope within their various cultural and social contexts.[5] This concept is interesting because it implies that something good can come out of the pain and rubble of war; the central concern is how to change the situation during and after a war or conflict. The research question they pose is, "How can centering practices of love and care illuminate different pathways for understanding the remaking of worlds in the wake of violence?"[6] The principal framework for their research is political,

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[4] Roxani Krystalli and Philipp Schulz, "Taking Love and Care Seriously: An Emergent Research Agenda for Remaking Worlds in the Wake of Violence," *International Studies Review* 24.1 (2022): 3.

[5] See Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Margaret Lock, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1, 3.

[6] Krystalli and Schulz, "Taking Love and Care Seriously," 1.

and it draws on "how people survive and make sense of violence as well as imagine and enact lives in its wake."[7] They report that "in the midst and wake of violence, people [victims] also fall in love, forge social and intimate relationships, and extend different forms of care to one another."[8] This practical humanism is built on the ethics of care and love, especially on the caring aspect; its goal is entirely human centered: "The ethics of care sees people as relational, connected, interdependent, and inherently vulnerable, recognizing the moral value and importance of relations and the inescapable reality that care is universally required for all human beings to survive."[9]

The case that their research presents is highly laudable, as it underscores the human need for care and love in any crisis, and it also unpacks the internal creativity of the victims as they devise means of survival in the aftermath of war and conflict through supportive care and love. The question, however, is the foundation upon which this can stand sustainably, not only materially but also spiritually. All social actions for the good of human beings should be consistent with the origins and destiny of humanity.[10] That is, the mercies that we extend toward our fellow humans in their critical conditions should flow from the mercies that we receive from the source of our origin, namely God. Despite human failure, God has consistently stated that he will save humanity for his own sake (e.g., Ezek 20:44). He has therefore formulated and is executing a redemptive plan, and his agenda for reconciliation provides the mandate and framework for humanitarian engagement. The church needs to remember that as it becomes involved in humanitarian needs, its ultimate goal is unique. Karen Ellis captures this sense in the most profound way:

> Organizations can provide comfort, they can provide aid, they can provide relief, they can provide hospitality. But only the body of Christ can provide the hope that's found in Christ. … And so, [you need] to be able to have enough of your mind left in a difficult situation to continue to point people to Christ, the Provider, the Sustainer, the One who gives strength and courage, and to look for those opportunities and to watch God's hand in the middle of it, because only his hand and his plan and his sovereignty make sense out of such a senseless thing like war.[11]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 2.

[9] Ibid., 8.

[10] Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 122.

[11] Karen Ellis, "How Can I Best Care for the Church in Crisis?," Reformed Theological Seminary, March 22, 2022, https://rts.edu/resources/how-can-i-care-for-the-church-in-crisis/.

The International Red Cross has provided insight into the massive humanitarian crisis around the world as a result of wars and conflicts: "Malnutrition, illness, wounds, torture, harassment of specific groups within the population, disappearances, extra-judicial executions and the forcible displacement of people are all found in many armed conflicts."[12] Therefore, it issues a clarion call for global intervention to assuage the pains of wars and to "prevent the deterioration of health care, agricultural or other local systems."[13] It has proposed short-term, medium-term, and long-term measures, with the ultimate goal being "to save lives, relieve suffering, improve health, maintain health-care systems, place the victims' economy back on a sound footing and also restore people's dignity."[14] While this is laudable, the emphasis is on caring for the material, whereas the complete person needs material and spiritual help navigating this kind of situation to make sense of life. This is where Christian faith-action takes its place and gives care a special meaning. The brokenness of humanity encompasses the material and the spiritual. The gospel is God's comprehensive response to the totality of the human personality, which speaks to the inner recesses of the person beyond what the material response can accomplish.

That said, one important lesson to draw from the Red Cross is that "a framework within which we can study the extent to which humanitarian aid influences the dynamic of armed conflict" needs to be established.[15] This element is critical because the presence of aid can either escalate or decrease violence. Pierre Perrin has enumerated the many ways in which humanitarian aid can be abused.[16] For instance, while aid is intended for the victims of violence, there is the danger that the "beneficiaries of the aid" or those delivering the materials can "become the target of armed groups trying to get their hands on relief supplies."[17]

Another important insight is to consider the "principle of impartiality and neutrality," according to which the intervening party is required not to take "part in the hostilities, nor in the disputes underlying them."[18] The nature of the complexity that conflicts impose upon any attempt to reach victims requires strategic planning. On this, too, Perrin makes a good point: "To lessen the negative effects of humanitarian aid, each situation needs to

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[12] Pierre Perrin, "The Impact of Humanitarian Aid on Conflict Development," *International Review of the Red Cross* 323 (1998): 1.
[13] Ibid., 3.
[14] Ibid., 5.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 6.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 10, 12.

be analyzed in detail, with due account taken of the socio-economic and cultural context, to provide a response specifically tailored to the needs while minimizing the undesirable effects of the aid."[19] These views are evidence of divine grace in unbelievers' systems of thought and action, which Christians can adapt and improve. While applauding the immense resourcefulness of unbelievers' systems, Cornelius Van Til observes that their knowledge and actions are "borrowed capital,"[20] which must be retrieved and set in a proper theocentric and christocentric context. Instead of Reformed churches waxing stronger in the calling for global evangelism through humanitarian aid, some have closed up. For instance, the Christian Reformed Church announced the closure of its agency International Aid on July 8, 2009.[21] Our evangelical calling abides as long as the church lives, and the church moving and having its being in God should demonstrate the living power of God in it.

II. *War as a Problem and an Opportunity: God's Grace in a War Situation*

The compelling question for Christians as we contemplate ministry in war contexts is how we can present the care, love, and power of God to victims.[22] The most basic stance for believers is to consciously align with God's mission in the world, especially where there is so much affliction. The goal of God's mission to the world in its brokenness is the restoration of humanity amid all its dimensions of suffering.[23] The biblical good news that draws on the power of the cross should make a comprehensive impact on the whole person, which covers the physical, mental, spiritual, and social facets.[24] If our biblical Reformed foundation in Calvinism has comprehensively affected the entirety of life, then we should heighten our realization that we are called to be responsible in respect to those four facets in our ailing twenty-first century. The social facet is as important as the other three

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[19] Ibid., 12.

[20] John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 42.

[21] Chris Meehan, "International Aid Closes," Christian Reformed Church, July 8, 2009, https://www.crcna.org/news-and-events/news/international-aid-closes.

[22] See a similar question in Jean Lasserre, *War and the Gospel* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1962), 10.

[23] For an elaborate reading on this, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 289–90.

[24] Ibid., 315, 318. Wright also appeals to Jean-Paul Helch, "Revisiting the Whole Gospel: Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century," *Missiology* 32 (2004): 157.

because it affects them: by being "socially responsible, the Church can provide answers to the sufferings of the world in at least two ways: by offering direct assistance to the needy and by participating in changing and building a better, more just, or at least less unjust, society."[25] The gospel calls us to partner with Christ in re-creating life that sin, with its consequences, has de-created. Since war has become an almost unavoidable evil in human existence, the question now remains: How can believers turn war or conflict into an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ in the most effective way to those who are affected?

The text of Jeremiah 39:10–12 (cf. 2 Kgs 25:22) provides an interesting insight and a theological springboard for our agenda.

> Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.
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> Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying, "Take him, look after him well, and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you."[26]

Though the destruction of Judah came as a result of divine judgment, God equally gave room for his mercy and grace by providentially controlling the way that Nebuchadnezzar's commander demonstrated compassion for the downtrodden, whose situation had been compounded by the war. God's grace came alongside his judgment, bringing healing and restoration to those who were broken by injustice at the hands of the most powerful.

While the Babylonian army abandoned the poor, probably because they were a liability, God's providence created a new lease of life for the remnant victims of this violence.[27] Nothing in Nebuzaradan's nature made him show this kindness, which may have undone injustices committed by the leaders of Judah against these victims, and direct the same kindness to Jeremiah; the prompting had to have come from God's divine providence.[28] So, if God had raised up the Babylonians for this project (Jer 12:12; 20–22; 24–32;

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[25] Antal Balog, *Toward an Evangelical Missiology of Humanitarian Aid Ministry*, ed. Anne Harper, trans. Julijana Tesija (Osijek, Croatia: Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2007), 59.

[26] Reputable scholarship has confirmed the historicity of this event; see Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 283.

[27] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1006–1007 (on Jer 39:1–18); Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary: Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 644 (on Jer 39:10); and John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition on the Entire Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 627–28 (on Jer 39:10–12).

[28] Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 2:611–12 (on Jer 39:9–10).

34–45; 52; Hab 1:6), then he certainly had a definite plan that included control of the details of the fate of everyone, including the remnant and the prophet Jeremiah. In this case, Nebuzaradan represented two trajectories: one that brought suffering to the people and another that showed humanitarian compassion to those who faced double jeopardy. We can see the same situation in modern warfare; it is uncommon for aggressors to show mercy to their victims since they cannot expect to find friends among their enemies. And, while the Geneva Convention stipulates that military offensives should spare civilian targets, this has most times been neglected, which usually results in civilian casualties.[29]

John Calvin explains how this story demonstrates that in our worst situations, such as that of the poor that the captors left behind, God cares for our salvation.[30] While Nebuchadnezzar's motivation for giving the land of the wealthy to the poor may have had nothing to do with his original intentions to take over the land, God in his providence used this invasion to change the situation of the poor. Apart from the war, this swap of economic status and freedom would probably not have occurred. In this case, there was a "remaking" of a new world for these people, who were previously referred to as the poor, but at this point, God reversed the situation. Though war is bad in itself, it also provides an opportunity for service and, more pointedly, an opportunity for the love of Christ to be shown to those who are victims. This development has set an evangelistic template for our commitment to the Reformed trajectory of Christianity being a comprehensive life system that responds to all the deepest structures of the human personality.[31] If Nebuchadnezzar became God's extraordinary instrument of hope and restoration to these people, we are to be much more instrumental, having been re-created in Christ for good works and given the

[29] For instance, Russia has been accused of causing civilian casualties in Ukraine; see Daniel Victor and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Russia Repeatedly Strikes Ukraine's Civilians: There's Always an Excuse," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/article/russian-civilian-attacks-ukraine.html; see also, Keith Collins, Danielle Ivory, Jon Huang, Cierra S. Queen, Lauryn Higgins, Jess Ruderman, Kristine White, and Bonnie G. Wong, "Russia's Attacks on Civilian Targets Have Obliterated Everyday Life in Ukraine," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/03/23/world/europe/ukraine-civilian-attacks.html. This sad reality of targeting civilians was just repeated at the start of the Israeli-Hamas war, where Hamas targeted and killed over 260 civilians during a festival on October 7, 2023.

[30] John Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 4:469.

[31] See Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), xi–xii.; Abraham Kuyper, *Christianity: A Total World and Life System* (Marlborough, NH: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 1996), 46, and *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Stone Lectures Delivered at Princeton University* (1899; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1899), 79.

ministry of reconciling the broken world to God (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:18–19). The message of reconciliation that God has given us is not only verbal but also tangible.

III. *The Reformed Christocentric Principle of Ministry in the Context of War*

We begin with a question here: What would Jesus's social response to today's wars and violence be? Surely, his life and teachings are opposed to violence and war,[32] but where war has happened, in the aftermath of "pain and need," would he not see it as an opportunity to share the gospel?[33] Jesus's ministry recognized the physical, social, and spiritual dimensions and addressed them by healing the sick and feeding the hungry (Matt 8:1–16; 14:13–21), restoring the outcast (Luke 17:12–19), and preaching repentance and acceptance of the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt 4:17, 23; 9:35; Mark 1:14; Luke 8:1). His forgiveness of his attackers and the confession or repentance of the centurion also attest to this gospel package (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). Therefore, Christ is the prime example for our ministry.

Calvin teaches that we can only be productive in our ministry to others when we cultivate the right attitude, which is self-denial.[34] He would consider our ministry in this case to be works that show love to the victims of war or conflict. This attitude requires that we look away from our comfort to the comfort of others and serve them graciously—not because of any meritorious deeds on their part but because they are image bearers of God to whom we owe "honor and love."[35] And it is the true love of God that can provoke one's love for the neighbor: "The word neighbor extends indiscriminately to every man, because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship."[36] Calvin's theology of the neighbor became a springboard for the development of a solid theory of Reformed

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[32] H. Leo Boles, *The New Testament Teaching on War* (1923; repr., Abilene, TX: Stone-Campbell Books, 2017), 24, https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/444.

[33] Vladimir Kuzmin, "Building the Church in a War Zone," Christian Vision (CV), July 9, 2019, https://www.cvglobal.co/building-the-church-in-a-war-zone/.

[34] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:695 (3.7.5); Denis R. Janz, ed., *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 256.

[35] Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 258; see also, Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 127.

[36] John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 3:45–46.

philanthropy, providing a framework for action in special circumstances.[37] This task is not devoid of complex issues in its implementation, as David Hall and Matthew Burton attest: "Calvin's challenge was to arrive at practical protocols that would use the mechanisms already provided by God to maximize the efforts of these ministers of mercy."[38] Since global violence is on the increase, the global Reformed faith can critically review its existing interventions and set up ministries to deal with global crises in which churches can raise funds through their deacons and deposit them to be stored and used for evangelistic interventions in the affected places.

Christian philanthropy has three definite purposes and goals: to proclaim the gospel of the love and care of Christ, to strengthen believers in their critical moments, and to persuade unbelievers to turn to God through Christ, who cares for them. While unbelievers also carry the sparks of God's love in them by which they engage in humanitarian services, believers are called not merely to replicate the same but to do even better, since they have been transformed by the Spirit of Christ so they can excel (1 Pet 2:9; Matt 5:14–16; Dan 6; Titus 2:7–8). We are called to excellence as we exemplify the character of our Lord, who is the fountain of all excellence: "Working with excellence demonstrates gratitude to our Maker for how he made us and for the opportunities he presents to us."[39]

An anonymous reviewer who attended a conference in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2003, explains the effectiveness of building resilience by enlightening people to adopt the biblical worldview and shape their behavior thus:

> In their involvement in development aid programs in various countries around the world for decades, the *Disciple Nations Alliance* became increasingly convinced that the most sustainable community development has taken place where a biblical worldview and Christian stewardship became part of people's outlook on life. His big emphasis was: Change will not come by dumping more money into poor areas, but transforming thought patterns has the most powerful effect on life change.[40]

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[37] David W. Hall and Matthew D. Burton, *Calvin and Commerce: The Transforming Power of Calvinism in Market Economies* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 149.

[38] Ibid., 123.

[39] Jeremy W. Johnston, "In Pursuit of Excellence: 'Why We Need to Be Excellent': Part 1," H&E Publishing, February 19, 2020, https://hesedandemet.com/in-pursuit-of-excellence-why-we-need-to-be-excellent-part-1/.

[40] Anonymous, "Review comments on 'Christian Community and Constructive Ministry in Violent Context,'" 2023 (unpublished).

Christian ministry supports the cogency of the gospel when it not only supports ailing communities but also, beyond that, helps in the transformation of their worldview and character so that they can become more productive even in the midst of adversity.

The motivation for Christian charity is a recognition of the grace and mercies we have freely received from God to help those in need.[41] We are to be like an active conduit through which the mercies of God flow to the world. The necessity and fact of charity are occasioned by hostile conditions that God calls us to take responsibility for and change. Alvin Schmidt rightly observes, "In short, every time charity and compassion are seen in operation, the credit goes to Jesus Christ. It was he who inspired his early followers to give and go to help the unfortunate, regardless of their race, religion, class, or nationality."[42]

In Calvin's day, the surge of refugees in Geneva prompted the church there to be increasingly responsive, and this drew the sympathy of churches in other European countries to collaboratively meet the refugees' needs.[43] This action became essential, as the minority churches in the predominantly Catholic countries "could not have survived without this financial infrastructure."[44] This set a pattern for believers in safe places to form a global network and proactively plan to intervene in the situations of believers whose lives are under the threat of violence.

How, then, can we minister effectively in our time of global terrorism and wars in places like Nigeria and Ukraine? Timothy Beougher argues that the challenge of evangelism today is in terms of not only the dangers that we might encounter in the contexts of war and violence but also such attitudes as our selfishness that hinder our commitment to the cause of the gospel.[45] This selfishness arises from our fear of losing our comfort—or perhaps from the love of castigating certain groups that cause such situations.

Harvie Conn has developed an excellent book on "holistic evangelism," a combination of the gospel and social Christian action: *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*.[46] The book is an attempt to balance the biblical

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[41] Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, 126.

[42] Ibid., 148.

[43] Jeannine E. Olson, "Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166–67.

[44] Ibid., 167.

[45] Timothy K. Beougher, "Challenges and Encouragements for Evangelism Today," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23.3 (2019): 27.

[46] Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

view of the gospel through evangelism over against both evangelicals and liberals, who go to the extreme ways of either the gospel in words only or the gospel in deeds only, respectively. The divide between the cultural and the evangelistic mandates has affected the force and impact that the Christian gospel could achieve in its mission to the world. In his review of the book, Greg Gilbert raises some fundamental questions: "The difficulty comes when we try to explain exactly how works of compassion relate to the task of evangelism. Are those works part of evangelism itself? Signs of it? Means to it? Does 'evangelism' mean—at its heart—'telling' only, or is it ultimately some combination of 'telling and doing?'"[47]

Conflicts and war situations provide opportunities for emotional healing that will give birth to forgiveness between victims of warring nations such as Russia and Ukraine. Such opportunities were opened in such African countries as South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo when the Reformed churches not only worked on building resilience in the victims but moved the warring ethnic groups to forgive one another, and more people were converted to Christ.[48] Similarly, the Christian Reformed Church has done an excellent job in Sierra Leone with the indigenous people there sharing their testimony: "We've learned not to look at our differences anymore, but what do we have in common and work for a common goal together."[49]

Calvin disapproves of any excuse for withholding our ministry to those in need, including those who might offend us:

> Now if he has not only deserved no good at your hand, but has also provoked you by unjust acts and curses, not even this is just reason why you should cease to embrace him in love and to perform the duties of love on his behalf [Matt 6:14; 18:35; Luke 17:31].[50]

We can deal with the human sentiments of reacting to offense only if we embrace humility and resist the temptation to harbor malice. Again, this is possible only where the operation of the Holy Spirit is effective in believers' lives.

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[47] Greg Gilbert, "Book Review: *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* by Harvie Conn," 9Marks, September 2, 2002, https://www.9marks.org/review/evangelism/.

[48] Anonymous, "Review comments on 'Christian Community and Constructive Ministry in Violent Context.'"

[49] Kristen deRoo Vanderberg, "One Church, One Country: CRC Ministry in Sierra Leone," reliefweb, January 30, 2012, https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/one-church-one-country-crc-ministry-sierra-leone.

[50] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:696 (3.7.6).

The spirit of Calvinism saw the refugee crisis in the sixteenth century not merely as a problem but also as an opportunity for compassionate ministry to the victims and to the poor. As Robert Kingdom notes, "The almsgiver … [sees] the face of Christ in the beggar," who bears the image of God.[51] While Rubén Rodriguez develops Calvin's unique teaching and action in human compassion toward the refugees in Geneva as a means of advocating that immigrants fleeing persecution in their countries be accepted in America,[52] this has similar implications in other contemporary war and conflict situations that have put thousands of victims into various forms of affliction. Calvin generated an enduring, comprehensive worldview that continues to impact our contemporary times, including his compassionate affection for the poor and needy.[53] For Calvin, diakonia has a wider application than merely distributing alms and taking care of the poor or serving them.[54] In contrast to non-Christian humanitarian philanthropy, this diaconate stands on religious and ideological principles that center on the kingdom-rule of God.[55] Calvin's principle in all matters of faith and conduct is for every believer to "serve as the servants of God and not as the servants of men."[56] He preeminently places the glory of God or "honour of God" first, while the "utility of this Council"[57] and its wider application to believers universally follow second. This emphasis is because we must recognize that we are not our own but belong to God, which should hold us tight to this calling.[58] The magnitude of the importance of serving the afflicted in Calvin's mind was expressed in a letter of appreciation to

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[51] Robert McCune Kingdon, "Calvinism and Social Welfare," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17.2 (1982): 213; see also, Rubén Rosario Rodriguez, "Calvin's Legacy of Compassion: A Reformed Theological Perspective on Immigration," in *Immigrant Neighbors among Us: Immigration across Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 50.

[52] Ibid.

[53] David W. Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 16; David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett, *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 294.

[54] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:1061 (4.3.9); see also Elsie A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Droz, 1984).

[55] David W. Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights and Civil Liberties* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 106; Hall and Burton, *Calvin and Commerce*, 123–24.

[56] John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3, *Tracts, Part 3*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 28. Note that Calvin seems to be drawing some insights from the Acts of the Council of Trent as his grounds for reforming the church, a tactic his attackers misunderstood.

[57] Ibid. Calvin's reference to "the glory of God and the good of the church" as the focus of ministry is characteristic of him (ibid., 19). See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:52–53 (1.5.1–2).

[58] Ibid., 1:690 (3.7.1).

Heinrich Bullinger, in which he speaks of such duties as a "remarkable office of humanity" that was "discharged towards exiled and afflicted brethren."[59] This task of ministering the love and care of Christ to victims of war is a "bright and singular example of piety."[60]

IV. *Ministry-Strategic Planning in Contexts of War*

Terrorists of various groups carry out violence in Nigeria: religious terrorists such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA) and ethnic terrorists such as the armed Fulani bandits.[61] When Boko Haram started its violent actions in northeastern Nigeria, Christians were their immediate targets, and they made their message very clear: anything that originates in the West, such as education and the Christian religion, is sinful—but as these terrorists grew in strength, many Muslims also suffered destruction. By attacking even some Muslim communities, the terrorists were most probably expressing their anger against the Muslim elite responsible for their impoverished conditions. One possible important way of addressing that problem would be to improve their livelihoods and grant them access to political participation.[62]

While the religious terrorist groups in Nigeria pursue a religious agenda, the agenda of the violent Fulani armed bandits seems to be ethnic and economic: they kill farmers, rustle their cattle, or kidnap for ransom. These groups have created a terrifying situation for millions of people who either are in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) or have fled to other safe places and live under difficult conditions.[63]

Similarly, according to reports for the period from February 2022 through September 2023, the Russia–Ukraine war accounted for nearly 500,000 people killed or injured,[64] though the figures are sometimes politicized. The

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[59] John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters, Part 3, 1554–1558*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. Marcus Robert Gilchrist (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 131.

[60] Ibid.

[61] John Paden, *Religion and Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2015), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR359-Religion-and-Conflict-in-Nigeria.pdf.

[62] Andrew Walker, *What Is Boko Haram?* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/05/what-boko-haram.

[63] Doris Dokua Sasu has put the figure at 2.7 million affected people; see Doris Dokua Sasu, "Number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in Nigeria from 2013 to 2020," Statista, February 1, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1237374/number-of-internally-displaced-persons-in-nigeria/.

[64] Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt, and Julian E. Barnes, "Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say," *The New York Times*,

conditions in which the survivors find themselves are inhumane, with crises of homelessness, health hazards, and a lack of food. The Middle East has also been in turmoil over the years, with similar consequences.

What, then, should we do? Global terrorism, threats of wars by the superpowers, and armed banditry are increasing, with terrifying consequences. However, believers who are given the power to be God's children (John 1:12) and a spirit that is not prone to fear and timidity (2 Tim 1:7) should not "acquiesce in the general mood of helplessness."[65] As the forces of darkness push for a more uncomfortable life for humanity and the entire creation, our challenge is to rise up to the challenge, knowing that God's providential presence is with us. Along this line, John Stott makes a strong call to action:

> We are called to engage with our contemporary culture rather than be indifferent to it, and to be an example of hope in a culture of despair where people have become cynical about any possibility of change for the better. It is important for the voice of the Christian church to be heard not only locally but nationally and internationally, and this means making our points clearly in the media and by lobbying the government when change is necessary.[66]

The call to be an "example of hope in a culture of despair" is a call to go against a force that has engulfed the world and brought about its miserable predicament. It is a call for a unique agenda for ameliorating the human situation in a way that brings hope to those affected. This can be possible by planning a complete package for the gospel in Nigeria and in Ukraine, and our gospel in deeds should target Christians, Muslims, and nonreligious victims. And if our position is not that of withdrawal and isolation from sinners, as others think,[67] but to relate with them to witness Christ to

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August 8, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/politics/ukraine-russia-war-casualties.html; Erika Kinetz, "How Many Russians Have Died in Ukraine? Data Shows What Moscow Hides," The Associated Press, July 10, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-military-deaths-facd75c2311ed7be660342698cf6a409; Rami Ayyub and David Ljunggren, "Troop Deaths, Injuries in Ukraine War Nearing 500,000 – NYT citing US officials," Reuters, August 8, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/troop-deaths-injures-ukraine-war-nearing-500000-nyt-citing-us-officials-2023-08-18/; Andrew Roth, "Battlefield Deaths in Ukraine Have Risen Sharply This Year, Say US Officials," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/18/ukraine-russia-war-battlefield-deaths-rise. The Russian version accounts for 43,000 casualties but only on the side of Ukraine without mentioning the effect on the Russian side; see "Moscow Issues Update on Estimated Ukrainian Casualties during Counteroffensive," RT, August 4, 2023, https://www.rt.com/russia/580823-ukraine-counter-offensive-casualties/.

[65] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 129.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Beougher, "Challenges and Encouragements," 27.

them, then the war situation presents an opportunity for ministry through charity and other ways of bringing hope and renewal to people's lives.

Drawing from these insights, the church needs to consciously draw up special evangelism and ministry programs to support those who have been called and given the courage to evangelize in such risky environments. Such programs are special because they deal with extraordinary and complex situations that require strategic approaches that can protect those engaged in evangelism.

In this regard, such a strategic approach and special program may be summarized as follows.

First, the Reformed family should be able to identify with the victims in their cultural contexts of suffering while holding firmly to the truth without compromising Christian ethical standards, instead presenting the Christ who has suffered for our sins that we might have the hope of a better earthly life and a future eternal life.[68] Christ's identity with those who suffer is the message that needs to be given to people in this context (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17; 1 Pet 3:18).

Second, evangelistic materials should be constructed to articulately address contemporary issues facing believers in places where there is violence, explaining God's will and sovereign control in circumstances like this.

Third, given that the surge in global violence will continue for the foreseeable future, the Reformed church should consciously prepare itself by setting up a global networking body that can coordinate prayers and support to respond to the challenges of war and violence.

Fourth, the Reformed church and seminaries should also set up special training programs for those who would minister in war situations. This training should emphasize emotional resilience, which they can inculcate into victims through Bible study programs for solid faith and survival. Resource persons can be identified in the various contexts of war and trained for this purpose.

Fifth, a special team can be set up to perform a needs assessment in the affected places for intervention within short-term, medium-term, and long-term frameworks in a way that enables outcomes to be easily measured. This may require the development of community health projects that can save lives in the aftermath of wars.

Sixth, the global Reformed Churches in stronger economies need to replicate the Hungarian Reformed Church by setting up special ministries for refugees that have a global scope.

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[68] Ibid., 29.

Paul's idea of the inspiration and authority of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16) gives us a foundation upon which we can be "complete" and "thoroughly equipped for every good work" in our theological and practical vocations (2 Tim 2:21; 3:17). This thorough preparation for the gospel is to be taken into consideration; believers should envisage convenient and inconvenient times as they engage the hostile world (2 Tim 4:2). As the word of God is timeless, and as it instructs us about our present precarious global situation, it is expedient that theological seminaries should consider some inter- or multidisciplinary theological, missiological, and psychological curricula that will produce strong and supple graduates who can boldly face the harsh, unpredictable challenges of our world.

Conclusion

While war and violence are some of the worst phenomena affecting human well-being, they also present an opportunity for the gospel. As non-Christian philanthropists have been making great efforts to reach out to victims with their own gospel of secularism, believers should note that these situations present special opportunities that God has opened to us to bring him closer to the victims and to express his care and love for them. Christ is the principle of life and the hope of life in our ashes, and he is the center of our humanitarian actions.

Situations like the terrorist events in Nigeria and the Russia–Ukraine war pose big challenges, so the Reformed church needs a creative approach to fulfill its divine mandate to minister to the victims in keeping with Calvin's tradition first established in the sixteenth century. The church should be willing to improve its mission and scale up its resources. The church has been redeemed to partner with God in his mission to bring healing and hope. We are called to active obedience, and we are not our own but God's, so we cannot choose what we will obey and what we will not obey. Having been called to be the light and salt of the world (cf. Matt 5:13–16), our willingness to obey in deeds demonstrates our true piety, as all our being is to radiate his glory. On this note, the Reformed church can constructively and creatively plan strategic approaches and special training programs to equip believers for the good work of the Lord for which we have been created in Christ (Eph 2:10).

The Geneva Bible: How Reformed Refugees Shaped Renaissance Reading of Scripture

W. GORDON CAMPBELL

Abstract

"Geneva Bible" is an umbrella-term for two New Testaments and two Bibles: an inaugural New Testament (1557), followed by a study Bible (1560), provided vernacular Scripture in English for believers under duress in Britain; then each was later refined, in 1576 and 1599 respectively.[1] The first translators and publishers were English-speaking Reformed refugees from persecution under Mary Tudor, who brought their expertise and industry to a flowering of international biblical scholarship in 1550s Geneva, alongside fellow refugees from other repressive European contexts. This article explores how they and their successors progressively resourced readers to engage with Scripture via sophisticated peritextual aids.

Keywords

Genesis 1, Geneva, Junius, Matthew 1, peritextual material, readers and reading, refuge(e), Revelation, Tomson, Whittingham

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[1] Geneva Bibles in the Gamble Library special collection, in Union Theological College, Belfast (where I work), gave special impetus to this research.

Introduction

No commission or warrant from either the English Church or the state occasioned the Geneva Bible in English—unlike the 1568 Bishops' Bible or 1611 King James Bible (or Authorized Version)—even though the first underwriter, John Bodley, would soon receive Queen Elizabeth I's exclusive permission to print it.[2] Under her Stuart successor, the King James Bible would explicitly rework the Bishops' Bible yet cite the universally used Geneva Bible in its long, introductory translators' letter, implicitly revise it,[3] and eventually supplant it. This eclipse has left the Geneva Bible largely forgotten today, along with the huge success it enjoyed, or impact it made, from the late 1570s onward until well into the seventeenth century.

Between its launch in 1560 and that of the King James Bible in 1611, more than one hundred and twenty editions of the Geneva New Testament or Bible appeared, with a further sixty even after the King James Version emerged. (Some King James editions had Geneva notes added.) Across these decades, most ministers—whether Puritan or Anglican—would routinely preach from the Geneva, rather than from either the Bishops' or King James: the Geneva Bible was the bestselling and by far the most affordable, freely available, and widely used Bible among ordinary English-speaking people, with "something like half a million copies in circulation."[4] It may thus rightly be dubbed "the household book for all England and Scotland"[5] or simply "the Bible of virtually everyone."[6] The Geneva Bible's erstwhile popularity prompts this article's effort to illuminate the reading experience that it so successfully pioneered.

Contextually, the Geneva Bible is an outflow, downstream, from the dual wellspring of a previous generation (in the 1520s–1530s): Martin Luther's

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[2] Ira Jay Martin III notes the condition for the patent granted to Bodley: that "the Puritan features in the disturbing marginal notes" be toned down; see Ira Jay Martin III, "The Geneva Bible," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 1 (1961): 48; see further note 32 below.

[3] For the Geneva Bible as a gold standard, in the eyes of the King James translators, see Jeffrey A. Miller, "Better, as in the Geneva: The Role of the Geneva Bible in Drafting the King James Version," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47.3 (2017): 517–43.

[4] Thus Thomas Fulton, *The Book of Books: Biblical Interpretation, Literary Culture, and the Political Imagination from Erasmus to Milton* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 21.

[5] Martin, "Geneva Bible," 46, for whom the Geneva Bible is "easily the most accurate and scholarly English translation up to the time of the King James Version," making it prime "reading matter in the average households of the land" (47), "a matchless translation" (48), and a "masterpiece of translation and publication" (49).

[6] Fulton, *Book of Books*, 111.

German Bible and William Tyndale's English New Testament and incomplete Bible. In a companion piece, I investigate how, from the project's inception in 1557 through to the 1590s, the Geneva New Testament or Bible emanated from and exploited those twin sources, with particular consideration of the special exegetical attention paid by Luther and second-generation Reformed theologians to John's Revelation.[7] My focus in the present contribution is, however, the early modern reading experience that the Geneva Bible launched and developed through its various iterations and the readers that its successive versions sought both to mold and to serve: essentially biblically literate believers who read the Bible nonprofessionally around the kitchen table and applied Scripture to their life and context. The Geneva Bible inaugurated no less than a transformation of "the Bible-reading habits of the English and the Scottish … [as] the means by which nonspecialist reading of the Bible became commonplace;"[8] accordingly, my particular aim here is to offer a comprehensive picture of the range of exegetical aids provided by successive Geneva Bibles and thereby to evaluate the translators' and publishers' success in creating and then sustaining this new phenomenon.

The article title specifies all of the main *connected aspects* for exploration:

1. The title *Geneva Bible* (preceded by a New Testament) connotes a foreign geographical context—1550s Geneva—and bespeaks a dearth of Bibles in England and repression there that prevented a local remedy. While Henry VIII's previous restraints on Bible publication in English were lifted by Edward VI, during whose short reign (1547–1553), no fewer than thirty-five editions of the New Testament and thirteen of the whole Bible in English were published,[9] this positive upturn was quickly reversed by his successor Mary Tudor (1553–1558), who hunted down and burned thousands of copies of Scripture in English, along with several hundred Protestants.

2. Choosing flight over martyrdom to escape her clutches (mostly by early 1554), hundreds more of Mary's potential victims made initially for Frankfurt before many of them subsequently took second refuge in Calvin's Geneva. It is these fugitives who are the *Reformed refugees* of my title. In

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[7] W. Gordon Campbell, "The Geneva Bible's Expansion of Luther's Innovative Approach to Reading and Interpreting the Book of Revelation in the Vernacular," in *Martin Luther's Bible: Perspectives on a Rich Legacy*, ed. W. Gordon Campbell (Cambridge: James Clarke, forthcoming).

[8] Michael Jensen, "'Simply' Reading the Geneva Bible: The Geneva Bible and Its Readers," *Literature and Theology* 9 (1995): 31. Jensen thoroughly characterizes the reading and reader being facilitated, sampling the explanatory approach taken in select marginal notes and relevant texts.

[9] William F. Moulton, *The History of the English Bible* (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878; repr., Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2019), 150.

1550s Geneva, a Reformed Church was well established, yet this relatively stable ecclesial phenomenon masks a core defining element of note: *exile*. Like William Farel and Theodore Beza, John Calvin himself had fled France, and the Geneva he knew was, in reality, "a city packed with exiles."[10] Whatever the language of expression of its Reformed churches, all were led and largely shaped by migrants whose refugee status helped craft their mindset and define their theological stance. The English-language exiles established and developed their distinctive community from November 1555 onwards, sharing the building in which they met for worship with fellow refugees from Italy.[11]

3. By *Reformed*, I also mean to imply the scholarly credentials of those involved in the English Bible project. Geneva at the time was not merely conducive spiritually or ecclesially but a veritable hub of scholarship, bustling with multilingual endeavors in Bible production. From the safety it provided, refugees from various fraught European contexts (not least France) undertook Bible translation and publication efforts that furthered reformation and spread the gospel in homelands characterized by persecution and turmoil. Thus, asylum in Geneva proved ideal and providential for responding to a famine of God's word back in Britain. The English Bible was undeniably "the exile community's most enduring contribution,"[12] amid a broader literary output, with first a New Testament (1557) and quickly thereafter (1560) an entire Bible. By then, migrants no longer, almost all the refugees had returned home with their reformist ideas and intentions; but even so, Geneva would remain the point of supply through further printings in 1562 and 1570 until, after 1575, the Geneva New Testament or Bible could at last be lawfully printed in England.

4. Reference in the title to *renaissance* reading draws attention to the Geneva Bible's context of production and influence: the English Renaissance and the early growth and consolidation of Protestantism in the British Isles, when politics, religion, and culture were thoroughly intertwined. Even as it was reforming lives across different strata of society, the Geneva Bible was also refining letters, profoundly impacting the artistic elite, among them John Donne, William Shakespeare, and Edmund Spenser. Fundamentally, "the point of the Geneva Bibles is to help understanding

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[10] Jane E. A. Dawson, "Scotland and the Example of Geneva," *Theology in Scotland* 16.2 (2009): 55.

[11] David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 278.

[12] O. T. Hargrave, "The Predestinarian Offensive of the Marian Exiles at Geneva," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 42.2 (1973): 113.

and faith," and their production was a profoundly Christian and evangelistic gesture; yet, simultaneously, "the life of Geneva Bibles coincided with the very highest flourishing of literature in English life from 1560 to 1660, that extraordinary uprush of Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline drama, poetry and prose."[13] As the go-to Bible of the period, the Genevan thoroughly influenced letters, politics, and culture, as well as theology, and it remained the most familiar English Bible in Britain and Ireland and the New World colonies until at least the 1640s, long after the King James Bible's appearance.

5. This article's ultimate focus is the Geneva Bible's energetic promotion of an informed *reading of Scripture*. Emanating initially from a place of refuge, its developing reading experience, traceable across its four emblematic sixteenth-century editions, would always address an evolving religio-political context.

I. *The 1557 New Testament*

Today, the 1557 New Testament[14] is still largely or wholly credited to just one exiled English scholar, William Whittingham. Upon opening it, the reader encounters a title-page (see Figure 1) that bears the legend "God by tyme restoreth trvth and maketh her victoriovs";[15] this is framed by an illustration of Lady Truth being restored to life, under God, by Father Time, who is a hybrid of angel, man, and faun or satyr, equipped with hour-glass and reaper's scythe.

Together, word and image may well evoke interrelated themes: the deadly reign of Mary and the action, and providential impact, of making God's word accessible through this New Testament. However, perhaps most significant is the title page's implicit appeal to efforts that readers will themselves expend when profiting from its helps: this New Testament's producers have made their translation the best they can, by reference to the Greek and to the best vernacular versions, and the arguments, readings, and annotations aim to instruct readers in reading well: in short, "critical study is invited."[16]

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[13] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 375. Daniell discusses how Spenser and Shakespeare explore and exploit the book of Revelation (376–88) and explores "The English Bible in America: From the Beginnings to 1640" (389–426), when colonists overwhelmingly used the Geneva Bible.

[14] All reference is to *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: A Fac-simile* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1842), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002012678489.

[15] For quotations, original spelling is retained. Readers should note how, at this period, the letters *v* and *u*, *y* and *i* or *j* and *i* were interchangeable, or how *ē* abbreviates *-en*. For the sake of clarity, occasional words are repeated with modern spelling.

[16] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 276.

Following a translation of Calvin's Dedicatory Epistle comes a first-person singular anonymous General Preface: "To the Reader Mercie and Peace through Christ our Saviour." The implied reader is a "simple" reader—a designation that self-consciously draws on, and repeats, advice by Miles Coverdale twenty years previously on how to get the best out of Bible reading. Exhorting his reader directly, Coverdale promotes a kind of who-what-when-where-why approach to what is being read:

> It shall greatly help ye to understonde Scripture, if thou marke not onely what is spoken or wrytten, but of whom, & vnto whom, with what wordes, at what tyme, where, to what intent, with what circumstaunce, consyderynge what goeth before, and what foloweth after.[17]

Coverdale's ideal reader, a "symple" person, is humble and unpretentious in responding thus to the Scriptures.

On its opening page, the 1557 preface provides further clues to the reader and reading ethos envisaged. Speaking initially of a "true Christian," it later identifies "thre kyndes of mē" in Christ's church: first, "malicious despicers," second, those who "quarell and cauell, or els deride and mocke"; and third, the category that the translator especially has in mind, the elect:

> … the simple lambes, which partely are already in the folde of Christ, and so heare willingly their Shepeherds voice, and partly wandering astray by ignorance, tary the tyme tyll the Shepherde fynde them and bring them vnto his flocke.

Like Coverdale, the Geneva Bible calls for biblically literate, wholesomely fed believers.

But what if ordinary believers lacked access to commentaries or works of theology? The 1557 preface also assures such readers that summaries preceding each book and chapter, and accompanying contextual side notes, will fully meet their needs. Not merely for readers well versed in Scripture, these interpretative aids are equally for "the simple and unlearned": notes are plain and brief, such "that the verie ignorant may easely vnderstande them and beare them in memorie." Such language may sound disparaging today, but it targets listeners' mnemonic powers, has consideration for "the needs of struggling readers" and seeks to "enhance literacy for the sake of salvation."[18] On page three, the translator claims a degree of comprehensiveness:

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[17] Miles Coverdale, *A Prologe: Myles Coverdale unto the Christen Reader* (prob. Antwerp, 1535), 4; https://archive.org/details/1535-coverdale-bible.

[18] Femke Molekamp, "Using a Collection to Discover Reading Practices: The British Library Geneva Bibles and a History of Their Early Modern Readers," *Electronic British Library Journal*, art. 10 (2006).

THE

NEVVE TESTA-

MENT OF OVR LORD IE-

ſus Chriſt.

Conferred diligently with the Greke, and beſt approued tranſlations.

VVith the arguments, aſwel before the chapters, as for euery Boke & Epiſtle, alſo diuerſities of readings, and moſte proffitable annotations of all harde places: wherunto is added a copious Table.

AT GENEVA

Printed By Conrad Badius.

M. D. LVII.

Figure 1. The 1557 Geneva New Testament title page.

> I have endeuored so to proffit all therby, that both the learned and others might be holpen: for to my knollage I have omitted nothing vnexpounded, wherby he that is anything exercised in the Scriptures of God, might iustely complain of hardenes.

A first directly text-centered reading aid precedes Matthew's Gospel: "The Argument of the Gospel, writ by the four Evangelists," presented as a "historie writtē by Matthewe, Marke, Luke and Iohn." Balancing the Gospels' differences and commonalities, it mostly commends the fourfold Gospel—whose "very substance" is Jesus Christ—and in its first paragraph defends the unity in diversity of the Evangelists' works:

> The Spirit of God so gouerned their hearts, that although they were foure in nomber, yet in effect and purpose they so consent, as thogh the whole had bene composed by any one of them. And albeit in stile and maner of writing they be divers, and some tyme one writeth more largely that which the other doth abbridge: neuertheles in matter and argumēt they all tende to one ende: which is, to publishe to the worlde the fauour of God towarde mankynde through Christ Iesus, whome the Father hath geven as a pledge of his mercie and loue.

A similar short argument prefaces every subsequent New Testament book from Acts onwards.

Beyond these preliminaries, only peritextual material[19] adorning Matthew's opening page separates readers from Matthew 1:1 (see Figure 2).

The decorative header, book title, and note (recalling the argument) that "gospel" means "good tidinges" are followed by a short summary of Matthew 1. Similar succinct outlines will introduce every chapter of each New Testament book, furnishing a rudimentary Bible commentary to orient and empower ordinary Bible readers: "What the Geneva translators had done, in effect, was to give every reader the tools to be his own Bible scholar."[20] These chapter summaries expand on more basic provision previously offered, in the 1530s, by the Coverdale Bible for Genesis and by the Matthew Bible for the whole of Scripture.[21] As Stephanus's 1553 French Bible had also provided short summaries (though no introductory arguments), the English Bible may have been consciously imitating it.

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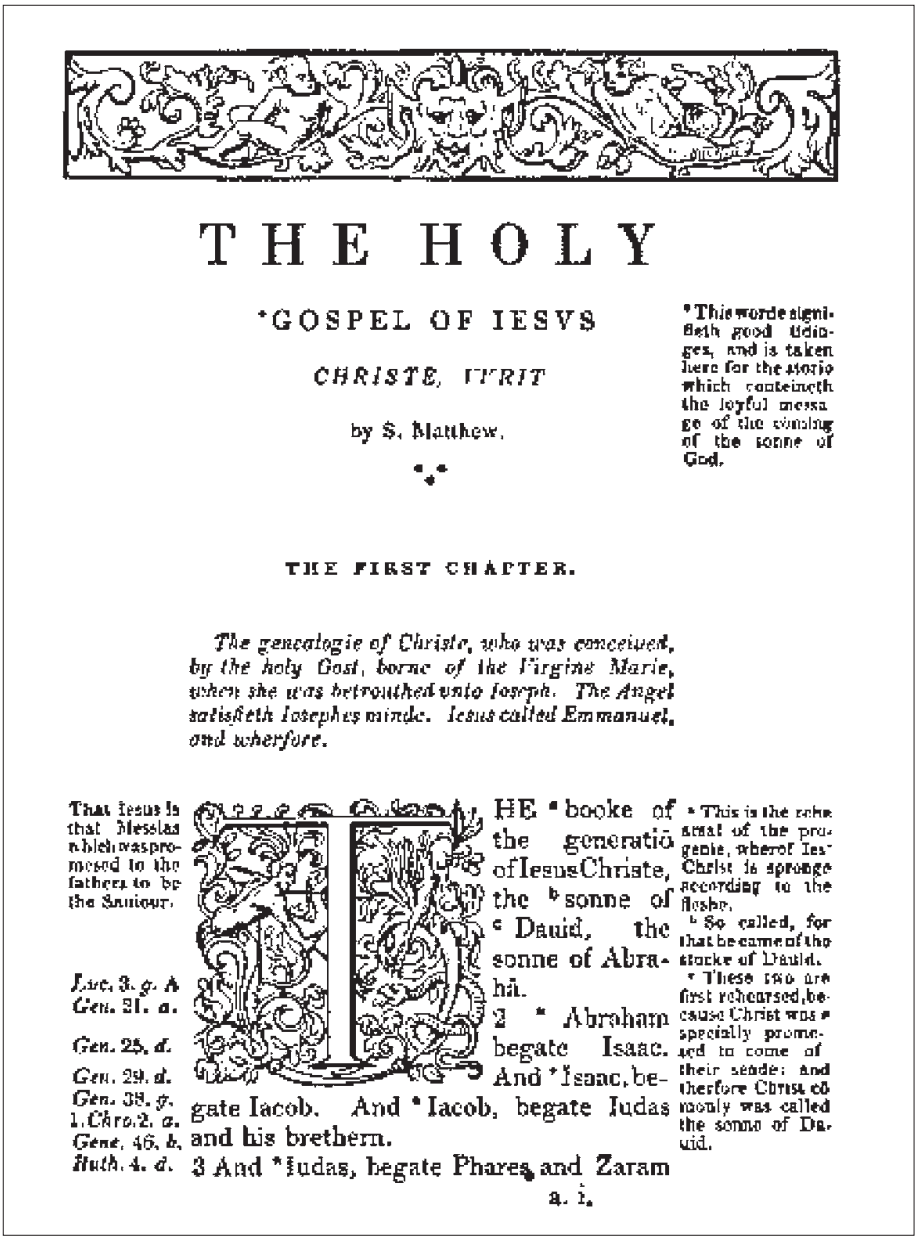
[19] "Peritextual" material covers all elements ancillary to a text (called "paratexts") that help readers engage with its content.

[20] Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), 95, quoted in Jensen, "'Simply' Reading," 35.

[21] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 281. For a comparative study of the chapter summaries in several early-modern Bibles (including the Geneva), see Ezra Horbury, "The Bible Abbreviated: Summaries in Early Modern English Bibles," *Harvard Theological Review* 112.2 (2019): 235–60.



THE HOLY

*GOSPEL OF IESVS

CHRISTE, WRIT

by S. Matthew.

*This worde signifieth good tidinges, and is taken here for the storie which conteineth the ioyful message of the comming of the sonne of God.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The genealogie of Christe, who was conceiued, by the holy Gost, borne of the Virgine Marie, when she was betrouthed vnto Ioseph. The Angel satisfieth Iosephes minde. Iesus called Emmanuel, and wherfore.

That Iesus is that Messias which was promised to the fathers to be the Sauiour.

Luc. 3. g. A
Gen. 21. a.
Gen. 25. d.
Gen. 29. d.
Gen. 38. g.
1. Chro. 2. a.
Gene. 46. b.
Ruth. 4. d.

THE *booke of the generatiõ of Iesus Christe, the [b]sonne of [c]Dauid, the sonne of Abrahã.

2 *Abraham begate Isaac. And *Isaac, begate Iacob. And *Iacob, begate Iudas and his brethern.

3 And *Iudas, begate Phares and Zaram

a. i.

*This is the rehearsal of the progenie, wherof Iesus Christ is sprunge according to the flesh.

[b] So called, for that he came of the stocke of Dauid.

*These two are first rehearsed, because Christ was specially promised to come of their seede: and therfore Christ commonly was called the sonne of Dauid.

Figure 2. The 1557 Geneva New Testament opening page (Matthew 1:1–3).

As Matthew's Gospel opens, the 1557 text sets Scripture in one central column. Throughout, a major innovation—invisible to our long-accustomed eyes—is the use of a roman font (a simple, vertical typeface): if this element slowed down readers habituated to a more elaborate Gothic script, that could only be of benefit.[22] Two further important innovations, not seen before in English Bibles, were verse divisions and verse numbers "according to the best editions in other languages," as acknowledged on page two of the preface: every verse now started on a new line as a distinct sense unit, inaugurating verse divisions that only a few Bishops Bibles or New Testaments subsequently declined to use[23] and taken for granted in English Bibles today. Stephanus had introduced both novelties into his 1551 Greek-Latin New Testament, 1552 Latin-French New Testament,[24] and 1553 French whole Bible.[25] Himself a refugee in Geneva from 1550 onwards,[26] Stephanus justified verse divisions as helping readers pause to follow up a reference or establish parallels and agreements between Bible texts; making each verse a new paragraph also assisted with reading aloud and especially suits units of parallelism in poetic texts. Conversely, the continuity and flow of consecutive narrative texts like Matthew's Gospel, and much of Old or New Testament Scripture generally, could be imperiled by versification.[27]

In Matthew 1:1, the letters a, b, or c point to corresponding explanatory notes in the right-hand margin. In Matthew 1:2, asterisked names in the text—like Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—can be followed up in the index. The left-hand margin mostly contains parallel texts of Scripture, here largely from Genesis, in support of Matthew's genealogy. A supplementary opening left-margin comment also captures the upshot of the chapter: "that

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[22] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 284.

[23] Norton, "English Bibles," 317 and note 35.

[24] Stephanus's Latin text in small characters sits to the left of the French—both versions "translated from the Greek, corresponding to each other verse by verse" (my translation)—with verse numbers set in between, in a narrow dividing column. See Frédéric Delforge, *La Bible en France et dans la francophonie: Histoire, traduction, diffusion* (Paris: Publisud/Société biblique française, 1991), 82–83.

[25] For the numbered verses and chapter outlines in Stephanus's 1553 French Bible, see, for example, the copy held by the University of Geneva, *La Bible, qui est toute la saincte Escripture contenant le Vieil et Nouveau Testament, ou Alliance*, https://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/content/zoom/12578370.

[26] Stephanus—French name, Robert Estienne—had been Francis I's printer for Hebrew and Latin from 1539 and for Greek from 1540, being fluent in all three languages. For his sympathies with the Reformed faith, he had to flee Paris in 1550, setting up his press instead in Geneva, where, on his death in 1559, the business passed to his son, Henri. See, for example, "Robert I Estienne," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 3, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-I-Estienne.

[27] See Norton, "English Bibles," 317.

Iesus is that Messias which was promesed to the fathers to be the Sauiour." Although page one has full margins, this is rather atypical since notes generally intrude little upon the Scripture text.

A few further peritextual tools for readers' use come after the end of Revelation. The first, a forty-six-page alphabetical concordance to the NT, enjoins readers in the introduction to exhibit spiritual readiness, weapons of God's word to hand: its twin columns run from Aaron to "Zele without knollage [knowledge]" and set out "common places and principal points conteyned in the Newe testament." Next, a calculation incorporating relevant time-periods mentioned in Scripture, computes the time-lapse separating Adam from Christ's birth as 3974 years, six months, and ten days, correlating this reckoning with the time of writing:

> Then the whole summe and number of yeres from the begynnyng of the worlde vnto this presente yere [year] of our Lord God 1557, are iust 5531, six monthes, and the said odde ten dayes.

Finally, a printer's note gives the publication date (June 10, 1557), while a short list of "fautes [faults] committed in the printing" is appended, affecting ten New Testament books: the last of these, Revelation, acknowledges four errors,[28] but a fifth error—mislabeling Revelation 13 as Revelation 12 over again—was missed.

II. *The 1560 Geneva Bible*

Whittingham also spearheaded work on the whole Geneva Bible,[29] helped by fellow Oxford-trained linguists Anthony Gilby and Thomas Sampson and perhaps others.[30] They revised the 1557 New Testament and, for review of the Old Testament, took special account of the 1539 Great Bible. Production of the 1560 Bible began in January,[31] and the printer was Rowland Hall, resident in Geneva since 1557 and engaged in printing since 1558. Costs were principally underwritten by John Bodley.[32] This compact

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[28] Revelation 5:6; 12:3; 16:17; and 19:20.

[29] Reference is to *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

[30] Lloyd E. Berry, "Introduction to the Facsimile Edition," 8, suggests up to eleven.

[31] See Carl S. Meyer, "The Geneva Bible," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (1961): 139.

[32] Queen Elizabeth exclusively licensed Bodley to print the Geneva Bible in England between 1561 and 1568; already in 1564, Archbishop Matthew Parker and Bishop Edmund Grindal proposed a further twelve-year extension. In reality, before 1575 (when Parker died), none were actually printed in Britain, since for Parker "the return of the Marian exiles eager for a

Bible in English was designed for use in the home, its quarto size (6 ½ by 9 ¾ inches) making it inexpensive. Mirroring French Bibles from 1556 onwards, it contained the Psalter, dated 1559 for having been published separately in advance.[33] In 1562, a first small-folio edition Bible was produced, and later, in 1578, a first pulpit edition. Readers were, for the first time, offered "what amounted to an encyclopedia of Bible information"[34] that built on the foundations laid in 1557 and sometimes adapted marginal materials from the French Bible then simultaneously in production.[35]

Although rather overelaborate, compared to its 1557 predecessor, the 1560 title page speaks volumes. As in 1557, it advertises the text's conformity to the original Greek (and now Hebrew) and to "the best translations in diuers langages"[36] but points additionally to the Epistle to the Reader. It also displays an image of the parting of the Red Sea, captioned with Psalm 34:19 ("Great are the troubles of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all") and with Exodus 14:13–14, evoking "the salvation of the Lord" who "shall fight for you." Might the picture and captions connote less the Marian exiles' "uncertainty and affliction" and more their deliverance, under Elizabeth, and new optimism as ex-refugees turned returnees rejoining "the Promised Land, across the sea"?[37]

A list of Bible books follows. Unlike today's Protestant Bibles, this inaugural Reformed Bible in English (like parallel Bibles in other languages) includes the thirteen Apocrypha between the Testaments, preceded by a very brief argument explaining that, while these books lack the canonical status of the others and are not "red [read] and expounded publikely in the Churche," nevertheless they "were receiued to be red for the aduancement and furtherance of the knowledge of the historie, & for the instruction of godlie maners."[38] Like every fully canonical book, each apocryphon has a short

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more thorough reform of the English Church was a matter of concern"; see Naseeb Shaheen, "Misconceptions about the Geneva Bible," *Studies in Bibliography* 37 (1984): 156–58.

[33] Norton, "English Bibles," 316. The French Psalter was versified by Clément Marot and Theodore Beza and set to music.

[34] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 291.

[35] For a 1560 copy digitized by the Bibliothèque de Genève, see *La Bible, qui est toute la Saincte Escriture, contenant le Vieux Testament et le Nouveau, avec les figures & leurs descriptions (etc.)*, https://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/content/zoom/10687373. Its composition is strikingly similar.

[36] Per the title-page of the copy in the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, *The bible and holy scriptures conteyned in the olde and newe testament. translated according to the ebrue and greke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers langages (etc.)* (Geneva, 1560), https://www.proquest.com/books/bible-holy-scriptures-conteyned-olde-newe/docview/2240910134/se-2C.

[37] See Fulton, *Book of Books*, 119–20.

[38] Huntington Library copy, "Apocrypha, the Argument," 403.

chapter summary, but marginal notes per page typically number none or just one.[39]

Next, an Epistle addresses "the moste vertuous and noble Quene Elisabet," then in the second year of her reign. Select Scriptures offer Elizabeth scriptural analogies from godly rulers like Jehoshaphat, Josiah, and Hezekiah, who promoted and protected the Old Testament people of God:

> These excellent Kings did not onely imbrace the worde promptely and ioyfully, but also procured earnestly and commanded the same to be taught, preached and maynteyned through all their countreys and dominions.[40]

England is here viewed through the lens of Israel, with Elizabeth the godly monarch charged before God, like a Josiah, with rebuilding the church in her realm: believers look to her for "some wonderful worke by your grace to the vniuersal comfort of his Churche."[41] First from enforced exile, then as repatriated exiles (after Bloody Mary's death and Elizabeth's accession), the translators and commentators of the Geneva Bible hoped to edify that Protestant church on English and Scottish soil through "the building of the Lords Temple, the house of God, the Church of Christ."[42]

Moving from the queen to her subjects, a first-person-plural General Preface to the reader, dated April 10, 1560, then addresses the believers of the British Isles. The reason for this Bible's dispatch is explained toward the end: it is "sent from God to the people of God, for the increase of his kingdome, the comfort of his Churche, and discharge of our conscience." Providential circumstances of production are highlighted: its writers are "translating … the holy Scriptures into our natiue tongue," in a situation described as "this ripe age and cleare light," exhorted by those "whose learning and godlynes we reuerence." Their challenging task entails confronting "the tyme … moste dangerous and the persecution sharpe and furious"—still a reference to recent Marian oppression rather than to Elizabethan liberation.

As part of a "suite of interpretive aids,"[43] the preface introduces three further helps for readers; first, maps and other illustrations, which I discuss

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[39] Fulton, *Book of Books*, 304.
[40] Huntington Library copy, 3.
[41] Ibid., 4.
[42] Ibid., 2.
[43] Justine Walden, "Global Calvinism: The Maps in the English Geneva Bible," in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 193.

in detail elsewhere;[44] second, a comprehensive table of Hebrew names that aims "to restore the names to their integritie" by helping contemporary believers derive encouragement for faith from Scripture's godly exemplars; and third, a three-column, eighteen-page table of principal Bible topics, "conteyning all the chefe [chief] and principal matters of the whole Bible," which greatly expands the one from the 1557 New Testament, this time in light of all Scripture, "so that nothing (as we trust) that any colde [could] iustely desire, is omitted." The 1560 Bible also reproduces all invaluable arguments first provided for New Testament books in 1557.[45] Here, in truth, is a Bible "packed with diagrams, charts, prefaces and printed marginal notes designed to guide and facilitate the reading of the scriptures."[46]

The 1560 Bible's abundant offer to the reader becomes immediately apparent in the text and apparatus of the opening page, Genesis 1 (see Figure 3).

Like the 1553 French Bible, the text occupies two columns per page; as a corollary, a page header—here, "the creation of the worlde"—can now headline essential happenings in the text or discussed in accompanying notes. Each double-page spread is also consecutively numbered.[47] After an introductory argument—an aid absent from French Bibles—a chapter summary highlights key verses and their content: there is less detail than in the 1553 French Bible but more than its 1560 French successor (as also for the notes). Wherever the English text paraphrases the original, a corresponding note supplies a more literal rendering (and vice versa).[48] By comparison with the 1557 Geneva New Testament, the 1560 Bible's consecutively lettered marginal notes—all keyed to their respective column of text—now form an almost continuous scaffolding. The annotated Matthew Bible of 1537 had fallen afoul of Henry VIII's 1538 ban on annotated books; correspondingly, the 1539 Great Bible made available for use in worship in churches or for broader consultation had none. Thus, the 1560 Bible's fulsome and uncensored marginal apparatus both created and satisfied a demand for interpretative guidance to help with understanding ancient Scripture and applying it "in the early modern present."[49]

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[44] See my "The Geneva Bible's Expansion."

[45] See Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 282–83.

[46] Thus Molekamp, "Using a Collection," art. 10, section 1. Molekamp had access to nearly three quarters of all complete Geneva Bible editions published in England between 1575 and 1644; evidence left by their original owners and users—such as underlining or ringing of text, or written comments—points to acts of reading that they occasioned.

[47] Here "1" (p. 1).

[48] Norton, "English Bibles," 318: "Either way," he says, "the reader could feel that he had both the words and the meaning."

[49] Fulton, *Book of Books*, 114.


The creation of the worlde. 1

THE FIRST BOKE OF
Mosés, called * Genesis.

THE ARGUMENT.

MOSES in effect declareth the things, which are here chiefly to be considered: First, that the worlde & all things therein were created by God, & that man being placed in this great tabernacle of the worlde to beholde Gods wonderful workes, & to praise his Name for the infinite graces, wherewith he had endued him, fel willingly from God through disobedience: who yet for his owne mercies sake restored him to life, & confirmed him in the same by his promes of Christ to come, by whome he shulde overcome Satan, death and hel. Secondely, that the wicked, vnmindeful of Gods moste excellent benefites, remained stil in their wickednes, & so falling moste horribly from sinne to sinne, prouoked God (who by his preachers called them continually to repentance) at length to destroye the whole worlde. Thirdly, he assureth vs by the examples of Abraham, Izhak, Iaakob & the rest of the Patriarkes, that his mercies neuer faile them, whome he choseth to be his Church, and to professe his Name in earth, but in all their afflictions and persecutions he euer assisteth them, sendeth comforte, & deliuereth them. And because the beginning, increase, preseruacion and successe thereof might be onely attributed to God, Mosés sheweth by the examples of Kain, Ishmael, Esau and others, which were noble in mans iudgement, that this Church dependeth not on the estimacion and nobilitie of the worlde: and also by the fewenes of them, which haue at all times worshiped him purely according to his worde, that it standeth not in the multitude, but in the poore and despised, in the smale flocke and litle nomber, that man in his wisdome might be confounded, & the Name of God euer more praised.

CHAP. I.

1 God created the heauen & the earth, 3 The light & the darkenes, 8 The firmamēt. 9 He separateth the water from the earth 16 He createth the sunne, the moone, & the starres. 21 He createth the fish, birdes, beastes. 26 He createth man and giueth him rule ouer all creatures. 29 And prouideth nourriture for man and beast.

1 IN THE a beginning
* God created ẏ heauen and the earth.
2 And the earth was b
without forme & voyde, and c darkenes was
vpon the depe, & the
Spirit of God d moued
vpon the waters.
3 Then God said, * Let there be light: and
there was e light.
4 And God sawe ẏ light that it was good,
and God separated the light from the
darkenes.
5 And God called the light, Day, and the
darkenes, he called Night. | So the euenīg
and the morning were the first day.
6 ¶ Againe God said, * Let there be a * firmament in the middes of the waters: and
let it separate the waters from the waters.
7 Then God made the firmament, & parted the waters, which were f vnder the
firmament, from the waters which were
* aboue the firmament. and it was so.
8 And God called the firmament, g Heauen. | So the euening and the morning
were the seconde day.
9 ¶ God said againe, * Let the waters vnder the heauē be gathered into one place,
& let the drye land appeare. and it was so.
10 And God called the drye land, Earth, &
he called ẏ gathering together of the waters, Seas: & God sawe that it was good.
11 Then God said, h Let the earth budde
forthe the budde of the herbe, that sedeth
sede, the fruteful tre, ẇ beareth frute according to his kinde, which maie haue his
sede in it self vpon the earth. & it was so.
12 And the earth broght forthe the budde
of the herbe, that sedeth sede accordīg to
his kinde, also the tre that yeldeth frute, ẇ
hathe his sede in it selfe according to his
kinde: & God i sawe that it was good.
13 | So the euening and the morning were
the third daie.
14 ¶ And God said, * Let there be k lightes
in the firmament of the heauen, to l separate the daie from the night, & let them be
for m signes, and for seasons, and for daies
and yeres.
15 And let them be for lightes in the firmament of the heauen to giue light vpō the
earth. and it was so.
16 God then made two n great lightes: the
greater light o to rule the daie, & the lesse
light to rule ẏ night: he made also ẏ starres.
17 And God set them in the firmament of
the heauen, to shine vpon the earth,
18 And to * rule in the daie, & in the night,
and to separate the light from the darkenes: and God sawe that it was good.
19 | So the euening and the morning were
the fourth daie.
20 Afterwarde God said, Let the waters
bring forthe in abundāce euerie p creping
thing that hathe * life: & let the foule flie
vpon the earth in the * open firmament of
the heauen.
21 Then God created the great whales, &
euerie thing liuing & moving, ẇ the q waters broght forthe in abundance, accordīg
to their kinde, & euerie fethered foule according to his kinde: & God sawe that it
was good. a.i.

Figure 3. 1560 Geneva Bible opening page (Gen 1:1–21).

An appendix of Hebrew proper names and an alphabetical topical concordance (mentioned earlier) follow Revelation, as does the calculation of time from Adam to Christ—updated by three years to 1560. A further timeline of the life of the Apostle Paul comes next, calculated from Acts 9 onward and correlated with the reigns of the relevant Roman emperors; running from 35 to 70 CE, from Paul's conversion to his execution, it includes dates for the penning of his Epistles.

Four assorted helps for worship complete the 1560 Bible. First, Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins' Psalter: each Psalm is in meter and instructions for use, on the title page, envisage both ecclesial and private settings, with the latter of some interest in our day, after a century of popular music:

> … in private houses, for their godly solace and comfort, laying apart all ungodly songs and ballads, which tend onely to the nourishing of vice, and corrupting of youth.

Twenty-three assorted texts for further use in household worship follow: beginning with the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, they include, for instance, the *Magnificat* or *Benedictus* from Luke's Gospel, the Ten Commandments, a Creed in meter, and various prayers. The third aid is a "forme of prayer to be used in priuate houses euery Morning and Euening." Finally, two short indexes respectively key the opening words of each metrical Psalm to its psalm number (and to the relevant page) and align the twenty-three liturgical texts for use after the Psalms.

III. *The 1576 Tomson New Testament*

Briefer comments will suffice for the revised New Testament[50] by public servant Laurence Tomson, secretary to Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I's principal secretary from 1573 until his death in 1590. Without being "an outspoken defender of puritanism and presbyterianism,"[51] Tomson maintained Reformed views and Puritan churchmanship or associations throughout his life. The front-matter includes a table of New

[50] Reference is to *The Nevv Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ translated out of Greeke by Theod. Beza: Whereunto are adioyned brief Summaries of doctrine vpon the Euangelistes and Actes of the Apostles, together with the methode of the Epistles of the Apostles by the said Theod. Beza: (etc) … Englished by L. Tomson* (London 1576); digitized copy in the Bodleian Library, https://www.proquest.com/books/nevv-testament-our-lord-iesus-christ-translated/docview/2240909980/se-2?accountid=200462.

[51] Irena Backus, "Laurence Tomson (1539–1608) and Elizabethan Puritanism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28.1 (1977): 27.

Testament books; Tomson's Epistle to Walsingham and Francis Hastings; a translation of Beza's long epistle to Prince Louis de Bourbon; "The printer to the diligent reader," where Tomson briefly presents the numbered notes, drawn principally from those in Beza's 1565 Latin Version,[52] and interspersed italicized lettered notes of his own, explaining in paragraph three how the alphabetical notes "expound and enlighten the darke words and phrases" of the Scripture text; and a map of the Holy Land with legend. Like its 1557 predecessor, Tomson's New Testament text is a single column, with chapter summaries (their content now keyed to relevant verses) and marginal notes (now only in the outer margins, sometimes running on between portions of text).

From 1579 onwards, the Scottish printers Alexander Arbuthnot and Thomas Bassandyne combined Tomson's New Testament with the remainder of the 1561 second-edition Geneva Bible (although often omitting the Apocrypha), with a long preface in Scots: this would become Scotland's Geneva Bible and make the realm "effectively a kingdom of the Geneva Bible" until the late 1620s and 1630s, when the King James New Testament or Bible began displacing it.[53] Outside Scotland, the Tomson New Testament went through twenty reprints between 1576 and 1599 and featured in nine whole Bibles from 1587 to 1599.[54]

IV. *The 1599 Geneva-Tomson-Junius Bible*

The text and peritextual elements of this definitive Geneva Bible[55] from the close of Elizabeth I's reign mostly come from earlier versions and require concise treatment only. The title page is followed by an Epistle to the Reader and a prayer in verse that speaks "of the incomparable treasure of the holy Scriptures." A one-page diagram entitled "How to take profite in reading of the holy Scriptures" points users to prayerful reading or to relevant sermons and commentaries available elsewhere that further expound the text. Last is a table of Bible books, Apocrypha included.

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[52] For Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), 70, Beza's notes "were designed to educate their readers into Calvinism and supply them with answers to challenges to it."

[53] Norton, "English Bibles," 319. Scots preface aside, Scotland's Geneva Bible in English had the unforeseen consequence English becoming "the language of print in Scotland": Dawson, "Scotland," 65.

[54] See Lewis Lupton, *Ƒoy: A History of the Geneva Bible*, vol. 7 (London: Olive Tree, 1975), 163–64. Martin, "Geneva Bible", 47, gives 1616 as the final publication date for a Tomson edition.

[55] Reference is to a copy (see Figure 4) in the Gamble Library, Union Theological College, Belfast.

Marginal notes for Revelation principally set this 1599 Bible apart from its 1560 predecessor, providing very detailed commentary from the Heidelberg theologian Franciscus Junius (see Figure 4).[56]

Interspersed with Beza's short notes, in italics, is Junius's copious material, destined to be "extraordinarily influential": from these Bible margins, his interpretation would exert "a tremendous influence on biblical interpretation in England and its American colonies for generations."[57]

After Revelation, two familiar 1560 tables recur: the proper names appendix and topical concordance. Sternhold and Hopkins's Psalter is now bracketed at the start by a dozen or so hymns (from the *Veni Creator* to *The Complaint of a Sinner*) and at the end by settings of the Lord's Prayer or the Creed and other liturgical items, with melodies in musical notation provided for each Psalm in meter or other text in verse.

V. *Readers and Reading*

Having surveyed how Geneva Bibles provided support for readers, we may further interrogate those readers' reading experience or circumstances.

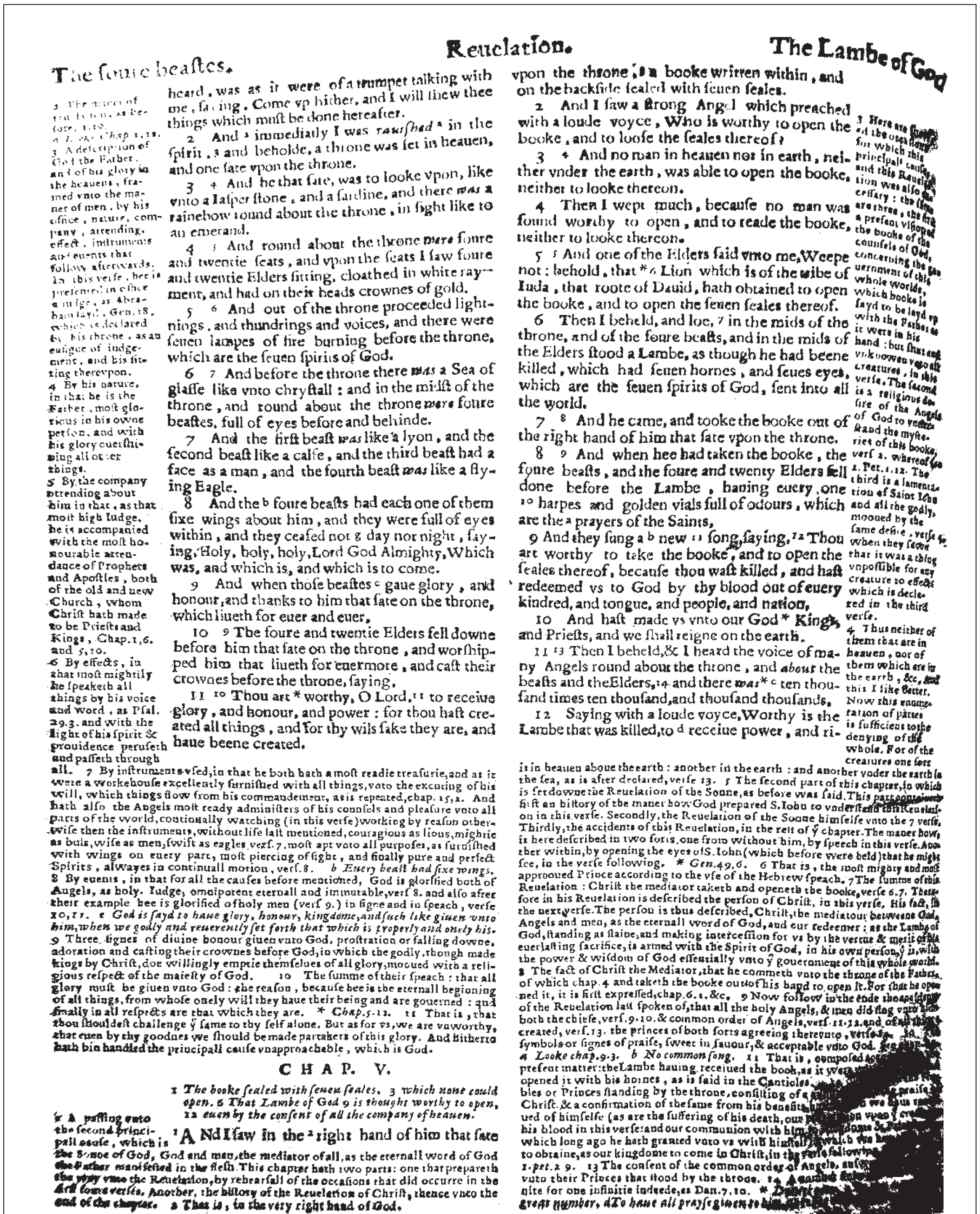
In the early modern period, affairs of church and state were so inextricable as to impinge jointly on all Bible translation or commentary. From the 1520s to the 1540s, while Henry VIII reigned, not just translation itself but even purchase or ownership of an English Bible were deemed seditious: for having broken this ban, William Tyndale paid with his life in 1536. Under Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer's influence, Henry was temporarily persuaded that translating the Bible into English could help consolidate his leadership of an English Church that had broken with Rome, and the Great Bible of 1539 was the tangible result: but it was not meant for private readers, and the 1543 Act for the Advancement of True Religion outlawed other translations and kept the Bible out of the hands of ordinary readers.

By contrast, the new democratization of access to Scripture was the Geneva Bible's very intention, and ordinary readers were its target audience. If "there are no politically innocent texts" and "no politically neutral marginalia" either,[58] precise ecclesial or political categorization of the

[56] Or François du Jon, to give this Heidelberg exile his French Huguenot name. For much more on Junius, his notes, and Revelation commentary, see my "The Geneva Bible's Expansion."

[57] Patrick J. O'Banion, "The Pastoral Use of the Book of Revelation in Late Tudor England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57.4 (2006): 706, 709.

[58] William Slights, "'Marginall Notes that Spoile the Text': Scriptural Annotation in the English Renaissance," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 55 (1992): 258.



Reuelation. The Lambe of God

The foure beastes.

heard, was as it were of a trumpet talking with
me, saying, Come vp hither, and I will shew thee
things which must be done hereafter.
2 And [a] immediatly I was rauished [a] in the
spirit, [3] and beholde, a throne was set in heauen,
and one sate vpon the throne.
3 [4] And he that sate, was to looke vpon, like
vnto a Iasper stone, and a sardine, and there was a
rainebow round about the throne, in sight like to
an emerand.
4 [5] And round about the throne were foure
and twentie seats, and vpon the seats I saw foure
and twentie Elders sitting, cloathed in white ray-
ment, and had on their heads crownes of gold.
5 [6] And out of the throne proceeded light-
nings, and thundrings and voices, and there were
seuen lampes of fire burning before the throne,
which are the seuen spirits of God.
6 [7] And before the throne there was a Sea of
glasse like vnto chrystall: and in the midst of the
throne, and round about the throne were foure
beastes, full of eyes before and behinde.
7 And the first beast was like a lyon, and the
second beast like a calfe, and the third beast had a
face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a fly-
ing Eagle.
8 And the [b] foure beasts had each one of them
sixe wings about him, and they were full of eyes
within, and they ceased not day nor night, say-
ing, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Which
was, and which is, and which is to come.
9 And when those beastes [c] gaue glory, and
honour, and thanks to him that sate on the throne,
which liueth for euer and euer,
10 [9] The foure and twentie Elders fell downe
before him that sate on the throne, and worship-
ped him that liueth for euermore, and cast their
crownes before the throne, saying,
11 [10] Thou art * worthy, O Lord, [11] to receiue
glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast cre-
ated all things, and for thy wils sake they are, and
haue beene created.

[2] The maner of reuelation, as before, 1.10. [a] Looke Chap. 1.10. [3] A description of God the Father, and of his glory in the heauens, framed vnto the maner of men, by his office, nature, company, attending, effect, instruments and euents that follow afterwards. In this verse, hee is presented in office a iudge, as Abraham sayd, Gen. 18. which is declared by his throne, as an ensigne of iudgement, and his sitting thereupon. [4] By his nature, in that he is the Father, most glorious in his owne person, and with his glory euershining all other things. [5] By the company attending about him in that, as that most high Iudge, he is accompanied with the most honourable attendance of Prophets and Apostles, both of the old and new Church, whom Christ hath made to be Priests and Kings, Chap. 1,6. and 5,10. [6] By effects, in that most mightily he speaketh all things by his voice and word, as Psal. 29.3. and with the light of his spirit & prouidence peruseth and passeth through all. [7] By instruments vsed, in that he both hath a most readie treasurie, and as it were a workehouse excellently furnished with all things, vnto the executing of his will, which things flow from his commandement, as is repeated, chap. 15,2. And hath also the Angels most ready administers of his counsels and pleasure vnto all parts of the world, continually watching (in this verse) working by reason otherwise then the instruments, without life last mentioned, couragious as lions, mightie as buls, wise as men, swift as eagles vers. 7. most apt vnto all purposes, as furnished with wings on euery part, most piercing of sight, and finally pure and perfect Spirits, alwayes in continuall motion, vers. 8. [b] Euery beast had sixe wings. [8] By euents, in that for all the causes before mentioned, God is glorified both of Angels, as holy. Iudge, omnipotent eternall and immutable, vers 8. and also after their example hee is glorified of holy men (vers 9.) in signe and in speach, verse 10, 11. [c] God is sayd to haue glory, honour, kingdome, and such like giuen vnto him, when we godly and reuerently set forth that which is properly and onely his. [9] Three signes of diuine honour giuen vnto God, prostration or falling downe, adoration and casting their crownes before God, in which the godly, though made kings by Christ, doe willingly emptie themselues of all glory, mooued with a religious respect of the maiesty of God. [10] The summe of their speach: that all glory must be giuen vnto God: the reason, because hee is the eternall begining of all things, from whose onely will they haue their being and are gouerned: and finally in all respects are that which they are. * Chap. 5.12. [11] That is, that thou shouldest challenge ẏ same to thy self alone. But as for vs, we are vnworthy, that euen by thy goodnes we should be made partakers of this glory. And hitherto hath bin handled the principall cause vnapproachable, which is God.

CHAP. V.

1 The booke sealed with seuen seales, 3 which none could open. 6 That Lambe of God 9 is thought worthy to open, 12 euen by the consent of all the company of heauen.

[1] AND I saw in the [2] right hand of him that sate
vpon the throne, [a] a booke written within, and
on the backside sealed with seuen seales.
2 And I saw a strong Angel which preached
with a loude voyce, Who is worthy to open the
booke, and to loose the seales thereof?
3 [4] And no man in heauen nor in earth, nei-
ther vnder the earth, was able to open the booke,
neither to looke thereon.
4 Then I wept much, because no man was
found worthy to open, and to reade the booke,
neither to looke thereon.
5 [5] And one of the Elders said vnto me, Weepe
not: behold, that * [6] Lion which is of the tribe of
Iuda, that roote of Dauid, hath obtained to open
the booke, and to open the seuen seales thereof.
6 Then I beheld, and loe, [7] in the mids of the
throne, and of the foure beasts, and in the mids of
the Elders stood a Lambe, as though he had beene
killed, which had seuen hornes, and seuen eyes,
which are the seuen spirits of God, sent into all
the world.
7 [8] And he came, and tooke the booke out of
the right hand of him that sate vpon the throne.
8 [9] And when hee had taken the booke, the
foure beasts, and the foure and twenty Elders fell
done before the Lambe, hauing euery one
[10] harpes and golden vials full of odours, which
are the [a] prayers of the Saints,
9 And they sung a [b] new [11] song, saying, [12] Thou
art worthy to take the booke, and to open the
seales thereof, because thou wast killed, and hast
redeemed vs to God by thy blood out of euery
kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,
10 And hast made vs vnto our God * Kings,
and Priests, and we shall reigne on the earth.
11 [13] Then I beheld, & I heard the voice of ma-
ny Angels round about the throne, and about the
beasts and the Elders, [14] and there was * [c] ten thou-
sand times ten thousand, and thousand thousands,
12 Saying with a loude voyce, Worthy is the
Lambe that was killed, to [d] receiue power, and ri-

[1] A passing vnto the second principall cause, which is the Sonne of God, God and man, the mediator of all, as the eternall word of God the Father manifested in the flesh. This chapter hath two parts: one that prepareth the way vnto the Reuelation, by rehearsall of the occasions that did occurre in the first foure verses. Another, the history of the Reuelation of Christ, thence vnto the end of the chapter. [a] That is, in the very right hand of God.

[3] Here are [...] for which this principall cause, and this Reuelation was also necessary: the [...] are three, the first a present vision of the booke of the counsels of God, concerning the gouernment of this whole worlde, which booke is sayd to be layd vp with the Father as it were in his hand: but shut and vnknowen vnto all creatures, in this verse. The second is a religious desire of the Angels of God to vnderstand the mysteries of this booke, vers 2. whereof see 1. Pet. 1.12. The third is a lamentation of Saint Iohn and all the godly, mooued by the same desire, verse 4. when they sawe that it was a thing vnpossible for any creature to effect which is declared in the third verse. [4] Thus neither of them that are in heauen, nor of them which are in the earth, &c. and this I like better. Now this enumeration of partes is sufficient to the denying of the whole. For of the creatures one sort is in heauen aboue the earth: another in the earth: and another vnder the earth in the sea, as is after declared, verse 13. [5] The second part of this chapter, in which is set downe the Reuelation of the Sonne, as before was said. This part containeth first an history of the maner how God prepared S. Iohn to vnderstand this Reuelation in this verse. Secondly, the Reuelation of the Sonne himselfe vnto the 7 verse. Thirdly, the accidents of this Reuelation, in the rest of ẏ chapter. The maner how, is here described in two sorts, one from without him, by speech in this verse. Another within, by opening the eyes of S. Iohn (which before were held) that he might see, in the verse following. * Gen. 49.6. [6] That is, the most mighty and most approoued Prince according to the vse of the Hebrew speach. [7] The summe of this Reuelation: Christ the mediator taketh and openeth the booke, verse 6.7. Therefore in his Reuelation is described the person of Christ, in this verse. His fact, in the next verse. The person is thus described, Christ, the mediatour betweene God, Angels and men, as the eternall word of God, and our redeemer: as the Lambe of God, standing as slaine, and making intercession for vs by the vertue & merit of his euerlasting sacrifice, is armed with the Spirit of God, in his own person, ẏ is, with the power & wisdom of God essentially vnto ẏ gouernment of this whole world. [8] The fact of Christ the Mediator, that he commeth vnto the throne of the Father, of which chap. 4 and taketh the booke out of his hand to open it. For that he opened it, it is first expressed, chap. 6.1. &c. [9] Now follow in the ende the accidents of the Reuelation last spoken of, that all the holy Angels, & men did sing vnto him both the chiefe, vers. 9.10. & common order of Angels, vers. 11.12. and of all things created, vers. 13. the princes of both sorts agreeing thereunto, verse 14. [10] [...] symbols or signes of praise, sweet in sauour, & acceptable vnto God. [...] [a] Looke chap. 9.3. [b] No common song. [11] That is, composed [...] present matter: the Lambe hauing receiued the book, as it were [...] opened it with his hornes, as is said in the Canticles [...] bles or Princes standing by the throne, consisting of a [...] praise [...] Christ. & a confirmation of the same from his benefits [...] ued of himselfe (as are the suffering of his death, our [...] his blood in this verse: and our communion with him [...] which long ago he hath granted vnto vs with himselfe [...] to obtaine, as our kingdome to come in Christ, in the verse following [...] 1. pet. 2 9. [13] The consent of the common order of Angels [...] vnto their Princes that stood by the throne. [14] A [...] nite for one infinitie indeede, as Dan. 7.10. * [...] great number. [d] To haue all prayse giuen to him [...]

Figure 4. 1599 Geneva Bible, with text and full apparatus for Revelation 4:1b–5:12.

Geneva notes remains elusive: might the 1557 Genevan text or the critical apparatus that frames it "be seen as offering a revolutionary solution to the crisis of the Marian regime"? Do the helps in the various Geneva Bibles somehow connect subsequent readers "to later political crises such as the English Civil War"?[59] Undoubtedly, some of the exiles' publications—like John Ponet's *A Short Treatise of Politike Power* (1556) or Christopher Goodman's *How Superior Powers Oght to Be Obeyd of Their Subjects* (1558)—are resistance literature, expressing revolutionary ideas about "the right and duty to overthrow idolatrous tyrants"[60] and paralleling the tribulations of the people of England with those of Israel in the Old Testament. Yet overall, comment on idolatry or tyrannical rulers in the Geneva Bible notes is both more nuanced, and less prevalent, than is often claimed.[61]

For successive Genevan editions, guidance on "the spiritual life of the reader" represents the bottom line,[62] with the relational context of the household, rather than solitary private reading, as we might spontaneously think today, everywhere assumed and facilitated.[63] Nonetheless, aids to reading, as itemized above, suggest a range of reading experiences on offer. Whereas shared habits characterized early modern readers, such as how they "loved to mark Bibles,"[64] available evidence does suggest an "ineluctable specificity of readers and readings"[65] and requires recognition of a certain diversity. Publishers of any given edition sought to build and nurture a particular readership, providing appropriate prefatory material or elements of apparatus with a tailored rhetorical appeal.[66] Geneva Bibles were printed in two typefaces: roman type (described above) and commonly, in England, stylized and decorative black-letter (or Gothic) type. The former attracted

[59] See Tom Furniss, "Reading the Geneva Bible: Notes Toward an English Revolution," *Prose Studies* 31 (2009): 3.

[60] Furniss, 4, referencing Gerry Bowler, "Marian Protestants and the Idea of Violent Resistance to Tyranny," in *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England*, ed. Peter Lake and Maria Dowling (London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1988), 124–43. For social matters or the social order, addressed in the notes, see Richard L. Greaves, "Traditionalism and the Seeds of Revolution in the Social Principles of the Geneva Bible," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 7.1 (1976): 94–109.

[61] See Fulton, *Book of Books*, 127–29, who remains well aware that the notes reveal "a religio-political lexicon for Tudor culture".

[62] Molekamp, "Using a Collection," 9.

[63] Sasha Roberts, "Reading in Early Modern England," *Critical Survey* 12 (2000): 5.

[64] Thus Thomas Fulton and Jeremy Specland, "The Elizabethan Catholic New Testament and Its Readers," *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 6.2 (2019): 251.

[65] Richard Calis and Arnoud Visser, "Building a Digital Bookwheel Together: Annotated Books Online and the History of Early Modern Reading Practices," *Bibliothecae.it* 3 (2014): 65, quoting William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), xv.

[66] Roberts, "Reading," 2, 8.

the well educated, while the latter targeted a less-schooled readership. Distinct reading aids were designed for each, with three helps appearing only in black-letter editions: "Certaine questions and answeres touching the doctrine of Predestination," "The summe of the whole Scripture of the bookes of the olde and Newe Testament," and a "Glossary of strange names." Intended to be "more discursive and instructive" than aids provided by roman printings,[67] they may reflect the needs of aural readers like children or household servants, as well as the literate. By contrast, Bibles in roman type presupposed a firmer educational and theological basis and might include short calendrical elements, drawn from contemporary almanacs, or propose "a full arsenal of cosmological, historical as well as instructive paratexts."[68] Whatever the specific aids in individual Geneva Bibles, arguably in each case, "the text could not carry the argument fully without the paratext."[69]

Conclusion

By the time the printing of Geneva Bibles in Britain was outlawed (1616), in tandem with publication and promotion of its replacement, the 1611 King James Bible, successive Geneva Bibles had aroused and assuaged popular hunger for a Bible with extensive interpretative aids, fostering readers' biblical literacy and a living faith for working out in everyday contexts. When importation of Geneva Bibles printed abroad also became illegal in 1630, minimal marginal helps gracing the King James Bible—as preferred by the sponsoring monarch, James I, or the English bishops—simply could not satisfy ministers', believers', and citizens' taste for theological aids to reading and responding, an appetite that Geneva Bibles had both created and long catered to. By 1640, "the reading public, both clergy and lay, were understood as desiring an up-to-date annotated Bible,"[70] and a newly glossed King James Bible duly appeared in 1645: with appropriate revisions, its apparatus was—unsurprisingly—predominantly Genevan-inspired,[71] in retrospective tribute to its forerunner.

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[67] Molekamp, "Using a Collection," 4.

[68] Ibid., 5–6.

[69] Fulton and Specland, "Elizabethan Catholic," 254.

[70] Richard A. Muller, "An Entire Commentary…, the Like Never Before Published in English," in Richard A Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship. Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007), 14.

[71] Muller, "An Entire Commentary," 15. For around thirty years, and as an interim solution, printers mindful of customer preferences had sporadically produced hybrid King James Bibles with Geneva annotations added.

Is the Pope Catholic?

LEONARDO DE CHIRICO

Abstract

In Roman Catholic history, popes have been conservative or progressive. Pope Francis's pontificate is different. He does not fit the traditional "right" and "left" categories, although his teaching and actions have often been labeled as disruptive. He has been called "radical," "heretical," and even "Protestant." Ten years after the beginning of his pontificate, this article explores some of the significant influences on his formation and assesses some critiques he has received within Roman Catholic circles. It ends by suggesting that Pope Francis is more "catholic" than "Roman" in the sense that he is more interested in expanding the "catholicity" of Rome (i.e., its inclusivity), as it was envisaged at Vatican II, than in defending its doctrinal-institutional "Roman" markers.

Keywords

Pope Francis, Vatican II, The Joy of the Gospel*,* All Brothers*, Roman Catholic Church*

On March 13, 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, marking a significant transition in the Roman Catholic Church. What he has been saying and doing since being elected—for instance, his affirming attitudes toward all, his noisy silence over traditional doctrine, his ambiguous language, his thoroughgoing Marianism, and his lack of clarity on several key issues—has caused many to wonder where his thought came from.

Some have acclaimed him as the "great reformer";[1] others have argued that he is bringing about a "revolution of tenderness and love."[2] Yet others too have found it difficult to square his words and actions into the established patterns of traditional Roman Catholicism.

There is a general perception that Pope Francis's pontificate has entered an irreversibly declining phase, a sort of late autumn that is a prelude to the end of a season. It is not just a question of age: Yes, Pope Francis is elderly and in poor health. But aging aside, the pontificate finds itself navigating a descending parabola. It started with the language of "mission" and "reform." Francis's tenure, now more than ten years old, was immediately engulfed in a thousand difficulties, particularly within the Catholic Church. Many of these problems were caused by the ambiguities of Francis himself, to the point that the push envisaged at the beginning turned out to be broken, if not wholly inconclusive.

In this article, after surveying his intellectual journey prior to becoming pope, we will pause on some questions that have been asked in relation to him. They provide a variety of interpretative keys to coming to terms with the complexity of Francis's papacy, both inside and outside of the Roman camp. The final section will suggest a hermeneutic of Pope Francis within the dialectics of the "Roman" and the "catholic" dimensions of Roman Catholicism.

I. *Who Is Pope Francis?*

If you want to get to know a person, ask questions about where he comes from. Massimo Borghesi's recent intellectual biography looks at the life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis) from a particular angle.[3] Borghesi focuses on the intellectual influences (e.g., books, journals, authors, friendships, networks) that have shaped Bergoglio's thought. In so doing, he provides a fruitful perspective on the genesis and development of the vision that Bergoglio embodies and promotes as pope. In addition to surveying all the relevant literature, Borghesi has also worked on a questionnaire that Pope Francis responded to, giving further details and filling in the blanks of previous attempts. According to this well-researched analysis, Bergoglio's

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[1] Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Picador, 2015).

[2] Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (New York: Paulist, 2015).

[3] Massimo Borghesi, *Jorge Mario Bergoglio: Una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Jaca, 2017).

intellectual biography seems to be marked by three main influences: Jesuit sources, Latin American sources, and Vatican II.

Bergoglio's formative years as a student in philosophy and theology were profoundly impacted by his reading of French Jesuit intellectuals like Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, and Michel de Certeau. They introduced the young Bergoglio to the Catholic dialectical thought, which shies away from rigid Thomism and toward the dynamic synthesis of embracing opposites and enlarging the overall vision. In this Jesuit school of thought—which, by the way, became the matrix of the theology of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)—what are perceived as oppositions become "tensions," at times painfully disruptive but also potentially creative and always to be maintained as such. Bergoglio became persuaded that human thought is always "in tension," never fixed or stable. He distanced himself from abstract definitions and propositions. He learned always to think in programmatically "open" and "loose" thought forms.

Intertwined with this dialectical tendency was Bergoglio's early exposure to liberation theology. Since his first attempts to come to terms with its growing popularity in Latin America, Bergoglio has not been interested in the Marxist ideological and political framework of much of the liberation theology of those years. However, he was definitely attracted to the "theology of the people," which is a side aspect of liberation theology. According to this particular way of theologizing, the people's concerns, preoccupations, and aspirations need to be theology's starting point. Rather than considering folk devotions and beliefs as a premodern stage that will be overcome by political liberation, the "theology of the people" assumes them as vital and central. Marian devotions and practices become the most appreciated expressions of the people's hearts, even if they are contrary to Scripture. Theology and pastoral practice must therefore be developed only in a bottom-up way. In this view, the Bible can in no sense be the supreme norm for faith and life. In Borghesi's terms, the future pope embraced "a liberation theology without Marxism."[4] This is the context of Bergoglio's important emphasis on "the people" as the principal subject of theology and church life.

Bergoglio's early fascination with French Jesuit thought was further consolidated by his reading of the lay Uruguayan Catholic philosopher Alberto Methol Ferré (1929–2009). From Ferré he learned that human thought is always unstable, mobile, and ever renewing. This was yet another injection of Catholic dialecticism that moved Bergoglio further away from static and traditional Thomism.

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[4] Ibid., 71.

Ferré suggested that with Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church had finally overcome both the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. After fiercely fighting them up front (from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century), Rome eventually came to terms with its ability to assimilate and absorb the Reformation and the Enlightenment rather than opposing them. At Vatican II, the Catholic Church took the "best" of both and launched a "new" Reformation and a "new" Enlightenment. They were no longer adversaries but contributed positively to the "catholic" accomplishment. In short, after Vatican II, the Reformation as such is over and has been absorbed within the ongoing renewal of the Church of Rome.

Building on his early Jesuit influence and Ferré's thought, Bergoglio grew in his conviction that the Catholic Church was the "*complexio oppositorum*" (the whole that makes room for the opposites). His study of German theologian Romano Guardini (1885–1968) corroborated the Catholic dialectical dimension of his thought. Guardini argued that Roman Catholicism is a weltanschauung, an all-embracing worldview, the only one capable of handling multiple tensions between diverging poles and bringing them to a "catholic" unity. From Guardini, Bergoglio developed his idea of unity as a "polyhedron," a geometric figure with different angles and lines, all of which have their own peculiarity. It is a figure that brings together unity and diversity, and Roman Catholicism is the home of unity as a polyhedron. This explains Francis's commitment to ecumenical and interreligious unity, which downplays differences and concentrates on generic commonalities. In this view, unity is governed not by biblical truth and biblical love but by the embracing view of Rome that holds together all angles and lines of life.

Borghesi's intellectual biography makes it clear that Francis's pontificate comes from afar. It is the result of a long series of developments within Catholic thought, from Jesuit sources to Latin American influences up to the Vatican II matrix of contemporary Rome—and all without the correction of the word of God. One needs to immerse oneself in what happened at the Second Vatican Council to begin to make sense of what Francis is saying and doing now. All analyses of Francis being an "evangelical" or a "kerygmatic" pope are simplistic and shortsighted. He is much more than that in ways that are dialectical, open ended, and at the service of the Catholic vision to embrace the whole world.

II. *A Hugging Pope?*

Many Roman Catholics (and also many non-Catholic observers), accustomed to associating the papal magisterium with an authoritative, coherent,

and stable form of doctrinal teaching, are perplexed if not dismayed by a pope who seems both to say and not say, to argue for something and to undermine it, to state one position and then contradict it the next breath. As a Jesuit, Pope Francis tends to use an equivocal style, a dubitative and incomplete form of argumentation, an "open" logic, a colloquial, if not casual, tone, and a pastoral style that often lacks clarity and coherence. Officially, the pope's teachings are set in the context of the historical traditions of the church. In this sense, nothing changes. In reality, however, Francis is accentuating the developmental and inclusive dynamic of Roman Catholicism as it emerged from Vatican II. According to this trend, while there is a sense in which nothing changes, everything is nonetheless rethought, reexpressed, and updated. The "Roman" side of the teaching does not change, while the "catholic" side does change.

A book by the Sicilian Roman Catholic theologian Massimo Naro is a helpful guide in the theological universe of Pope Francis.[5] From the outset, Naro readily acknowledges that the theology of Pope Francis is "an innovative proposal," even when compared with the updating trends of Vatican II. Above all, the pope's vocabulary needs to be taken into consideration. If you want to try to enter the world of Francis, here are his central words: "mother church," "faithful people of God," "popular spirituality," "mercy," "synodality," "polyhedric ecclesiology," "processes to initiate," "existential peripheries," "humanism of solidarity," "ecological conversion," "dialogue," and "fraternity and brotherhood."[6] Not all are new words; some of them are terms that have already been used in Roman Catholic teaching; however, Francis now gives them a new nuance or a distinct significance.

Naro further suggests that there are two theological frameworks that give meaning to his words: the "theology of the people" and the "theology of mercy." For Francis, theology begins not with biblical revelation or the abstract principles of the official church's teaching but with the common and daily stories of men and women who must be welcomed and affirmed in their particular contexts and life journeys. This attention to the "inside" of the world and to the level where "the people" live pushes him to elevate forms of popular spirituality as authentic religious experiences. He is not

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[5] Massimo Naro, *Protagonista è l'abbraccio: Temi teologici nel magistero di Francesco* (Venice: Marcianum, 2021).

[6] Ibid., 19. For recent attempts at coming to terms with Francis's theology, see Severino Dianich, *Magistero in movimento: Il caso Papa Francesco* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2016); Ghislain Lafont, *Petit essai sur le temps du pape François* (Paris: Cerf, 2017); and Leonardo Di Chirico, "A Window into the Theological Vision of Pope Francis," *Christian Research Journal* 38.6 (2015): 12–19.

scandalized by the "irregular" situations of life in which people find themselves, such as divorce, cohabitation, or same-sex relationships. Instead of teaching an external standard (in theology or morality), the pope begins where people are, assuming that where they are, there is something good that needs to be affirmed.

According to Francis, "the people" are not the passive and obedient recipients of a top-down ecclesiastical magisterium but active subjects whose religious experiences are true and real (even though not squared with traditional patterns), and they therefore need to be part of the teaching itself. "The people" make the teaching as much as the ecclesiastical authorities of the Roman Church promulgate it.

This version of the "theology of the people" is far from the evangelical belief that Scripture, as the inspired word of God, is the source by which God teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). And whom does he train? Not those who want to affirm their own experiences and lifestyles but those who wish to repent from sin and reform their lives following the path indicated by the Bible. From a biblical perspective, Francis's "theology of the people" does not have the external criterion of the word of God, which questions hearts, practices, and sinful habits and forges a new humanity that is always open to renewal in a process of ongoing sanctification.

Mercy is another keyword in the pope's magisterium. In his way of putting it, mercy is "the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite the limits of our sins."[7] In this dense sentence, there is a strategic theological point. Among other things, as Cardinal Matteo Zuppi writes in the introduction, the pope means that "at the center of the biblical message is not sin, but mercy."[8] In Naro's words, Christian theology must be freed from "hamartiocentrism,"[9] that is, from the centrality of sin. Sin must be replaced by the pervasiveness of God's mercy, which "can help us to break free from hamartiocentrism and to rediscover the tenderness of God."[10] In his view, Pope Francis has replaced sin with mercy at the center of his message.

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[7] The English translation of the papal text on the Vatican website is blurred and incorrect. It says, "… the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever *despite our sinfulness*" (italics added). However, the Latin official text says, "… *praeter nostri peccati fines*," which needs to be translated as "despite the limits or bounds of our sins," as the Italian, French, and Spanish versions rightly translate. *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 2, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

[8] Naro, *Protagonista è l'abbraccio*, 16.

[9] Ibid., 93.

[10] Ibid., 114.

In the pope's theology, sin is at most "the human limit"[11] but not the breaking of the covenant, the rebellion against God, the disobedience to his commandments, or the subversion of divine authority that results in God's righteous and holy judgment. If sin is a "human limit," then the cross of Christ did not atone for sin but only manifested God's mercy in an exemplary way. The words used by the pope are the same as those of the evangelical faith (e.g., mercy, sin, grace, gospel) but are given a different meaning than in the gospel.[12] Francis sees everything from the perspective of a metaphysic of mercy that swallows sin without passing through propitiation, expiation, or reconciliation, which the cross of Jesus Christ wrought to give salvation to those who believe in him. If everything is mercy and sin is only a limit, the "popular" and "merciful" account of the gospel taught by Pope Francis is another "catholic" variant of the deviation on which the Church of Rome was established and on which, sadly, it continues to move forward.

III. *A Protestant Pope?*

"Here I stand": these are the famous words spoken by Martin Luther in front of the Diet of Worms in 1521. Questioned about his convictions as they had been outlined a few years before in the Ninety-Five Theses, Luther stood firm on the truth of the Bible and its good news: sinners can be justified by Christ alone through faith alone. It was clear to all what he believed. The Council of Trent (1545–1562) was the official response of the Roman Catholic Church to the issues raised by the Protestant Reformation. By rejecting the tenets of the Protestant understanding of the gospel and declaring its proponents anathema, Trent endorsed the view that sinners could not be justified by faith alone; instead, Catholicism insisted on an ongoing journey of good works punctuated by the sacraments administered by the church. Where Trent stood was and is crystal clear.[13]

In recent decades, though, the situation has become blurred. The 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification[14]—signed by mainstream

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[11] Ibid., 91.

[12] For an exploration of this theme, see Leonardo De Chirico, *Same Words, Different Worlds: Do Roman Catholics and Evangelicals Believe the Same Gospel?* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2021).

[13] It is no surprise that justification was dealt with during the first session of the council. The session lasted seven months (from June 21, 1546, to January 13, 1547), and it was the most intense topic that the council addressed. See John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

[14] "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church," The Lutheran World Federation, 1999, https://www.lutheranworld.org/

Lutherans and the Church of Rome—introduced ambiguities in language, juxtapositions of terms, and theological nuances that make it difficult to understand where the signatories stand in comparison to Luther's and Trent's viewpoints. After the declaration, Rome's position on justification is harder to ascertain.[15] This ambiguous context is Pope Francis's framework when he speaks on the topic.

In the ecumenical ceremony that commemorated the Reformation in Lund (Sweden) in 2016, Pope Francis made a perfunctory reference to the doctrine of justification.[16] In a generally positive comment on Luther, the pope argued that "the doctrine of justification expresses the essence of human existence before God," thus seeming to be in accord with what Evangelicals might say about the doctrine. Recognizing justification as something essential is surely a pointer toward its primary importance for the Christian life. But notice that the pope speaks of the essential role of justification in "human existence" in general, not just in the Christian life. The context of this statement does not restrict it to Christians, believers in Christ, or disciples of Jesus. The pope is not referring to the essence of the Christian life but to human existence as a whole.

Here is the ambiguity. Does this mean that justification is essential for all human beings, regardless of whether or not they are Christians? Does it mean that justification is a constitutive component of life in general, a defining mark of the existence of all men and women? Does it mean that all those living a "human existence" are essentially justified? Certainly, this is not the meaning that either Luther or the Council of Trent gave to justification. For Luther, there was a sense in which justification could be defined as "the essence of human existence before God," with the caveat that this would refer only to those who have received the grace of God by faith alone. In other words, justification is the essence of the *Christian life*, not of human life in general.

On the surface, then, the pope's comment on justification seems to be very biblical and indeed very Protestant. A closer look reveals, though, that things are not as clear as they appear. While affirming the importance of justification, Pope Francis seems to confuse it with a universal property that

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sites/default/files/Joint%20Declaration%20on%20the%20Doctrine%20of%20Justification.pdf.

[15] See Leonardo De Chirico, "Not By Faith Alone? An Analysis of the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Justification from Trent to the Joint Declaration," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 739–67.

[16] His homily can be found here: "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Lund, Monday, October 31, 2016, Libreria Editrice Vaticane, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161031_omelia-svezia-lund.html.

all human beings share. If this is what the pope meant, he is very far from what either Luther or Trent stood for. Indeed, he is very close to a universalist, all-embracing, humanistic "gospel" that betrays the biblical gospel of salvation in Christ alone by faith alone for those who repent and believe.

Arguably, what Pope Francis said in Lund on justification is generic and can be interpreted in different ways. It is not possible to say for sure that this is what he had in mind. Therefore, one needs to look for other references to justification elsewhere in his writings or speeches.

Another quotation is worth pondering. In his widely acclaimed 2013 Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*,[17] the programmatic document of his pontificate, Francis writes, "Non-Christians, by God's gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live justified by the grace of God" (n. 254). This section of the Exhortation deals with ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the context of mission. According to Pope Francis, non-Catholic Christians are already united in baptism (n. 244), Jews do not need to convert (n. 247), and with believing Muslims, the way is "dialogue" because "together with us they adore the one and merciful God" (n. 252, a quotation of *Lumen Gentium*, n. 16). Other non-Christians are also "justified by the grace of God" and are linked to "the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ" (n. 254).

Justification according to the pope seems to be the outcome of following one's own conscience. It is still "by God's gracious initiative" (although not necessarily by his grace alone), but it is no longer by faith—let alone by faith alone. It is through the conscience that men and women are linked to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ—that is, the work of Christ as it is reenacted at the Eucharist, the chief sacrament of the church. Faith in Jesus Christ is gone. The gospel appears to be not a message of salvation from God's judgment but instead a vehicle to access a fuller measure of a salvation that is already given to all humankind through the conscience. What about faith in Jesus Christ? What about his justice being credited to the sinner? Are, therefore, all human beings justified ultimately by following their consciences? By grace but not by faith?

At this point, it becomes clear that the Lund reference to justification being "the essence of human existence" was purposefully and intentionally designed to mean that justification defines everyone's life, not only that of the believing Christian. This reference in *The Joy of the Gospel* makes it

[17] "Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis," Libreria Editrice Vatican, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

abundantly clear that the pope, while using the language of justification, has radically altered its meaning and made it synonymous with a universal existence embracing the whole of humanity. He is using the word in an ambiguous way, but a closer inspection reveals its nonbiblical content.

Is Pope Francis's justification what Luther stood for? And, more decidedly, is this what the Bible teaches about justification? The pope is saying radically different things. Therefore, before listing Pope Francis as a friend of the Evangelical faith, we must understand what he is saying on his own terms. Beyond commonalities in the use of words, he belongs to a different world.

IV. *A Heretical Pope?*

Roman Catholics as individuals and groups may have different opinions about the pope. After all, the Church of Rome is not a monolith, and even Catholic people are polarized by their views of the pope. But what happens when negative voices become more frequent, more outspoken, and more radical in their criticism, as seems to be the case in recent months? While public opinion is still heavily influenced by the overall positive image that Francis has and continues to consider him a kind of hero, within Catholic circles, the "wait-and-see" approach toward some awkward aspects of his teaching is coming to an end. Groups of intellectuals, priests, and even cardinals are voicing their growing embarrassment and are doing it publicly and with a severe tone. In raising their concerns, they point not to peripheral elements but to crucial matters of doctrine. The irony is that the one who is supposed to guard the Roman Catholic deposit of faith is charged with allegations of introducing confusion, if not heresy.

At least three criticisms of Pope Francis are worth considering. Let us briefly look at them chronologically.

In September 2016, four cardinals (three of whom have recently died) sent to the pope five questions (in Latin, "*dubia*," doubts)[18] concerning the interpretation of key parts of his 2016 postsynodal exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*.[19] In the explanatory note, they give voice to the "grave disorientation and great confusion" that exist in the Catholic community. According to the cardinals, the contrasting interpretations of the papal text

[18] Edward Pentin, "Full Text and Explanatory Notes of the Cardinals' Questions on 'Amoris Laetitia,'" National Catholic Register, November 14, 2016, https://www.ncregister.com/blog/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia.

[19] "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of the Holy Father Francis," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html.

arise from its ambiguity and the apparent contradictions with previous official teaching on the readmission of divorced people to the Eucharist. Although they asked the pope to clear any ambiguity, Francis never responded and perhaps will never do so. Their doubts will remain unanswered.

In July 2017, more than 200 Catholic priests and intellectuals from around the world wrote "a filial correction concerning the propagation of heresies" to the pope,[20] thus elevating the tone of the criticism to the denouncing of doctrinal deviations. Their observations were no longer questions but real corrections made to the pope's teaching. The word "heresy" was evoked in looking at the demise of the traditional teaching on marriage and the sacraments, as they see happening and severely threatening the future credibility of their church.

Finally, at the end of July 2017, Father Thomas Weinandy, a Capuchin priest, a former chief of staff for the United States Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and a current member of the Vatican's International Theological Commission, made public a letter sent to the pope.[21] In it, he argues that "a chronic confusion seems to mark your pontificate obscured by the ambiguity of your words and actions. This fosters within the faithful a growing unease. It compromises their capacity for love, joy and peace." Moreover, Weinandy charges Francis with "demeaning" the importance of doctrine, appointing bishops who "scandalize" believers with dubious "teaching and pastoral practice," giving prelates who object the impression they will be "marginalized or worse" if they speak out, and causing faithful Catholics to "lose confidence in their supreme shepherd." This is hard language coming from a mainstream Roman Catholic theologian who has spent his whole life in the service of his church and the Vatican. These three criticisms are extremely serious and perhaps a tipping point in Catholic circles as far as the uneasiness toward Pope Francis is concerned.

V. *An Interfaith Pope?*

The 2020 encyclical *All Brothers* has been rightly called the "political manifesto" of Pope Francis's pontificate. In fact, there is much politics and

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[20] "Correctio filialis de haeresibus propagatis," July 16, 2017, http://www.correctiofilialis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Correctio-filialis_English_1.pdf.

[21] "Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy Explains His Critical Letter to Pope Francis," *Catholic World Report*, November 1, 2017, https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/11/01/fr-thomas-g-weinandy-explains-his-critical-letter-to-pope-francis/.

much sociology in All Brothers,[22] a very long document (130 pages) that looks more like a book than a letter. Francis wants to plead the cause of universal fraternity and social friendship. To do this, he speaks of borders to be broken down, of waste to be avoided, of human rights that are not sufficiently universal, of unjust globalization, of burdensome pandemics, of migrants to be welcomed, of open societies, of solidarity, of peoples' rights, of local and global exchanges, of the limits of the liberal political vision, of world governance, of political love, of the recognition of the other, of the injustice of any war, and of the abolition of the death penalty.

Pope Francis has disseminated these themes in many speeches and in his other encyclical, *Laudato si'* (2015),[23] on care for the environment. Not surprisingly, he himself is by far the most cited author in the work (about 180 times), which evidences the circular trend of his thinking (the need to be self-strengthening) and the "novelty" of his teaching with respect to the traditional themes of the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

Only in the eighth (last) chapter of the encyclical does the pope deal with the theme of fraternity with religions, and here the document becomes more "theological." This section can be considered an interpretation of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together that Francis himself signed in Abu Dhabi with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in 2019.[24] More than just a reflection, this section is a jumble of quotations (better: self-quotations) that, by overlapping plans and juxtaposing issues, ends up confusing rather than clarifying. Despite this, its basic message is sufficiently clear: we are all brothers as children of the same God. This is Pope Francis's theological truth.

When *All Brothers* talks about God, it does so in general terms that can fit Muslim, Hindu, and other religions' accounts of God or gods, as well as the Masonic reference to the Watchmaker. To further confirm this, *All Brothers* ends with a "Prayer to the Creator" that could be used both in a mosque and in a Masonic temple. Having removed the "stumbling block" of Jesus Christ, everyone can turn to an unspecified divinity to experiment with

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[22] "Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* of the Holy Father Francis: On Fraternity and Social Friendship," Libreria Editrice Vaticane, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

[23] "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for Our Common Home," Libreria Editrice Vaticane, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[24] Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, "A Document on *Human Fraternity* for World Peace and Living Together," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, February 4, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

what it means to be "brothers"—brothers in a divinity made in the image and likeness of humanity, not brothers and sisters on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ who has died and risen for sinners. *All Brothers* genetically modified the biblically understood meaning of fraternity by transferring it to common humanity. In doing so, it has lost the biblical boundaries of the word and replaced them with panreligious traits and contents. Is this a service to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Many people, the vast majority of people, will not read Pope Francis's long encyclical *All Brothers*. They will only hear a few sentences or lines repeated here and there as slogans. However, what everyone will retain lies in the effective opening of the document: "'ALL BROTHERS.'" After quoting this famous greeting of Francis of Assisi, the pope goes on to fill the words with his own meaning: we are all brothers (and sisters). It is a very powerful universalist and inclusive message that communicates the idea that the lines of demarcation between believers and nonbelievers, atheists and agnostics, Muslims and Christians, and Evangelicals and Catholics are all so fluid and relative that they do not undermine the bonds of fraternity that they all share. The French Revolution had already launched "fraternity" as a secular belonging to human citizenship (together with "freedom" and "equality"), but now the pope defines it in a theological sense. We are "brothers"—not because we are citizens, but because we are children of the same God. According to Pope Francis, we are all children of God and therefore brothers and sisters of all those among us.

In *All Brothers*, there is the understandable anxiety aimed at dissolving conflicts, overcoming injustices, and stopping wars. This concern is commendable, even if the analyses and proposals are political and therefore can be legitimately discussed. What is problematic is the theological key chosen to overcome divisions: the declaration of human fraternity in the name of the divine sonship of all humanity. The pope uses a theological category ("all brothers as all children of God") to create the conditions for a better world.

What are the theological implications of such a statement? Here are a few: First, *All Brothers* raises a soteriological question. If we are all brothers because we are all children of God, does this mean that all will be saved? The entire encyclical is pervaded by a powerful universalist inspiration that also includes atheists (n. 281). Religions, in the broad sense, are always presented in a positive sense (nn. 277–79), and there is mention neither of a biblical criticism of religions nor of the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the key to receiving salvation. Everything in the encyclical suggests that everyone, as brothers and sisters, will be saved.

Second, there is a christological issue. Even though Jesus Christ is referred to here and there, his exclusive and offensive claims are kept silent. Francis wisely presents Jesus Christ not as the cornerstone on which the whole building of life stands or collapses but as the stone only for those who recognize him. Above Jesus Christ, according to the encyclical, there is a "God" who is the father of all. We are children of this "God," even without recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus is thus reduced to the rank of the champion of Christians alone, while the other "brothers" are still children of the same "God," regardless of faith in Jesus Christ.

Third, there is an ecclesiological issue. If we are all "brothers," there is a sense in which we are all part of the same church that gathers brothers and sisters together. The boundaries between humanity and church are so ill-defined that the two communities become coincident. Humanity is the church, and the church is humanity. This is in line with the sacramental vision of the Roman Catholic Church, which, according to Vatican II, is understood as a "sign and instrument of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). According to the encyclical, the whole of the human race belongs to the church, not on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ but on the basis of a shared divine sonship and human fraternity.

After the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and up to Vatican II (1962–1965), Roman Catholicism related to the "others" (be they Protestants, other religions, or different cultural and social movements) through its "Roman" claims and called them to return to the fold. The "brothers" were only Roman Catholics in communion with the Roman pope. The others were "pagans," "heretics," and "schismatics," excluded from sacramental grace, which is accessible only through the hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic Church. With Vatican II, it was Rome's "catholicity" that prevailed over its "Roman" centeredness. Protestants have become "separated brothers," other religions have been viewed positively, and people in general have been approached as "anonymous Christians." Now, according to Francis's encyclical, we are "all brothers." The expansion of catholicity has been further stretched. From being excluded from the "Roman" side of Rome, we are now all included by the "catholic" side of Rome.

VI. *A Liquid Pope?*

Since sociologist Zygmunt Bauman coined the expression *Liquid Modernity* (2000), the adjective "liquid" has been applied to almost all phenomena: liquid society, liquid family, and liquid love. In our world, liquidity seems to describe well the vacillating, uncertain, fluid, and volatile features of

contemporary life. Everything is mobile, plastic, and soft; nothing can be put into solid, stable, and lasting casts.

To the already wide range of associations, liquidity has been added as a descriptor for a specific religious tradition—in this case, liquid Roman Catholicism. In an article in *First Things*, George Weigel, a conservative American intellectual, writes about it in a worried tone.[25] For some time, Weigel and other exponents of Roman Catholic traditionalism in the United States have expressed their frustration (to put it mildly) at the massive injection of liquidity into Roman Catholicism by Pope Francis, which includes the uncertain teaching on doctrinal and moral subjects of primary importance, a kind of intolerance toward the preconciliar liturgy, the constant pickaxing of the Roman Catholic institution with repeated criticism of clericalism, the ways the pope acts outside the box and so destabilizes customs, and the welcoming and merciful message at the expense of the doctrinal and moral requirements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. All of these make Francis a "liquid" pope who is liquifying an institution that has made its rocky and immutable structure a distinctive identity trait.

In addition to Francis, Weigel sees the Roman Catholic Church troubled by other sources of liquidity. Weigel's article indicates his alarm at the requests that are emerging from the so-called Synodal Path of the German Catholic Church, including a series of conferences of the Catholic Church in Germany to discuss a range of contemporary theological and organizational questions. Supported by the majority of German bishops, these requests include celibacy becoming optional for clergy (married life being the other option), opening ministries to women (the diaconate first, then one day the priesthood perhaps), and recognition (with ecclesiastical blessing) of homosexual unions. These are just some of the controversial proposals that are about to arrive at the Vatican. There are growing concerns all over the Roman Catholic world about the German Synodal Path. In this regard, Francis's liquidity is just a pale version of the turboliquidity coming out of Catholic Germany.

Weigel and the circles of Catholic traditionalism in the United States witness these processes of liquefaction horrified. For them, Roman Catholicism is a canonically compact religion, sacramentally coherent, institutionally stable, and doctrinally integrated. They have in mind a Roman Catholicism that is more "Roman" than "Catholic," anchored to its

[25] George Weigel, "Liquid Catholicism and the German Synodal Path," *First Things*, February 16, 2022, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/02/liquid-catholicism-and-the-german-synodal-path.

unchangeable dogmas, tied to its consolidated tradition, characterized by fidelity and obedience on the part of the faithful, and centered on its ecclesiastical hierarchies. Liquid Roman Catholicism, for them, is a pathology of catholicity that runs the risk of Protestantizing Rome and dispersing its uniqueness in the bewildering contemporary age.

It is interesting to observe these internal conflict dynamics in Roman Catholicism from the outside. Often, in the past, Roman Catholic apologetics contrasted evangelical fragmentation with Roman Catholic solidity, denigrating the former and exalting the latter. It was not a credible argument in the past, but it is even less so today. Roman Catholicism is as divided internally as any other religious movement of global reach. Moreover, traditional Roman Catholic apologetics contrasted the stability of Rome with the volatility of the Reformation. This argument too was superficial and one-sided, and it is even more so now. Roman Catholicism is undergoing significant transformation processes. The fact that Rome is deemed to be *semper eadem* (always the same) needs to be seen in light of its ongoing updating and development.

The key elements to come to terms with in this issue are twofold. First, one needs to consider the dual nature of Roman Catholicism, which is, at the same time, "catholic" (liquid) and "Roman" (solid). Its genius has always been to combine the two faces in order to make them coexist and reinforce each other. Today, it is its liquidity that seems to be prevalent, but its solidity will not fail, as Roman Catholicism comprises both. The second key element is the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which fostered change.[26] Vatican II has given Roman Catholicism such an injection of liquidity that today it is impacting the solid structures of Rome as never before. Will the long-term outcomes of Vatican II be able to liquefy them completely? Unlikely.

Rome will remain liquid and solid, perhaps in a different arrangement than it combines them today, but it is still "catholic" and, at the same time, "Roman." Weigel and other Roman Catholic traditionalists dream of a return to a more "Roman" Catholicism, but have they not yet understood that their religion is also increasingly "catholic" at the same time?

[26] As Shaun Blanchard has reminded us in a recent article; see Shaun Blanchard, "The Reform Was Real: Continuity and Change at Vatican II," *Commonweal* 149.3 (March 14, 2022): 20–26.

VII. *A More "Catholic" Than "Roman" Pope*

After celebrating the 500 years of the Protestant Reformation, with its call to the church to submit to the authority of Scripture and its recovery of the good news that we are saved by Christ alone through faith alone, it is appropriate to ask whether Rome is still grappling with the same issues that gave rise to it. Luther took issue with the pope and his theology and practice of dispensing God's pardon through indulgences. Luther's standard was the biblical gospel, and he challenged the Catholic Church to embrace afresh the gospel. Rome responded by absorbing some of Luther's concerns about grace and faith within the sacramental system largely shaped around Roman elements and within its synergistic theology significantly marked by Catholic components, thus reinforcing the overall Roman Catholic synthesis rather than reforming it according to the word of God.

Ever since, the Roman Catholic system has been swinging and bending one way or another to accommodate either progressive or traditional trends, either reiterating Roman emphases or introducing Catholic ones and then rebalancing the whole. However, the church was not reformed because it did not recognize the external and supreme authority of Scripture and the gospel of salvation by faith alone. As it stands, it will never be renewed according to the word of God. It will certainly accommodate "Catholic" movements like the Charismatic renewal and "Roman" movements like the Marian groups and then refix the overall synthesis. It will even accommodate an emphasis on biblical literacy while commending unbiblical devotions and beliefs: both–and, Roman and Catholic!

Roman Catholicism is what it is because it inherently combines the "Roman" element with the "catholic" one. Both are essential components of the synthesis offered by the Roman Catholic system. The genius of Roman Catholicism is its being at the same time Roman and catholic, one *and* the other, one never *at the expense of* the other.

It is "Roman" in the sense that it is organically attached to the city and the Church of Rome and, by extension, to the institutions, canon laws, dogmas, hierarchy, and political outlook associated with it. Much of this derives from a complex history marked by an imperial ideology.

It is "catholic" in the sense of being inclusive, global, embracing, and open to different movements, trends, and trajectories. The Roman elements provide stability and continuity, while the Catholic element fosters development and renewal. Roman Catholicism is able to hold the tension deriving from its dual identity and maintain it at a manageable balance.

What is happening with Pope Francis is to be understood against the background of the tensions between the Roman and Catholic poles within Roman Catholicism. Francis is strongly pushing Rome's "catholic" agenda, embracing all, affirming all, expanding the boundaries of the Church, and expanding its traditional boundaries.

Some traditionalist circles are reacting strongly because they see the danger of losing the Roman elements represented by the well-established teachings and practices of the church. They see the Catholic swallowing the Roman. They see the risk of the Catholic taking precedence over the Roman and therefore severing the dynamic link that has characterized Roman Catholicism for centuries. Whereas with the previous pope (Benedict XVI), the overall balance was more in favor of the Roman than the Catholic, with Francis the Roman Catholic pendulum is swinging toward the catholicity of Rome. Francis's critics believe that he has gone too far and want the pendulum to reverse toward more reassuring Roman elements.

What is happening now with the criticism of Pope Francis is business as usual in the Roman Catholic Church: at times, the pendulum swings one way before readdressing the overall balance. It could be argued that the Second Vatican Council was a great push toward the Catholic element, and the reigns of John Paul II and Benedict XVI were subsequent attempts to moderate it in terms of reinforcing the Roman elements. With Francis, the Catholic is again winning the day. These tensions will continue as long as Roman Catholicism exists. They are inner movements within the system. Pope Francis is the living embodiment of this tension.

Nothing is going to break abruptly, and more importantly, no biblical reformation is possible under these conditions. Roman Catholicism will be stretched and go through a stress test but will be able to handle both Francis's catholicity and his critics' insistence on the Roman component. The synthesis will be expanded, but the gospel will not be allowed to change Rome. This is why the Reformation is not over.

Redeeming Mary: The Historical Mary and Mary in the Tradition

RACHEL CIANO

Abstract

The Reformed tradition has struggled to engage sufficiently with the history and theology of Mary, the mother of Jesus, mainly consigning her to the Roman Catholic tradition. Reformed scholarship must redeem Mary's contribution to the church by retrieving her biblical and historical narrative to address this deficit. Comparing the Mary of the historical record of the New Testament with the portrayal of her that developed into an inflated Marian vision in subsequent centuries reveals marked differences between them. Mary's historical and biblical story depicts her as a picture of faith, obedience, and God's grace shown to a woman needing redemption. This retrieval can contribute to apologetics and mission in contexts where Mary sits at the center of spiritual life.

Keywords

Mary, Theotokos*, Mariology, Roman Catholicism, apologetics, mission*

Since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, scholars and leaders in the Reformed tradition have not interacted sufficiently with a theological vision of Mary as outlined in the New Testament. The Reformed tradition has viewed Mary's depiction, veneration, and spiritual practices associated

with her in the Roman Catholic tradition as overinflated and not representative of her historical depiction. However, while recognizing that her portrayal in the New Testament does not accord with the interpretation of Mary and the associated theology that developed, little has been done to retrieve a biblical vision of her narrative. Reformed scholarship appears to engage less with Mary than do the writers of the New Testament. This article will offer a comparison between Mary as represented in the historical record of the New Testament and the narrative that has developed about her throughout history, which resulted in an inflated view of the historical Mary. As the differences between the historical view of Mary and the exaggerated persona that developed subsequently are drawn out, crucial aspects of her narrative will be highlighted. She is a picture of faith in God's promises, obedience to God's word, and reception of God's grace. In sum, she was a woman in need of God's redemption. In this way, she is a model disciple and an everyday believer. Reexamining and redeeming her narrative contribute to apologetics and mission, especially in contexts where Mary is prominent in spiritual practices and faith.[1]

There have been some attempts to retrieve Mary in the broad Reformed tradition. Most recently, Arnold Huijgen has published a monograph on Mary in Dutch and offers a synopsis of the book in English in a recent article.[2] However, even Huijgen admits that "as a Reformed theologian, reflection on the theological position of Mary, let alone a full-blown Mariology, was previously not on my radar."[3] He argues that "Mary deserves a larger place in Reformed theology than she has hitherto had," situating his work in the context of Scripture and tradition, particularly the magisterial Reformers and, notably, Martin Luther.[4] Huijgen's scriptural examination is broadly thematic, so a more comprehensive account of Mary's narrative across the four Gospels is offered here. Two decades ago, Protestant scholars examined Mary's identity and what she teaches us about God and contemporary life in a collection of essays. These chapters centered on the themes of "encountering Mary," observing her from the Gospels, "living Mary," exploring her contemporary application, and "bearing Mary," addressing

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[1] This article adapts and develops Rachel Ciano, "Mary, the Mother of Jesus," in Rachel Ciano and Ian Maddock, *10 Dead Gals You Should Know* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2023), 15–38. It also borrows from a paper presented on similar themes: Rachel Ciano, "Redeeming Mary: Mary in History and Mission" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rome Scholars and Leaders Network, Rome, June 13, 2023), 1–20.

[2] Arnold Huijgen, *Maria: Icoon van genade* (Utrecht: Kok, 2021); Arnold Huijgen, "Mary: Icon of Grace," *Verbum Christi* 10.1 (2023): 2–16.

[3] Huijgen, "Mary," 2.

[4] Ibid.

how Reformed scholars and artists have engaged with her story.[5] The book's aim is stated at the outset: "The time has come for Protestants to join in the blessing of Mary" because "so fearful have we been of what seems to us excessive attention to Mary in Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions that Mary is virtually absent among us."[6] However, this work did not produce the desired effect, and Mary continues to be largely ignored in Reformed scholarship. The presence of several recent primers on Mary, including an evangelical understanding of her and responses to her depiction within Roman Catholicism, demonstrate that, for many within the Reformed tradition, she is still largely unfamiliar.[7] Another study is currently being conducted into evangelical interpretations of Mary.[8] However, these examples of research and examination are exceptions to the relative silence toward the history and theology of Mary in the Reformed tradition.

I. *The Historical Mary: Mary Receiving Redemption in the New Testament*

An examination of Mary in each Gospel begins to redeem her narrative. Her record here is not extensive; instead, the Gospels spotlight her son, the Son of God. This focus on Jesus accords with Mary's depiction as a disciple of her son; she desires the attention to be on him, not herself. Mary is not obscured or absent in the Gospel narratives, but neither is she the centerpiece. Mary appears in each of the four Gospels and in one brief mention in Acts. Among the Gospels, Matthew and Luke provide the most detail of Mary's life, especially as they both contain extended infancy narratives.

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[5] Beverly R. Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, eds., *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[6] Beverly R. Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, "Introduction," in ibid., 1.

[7] For example, Leonardo De Chirico, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Mary: Mother of God?* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2017). This popular-level book is aimed at evangelicals who have little to no prior understanding of Mary or Mariology, especially the development in the Roman Catholic tradition. Similarly, Gregg Allison sets out Roman Catholic doctrine and practice in an accessible format; see Gregg Allison, *40 Questions about Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021). Chapter 32, "How Does Catholicism Understand the Biblical Teaching about Mary?" and chapter 33, "What Are the Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption of Mary?" demonstrate that these issues need addressing in evangelical contexts, and even in Roman Catholic contexts, given the book's intended audience as stated in the introduction. Ibid., 9–10. This work distils Allison's more technical, earlier work. Gregg Allison, *Roman Catholic Doctrine and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

[8] See evangelical theologian Lauren Moore's doctoral work on "Marian Apparitions and the Catholic Church: A Phenomenological Study of Their Mutual Influence," due for completion May 2024 through the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and the Union School of Theology, Wales.

However, Mary is also present in Mark and John, albeit in the context of Jesus's adult ministry. We can observe Mary's story through Jesus's life, particularly his birth and early years, as she becomes a disciple of her son, and in her presence at the cross and the empty tomb. In this way, she is a witness to and an integral part of Jesus's entire earthly life: his life *in utero*, birth, childhood, adolescence, adult ministry, death, and resurrection.

Matthew offers a vision of Mary as a woman who received God's grace and kindness despite social and religious stigmas. Matthew opens with the remarkable genealogy (*genesis*) of Jesus (Matt 1:1–17). This genealogy culminates in the momentous birth of Jesus and the beginning of the new era in which the Son of God enters human time and space. However, this family tree is marked by scandal. Matthew does not gloss over or omit the notorious people in the list but instead places them at the opening. The inclusion of women in the genealogy is remarkable enough; the presence of Gentile women, however, adds to the shocking nature of this list, pointing to God's intention to include Gentiles in salvation, and their status as social outcasts deemed dishonororable in their cultural and historical contexts further adds to this surprise. Jesus's earthly forebears included Tamar, who had sexual intercourse with her father-in-law, Rahab, renowned as a prostitute in her town of Jericho, and Ruth, the foreign Moabitess. Of note is Bathsheba, who is referred to only as another man's wife; the responsibility for the scandal falls more on David, yet Bathsheba bore the disgrace and horrific aftermath in the death of her husband and child and is here unnamed. Women with social and religious stigmas are clearly on display in Jesus's lineage, and Mary is the final woman in Jesus's extraordinary genealogy.

Mary did not deserve either the social shame or the unique position of her pregnancy with Jesus. Matthew indicates the potential disgrace of a child out of wedlock in Joseph's reaction to Mary's pregnancy: "Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to *public disgrace*, he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Matt 1:19 2011 NIV, emphasis added). Beyond the social stigma, Mary's pregnancy was also a potentially dangerous situation for her (cf. Deut 22:23). This stigma and possible danger were not from Mary's insufficiency; however, neither was she deserving of the unique position in which God placed her. Mary was an ordinary Jewish girl inhabiting the Roman Empire in the first century. Matthew does not highlight any of Mary's personal qualities that make her fit for this task; instead, God's grace and kindness toward her bring her into the salvation narrative.

Luke is the most comprehensive of the Gospels in terms of its depiction of Mary; this is unsurprising, given Luke's extended infancy narrative and its

emphasis on people regarded as inconsequential in first-century Roman society. These lowly people included women, and it is noteworthy that the Magnificat features the reversal of situations for those in a "humble estate" and those who are "mighty," "rich," and "proud" (Luke 1:46–55). In Mary's surging poetic praise here, she refers to God as her Savior, pointing to the fact that she is a person in need of redemption (Luke 1:46). In Luke's two-volume narrative (Luke-Acts), Mary is named thirteen times, and she is referred to a further three times. Mary is depicted in Luke as an active rather than passive agent; Joseph usually stands in relation to Mary, not Mary to Joseph. For example, Joseph was Mary's fiancé, he accompanied her to Bethlehem, and he is named after Mary in Jesus's birth scene (Luke 2:5, 16). Simeon, though he blessed both Mary and Joseph, addressed Mary in his prophecy about Jesus (Luke 2:33–34). Although both Mary and Joseph find Jesus at the temple, it is Mary who speaks to Jesus on behalf of both of them (Luke 2:48). Thus, in Luke, Mary features in the narrative more than in other Gospels, and when she is mentioned, she is active, not passive.

In Luke, Mary is characterized and identified as "favored" and "blessed." The angel Gabriel told Mary twice that she was "favored" (Luke 1:28, 30). Elizabeth proclaimed twice that Mary was "blessed" (Luke 1:42, 45). Mary declares herself "blessed" in the Magnificat (Luke 1:48). Interestingly, when a woman in a crowd cried out to Jesus and called his mother "blessed" to have birthed and raised him (Luke 11:27), Jesus reshaped her understanding of blessedness and instead identified the "blessed" as "those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). In Jesus's reconfiguration of a "blessed" person, he stressed the blessedness that comes from listening to and heeding God's words rather than allegiances to his earthly family. This will become the dominant picture of blessedness in Luke's Gospel, where the "blessed" circle widened to include Jesus's spiritual family.

While the "blessed" group are those in Jesus's spiritual rather than earthly family, this did not exclude but instead included Mary. She was part of the early band of disciples who listened to and obeyed God's words, as demonstrated in her earliest recorded words in Luke. In response to Gabriel's announcement that she would conceive and give birth to a son, whom she was to name Jesus (Luke 1:30–33), Mary understandably asked, "How will this be … since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). Gabriel answered Mary that it would be through the Holy Spirit that this would take place, "For no word from God will ever fail" (Luke 1:35–37). This pronouncement elicited Mary's response: "I am the Lord's servant … may your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Thus, Mary's blessedness and favored status came from her believing and responding in faith to God's word, making her the

first person to hear and respond in faith to the gospel message of Jesus as Lord and Savior (cf. Luke 1:31–32). Mary became part of the community of people who listened and lived according to God's word, and thus God includes her in his spiritual family.

In Luke, Mary transitions from being Jesus's earthly mother, especially before his adulthood, to being his disciple. She is integral to his growth and development; Luke twice records that Jesus grew both physically and in wisdom, both times immediately after mentioning Mary (Luke 2:39–40, 51–52). After Jesus "grew and became strong" (Luke 2:40), Mary transitions to being cast as an "accessible exemplar" who is just like other believers, demonstrating the life of faith of all disciples of Jesus.[9] She is not merely an example for women; instead, she exemplifies faith for all those in the kingdom of God. Twice Luke records that Mary pondered the works of God and treasured pronouncements about Jesus. These occurrences act as bookends around the narrative of Jesus's childhood (Luke 2:19, 51). Mary is also embedded in the early church. The New Testament's last mention of Mary situates her in the early band of praying disciples in Jerusalem following Jesus's resurrection (Acts 1:14). Luke's portrait of Mary emphasizes her as an everyday disciple whose blessedness comes from meditating upon, heeding, and treasuring within her heart the words of God within his community.

While Luke portrays Mary positively as a model disciple, Mark's Gospel depicts her differently. In Mark, Mary does not always fully comprehend God's purposes. Sometimes she perceives, and at other times, she misses the point; sometimes she listens, and at other times, she is demanding and interfering (e.g., Mark 3:21). However, far from failing to provide a paradigm for Christian discipleship, she instead provides a picture of a disciple from an alternate angle, one who is *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time justified and a sinner. When Mary asked for Jesus to align himself with his earthly family, Jesus redefined family as those who do God's will (Mark 3:31–34; cf. 3:21). At the close of Mark's Gospel, Mary is represented as fearful, trembling, and bewildered, along with the other women who had assembled at Jesus's tomb to anoint his body (Mark 16:1–8). The ending of Mark has prompted much scholarly debate over the years. However, if verse 8 is taken as the final verse of the earliest manuscripts, then the abrupt finish may raise in the reader a question regarding discipleship: "How will you, the reader, respond to the scene of the empty tomb?" In this

[9] The phrase "accessible exemplar" is borrowed from Joel Green; see Joel Green, "Blessed Is She Who Believed: Mary, Curious Exemplar in Luke's Narrative," in *Blessed One*, ed. Gaventa and Rigby, 10.

interpretation, Mary again encourages faith, albeit within a realistic, frail human framework. The fear and flight depicted in Mary and the other women (Mark 16:8) is an authentic picture of discipleship, which is not devoid of distress and even, on occasion, doubt and confusion.

In John, Mary also demonstrates discipleship, particularly in two critical narratives near the beginning and end of Jesus's ministry. At the wedding at Cana, Mary's statement to Jesus, "They have no more wine" (John 2:3), is simple enough. Still, it implies that Mary fully expects Jesus to do something about the situation. Jesus's response, "Why do you involve me? … My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4), is replete with the signification of his "hour" at the cross. Having instructed Jesus, Mary changes her posture to that of a disciple as she invites the waiters to heed his words: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). After the water is turned into wine, the scene ends with a declaration that Jesus's first sign here was a revelation of his glory, which leads to the disciples putting their trust in him (John 2:11). Mary is named soon after as among the early band of people traveling with Jesus (John 2:12). In this narrative, Mary moves from instructing and trying to influence Jesus to submitting to his timing (his "hour") and encouraging others to listen to him. In this way, Mary again models discipleship. Near the end of John's Gospel, Mary continues to follow Jesus closely as one of his disciples and remains to the end at the cross (John 19:25). While hanging there, Jesus bequeaths her a son and a home in the person of John, demonstrating again God's grace and kindness toward her (John 19:25–27). John's narrative of Mary reinforces the picture of her as a disciple; she learns the posture of a disciple, encourages others to listen to Jesus, is with Jesus in his early group of followers, and remains to the last at the cross. Across the four Gospels, Mary is pictured as a woman of faith and obedience, a recipient of God's grace who is found in the early community of Jesus's followers. How she was cast in subsequent centuries is vastly different from this historical picture.

II. *Mary in the Tradition: Mary Accomplishing Redemption Alongside Her Son*

In the course of history, Mary's narrative was constructed into a vastly different Marian vision after the close of the New Testament. After Mary's last-named appearance in the Bible (Acts 1:14), the interpretation of Mary moved from a view of her as a picture of faith in God's promises, obedience to God's word, and reception of God's grace to one of her as a *conduit* of God's grace, made possible *through* her faith and obedience. The historical

account in the New Testament is at odds with later Marian piety and devotion, where Mary is cast as "the Mother of the Church," who "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Savior's work," which led to titles such as "Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix" being attributed to her without her being the source of salvation herself.[10] Mary's faith became the reason she was able to cooperate with God in bringing salvation to the world alongside her son, and Mary's consent to the Incarnation was pivotal to cooperating with God's work of redemption.[11] This is decidedly different from the New Testament depiction of Mary as an everyday disciple among many, *simul iustus et peccator*. This section will examine how Mary's story developed in the subsequent centuries after the Gospel accounts were written. It will focus on what contributed to, by Reformed standards, an increasingly inflated Marian vision, particularly in the Western church tradition from the early church onwards as it developed into the Roman Catholic Church.

1. *The Contemporary Marian Vision: Mary as* Co-Redemptrix *in the Roman Catholic Church*

In the contemporary Roman Catholic Church, Mary possesses a unique position in bringing salvation to humankind. Some Catholics maintain that Mary is *co-redemptrix* because she participates alongside Jesus in the work of redemption, despite a more recent effort by the papacy to distance Mary from such a description. The Second Vatican Council strongly implied the Marian title, *co-redemptrix*.[12] The Roman Catholic Church states, "Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. 'This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death.'"[13] The fifth Marian dogma of Mary as *co-redemptrix* is not yet officially recognized. However, formal pronouncement or not, this notion of *co-redemptrix* is widely practiced and believed in the Roman Catholic

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[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*; Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 963–975, esp. 968–70. See the section "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church" at "Catechism of the Catholic Church," The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

[11] "By pronouncing her 'fiat' at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish" (*CCC* 973).

[12] Mark Miravalle, "The Council and Co-Redemptrix," Mother of all Peoples, 2003, https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/amp/the-council-and-co-redemptrix.

[13] *CCC* 964; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 57. "*Lumen Gentium*" ("The Light of the Nations"), Promulgated by Pope Paul VI (1964), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

Church, from the papacy to the laity, indicating that even if not officially recognized as a promulgated doctrine, the idea is embedded in popular-level practices, which are important elements in developing Roman Catholic dogmas. Furthermore, her other attributes contribute to this understanding of Mary as *co-redemptrix*.

Marian titles and dogmas illustrate her hyperveneration. The Second Council of Nicea (787 CE) determined that saints should be venerated (*dulia*), while Mary should be hypervenerated (*hyperdulia*).[14] In Roman Catholic theology, supreme worship and adoration (*latria*) are reserved only for the Trinitarian Godhead. Nevertheless, even though supreme worship is reserved for God alone, the titles and Marian dogmas demonstrate her hyperveneration, which is sometimes difficult to distinguish from worship. Along with *co-redemptrix*, Vatican II titled Mary *mediatrix* because she mediates God's grace, having cooperated in accomplishing salvation. Mary's eminence is also evident in other titles, including Queen of the Universe, Mother of the Church, and Advocate, because she can hear prayers and advocate for intercession with her son, given her assumption and close proximity to him.[15] The Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* states that, "The Blessed Virgin is invoked *by* the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix."[16] The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (promulgated 1854) and the Dogma of the Assumption (promulgated 1950) highlight that she originated and remained without sin, demonstrated in her perpetual virginity; her sinlessness in conception and life meant death could not hold her. [17] These Marian dogmas and titles provide evidence of a different Marian identity than that provided in the Gospel accounts.

Not only Mary's titles and dogmas, but Marian piety and prayers, which were developed in the church in the early centuries, point to her elevated status. Evidence from the late third century suggests that Christians in

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[14] De Chirico, *Mary*, 33.

[15] These titles are seen, for example, in *Lumen Gentium*, 59–62.

[16] *Lumen Gentium*, 62 (emphasis added). It is not the case that Mary is invoked *in* the Roman Catholic Church, but rather *by* the Church, which is an important distinction.

[17] The four Marian dogmas promulgated thus far are Mary as "Mother of God" (*theotokos*); Mary as "Ever Virgin" referring to her perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Jesus; Mary's "Immaculate Conception," meaning Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin, and Mary's "Assumption," where she was taken up, or assumed, to heaven at the end of her earthly life. Within the Roman Catholic Church, a dogma is an unchanging and binding truth revealed by God and is a requisite belief of a communicant, faithful Catholic. See "*Munificentissimus Deus*: Defining the Dogma of the Assumption," The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XI (1950), https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html.

Egypt prayed to Mary and asked for her intercession.[18] In the patristic period, Gregory of Nazianzus recorded a Marian prayer in the fourth century.[19] Gregory of Nyssa recorded the earliest known apparition in the third century.[20] The fourth-century *Six Books Apocryphon* demonstrates a significant increase in Marian veneration and is evidence that "full bloom" Marian piety already existed by then.[21] The *Apocryphon* records Marian devotional practices and references to the sun and moon worshiping Mary, Mary pleading to Jesus for mercy on behalf of the dead, her performance of miracles, and her intercession for healing.[22] Fourth-century evidence exists of annual commemorations of Mary, seemingly connected to her assumption, which included bread offerings in her honor.[23] Shrines to Mary were erected, and feast days were held from the late fourth or at least the early fifth century.[24] Therefore, there is strong evidence of Marian devotional practices, piety, and prayers in the church before the fifth century.

Prayers to Mary as a crucial devotional practice indicate her important position in Roman Catholic spirituality. She is approached in prayer because of her proximity to her son; as his mother, Mary is uniquely positioned to have the ear of Jesus and can intercede on the faithful's behalf. Mary is the maternal, more approachable figure; despite Jesus's ascension, he is often regarded as distant, while Mary is closer to people. Regarding specific prayers addressed to Mary, two will be mentioned here. The Rosary is an "epitome of the whole Gospel," and Mary is central to its practice.[25] The "Hail Mary" prayers, which address her and mention the "crowning" she receives upon the completion of every Rosary, make the Rosary one of the most essential spiritual practices for Roman Catholics.[26] The popularly used *Regina Caeli* ("Queen of Heaven") prayer demonstrates her intercessory role in praying to God for people, her merit that enabled her to bear Jesus, and her role in granting everlasting life. Prayers addressed to Mary indicate her essential role in the spiritual lives of the Catholic faithful.

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[18] The papyrus *Sub tuum Praesidium* records this prayer: "We take refuge beneath the protection of your compassion, Theotokos. Do not disregard our prayers in troubling times, but deliver us from danger, O only pure and blessed one." Stephen Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 69.

[19] Ibid., 174.

[20] Gregory recorded it in 380 CE in his biography of Gregory the Wonderworker; ibid., 175.

[21] Ibid., 130–33.

[22] Ibid., 136–45.

[23] Ibid., 145–52.

[24] Ibid., 17–18.

[25] *CCC* 971.

[26] According to the Roman Catholic Church, Mary has revealed to various people that for each completed "Hail Mary," she is given a rose, and upon a completed Rosary, she is given "a crown of roses," which is what "Rosary" means. De Chirico, *Mary*, 55.

Devotional practices linked to specific places also indicate Mary's exalted position. Worldwide, thousands of church buildings are dedicated to Mary. One of the oldest and most preeminent is Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which demonstrates Marian devotion. Pope Francis dedicated his papacy and the world to Mary at this church, laying flowers at the feet of a statue of Mary and praying to her for her protection of Rome on the day after he was elected pontiff.[27] Shrines dedicated to Mary are found in everyday places and spaces, for example, at the side of the road, in gardens, schools, hospitals, and houses; the many Marian shrines indicate her accessibility and nearness. Places of Marian apparitions have become pilgrimage sites and form an essential part of Marian devotion. The liturgical calendar, which dedicates to her feast days and the month of May, also illustrates Marian devotion.[28] All these devotional practices demonstrate Mary's preeminent place in the spiritual lives of those devoted to her adoration.

2. *Early Marian Documents and Devotion: Praise for the Co-Redemptrix*

The early church recognized the New Testament books as the reliable, authoritative record of the events of Jesus's life, including Mary's narrative. However, several noncanonical works purport to provide further details, particularly regarding the infancy narratives, by expanding on Jesus's and Mary's works and words. Many of these works situate Mary instead of Jesus at the center of the narrative. In particular, her inherent holiness and worthiness uniquely position her to play a pivotal role in redemption. Rather than the New Testament's portrait of Mary as a disciple in the community of faith, these texts portray Mary as a central character who brings salvation alongside her son. For example, the *Protoevangelium of James* (ca. late second century CE) is the first noncanonical narrative of Mary's life. The existence and content of this text indicate that it is both the cause and the evidence of second-century Marian devotion, and "although it affords no evidence of any cult, the *Protoevangelium* attests to a surprisingly advanced piety centered on Mary's exceptional purity and holiness already by the later second century."[29] The *Protoevangelium* emphasizes Mary's ongoing virginity; indeed,

[27] "Pope Entrusts World to Immaculate Heart of Mary," Catholic News Agency, October 13, 2013, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/28237/pope-entrusts-world-to-immaculate-heart-of-mary. Upon his election on March 13, 2013, Pope Francis indicated his plans for prayer to Mary for the following day; see "Transcript: Pope Francis' First Speech as Pontiff," National Public Radio, March 13, 2013, https://www.npr.org/2013/03/13/174224173/transcript-pope-francis-first-speech-as-pontiff.

[28] For further details on Marian devotional practices, see DeChirico, *Mary*, 60–62.

[29] Shoemaker, *Mary*, 22, 47–63.

it contains a story of the midwife who confirmed Mary's virginity after birthing Jesus. While these documents were composed too late to be canonical, they nevertheless gained influence and are evidence of early Marian piety. Marian devotion from the early centuries onwards emphasized Mary's holiness and purity and particularly concentrated on her perpetual virginity.

The inextricable link between Mary's piety and her virginity to emphasize her "purity" is evidenced in other early noncanonical writings. In addition to the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*—dated from the second to the fourth century but most likely from the early-to-mid-second century—relates the tradition of Mary's virginity *in partu*—that is, during birth, her hymen remained intact.[30] The *Odes to Solomon*, a text of early Christian hymns from around the mid-second century, contains high praise for Mary and maintains that Mary retained her virginity in both the conception of Jesus and his birth. It also added the idea that Mary birthed Jesus without pain, which would become an essential theme in Marian devotion.[31] The *Book of Mary's Repose*, a third-century, Gnostic-flavored text, is the earliest known account of Mary's dormition and assumption—that is, the end of her life ("falling asleep") and her bodily assumption to heaven.[32] Mary's purity and protection from sin—highlighted in her perpetual virginity—are woven into the dormition and assumption, for death could not hold her, and her assumption confirmed her sinlessness.[33] Church councils would later confirm this connection between Mary's virginity and sinlessness. At the Council of Constantinople (533 CE), Mary was referred to as the *Aeiparthenos* ("the Ever-Virgin"). In sum, the Roman Catholic Church affirms not only Mary's virginity *ante partum* ("before birth"), as stated in the New Testament, but also her virginity *post partum*, and by a miraculous work of God, *in partu*. The perpetual virginity of Mary is one significant way that the Marian vision of the Roman Catholic Church is at odds with the historical record of the New Testament.

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[30] Ibid., 43. For further details on the *Ascension of Isaiah*, see the following critical edition of the text and the extensive commentary, Paulo Bettiolo, A. Giambelluca Kossova, Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Norelli, and Lorenzo Perrone, eds. and trans., *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus*, CCSA7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995); Enrico Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae: Commentarius*, CCSA 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

[31] Shoemaker, *Mary*, 44.

[32] The *Book of Mary's Repose* survived only in the Ethiopian language, Ge'ez, but also exists in fragments in Aramaic and Old Georgian. However, early and medieval Christian writings allude to its content. Ibid., 101–4.

[33] *CCC*, quoting *Lumen Gentium* and echoing *Munificentissimus Deus*, states, "'Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death." *CCC* 966; *Lumen Gentium* 59; *Munificentissimus Deus* 40.

Early church fathers contributed to the theological development of Marian devotion. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–107 CE) considered Mary's virginity in the conception and birth of Jesus a cornerstone of faith, and he asserted as much in his letters in language similar to creedal statements (e.g., Ignatius, *Eph*. 19:2).[34] Justin Martyr (ca. 100–165 CE) and, later, Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202 CE) developed a theology of Mary's virginity, particularly connecting it to Mary being a second Eve whose obedience and chastity reversed Eve's disobedience and sin.[35] Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* elevated Mary's status by identifying her obedient response at the annunciation as a turning point in salvation history; Mary's active participation in God's plan countered Eve's disobedience, opening the way for the destruction of sin and death.[36] Irenaeus's theory of recapitulation asserted this theme: as Christ is the new Adam, so Mary is the new Eve. However, Irenaeus developed this idea more explicitly, so Mary became the "cause of salvation" who "rescues" humanity from sin and death and whose obedience makes the salvation of God's creation possible.[37] Among Clement of Alexandria's (ca. 150–215 CE) surviving works, the sole reference to Mary states Mary's virginity *in partu*.[38] Origen (ca. 184–253 CE) seemed to give contradictory pronouncements about Mary's virginity in partu but did maintain that she never had sexual relations with Joseph; as Jesus modeled celibacy for men, so Mary did for women.[39] Origen's idea of Jesus and Mary being ideal models of celibacy had enormous repercussions for the church, and celibacy came to be viewed as the ideal, more spiritual, state. Tertullian was an exception among the early Church Fathers; he adopted a restrained Eve–Mary typology, but otherwise, he asserted a picture of Mary more in keeping with the New Testament.[40] Tertullian maintained that Mary did not remain a virgin *in partu* or *post partum*; rather, she married Joseph and had children with him.[41] He went further and placed Mary in the category of unbelievers, following Jesus's definition of "family" in Mark 3:32–35 and Luke 11:27–28.[42] The development of Marian theology, particularly regarding Mary as

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[34] Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, trans. Frank Clarke (London: SCM, 1964), 19, 29–30; Shoemaker, *Mary*, 44.

[35] Shoemaker, *Mary*, 44.

[36] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100.4–5; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 45.

[37] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 46.

[38] Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.16; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 67.

[39] Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Luke* 14; *Commentary on Matthew* 25; *Homilies on Luke* 7; see. Shoemaker, *Mary*, 67.

[40] For example, Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 7, 17, 20; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 66.

[41] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 23.2; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 66.

[42] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 7.13; see Shoemaker, *Mary*, 66.

the new Eve as connected to her virginity, was an extrabiblical legacy that some of the church fathers bequeathed the church.

Jerome's work on the Vulgate laid the groundwork for a theological understanding of the intersection of Mary and God's grace, particularly the notion that she possesses and is a conduit of God's grace. In 382 CE, at the request of Damasus, bishop of Rome, Jerome commenced work on a unified Latin translation of the Bible. Jerome was aware of the seriousness of the task, writing to Damasus in 383 CE that revising the old Latin version was a task "both perilous and presumptuous" and arguing that while the Latin version was "marked by discrepancies," he wanted to "go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators.... We must go back to the fountainhead."[43] Despite Jerome's conscientious effort to produce a trustworthy Latin translation based on the original sources, a translation choice about Mary did not adequately reflect the Greek and had associated theological repercussions. Luke describes Mary as "highly favored" (*kecharitōmenē*, Luke 1:28); Jerome, however translated the word as *gratia plenia*, that is, "full of grace," suggesting that grace is a substance that could fill Mary. This view of grace accords with the notion that Mary bore and birthed Jesus on account of her own merit as an obedient second Eve rather than the undeserved favor of God, who included her in salvation history as the mother of Jesus. Among other humanists, Erasmus in the sixteenth century demonstrated that *kecharitōmenē* meant "favored one" rather than "full of grace."[44] However, this understanding of Mary as "full of grace" was already theologically embedded in the Roman Catholic Church, where the Latin Vulgate remains the official translation. The locus of God's grace in the Roman Catholic system was not the grace bestowed on Mary, as proclaimed in the New Testament, but rather resided in Mary by virtue of her unique obedience, providing another example of how Mary's depiction in the course of history was not in accord with the vision of her in the Scriptures.

The Trinitarian and christological controversies of the early centuries led to statements about Mary's role as "God-bearer" or "Mother of God." In the face of various heretical movements, the church sought to clarify and articulate the nature and relationship between members of the Godhead, as well as the divine and human nature of God the Son. The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) sought to address Arianism and its teaching that Jesus was not

[43] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6: *St Jerome: Letters and Select Works* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 487.

[44] See Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 133.

coeternal; this is particularly evident in the Nicene Creed's statement of Jesus's complete divinity and humanity. These christological debates did not end at Nicaea but continued across the Roman Empire, and Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, preached in late 428 CE that Mary should not be titled *Theotokos*. Nevertheless, she received this title at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, which Nestorius refused to attend. *Theotokos* is best understood as "the one who gave birth to the one who is God" and declared the divinity of Christ and the unity of his person, in opposition to Nestorius's division of his two natures.[45] While Marian devotion and piety were already established before the Council of Ephesus, what was a statement about Christ's divinity (*theotokos*) was soon accosted as a statement about Mary. This is evident in the council's immediate aftermath, when Pope Sixtus III began building Santa Maria Maggiore in Mary's honor to celebrate her proclamation as *Theotokos*.[46] Thus, early theological controversies and the church's response helped cement and articulate Marian piety.

III. *Redeeming Mary: Her Narrative as a Picture of Faith, Obedience, and God's Grace*

There are marked differences between the Mary of the reliable historical record of the New Testament and the elevated persona that developed over the following centuries in noncanonical texts, early church fathers, and theological controversies. The Scriptures testify to Mary as a woman of faith in God's promises, obedience to God's word, and a person who received the grace of God, neither through her personal merit nor because of any particular deficit. She bore witness to her son's development *in utero*, birth, life, death, and resurrection, and she was one of his early followers. As the story of a disciple and an everyday believer, hers is a powerful picture of what it means for millions of others across the centuries who count themselves as followers of her son. In this way, redeeming Mary's narrative allows those in the Reformed tradition to tell a better story of her life and witness than the one that led to her hyperveneration. Reexamining her in history contributes to the fields of apologetics and mission, particularly in settings where Mary occupies a dominant place in spiritual practices and devotion.

In contexts where Marian piety seems at odds with the Reformed faith, pointing back to a biblical portrayal of Mary can encourage people to

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[45] Jaroslav Pelikan helpfully defines *Theotokos* this way; see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996), 55.

[46] De Chirico, *Mary*, 30.

interact with her in a way that brings appropriate honor to her and her son. Wanting to respect Mary is an admirable quality, yet in giving her due honor, it would be remiss not to return to her original story in the New Testament. Mary points people to her son there: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Honoring Mary requires that the faithful honor Christ first and foremost. It is unnecessary to expunge Mary from spiritual life entirely; however, recovering her narrative will challenge how this is expressed and exclude any practices or beliefs that exalt her to a position that the New Testament's testimony does not endorse. Mary's story is about a woman whom God treated graciously and kindly and included in salvation history. It is the remarkable story of a woman who carried, birthed, and raised Jesus to maturity and learned what it meant to be his disciple. She was faithful, part of the remnant of followers of Jesus who were last at the cross, first at the grave, and among the earliest band of God's new community in the early church. Retrieving Mary's narrative as that of a woman of faith and obedience who received God's grace allows those in the Reformed tradition to tell a powerful story of what it means to receive and respond to God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

The juxtaposition of the New Testament's depiction of Mary with later Marian devotion in subsequent centuries reveals a marked chasm between them. The New Testament historical record reveals that Mary was an everyday disciple. This accessible exemplar received God's grace not through her own merit but by God's kindness toward her. She was the first to believe the gospel and bore witness to Jesus's entire earthly life, from the womb to childhood and adulthood. She followed him as a disciple until the end, staying at the foot of the cross and hurrying as soon as she could to the mouth of the empty tomb. While Mary occasionally made demands of Jesus or misunderstood him, even in this, she models that discipleship is a journey of following Jesus, not a status that demands perfection. A very different image emerges when this depiction of Mary is held up against the Marian vision that developed in the aftermath of the New Testament. Here, she accomplishes salvation alongside her son by her obedience, her perpetual virginity and sinlessness lead to her dormition and assumption, and she intercedes as mother of the church on behalf of those who pray to her. Redeeming Mary's historical narrative opens the way for those in the Reformed tradition to tell a compelling gospel story wherein God's grace enters the world in the person of her son. For all who follow Jesus as Mary did, she provides a robust paradigm of discipleship, one worthy of emulation. In the redemption of her story, it is evident that she was a woman in need of redemption, not a woman who accomplished redemption.

Review Article: Quick and Modeling the Difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism[1]

PAUL WELLS

Abstract

Oliver Quick was in his day an important Anglican thinker. He was interested in pinpointing where the fundamental systemic distinction between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism lay. He located the difference in Catholicism's emphasis on the religious *act* and its consequences and Protestantism's emphasis on the *word* and its interpretation. Quick's analysis proposes an approach to the various features of the two.

Keywords

Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, grace, sacramentality, tradition

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[1] This article was originally presented as a paper to the Reformed Scholars and Leaders Network, Rome, in June 2022.

The difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is to be determined in a systemic, not piecemeal, fashion. If what is fundamental can be identified, other issues will fall into line.[2]

During the last century several suggestions have been made from different Protestant perspectives by scholars as diverse as Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Heim, and Paul Tillich.[3] These have been largely forgotten, as has the model proposed by the Anglican scholar Oliver Chase Quick (1885–1944), a preecumenical figure who considered confusion, not definition, an enemy of peace.

Quick was a professor of theology at the University of Durham, Canon of Durham Cathedral, and from 1939 Regius Professor at Oxford University. He taught shortly before J. I. Packer and John Stott were theological students at Cambridge and Oxford, and he was surely known to them since he was well published and representative of the middle-of-the-road Anglican orthodoxy of his time.[4] Like his Anglican colleagues, he wove together a threefold cord of Scripture, tradition, and apostolic succession to establish continuity in Christianity and confront modernity. This perspective explains his appreciation of Roman Catholicism's approach to questions of church and history, rather than the bare bones of the Reformation *solas*.

Following Quick, we propose that the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism concerns how the relation between the invisible and the visible is construed. We will suggest how Quick helps describe this relation and give two illustrations relating particularly to Vatican II.

I have found Quick's model stimulating and consider that it does not necessarily lead to the conclusions he drew from it, particularly concerning the superiority of Catholicism as a perennial expression of Christianity. His argument was published early in his career in a monograph, *Catholic and Protestant Elements in Christianity*.[5]

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[2] Leonardo De Chirico, *Same Words, Different Worlds* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2021), 98–99.

[3] Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912); Karl Heim, *Spirit and Truth: The Nature of Evangelical Christianity* (1929; repr., London: Lutterworth, 1935); and Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (London: Nisbet, 1955).

[4] On Quick, see John K. Mozley, *Oliver Quick as a Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1945), and, more recently, Alexander J. Hughes, *Oliver Quick and the Quest for a Christian Metaphysic* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[5] Oliver C. Quick, *Catholic and Protestant Elements in Christianity* (London: Longmans, Green, 1924). Quick wrote other major works on the sacraments (1927) and on the Apostles' Creed (1938); see "Oliver Chase Quick (1885–1944)," Project Canterbury, http://anglicanhistory.org/england/ocquick/.

I. *The Argument*

Following Troeltsch, Quick recognized the limitations of proposing "ideal conceptions attaching themselves to the real." Nevertheless, these are useful for understanding historical realities.[6]

Quick contrasts the "genius" of the Catholic and Protestant religions in analyzing faith as historical, the doctrine of the sacraments, religious knowledge as consciousness and desire, and the kingdom of God.

In Protestantism, origins are expressions of the relation between the visible and the invisible realms. Catholicism accentuates development in the context of the living church. Protestantism also accentuates inward experience over forms, whereas in Catholicism uniformity of outward form allows for greater inward variation. Quick refers to John Henry Newman as a case of development being more important than the source. Quick judges that the early church primarily pointed not back, but forward and up. This is an oversimplification. However, it points to a problem with the Protestant approach. If the incarnation is the source of the Christian religion, historical criticism presents difficulties. Development, on the other hand, refers to the power of the Spirit in the life of the church. Quick considers Protestantism to be essentially conservative and Catholicism more dynamic in its genius.[7]

Quick illustrates this systemic contrast of the reference to the source or the development by two contrasting models: either that of words and their meaning or that of acts and their intentions. This also explains why preaching is central in Protestant experience, whereas reenactment and rite is in Catholicism.

A word is declaratory and expresses an already-existing meaning. It refers naturally to something prior by pointing back to it. The hearer understands by looking back at what is meant. An act, on the other hand, is purposive and causes a new event, with an external effect. The observer looks at what has been done in terms of whether the act has effected the intention. Quick gives the Mass as case in point:

> In a Latin mass the words have come to have the value of acts, and the acts the value of words; but the total effect is to stress the whole rite as an act. This is exactly congenial to the particular point of view from which Catholicism regards the sacrament. It is the fact that something is being done which it desires to stress.[8]

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[6] Quick, *Catholic and Protestant Elements*, vi.
[7] Ibid., 9–20.
[8] Ibid., 31.

The systemic difference lies in this. Protestantism refers to something *said* and Catholicism to something *being done*. Both seek to make real the relation of the physical world and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly, and the actual and the ideal. In the geographical gap between the visible and the invisible realms either the word or the act mediates.

Roman Catholicism relies on the primacy of the act in an unfolding chain of events, as acts express a purpose. A gracious intention gives value to the temporal process and so justifies the ongoing development of tradition in history. An illustration: a stone thrown in a pond creates ripples until the energy of the impact is exhausted. Catholic religion has emphasized the importance of developments from the beginning. Completed reality comes through development; the original is not the best representation of the thing. This emphasizes the importance of the continuity of tradition, the march toward a higher expression of the spiritual, and the importance of the church as guardian and cause of historical progress.

Protestantism proposes the word model as a witness to the invisible. It looks back to primordial grace as a word refers to its meaning. A word presents a different configuration of the temporal and the eternal. Protestantism refers not to the development but to the source, which is why the divine inspiration of Scripture is all important. Without it Protestantism is a lost cause because the source is lost. The truth of Scripture is timeless and eternal even when expressed temporally.[9] To repeat the illustration: from a Protestant point of view, the important thing is not the impact or the ripples that flow out, but the one who threw the stone. In a radical way this is what Karl Barth was getting at when he said that when revelation lands in history it leaves a crater; the only analogue of revelation is further revelation. Christ stands above the church, and grace does not develop in and through it.[10]

Quick is, of course, careful to say that word and act are not opposed. A later development of their complementarity was made in speech-act theory. Words do have effect as well as meaning; acts do have meaning as well as effect. Word and act can pass into each other, something attested by the Hebrew *dabar*.[11] However, the important point is where the *primacy* lies and how it shapes the ethos of the two systems.

If a model is to be considered valid, it must have general application to detail as well as describing the big picture. The difference between Catholic continuity and development and Protestant discontinuity and return to

[9] Ibid., 107–16.
[10] De Chirico, *Same Words*, 102–4.
[11] Quick, *Elements*, 27–28.

the source is seen in the nature and grace structure of the first and the creation–fall–redemption discontinuity of the second. However, does it apply more generally? We think it does and propose to illustrate with reference to the sacramentality of the church and to Scripture and tradition.[12]

II. *The Sacrament as Enacting Grace*

The view of the role of the church that developed in the Middle Ages proposed that the church substituted for the absence of Christ. The church is a historical actualization, in different form, of the incarnation. It becomes an instrument of revelation; grace is known and received through the church and its offices.

1. *The Sacramentality of the Church*

The sacraments of the church in Catholicism are enacted in a self-referential fashion. The church itself is sacramental, and grace flows through its sacramental acts. Their nature is kingly and priestly rather than prophetic. John Calvin added the third office of Christ to the two traditionally recognized offices to describe the ministry of the confessing church. Union with Christ is different from Christ's continuing presence in the body of the church.

In his book *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, Edward Schillebeeckx calls Christ the primordial sacrament and the church the sacrament of the risen Christ. Christ and the church are two sides of the same reality, like the head and tail of a coin. The church as a signifier is bound to Christ, and Christ is bound to the church as the thing signified.[13] In this way, it actualizes his redemptive presence.[14]

The Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (§7) on the church has a realistic-materialistic notion of the church as body of Christ:

> In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified.

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[12] What follows reworks some elements from Paul Wells, "Catholicisme romain, protestantisme et histoire," in *En toute occasion, favorable ou non* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 2014), 381–91.

[13] Schillebeecx uses Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *signifiant* (signifier/expression) and *signifié* (signified/content); see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 13–17, 47–49, and Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1915; repr., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 79–81.

[14] De Chirico, *Same Words*, 101–2, on Karl-Heinz Menke, *Sakramentalität: Wesen und Wunde des Katholizismus* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012).

> In the sacred rite (of baptism) a oneness with Christ's death and resurrection is both symbolized and brought about …. Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. … In this way all of us are made members of His Body.[15]

French theologian Daniel Bourgeois comments, "In the Catholic perspective sacramentality is not limited to the system of signs that accompanied the founding acts of the covenant between God and man. ... The system of signs that has accompanied the people of God is not a closed system." The church and its life are "a living, moving system of meaning, rich in dynamism and an inexhaustible capacity to express the truth of the acts of the covenant."[16] There is a constant renewal of the initial act of redemption in the church and in its structures that works grace.[17]

One striking example of this is the Mass as a bloodless re-presentation of the one sacrifice of the cross. In the *ex opere operato* what is represented is done by the act itself. Through historical acts in the material world, the spiritual world is made present in a real way.

As a sacrament of redemption, the church is the vehicle uniting Christ and humanity. She is also the link between the eternal and the temporal in the acts she performs. Through the Church's acts nature is elevated to grace.

2. *Church and the Kingdom of God*[18]

Grace is also enacted through the church as the presence of the kingdom of God. *Lumen Gentium* states of the church (§5),

> When Jesus, who had suffered the death of the cross for mankind, had risen, He appeared as the one constituted as Lord, Christ and eternal Priest, and He poured out on His disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King.[19]

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[15] *Lumen Gentium*, §7, Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[16] Daniel Bourgeois, "Essai d'analyse théologique de l'intégrisme catholique," *La Revue réformée* 43.3–4 (1992): 41.

[17] The idea of the re-presentation of the original act in modern Catholicism owes not a little to the thought of Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren Öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften*, 8th ed. (1832; repr., Mainz, 1871–72); translated into English by S. B. Robertson in 1843. This work influenced theologians like Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar and no doubt Cardinal Newman.

[18] Quick, *Elements*, chap. 5.

[19] *Lumen Gentium*, §5.

Despite the discrete formulation, the church is the instrument, "the initial budding forth," by which the spiritual penetrates the physical world and gradually extends its presence. This idea, originating in Augustine, proposes that Christ's reign on earth is already real in the church. The church has the mission of continuing God's kingdom acts. So, the reality of this world takes its place in the other world.[20] In Marxism we find a similar structure as in the grace-enacted sacramentality of the church.

For Protestantism, the church does not continue the incarnation, which was completed by the resurrection and Christ's presence in heaven. For this reason, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are "visible words" witnessing with the preached word to a once-for-all meaning. The efficacy of the sacrament is not in the *act* itself but in the *understanding* of it that unites the believer to Christ through the instrumentality of the word and Spirit.

The teleology is also different. For the Protestant, the coming of the kingdom is not about "supernature" mysteriously invading and transforming nature, moving it up Aristotle's chain of being. It concerns righteousness that cancels sin in the divine declaration of justification, forgiveness announced in the word, and completion in Christ.

III. *Church Tradition as Revelation*

Roman Catholicism and its emphasis on the central role of the church as the bridge in history between this world and the world to come implies the development of dogma. Continuity is assured by the authority of the historical institution of the church: Christ through the apostles to their successors. The ultimate justification for the development of tradition alongside Scripture is that the church prolongs the incarnation under the guidance of the Spirit. Thus, it regulates faith not only by Scripture but also by tradition. "Sacred tradition" carries forward the word of God, as the constitution *Dei verbum* of Vatican II (§9) states:

> Sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything

[20] This idea, secularized, gave rise to socialism, where the party rules over all life through its members. This affinity partly explains why Catholic or Orthodox nations have been bastions of Marxism-Leninism. Cf. Quick, *Elements*, 97.

> which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.[21]

The church enacts teachings to further what is taught by Scripture itself. Gabriel Moran, in his book *Scripture and Tradition*, states that by 1500 tradition called "constitutive" had gained autonomy in its own right.[22] Its teachings received by the church are normative for faith. Among their number, we can mention such teachings as purgatory, transubstantiation, Mariology, the primacy of the pope, and prayer to the saints.

As to the origin of those traditions recognized by the church as authoritative, various proposals have been made: the pope speaking *ex cathedra* as Christ's representative on earth, church councils, oral tradition since apostolic times, or all three. The question is where the ultimate authority lies between Scripture and tradition. Rome's position has not greatly varied over the centuries. Yves Congar bluntly stated that the Roman position recognizes the insufficiency of Scripture alone. Georges Tavard, in his book *Holy Scripture or Holy Church*, says, "Scripture and the Church are mutually inherent. Scripture has an ontological primacy and the Church an historical primacy, for it is only in its receptivity that men become aware of the Word."[23]

Historically both Scripture and tradition come from the church. The church passes on Scripture from one generation to another, supplementing its meaning. Tradition is essentially the interpretation of Scripture plus teachings that complete its statements. The Council of Trent responded to the Reformers' *sola Scriptura* by affirming the authority of Scripture and tradition.[24] Congar comments, "By affirming, in effect, the normative value of apostolic traditions not contained in Scripture, the Council made tradition a formal principle other than Scripture, if not autonomous from it."[25]

As *Dei verbum* states at the end of the section quoted,

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[21] *Dei verbum*, §9, Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

[22] Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition: A Survey of the Controversy* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963); cf. Robert B. Strimple, "The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40.1 (1977): 22–38.

[23] Georges Tavard, *Écriture ou Église? La crise de la Réforme* (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 41.

[24] Cf. "Fourth Session: Decree concerning the Canonical Scripture," *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 2:79–80.

[25] Yves M.-J. Congar, *La Tradition et les traditions* (Paris: Fayard, 1960), 1:188. From a conservative Catholic perspective, see Florent Gaboriau, *L'Écriture seule?* (Paris: FAC-éditions, 1997).

> It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.[26]

Just as revelation is given by a divine act, so also is tradition in the church. Thus, the incarnational presence of God presses on to the fullness of redemption. Divine grace comes to fruition with the church playing a vital and active role.

Conclusion

The issue is the relation of eternal and temporal reality. In Protestantism the model of the word in relation to its meaning shows how it is essential to return and conform to the once-and-for-all origin to confess the authority of divine truth, "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). That means cutting away the traditional historical foliage that blocks the route.

The Roman Catholic model of the act and its intention leads to completed acts that express the intention more perfectly. This is why in Catholicism reform movements are suppressed and eradicated, as in the case of Jan Hus and John Wycliffe, if they cannot be incorporated and redirected as new traditions in harmony with the whole. The New Testament accent on fulfillment, the fullness of time, the end of the ages, and the once-and-for-all of the incarnation is obscured. A theandric sacramental river flows on uninterrupted until the ocean of eternity is reached. On its way to finality the *totus Christus* envelops the whole world.

Behind these two visions of how God acts through the church, is there not ultimately a different conception of the God who reveals himself, a conception that expresses a metaphysically grounded essentialism or a relational personalism based on a saving knowledge of Christ?

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[26] We will not enter into discussion about the interpretation of "partim/partim" at the Council of Trent. Many Protestants have now adopted the notion of the insufficiency of Scripture, as illustrated by the discussions at the 1963 Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches in Montreal on *Tradition and Traditions*. A current consensus between modernist Catholics and liberal Protestants would affirm that Scripture is the first link in the Christian tradition.

The Church and the Kingdom[1]

RICHARD L. PRATT JR.

Abstract

The relationship between the church and the kingdom is hardly a new topic in Reformed theology. One might think that by now every imaginable facet of this matter would be settled. However, discussions in various parts of the world show how easily conversations degenerate into polemics that stifle the sacred responsibility "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Perhaps vigorous polemics have served some positive ends in the past. However, at this time when interest in Reformed theology grows around the world, paths must be found that will move beyond the controversies of the past and toward more mutuality.

Keywords

Church and kingdom, covenant theology, Reformed confessions, Christ and culture, kingdom in Scripture, mission of the church, kingdom and eschatology

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I. *Our Theological Heritage and the Kingdom*

It will serve us well to begin our discussion of the church and the kingdom with a few words about our shared theological heritage. How do Reformed confessions and catechisms shape, or not shape, our contemporary outlooks on the relationship between the church and the kingdom? For the sake of time, we will offer a few comments on the Belgic Confession (BC), the Heidelberg Catechism (HC), the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), and the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) and what they tell us about our topic.

In brief, these secondary doctrinal standards deal unevenly with the church and the kingdom. They refer to the church in a variety of contexts and occasionally at length. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for instance, devotes an entire chapter to the subject "Of the Church" (WCF 25.1–6). However, our doctrinal standards do not have much to say about God's kingdom and even less to say about the relationship between the church and the kingdom.

Consider how seldom our standards explicitly refer to the kingdom. As surprising as it may be, the Belgic Confession speaks of "the kingdom of Christ" only once (BC 36). Other standards offer a bit more, but not much. The Heidelberg Catechism refers to "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" to distinguish church and civil authorities, largely in opposition to Roman Catholicism (HC 82–85). It also briefly sheds some practical insights into the two times the word "kingdom" appears in the Lord's Prayer (HC 118, 123). The Westminster Shorter Catechism deals with references to "the kingdom" only in the Lord's Prayer (WSC 102, 107). The Westminster Larger Catechism offers a bit more explanation of "the kingdom" in the Lord's Prayer (WLC 191, 196) after mentioning that Jesus taught his disciples about "the kingdom of God" before his ascension (WLC 53). Finally, the Westminster Confession of Faith refers to our "everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven" (WCF 8.5), to "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" to distinguish ecclesiastical and civil authority (WCF 23.3 and 30.2), and to "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ" (WCF 25.2) in its discussion of the visible church. This quick survey reveals that the theme of God's kingdom does not receive much attention in our doctrinal standards.

What do these documents have to say about the relationship between the church and the kingdom? The Westminster Confession of Faith stands out as the only place that explicitly connects the terms "church" and "kingdom":

> The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (WCF 25.2)

We will make four brief observations on this paragraph. First, the association between the church and the kingdom focuses exclusively on the concept of "the visible Church." For this reason, when I speak of the "church" in this article, I will always have in mind the visible church rather than the invisible church.

Second, this paragraph focuses primarily on the church and the kingdom in the New Testament age "under the Gospel" and only notes that it is "not confined to one nation as before under the law." Along these lines, it describes the kingdom as "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ" and offers no more insight into how the kingdom of God in the Old Testament age helps us understand the relationship between the Christian church and the kingdom.

Third, this passage also states that the visible church "consists of all … that profess the true religion; and of their children." In so doing, the Confession focuses on the church as consisting of people, not as an institution. Presumably, the service of the people of the church to God is also in view by metonymy. This focus on people and their service to God fits well with the Old Testament use of *qahal* (קָהַל; "to form an assembly") as the assembly of the people of Israel. The Septuagint usually translates this terminology *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) and represents the backdrop of the New Testament "church" as consisting of people and their service in the New Testament.

Fourth, the Confession explicitly touches on both sides of our topic by declaring, "The visible Church … is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ." Unfortunately, the language here raises a difficult question. Are we to believe that the visible church and the kingdom are simply one and the same? Such a posture would be difficult to maintain if we go much beyond thinking that the Westminster Assembly simply affirmed here that those who serve God as the people of the visible church also serve him as the people of his kingdom.

Frankly, I wish that our doctrinal standards had much more to say about the church and the kingdom, but they do not. I find that frustrating at times. However, I also believe that we have much to learn from this lack of attention. If nothing else, we have a lot of work to do if we hope to understand these matters more fully.

Allow me to make one crucial observation at the outset of this presentation. Our confessional and catechetical heritage does not settle lines of

demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable points of view on many facets of our topic. There is a lot of room for different outlooks on the church and the kingdom in our branch of the church.

In my experience, all too often, modern Reformed theologians speak as if there is one and only one authentically Reformed viewpoint on our topic. Take, for instance, the often-vigorous discussions that currently take place among those who identify themselves with "theonomy," "two-kingdom theology," and "transformationalism."[2] Advocates of these views often strongly dismiss the others as "not being Reformed." Well, it seems to me that some articulations of these views likely venture beyond the parameters of our theological standards. Theonomists who hope to "take us back to the Old Testament theocracy," as is often said, would fall outside of our doctrinal standards. But I have never met one who actually believes this. Transformationalists who have "turned to the Social Gospel" have strayed, but I have never talked with one of them in evangelical circles either. Advocates of "two kingdom theology" have left the camp if they believe that "natural law can be used as our standard apart from Scripture." Once again, I have yet to come across one of them. Dangers abound for all three camps, and we should explore these dangers together, yet I am also convinced that all of us have much to learn from each other.

Given how little our doctrinal standards say about these matters, I would strongly suggest at the outset of this presentation that we would be wise to refrain from speaking as if there were one and only one legitimate articulation of Reformed outlooks on the church and the kingdom. We would be much better off acknowledging that there always have been, currently are, and likely always will be a variety of viewpoints that fit securely within the doctrinal parameters of our confessional and catechetical heritage. Perhaps then, we will be able to move toward a better understanding together.

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[2] For a survey of various Christian perspectives on Christ and culture, see D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 205–28; for an introduction to theonomy, see Greg Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985); and for a critical evaluation of theonomy, see William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), and John Frame, "*The Institutes of Biblical Law* [by Rousas John Rushdoony]: A Review," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (Winter 1976) 195–217; for a presentation of the two-kingdoms approach, see David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), esp. 11–32; a critique of this theological approach can be found in John Frame, *The Escondido Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2011); for a concise presentation of a transformalist position, see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

II. *The Importance of the Kingdom in Scripture*

The lack of attention to the relationship between the church and the kingdom in Reformed doctrinal standards raises a fair question. If our forebears did not deal with the details of this topic, then why should we explore it further? Why not let things stand as they are?

In many respects, the answer to this question lies in the importance of the concept of the kingdom in Scripture. As I am about to suggest, the kingdom of God was not just one of many biblical teachings. Biblical authors consistently relied on God's kingdom as the most integrative, metatheological framework for understanding the boundaries and interconnections among other biblical teachings. For this reason, our commitment to the Scriptures as "the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined" (WCF 1.10) requires us to ensure that we give the same priority to the kingdom of God in our discussions of ecclesiology.

In the past, many biblical interpreters wrongly held that the kingdom does not play a major role throughout the Bible. This is unfortunate because explicit biblical references to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and the like appear over 150 times in the New Testament. However, depending on how one handles several linguistic and text-critical issues, the Old Testament only refers explicitly to God's kingdom some fourteen times. It is no wonder, then, that so many interpreters in the past have had the impression that the concept of God's kingdom rose to prominence in the New Testament age.

From the middle of the twentieth century, however, several Old and New Testament scholars in our branch of the church have helped us see that the opposite is true.[3] While the terminology of God's kingdom may be rare in the Old Testament, the concept permeates every dimension of Old Testament theology. The complex theme of the kingdom of God is the most fundamental and pervasive theological orientation of every Old Testament author, and it gave rise to a more explicit focus on the kingdom in New Testament theology. Actually, this point of view should not surprise us. In God's providence, biblical authors wrote in the political and religious context of

[3] For several examples of recent works that have emphasized the kingdom in the Old and New Testaments, see Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 144–46; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981); Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 3–13; Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 11–24.

emperors and empires. This was their world. As a result, the constellation of biblical teachings on the kingdom of God exerts great gravitational force throughout the universe of all biblical teachings. This gravitational pull of the kingdom is so powerful that our ability to understand other parts of the Bible is significantly diminished if we do not consider it—at times, immeasurably diminished.

We could point to this importance of the kingdom in Scripture in any number of ways, but for the sake of time, consider the opening verses of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus reflected the prominence of God's kingdom in both Testaments.

> Our Father in heaven,
> hallowed be your name.
> Your kingdom come,
> your will be done,
> on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6:9–10)

We can see how Jesus's opening words draw attention to the kingship of God when we acknowledge that his petition "hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9) unmistakably alludes to Isaiah's vision of heaven in the temple in Isaiah 6:1–13. Jesus's call for the name of God to "be hallowed" (*hagiasthētō*, ἁγιασθήτω) echoes the prophet's vision of seraphim who cried, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3). This allusion also clarifies what Jesus had in mind when he turned his disciples' thoughts toward God "in heaven." Although the term "heaven" is used in a variety of ways in Scripture, Isaiah spoke of heaven as the place where he saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa 6:1). Rather elaborate depictions of heaven as the Lord's throne room appear in a number of biblical passages (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19–23; 2 Chr 18:18–22; Job 1:6–12; Pss 29, 82; Rev 4:1–11). Similar depictions of heaven also occur widely in the literature of ancient Near Eastern cultures and of the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament period. When Jesus called on his disciples to turn their hearts toward God in heaven, he taught them to give attention to God as the king who is enthroned in the royal court of heaven.

Jesus also referred to the kingship of God when he initially addressed God as "Our Father." The Scriptures frequently refer to God as the Father of Israel and of Christ's followers. But what did it mean to speak of God in this way? We find the answer in the political literature of the ancient Near East. In other nations, kings were called the fathers of their subjects.[4] This

[4] For the use of the term "father" in Akkadian and Sumerian texts in relation to kings, see M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales Akkadiennes et Sumériennes* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1967), 25–26, 33,

paternal imagery extolled the fatherly love of kings toward those under their care. Jesus drew upon this widespread royal imagery when he spoke of God as Father. In fact, we may rightly sum up the depiction of God as king in the opening verse of the Lord's Prayer in this way. There, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our [royal] Father, [enthroned] in heaven, hallowed be your name."

The importance of God's kingship comes into view through other biblical depictions of God as well. The Bible explicitly calls God "the king" many times, but these references represent only a small percentage of the times when he is acknowledged as the king. The nations surrounding Israel often extolled human kings as shepherds, light, wise architects, skilled builders, warriors, leaders of armies, lawgivers, covenant-makers, and covenant-keepers—to name just a few examples.[5] These and similar descriptions of God in the Scriptures extol the God of Israel as king. When we consider how often this happens in the Bible, it is no exaggeration to say that biblical authors conceived of God first and foremost as the supreme king over all of creation. If we were to answer the well-known Westminster Shorter Catechism question "What is God?" with this biblical emphasis in mind, we would have to say something like "God is the king, who is 'a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth'" (WSC 4).

We should also note that the opening verses of the Lord's Prayer directly connect the kingship of God with the kingdom of God. As he put it, "Our [royal] Father … Your kingdom come" (Matt 6:9–10). In so doing, Jesus expressed the conceptual inseparability of God's kingship and his kingdom. We are all familiar with the debate over whether *basileia* (βασιλεία, "kingdom") should be taken abstractly as "reign or rule" or concretely as "that which is ruled."[6] In my opinion, this distinction is of little value. A king's

384–85; for examples of the use of "father" terminology in ancient Near Eastern texts, see Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, eds., *Readings form the Ancient Near East*, EBS (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 137, 162, and 198; for an older study of royal titles in the ancient world and allusions to "father" vocabulary, see Robert D. Wilson, "Royal Titles in Antiquity: Article Two," *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (1904): 465–97, esp. 467, 474–75, 490, 493; and "Royal Titles in Antiquity: Article Three," *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (1904): 618–64, esp. 645.

[5] See the references given in the previous note. For kings as shepherds, see Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58–74, 257–59; for ancient rulers' self-presentation as builders and gardeners, see Douglas J. Green, *"I Undertook Great Works": The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions*, FAT 2, Reihe 41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 46–86, 307–15.

[6] For more on definitions, see Vos, *Kingdom of God and the Church*, 25–31; Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 24–29; and George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 60–61.

reign always has in view his reign over something. This is certainly the case in the opening of the Lord's Prayer.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the fact that Jesus called on his disciples to pray about the king and his kingdom before they offered any other petitions. Jesus knew that at nearly every moment his followers were preoccupied with their need for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from the temptations of the Evil One. Still, he called for his disciples to address these concerns in prayer only after they had given attention to God's kingship and his kingdom.

The priority Jesus gave to God and his kingdom helps us grasp that we are not to pray about our other needs for our own sakes, not for our own well-being, or even our own eternal salvation. Rather, we are to ask for these things for the sake of something of supreme importance. As Jesus himself put it later, although we have many needs, we are to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

I have to admit that I often experience resistance from Reformed theologians to the suggestion that the kingdom of God has this much importance in the Scriptures. This resistance usually comes from those who align themselves with the Westminster standards, because the Westminster Assembly relied heavily on divine covenants as the highest, most comprehensive organizational framework of biblical teaching (see WCF 7.1–6, WLC 30–36; WSC 12, 16, 20, 92, 94). The Confession speaks of covenant as the means by which God condescended to bridge the gap between himself and humanity. "The distance between God and the creature" was overcome by a "voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant" (WCF 7.1). The Confession then goes on to organize all biblical material under two rubrics, the "covenant of works" (WCF 7.2) and the "covenant of grace" (WCF 7.3). In this approach to Scripture, these dual divine covenants represent the most unifying metatheological conceptual framework of Scripture. To be sure, this traditional outlook is fair enough as far as it goes. These dual divine covenants certainly provide a great many insights into the teachings of Scripture.

Still, we all know that from the middle of the twentieth century to our own day, the Reformed concept of covenant has undergone a significant transformation. Comparisons between divine covenants in the Bible and ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties and royal grants have revealed that biblical covenants were in fact historical administrations of God's kingdom.[7] The supreme divine king governed his kingdom through

[7] See, e.g., Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 36–37.

covenants much as ancient kings governed their kingdoms through their treaties, grants, and a number of other assorted types of texts. He regulated his kingdom by establishing covenants with the entire human race in Adam and Noah. He also administered his kingdom in Israel by means of covenants in Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as the new covenant or covenant of peace that was to begin after Israel's exile. We can no longer view divine covenants merely as the way God overcame the distance between himself and his creatures. We must reckon with the fact that his covenants were royal instruments by which he acted as king of all creation and administered the policies of his kingdom.

How does the importance of God's kingdom in Scripture impact our understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom? The kingdom provides an indispensable orientation for every facet of biblical ecclesiology. Consider just a few questions. Who are the people of whom the visible church consists? They are the subjects of God's kingdom. What is the potential scope of service required of the people of the church? It is the potential scope of service required of the people of the kingdom. What is the goal of the church? It is the goal of God's kingdom. If we fail to cast our concept of the church in the mold of the kingdom, we fall short. The concept of God's kingdom shapes every contour of biblical teaching about the church.

III. *The Coming of the Kingdom*

Having noted how the importance of God's kingdom encourages us to move forward in exploring the relationship between the church and the kingdom, we are in a position to consider how the Lord's Prayer also calls on us to focus on the coming of the kingdom. As Jesus put it,

> Your kingdom come,
> your will be done,
> on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6:9–10)

To grasp why Jesus brought the coming of the kingdom to the foreground in his prayer, it will help to set it within the context of another biblical perspective on the kingdom that lies in the background of what he said.

I have in mind a belief about God's kingship and kingdom that distinguished normative Israelite religion from the religions of most other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Faithful Israelites believed that God has been enthroned in heaven from the moment of creation and that he will

forever remain the supreme king over all (e.g., Ps 10:16; 29:10; 45:6; 103:19; 145:13; 146:10). In the polytheistic and henotheistic cultures of nations surrounding Israel, major events on earth were often interpreted as reflections of changes in the status of gods in the court of heaven. Gods rose and fell with the annual cycles of the seasons. Economic hardships and prosperity also indicated that shifts had occurred in the hierarchy of the heavenly court. Defeats and victories of nations on earth were thought to indicate the subjection of one god to another. All biblical authors and Jesus himself knew that Israel's faith stood in sharp contrast with these false beliefs. The one God, the God of Israel, has always ruled with complete control over every historical vicissitude. From the beginning, the entire creation has been his kingdom. He always has held and always will hold absolute royal authority over it all.

This biblical teaching, however, raises a serious question. Why, then, did Jesus call on his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom *come*"? If the entire creation has always been and will always be his kingdom, then in what sense can his kingdom "come" or "arrive" at some moment in history?

Jesus's petition reflected two additional biblical teachings that he knew well from the Scriptures. In the first place, God decreed that his unchanging, supreme rule over all was to be manifested in the sight of his creatures. This is why Moses declared, "The Lord will reign forever and ever" (Exod 15:18) after witnessing the power of God at the sea. In a similar way, when David completed his preparations for the temple, he also honored the Lord by affirming, "Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all" (1 Chr 29:11). Biblical authors celebrated manifestations of God's kingship every time they wrote about him acting as the royal shepherd, light, wise architect, skilled builder, warrior, leader of armies, lawgiver, covenant-maker, covenant-keeper, and the like. Historical displays of God's unending reign over all of creation fill the Scriptures. In this light, we can see that Jesus's prayer for the kingdom to "come" was not unusual at all. He led his disciples to ask God to manifest his absolute rule over all once again in the history of the world.

In the second place, Jesus's prayer for the coming of the kingdom also reflected the Old Testament teaching that every historical display of God's kingship was for an ultimate purpose or goal. To see how this is true in detail would require a review of every event in the Old and New Testaments. In broad terms, however, the path of this teleological vector can be traced by noting how God administered his kingdom through covenants. As we have already mentioned, comparisons of biblical covenants with royal documents from the ancient world have shown that God's covenants

established the policies by which he administered his kingdom. For this reason, his covenants in Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David and the new covenant in Christ are not somehow opposed to each other. Nor is one cast aside as useless in favor of another. Rather, they represent points, as it were, on the same historical trajectory, a trajectory that stretches throughout the Bible and leads to the final goal that the king of heaven ordained for his kingdom from the beginning.

In many branches of the church, this teleological continuity among God's covenants has been obscured by misunderstandings of New Testament teachings on the covenants in Moses and in Christ. In this popular outlook, the covenant in Moses is characterized as providing a way of salvation by works, and the new covenant in Christ is characterized as providing a way of salvation by grace.

This misunderstanding of New Testament teachings even subtly impacted our branch of the church as our scholars compared biblical covenants with documents from the ancient world. As capable Reformed scholars first began this project, they often aligned Moses's covenant with suzerain-vassal treaties and deemed it a conditional, obligatory covenant. However, they aligned the new covenant with royal grants and deemed it an unconditional, promissory covenant (along with the covenants in Noah, Abraham, and David).[8] This distinction even led some Reformed theologians to reaffirm an older and, in my opinion, unfortunate viewpoint in our branch of the church that referred to God's covenant with Moses as a "republication" of the covenant of works in Adam.[9]

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[8] For an early criticism of the distinction between conditional and unconditional covenants, see William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 124; for a more extensive account in relation to the Davidic covenant, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 243–52; see also, Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.4 (October-December 1996): 670–97, esp. 686–94; Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanations of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2020), 273–75. Thomas E. McComiskey also distinguishes sharply between covenant types in the Bible; see Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Covenant of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), and Richard L. Pratt Jr., review of *The Covenant of Promise*, by Thomas E. McComiskey, *Westminster Theological Journal* 49.1 (Spring 1987): 218–21.

[9] See Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), esp. 38, 48, 54, 74–75, 90, 90, 94–97, 175–76; for a discussion of the relationship between covenant of works and the Mosaic covenant in Reformed theology, see Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy," in *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 90–98; for a discussion of Meredith G. Kline's view of the relationship, see Belcher, *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God*, 273–74.

In recent decades, however, ancient Near Eastern scholars have pointed out that these distinctions are not valid. Careful analysis has demonstrated beyond doubt that royal grants included conditions and obligations, much like suzerain-vassal treaties.[10] This should have come as no surprise. In the *Realpolitik* of the ancient world, maintaining a royal grant was always conditional upon the recipient's continued loyalty to the king. Like treaties, royal grants were obligatory.

This is why every biblical covenant included the same basic dynamics of divine/human interaction. As ancient kings administered their kingdoms, they all drew attention to God's royal benevolence toward his subjects, his requirements of grateful loyalty from his subjects, and his blessings for their obedience and curses for their disobedience. Divine covenants in the Bible represent not different paths leading in different directions but one path along which every manifestation of God's kingship in history fell.

At the same time, however, it is important to note that the emphases of each covenant in the Bible were tailored to suit the conditions of God's kingdom for the circumstances in which they were established. Different sorts of divine benevolence, different requirements for human loyalty, and different blessings and curses come into view with each covenant. The king was moving his kingdom toward a goal. To reach that goal, the divine king established different sorts of benevolence, requirements, blessings, and curses.

At the risk of oversimplification, allow me to illustrate how this was true of just one element, the requirement of human loyalty in every covenant. The covenant in Adam set in place the service of humanity for all time as images of God who were to serve God's kingdom by having dominion over the entire world. The covenant in Noah established stability in nature as the arena in which this service of the entire human race was to take place in every subsequent age. The covenant in Abraham focused on Israel's call throughout the ages to extend the blessings of God from the promised land to other nations. The covenant in Moses focused on the gift of law to guide the nation of Israel as generation after generation succeeded and failed in their service to God. The covenant in David established the royal dynasty

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[10] See, e.g., Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?," 670–97; David Andrew Dean. "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57.2 (2014): 281–308; Richard Pratt, "God of Covenant," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 10.5 (February 2, 2008), http://reformedperspectives.org/magazine/article.asp/link/http:%5E%5Ereformedperspectives.org%5Earticles%5Eric_pratt%5Eric_pratt.Covenant.ab_david.html/at/God%20of%20Covenant.

that would expand the dominion of God's kingdom throughout the world. The New Covenant was granted after Israel's exile to guarantee the complete and permanent fulfillment of the end for which all earlier covenants were enacted.

We must always keep in mind that the biblical record also tells us that, as God moved his kingdom forward, he always exercised his royal prerogative to enact the dynamics of his covenants as he saw fit. Often, the wisdom and goodness of his providence remained hidden from human beings. As Moses explained to Israel, the "secret things belong to the LORD our God" (Deut 29:29). Yet, as the recipient of divine revelation regarding mysteries in the past, Paul reviewed the ways of God in the past and exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! … From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11:33–36). The apostle's amazement reassures us that God's benevolence, requirements for loyalty, and blessings and curses always led to his glorious end.

When will this ultimate end be fulfilled? Moses spoke of its fulfillment as taking place after Israel's exile ended "in the latter days" (*ep eschatō tōn hēmerōn*, ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτῳ τῶν ἡμερῶν [LXX]), or "in the end of days," as it may be translated (Deut 4:30). Israel's prophets and New Testament authors also spoke of the time of ultimate fulfillment in this way. For this reason, Christians have rightly described the fulfillment of God's purpose as the eschatological kingdom, the manifestation of his kingdom in the last days.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come," he called for them to pray for the arrival of this eschatological manifestation of God's kingdom. A remnant of Israel had returned from exile long before the days of Christ, but continuing rebellion against God confined Israel to nearly half a millennium of suffering under the tyranny of other nations and their false, demonic gods. Because of the suffering of those centuries, in the days of Jesus, many in Israel longed for the final manifestation of God's kingship to arrive. The prophet Daniel had predicted that "a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor … left to another people … shall stand forever" (Dan 2:44; see also 4:3, 34; 6:26; 7:14, 27; Obad 21). As the "Son of God" fragment in the fourth cave at Qumran illustrates, near the time of Jesus, a number of Jewish sects expected that the royal son of God would soon establish "an eternal kingdom … his rule will be an everlasting rule" (4Q246 II, 5–9).[11] John the Baptist, Jesus himself, and his disciples announced that

[11] See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "4Q246: The 'Son of God' Document from Qumran," *Biblica* 74 (1993): 153–74, esp. 155–56; cf. Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 332.

this final, glorious manifestation of "the kingdom of heaven [was] at hand" (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus called for his disciples to pray for this eschatological kingdom to come.

In the last two lines of the opening of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus went on to describe the wonder of the coming eschatological display of God's kingdom when he said, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). Here Jesus spoke of God's will in the sense of God's ideals or commands, what Reformed theologians often call the prescriptive will of God. Jesus knew all too well that rebellion against the commands of God filled the earth in his day, not only among the Gentile nations but within Israel as well, so he called on his disciples to pray for the arrival of the kingdom, when the earth would be filled with obedient servants of God.

But also notice Jesus's indication that in the eschatological kingdom, obedience to God will be rendered "on earth as it is in heaven." As mentioned earlier, when Jesus spoke of "heaven" in the Lord's Prayer, he had in mind the heavenly royal court of God. As biblical accounts of this celestial throne room reveal, every creature there obeys the divine king. So, when the eschatological kingdom comes, the same will be true everywhere on earth as well. The enemies of God will be eliminated from our planet, and every creature remaining will obey him here, as he is already obeyed in the court of heaven.

Now in our day, it is common to speak of the arrival of this eschatological manifestation of God's kingdom as "now, but not yet"—that is, the manifestation began with Jesus's first advent, but it will not come in its fullness until his second advent. Personally, I prefer to summarize the unfolding of the eschatological kingdom as coming in three phases.[12] The kingdom was inaugurated in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and in the outpouring of the Spirit during the foundational ministries of Christ's apostles and prophets. The eschatological kingdom continues to spread everywhere on the earth throughout history as the Spirit empowers the church under the heavenly reign of the ascended Christ. The kingdom will reach its consummation sometime in the future when Christ returns and reigns forever with his people in the glorious new creation.

This Christian understanding of the eschatological age shocked many in Israel and led them to reject Jesus as the Messiah. It also confused many early followers of Christ. As John the Baptist faced execution, he asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt 11:3).

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[12] See Richard L. Pratt Jr., *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1990), 352–55.

As the decades passed, there was much need for authoritative explanations, and this is why we have the New Testament. It is not an overstatement to say that the New Testament was written to explain the unfolding of the eschatological kingdom and to address its practical implications for the church of Christ.

In recent decades, a number of Reformed scholars have explored an outlook on this purpose of the New Testament that has proven to be very insightful. Rather than offering one explanation of the coming of the eschatological kingdom, the New Testament authors addressed rather specific misunderstandings. Different practical implications of the unfolding eschatological age had to be clarified for different people. How did the unfolding of the eschatological kingdom apply to the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church? What did it say about the influence of hypocritical legalism and the adoration of angels alongside Christ? How did it speak to busybodies and to the neglect of honorable work? What were the implications for arrogance that had led to factions in the early church? How did it address those who preferred their own spiritual insights over those of the apostles? What did it say to a runaway slave and his master? How did it address strife between rich and poor followers of Christ? What kinds of leaders did the church need? What did the unfolding of the eschatological kingdom have to say to Christians who found acceptance in their local communities and those who suffered persecution? The list of issues that rose in different times and places during the first century was very long. Yet, in one way or another, the books of the New Testament deal with them primarily in terms of the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of the coming of the kingdom in Christ.

This summary of the unfolding of the kingdom has many implications for understanding the relationship between the church and the kingdom today. We all live, work, and serve in what I have called the "continuation of the kingdom." But let me suggest a few ways we can learn a lot about how the church and the kingdom today relate to each other by turning our thoughts toward what lies behind and ahead of us, toward the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom.

Consider first how much the church should be shaped by what happened in the inauguration of the kingdom. We turn there because of Paul's claim that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). Even in our own day, we must build the church on a foundation that was laid over two thousand years ago.

There are at least three ways in which this is true. In the first place, we must build on the full authority of the writings of Christ's apostles and prophets collected in the New Testament canon. Now, I have every reason to believe that readers of this journal intend to follow this course, yet in my experience, it is often much easier to follow old traditions or to run enthusiastically to novel practices that may or may not faithfully follow Scripture. We must remain convinced that the apostolic and prophetic word of the New Testament is a precious gift the church given thousands of years ago, a blessing of the eschatological kingdom.

I am also confident that Reformed Christians are keen to build the church on Christ, the cornerstone. But once again, it is easy for Christ to be diminished in the church when we do not admire the moral perfection of his life, his miracles, the penal, substitutionary nature of his atoning death, his magnificent victory over death in his bodily resurrection, and his ascension into the court of heaven. It is the Christ of two thousand years ago whom we adore and whose good news we proclaim because he began the last manifestation of God's kingdom on the earth.

In all honesty, however, it seems to me that we may not be doing as well at building the church on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the inauguration of the kingdom. As I visit Reformed congregations in various parts of the world, I often worry that our dismay over the excesses we see in the name of the Spirit in other branches of the church has driven us to quench the Spirit. The Spirit has been given to the church as "the guarantee of our inheritance" in Christ (Eph 1:14). One of the best ways to determine the degree to which this is true is to ask if "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" abound in our churches (Gal 5:22–23). If not, we need to give much more attention to the Spirit, the love he instills within us for each other, and the power he gives to our gospel ministry to the world.

As important as it is for us to continue to build on the foundation of the inauguration of the kingdom, we must not only look to what lies behind us. We must also look to what lies ahead, to the future consummation of the kingdom. The full and never-ending manifestation of God's kingship over creation is our destiny.

In my experience, many faithful Christians in the Reformed branch of the church have never been given a compelling vision of their eschatological destiny. I have heard so many of our leaders respond to queries about the consummation with "I do not know anything about it." All too often, we leave those we lead with the popular visions of enjoying endless sunrises, golf games, and fishing expeditions in heaven. Or we press upon them more

pious images of singing in choirs forever. These options may assure us of goodness beyond the grave, yet they usually do not enable the people of the church to live as people of the kingdom.

Imagine the impact on every dimension of the church today when the biblical portrait of the consummation of the kingdom resides deeply within our hearts. On that day, we will be raised incorruptible to enter a glorious, new world. The judge of all the earth will look at us and say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34).

Dark dystopian visions of the future of our world surround us today, but our hope for the future is utopia, a perfect new creation. At the consummation of our age, the corrupt, oppressive, violent kingdom of this world will "become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever" (Rev 11:15). When we fix our eyes on this compelling vision of our future as the people of the church and the kingdom, we will be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord [our] labor is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).

The Holiness of the Church[1]

GERALD BRAY

Abstract

Holiness, the Holy Spirit's work, is not external conformity to a law but an internal transformation. God does not expect us to be perfect, but he wants us to have the mind of Christ and to act accordingly. Personal holiness and the holiness of the church ("a holy nation") go together. Our lives must reflect the teachings of the Bible. We are holy because God chose us, but we must grow in holiness (sanctification). In this life, we shall always be sinners, saved by divine grace and not by human effort. Today, the church needs pastors and teachers who can show us how to grow in holiness, to strengthen the church for the battle and share in the victory over sin in Christ.

Keywords

Behavior, chosen, creation, divine, holiness, image, law, likeness, perfection, persons, sanctification

I. *A Holy Nation*

> You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9–10 ESV)

[1] This article was originally presented on October 29, 2022, at the Sixth General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship, in Orlando, Florida, https://wrf.global/about/the-general-assembly/sixth-assembly. The editors added footnotes for this publication.

These stirring words, written by the apostle Peter to "the elect exiles of the dispersion" in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1 Pet 1:2), continue to echo down through the ages as a clear definition of what the church is and why God has called it into being. At the heart of our identity as Christians is the fact that we are holy, set apart by God for his purposes, gathered together from the four corners of the earth and blessed by the grace that equips us for the task that no human being, relying on his own strength, could ever hope to accomplish. "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"—this definition of the church must be the starting point for considering what it means to be his children and how we should reflect that in our lives today.

Peter's definition begins with an explanation of the church's origins in the mind of God—it is a chosen race. It continues with a declaration of its function in the created order—it is a royal priesthood. And it culminates in the perfect description of its character—it is a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. We shall return to the church's origin and its chief function in due course, but let us begin with what the church is meant to be in its very essence. What does it mean for it to be a holy nation? Already, at the beginning of his epistle, Peter had quoted Leviticus 11:44–45, where, in the midst of regulations regarding clean and unclean foods, God told the Israelites that they were to be holy, even as he is holy (v. 11; cf. 1 Pet 1:16).[2] The Christian church, following the command and example of Jesus himself as recorded in Mark 7:14–23, abandoned the letter of the food laws but kept their spirit by extracting the underlying principle of holiness from its external manifestation in the Mosaic legislation. Christian holiness is not measured by what we eat and drink but by how we purge the thoughts and desires that come from within our hearts and minds.

It is a much taller order than the one God gave to the Israelites. It is relatively easy to abstain from eating pork, for example, but how do we get rid of those passions and prejudices that haunt our minds and corrupt our judgments? Often, we do not even recognize these malign impulses and allow ourselves to be led astray by forces that creep up on us seemingly unawares. Moreover, by internalizing the demand for holiness, Jesus shifted the

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[2] On God's holiness, see Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 215–18; see further Gerald Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979). For brief comments on holiness and its relation to the church, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, New Combined Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 73–74, 574–75.

burden of proof from the community to the individual. Eating nonkosher food might be an individual choice, but it could easily be perceived by the community and censured accordingly. Pigs can be banned from sale in the market in a way that evil thoughts cannot be wished away. Being governed by law, Israelite society could present an appearance of outward holiness that was much more difficult for the church to replicate. There have been times when the church has enjoyed secular power and has been able to turn its principles into law, but this has always been seen as inadequate. As the New Testament makes clear, holiness is primarily a matter of transforming individual behavior so that Christians conform to God's will and so contribute to the upbuilding of the church as a whole. The foundation is secure because it rests on the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. However, the superstructure of the holy temple must conform to its foundations if it is to withstand the pressures that it will face, and Paul appeals to every believer to make sure that he is worthy of his calling (Eph 2:19–22). To be a holy nation in the sight of God is not the result of a decree given from the top down but the fruit of patient construction from the bottom up—a more challenging but also more promising procedure because a church built on a solid foundation with every stone in place is more likely to endure than a prefabricated frame that has been dropped down with little regard for the ground on which it is placed or for the people who are meant to inhabit it.

When considering what it means for us to be holy, even as God is holy, the first thing we must accept is that there are some ways in which we can never be like him. He is infinite, eternal, and sovereign over everything he has made. If these are the attributes that make him holy, then we can never duplicate them, however much we may want to and however hard we try. God knows that, of course, and does not expect us to achieve the impossible.[3] Strictly speaking, holiness is not an attribute of God's being at all. God can be described as holy only when he is being contrasted with other things that are not, and since he has made those other things out of nothing, the word holy cannot be applied to him apart from their existence. In other words, God is holy, not in his eternal, uncreated self but in relation to the things that he has made—he is completely different from them, must not be confused with them, and, above all, must not be mistaken for them.

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[3] For discussions of holiness among God's attributes and in relation to the distinction between God's incommunicable and communicable attributes, see Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 212–14; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 55–56; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 148–255, esp. 216–21.

Pagan peoples worship creatures instead of the creator because they are unable to distinguish him from them, but neither Jews nor Christians can do so. Idolatry, as the worship of creatures is called, is the greatest sin because it sanctifies what is not divine and has no conception of God's absolute distinctiveness, which is what the Bible calls his holiness.

No creature can ever become divine, and in that sense, no human being can ever be truly holy. However, human beings are unique in the created order because we are created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26).[4] Even though we are not divine in ourselves, there is something in us that connects us to God, whether we recognize that or not. Even fallen humanity shares in this connection, which makes us guilty for not honoring our prototype in a way that no other creature is. Sin is a human failing that does not apply to other creatures. An animal or a falling tree may kill me, but neither of these has committed a sin or broken the sixth commandment (Exod 20:13). At the same time, neither of them can be redeemed either—when the Son of God came into the world, he came to save human beings, not dogs or trees. This principle also applies to the angelic creatures who have rebelled against God. They could fall away, and some did, but the demons, as these fallen angels are called, cannot be redeemed because they are not made in God's image. God hates nothing that he has made, and so he loves even Satan and his minions, but in their case, love means keeping them in being but denying them either salvation or eventual annihilation. They will worship God and acknowledge his sovereignty, but they will remain outcasts and will not reign with him in his glory as believers in Christ will do.

To be created in the image and likeness of God is to be a person with an innate capacity for relationships with other persons, not just with other human beings but also (and primarily) with the three persons of God himself, as Peter reminds us in the opening salutation to his first epistle (cf. 1 Pet 1:2). We must look at that the level of personal relationship to see how we can share in the holiness of God. Finite creatures though we are, we are nevertheless called to enjoy a relationship with him that allows us to speak to him and enter to some degree into the mysterious thoughts of his mind. We cannot expect to understand everything about him, but the fact that we can stand in his presence and commune with him is an act of divine grace that transcends the capacity of our minds to understand. We can see that it is to our great advantage to be able to talk to God, but why should he want to communicate with us? He does not need us to be himself or to manifest

[4] For more on the concept of the image of God, see Gerald Lewis Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.2 (1991): 195–225.

his glory, and the majority of those who have been created in his image and likeness are not granted that privilege. Communion with him is granted only to those on whom he has set his love. Why he should have chosen us and not others is a mystery that has not been revealed to us, but we can be quite certain that it has nothing to do with any merits that we might possess. Israel was taught this fundamental lesson by Moses himself:

> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers … (Deut 7:6–8)

It is by an act of his unfathomable love that God has chosen us from among the nations. In Christ his choice has broadened from the physical descendants of Abraham to encompass representatives of the entire human race (cf. Rom 3:16–17). Before Christ came, Israel existed as an identifiable reality with its own language and culture, but the church did not. In Christ, those who were not his people have been called to become a new nation, one not bound by language, geography, or inheritance but united across all human barriers, as members of the body of God's beloved Son. It is our holiness in his eyes that makes us what we are, binding us to him first and then to one another as we share in the common inheritance of the saints in light.

This new nation, let it be said, is first and foremost God's choice and not ours. We are neither born into it, nor can we apply for citizenship in it by taking some kind of test or fulfilling certain criteria for belonging. To be sure, the church has visible and external signs of membership, of which baptism is the most important and universal, but it is no guarantee that we are members of the chosen people. Like the Lord's Supper, baptism shows us what the gospel is and what its benefits are, but if we do not receive that gospel by faith, then it is of no value to us. On the contrary, as Paul says of the Lord's Supper, we may eat and drink to our own damnation because we are unable to discern what the true meaning of the outward signs is (1 Cor 11:27–29). Some Christians are at great pains to fence the Lord's Table or to restrict baptism to those whom they believe to have an adequate profession of faith, but these attempted safeguards are far from foolproof. There is no substitute for faith, and ultimately it is God alone who sees into our hearts and who knows the truth about where we stand in relation to him.

To be chosen by God means that our holiness is not synonymous with sinless perfection. If it were, nobody would (or could) ever be chosen at all.

No one is so close to the kingdom of God that he is entitled to enter it on his merits, but equally, nobody is so far away from it that he has no chance of ever being included in it. It is God's decision, not ours, and our holiness is a gift from him. In human terms, some of the most promising candidates will be turned away at the judgment, while some of the least noteworthy will be crowned with glory and honor. That is not an excuse for us to behave like the prodigal son, but it is a reminder that however far we may be from God, he can still call us to himself. Those who have been chosen will be redeemed, and no power in heaven or on earth will be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38–39).

To be chosen by God means that we are given an agenda to live by that is laid down for us in the Holy Scriptures. Just as we have not chosen our election, we have not chosen this agenda either. We have no need to add to it, as some branches of the Christian church have done by inventing devotional practices or other traditions that go beyond what God has commanded, but we cannot subtract from it either, as many people are prone to do. There is no shortcut into the kingdom of heaven, and the church today is not at liberty to excuse its members from obedience to God's commands on the ground that they are no longer applicable. Neither the passage of time nor the expansion of human science has altered the will of God for our lives, and we must respect that whether we find it convenient to do so or not.

God's agenda for us is not something that we can accomplish by ourselves—the only way to fulfill it is for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, guided and strengthened by him to do what would otherwise be impossible for us. The agenda is the law written on our hearts. To those who are not filled with the Spirit, the law's holiness is a message of despair and ultimately of death. By itself, the law can do nothing but set the standard required of us—it cannot give us what we need to live by it. But to those who are filled with the Spirit of God, the holiness of the law comes into its own as we interpret it not according to the letter but in the Spirit who has been given to us. This is what the church claims to be and to possess.

To be chosen by God means that there is no escape from his will, which he will accomplish in our lives whether we want him to or not. We may be tempted to deny Christ as Peter did or run away from his calling like the prophet Jonah, but God will call us back to his purposes. We may even discover, as Jonah did, that the ministry we do not want bears fruit in ways that we cannot appreciate. God is sovereign and uses us, weaknesses and all, to work out his plan both for us and for the world. It is also possible that we shall wander in error and rebellion for many years, as Saul of Tarsus did, but remember what he said to the Galatians: after telling them that he had

persecuted the Church of God, Paul went on to say, "He who had set me apart from before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me" (Gal 1:15–16). Like all of us, Saul had been chosen from before the foundation of the world to manifest the glory of God. For those who are chosen, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, whatever appearances may suggest to the contrary. We are holy and therefore protected, whatever our outward circumstances or actual behavior may be. God does not approve of everything his chosen people do, but we may rest assured that when the time is ripe, he will intervene, put us right, and send us out along the path that he has prepared for us from the beginning.

What is true of individuals is even more true of the church. There have been times when the church has rested on its laurels and done nothing to further the gospel. There have been places where it has been complicit in social evils like slavery and racial segregation. Church leaders have sinned for a long time and discredited their ministry. Corruption of one kind or another has dogged the church's mission, even in places where the gospel has never put down solid roots. And yet, in spite of everything, the light of Christ has not been extinguished. Faithful watchmen have kept the flame burning, even when it has appeared that all was lost. Where Christians have been persecuted—and more people died for their faith in the twentieth century than in the entire history of the church before then—martyrs have arisen, and the church has been purified by their witness. It may yet be that the sick churches of the Western world will not come back to life unless and until they are forced to suffer for their beliefs—we do not know. It may also be that the remarkable growth of the church in places like Iran and China will cease when persecution comes to an end, and they will find themselves in the same predicament that their Western counterparts do, with internal division, false teaching, and general apathy replacing the zeal that we now see. The history of Israel is a warning to us—the chosen people suffered slavery, exile, and internal apostasy for centuries, but they were preserved in being, and in spite of everything, they are still with us today. Holiness is not a passport to an easy life for people who are not naturally born to it. It is the fruit of the refiner's fire, and the church experiences it as much as individual believers do. There is no escape from the will of God for our sanctification.

To be a holy nation is to be chosen by God as a royal priesthood. The oddness of this expression may not strike us immediately, but in Israel, the monarchy and the priesthood were never combined. The only priest-king in the Old Testament is Melchizedek, who stands out because of his

uniqueness. It is only in Jesus Christ, the one who is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (cf. Heb 7:17), that the throne and the altar come together. He is both the king and the priest, the kingdom and the sacrifice. We who are called to be members of his body are also called to sacrifice as our priest-king has done. The apostle Paul is very clear about this. He told the Romans to present their bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," which was their spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). It is obvious that he was using the word "sacrifice" in a metaphorical sense, but that we must die to this world and be born again by the Spirit of God is a constant New Testament theme, and it defines what the Church is and is called to be. The holy nation is a royal priesthood formed after the image of Christ and called to witness to and for him.

II. *Sanctifying What Is Already Holy*

One of the apparent paradoxes about holiness is that it is both a gift and a work in progress. It is a gift with immediate application, as, for example, in the case of the thief on the cross, who Jesus said would be with him that very day in Paradise (Luke 23:43). Of course, nobody should use that example as an excuse to put off conversion until death approaches, but we must accept that such unusual circumstances are possible and that the grace of God is not diminished because of a lack of time for sanctification. This needs to be said, if only to counteract the opposite error that has plagued the church for generations and still leaves its mark today. It has long been thought by a great many people that sanctification is the achievement of a very few, a spiritual elite dignified with the title of saint. The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, has a sophisticated procedure for determining who these people are, and every once in a while, new "saints" are proclaimed and canonized. To get on this list, it is necessary for the candidate to have performed a miracle or two because there is really no other way of knowing whether he or she is actually in heaven. When looking back to the distant past, however, the careful procedures of the modern Catholic Church cease to apply. There are a large number of saints whose credentials are impossible to verify and who in some cases may not have existed, the most famous examples of these being Saint George, the patron saint of England, and Saint Denis in France. To be fair, Rome occasionally takes some of these traditional saints off the approved canonical list, though what happens to the prayers that innocent people have offered to them is not explained.

It is easy for us to shake our heads in disapproval at this sort of thing, but the notion that some people can (and do) attain sinless perfection is by no

means absent from the Protestant world. John Wesley came to believe that he had reached that goal toward the end of his life, and the holiness tradition has continually emphasized the need for a second blessing that will set the seal on the Christian's sanctification and guarantee his entry into heaven. There is no ground for this kind of belief, but that is not to say that it does not exist or that it is not very influential. In the New Testament, all believers are called saints, but none of us could approach a stranger and introduce ourselves in such terms—even if what we would say is correct. For me to call myself a saint would sound ludicrously presumptuous, and I would never do so, but I have to admit that in reacting this way I am bowing to the false doctrine of sanctification that has so deeply affected the church through the ages. I do not like that, but I have no choice in the matter because the penetration of erroneous teaching has gone too deep to be reversed, and the truth is obscured as a result.

But if as Christians we are holy in principle, do we still need to be sanctified in practice? How is that possible? Some people have said that sanctification is an illusion, a relapse into a doctrine of salvation by works that the Protestant Reformation has supposedly delivered us from. To their minds, justification by faith alone is all that is required, and the Christian can "sin boldly," to misquote Martin Luther's famous remark to Philipp Melanchthon, knowing that we cannot lose our salvation by our bad behavior. Many Catholics believe that this is authentic Protestant teaching and reproach us for it, but Paul's words to the Romans are a sufficient refutation: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1–2). On the contrary, we are called to live in newness of life, which in effect means that we have to adopt a program of sanctification that requires deliberate action on our part.

Others have tried to explain the apparent paradox by claiming that sanctification means becoming what we already are. This means that what is true in theory must become a reality in practice. There is undoubtedly some truth in this, but there are dangers in such paradoxical thinking that we must not ignore. What will happen if I die before reaching Christian maturity, which is almost certainly going to be the case? Will I go to heaven half-formed, or will there be an intermediate stage in which what is missing in me will be introduced or brought to completion? It is thoughts like that that led to the invention of purgatory as a place where the dead can pursue their sanctification until such time as they are good enough to get to heaven. No doubt, many of those who advocate the "become what you already are" interpretation of sanctification would reject such a conclusion, but we must

apply logic to good intentions and adjust our theology accordingly. In recent years, there have been some Evangelical theologians who have fallen for this way of thinking and who have sought to reintroduce a doctrine of purgatory into Protestant thought, even though there is no evidence for it and it contradicts the very nature of the gospel. Purgatory resurfaces in spite of all the arguments advanced against it because people know that there will always be a discrepancy between what we are and what we are supposed to be, and the only way out seems to be by providing a means to close that gap before we enter into our eternal rest.

That fact is that we are what we are, and that will not change. We are saved by grace through faith and, having done all, remain miserable sinners in need of that grace until the day we die. When we are in heaven, we shall be there, not because we have been miraculously turned into better people, but because we have been grafted into the olive tree of Christ. It is by union with him, not by any transformation of ourselves, that we shall be there, and we shall be shining in his glory, not our own. As branches of the tree, we shall be visible and distinguishable—we shall not dissolve into the Being of God—but it is only by union with him that we shall live, and not by any transformation of our own natures.

So what, then, is sanctification? As the New Testament tells us, it has two main components that follow one another in logical sequence, though in practice, they go together. The first element is that we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). This is fundamental. Without understanding there can be no sanctification or holiness of any kind. Good intentions are not enough. It is possible to do the right things in ignorance, as the rich young ruler did (Matt 19:16–22). Jesus did not criticize him for his accomplishments or even suggest that he was being hypocritical in his claim to have fulfilled the law. Instead, he showed the young man that he did not have the mind of Christ by reaching deeper into the recesses of his soul. The young man did not fall down by any failure to keep the commandments but by something more fundamental than that—his heart was in the wrong place. Instead of trusting in God, he put his faith in his own possessions. The commandments do not touch on those, at least not directly, but Jesus did, and the young man turned away in sorrow. To have the mind of Christ is to give up everything to follow him wherever that may lead and never to look back. We may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but if he is our guide, we shall fear no evil. Do we have this kind of faith? It is easy to sit here in comfort and say that we do, but what will happen when the test comes? The mind of Christ is one that learns obedience in the school of suffering (Heb 5:8), and how many of us can claim that we have succeeded

in doing that? We are haunted by the memory of Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, who recanted his beliefs in writing in the hope of saving himself from being burned at the stake, but who in his final agony found the courage to put his hand into the fire first, as if to atone for his weakness. What would you or I do in his place? Would we try to save ourselves at the cost of our conscience, or would we have the courage to be true to our beliefs, even if it cost us our lives? We all know what the right answer is, but would we have the courage to act on it? Tertullian wrote that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, but there is no indication that he was a martyr himself, and I fear that most of us are probably in the same position as he was.

To have the mind of Christ is to act in the knowledge that Christ gives us—that is the second element of our sanctification. We are not perfect people, nor can we perform superhuman acts of heroism without the grace of God working in us. We hold our spiritual treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7), and we must not be surprised if at times the earth makes its presence felt. It is not success that God demands of us but obedience to him, whatever the result may be. There are many martyrs whose obscure deaths must seem pointless to most observers but who will be wearing crowns of glory in heaven because they have been faithful, even if they have apparently achieved nothing noteworthy in this life.

It is remarkable how often the New Testament connects holiness in the church with sexual morality. Christians are constantly being told not to indulge in fornication, to practice continence in their relations with each other, and to remove offenders in this respect from their midst. Other forms of personal misconduct also come in for censure, sometimes with impressive vice lists that are almost always tied to social behavior. The works of the flesh, says Paul, in addition to sexual immorality, are "impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these" (Gal 5:19–21). He tells Titus that a church leader must not be "arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain" (Tit 1:7). Once again, the emphasis is on antisocial behavior by particular individuals, which the apostle clearly sees as injurious to the health and reputation of the church community. These things are the result of inner disorders and can only be controlled if those who are susceptible to them experience an inner transformation of heart and mind that will change the way they act and relate to others.

What we are dealing with here is spiritual warfare within our own souls. It is not so much a case of becoming what we are as of expelling from our minds the thoughts and attitudes that we have inherited from Adam and

switching our allegiance to Christ. We are set apart, called to be holy, and therefore subject to deep inner change that will affect everything we think, say, or do. That this process is likely to be gradual is built into the image of the new birth. To be born again is to start afresh, to become like a little baby, and to grow in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. Yet this process of regeneration begins when our old Adam is already fully formed. It is therefore not surprising that the spiritual struggle that we are called to wage will at first appear to be a very difficult challenge. How can a child fight a grown man? But if defeat is often hard to avoid, especially in the initial stages, we must always remember that the old man is dying while the new one is going from strength to strength. We shall never escape from the old Adam completely, and as long as we live in this world, the voices attracting us back to him will continue to be heard. Yet if and as we turn our eyes toward Jesus and cling to him for succor and deliverance, we shall find that both our understanding of what is right and our ability to resist what is wrong will grow proportionately as we soldier on. This is what it means to be holy and to be continually sanctified at the same time. We are holy because we are justified by faith alone as a once-for-all act of divine grace and mercy. But it is as we do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil that we grow into our new life and draw nearer to the likeness of God.

III. *From Individual Sanctification to Corporate Holiness*

So far, I have been speaking mainly in terms of the individual believer as a member of the church and not about the church as a whole. This is in line with the New Testament, where the holiness of its individual members is often stressed as the essential foundation for the holiness of the entire church. But in 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul tells us that as a church, Christians are like a body, with eyes, ears, and hands that may look very different from each other but that are not self-sufficient and must work together for the greater good of the whole. In the same passage, we are also told that if one part of the body suffers, the entire body is affected. If there is a thorn in our little toe, for example, the pain it causes will focus our attention on it, and we will not overcome it by the thought that there is nothing wrong with our eyes. The good of the whole is directly dependent on the well-being of each part, and on this basis, we must approach the question of the holiness of the entire church as opposed to the holiness of each individual within it.

The first principle that we have to accept is that however we define the church, it is made up of sinful human beings. The idea that there can be

some kind of spiritual perfection in a body of people who are not themselves perfect is illusory, and those who have sought collective purity by seceding from a mixed multitude have invariably been disappointed sooner or later. However, if perfection is unattainable, the sense of a common calling and purpose is not. It is one thing to be part of an army in which all the soldiers wear the same body armor and are combatting the same enemy and quite another to find ourselves in the midst of a group of people, some of whom are dressed for spiritual warfare but others of whom are not and indeed may be actively fighting for the other side. Sadly, we have to admit that in the church today the second scenario is often the more common one. Time and again, the warriors of Christ find that they are being sabotaged from within their own ranks by people who are either indifferent to their concerns or in active collaboration with the enemy. In the Western churches we see this very clearly in the struggles over homosexuality. Many people in those churches do not see any problem at all. For them, the issue is either unimportant or a matter of personal choice that should not be allowed to interfere with the fellowship of the wider body. In practice, of course, their indifference works in favor of the enemies of the gospel, who use it to pretend that the issues involved are secondary and can therefore be brushed aside, while at the same time insisting that anything less than the full acceptance ("inclusion") of practicing homosexuals at every level of the church is unloving and therefore a denial of the teaching of Christ. Those who oppose such tactics are often accused of bigotry and prejudice based on emotion rather than reason. Arguments like that can be powerful and difficult to combat, with the result that false teaching gains a foothold and the holiness of the church is compromised.

There is no easy solution to this problem, and orthodox believers must be prepared for a long and difficult battle. The biggest single difficulty that we face is that few Christians are trained to see that practical questions such as the recognition of homosexuality are rooted in fundamental principles of doctrine that ought to shape and determine our approach to them. In this particular case, the doctrine at stake is that of creation. When God made human beings, he made them not only male and female (cf. Gen 1:28) but also for each other. If Adam was lonely all by himself, God could presumably have produced a second Adam to keep him company, and the garden of Eden could have become a boys' club, something that Adam himself might even have preferred. But that was not his way. Instead, he created Eve, not out of the ground, as he had created Adam, but from Adam himself, so that different though she was from him, she was nevertheless bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (cf. Gen 2:23). Male and female complement each

other and were meant to do so from the beginning. Same-sex relationships are possible and have their place, but they cannot imitate, let alone replace, the most essential relationship of all. However much we may wish to ignore or deny it, humanity cannot reproduce itself except by the sexual interaction of male and female. This interaction is necessary for the preservation of our race; it is not an optional extra that can be safely disregarded or replaced with something else. To use our sexual organs for something that precludes reproduction is to abuse them and to attack the doctrine of creation.

Attacks on creation are nothing new. The early Christians had to face an opposition that claimed that because the created order is imperfect in some ways—allowing disease and deformity to exist, for example—it cannot have been the work of a good creator. Instead, it was claimed that the world was made by a divine force called the Demiurge (Greek for "creator"), whose work had to be brought to perfection by a higher god, identified as the Father of Jesus Christ but a divinity quite distinct from, and in competition with, the God of the Jews. For these thinkers, or Gnostics, as we call them today, the Christian must rise above the limitations of the created order and seek salvation in a higher, more purely spiritual reality.[5] It was a denial of the material world in favor of a supposedly more spiritual order, but it was also a denial of the incarnation and therefore a repudiation of the salvation offered to us in Christ. The truth, however, is that the Son of God did not appear on earth in human form—he became a man in the womb of his mother Mary. He did not go through the motions of suffering and death without really feeling them himself—he suffered and died for our salvation. On the cross he took our place and died the death that we deserve for the sins that we have committed. The early Christians had to insist that the creator God is also our Redeemer—what is wrong with the world lies not in the way in which it was created but in the disobedience of those who were given dominion over it. Sin and evil are spiritual forces in the mind, not defects in the material universe.

What we are seeing today is a similar movement, in which the fantasies of the mind are being allowed to deny the reality of matter. If our identity as human beings is not tied to our material bodies, it is a mental construct that has no concrete existence. Transgenderism is the natural outcome of this worldview because it insists that I can have whatever identity I choose, even if that identity flies in the face of biology. The notion that I can claim to be

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[5] On Gnosticism, see Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 29, and 255, n. 16; on God as creator and Gnosticism, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (1960; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 83–86.

a woman with no objective evidence to demonstrate it and that others must respect my assertion is the ultimate denial of the goodness of our creator. The church cannot succumb to this without denying the first article of the Creed ("I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth") and the entire logic on which Genesis 1–3 is built. If the church is to be holy, it must be built on a foundation of truth (2 Thess 2:13), and the truth is not a matter of personal preference or opinion. Making that case may be very difficult in many parts of the modern church, but it must be our starting point. There can be no holiness in practice if there is no holiness in principle, and it is the function of our doctrine, contained in the ancient creeds and in the Reformation confessions, to point that out. Our first task must therefore be to educate our people to appreciate this and to look for the principles underlying the questions that we are expected to deal with.

Teaching correct doctrine to the church can only be done by preparing teachers who can do that effectively. This is the role of seminaries and of those who have been called to write for the benefit of God's people everywhere. We are fortunate to be living in a time when global communication is easier than it has ever been and when the resources available to some churches can be readily shared with others. Of course, these same advantages are also available to heretics, but we should not be too worried about that. In the open marketplace of ideas, the good can drive out the bad, and if the members of the church are primed to seek what is good and faithful to the Scriptures, the chances that this will be the preferred outcome are high. There is no infallible method for assuring that, of course, and there will always be charlatans who will do what they can to lead people astray, but here we must trust in the sovereignty of God. The apostle Paul discovered that his congregations often went astray as soon as he left them, but we know that it is the letters that he wrote to rebuke and correct them that have survived, whereas the nature of the errors have to be guessed at from the evidence that he provides for them. Let us trust that it will also be so with us.

Teaching correct doctrine requires preparing gifted teachers, but those teachers must also model the principles that they proclaim to others. The Pastoral Epistles make this very clear. Many scholars think that they are not authentically Pauline in origin because of the subject matter of which they treat, but I would argue that, on the contrary, they are central to Paul's understanding of ministry. The shocking truth is that there are teachers and preachers whose words are fully orthodox but whose lives are a contradiction of everything they proclaim. Sooner or later, many of them are exposed, and the church is scandalized by their deception. There is no guaranteed

way of avoiding this altogether, but we must always be on the alert for it and, when we come across it, have the courage to say so and deal with the offender(s) as best we can.

This is not easy. Heresy trials seldom achieve their aims and may backfire if there is a wave of sympathy for the accused. But problematic as church discipline often is, it must not be lost sight of, as it often has been in mainline Protestant churches, especially in the Western world. At the time of the Reformation, the Church of England included a service in its Prayer Book that asserted first that the discipline demanded of the church had ceased to function effectively and second that congregations needed to be exhorted to try to examine themselves until such time as the desired discipline could be restored. This service, known as the Commination, or denunciation of sinners, still survives in the traditional Book of Common Prayer, where it is appointed for use on Ash Wednesday in particular, but it is seldom heard in practice, and in modern liturgical reforms it has been omitted altogether. The desire to restore the church's primitive discipline has simply been abandoned, with consequences that are evident all around us.

Yet true teachers of the faith cannot ignore the need to challenge people in this way. Preaching is more than just teaching—it is exhortation to obey and apply what we already know. I listen to a great many sermons, most of which convey interesting and useful information but few of which challenge anybody to do anything—and certainly not to examine themselves and repent of their sins. One of the glories of classical Presbyterianism was the communion season, when church members were prepared in advance by a series of sermons and other spiritual exercises exhorting them to turn to the Lord before presuming to come to dine at his table. I believe that this practice still survives in some places, but very often it has faded away, to the great detriment of the church. The fear expressed by men like the late James Torrance, that some people may be so overcome by a sense of their own sinfulness that they dare not come to Holy Communion, is misguided and overblown. Perhaps there are a few people like that, but better that than the opposite, which is all too common nowadays. Staying away from the Lord's Supper out of an exaggerated sense of unworthiness is based on a misunderstanding, since none of us is worthy to partake of the grace of God. That is why Christ came, after all, and why he has given us his Holy Spirit. But to eat and drink with abandon, not discerning the Lord's body, is far worse and far more likely to be the case today. I am not advocating mass excommunication of those whose indiscipline risks profaning the Lord's table, but surely some sense of the solemnity of the undertaking to which we are committed ought to be conveyed to those whom we invite to partake.

Here we have reached the heart of the matter and the ultimate test of the church's holiness. The command of Jesus to remember his atoning death until he comes again is the call to affirm that we are prepared to take up our cross and follow him, that we are totally dependent on his sacrifice for our spiritual life, and that only as we proclaim our corporate union and our spiritual unity with him can we truly say that we are advancing the holiness of the church. Sin will always be with us, and failure is inevitable in a fallen world. However hard we try, we shall never manage to cleanse our churches or ourselves from the burdens that we bear as a consequence of the fall of Adam. We cannot be what we were never meant to be, nor can we become something that lies beyond our grasp. But the light of Christ has shone in our darkness, and we have beheld his glory. It is as we walk in that light that his glory will shine in and among us and that the church will manifest the holiness without which we shall not see the Lord.

Church and State: The Promise of Reformed Theology for the Church Today

GUY PRENTISS WATERS

Abstract

This article surveys the ways in which Reformed theology (particularly the Westminster Standards and subsequent generations of Scottish and American Presbyterians) has articulated the relationship between the church and civil government. It addresses two fruits of this line of reflection that are especially pertinent to the contemporary church. The first is that this doctrine makes provision for the divinely guaranteed religious liberty of all human beings, even in the face of a civil government's attempts to abridge or usurp that authority. The second is that this doctrine provides clear guidance to the church concerning the ways in which the church, in its organized capacity, may and may not engage in matters that concern both the church and the state.

Keywords

Church, state, civil magistrate, religious liberty, Westminster Assembly, Scottish Presbyterian, American Presbyterian, PC (USA)

The church has scarcely known a day when it has not had to negotiate its relationship with the civil powers of this world.[1] The nature and dynamics of the relationship between the church and the civil magistrate are simultaneously theological and practical. Whether or how the church should be active in the public square requires careful reflection on the nature, government, and mission of the church. One's answer to this question has wide-ranging implications for the church's day-to-day engagement with the world, particularly the temporal authorities in this world.

In this article, we will first chart some of the primary positions that Christians throughout the centuries have staked out with respect to the relationship between the church and civil government. In doing so, we will particularly explore the way in which Reformed theologians in Scotland and the United States articulated this relation. We will give specific attention to some of the practical implications that this doctrine has for the church's engagement with the governments of this world.

I. *Church and State—A Brief Survey*

Any survey of positions within the church's history regarding the relationship between church and state must be selective and brief. We may look to some of the leading positions within the Protestant churches of the Reformation. A leading question concerned whether the civil magistrate had authority with respect to the worship and discipline of the church, and, if so, the extent of that authority. Many in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries affirmed that the civil magistrate had some responsibility for either or both of these. The sixteenth-century Continental Reformed writer Thomas Erastus argued that the state had a proper role in aspects of the church's government, particularly in matters of church discipline.[2] What came to be known as Erastianism denoted a constellation of positions that advocated generally for "state control of religion."[3] Such divines as John Lightfoot and John Selden advocated (unsuccessfully) for Erastian views of church and state at

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[1] This article will appear as a chapter in my forthcoming *One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Biblical Doctrine of the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham). A form of this article was presented as a seminar at the General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship, Orlando, FL, in October 2022.

[2] On the life and thought of Thomas Erastus, see Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate: A Renaissance Physician in the Second Reformation*, BSCH 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[3] Alan D. Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*, RAD (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 21.

the Westminster Assembly.[4] The Church of England, from its founding, acknowledged the crown as the Church's head. The king or queen possessed and exercised wide-ranging powers with respect to the doctrine, worship, and government of the Church of England.[5]

Within the broader Reformed tradition, however, a more circumscribed view of the powers of the civil magistrate with respect to the church became increasingly prominent. The late-seventeenth-century Genevan theologian Francis Turretin denied that the civil magistrate had the authority to "make new articles of faith or institute and enjoin new worship" or to "exercise ecclesiastical discipline by the authority of the ecclesiastical keys."[6] The principle of the delimitation of the magistrate's authority with respect to the church was one that John Calvin had articulated earlier.[7] Even so, Calvin positively affirmed the lawful authority of the civil magistrate with respect to some aspects of "religion and divine worship," a point that Turretin would later reiterate and develop.[8] The Westminster Assembly would forcefully affirm this delimitative principle in expansive and comprehensive terms.[9]

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[4] On the debates relating to church and state in the Westminster Assembly, see Robert S. Paul, *Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the "Grand Debate"* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985).

[5] For a survey of the powers of the crown with respect to the Church of England, see Charles Hodge, "Relation of the Church and State," in *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 110–11. In different circumstances, Lutheran churches experienced the oversight and even control of German princes. Decisive in this regard for formalizing this practice on the Continent was the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose territory, his religion"), in which the prince of a realm had the authority to determine the religion of his realm, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed.

[6] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 3:319 (18.34.12–13).

[7] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battle, LCC 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.20.1–2 (2:1485–88).

[8] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.9 (2:1495); Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:316–36 (18.34.1–51), esp. 3:320 (18.34.14). In the course of this question, Turretin denies that the magistrate "can or ought to compel his subjects to religion and faith" while arguing that the civil magistrate may "coerce and … inflict some punishment upon contumacious and obstinate heretics," even to the point of capital punishment; ibid., 3:323, 328, 332 (18.34.21, 32, 44).

[9] A critical antecedent to Westminster's doctrine of the independence of the church's government from the civil magistrate is found in the Scottish Second Book of Discipline (1578), on which see Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 25–30, and "Second Book of Discipline [SBD]," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 765–66. The author of the SBD, Andrew Melville, is famous for his 1596 declaration to King James VI of Scotland: "There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland; there is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member." Thomas McCrie, *The Life of Andrew Melville*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1824), 1:391–92. For a discussion of this

> *The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven*: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God. (WCF 23.3, emphasis added; compare WCF 30.1)[10]

The material that follows the colon in this paragraph would have been unobjectionable to many seventeenth-century Protestants (yet, as we will note below, it was substantively rewritten by the eighteenth-century American Presbyterian church). However, the initial statement (italicized) "was a radical proposal for the times," not least within the Church of England.[11] Furthermore, while the Westminster Confession later affirms the right of the civil magistrate to "call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion," such a call was not required for an assembly of ministers to convene (WCF 31.2). Whatever the circumstances of these assemblies' convening, Westminster affirmed their right "ministerially" to address matters of doctrine, order, and discipline and declared that the authority of their "decrees and determinations" derived entirely from Scripture (WCF 31.3). The deliberations, conclusions, and authority of such assemblies are therefore expressly said to be independent of the civil magistrate.

The Confession's articulation of the fundamental integrity of the church's government and its essential independence from the authority of the civil

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doctrine in the writings of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie, see John V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 304–12.

[10] Unless otherwise indicated, references to the Westminster Confession of Faith in this chapter are to the original edition of 1647 as found in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990).

[11] Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 312. Note the assessment of Alexander F. Mitchell: "Some, I know, will have it, that though the limits of civil obedience are rightly defined in this chapter, too much is allowed to the magistrate in connection with religion. But such should consider that what is here allowed is less than was claimed for him in the old Scotch and other early reformed confessions, and far less than what was conceded in the English and the Irish Articles." Alexander F. Mitchell and John F. Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (1874; repr., Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), lxix, as cited in William S. Barker, "Lord of Lords and King of Commoners: The Westminster Confession and the Relationship of Church and State," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, vol. 1, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003), 418–19.

magistrate received development and refinement within the American Presbyterian Church.[12] The American Presbyterian Church, in adopting the Westminster Confession of Faith a little less than a century after the Confession's drafting, proceeded to modify some of the Confession's articles pertaining to the church's relationship to the governments of this world.[13] In the judgment of the American Presbyterian Church, the original Westminster Confession had not adequately safeguarded the church's independence from the civil magistrate. To this end, the American church in 1788 amended portions of WCF 20.4, 23.3, and 31.1. This effort was complemented by the drafting of eight prefatory "Preliminary Principles" to the new church's "Form of Government," in which care was taken to reaffirm the independence of the church's government from the civil magistrate.[14]

When read alongside the original text of the Westminster Confession, the American Presbyterians' modifications should not be seen as a repudiation of the original Confession's basic doctrine. On the contrary, they were advanced in the interest of clarifying, refining, and maturing the Confession's original statements.[15] The amendment of WCF 20.4 categorically prohibited any involvement of the civil magistrate in the workings of ecclesiastical discipline.[16] The revision of WCF 23.3 clarified that the civil magistrate's obligations and commitments to a particular Christian denomination

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[12] The Scottish Church maintained its adherence to Westminster's doctrine, even as it upheld the doctrine of the state's establishment of the church, on which see, representatively, George Smeaton, "The Scottish Theory of Ecclesiastical Establishments" (1875), in *Sermons and Addresses of George Smeaton*, ed. John W. Keddie (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2022), 193–235; James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (1869; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 1:94–185, 2:345–51; William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 2:557–87. See in particular these surveys, "Church and State (Legal Questions)" and "Church and State (Theological Questions)," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Cameron, 179–80, 180–82.

[13] The material in the remainder of this paragraph and in the following paragraph has come from my "Westminster and Church Government," in *The Westminster Standards for Today: Recovering the Church and Worship for Everyday Christian Living*, ed. Kevin Bidwell (Darlington, UK: EP Books, 2017), 154–55.

[14] Lewis S. Mudge, ed., *Digest of the Acts and Deliverance of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: General Assembly of the PCUSA, 1938), 73–75, as cited by Barker, "Lord of Lords and King of Commoners," 425–26.

[15] So, rightly, Archibald A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (1869; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 427–29. This also was Charles Hodge's view; see Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 42–48. The American Presbyterian Church also removed "tolerating a false religion" as a sin against the second commandment from Westminster Larger Catechism 109.

[16] For a listing of the original Westminster Confession and the American revisions in parallel columns, see Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 22–23.

extended no further than its obligations and commitments to any other particular Christian denomination. It added the provision that the civil magistrate could not "in the least interfere in matters of faith" and omitted lines from the original Confession that affirmed the civil magistrate's duty "that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed." The revision of WCF 31.1 (31.2 original edition) removed from the civil magistrate the right "lawfully [to] call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion," leaving it to the officers of the church alone to call ecclesiastical synods and councils. In summary, the American revisions served to remove what were regarded as inconsistencies within the Westminster Confession by affirming with greater clarity the very biblical principles that the Westminster Divines had expressed in the Westminster Confession.[17]

II. *Basis and Nature of the Church's Relationship with the State*

This "Scoto-American theory" of the relationship between church and state finds its basis in the teaching of Scripture, particularly Jesus's teaching regarding the kingdom of God and the church.[18] Jesus declared to Pilate

[17] That this was the intent of the American Presbyterian Church is suggested by a declaration of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1786, "The Synod of New York & Philadelphia adopt, according to the known and established meaning of their Terms, the Westminster confession [*sic*] of faith as the confession of their faith; save that every candidate for the gospel Ministry is permitted to except against so much of the twenty third Chapter as gives authority to the Civil Magistrate in matters of Religion. The Presbyterian Church in America considers the Church of Christ as a spiritual Society intirely distinct from the Civil Government; & having a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical policy independently of the Interposition of the Magistrate," *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1706–1788*, ed. Guy S. Klett (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), as cited by Leah Farish, "The First Amendment's Religion Clauses: The Calvinist Document that Interprets Them Both," *Journal of Religion and Society* 12 (2010): 3–4.

[18] The expression is that of Stuart Robinson, *Discourses of Redemption*, 3rd ed. (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1867), 474. This doctrine has gone under various names. A common one is that of the "spirituality of the church," a label that can carry liabilities; see the discussions of Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 3–5, and Preston D. Graham Jr., *A Kingdom Not of This World: Stuart Robinson's Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular during the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 169–73. What has come to be known as the two kingdoms doctrine substantially overlaps with the doctrine under review here, on which see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). The extensive biblical-theological framework of the two kingdoms doctrine, however, is unique to it; see David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and*

that his "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). His kingdom is "in origin and nature of another order than the kingship of which Pilate has spoken."[19] Jesus elsewhere affirms the legitimacy of civil government, even as he affirms it to be distinct from the kingdom of God (Matt 22:21). Specifically, disciples have obligations to the governments of this world—they are to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (compare Rom 13:1–7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13–14), but they have no less obligation to God and his kingdom: "Render … to God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21). The kingdom and the state, then, represent distinct spheres of authority that both command the allegiance of every disciple. Because God has appointed each sphere and commands people's allegiance to each as an act of obedience to him, the kingdom and the state therefore do not overlap in their spheres of authority. Each possesses "autonomy in reference to the other" and inherent "freedom from intrusion on the part of the other" with respect to "function and … sphere."[20] "They are as planets moving in concentric orbits."[21]

The kingdom comes to its visible and fullest expression in the church that Jesus establishes.[22] To the church, Jesus assigns a government that is separate from the government of the state. The "rock" upon which Jesus builds his church is Peter as the representative of the Twelve and as the apostolic recipient of revelation from Jesus's heavenly Father (Matt 16:17–18).[23] For this reason, the state has no authority to instruct the church which doctrines or teachings the church must embrace, teach, inculcate, propagate, and enforce. The authorized teachers of the church—the "elders"—are elected by the church upon the church's satisfaction that they possess the requisite qualifications for that office set forth in Scripture. When Jesus speaks of the church's discipline a little later in Matthew's

Culture (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), and the review of Michael N. Jacobs, "The Resurgence of Two Kingdoms Doctrine: A Survey of the Literature" *Themelios* 45.2 (2020): 314–32.

[19] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 594, referencing in addition John 8:23, 38.

[20] John Murray, "The Relation of Church and State," in *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 1:254.

[21] *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Atlanta: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022), 3–4, employing language originally drafted by the nineteenth-century American Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell.

[22] "The visible church … is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ" (WCF 25.2). For an exegetical argument in support of this particular identification, see Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 77–90.

[23] See further Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 36–37.

Gospel, the persons and procedures entailed in discipline comprise a closed system within the church (Matt 18:15–20). The state plays no role in determining how the church should discipline or whom she should discipline, and its agents in no way participate in the church's disciplinary proceedings. It is the church's elders, and they alone, who are tasked with implementing discipline within the church.

The New Testament, however, does not teach the immunity of church members or officers from due punishment lawfully administered by the civil magistrate. The apostle Paul informed the Roman official Festus that he was willing to face the death penalty for any capital crimes that he had committed (Acts 25:9–11). The independence of church and state is not, therefore, altogether absolute. Each, after all, is an ordinance of God. It may help, then, to consider more precisely how it is that church and state (and their respective governments) differ from one another.[24] First, both church and state look to "God as the source of power" for each, but in distinct ways.[25] Civil government is an ordinance of creation and looks to God as the creator, preserver, and judge of all human beings. The church's government is instituted by God as the redeemer of his chosen people.[26] Second and relatedly, the state's government concerns human beings as created in the image of God, whereas the church's government concerns human beings as sinners in need of redemption through Christ. "The state is for the whole race of man, the church consists of that portion of the race which is really, or by credible profession, the mediatorial body of Christ."[27] Third, as "the state is ordained for man as man, [it] is ordained to realize the idea of justice."[28] For this reason, the apostle Paul characterizes civil government through the symbol of a sword (Rom 13:4). The state is not the implement of eschatological justice, but its infliction of penalties and punishments is an expression of "God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:4)

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[24] The order and observations of what follows is particularly indebted to Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1892), 145–52.

[25] Ibid., 145.

[26] This distinction underlies the related distinction between the "essential" and "mediatorial" reigns of Christ, the former concerning his sovereignty as the Second Person of the Godhead over all the works of his hands and the latter concerning authority over all things for the sake of his church; see James Fisher, *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained by Way of Question and Answer*, 3rd ed. (repr., Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1925), 138.

[27] Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 145. Of course, the children of at least one professing member of the church are also subject to the church's government.

[28] Ibid., 145.

and, thus, a pointer to the judgment of the last day.[29] The church's government, however, is not punitive or retributive. It is disciplinary, seeking the "reformation and salvation" of the church's members.[30] As such, it does not employ force or intimidation and has no right to impose this-worldly or bodily sanctions upon its members. Because "the church … moves in the sphere of the spirit," it "appeal[s] to the judgment, the faith, the conscience of its members" and employs "only … argument, exhortation, admonition, [and] censure."[31] It is "not a kingdom of force, but of persuasion, founded upon the conviction of the truth."[32] Finally, both church and state are accountable to God and regulated by God's truth. However, "the constitution of the church is a divine revelation; the constitution of the state must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events."[33] The state is accountable to God as he has made himself known through general revelation, and the church is accountable to God as he has fully revealed himself in Scripture. Because the state is an ordinance of creation, civil magistrates have no authority, as officers of the state, to pronounce the Bible, or any other text, to be revelation from God—"God has given no commission to the state to testify to the truth of Christ's revelation, or to interpret it."[34] This is solely the prerogative of the church.

III. *Foundations for Religious Liberty*

This Scoto-American understanding of the relationship between the church and the state yields at least two particular benefits, each of which serves not only members of the church but also all human beings who come into contact with the church. The first benefit is the provision made for the basis of and guarantee for the divinely guaranteed religious liberty of all human beings, particularly in the face of attempts by civil government to abridge or usurp that authority.

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[29] Peck observes that civil government, as an ordinance of creation, would have been a feature of human society even had Adam not fallen into sin. In such a case, it would have been "simply a directing power," coordinating the efforts of many human beings to "fulfil … love of self and love of neighbor." Ibid., 147. Given the fall, however, civil government necessarily assumes the added function of "restraining and punishing" people for their evil activities. Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 150.

[31] Ibid., 149–50.

[32] Ibid., 155.

[33] Ibid., 151, citing the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (1861).

[34] Ibid., 152.

Although the Protestant Reformation laid the foundations for religious liberty, it was not until the seventeenth century that Protestants began to articulate the doctrine.[35] In contrast with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who claimed that the civil magistrate had complete authority over the church, even in doctrinal matters, the philosopher and theologian John Locke (1632–1704) drew clear delineations between the authority, scope, and power of the commonwealth and that of the church.[36] Locke argued for the "duty of toleration" within civil society, a duty especially incumbent upon the civil magistrate.[37] "Men [are] freed from all dominion over one another in matters of religion," and "these religious societies I call churches … these I say the magistrate ought to tolerate."[38] In particular, Locke denied that the civil magistrate had any authority to regulate the worship and doctrine of particular churches.[39]

In the American colonies, Roger Williams (1603–1683) is widely recognized as a pioneer in the doctrine of religious liberty.[40] Williams pled not only for the Christian citizen's liberty of conscience but for liberty of conscience as a right belonging to all people, at least since the dawn of Christianity.

> It is the will and command of God that (since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus) a permission of the most pagan, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries, and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, [that is,] the sword of God's Spirit, the Word of God.[41]

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[35] For a brief but incisive treatment of Calvin on this point, see David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 195–96.

[36] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 39; John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," in *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 214–25. Note Locke's statement later: "But there is absolutely no such thing, under the Gospel, as a Christian commonwealth." Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," 239. For a recent survey of Locke's understanding of religious freedom, see Joseph Loconte, *God, Locke, and Liberty: The Struggle for Religious Freedom in the West* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014).

[37] Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," 223, 228. Whereas Locke speaks of "toleration," that is, the permission granted by the civil magistrate to citizens to exercise religious freedom, later writers will speak of "liberty," that is, the inherent right of an individual to believe and act according to the dictates of his conscience.

[38] Ibid., 232.

[39] Ibid., 233–44. On Locke's qualifications to this principle, see ibid., 244–46.

[40] For Williams's writings, see representatively, *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams*, ed. James Calvin Davis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008). For a treatment of Williams's views, see Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State: Roger Williams and Religious Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

[41] Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenent of Persecution," in *On Religious Liberty*, 86. Williams subsequently argues that the Israelite civil order is only "figurative and ceremonial, and

Williams further argued that "true civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of diverse and contrary consciences, either of Jew or Gentile."[42] That is to say, not only must the gospel advance by persuasion and not by the sword, but Christianity may and has flourished in a pluralistic society in which the civil magistrate gave no legal preference to Christianity.

American Presbyterians, particularly in Virginia, took a leading role in advancing the cause of religious liberty in the late eighteenth century.[43] This is why we may characterize the doctrine of religious liberty in the modern West as particularly indebted to American Presbyterianism. To be sure, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison emerged as leading figures championing the cause of religious liberty in the Revolutionary era and the early Republic.[44] Even so, one may not discount the influence of American Presbyterianism, even upon Jefferson and Madison, with respect to this particular question of the relationship between church and state.[45] Importantly, the Memorial of Hanover Presbytery (1776), which petitioned the General Assembly of Virginia, pled for religious liberty and against religious establishments by appealing to what was common to all human beings—the rights of conscience before the Creator.

> Therefore we rely upon this *Declaration*, as well as the justice of our honorable Legislature, to secure us the *free exercise of religion according to the dictates of our consciences* …. But that *the duty which we owe our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can only be directed by reason and conviction; and is no where cognizable but at the tribunal of the universal Judge*.[46]

The Memorial advanced several arguments against establishments and for religious liberty. Absent the possession of "a chair of infallibility," the civil magistrate is not competent "to adjudge the right of preference among the

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[is] no pattern nor precedent for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow." Ibid.

[42] Ibid, 87.

[43] See Thomas Cary Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty in Colonial and Revolutionary Times* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907); Charles F. James, *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA: J. P. Bell, 1900).

[44] See, e.g., "The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" (1786), authored by Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments" (1785). For discussion of the views of each, see Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Real Threat and Mere Shadow: Religious Liberty and the First Amendment* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987), 99–158.

[45] Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty*, 80, 84.

[46] "Memorial," in William Henry Foote, *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1850), 323 (emphasis original).

various sects that profess the Christian faith."[47] Not only are "religious establishments … highly injurious to the temporal interests of any community" in multiple respects, but "the gospel" has no "need [of] any such civil aid."[48] Establishments transgress "the only proper objects of civil government," namely, "the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence; the security of the life, liberty and property of the citizens; and to restrain the vicious and encourage the virtuous by wholesome laws, equally extending to every individual."[49]

Religious liberty, then, is tied to a number of theological and political realities—the rights of the conscience of every image-bearer; the prerogatives of God, the creator and judge, over each man and woman; the competencies, concerns, and limitations of civil government; and the corrupting influences of state establishment upon both the commonwealth and the church. Significantly, American Presbyterians' arguments for the rights of religious liberty safeguarded the rights of all human beings—not merely Presbyterians or Christians—with respect to the civil magistrate. This is not to say that American Presbyterians have uniformly or consistently advocated for these principles in the public square.[50] However, it is to say that these arguments will serve well Christians who live in many different kinds of societies. They will help Christians plead for the liberties that are inherent to the humanity of every person, encourage civil government that stays within its proper bounds, and strive for the church to steer clear of compromising entanglements with the state.

IV. *Principles of the Church's Engagement with the State*

The Scoto-American understanding of the relationship between church and state yields a second benefit. It affords principles for the way in which the church, in its organized capacity, may and may not engage the state in matters that concern both the church and the state. The Westminster Standards address this subject forthrightly.

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[47] Ibid., 324.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] See, for instance, Darryl Hart's discussion of John Witherspoon's 1776 sermon; Darryl Hart, "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men," in *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 50–52. Even the Hanover Presbytery, in its actions during and after the Revolution, was not entirely consistent with its Memorial of 1776; see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Early Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 212–75, and Paul C. Kemeny, "Eighteenth-Century Virginia Presbyterians and the Long Road to Religious Liberty," *Westminster Theological Journal* 84 (2022): 216–20.

> Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate. (WCF 31.5; 31.4 American editions)

The Westminster Assembly makes clear that the courts of the church are neither to "handle" nor "conclude" anything except what is "ecclesiastical." They are forbidden from taking up "civil affairs which concern the commonwealth." For this reason, "the charge of danger [i.e., posed by the church] to government, as in the case of an *imperium in imperio*, is unfounded."[51] Westminster, however, recognizes two exceptions to this general rule. In one case, the church may approach the state. In the other, the state may approach the church. In the first instance, "in cases extraordinary," the church may humbly petition the civil magistrate. Such situations are "extraordinary," that is to say, uncommon, and they must be such that "the interests of the Church are immediately concerned."[52] In the second instance, the state may solicit the church for advice on some matter of state, and the church "for satisfaction of conscience" may comply with that request.

Underlying this paragraph of the Westminster Confession is the doctrine of church power as exclusively ministerial and declarative (WCF 31.3; 31.2 American editions). The church has neither the authority nor competency to pronounce anything save what God has revealed in his word. The church, however, has "no right to presume to give advice to, or to attempt to influence, the officers of the civil government in their action as civil officers," except for the two instances noted above.[53] In the words of the 1845 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, "The church of Christ is a spiritual body, whose jurisdiction extends only to the religious faith, and moral conduct of her members. She cannot legislate where Christ has not legislated, nor make terms of membership which he has not made."[54]

This doctrine came to particularly full expression in the Southern United States before, during, and after the American Civil War.[55] However, it is not

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[51] John MacPherson, *The Confession of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), 164.

[52] Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, 377.

[53] Ibid.

[54] As cited at Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 198.

[55] In addition to the work of Peck, cited above, see the writings of James Henley Thornwell, especially "Address to All the Churches of Christ upon Earth," in *Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 4 vols. (1871–1873; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 4:446–52, and Samuel R. Wilson, "Declaration and Testimony against the Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines and Practices, which have been obtained and propagated in the Presbyterian Church

unique to the Southern Presbyterian Church, nor may it be dismissed as an instrument of Southern ecclesiastical resistance to postbellum Reconstruction.[56] Charles Hodge, who would enter the Northern Presbyterian Church after the church's geographical division in 1861, was a firm supporter of the Union and a firm adherent of the church's spirituality, both before and after the Civil War. His protest of Gardiner Spring's 1861 Resolution to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church illustrates his commitment to the doctrine. Spring's Resolution sought the Assembly's "expression of their devotion to the Union of these States, and their loyalty to the Government."[57] After the Assembly adopted that resolution, Hodge offered a protest, which opens with a statement of the doctrine of the church's spirituality and its application to the question at hand.

> We make this protest, not because we do not acknowledge loyalty to our country to be a moral and religious duty, according to the Word of God, which requires us to be subject to the powers that be; nor because we deny the right of the Assembly to enjoin that, and all other duties, on the ministers and churches under its care; but because we deny the right of the General Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due, and its rights to make that decision a condition of membership in our Church.[58]

The Assembly, Hodge argued, was within its rights to demand loyalty to the country and obedience to the civil magistrate, both of which are taught in Scripture. However, the political question that was being agitated in 1861 concerned whether one's allegiance should be to his state government or to the federal government. Through this resolution, Hodge argued, the church was attempting to settle that political question. In doing so, it was binding the consciences of her members, going beyond the testimony of Scripture, and requiring, as a condition of church membership, adherence to a particular political viewpoint.

Hodge's protest clarifies that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church in no way prevents the church from speaking to moral issues of contemporary

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in the United States during the past five years" (1865), reprinted in John S. Grasty, *Memoir of Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters* (St. Louis: Southwestern Book & Publishing Co., 1871), 316–27.

[56] Jack Maddex has argued that the Southern church received the doctrine of the spirituality of the church from border-state Presbyterians and then adopted and employed it during Reconstruction for self-serving ends; Jack P. Maddex, "From Theocracy to Spirituality: The Southern Presbyterian Reversal on Church and State," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (1976): 438–57; compare Ernest T. Thompson, *The Spirituality of the Church: A Distinctive Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1961).

[57] "The Gardiner Spring Resolutions," May 16, 1861, PCA Historical Center, https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/gardinerspring.html.

[58] Ibid.

importance.[59] The church is in no way hindered by the doctrine from speaking to such moral issues as slavery, racism, and elective abortion. What the doctrine does is establish certain critical parameters around such speech. The issue must be one that is expressly raised in Scripture. The church's declaration on the matter must not venture into the arena of public policy and thus bind the consciences of any of her members. The church must recognize that Christians may concur with respect to biblical beliefs and morals and yet disagree as to their prudential implementation in the public square. It is the task of the church to inform people of the revealed will of God so that the people of God may undertake the application of the word of God in their various callings.

Understanding these principles is critical to the life and well-being of the church in the twenty-first century. Faithfulness to them will help preserve the peace and unity of the church. It will help safeguard the liberty of the Christian and respect the bounds that Christ has set for his church. It will also help to ennoble and encourage Christians' engagement in the culture, particularly the public square. It does so by offering biblical direction with respect to the content, form, and manner of Christians' speech in such matters. Also, it will especially help the church remain faithful to her calling to proclaim the gospel of Christ, making known the whole counsel of God.

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[59] This becomes evident from even a casual survey of the acts and deliverances of the General Assemblies of the American Presbyterian Church. See, for example, Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church* …, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1855), and George F. Nicolassen, *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1923). Note the testimonies against "fœticide" (abortion) of the 1869 General Assembly (Old School), reaffirmed by the 1874 General Assembly: "Nor can we shut our eyes to the fact that the horrible crime of infanticide, especially in the form of destruction by parents of their own offspring before birth, also prevails to an alarming extent." "[We view this] with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature; and as the frequency of such murders can no longer be concealed, we hereby warn those that are guilty of this crime that except they repent they cannot inherit eternal life." "All who seek to avoid the responsibilities and cares connected with bringing up children not only deprive themselves of one of the greatest blessings of life, and fly in the face of God's decrees, but do violence to their own natures, and will be found out of their sins even in this world," as cited by J. Aspinwall Hodge, *What Is Presbyterian Law as Defined by the Church Courts?*, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1894), 106–7.

INTERVIEW

Church Discipline: Interview with Alfred Poirier

PETER A. LILLBACK

(April 11, 2023)

PETER A. LILLBACK: *It is my joy today to interview Dr. Alfred Poirier. He is professor of biblical counseling and pastoral theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and we are going to be talking today about his commitment to church discipline. I want to welcome you and ask you if you would open us briefly in prayer.*

ALFRED POIRIER:

> Father, we thank you for this day and the opportunity to talk about church discipline. One of the great gifts you have given us as a people made in your image, and, now through Christ, been conformed us into greater likeness to that image. And we pray, may that be used throughout the world as we seek to conform to Christ. In Jesus's name, we pray, Amen.

PAL: *Alfred, please share with us a general statement about your experience in dealing with church discipline. What have been some of the things you have done that have prepared you to do this type of work?*

AP: Being convinced of the authority of Scripture is most important. Before I went to seminary, I had never seen church discipline in the churches I had

gone to. In seminary, I was taught by Dr. Robert Strimple[1] and others that church discipline was part and parcel of what it means to be a pastor. I was pastoring a church, and that was an eye-opener for me to learn my ecclesiology, and particularly this issue of church discipline, which I found difficult. John Calvin was very helpful. I always thank the Lord for Calvin, that not only in his commentaries, but also in his *Institutes* [4.1.9; 4.12.1–13], he actually spends some time talking about church discipline and then practicing it. In my second and third churches, which were Reformed, I had the beginnings of the rules of discipline that would help guide the process. I still find our denominational material wanting, even if you cannot say everything in the rules of discipline. Over the years, particularly with my work through Peacemaker Ministries, I had the wonderful task of refining this, and then refining it in my own church, as we dealt with cases of drunkenness, incest, domestic abuse, and sexual immorality. We also had pedophilia, and we had fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. I saw the good of church discipline, people actually repenting, but also some times where people rejected the faith and did not want to be disciplined anymore.

PAL: *In March 2023, Dr. Christopher Watkins spoke at our conference, "Van Til and the Future of Reformed Apologetics." At the final plenary session, he was asked,* What is the foremost challenge to Christianity in the church today, and how do we answer it? *Do you recall what he said?*
AP: One word: "Us." It is ourselves. We—myself, the church—are the greatest impediment to our witness to the world. Lack of godliness, lack of discipline, and our need of repentance. If you remember, Peter, he alluded to some of the recent abominable—and those are his words—incidents of pastors and churches in the United States. All of us are ashamed for the church and for the witness given to Christ and the disrepute to his name.

PAL: *In light of that, how do we as pastors and elders of Christ's church practically address the issue of a holy community?*
AP: The Reformers had to ask these very questions. What does it mean to be the church? They spoke about the marks of the church: the right preaching of God's word, the right administration of the sacraments—and Calvin added a third mark touching on the wellbeing (the *bene esse*) of the church, not the essentials, and that third mark is the discipline of the church.

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[1] Robert Strimple had a long teaching career at Westminster in Philadelphia and California; see David VanDrunen, *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries; Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004).

ALFRED POIRIER

PAL: *Making discipline a mark of the church might initially cause some pushback from the people who are present. What if they think it is too extreme, with the idea of excommunication, exclusion, or some type of punishment for membership?*
AP: Exactly. If I were to say, "Peter, how was your day?" And you said, "Oh, I have been disciplining my kids." I would wonder what is going on. Most of us hear the word discipline in terms of its most extreme acts. So, in a family, if the dad or mom says they are disciplining their kids, we think there is corporal punishment or they are sending them off to their room. People think the same way when you talk about church discipline and the church. As you said very rightly, they think of the most extreme, excommunication or cutting people off, as a harsh form of punishment.

PAL: *If you do not see it that way, how would you conceive of discipline for the church?*
AP: One of the passages the Lord has given us is Hebrews 12, which contains a lengthy exposition on God's discipline of us and much wisdom. One of the chief truths is that God's discipline of us is fatherly love and discipline. He teaches not to treat lightly the Lord's discipline and that he disciplines those he loves [Prov 3:11–12]. And so biblical discipline has to be thought first in terms of the covenant context, for God through Jesus Christ is our Father, and we are adopted sons through his Son Jesus. We are to realize that discipline is part of God allowing us to share in his holiness: "If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons" [Heb 12.8.] God disciplines us out of love so that we may share in his holiness and character—in Paul's language, that we may be conformed to the likeness of Christ [Rom 8:29].

PAL: *So, you really have a much broader view, taking into account the glory of God and the good of God's people. Is that a proper way to understand your sense of discipline?*
AP: Yes. We need to step back and think of where discipline comes from. God created us for communion with him. Geerhardus Vos says in a beautiful statement that God created us for communion with him.[2] That communion brings glory to God. We are made in his image. We are made to listen to the Lord and to speak to him and to have real deep intimacy with our God and Creator as sons and daughters. We want not only to commune with him but also to reflect him, to take on his character, and that is what he wants of us.

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[2] Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 28.

A Diagram of Church Discipleship/Discipline

by Rev. Dr. Alfred Poirier © 2023

"Go and make disciples … teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you …" Matthew 28:19–20

FORMATIVE ⟶ **CORRECTIVE** ⟶ **PURGATIVE**

"One another" "as a brother" "Expel the wicked man."

General and Formal	General and Informal	Specific and Informal	Specific and Formal
Preaching and teaching by authorized church leaders (1 Tim 3:2; 4:13; 2 Tim 2:24–26; 4.2; Titus 1.9) "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). "[The elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).	• **Self-discipline** (Rom 12:1–2; Col 3:5). • **Godly counsel, pastoral and from other members** (Rom 15:14; Gal 6:1–2; Col 1:28; 3:16). • **Small group mutual care and counsel** (Heb 3:12–13; 10:24–25) "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature … which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb 3:12–13).	**Concerns a specific sin or sinful habit** "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (Matt 18:15) "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal 6:1–2). "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (Jas 5:20).	**Specific and formal censures** "Take special note of him" (2 Thess 3:14–15). "Do not associate with him" (2 Thess 3.6, 14b). "Warn a divisive person one, and then warn him a second time …" (Titus 3:10a). "After that, have nothing to do with him" (Titus 3.10b). "Tell it to the church" (Matt 18:17). "Treat him as a pagan or a tax collector" (Matt 18:17b). "Expel the wicked man. … Hand this man over to Satan"(1 Cor 5:2–7, 11–13).

Love undergirds all true discipline.

"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Prov 3:11–12).

I think that is where discipline begins. Discipline does not begin with sin and correction as much as it begins with a covenant that God enters into, as he did with Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2. It is a precious relationship. And he provides a plan or a goal. In Genesis 1, he tells them to rule over the whole earth and to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). What is God doing? He is discipling us. So I like to talk about church discipleship as well as church discipline.

PAL: *So from the creation account, the biblical theology that unfolds in the rest of the Scripture, is an ongoing concern to disciple or to form children who are obedient in covenant to God. How do you work that out?*

AP: For pastors, it is important to talk about discipleship from the covenant of works, from creation on, not just after the fall. We do see it after the fall, understandably, since there are only two chapters where things are going well. In the rest of Scripture, for the most part, discipline is in the sense of correcting sinners, such as when the Lord had to discipline Cain. Sadly, Cain does not listen to the Lord. I was always amazed at how God knows what is in Cain's heart, and he comes to him and speaks gently, and he says, "Sin is crouching at the door and will devour you. You need to get a grip on it" [Gen 4:7].

God does the same with Noah. Even in the horrible time of great ungodliness of his day, when God is going to send a flood, we see his wonderful grace as he is discipling Noah. He teaches Noah how to build an ark and gives him its precise dimensions.

He does the same with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So our God is the discipling God. One of my favorite passages is when the Lord, just before he discloses to Abraham what is going to happen at Sodom, says in Genesis 18:19, "for I have chosen him." He is questioning: "Should we talk to Abraham about this?" And he says, "Yes, for I have chosen him"—Abraham, that is—"so that he will direct and command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." There is our God, discipling his covenant people.

PAL: *As you look at that verse, there was a need for Abraham himself to be disciplined so that he could discipline those that followed him.*

AP: Exactly. Abraham now is given the task to discipline his children, his household. And that continues throughout Scripture. Moses is given the same task. Moses has to teach the elders. Think of the exodus and the Passover. In the Passover instructions in Exodus 12—what is he teaching

him? Think of Leviticus, with all the Levitical laws, and the Lord keeps saying, "Be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy" [Lev 11:44]. So, God teaches us to be holy, as he is holy, and we, those of us who are pastors and fathers, are called to do the same and to disciple our people that they be holy and bear the likeness of Christ [cf. 1 Cor 15:49].

PAL: *So you are trying to encourage us to see that discipline is not something exceptional. It is ordinary and regular and comes from a full understanding of the Scriptures being taught and encouraged in day-to-day life and Christian worship.*

AP: Exactly. Every time you open the Bible to read it, God is disciplining you. Every time you listen to a sermon or a teaching, God is disciplining you. There is a wonderful passage in Deuteronomy, where Moses looks back to the day where the Lord spoke from Mount Sinai and gave the people the covenant and the Ten Commandments. He says, "Remember"—Deuteronomy 4:36—"out of heaven he let you hear his voice that he might discipline you." So, discipline is very broad. It is not the extreme. It is one perspective, to use Vern Poythress's kind of language,[3] on the whole of what we are seeing in Scripture. We might say, the Bible is a book about discipleship.

PAL: *Regarding the Great Commission of Jesus, in a previous conversation you said that that form of discipleship is really something that covers this whole process. How do you work that out in a practical way?*

AP: We typically hear the Great Commission as, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit …. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" [Matt 28:19, 20b]. And we forget that line in between where Jesus says, after you baptize, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" [v. 20a]. That is the great omission. So again, we need to understand that the whole of the Christian life is under discipleship, under discipline.

PAL: *How do you see the phases of discipline working out in light of the Great Commission?*

AP: Pastors need to teach their people that holding one another accountable is not just for pastors or elders, but as Christians, we must hold one another accountable. Hebrews 3:12–13, says, "See to it, brothers, that none of you

[3] For an introduction to Poythress's perspectivalism approach, see Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another." There is the language of "one another." "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Part of teaching the word of God, what pastors need to teach, is that we all should be committed to this. It is not just the teaching elder that is going to teach you to be disciplined. You must teach one another, and you must hold one another accountable. You must lovingly press into one another.

PAL: *How do you get people to understand that discipline is the work of the entire congregation of believers?*

AP: One of the things I want to communicate to my students here at Westminster is getting the pastors to actually believe that.

Our people will not believe it unless it is coming from the pastors. We have to set an example. In church history, the issue of pastors, the church leaders, and the elders, exercising discipline has always been a struggle. Richard Baxter, in *The Reformed Pastor*, in his own day, around 1650, is crying out, pleading to ministers that they set themselves to the practice of church discipline; and he says the problem is that pastors neglect it.[4] One of Calvin's issues with the Roman Catholic churches was that there was no discipline. And we have just heard of a scandalous report in the United States about sex abuse within the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants have similar issues. This is Calvin's concern, but after Calvin, it is not like the Reformation children listened. Around 1700, Wilhelmus à Brakel, that great Dutch theologian fifty years after Baxter, said,

> The exercise of church discipline is almost entirely neglected. There is no longer a model of what the church ought to be. Men are therefore satisfied if many people come to church, and if many members are accepted. Such churches are then referred to as flourishing.[5]

In a recent class on peacemaking for pastors, two pastors confessed, "We do not do church discipline, and we are listening to your lectures, and we are fearful." And I was able to say, "Listen, you are not unique here; this has been going on from long ago. Almost every pastor has had to wrestle with this—I did—but the question is, what is God saying?"

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[4] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 46–47.

[5] Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 2:72. À Brakel lists three signs of the degeneracy of the church: worldly pastors, worldly members, and the failure to exercise church discipline.

PAL: *If discipline does its work properly, the goal is not to shame or punish someone, it is to bring reconciliation and restoration to a true relationship with God and one another. How do you put that emphasis as you begin this process?*
AP: The goal is to set before your people what God is doing. You need to talk about church discipline in teaching individuals and preaching. Baptism and the Lord's Supper mark us out that we are distinctive people. The distinction is not just "I am a member of the church," but it is "I am holy." There are implicit requirements to being holy: I seek to keep God's commandments, to be humble, to confess my sin, to grant forgiveness. It is clear when Paul states, "We died to sin, we cannot live in it any longer." If we were baptized into Christ, we were also buried with Christ, so that we might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:2–4). So we are to be a distinct and disciplined people. At baptism, you mention to the people who are watching, "Remember, we are a marked-out people." In the Lord's Supper, in my church, we would have the Lord's Supper weekly and would be fencing the table at all times. You are saying, "This is a sacrament unique to Christians that marks us out. And if you are in a conflict with somebody and refusing to be reconciled, refusing to take a first step, please refrain from partaking of the Lord's Supper; rather, talk to us afterwards." After every worship service, we would actually have a pastor and elders praying for people under conviction of sin or in need prayer, for whatever was on their heart or mind. We would also have times during the Lord's Supper, with people coming and saying, "Thank you. I withheld from the Lord's Supper. I am having issues with my husband [or with this brother or sister in the church]. I do not know what to do." We would tell them, "We are not saying you have to have your issues resolved, but if you are refusing to take the first step, you should abstain."

PAL: *In a certain sense, proper discipline needs to have a proper understanding of peacemaking in the church.*
AP: Paul refers to peacemaking as the ministry of reconciliation. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–21, Paul describes his entire ministry as a ministry of reconciliation and his entire teaching and preaching as the message of reconciliation. Paul has a quite expansive understanding of what Christ is doing: He is reconciling us one to another through Jesus Christ: first, to be reconciled to God, and then, to be reconciled to one another. So, if you find out that somebody in your church is fornicating, that person has an unreconciled relationship with the Lord. They violated their conscience, they violated his law, they transgressed it, as well as they have transgressed against another person. They have sinned against the person that they were

fornicating with. Similarly, in a domestic abuse case or drunkenness, there is always a Godward element to it because that is how he made us.

PAL: *At some point, this broader understanding of discipline that you have outlined for us moves into the more narrow expression of discipline, which is when the elders and the pastor become involved. When does that process become appropriate?*
AP: Jesus says the trigger is refusing to listen. In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus gives us several steps. These are not to be hurried in any fashion, and the first two steps are in an informal appeal to people. "If your brother sins against you"—or "If you see your brother sin"—"go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (v. 15a). So, you keep that communication very exclusive. If he listens, you have won your brother over (v. 15b). If he refuses to listen—and that would mean that you have probably talked to him multiple times—then Jesus says you still keep it informal. He says, in verse 16, then get one or two others, and those one or two others can serve as mediators, can serve to help to clarify things, can probe more deeply the heart of the brother or sister who is thought to have erred, and if the person really has erred, they eventually will proceed as witnesses. And I think this is very important because in many churches I have seen, somebody misbehaves, and pastors and elders typically either do nothing, which is the general rule, or if they do something, they become quite formal, if not harsh. They send letters or emails, but they do not do the face-to-face. "How can I talk to this person and make a real heart-to-heart appeal?" So those first two steps take the time for gently restoring. However, Jesus says, if you have done that, you have done it multiple times, and it is not working, and the person still is digging in their heels, refusing to listen—and that is Jesus's special language—the next step, he says, is you will "tell it to the church" (v. 17), and by that I have always understood the leaders of the church. Because if he refuses to listen to the church, you have to expel the person. If anybody is called to rule, it is the elders. Those who rule the church are worthy of honor, and those who teach and preach of double honor (1 Tim 5:17).

PAL: *As you think about this process, there are those in history who have tried to do discipline at the sacraments, and it has actually backfired, and those who are exercising discipline were removed from the church or expelled. That is Calvin's story. Did Calvin do the right thing? If you are going to try to fence the table, you might not want to do it in light of the challenges. What does that teach us at that point, as you look at that historical moment?*
AP: Sometimes that must happen. If you have censured a member from

participating in the Lord's Supper and they defy that censure and seek to partake of communion, then, Calvin did the right thing and so should we. However, failure to fence the table is a symptom of the larger problem today because many churches do not exercise discipline at all.

PAL: *If there has been such a struggle through history going back to Calvin and other periods with church discipline, dare we really try to restore it? If the church's stories are that it is hard, what encouragement do we have to try to begin to address this issue directly today?*

AP: Again, we go back to Scripture, and what did Jesus say? One of the things he says, in the Great Commission is, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt 28:20). He has not left us. I told those pastors who were confessing their sin of not exercising church discipline, "Confess it. Just repent to the Lord." They had read the chapters in my book on church discipline[6] and had listened to my lectures. I said, "Start to implement this. Then, the first thing is you really need to understand and know what God is saying in Scripture. Two, once you have learned it, you need to teach your elders, and you need to press them in this way. If they do not like it, tell them, "It is not a matter whether I like it or not, or whether you like it. We are going to answer before God. He is not going to say on the day of judgment, *Did you like it?* He is going to say, *Were you a good and faithful servant?*" And of course, Christ gave us Matthew 18 and many other passages we have recalled.

There are three great goals of church discipline. One is God's honor. You want the community around you to be able to look at your church and say, "They do it." Near my church, there was a very large church that had a scandalous situation. One of the pastors had run off with a young girl and the church did nothing. By contrast, we had a reputation in the community for being a reconciling church that practices church discipline. So, we had people that came because we exercised church discipline. In my church, we are going to honor God.

The second goal of church discipline is the purity of the church. "A little leaven," Paul says, "leavens the whole loaf" [1 Cor 5:6]. So, we need to exercise discipline and be holy, because if we are not, our own church will become unholy, impure. I have seen myself through my work in peacemaking that churches have let down their guard and sin has run rampant.

The third goal of church discipline is the restoration of the sinner. Jesus says, "If you see your brother sin against you, go and show to him his fault,

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[6] Alfred Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 220–64, 307–9.

and if he listens you have restored your brother" (Matt 18:15). Our Lord stands behind each of those goals. He wants to glorify his own name by your obedience; he wants to keep his church pure by your obedience and having church discipline; and he wants to restore sinners.

PAL: *We have summarized a number of important points. You have made the point that discipline is broader than just these immediate cases. But what do you say to a pastor or church leader who says, "We have just failed. We have not done this. It has been too hard" or "We blundered in the past. I am afraid to do it"?*
AP: In my book, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, I have two chapters on this issue.[7] Those would be a good place to start. There I lay out in chapter eleven, called "Church Discipline Principles," the whole biblical principles of church discipline. And I go into issues such as the keys of the kingdom, authority, and the manner in which we are to exercise church discipline. And then in the twelfth chapter, "Church Discipline Practices," I deal with the nuts and bolts of discipline. I wrote the book for Bible-believing people who want to follow the word.

PAL: *Romans 6 comes to mind as a force to help us really move in this direction. How would you apply Romans 6:1–4 and get serious about this whole matter in the church?*
AP: Very clearly Paul asks, "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Rom 6:1). And he says, *Me genoito*, "By no means" (v. 2). He is shocked that anybody would think such. He says,

> We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? We were baptized into Christ; we were baptized into his death. We were buried, therefore, with him, so count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ.

So, we go back to our beginnings. What does it mean to be a baptized Christian when you came to Christ? What did that really mean? It is more than just I am justified and one day when I die, I am going to go to heaven. No, I am united with Christ, and in that union with Christ, I want to walk in newness of life and holiness of life, and I want to be a distinct and disciplined, holy person, with a holy people. Those who have died in Christ are now living for Christ.

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[7] Ibid.

PAL: *Briefly comment for pastors on how your view of discipline, discipleship, relates to the word, the sacraments, their work of leadership, and the church's elders. How does that come together holistically?*
AP: First, one has to emphasize the word. There needs to be so much work in this area. It is like a missing part of Scripture, and it is more than just Matthew 18. Think of Ezekiel 34, where the Lord chided the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel's day for failing to care for the sheep. So there has to be a strong word ministry. In our new member class, we taught on church discipline. We let people know, "If you join our church, this is the kind of things that may happen; we call it accountability." We said, "Listen, we are a family, and Jesus teaches, 'When one of you is going astray, you leave the ninety-nine, and you go after that one'" [Matt 18:12]. So, there has to be a shepherd's heart that preaches and teaches elders, those in authority, who will have to exercise discipline. Teach your people as well. If the elders know, but the people do not know, they are going to be shocked and surprised. Also, seize the opportunities in baptism. When you teach on baptism, when you teach on the Lord's Supper, there are simple things that you can say. When baptizing an adult or a child, you can say, "This is God's mark, sign, and seal of now belonging to Christ and being set apart to be a holy person," and the church can commit herself with every baptism, anybody becoming a member, and the entire congregation can take a vow to pray for this person and to help this person to live a holy life. So this is where word and sacrament come in. Take the very means of grace and use them to highlight what it means to be a holy people.

PAL: *You have used the expression "fencing the table," which means when you come to the Lord's Supper, you are calling people to exercise personal discipline within their own hearts and lives. Can you please expand on that?*
AP: Paul himself says in the first Corinthians 11:28–29 that we have to judge ourselves when we partake of the Lord's Supper. To the degree that you can shape your liturgy, integrate that element. Because I was the senior pastor, I had quite a bit of responsibility to shape our liturgy. We began to put in a confession of sin, corporate confession, some private confession of sin, and then a promise of forgiveness. So every week, the entire congregation would corporately confess their sins and corporately hear of God's promise of forgiveness. That is important because every week we are telling ourselves we are sinners in need of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

PAL: *What is the good fruit that comes from practicing this kind of serious discipline for the church? What will be the result?*

AP: It is not going to be that there are no problems in the church or no more sin, but people know that they are cared for. I liken it to a fence; I take this from G. K. Chesterton. In his book *Orthodoxy*, he has a wonderful image that discipline is like a fence. He says, imagine children playing soccer—he does not use the word soccer—on a hill overlooking the sea where there is a sharp cliff. If you have a fence, they can play soccer all they want, and nobody is going to fall and hurt themselves. There is freedom, there is joy, they can play. But if you remove that fence, if you remove discipline, the children become fearful, they are huddled. They are no longer running about laughing and enjoying one another.[8] That is what I found with discipline. You see it in every family. Calvin asks, What society, what family, can operate without discipline? What business could operate without discipline [Calvin, *Institutes* 4.12.1]? We all need discipline, and when a family is disciplined, when a business is disciplined, when a church is disciplined, things run smoothly; we all know our place. We all know what is expected of us and of one another, and we really can be a family church, the household of God.

PAL: *How does the church learn to welcome back someone who has been removed through the disciplinary process? How does that come about?*

AP: In terms of practice, we would always have our church discipline sessions, all members only. In my almost forty-year career as a pastor, I used to exercise discipline publicly on the Lord's Day in the morning worship. A wise brother in the Lord suggested a better way, which is meetings for members only, those that have been taught. So, when we receive people back, when they come back, we call a special meeting. You remind the church that this is part of your process, not only to discipline and censure people publicly but to receive them and restore them publicly. And then you have a meeting and a restoration service. We went through several of these. I remember a classic one. We had a young woman who had had a child out of wedlock, and we were able to have a godly mother in the church to disciple her, and a godly elder in the church to disciple her boyfriend. That boyfriend came to faith in Christ. Because the young woman was pregnant, it was a public sin and called for a public restoration. She was very repentant, and I still can remember that day. The meeting was right after church, and we dismissed everybody except members. Then, we had her stand up with me, and I just addressed the entire congregation, and I said, "This is what happened"—the situation, the sin—"and this person has been repentant. Now we are restoring her fully." She gave such a

[8] Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 157.

wonderful public confession of sin and apologized to her parents, her siblings. She said, "I have offended God, I offended the elders, I offended you, the congregation. Please forgive me. I am seeking to walk closely with Jesus Christ now. Sister so-and-so is discipling me." Then, everybody's heart broke, and so I gave her a big hug, and her parents did, and then I invited the rest of the congregation to come and welcome her back, and they did. They stood in a long line and for almost forty minutes, people came by, just giving her a big hug, and it was so salutary for the entire congregation. People saw the church, because of discipline, as a real family that really cares, and that was the beauty of it.

PAL: *Any final thoughts you want to share with us? I would love you to have the last word.*

AP: We began talking about the way we conduct discipline, and I mentioned Hebrews. So let me finish by quoting that passage where the Lord, who loves us and gave his life for us, speaks to us: "My Son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a Father, the Son in whom he delights" [Prov 3:11–12]. That is discipline—a sign of love.

PAL: *That is wonderful. Well, thank you for your leadership in this regard, and we are confident that as we remember the three marks of the church—the preaching of the word, the faithful administration of the sacraments, and then the calling of the community to live in humble obedience to Christ with support from the disciplinary function of our own hearts, our community, and our leaders—there is a hope for a true holy church, a holy catholic church, and you have been a faithful leader in that. We thank you for your diligence, so may God bless you.*

Book Reviews

A new translation of the *New Testament and Psalms* in Armenian

The recent publication in Armenia of the New Testament and Psalms in modern Eastern Armenian represents a significant milestone in the history of the Bible in the Armenian language (*New Testament and Psalms* [Erevan, Armenia: Faith and Life, 2021]). It is generally accepted that Armenia was the first nation to have officially adopted Christianity as its state religion (301 CE, i.e., under the reign of emperor Diocletian, thus thirteen years before the Edict of Milan). A century later, a translation (technically speaking, a *version*) of the Bible from the Septuagint and Syriac manuscripts of the New Testament was undertaken under the leadership of Meshrop Mashtots, a learned cleric surrounded by a team of disciples. For this purpose, an alphabet consisting of thirty-six letters matching the sounds of the Armenian language was designed. It was organized in such a manner that each letter corresponded to a section of the Lord's Prayer. As remarkable as this version (called the *Grabar*) may have been in its time, to the point of appearing regularly in the critical apparatus of modern eclectic texts of the New Testament, it remained precisely a *version*, not a direct translation.

Many revisions of the *Grabar* were undertaken through the centuries. Toward the end of the nineteenth century (1896), another version of the Bible, called the Ararat Bible, entered use among evangelical Armenians, and it is still being used, despite its many flaws and obsolete idioms. Until now, no translation of the Bible made directly from the original Hebrew and Greek has ever been undertaken, though the source languages were consulted in the various updates. At one stage, a translation made from the King James Version was even circulated. In some cases, new editions of the very same text, offering mere cosmetic changes of cover or format, were presented as "new translations."

In 2005, Rev. Aaron Kayayan (1928–2008), aware of the many flaws of the Ararat Bible, undertook and before his passing completed a translation of the New Testament in the Western Armenian idiom, which was his mother tongue. Western Armenian was the idiom spoken in Anatolia (Eastern Turkey) by the two million Armenians who lived under the Ottoman Empire before the 1915–1920 genocide. Today, it is mostly in use among the Armenian diaspora living in Lebanon, Western Europe, and America. It differs to some extent from Eastern Armenian, which is spoken in the Republic of Armenia and among the large Armenian diaspora living in Russia and neighboring countries (such as Georgia and Uzbekistan).

After 2008, the steering committee of Christians for Armenia, founded by Rev. Aaron Kayayan, resolved to take up the matter again, adding the Psalms to this project (see http://www.christiansforarmenia.org/Home/tabid/38/Default.aspx). The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (4th edition) and the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland New Testament were used as source texts, while Rev. Kayayan's own translation of the New Testament was regularly consulted. One of the main challenges faced by the committee of Christians for Armenia was to recruit and consolidate a reliable ground team of translators and editors despite the limited human resources available in Armenia for such a complex task. Exegetical resources and external advice were regularly provided to them whenever requested. The goal pursued was to remain faithful to the source text while putting it in an impeccable idiom understandable by the contemporary Armenian reader, though without resorting to dynamic equivalencies. Many screenings of the translation were effected by the editing team before this New Testament and Psalms was eventually published in March 2022. Six thousand copies were printed by two printers in the capital of Armenia, Erevan. Many of them have already been distributed. The readability of the characters and the clear layout of the text mark a significant change in comparison with the existing publications of the Bible. Introductory texts explain to the readers the purpose, the relevance (*necessitas*), and the principles followed. A theologically informed introduction to the New Testament already written in 2005 for the purpose of this project by the late Prof. L. W Schulze from Potchefstroom, as well as a short introduction to the Psalms, complete these preliminary texts.

Officially presented to the public during two events organized in Erevan and Gyumri in May 2022, this *translation* is already making headway in the Armenian public, as several letters and messages received by the committee of Christians for Armenia testify. They stress the impact that the text of Holy Scripture has on hearts and minds once it reaches the people in an

understandable idiom. In a time of great turmoil and uncertainty about the survival of their country's independence, these first readers eagerly want to return to Christianity as the source of the life of their nation.

Exactly five hundred years after the publication of Luther's New Testament in vernacular German (1522), this translation also exemplifies the need of every tongue and nation to hear God's word in their own language (Acts 2:7–11) despite conservative resistance and a false appeal to "tradition" (in fact, "traditionalism"). Of course, no translation of the Bible as such is perfect. Necessary revisions or adjustments here and there will certainly take place in time when new editions are published. The public addressed during the abovementioned presentations was invited to make remarks or deliver informed criticisms (based on solid arguments, not mere reading habits).

The next step is, of course, to complete the translation of the Old Testament and eventually publish the whole Bible. The committee of Christians for Armenia is committed to achieving this goal, which will take a few more years. Completing the translation of the Pentateuch is already well on its way. It might be published in a proof edition before the end of 2024. Needless to say, ensuring that adequate financial backing will enable the costs of this long-term enterprise to be covered remains a priority for this committee. While significant pledges have already been received, a fund destined to cover the eventual printing costs needs to be established without delay.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105).

ERIC KAYAYAN
Reformed Faith and Life[1]

Gerald Bray. *How the Church Fathers Read the Bible: A Short Introduction*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022.

Interest in the church fathers and studies focusing on how they interpreted the Bible have undergone a renaissance in recent years. It is not uncommon to find an increasing number of studies on biblical hermeneutics today that invoke the precedent of church tradition, not least the ancient church. However, the past is a foreign land, and finding one's way in the labyrinthine field of patristics studies can be daunting. While nothing can replace a deep dive into the primary sources, Gerald Bray has offered a wide-angle lens on

[1] Rev. Kayayan is involved with Reformed Faith and Life, both its French ministry and its Armenian branch, known as "Christians for Armenia," of which he is the chairman.

patristic biblical interpretation for those new to the field, as well as a helpful assessment and review for those who already have some exposure.

Chapter 1 broaches the question "What Is Patristic Biblical Interpretation?," and here Bray makes the important observation that the Bible was central to the fathers and we must appreciate that we are to understand them in their own time (5–6). Bray covers translation and canonical issues, and important topics such as the Alexandrian/Antiochene distinctives in biblical interpretation. Here, and elsewhere, he notes Origen's massive influence on the interpretation of the Bible (e.g., 38).

Chapter 2 ("The Clash of Worldviews") considers Christian interpretation in dialogue with Judaism and affirms a more "traditional" view of allegory and typology. Whereas typology is rooted in history, allegory (which Bray compares to astrology) assumes that the text is meant to be read metaphorically (e.g., 60, 101–2). Here, Bray focuses on four core convictions of early Christian biblical interpretation: monotheism, creation, theodicy, and eschatology. He also addresses Christianity in light of Greco-Roman religion and argues (apparently departing from some recent contributions to the field) that "patristic Christianity was far from being Neoplatonic in content or in inspiration" (82).

Chapter 3 addresses the four senses of biblical interpretation, which are indebted to Origen's three senses (bodily, moral, and spiritual), along with John Cassian's anagogical sense. Chapter 4 ("The Search for Consensus") discusses different approaches to the complex issue of allegorical interpretation and looks at Tyconius's seven rules of interpretation (famously used by Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*).

Chapter 5 provides case studies of ten biblical passages: five from the Old Testament and five from the New Testament. The selection here includes foundational texts (e.g., Gen 1:26–27) and controversial texts (e.g., 1 Sam 28:13–14; Rev 20:1–6). Bray illustrates the difficulties and approaches taken and suggests his own way forward through the difficulties. Consistent with the design of many recent Lexham volumes, the book concludes with seven theses summarizing the book's argument.

Bray has provided a thirty-thousand-foot overview of key issues and figures in the field of biblical interpretation that will be useful for those coming to the field for the first time and suggestive of some ways forward. The book is written in a simple, conversational manner, with a minimum of footnotes (and no highly technical footnotes). Bray helpfully reminds us that we should neither discount the fathers' interpretations nor follow them blindly. He also argues that we may well find that we follow their conclusions without following their exegesis (156). This may seem to be a disconnect, and some

would say it must be both–and (that is, we must follow their exegesis if we follow their conclusions), but Bray reminds us of the limitations the fathers labored under and the better exegetical tools we have at our disposal today. Even so, we have much to learn from the fathers' approach. Bray does a fine job sketching the culture of the fathers and the complexities of their thought. This would not be the only book one needs to read on patristic biblical interpretation, but it will find a place as a simple, nontechnical overview.

Though they were not Bray's main focus, some of his passing assessments are unpersuasive. For example, he states that the Gospels are translations and seems to suggest the need to get behind the Gospels to determine original Aramaic words (23–24). But surely, the Gospels as we have them are the inspired texts, and though we may be curious as to what (or whether) Aramaic terms lie behind the text, the texts as we have them are the objects of our study. Furthermore, it is not altogether clear that the codex was preferred over the scroll for convenience (26); scholarship remains divided on the "why" of the codex's adoption among early Christians.

This is not a book that provides exhaustive, detailed discussions of the issues. It is a primer. But therein lies the beauty of a concise book like this one, which is designed to help open up the sometimes strange world of the church fathers to readers today. Yet we should not stop with what Bray himself says; we should read the sources ourselves—especially the Source they sought to explain.

BRANDON D. CROWE

Professor of New Testament
Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

Leonardo De Chirico. *Same Words, Different Worlds: Do Roman Catholics and Evangelicals Believe the Same Gospel?* London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2021.

If our theology is partly biography, it is not difficult to understand why evangelicals in traditionally Protestant countries look at Roman Catholicism differently from those who come from Latin culture. Our experience does not come from books or distant friends. We were born in Roman Catholic families, and many of our friends still consider themselves Catholics. Why, then, are evangelicals and Catholics closer in the United States of America, Great Britain, and Central and Northern Europe while there is such confrontation in Latin America, Spain, and Italy? The answer you usually hear from evangelicals who have not been Catholic before is that Roman Catholicism is different in every country. Leonardo De Chirico has another

explanation. In this book, he shows how Roman Catholics use the same words as Protestants, but with different meanings.

For many conservative Protestants, Rome's image is that of a traditional, stable, authoritative institution with an aura of doctrinal and moral integrity. It is viewed as a haven in the turmoil of our day, a bulwark against liberal and secularizing forces. They realize that there are differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, but they also see many differences between them and most evangelicals today. The vocabulary of Nicaea is the same: God the Father, Jesus Christ, salvation, Holy Spirit, the virgin Mary, a holy apostolic church, baptism, and remission of sins. The words are the same, but do they have the same meaning? There is an apparent common orthodoxy rooted in the ancient Trinitarian and christological creeds, but as the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure suggested concerning general linguistics, there is a distinction between language and words. The latter are not free-floating items but receive their meaning in the context of the system in which they are used.

In the first chapter of this book, De Chirico sketches several common views that are increasingly adopted in the ecumenical understanding of what is at stake between evangelicals and Catholics today. The second and third chapters examine some key common terms. The fourth considers Catholic theology as a coherent, all-encompassing system with two major features: the continuity and interdependence of the nature–grace and Christ–church interconnections. In the line of the late Barthian Italian theologian Vittorio Subilia and the Spanish Reformed Baptist Francisco Lacueva, De Chirico thinks the main difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is in ecclesiology because, as the Second Vatican Council says, there is an ongoing incarnation of Jesus Christ in the church. Many evangelicals understand the historical problem of the capacity of nature and matter to objectify grace in natural theology, but not many are aware of the centrality of the Christ–church interconnection in Catholic theology.

As with the Spanish theologian José Grau and the Welsh preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones, De Chirico thinks Roman Catholicism is not so much a denial of the truth as an addition to it that becomes a departure from it. The question is not what Catholics and evangelicals have in common but what Catholics add to what Evangelicals believe. The key to understanding De Chirico's or Greg Allison's way of looking at Roman Catholicism is to understand its systemic approach. Most evangelical assessments of Catholic theology and practice have focused almost exclusively on comparing agreements and differences between the two positions in an isolated, disconnected way. Most crucial Protestant books about Rome have an atomistic approach

to Catholic doctrines. Topics such as transubstantiation, purgatory, the immaculate conception of Mary, and the apostolic succession are described and critiqued as separate, unrelated beliefs. De Chirico convincingly demonstrates that Catholicism is unified but not uniform.

Contemporary Catholic theology embraces Augustinianism and semi-Augustinianism, liberation theology and conservative Opus Dei theology, and inclusivism and exclusivism; the integration of divergent elements has always characterized historical Catholic theology. As Grau and Subilia showed, there is an "and–and" approach rather than the Protestant "either–or" approach. For De Chirico and Lacueva, "the incarnational principle" is the normative pattern for the way God manifests his grace in this world. Grace must be embodied in a tangible way. The interdependence of nature–grace is based on the interconnection of Christ–church. This is a very attractive approach for those looking for the core difference between evangelicals and Catholics: it lies in the doctrine of the church.

The question for many of us is whether it is possible to define Roman Catholicism. Can you capture the heart of the Roman Catholic worldview in a short description? Obviously, Roman Catholicism is an extremely rich and complex universe. The best minds of contemporary Catholicism have tried to analyze what is essential to being Catholic. Think of Karl Adam (1929), Romano Guardini (1924), Henri de Lubac (1938), Hans Urs von Balthazar (1978), and Walter Kasper (2012). This is a key question as part of De Chirico's main concern of knowing whether Roman Catholics and evangelicals believe the same gospel. Most evangelicals will doubt that it is our task to discuss the nature of Roman Catholicism when we live in a secular society. In these times of ecumenical correctness, no one wants to be critical of any church or religion. However, dialogue is best served by transparency and honesty.

Why bother with questions of words in times like these? First, it is a global issue. Wherever you go in the world—North and South, East, and West—you will find people who call themselves Catholics. Roman Catholicism is by far the largest religious family within Christendom and the biggest religious organization on the planet. The pope is a global figure who attracts a lot of attention from the media. Second, it is still a theological issue. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation recovered and reaffirmed the biblical gospel, and Roman Catholicism stood against these truths and condemned those who embraced them. In Latin countries, they killed them! However, after the Second Vatican Council, Rome has somewhat changed. Its posture is different: the tone is friendlier, and the lines are blurred. However, we know Roman Catholicism is still not committed to Scripture alone, Christ

alone, or faith alone. Its devotion is not dedicated to God alone. The Roman Catholic gospel is different from the biblical one. If the dogmatic system of Rome, its institutional structure and devotional practices, have departed from the truth of the biblical gospel, how can we consider the Roman Catholic church "one denomination among others"?

The Argentinian Pope Francis incarnates the catholicity of Vatican II—open to dialogue, merciful, pleasing—but without paying a dogmatic, theological, or spiritual price. Rome speaks all languages: evangelical, ecumenical, interreligious, secular, and traditional. Evangelicals speak in translated English, shaped by American culture for conservative morality in favor of right-wing politics. It is no wonder Roman Catholicism is considered less binary and more universal. It seems to draw close to everyone without moving, to reach out to everyone without going very far. It recalls Giuseppe Tomasi Di Lampedusa's book and Luchino Visconti's 1963 film *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*) based on it: everything must change for everything to remain the same.

Cardinal Walter Kasper is aware that the pope is often perceived as attuned to the liberal spirit: strong on social issues, relaxed in doctrine, and wishing to include anyone at all costs. However, Kasper disagrees with this assessment and suggests that Francis is not a liberal but a radical. He goes to the etymological sense of the Latin word *radix*, root, or originating principle. Words confuse us, you see. The pope is challenging the church to be radical in the sense of rediscovering the roots of the gospel, which for him are joy, mission, frugality, solidarity with the poor, freedom from legalism, and collegiality. Kasper argues that the pope's tendency is not to run after the political correctness of Western liberalism but to call all Christians to recover the living source of their faith, the roots of the Christian life. What can you say against him?

De Chirico's book shows us how much we misunderstand Roman Catholicism. The pope encourages us to move beyond the usual polarizations between liberals and conservatives by introducing a third category, that of radicals. However, we see beyond his words. He appears to be radical on certain issues and much less so on others. He is radical on poverty but silent on the massive financial power of his church. He sounds radical on mercy but never mentions sin and divine judgment of all sinners outside of Christ. He is radical in denouncing the tragedies of unethical capitalism but seems to be much less outspoken toward immoral deviations in personal sexual life. In other words, his radicalism is somewhat selective. He is playing with words!

In a certain sense, the Protestant Reformation was a radical movement.

It was motivated by an aspiration to go *ad fontes*, back to the Bible, the word of God. It was aimed at recovering the radical gospel of *solus Christus* and *sola gratia*. Leonardo De Chirico and I were part of the third International Consultation of the Catholic Church with the World Evangelical Alliance (2009–2016) after the dialogue on mission led by John Stott (1977–1984) and the consultation led by the Reformed theologians George Vandervelde and Paul Schrotenboer (1993–2002). We both believe that dialogue must be pursued at all levels: theological dialogue with the Vatican but also with Catholic priests and intellectuals and discussions with our Catholic neighbors, colleagues, and family members. The differences that exist, no matter how deep, do not impede a friendly conversation about what really matters in our lives. When we point to the biblical meaning of the words, we trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls women and men to return to the God who speaks through his word. He manifests himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit when we understand his words. In them are eternal life.

JOSÉ DE SEGOVIA

Facultad de Teología Protestante UEBE
Madrid, Spain

CONTRIBUTORS

GERALD BRAY is Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, USA, and Director of Research for the Latimer Trust. His works include *The Church: A Theological and Historical Account* (Baker Academic, 2016), *Augustine on the Christian Life: Transformed by the Power of God* (Crossway, 2015), and *Doing Theology with the Reformers* (IVP Academic, 2019).

W. GORDON CAMPBELL has been professor of New Testament Studies in Union Theological College, Belfast, since 2007, having previously held a similar position at the Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence. He is a member of the Tyndale Fellowship, British New Testament Society, Irish Biblical Association, and Society of Biblical Literature. His recent publications include *Reading Revelation: A Thematic Approach* (James Clarke, 2022) and the entries for "Gethsemane," "Gog and Magog," and "The Resurrection of Christ" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

LEONARDO DE CHIRICO (PhD King's College London, 2002) is pastor of the Church Breccia di Roma, lecturer in historical theology at the Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione in Padova, Italy, and director of the Reformanda Initiative. He is author of several books, including *A Christian's Pocket Guide to the Papacy: Its Origin and Role in the 21st Century* (Christian Focus, 2015), *Same Words, Different Worlds: Do Roman Catholics and Evangelicals Believe the Same Gospel?* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2021), and the forthcoming *Engaging with Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Approach* (Apollos, 2024).

RACHEL CIANO is a Lecturer in Christianity in History at Sydney Missionary and Bible College and the Dean of Academic Development at Mary Andrews College. She has been an Anglican Deaconess Ministries Senior Fellow in 2023 and is a member of the Evangelical History

Association's executive committee. Rachel has authored *10 Dead Gals You Should Know* (Christian Focus, 2023), *10 Dead Guys You Should Know* (Christian Focus, 2021), and "Lament Psalms in the Church: A History of Recent Neglect," in *Finding Lost Words: The Church's Right to Lament* (Wipf & Stock, 2019), 9–23; with Gregg Allison, she co-authored "Roman Catholic Theology and Practice of the Priesthood Contrasted with Protestant Theology and Practice of the Priesthood," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23.1 (2019): 137–55.

BILLY KRISTANTO (PhD and ThD, Universität Heidelberg) serves at International Reformed Evangelical Church in Berlin, Hamburg, Bern, Munich, and Stockholm. He is a member of the theological commission of World Reformed Fellowship. His recent publications include *Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective* (Pickwick, 2022) and "J. S. Bach's Sterbekantaten im Lichte der lutherisch-orthodoxen und spätmittelalterlichen *ars moriendi*," in *Evangelische Theologie* 83.6 (2023): 404–30. He is currently working on a book on Reformational spirituality.

STEVEN M. GRANT is associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Bonita Springs, Florida. He has a degree in violin performance from the University of Missouri–St. Louis (Bachelor of Music, 1982), and he studied at McCormick Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity, 1985) and Westminster Theological Seminary (Doctor of Ministry, 2017). He served pastorates in St. Louis, Missouri; Lake George, New York; Omaha, Nebraska; and Fort Myers, Florida before his current post.

PETER A. LILLBACK is president of and professor of historical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He spent twenty-seven years as a pastor in Pennsylvania and Delaware. In 2000, he founded the Providence Forum. His most recent work is *Saint Peter's Principles: Leadership for Those Who Already Know Their Incompetence* (P&R Publishing, 2019).

ALFRED POIRIER is professor of pastoral theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. He has held several additional teaching positions and has 38 years of pastoral ministry experience, including pastor at Rocky Mountain Community Church (PCA) in Billings, Montana. He is the author of *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Baker, 2006), and *Words That Cut: Learning to Take Criticism in Light of the Gospel* (Peacemaker Ministries).

RICHARD L. PRATT JR. is president and co-founder of Third Millennium Ministries, an evangelical ministry providing biblical and theological training for Christian leaders globally. Before that, Dr. Pratt served as Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary and was chair of the Old Testament department. An ordained minister, he travels extensively to evangelize and teach. Dr. Pratt studied at Westminster Theological Seminary, received his MDiv from Union Theological Seminary, and earned his ThD in Old Testament studies from Harvard University. He is the general editor of the *NIV Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2003), a translator for the *New Living Translation*, and a Christian theology consultant for the *Islamic Encyclopedia*. He has authored numerous articles and books, including *Pray with Your Eyes Open: Looking at God, Ourselves, and Our Prayers* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), *Every Thought Captive* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made Possible for You to Be* (P&R Publishing, 2000), *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (P&R Publishing, 1993), *Commentary on 1 & 2 Chronicles* (Mentor, 2006). and *Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Broadman & Holman, 2000).

PHILIP TACHIN is an associate professor of systematic theology at the National Open University of Nigeria and the director of the university's study center in Jos. He is the founder of the Reformed Outreach Initiative in Nigeria and has written *Calvin and Turretin on the Merit of Christ* (2009) and articles on various subjects.

A. CRAIG TROXEL is the Robert G. den Dulk Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Seminary California and a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He previously served pastorates for twenty-five years in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and Wheaton, Illinois. He is the author of *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires and Will Toward Christ* (Crossway, 2020).

GUY PRENTISS WATERS is James M. Baird Jr. Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi. He is a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and is active in both his presbytery and the General Assembly, presently serving on the Assembly's Standing Judicial Commission (SJC). He is the author or editor of numerous books, including *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God* (Crossway,

2022) and *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (Crossway, 2020).

PAUL WELLS is Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence. Author of many articles and books, he is co-editor of *A Covenant for Global Mission* (P&R Publishing, 2020). He recently published a 2 volume French systematic theology, *La Grâce (étonnante) de Dieu: Une théologie biblique et systématique de l'alliance* (Excelsis, 2021, 2023).

Unio cum Christo: Nine Year Index (2015–2023)

Older issues of the journal are available on the journal's website: uniocc.com. This periodical is indexed in the Atla Religion Database® (Atla RDB®), and can be accessed in participating libraries (see Table 1).

I. *Contributors*

Table 1. Themes of *Unio cum Christo* issues (2015–2023)

Volume	Month/Year	Title / Theme
1.1–2	Fall 2015	The Global Witness of the Reformed Faith (232 pages)
2.1	April 2016	Valuing the Text for All Its Worth (244 pages)
2.2	October 2016	The New Testament: Gift to the Reformation (280 pages)
3.1	April 2017	Luther and the Reformation (288 pages)
3.2	October 2017	Calvin and the Later Reformation (264 pages)
4.1	April 2018	Currents in Reformed Theology (268 pages)
4.2	October 2018	Current Debates in Reformed Theology: Practice (260 pages)
5.1	April 2019	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (256 pages)
5.2	October 2019	Reformed Ethics (240 pages)
6.1	April 2020	Apologetics (276 pages)
6.2	October 2020	Public Theology, Freedom, and Persecution in Global Perspective (276 pages)
7.1	April 2021	Pastoral Theology and Practice (232 pages)
7.2	October 2021	Pastoral Theology and Preaching (256 pages)
8.1	April 2022	Economy, Business, and Ethics (220 pages)
8.2	October 2022	Packer, Stott, and Global Anglicanism (264 pages)
9.1	April 2023	Biblical Counseling (228 pages)
9.2	October 2023	The Doctrine of the Church and Her Mission (242 pages)

II. *Books Reviewed*

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR *UNIO CUM CHRISTO*

The editorial committee invites the submission of articles (between 7,000 and 10,000 words including footnotes) for future issues of the journal. Articles should be related to the Reformed faith or its confessional texts, and aim to be informative, edifying, missional in perspective, and relevant to current challenges facing the Christian faith worldwide.

We would like to encourage theologians (including research students) and pastor-theologians, particularly from countries in the developing world, to submit articles on issues relevant to the role of Reformed theology in their national and cultural contexts, and also book reviews.

We would also be pleased to consider texts translated into English based on already published articles in journals in other languages.

Submissions will be peer reviewed before acceptance.

Upcoming numbers of the journal will present the following general theme:

2024/1 New Testament Studies

Submissions on other themes are welcome.

Dates of submission of completed articles are six months before the appearance of the journal in April, August, and October.

Before submitting an article, contact Bernard Aubert (baubert@wts.edu) with a proposition of subject and an abstract (less than 200 words). Details concerning formal presentation will then be communicated to the author together with approval of the proposition (Guidelines of Style are available at uniocc.com/journal/guidelines).

Paul Wells
Editor in Chief