

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF REFORMED THEOLOGY AND LIFE

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Reformed Ethics



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Christ's Fourfold Declaration of Authority (Matt 28:18–20)

ERIC KAYAYAN¹

In spite of the emphasis in evangelical circles on Christ's missionary mandate to his disciples in Matthew 28, the bond between the cosmic authority asserted in verse 18 and the church, to which the mission is entrusted in verses 19–20, is not always acknowledged as it should be. Misunderstanding or lack of precision about this point runs the risk of distorting the reason for the missionary mandate, namely by displacing it from its christological focus. We will clarify the precise nature of the bond between Christ's authority and the church by an examination of the passage's fourfold declaration of authority, which reinforces the passage in question and uncovers how this bond establishes the New Testament church as well.

The beginning and end of Matthew teach about the reality of the kingdom. What Jesus declared about the kingdom when he started preaching is crucial for understanding the final passage of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 4:17 states, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (ESV). Mark 1:27 describes the reactions of those who witnessed this preaching accompanied by manifestations of authority:

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean

¹ This contribution was originally written in French and was translated by Thea Van Til Rusthoven, a long-time French instructor at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

From the outset of his ministry, Jesus leaves no doubt as to who possesses authority, even over demons.

Moreover, when Jesus addresses his disciples on the eve of his earthly departure, he establishes the proclamation of this authority the very theme of his disciples’ future preaching. He is the King of the kingdom. From his Father, he has received authority to reign and exercise sovereignty over all things. This kingdom is permanent, destined to last forever; after his victory over death, nothing and no one will be able to take it away from him. The prophecy in Daniel 7:13–14 is fulfilled.² This authority is the very heart of the gospel of the kingdom (*to euangelion tēs basileias*) already preached in Matthew 4:23.

In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus articulates what is called the *Great Commission*, the missionary commandment to go and make disciples from all the nations. Although Christians often understand this commandment as a significant ecclesiastical activity, they often view it as one among others, and even sometimes as a secondary task. Our text, however, teaches something else, namely, that this passage is nothing less than the founding declaration of the postresurrection church, with a definition of its true characteristics. The Great Commission is thus an integral part of this founding declaration, and it is not one task among others.

We now turn to *the first declaration of authority*, that of cosmic authority (all authority, *pasa exousia*). The misunderstanding about the importance of the bond mentioned above most often arises from the fact that the Great Commission is understood as being expressed solely in verse 19, and not starting already in verse 18b. Such a misreading is easily documented by a survey of various churches’ materials, websites, and brochures dedicated to their missionary activities and their “mission and vision” statements. The materials show that often the relationship between the *indicative mood* of verse 18b and the *imperative mood* beginning in verse 19a is broken, or at least obscured.

In verse 18b, using the indicative mood *edothē moi* (has been given to me),³ Christ indicates what the facts are, written down in the historical decree of the Father, a decree nevertheless anchored in eternity: he is by divine right the king whose authority extends over *all* things (*pasa exousia*) in heaven and on earth. These two places naturally refer us back to Genesis 1:1,

² Jesus had appropriated this prophecy in Matthew 26:64, and this assertion served as the motif for condemnation by the Sanhedrin.

³ The verb *didōmi* is in the aorist indicative passive.

evoking the totality of creation and the origin of the authority in question. Here no partial authority or kingship is in view. There is no place in this *pasa exousia* for a viceroy. The kingdom of God is first characterized by the fact that all authority has been given to Christ. Thus, we can never speak of the *kingdom* without speaking of the total kingship given to Christ and his exercise of it.

The *imperative mood* which follows—"You therefore, go"⁴—is just the necessary consequence of the indicative mood that precedes it. Here, the coordinating conjunction *oun* ("therefore, consequently") needs to be taken into account.⁵ The King James Version has exemplary clarity in this regard: "Go ye therefore." In other words, the only reason why the disciples are called to go and make disciples is because of the authority/kingship of Christ, such as it is expressed in verse 18b. It is at the center of the future proclamation. The actions that follow (the aorist imperative *mathēteusate*, "make disciples," is followed by two present participles that make its content explicit, *baptizontes* ... *didaskontes*, "baptizing" and "teaching," vv. 19–20) are included in the dynamics of "you therefore, go," itself generated and set in motion by the indicative mood of universal authority that precedes it. The mission will invariably fail if it is not grounded on this vision, one which creates it, motivates it, and determines its dynamics. Likewise, not obeying the given mandate would be a *de facto* rejection of the fact that all authority (*pasa exousia*) has been delivered to Christ in heaven and on the earth: a rejection of his authority corresponding in reality to a denial of his kingship.

The *second declaration of authority* concerns the geographical area where the authority is exercised (to all the nations, *panta ta ethnē*, v. 19). The geographical declension of the cosmic authority of Christ⁶ is revealed by his sending the disciples to *all* the nations of the earth (*panta ta ethnē*) and not just to some, which would be a denial of its universal dimension. His word, by which he governs the entire universe, must be heard in every place. It is the scepter of his government, referring us back, along with other passages in the broader scope of revelation, from Psalm 2:7–9 for the Old Testament ("Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession") and to Philippians 2:9–11 for the New Testament ("Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus

⁴ *Poreuthentes oun* is literally, "going therefore," but the aorist participle has an imperative value.

⁵ The variant *nun* ("now") is hardly affirmed or attested (it is found only in D and a few old Latin versions) and could be explained by an assimilation of the initial omicron into nu.

⁶ Here *gē* indicates the earth as distinguished from heaven.

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”). In Acts 1:8, just before his ascension to heaven, Jesus indicates the starting and ending points of the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Any attempt to exclude one of these regions or groups from the sphere of proclamation (in particular the Jewish people, historical custodian of the covenants) would represent a blatant rejection of the *pasa exousia* of Christ, and thus of his kingdom, so that it then becomes entirely useless to invoke this authority about other subjects.

The third declaration of authority expounds the extent of the obedience required (“all the things that I have commanded you,” *panta hosa eneteilamēn hymin*). The “all” or “all the things” that must be taught, retained, and practiced set apart the kingdom of Christ from the kingdoms of other gods, masters or idols, thus showing us the marks of the kingdom. It cannot be about making a personal or subjective choice concerning what can or cannot be obeyed. Here we remember the third and fourth petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: “Your reign/kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven” (Matt 6:10). The visible form of this kingdom coming on earth, of the accomplishment of God’s will on earth as in heaven, is the obedience to the kingdom’s laws as they are taught by the disciples, who were themselves taught by Jesus. The faithful mission is above all a faithful *transmission* (2 Tim 2:2; Jude 3b).

In short, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the scepter by which God wishes to govern the world, and his divine authority is expressed in order that everyone submit to it. Before touching upon the fourth declaration of authority, let us say a few words first about the relationship between the kingdom and the church and then about Jesus as Lord (*Iēsous Kyrios*). In parallel to the relationship between the kingdom and the mission, our pericope illustrates *the relationship between the kingdom and the church*, in the sense that the marks of the church, derived from the universal kingship of Jesus Christ, appear rather clearly:

- a) Proclamation/preaching/faithful catechesis of the Law-Word (20a: “all that I have commanded you”)
- b) Administration of baptism in the name of God—unique Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as a visible sign of belonging to the people of his covenant (19b)
- c) Exercise of spiritual discipline as systematic training in obedience (20a, which makes of a person a *disciplined* disciple)

- d) Universality and unity under the authority of the sovereign, in the plurality of places where preaching/catechesis is done, baptism is administered, and discipline is exercised (19a: “all nations,” city by city, town by town, community by community)⁷

In Matthew 28:18–20, the marks of the true church, namely, the church that obeys her only sovereign, are not presented to us outside of the Great Commission, either after it or even next to it, but, in fact, within the dynamics themselves of this mandate. It is the *raison d'être* of the church, since it proclaims the sovereignty of Christ over all things, Christ exalted at the right hand of the Father. These marks constantly refer us back to the sovereignty; they have no autonomy at all from it. An excellent example of this is the very young Thessalonian church, which the missionary work of Paul and Silas established amid great trials and tribulations (cf. Acts 17:1–9). The Apostle Paul writes at the beginning of his first letter to them,

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. (1 Thess 1:6–8)

In the case of the church of Thessalonica, the mission of the Apostle Paul and his companions resulted in an immediate transmission. This transmission was a sign itself of the dynamic energy of the universal kingdom of Christ that “goes viral,” from place to place, to the far ends of the earth, to such an extent that *we do not need to talk about it*. This proclamation is central to everything that the disciples must teach the nations to obey. It is precisely what the new disciples of Thessalonica had grasped, having received the gospel not only in words “but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and

⁷ Concerning the marks of the true church, the Belgic Confession says in article 29, “The marks by which the true church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure doctrine of the Gospel; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sins; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” Quoted from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 419–20. The English translation provided by Schaff is based on the Latin version. It is worth noting that the last phrase “from which no man has a right to separate himself” is first found in the 1566 French version, thus a year before the execution of Guido de Brès, the author of the Belgic Confession, as a martyr of Evangelical faith. Cf. as well John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.9.

with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5). This made them immediately a missionary church.

In light of these elements and the example of the church at Thessalonica, it is vital to emphasize—in contrast to so many churches that are often dozing off or self-absorbed—that the church itself (local or universal) does not arbitrarily decide the nature of the relationship that unites her with her King, setting up her own rules and priorities depending on what she thinks is the relationship. On the contrary, it is the King who establishes the relationship by his finished work (indicative mood) and who determines the rules and priorities of his church (imperative mood), of whose body he is the head (Col 1:17–18). Moreover, the very first thing that he commanded his disciples to teach all the nations was his universal authority on which everything else depends.

The lordship of Jesus over all things has been the rallying cry of the church since the beginning of the Christian era, as the recurring phrase *Iēsous Kyrios* attests. That is why the church seemed suspicious in the watchful eyes of the Roman authorities, who were very jealous of their self-divinizing political claims. The extent of the sphere of “all the things that I commanded you” (*panta hosa eneteilamēn*, v. 20) must be specified within the context of the church’s mission, which aims to be both outward⁸ and inward.⁹ The mission is not about preaching to the nations a simple, formal change of religion or about repeating the phrase *Iēsous Kyrios* like an overworked mantra without much discernment, without a progressive exposition of all its aspects. That would be missing the mark with respect to the real nature and behavior of a disciple trained in a systematic discipline.

In order to resist this easy way, under the leading of the Spirit, we should be able and willing to explore all the implications of obedience to the authority of Christ, in a constant renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23; 1 Pet 1:14). If the church, submitted to Christ-the-King, desires to take seriously the commandment that sends her outwards into the world, she must also be ready at any time to examine herself in order to confess her cultural sins; obviously not the whole culture as it is, but all the sinful aspects that distort it. The church must continually be dismantling the Asherah poles surreptitiously brought within her, avoiding the traps of compromise with the world and its ideologies, as well as fighting with spiritual clarity to maintain a renewed mind (1 Thess 5:21; 1 John 4:1). Everything that could disqualify

⁸ “Go therefore” (*poreuthentes oun*, v. 19a) indicates the transmission towards the world.

⁹ “Keep, preserve, obey,” (*tērein*, v. 20a) points to the transmission within the people of the covenant.

the church for this mission (and the world never fails to show her failures, though with the mere intention of paralyzing her efforts), can only be corrected by meditating on the *pasa exousia* of the risen Christ: it is the purpose par excellence of her proclamation. In this regard, Hebrews 1:3b–4 reminds the church that the precursor to the Son sitting at the right hand of divine majesty in the highest places has been the fulfillment of the purification of sins, namely the church's sins, the church sanctified by the Spirit of the one who has redeemed her. The *pasa exousia* of the incarnated Christ-the-King was displayed in the swallowing up of the sins of those who became his body, whom he could not abandon, and to whom he remains near.

The fourth declaration of authority is in the form of a promise: Christ's presence "every day [*pasas tas hēmeras*] to the end of the age" (v. 20). In addition to the indicative and imperative moods which form its initial core, the very end of the pericope of Matthew 28:18–20 adds an eschatological promise that is also a declaration of authority, this time about the temporal sphere in which the mandate is carried out through all of the disciples' successive generations (v. 20b): the King is with them every day (*pasa tas hēmeras*) to the end of the age—or the dispensation (*heōs tēs sunteleias tou aiōnos*). In light of Matthew 24:12—"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"—we understand that the end of the age in Matthew 18:20b includes both the waiting for and the arrival of the parousia, even if it is not explicitly mentioned here.

This fourth totality, a temporal one, must be understood not only in the sense of a total period but also in a distributive sense, as the plural *pasas tas hēmeras* indicates, each day displaying this accompanying presence. However, the spiritual presence of Christ "with you" (*meth' hymōn*) is only promised to the disciples within the context of obedience to the commission. It would be deceptive to expect to enjoy the benefits of this presence while at the same time ignoring the mandate (cf. again Matt 24:14). In the given and received context, however, this promise is introduced rather solemnly by *idou* ("behold"), which appears sixty-two times in Matthew, here not to indicate a new element of the narrative, like in Matthew 28:1, 10, but to forcefully highlight at the very end of the gospel the *egō eimi* ("I am") of divine significance. The indicative mood "I am" recalls verse 18 and the declaration of Jesus, also made in the indicative mood, concerning the universal authority that was given to him. Conveyed by a historic aorist, this authority is rooted in the eternal decree of the Father; it gives rise here to a verb in the present indicative mood that envisions this same eternity,

beyond the eschatological fulfillment of the present time (*heōs tēs sunteleias tou aiōnos*, Matt 28:20).

Thus, a circle is closed that leaves no place for any usurpation of authority, a circle that gives new weight to the title *Immanuel* (“God with us”), attributed to Jesus by Matthew from 1:23 onwards, as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Jesus Christ is *Immanuel* for his church sent in mission. Furthermore, he is *Immanuel* only for the church, as a promise and encouragement for their mission, which derives its source and power from him alone.

Before concluding, it is worthwhile to revisit in the Gospel of Matthew the expression *egō eimi*, which only appears four times in that form, in contrast to its numerous occurrences in the Gospel of John. In Matthew 14:27, Jesus tells his frightened disciples in the boat that they are not seeing a ghost, but that it is him walking on the sea and coming to them. He is with them in the midst of the storm; therefore, they need not be afraid. In Matthew 18:20, where Jesus teaches his disciples about relationships inside the *ekklēsia*-assembly (verses 15–21), the assurance of his presence (“there,” *ekei*) where two or three are gathered in his name precedes and foreshadows the expression of assurance in Matthew 28:20, which is final, more solemn, and encompasses all of time and space. In Matthew 18:20, the expression of assurance seems to await a greater fulfillment because *eimi* has not yet become *egō eimi*. In Matthew 22:32, speaking to the Sadducees, Jesus quotes Exodus 3:16, where God appeared for the first time to Moses on Mount Horeb to establish the resurrection of the dead (“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”). In Matthew 24:5, Jesus warns that many will usurp his name by claiming to be the Christ—*egō eimi ho Christos* (“I am the Christ”); we are led beyond these false claims to the expression of assurance in Matthew 28:20. In Matthew 26:63–64, during Jesus’s trial, the expression is indirectly attributed to him by Caiaphas when he asks him under oath “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God”;¹⁰ in turn it mirrors Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:16). Jesus’s response, “You have said so,” validates the predicate put forth by Caiaphas as unthinkable.

One marvels at the remarkable path that leads to the final affirmation in Matthew 28:20, an *egō eimi* that was prepared and validated throughout the gospel. The quote by Jesus from Exodus 3:16 in Matthew 22:32 seems indeed to play a pivotal role in this progression, since he directly links it to the question of the resurrection of the dead.

¹⁰ “If you are the Christ, the Son of God” (*ei su ei ho Christos, ho huios tou theou*, v. 63).

The exposition of the main elements of Matthew 28:18–20 and their relationships has had the purpose of pointing to a missiology based on the doctrine of the kingdom and the kingship of Christ, which we could call a *basileo-missiology*. This *basileo-missiology* is too often confused with a “Jesus-ology” in which the authority of the risen Christ is submerged in the demands of a poorly motivated and weakly structured proselytism. In the preceding pericope (Matt 28:11–15), a parallel *mission* was set in motion, involving a false report (a lie bought with money) concerning the body of Jesus snatched on the sly by the disciples. That very act, which the religious authorities saw as plausible and dreaded (Matt 27:62–66), became the official version due to the propaganda spurred on by these authorities, despite the contradicting initial testimony of the guards. This “fake news” was then spread among the Jews (Matt 28:15). However, it is striking that in Matthew’s narrative, the guards were the first witnesses to what happened at the tomb together with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. In Matthew 28:11, the two groups each go and transmit to two other groups the common core of the same fact-based reality of which they were witnesses. The guards “told the chief priests *all* that had taken place [*hapanta ta genomena*]” (v. 11b). The relationship of the women to the other disciples is, however, of a completely different kind, since to this common core is added the command of Jesus to his disciples to come and find him in Galilee; this command foreshadows the encounter related in the final pericope of Matthew.

The reporting by the women is therefore the first postresurrection movement of a mission/transmission that is not limited to bringing the same news that the guards gave to the chief priests, but includes a pressing invitation to the disciples, a commandment to come and meet the King in order to get back to obediently listening to his word and faithfully communicating it to the ends of the earth. The authority by which the gospel must be proclaimed in its totality to all the nations finds its source not in an interior religious movement, whether individual or collective, but in the word of the King whose kingship is the very object of this word.

It is by virtue of this authority that the disciples Peter and John are able fearlessly to confront the religious authorities who threaten them: “But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:19–20).

For the church of Christ currently persecuted worldwide, this should act as a first-rate encouragement, since the one who continues to send out his disciples, generation after generation, remains the same one who promises them his presence every single day until the end of the present age.



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Interpersonal Forgiveness as a Gospel Standard

DOUWE J. STEENSMA

Abstract

Should a Christian forgive seventy-seven times? Must the sinner first repent before he can be granted forgiveness? Is forgiveness possible if the sinner does not accept the gift of forgiveness? This article focuses on the gift of forgiveness one person offers another from the point of view of forgiveness as a theological, social, and ethical norm. Starting with the reality of people's low expectation of forgiveness, the essay moves on to evaluate the nature, origin, and limits of forgiveness in light of the gospel imperative to forgive, the disposition to forgive, and the sinner's acknowledgment of guilt. The last section of the essay presents the essence of the gospel regarding the social and ethical norm of forgiveness.

Up to seventy-times seven. Or, in the words of Augustine, seventy times eight.¹ But really, must a Christian go to such lengths? Or did the evangelists, in representing these words of Jesus, omit what is self-evident: there has to be a limit to the grace of forgiveness? Must the offender first show repentance before

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¹ Augustine, *Sermo* 83 in Aurelius Augustinus, *Van aangezicht tot aangezicht: Preken over teksten uit het Matteïsevangelie* [*Sermones de scripturis* 51–94], ed. Joost van Neer et al. (Amsterdam: Ambo, 2004), 462–69.

he can be granted forgiveness? Is forgiveness even possible if the offender does not accept it as a gift? And does remission of guilt also extend to the harm that has been inflicted on others?

Not all aspects of this interpersonal norm will be considered in this article. The remission of guilt that a group, a people, or a nation extends to another, whether collectively or in relation to individual persons, as presently relevant as that aspect undoubtedly is, will be kept out of the discussion. This article will concentrate on the offer of forgiveness by one person to another, on forgiveness as a social and ethical norm, or (better still) on forgiveness as a theological and ethical norm: this ethical norm—that is to say, this guideline and standard that serves and promotes essential humanity—is examined from a theological perspective. The effect that forgiveness has on the person who grants it will not be considered in this article. That question belongs—from a theological perspective—to the field of practical theology, as does any question concerning the harm done by someone who cannot (or can no longer) be reached.

Following a brief outline about the scarcity of forgiveness in our time, this article will consider the nature, origin, and limits of forgiveness, and the gospel command that applies to this matter. In order to arrive at how actual forgiveness comes about, attention will be given to the disposition of the one who was sinned against, and the acknowledgment of guilt by the offender. The distinctive character of the gospel in relation to the social and ethical norm of forgiveness will be especially highlighted in the final section, where we will consider whether forgiveness can be offered where there is no expression of prior repentance.

I. *Scarcity*

On May 13, 1981, Mehmet Ali Ağca attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Ağca was sentenced to life in prison. In 1983 the pope visited him in prison, spoke with him privately, and granted him forgiveness. Afterward, he remained in contact with Ağca's family, and in 2000 he appealed to the authorities to have Ağca released from prison. Today, such willingness to forgive is the exception rather than the rule.² In his own time, Søren Kierkegaard made a similar observation: "But why is forgiveness so rare? Is it not that faith in the power of forgiveness is so little and so rare?"³ It is not

² Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. David S. Swenson and Lilian Marvin Swenson, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 239.

unlikely that our present-day culture suffers from a similar lack or shortness of faith. At any rate, the unwillingness or inability to forgive fits well in a culture where people value their autonomy so highly: in general, their attitudes and actions are not determined by the relationships in which they exist; rather, they regard these relationships as a form of social contract, the terms of which they wish to control themselves. Where the other party incurs guilt, there is no obligation to act to restore the disturbed relationship, and there is no requirement to forgive.⁴

Similar to forgiveness, acknowledgment of guilt has become quite problematic. Friedrich Nietzsche had a very outspoken opinion about that: whoever admits his own guilt disgraces himself. “True” humans accept what they did wrong, including their misdeeds. And they also accept others’ wrongful acts against them:

To be unable to take his enemies, his misfortunes and even his misdeeds seriously for long—that is the sign of strong, rounded natures with a superabundance of a power which is flexible, formative, healing and can make one forget.... A man like this shakes from him, with one shrug, many worms which would have burrowed into another man.⁵

Nietzsche points to the French revolutionary Mirabeau, “who had no recall of the insults and slights directed at him because he simply—forgot.” Forgiveness is normally seen as a sign of impotence and weakness. Seeking the restoration of violated relationships outside of the “will to power” conflicts with one’s true humanity. It is not possible to make universal valid declarations concerning what has or has not been violated, for all of life is permeated with injustice. Hence, “forgiveness” will not be found in the vocabulary of one who is “truly human.”

Neither in classical antiquity was there such a thing as willingness to forgive. Aristotle does not include such a disposition in his list of the virtues of free citizens of the *polis*. It played no role in the ancient world.⁶ “Justice” was the pre-eminent norm.

⁴ Cf. Frits de Lange, “Room for Forgiveness? A Theological Perspective,” in Didier Pollefeyt, ed., *Incredible Forgiveness: Christian Ethics between Fanaticism and Reconciliation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 162–64. Cf. Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 211–12.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22.

⁶ Andreas Kinneging, *Geografie van goed en kwaad: Filosofische essays* (Houten: Spectrum, 2010), 121.

This same attitude also seems to be prevalent in our present-day culture, in which people wish to shape reality according to their own insights. Should anyone retain an unpleasant memory of a past event, no great harm has been done. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, such qualms are a thing of the past. A special kind of therapy removes any feeling of unpleasantness, of whatever kind.⁷

Still, other voices also make themselves heard. Hannah Arendt identifies forgiveness as one of the necessary means by which society is kept functioning when threatened by the "irreversibility ... of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing."⁸ Hence, life is a hazardous enterprise. Forgiveness, however, is a means to alleviate that:

Trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.⁹

Arendt identifies Jesus as the one who discovered the role of forgiveness within the domain of human affairs. This disposition is a "rudimentary sign of an awareness that forgiveness may be the necessary corrective for the inevitable damages resulting from action."¹⁰ Respect for the humanity of the other is already a sufficient incentive for such willingness to forgive.¹¹ This attribute—together with others common to our humanity—supports a plea for the re-evaluation of the norm of forgiveness. In the twentieth century, the awareness grew that forgiveness might serve to promote human well-being and mental health. There was also a growing awareness that forgiveness can play an essential role in the resolution of conflicts between nations or ethnic groups. One example of this was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, after the abolition

⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, With an Introduction by John Sutherland, Everyman's Library 359 (New York: Knopf, 2013), 204.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, With an Introduction by Margaret Canovan, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 236–37.

⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰ Ibid., 239.

¹¹ Ibid., 243.

of the policy of apartheid.¹² There can be no future without forgiveness, said Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Andreas Kinneging argues that over against the ethical minimalism of present-day society,¹³ forgiveness needs to be reconsidered. He supports a call to restore this norm to its rightful place next to, and even above, the norm of justice, and points to the rediscovery of a highly valuable ancient norm.¹⁴

II. *Nature and Origin*

From the perspective of social ethics, forgiveness is a standard and guideline for situations where people have suffered wrongful harm to their humanity as a consequence of the actions of others.¹⁵ People can always ignore all kinds of relatively minor offenses. However, there may also be injuries that cause serious harm to one's humanity. Examples of such injuries may be disloyalty, betrayal, or violence. Even offenses which may in themselves be "minor" can cause considerable pain if they are intentionally or persistently inflicted.¹⁶ The granting of forgiveness will of itself not yet bring about a full and complete act of forgiveness. Such an act of forgiveness can only attain its goal when those who have inflicted wrongful harm acknowledge their guilt. Within this perspective, forgiveness is an interpersonal, two-sided event. It is more than just an intention. For—in the words of K. J. Popma—such an intention "only attains the fullness of forgiveness when, from the other side, guilt is *confessed*."¹⁷

In themselves, however, human beings do not have the authority to forgive offenses. The Most High God has the highest authority in heaven and on earth. However, at the time of creation, he gave his image a role to play in his rule on earth: "You have made him a little lower than God," the poet sings in Psalm 8 (v. 5 NASB).¹⁸ After the fall, this authority gained a specific, concrete meaning, because interpersonal relationships had been seriously

¹² Anthony Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29–34.

¹³ Kinneging, *Geografie*, 116; also Andreas Kinneging, "Over rechtvaardigheid en vergeving," in Edith Brugmans et al., eds., *Rechtvaardigheid en verzoening: Over de fundamente van de moraal in een tijd van geweld* (Budel: Damon, 2000), 114–15.

¹⁴ Kinneging, *Geografie*, 126; also Kinneging, "Rechtvaardigheid," 121.

¹⁵ Cf. Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperCollins 1996), 5–13.

¹⁶ See Smedes, *Forgive*, 13–19.

¹⁷ K. J. Popma, *Levensbeschouwing: Opmerkingen naar aanleiding van de Heidelbergse Catechismus VII* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1965), 171.

¹⁸ Cf. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

and permanently disrupted. Because of the fall, man—to quote Popma again—“had been trapped like a fly in a spider’s web of the tough threads of offenses that he had committed, and that had been committed against him.”¹⁹ In his grace, God continued to allow humans to share in this authority, and granted them a special actualization of this authority, in order to preserve the well-being of society. Just as he continued, after the fall, to appeal to humans in relation to being his image, so God also appealed to them in relation to his power to grant forgiveness. In the same manner as the servant in Christ’s parable (Matt 18:21–35), when he met his colleague at the entrance to his lord’s palace, was empowered to forgive the personal debt that the other owed him, so all people—since they are the image of God—are empowered to forgive their neighbors.

How this empowerment reached its full realization has become visible in Jesus Christ. He is the true man, as God intended from the beginning. This Christ, this Son of Man, came to earth and had the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10–12). All believers who have communion with this Son of Man may and will, in virtue of this fellowship, also grant forgiveness to those who have caused them harm and have expressed repentance. In this way, they will represent and bear witness to Christ. This act of forgiveness is not an expression of high-handed autonomy, but truly a gift of love, one that they pass on to their repentant neighbors. It serves to take away sins. In the words of Kierkegaard, forgiveness is even “the most outstanding way” by which love can remove sin.²⁰ “As one, therefore, through faith *believes the invisible* in the visible, so the lover through forgiveness *believes the visible away*.”²¹ To this authority to forgive a certain power is also attached, namely the capacity to confer actual effect upon this authority. This authority, however, is anything but an occasion for self-aggrandizement. After all, it is a gift from above (cf. John 19:11).

III. *Limits*

The authority that God has conferred upon humans as his image, however, has a limit. First of all, this limit is found within people themselves. No people are empowered to grant forgiveness for wrongful harm that their neighbors have inflicted upon another person.²² In this sense, the reaction of Simon Wiesenthal, his refusal to grant forgiveness to a dying SS soldier

¹⁹ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, 196.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 238.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

²² Smedes, *Forgive*, 5–7.

for the suffering he had inflicted upon Jews in general, is understandable. Of course, Wiesenthal did have the power to grant forgiveness for the suffering he himself had experienced; he could choose to see in this soldier a human being who accepted responsibility for his actions. However, at that moment, he was unable to bring himself to make that choice. Nevertheless, this event haunted his memory long after the end of World War II; what he wanted was not revenge, but justice.²³

The forgiveness of suffering inflicted upon others, however, must be left in the hands of God. Only he can determine whether such guilt can be forgiven. Human beings only have the power to grant forgiveness for the wrongful suffering they themselves have endured. In Matthew 18:21, the apostle Peter spoke only of someone who had sinned *against him*. And Jesus instructed his disciples about situations in which others had wronged them (Luke 17:4). The general expression “forgive others their trespasses” must be read in the light of “our debtors” (Matt 6:12) and “against me” (Matt 18:21).

Forgiveness has its limits, not only in the one who was wronged but also in the administration of justice in society as a whole. Concerning this, victims have neither authority nor power. They neither can nor may, on their own authority, decide that the offender stands above the rights of society. When people by their actions violate the justice of society, then that justice must take effect, even when the victims have personally forgiven the offenders. Those who harm others have wronged not just those people, but also others around them, and also society as a whole.²⁴

The question may be asked whether the severity of the offense might set a limit to its forgiveness. Ivan Karamazov tells the story of a wealthy landowner who had two thousand persons living on his estate. This man, an army general, saw that his favorite dog was limping. What had happened? A boy—just eight years old—had thrown a stone at the animal. The landlord resolved to teach the boy a lesson and threw him into prison. The next morning, he prepared for the day’s hunt, together with his attendants and game drivers. The inhabitants of the estate were called to present themselves for inspection, with the boy’s mother in the front row. He gave orders to strip the boy stark naked and then set his hunting dogs upon the child until they had torn him to pieces while his mother looked on.²⁵ Ivan is quite

²³ Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, ed. Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman (New York: Schocken, 1998).

²⁴ Cf. Oliver O’Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 90.

²⁵ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Heinemann, 1974), 248–49. In a preceding passage, Ivan recounts the abuse a five-year-old

sure that the boy's mother would never be able to forgive that butcher. She did not have the right to forgive him. No-one would ever forgive such a brutal act! Yet Ivan believes that the church does teach such forgiveness, and as a result, he hastens to hand his membership card back to God. Still, he says, if the mother is determined to do so, she may be able to forgive "the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart."²⁶

Judgment concerning the suffering that has been brought upon another must be left to God. In the case of personal suffering, the victim may grant forgiveness, regardless of the enormity of the perpetrator's guilt. After all, where do we draw the line? The right to forgive such harm cannot be limited to "everyday" wrongs, while serious crimes, like those that fall under criminal law, would be excluded. Those who have suffered wrongful harm may grant forgiveness to anyone, even someone who has committed monstrous crimes against them.²⁷ Next to monstrous crimes, an unending succession of lesser, everyday offenses can also inflict great harm upon the other: persistent bullying, continuous intentional annoyances, systematic put-downs, and expressions of contempt. The gospel speaks of the number of times one is to forgive an offender. Augustine summarizes this command as follows: "Whenever someone sins against you, you must forgive him."²⁸ With "seven" or "seventy times seven" (Matt 18:22; Luke 17:4), the gospel means an unlimited number.²⁹ In this sense, forgiveness has no limit.³⁰

IV. Command

Forgiveness of personally inflicted harm is a command of God. Jesus taught his disciples that they must forgive a brother who shows that he repents. Even if he should sin against them seven times, and seven times returns and says, "I repent," they must forgive him (Luke 17:3–4). Paul says the same thing: Forgive one another (Eph 4:32b; Col 3:13). The use of the present tense indicates that this command always remains valid.³¹ Within the

child suffered at the hands of her parents (p. 247). This passage occurs in book 5, chapter IV. It is followed by the narrative of the Grand Inquisitor.

²⁶ Ibid., 251.

²⁷ Cf. Bash, *Forgiveness*, 11–13.

²⁸ Augustine, *Sermo* 83.3.

²⁹ Augustine, *Sermo* 114.1 in Aurelius Augustinus, *Als korrels tussen kaf: Preken over teksten uit het Marcus- en Lucasevangelie* [*Sermones de scripturis* 94A–116+367], ed. Joke Gehlen-Springorum et al. (Budel: Damon, 2007), 260.

³⁰ Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 16th ed., NTD 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 99.

³¹ Joachim Gnlika, *Der Kolosserbrief*, HThKNT 10.1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 195; J. P. Versteeg, *Oog voor elkaar: Het gebruik van het woord "elkaar" in het Nieuwe Testament met*

congregation—that is what the expression “one another” tells us³²—we may expect that each member confers this grace upon all the others. In this connection, Paul uses the word *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι), which highlights the gracious character of forgiveness. Because God has forgiven his own, they will also be able to grant forgiveness to each other (Eph 4:32b; Col 3:13b). His forgiveness has made forgiveness possible within the church. The word *kathōs* (καθώς), however—often translated as “just as” or “likewise”—also conveys a comparative sense.³³ Divine forgiving love is then portrayed as an example for those who are his own: do to others as your Lord has done to you. His love finds a reflection—as incomplete and fragmentary as it may be—in your love for each other. Matthew also points to this necessity (Matt 18:21–25). As the master is kind and gracious, so is his servant. Forgiveness is a part of following God.³⁴

It is striking that the Lord’s Prayer places the same emphasis on what the children of the kingdom should do,³⁵ namely, to forgive their debtors (Matt 6:12).³⁶ Moreover, the prayer is immediately followed by an elucidation of this clause: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (v. 14). This instruction, which Christ probably drew from Jewish tradition,³⁷ does not refer to the remission of a monetary debt. The disciples were not wealthy; how would they have been in the position to lend money to others? In this passage, the word “debts” is a reference to a nonmonetary debt,³⁸ one that was caused by the harm done to the human person. Likewise, it is clear from the use of the word *paraptōmata* (παράπτωματα, debts; Matt 6:14–15) that this is not a reference to mere human weakness; rather, it refers to something morally reprehensible.³⁹

The gracious gift of forgiveness, however, does impose a certain burden on the one who grants it. The king who forgave his servant must bear the consequences of that servant’s failure. Likewise, Christians who forgive

betrekking tot de onderlinge verhoudingen binnen de gemeente, Apeldoornse studies 15 (Kampen: Kok, 1979), 54.

³² Cf. Versteeg, *Oog voor elkaar*, 46–47, 53–54.

³³ Cf. Gnllka, *Kollosserbrief*, 196; Versteeg, *Oog voor elkaar*, 47, 54.

³⁴ Cf. Augustine, *Sermo* 114.3.

³⁵ Schweizer here speaks of an “interruption” to the prayer (Schweitzer, *Matthäus*, 97–98).

³⁶ Here Luke uses the singular: “for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4).

³⁷ Mark formulates a command here: “Forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). Here too, the reading is *paraptōmata* (παράπτωματα, trespasses) instead of *opheilēmata* (ὀφειλήματα, debts; Matt 6:12a).

³⁸ See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 250.

³⁹ Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 6th ed., THKNT 1 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1986), 204.

their neighbors assume the burden of the guilt that these neighbors have incurred. They would succumb to this burden, says Bonhoeffer, were it not for the fact that they themselves are carried by the one who took every sin upon himself. In the power of Christ's suffering, believers are able to overcome the sins that are done to them by forgiving them. The bearing of one's brother's burden is then the bearing of the latter's sins, and that would not be possible other than by way of forgiveness. Such forgiveness is one form of the suffering that believers undergo for the sake of Christ.⁴⁰

Those who go by the name of Christian but are unwilling to grant forgiveness to others who have acknowledged their guilt towards them and shown repentance do not live in line with the gospel. Matthew reinforces the emphasis of the Lord's Prayer and the statement that immediately follows it by adding, "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:15).⁴¹ This admonition is consistent with the juxtaposition of what Augustine calls "a most terrifying parable":⁴² the servant who refuses to show his neighbor the slightest patience or understanding, who will have nothing of any forgiveness, awaits a dreadful fate. While he may have been freed from his own debt by his master's decree, he is anything but free from unrighteousness (Matt 18:21–35). While love covers a multitude of sins, unwillingness to reconcile increases a multitude of sins. Whoever refuses to forgive "increases the sin; he makes it greater," says Kierkegaard, "and next, forgiveness takes the life from sin, but denying forgiveness nourishes the sin."⁴³

However, there is more. The formulation of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer and the admonitions recorded in Matthew indicate that there is a connection between what happens on earth and what happens in heaven. God takes account of what his own will or will not do, and he responds to that.⁴⁴ In a certain sense, the granting of forgiveness is a condition for receiving forgiveness oneself.⁴⁵ Not in the sense that believers could, by forgiving themselves, somehow earn God's forgiveness. This principle is not some *quid pro quo*, but it does emphasize the necessity of obedience to God's command. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes this necessity. Those who will not forgive their repentant neighbors' personal debts owed to them

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge: Mit einem Nachwort von Eberhard Busch*, 12th ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1981), 66.

⁴¹ Mark 11:26 is a later addition.

⁴² Augustine, *Sermo* 83.1.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 240.

⁴⁴ Grundmann, *Matthäus*, 204.

⁴⁵ John Calvin also speaks of a "*conditio*" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 3.20.45).

have reason to be greatly worried. Their own attitude of faith is not right. For such a faith attitude includes the forgiveness of debtors (Matt 6:12); and where that is missing, will God hear prayer for forgiveness? How could those unwilling to forgive others ever ask God to forgive their own sins?⁴⁶ For they show that in the end, they have not accepted the divine gift of grace.⁴⁷ With the parable of the king and his servant, Jesus wanted to warn us and so prevent that we should be lost, says Augustine.⁴⁸ Similar warnings can be found in other places in Matthew (Matt 25:31–46; 22:14). The misunderstanding that believers can earn God's forgiveness of sins by forgiving those who have sinned against them is excluded by the parable of the king and his servant.⁴⁹ This word of Christ is meant to exhort us to the obedience of faith.⁵⁰

Even though forgiveness is a command of God, it does not bypass the heart and the feelings of the victim. Forgiveness is a gift that might not always be immediately granted. Sometimes it takes time. Lewis Smedes gives several examples to describe how such an offer might eventuate. Often, insight into the situation of the one who has committed the offense may be helpful. Furthermore, the process of forgiveness may be accompanied by a sense of confusion concerning what exactly took place. There may also be residual feelings of anger. Sometimes forgiveness may be granted little by little.⁵¹ It must be granted freely; it can never be forced.⁵² However, regardless of how the process of forgiveness develops, perhaps with difficulty, perhaps hesitantly, and full of doubt, Christians will always be prepared to forgive. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, Christians will be “fully determined wholeheartedly to forgive [their] neighbor” (Heidelberg Catechism [HC] 126).

This disposition will not be limited to the forgiveness of brothers and sisters within the Christian congregation. Christ speaks in a general sense of “our debtors” (Matt 6:12), “others” (v. 14), and “anyone” (Mark 11:25). Still, forgiveness has a particular urgency in the congregation. Paul's admonitions clearly show this (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). And the parable of the king and

⁴⁶ Cf. J. T. Nielsen, *Het evangelie naar Mattheüs I*, 3rd ed., PNT (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1978), 131; Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.45.

⁴⁷ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 156.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Sermo* 83.2.

⁴⁹ Schweizer, *Matthäus*, 97.

⁵⁰ Calvin says that a believer may be assured that his sins are “as certainly forgiven as we are certainly conscious of having forgiven others, when our mind is completely purged from all envy, hatred, and malice” (Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.45).

⁵¹ Cf. Bash, *Forgiveness*, 166.

⁵² Smedes, *Forgive*, 95–121.

his servant is placed within that chapter of Matthew's Gospel in which life within the congregation of Christ stands at the center (Matt 18:21–35). The use of the word "brother" points to that.

Forgiveness as a social and ethical norm is directed to the neighbor's well-being, in accordance with the divine command of love towards the neighbor. In this way, such a norm serves the restoration of broken relations and the preservation of healthy relationships. It is directed to the future: renewed ability and willingness to live together in peace and harmony. People who by their actions have become estranged from the circle to which they belong can again be received. One example of such a person in the Gospels is Zacchaeus: he was known as a "sinner" (Luke 19:7). He had wronged those around him. Relations had been disrupted. However, after receiving forgiveness, his relationship with the people to which he belonged was restored. Jesus declared him to be a "son of Abraham" (Luke 19:10).⁵³

Forgiveness is directed not only to the well-being of the neighbor but also to that of the victim.⁵⁴ In this sense, the gift has a therapeutic dimension, enabling victims to be released from a painful past event; they experience inner peace and are set free from inner rancor. Forgiveness—said Augustine—sets the heart free from hatred, and that is necessary, for the more firmly we cherish feelings of hatred, the more we ruin our heart.⁵⁵ However, in the gospel it is not this therapeutic effect that is given the most prominence. In the same manner as love towards the neighbor has priority over love towards the self, so forgiveness with a view to the well-being of others has priority over one's own well-being.

V. *Disposition*

The gospel teaches not only that forgiveness is a command, but also that God grants to his own what he asks from them: a disposition, a willingness to forgive. This gift is grounded in the work of Christ, who has reconciled his own with the Father and has paid for their offenses. This gracious gift means that they now have a new relationship, not only with God but also with their neighbor: in Christ the wall of separation has been broken down (Eph 2:14). Believers now share in new interpersonal relations and a commensurate disposition. The reconciliation that began at the cross continues into a disposition to forgive neighbors and in acts of forgiveness.

⁵³ Cf. de Lange, "Room for Forgiveness," 174.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Bash, *Forgiveness*, 36–56.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Sermo* 114A.5; cf. also, for example, Bash, *Forgiveness*, 107.

While this new relationship becomes most apparent in the church, it also extends to other interpersonal relationships in which believers stand. It includes that believers cannot but grant forgiveness to repentant neighbors. That is a fruit of the forgiveness they have received: all who have received forgiveness from God will as a matter of course become forgiving people. All who sincerely pray to the Father for forgiveness will of themselves perform good works of forgiveness. Every forgiveness of others' offenses, in obedience to God's command, arises as a good fruit of their prayer for forgiveness.⁵⁶

This disposition to forgive, grounded in the work of Christ, is directed by his example. Just as Christ is willing to forgive, so likewise are those who have communion with him. It is an "identity marker" for those who are his disciples, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit not only causes this fruit to grow and ripen, but he also equips believers to put it into practice. This fruit is granted in the way of prayer. God grants it to "those who constantly and with heartfelt longing, ask him for these gifts and thank him for them" (HC 116). Every act of forgiveness finds its origin in God (cf. Eph 2:10).

This precious gift from the Triune God is, at the same time, capital to invest.⁵⁷ Because believers go to work with it, put it into practice, and make a habit of it, it increasingly becomes a part of them. This disposition will become more and more a distinctive trait. Believers find themselves in a continuous learning process,⁵⁸ one that takes place within their community⁵⁹ and one that has as primary constituents teaching and preaching, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, and the exercise of mutual fellowship. In this, believers will always keep an eye on their Master, who put this disposition to forgive into practice in an extraordinary manner throughout his ministry on earth, and most notably on the cross at Golgotha, when he prayed for his enemies.

In addition, believers will learn from fellow believers who in their own situation have applied this disposition in an especially striking way. The parents of Miroslav Volf, for example, did not lay any charges against the soldier who had killed their son. They chose to forego their right to compensation. They did this on the grounds of what Paul had taught. True, the forgiveness they extended caused great pain to the boy's mother. She had to deal with many conflicting emotions. But she was able to grant forgiveness

⁵⁶ Cf. Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, 171.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁸ Alan J. Torrance, "Forgiveness and Christian Character: Reconciliation, Exemplarism and the Shape of Moral Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30.3 (2017): 297–98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

because she was prepared to take this exceedingly difficult decision through her communion with Christ. In the meantime, these parents were plagued by others, who supposed they could explain why their five-year-old son had died.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding, they stuck to their intention to forgive. Believers will take note of such examples as well as those they may encounter within their immediate surroundings.⁶¹ In this way, they will learn to extend the gift of forgiveness themselves.

VI. *Acknowledgment of Guilt*

Those who grant forgiveness affirm by doing so that the other has caused them harm. They describe the injustice that was done and express a judgment about it, just as Joseph did when he saw his brothers as they came to Egypt. By putting them to the test, he confronted them with their own past. Forgiveness does not compete with justice, as if the offer of forgiveness might, in some way, diminish the need for justice. Both of these social and ethical norms—justice and forgiveness—have in common that they are an attempt to bring to an end something that might otherwise continue endlessly.⁶² While forgiveness is essential for the preservation of society, justice is no less essential. Justice is integral to the structure of society. Offenders stand in relation not only to their direct victims but also to society and its system of justice as a whole. This system calls for acts of justice, with a view to both the correction of offenders and the protection of society and its morality.

The reach of such justice, however, is limited.⁶³ An act of justice is unable to release repentant neighbors from their guilt fully and is also unable to restore the disrupted interpersonal relation fully. Disrupted or broken relations can only be restored through forgiveness. It is—as Kinneging puts it—“a necessary addendum to justice.”⁶⁴ Only forgiveness can bring about the restoration that justice cannot attain, which is why it is indispensable. The offer of forgiveness, however, is not yet the same as the acceptance of it. The actual realization of forgiveness does not occur unless the guilty party acknowledges his guilt. Forgiveness has its own “structure,” one that exists by virtue of the cooperation of two parties.⁶⁵ An essential element of

⁶⁰ Volf, *Free of Charge*, 213.

⁶¹ Torrance, “Forgiveness,” 312–13.

⁶² Cf. Arendt, *Vita activa*, 239.

⁶³ Cf. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 122–23.

⁶⁴ Kinneging, *Geografie*, 124.

⁶⁵ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, 173, 180.

this cooperation is acknowledgment of guilt: “otherwise there can be no room for the possibility of forgiveness.”⁶⁶ That is why repenting is part of unpacking the gift of forgiveness; it is accompanied by the leaving behind of harmful actions and the readiness to remove, as far as possible, the consequences of this harm. Those, however, who continue in their wrongdoing do not accept the gift of forgiveness; they retain their guilt. Were the church to speak of forgiveness while allowing the sin to continue, it would be proclaiming a cheap grace.⁶⁷ Repentance implies a genuine change of heart. In this connection, Scripture speaks of *metanoia* (μετάνοια): when “a brother” says “I repent” (*metanoō*, μετανοέω), you must forgive him. That is the rule where he truly repents (*metanoēsē*, μετανοήσῃ; Luke 17:3–4), that is, where he expresses genuine repentance, resolves to change his life in relation to the one he has harmed, and does everything possible to make amends for the harm he has caused.

In the same way, as people will usually find it difficult or sometimes even impossible to grant forgiveness, they will also find it difficult to genuinely acknowledge guilt. Who among us likes to admit that we have done something wrong? Most of us are inclined to compare ourselves with others so that we can conclude that the wrongs of others outweigh our own failures. We will often regard the actions of the other as not entirely right or even entirely wrong.⁶⁸ Often it will happen—writes Popma—that the guilty party

continues to evade or complain, and by means of an endless multiplicity of words contrives to confuse or obfuscate the issue as a whole. Gaining time, then, assumes a negative quality. The longer one harps on about it, the smaller the chances will be of a courageous resolution. The matter drags on, and in this way, “old wounds” are nurtured. . . . The long-standing conflict takes on an intractable character. . . . A more or less permanent estrangement develops, one that can no longer be remedied by the simple means of acknowledgment and forgiveness.⁶⁹

If, however, trespassing neighbors truly do acknowledge their guilt, are willing to make amends for the harm that was inflicted, and accept the forgiveness that is offered, then the act of forgiveness has been completed, and the relationship is restored. The offense itself can be left to sink into oblivion, both by those who suffered the harm and by those who inflicted it. In any case, those who were harmed may not, after the expression of repentance and the granting of forgiveness, still declare that they will not

⁶⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁶⁷ Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, 14.

⁶⁸ Volf, *Exclusion*, 119.

⁶⁹ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, 172.

forget the offense. Were they to do that, they would be signaling that they still regard their neighbors as wrongdoers.⁷⁰ That does not befit a Christian. A Christian wants nothing more than to fully restore a broken relationship. Sadly, this does not always happen. Popma even goes so far as to assert that the believer usually does not even receive the chance to restore the wrong; this is destructive to the Christian life and ultimately to Christ's church itself:

One does not consider that mutual forgiveness is the "daily bread" of life for the work that we have to do on earth. Forgiveness of sins is rendered brutally impossible by hard, arrogant people, who immensely overestimate themselves, people who are quite willing to work very hard, but who are never willing to acknowledge guilt at any point. This attitude is deadly for Christian activity in almost every field. Does anyone want to do Christian work? Excellent, but let him always keep in mind that this is only possible where he is prepared, on a daily basis, to admit every offense, right down to the smallest infraction. Not with feeble excuses, but with a full and genuine *admission*. Nothing less will suffice!⁷¹

Believers are willing to forgive their repentant neighbors. In all kinds of everyday annoyances, they are all the more willing to do so when they look at themselves, at all of their faults and shortcomings. Moreover, the line between the offenses of others and their own failings are not always so clear. Often, their failings are interwoven with the wrongs of others, especially in the fabric of everyday life.⁷²

VII. *Forgiveness before Repentance?*

In some circumstances, however, forgiveness may be granted before guilt is confessed. Those who have been harmed realize that those who have harmed them do not see their wrongdoing, have no regret, and do nothing to restore the harm they have caused. That evokes questions and creates disquiet and disappointment. Nevertheless, they are willing to grant their neighbors forgiveness, in part for the sake of their own peace of mind. Such a situation, however, calls for wisdom. Those who grant forgiveness where their neighbors have not acknowledged their wrongdoing must know what they are doing, as their neighbors could all too easily take it as an insult.

Where the offense is obvious, however, such an initiative will not be out of place. Those who have suffered wrong at the hands of their neighbors

⁷⁰ Cf. Volf, *Free of Charge*, 175.

⁷¹ Popma, *Levensbeschouwing*, 181.

⁷² Bash, *Forgiveness*, 10, 64.

might see that these neighbors carry a burden of which they themselves are unaware, one that plagues them in the present and may continue to do so in the future. They may realize that the others are incapable, in their own strength, of expressing regret. If they, in this situation, were to demand immediate apology, they would only make it harder for their neighbors to repent. Their demand for such an apology could in itself form a hindrance to restoration. Those who first demand regret and repentance from their neighbors before considering forgiveness might have good reasons for that. But believers also see that the gospel teaches something different. In the gospel, the indicative of salvation *precedes* the imperative of forgiveness.⁷³ In the same manner as God takes the initiative with humankind, so believers will take the first step with their neighbors. Hence, they may choose to take the initiative to forgive. For who is able, in their own strength, to acknowledge their faults, and to put them behind them? Those who have been wronged may extend a helping hand to them. By forgiving their neighbors, they can put the command of neighborly love into practice. In this way, evil can be overcome by good (Rom 12:21). Unconditional forgiveness, in the sense that the offer to forgive precedes repentance from sin, may be helpful in the process of forgiveness and restoration.

But there is more. An initiative to grant forgiveness before repentance is expressed fits well with the gospel itself. Proceeding from his unfathomable love, God took the initiative to redeem sinners. He granted forgiveness when his own were still enemies (Rom 5:8) and long before they showed any signs of repentance: that is the kind of love he showed to a world that had sinned against him (John 3:16). One example in the Gospels is the forgiveness that Zacchaeus the tax collector received. Jesus wanted to be a guest in his house and accepted him as a brother. It was not until afterward that Zacchaeus made amends.⁷⁴ While this example does not explicitly mention the forgiveness of guilt for any wrong that Zacchaeus had done to Jesus personally, it does demonstrate the application of the social and ethical norm for forgiveness. Here too, it is clear that this forgiveness is not unconditional in the sense that there was no call to repentance. Such an initiative clearly does include a call to repentance. This example also demonstrates that the act of forgiveness is completed by an admission of guilt and a willingness to make amends. Zacchaeus repaid those he had defrauded. Similarly, all believers will want to reflect Jesus in the divine love

⁷³ Torrance speaks of “legalistic” and “evangelical” repentance, and of legalistic and evangelical *metanoia* (Torrance, “Forgiveness,” 308–11).

⁷⁴ Cf. de Lange, “Room for Forgiveness,” 173, 175.

for sinners. How this love is realized in a concrete offer of forgiveness is secondary, as is the specific *moment* when that should take place.

However, in a situation where the confession of guilt does not follow after an offer of forgiveness, the act of forgiveness is not completed. This principle is illustrated in the parable of the king who withdrew his forgiveness of his servant when the latter showed that he had not accepted it. Such acceptance is necessary in the way of confession and repentance.

When people genuinely confess their guilt and are prepared to demonstrate repentance by their actions, then the act of forgiveness is completed. Reconciliation has taken place. The separation has been taken away. What was broken has been healed. Instead of tension, there is now peace. Instead of suspicion, there is now trust, however fragile it may be; there is now a beginning. Where there was silence, people are now speaking to each other again. Here, then, something of the new creation becomes visible; and this new creation is precisely what—in the words of Oliver O'Donovan—the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer asks for: a prayer for discontinuity, for the inauguration of a new righteousness.⁷⁵ This new creation calls for actions that are not determined by the history of the past or the facts of the present. Forgiveness is this kind of action, and as such is a sign of the new creation, one that is not independent of the authority and power that God, in the beginning, has bestowed on humans. "That we should be more than creatures of our past, more than mere continuers of it, that is the gift presupposed in our creation; it is the power which nature's Creator bestowed on creation's lord."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 41.

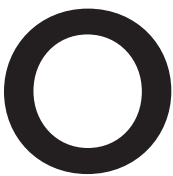
⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

Islam and Women¹

CHRISTINE SCHIRRMACHER

Abstract

Little can be said about all women in Islam, as they live in widely varied circumstances. Still, some guidelines apply to a vast majority of Muslim women today because civil law follows, by and large, the regulations of sharia law in most Arab countries and because the majority of Muslim women are living in traditional settings. This article surveys several of these fundamental guidelines without claiming to describe the actual living conditions of all Muslim women. It will consider the status of women, women and marriage, children, and some other laws and customs. This contribution will conclude with a brief consideration of the Islamic women's movement and a comparison of marriage in Islam with Christian marriage.



nly very little can be said in general about all women in Islam. Indeed, the differences in the circumstances of life created by the urban or rural environment are too significant; the gap between women in Afghanistan and Tunisia, between sternly religious families and secularized Muslims

¹ This article builds on the author's following contributions: Christine Schirmacher, "Women in Islam," World Evangelicals, http://www.worldevangelicals.org/resources/pdf/Women_in_Islam.pdf; Christine Schirmacher, "Women in Islam," Institute of Islamic Studies of the Evangelical Alliance in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, July 13, 2005, <https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/2005/frauen-im-islam/?cn-reloaded=1>; Christine Schirmacher, *Islam and Society: Sharia Law—jihad—Women in Islam: Essays*, The WEA Global Issues Series 4 (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008), <https://epdf.pub/islam-and-society-sharia-law-jihad-women-in-islam-the-wea-global-issues-series-v.html>.

in the Western world, is too high. The question whether one particular woman obtains access to schooling changes the circumstances of her life just as decisively as does her age at marriage and one individual family's view about how traditional Islamic regulations are to be applied and how strictly. In addition, ongoing secularization and the spread of Western lifestyles are rapidly changing living conditions in the cities of the Middle East. In some countries like Iran, female students already outnumber male students. Even in Saudi Arabia, twenty percent of the seats of the Consultative Assembly, the formal advisory body of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Arabic: *majlis ash-shura*) are currently reserved for women. In the cities, an ever-growing number of Muslim women are earning their own money running businesses. Young couples tend to be economically more independent, and larger families do not necessarily live together in one house anymore. One thing is sure: things are changing in the Muslim world. Still, some guidelines do apply for a vast majority of Muslim women today because civil law still follows, by and large, the regulations of sharia law in all Arab countries (except Tunisia) and because the majority of Muslim women are living in traditional settings.

I. The Status of Women

1. Men and Women—Equal before God?

This article names several of these fundamental guidelines without, thereby, claiming automatically to describe the living conditions of all Muslim women. The public debate over women's role in Islam tends in the West to center around the issue of the headscarf, seen as symbolizing women's inferiority, yet not all practicing Muslim women wear the scarf, and not all of them think it is indispensable. It is Islamic marriage law that cements women's inferior legal status as divinely ordained. The relevant provisions of sharia are linked to local cultural norms and time-honored traditions with roots in tribal society that were retained with the arrival of Islam. Some of the widely accepted standards of decency are a mixture of culture, religion, and tradition.

Muslim apologists have always insisted that Islam believes in the equality of men and women and adduce as evidence that the qur'anic creation account makes no distinction between man and woman (sura 39:6). God is said to have created man and woman "from a single soul" (sura 4:1) to be mutual "friends" and "protectors" (sura 9:71) and set "love and mercy"

between them (sura 30:21).² The tradition praises the man who treats his wife “best” as the best believer. Muslim apologetics further adduces the common duty of men and women to observe the five pillars of Islam: the creed, prayers, the fast, alms, and the pilgrimage, as well as the promise to both of great rewards in the afterlife: “To whoever does right and believes, be it man or woman, we will give a good life. And we will apportion them their reward according to their best deeds” (sura 16:97).

Despite this fundamental equality, traditional Muslim theologians (who make up the vast majority of Muslim theologians) assert that the tasks God has given women differ from those he has given to men. As women bear the children and the responsibility for home and family, so men are responsible for the family’s protection and maintenance, in other words, to be the breadwinner who has dealings with society at large. Differing tasks mean different rights. So it is seen as no more than an expression of justice between the sexes that only a half-share of an inheritance falls to the woman, since she does not bear the financial responsibility for the family. The principle enunciated in the Qur’an that a man’s testimony can only be outweighed by the testimony of two women (sura 2:282) is said to take account of the fact that women’s biology predisposes them to greater emotional fluctuations and that it would be an imposition on their often insufficient capacity of recall to ask them to decide another person’s fate in a court of law.

Men and women are equal in Islam in the sense that both are promised access to paradise and expected to observe the five pillars of Islam. However, women are excluded from religious practice during menstruation and childbirth.

In Islam, women are prohibited from touching the Qur’an, entering a mosque, saying liturgical prayers, and fasting during Ramadan. Only men are required to attend Friday prayers at the mosque and to listen to the sermon, whose content is frequently of political or social importance. If women attend the mosque at all, a practice frowned upon by some theologians and prohibited by others, they are separated from the men in a small and usually bare room, sometimes in a bad state of neglect through disuse, or in a balcony or basement. Only a sixth of the 1.6 billion Muslims are native Arabic speakers, and it is difficult for most women who are unfamiliar with the language to recite the prescribed ritual prayers in Arabic correctly and in full, to read and understand the Qur’an, or to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca.

² The translation of Yusuf Ali of the Qur’an is quoted in this article; see *The Holy Qur’an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (al-Madina: King Fahd Holy Qur’an Printing Complex, n.d.).

2. Women's Status in Family and Society

The social separation of the sexes is regarded as a means of maintaining decorum. In traditional families, men and women live virtually in different worlds, to a certain extent, even within the family circle. This separation is apparent in the dress code, which does in a strict interpretation not permit men to see a woman to whom they are not related unveiled, but also in the fact that Islam knows no neutral ground where men and women can meet. The wider family admits of a certain level of contact, but the innocuous intermingling of the sexes outside the family circle is impossible and suggests adultery. Muslim theologians have even recommended that women should refrain from greeting relatives in public because other passers-by will not be aware that they are related.

Children in Islam are brought up very differently according to sex. Sons especially develop a close emotional attachment to the mother, while the father is primarily respected as the authority figure. After circumcision, usually between four and nine years of age, fathers increasingly initiate sons into the male world, while the mother traditionally instructs daughters in household responsibilities, training them for their future role as housewives and mothers. Except in the case of serious impediment, marriage is the norm for men and women and guarantees a woman's livelihood.

3. Women's Legal Status

Islamic marriage and family law is prejudicial to women in several ways. Even if there are many loving fathers and husbands in Muslim countries, it is part of sharia law that it is a man's right to punish his wife by ignoring her or by beating her in case of discord (sura 4:34). Aside from questions of inheritance and legal testimony, women are at a disadvantage compared with men in marital law, divorce, and custody proceedings.

The Qur'an permits men up to four wives and an unspecified number of concubines (sura 4:3), even if in many countries polygamous marriages are discouraged by state authorities. The traditional divorce procedure allows a man to divorce his wife by merely pronouncing the formula "I repudiate you" without the need for giving grounds or going to court. Some Muslim countries have already introduced checks to this procedure and lay down laws that an attempt at reconciliation must be made in court, but this is usually only practiced in the bigger cities. In a rural setting, family members might try to reconcile a couple with each other in case of discord.

Women can only obtain a divorce in court and are only granted one if they can prove serious misconduct by the husband; in some countries like Saudi Arabia, it is virtually impossible for the wife to obtain a divorce. A

husband is only bound to pay alimony for a few months in case of her being pregnant, so divorce leaves a woman without means and children, for Islamic marriage law invariably grants custody to the husband once the children are out of infancy. Several Muslim countries have improved the legal status of women today, but only in areas which are not in direct conflict with sharia law. There might be impediments applied for conducting a polygamous marriage; still, in the last fifty years, no Arabic country has formulated a law forbidding it.

II. *Marriage*

1. *Marriage Contracts in Islam*

In a rural setting—that is, in the vast majority of cases—Muslim marriages are up to this day arranged by the families, and women are not always in a position to give their full and free consent. Even upper-class urban women who might have fallen in love with a young man at university will, in most cases, make their betrothal and marriage dependent on the full consent of their parents.

Arranged marriages tend traditionally to be associated with decency and respectability, while marriages “for love” often smack of immorality and Westernization. Marriage within the extended family is favored because familiarity with the cousin and his parents make it easier to assess the chances of a successful marriage than in the case of an outright stranger. It also guarantees the “compatibility” of the marriage partners with respect to social background, education, religion, and character, which Islam requires, and ensures the dowry stays within the family. It is also easier for the bride’s family to put pressure on a relative to save the marriage when it is in danger of breaking up, and it guarantees that any kind of support needed will come from within the family.

The cornerstone of the marriage contract is the husband’s responsibility to earn a livelihood and the wife’s duty to obey (sura 4:34). The duty of obedience has of late led some wives to include “escape clauses” in the marriage contract permitting them, for instance, to pursue education or career after marriage, since the husband in principle has the right to determine how often and for what purpose his wife may leave the house. Otherwise, should he forbid his wife to attend university after the wedding because he does not consider it compatible with decency, she should submit without demur if she cannot make her father convince her husband to change his mind.

Islamic marriage law demands submission particularly in sexual relations, for by paying the dowry the husband acquires the right over his wife’s body,

and she has no grounds to refuse him except for ritual impurity or during the fast, since according to established precedent, refusal, like infertility, gives the husband the right to repudiate her.

The traditional religious wedding ceremony is presided over by an imam, the mosque precentor or religious official; in urban areas marriages are also registered. The groom and the two obligatory witnesses sign the marriage contract. Strictly speaking, the bride does not even need to be present, the contract often being signed on her behalf by her guardian (in Arabic: *wali*) acting as her legal representative. The most important clause in the contract lays down the amount of the dowry, consisting of the “dawn gift” of clothing, furniture, jewelry, and money that the wife receives from groom’s family at the wedding, and the “evening gift,” the compensation due to the wife if they are divorced, since alimony only has to be paid for three months or until the delivery of a yet unborn child.

God’s blessing is not invoked at a Muslim wedding, a civil rather than a religious ceremony whose purpose is to seal a contract that explicitly anticipates the possibility of divorce through the specification of the “evening gift.” In the wedding ceremony, the marriage partners take no vow of mutual fidelity, nor do they make a promise of mutual care “for better or for worse.” Unlike Christian marriage vows, there is no promise of lifelong, exclusive devotion to one person, as there is in principle the possibility of taking a second wife (except in Tunisia and Turkey). If worse comes to worst, such things as an incurable illness, a prison sentence, impotence, or infertility are generally regarded in Islam as grounds for divorce for both husband and wife. The idea of lifelong spiritual fellowship before God, marriage as a partnership for service, is not central to the Muslim view of marriage; it is rather a compact setting out the rights and privileges of both sides. Nor is there any promise or vow to “love and honor” one’s partner, for the biblical commitment to mutual love is foreign to a Muslim marriage.

2. Up to Four Women

Polygyny (multiple wives)—possibly unlimited—probably existed in pre-Islamic Arabia. In sura 4:3, the Qur’an limits the number of a man’s wives to four and, beyond this, allows an unlimited number of concubines: “And if you fear not acting justly in regard to the orphans, then marry women as it befits you: two, three, or four. But, if you fear not acting justly, then marry only one, or whatever [female slaves] you possess. In this way, you can most easily avoid doing injustice” (sura 4:3).

A few countries, such as Tunisia, legally forbid polygamy. In other countries, however—provided that the marriage contract makes no other provision—a

woman can do nothing if her husband desires to take a second wife. In several Muslim majority countries (e.g., Egypt) today, though, she can require in the marriage contract that she be guaranteed the right to a divorce if her husband takes a second wife during her lifetime. In the other Muslim majority countries, polygamy is in no way the rule, but—presumably also for economic reasons—always the exception, and the Qur'an and Islamic tradition demand that all women be treated justly in regard to the material care and affection provided by the husband.

A few Muslim theologians have interpreted the only Qur'an verse that mentions the number of four wives (sura 4:3) in the sense that the Qur'an here actually speaks explicitly against polygamy, since the equal treatment of several wives is never really possible, as the Qur'an itself concedes: "And you will not really be able to treat your wives justly, however much you try to do so" (sura 4:129). The majority of Muslim theologians, however, has held fast to the permission, in principle, to marry up to four wives. One important argument put forward against any criticism of polygamy is the historical fact of Mohammed's multiple marriages, him being the very example for any believer after him.

3. *The Duty of Marriage*

In classical Islamic theology, voluntary unmarried existence is unthinkable, and so it is the case for the majority of Muslims in the Middle East today. The Qur'an, of course, clearly commands marriages in sura 24:32: "And give in marriage those among you who are single." The Islamic tradition declares marriage to be a good custom that is to be observed, that is, it is *sunna*: "Marriage is a part of my *sunna*, and whoever is against my *sunna* is against me," so Mohammed is reported to have said.³ Unmarried, divorced, or widowed women in the Islamic world usually do not live alone; single women live with their extended families, and divorced and widowed women move in again with their extended families, which often has the goal of seeing them married again. The fundamental reason for this is the Islamic concept of marriage that assumes that, without the control of the extended family, a single woman living alone might give rise to rumors about her moral conduct.

4. *Early Marriages*

The Qur'an makes no concrete statements about an acceptable age for marriage. It is known of Mohammed that he married some of his wives

³ Hans Bauer, *Von der Ehe: Das 12. Buch von al-Gazālī's Hauptwerk* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1917), 5.

while they were very young, especially his later, favorite wife Aisha, who is reported to have been nine years old at the time (although there are few reports that Aisha was sixteen or seventeen). This fact was later cited repeatedly as a justification for child marriages. Today, the law books of most Muslim majority countries contain provisions that determine a minimum age for marriage, which is frequently set at sixteen to eighteen years for girls and approximately eighteen years for boys, a regulation that in practice in rural areas due to poverty is not infrequently circumvented by the misrepresentation of birth dates. Thus, for example, Moroccan law forbids marriages for women under eighteen but allows “exceptions,” and these exceptions are reported to have doubled in the last fifteen years. In some countries and especially in poor and illiterate settings, girls not yet in puberty, at the age of eleven or twelve years, can be given in marriage. However, sometimes even nine-year-olds get married, and girls as young as ten or eleven become mothers.⁴

5. Arranged Marriages and Marriage Contracts

Up to the present, marriages frequently occur within the network of family relations, above all between cousins. This happens because marriage is considered very much under the aspect of a bond between two families. Once young people reach marriageable age and are not yet promised to a cousin, the traditional way is the arrangement of a marriage through the mother or an older female relation of the groom. Of course, modern marriages are certainly not arranged everywhere, and the number of “love marriages”—above all in urban areas—is steadily increasing.

If the family arranges the marriage, however, the mother of the groom will make inquiries about the family of the chosen young woman and her financial circumstances, and above all about her reputation, health, and domestic abilities. One or two visits in the home of the young woman take place when the amount of the marriage portion and the festivities are discussed. If both families reach an agreement, then an official date for the wedding is set, and the couple is considered engaged. The assent on the part of the young woman plays a more important role today than in earlier times, and the family law books of Muslim majority countries often contain a paragraph explicitly forbidding forced marriages. Today, she is in a better position to reject at most one candidate, but a second or third candidate less so, since in a traditional context she then easily can be considered

⁴ Fatima Mernissi, ed., *Der Harem ist nicht die Welt: Elf Berichte aus dem Leben marokkanischer Frauen* (Hamburg: Lüchtherhand, 1988).

difficult and unmarriageable and can thus bring shame upon her family.

The actual marriage ceremony is simple: the presence of the bride is not absolutely necessary from a legal point of view. She can have her father, brother, or another male relative stand in for her. Originally, the inclusion of an administrative authority in the ceremony, for the registration of the marriage, was not required, but only the presence of an imam (prayer leader in the mosque) and two witnesses. Today, marriages are also frequently registered with the state authorities, which places women in a more advantageous position. The marriage is purely a contract in civil law between the groom and the legal representative of the bride and is given no particular divine blessing.

The marriage contract regulates, above all, the financial aspect of the marriage portion (Arabic: *mahr*). The groom either pays the marriage portion completely to his bride as her property at the time of the marriage ceremony, or it is agreed upon that the first part ("morning portion") is due at the time of the wedding ceremony and the second part ("evening portion") in the case of divorce or the death of the husband, as a means of providing the wife with some financial security in these cases.

6. The Wedding Celebration

At the wedding celebration, men and women by tradition celebrate separately. The high point of the festivities is the act of bringing the bride into the house of the groom. There, the marriage is consummated and, in traditional settings, as proof of the virginity of the young woman, the bed-sheets are shown to the female relatives (modern couples no longer practice this). The respectability of the bride and the honor of the whole family are thus demonstrated. If the husband discovers that his bride is no longer a virgin, she is sent back to her family in shame and dishonor. For the family of the girl and the bride herself, this is undoubtedly the greatest conceivable disgrace. Absolute abstinence before marriage, as a rule, is not expected from the husband to the same extent as from the woman—even though both sexes may discreetly disrespect these traditional rules in urban and more anonymous settings.

7. The Provision for the Family

The husband is obligated to provide for the family. The wife, for her part, cannot be legally forced to contribute to the livelihood of the family due to sharia law. The wife has the obligation to care for the household and the children. Joint ownership of property such as we know it does not exist, since neither husband nor wife acquires the right to the property of the

other through the marriage. The dowry in the case of divorce is considered the property of the wife and cannot be used in meeting the costs of living.

Once married, the man, according to the Qur'an, has an unlimited right to marital intercourse whenever he wishes: "Your women are a fertile field for you. Go to your field whenever you wish" (sura 2:223). Refusal by the woman is always grounds for divorce, and some traditions pronounce a curse on the wife for her refusal. The wife, too, can sue for divorce in this regard, but only after a long period of continuous sexual neglect.

III. *Children*

1. *Sons and Daughters*

An Islamic marriage never will voluntarily remain childless. Childlessness is considered to be a disgrace, and the wife is almost always given the blame for it. Infertility is a common ground for divorce. Often the "evil eye" of a third party is seen as the cause of childlessness, and many infertile women visit the graves of holy figures or consult conjurors in order to attain fulfillment of their desire for children by use of magical practices, sacrifices, and occult ceremonies.

A birth is always a joyful event, especially the birth of a boy. The wife is awarded full recognition only through the birth of a child, for she now has fulfilled the most important expectation of her parents and in-laws. To have given birth to a son is such a tremendous event that many mothers afterward are no longer called by their own names, but rather only as the "mother of Aziz" (in Arabic: *umm Aziz*) or "mother of Isma'il" (*umm Isma'il*). The tradition says that "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers," and the Qur'an demands esteem for and the respectful treatment of parents, especially in their old age: "And we have commanded the people to be good to their parents" (sura 46:15). Only when the parents keep their child from the faith is the child theoretically allowed to be disobedient.⁵

At the birth of a child, the prayer call is whispered in its left ear and the confession of faith ("There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet") in its right ear. Special care is taken to ensure that the "evil eye" might not possibly strike the child, for the high rate of infant mortality in the Islamic world was and may still today be attributed to the effects of the "evil eye," that is, to the adverse magical practices of a third party. For this reason, attempts are made to protect the child from this influence by using various protective magical practices, such as blue beads sewn to the

⁵ Jacques Jomier, *How to Understand Islam* (London: SCM, 1989), 75.

clothing of the child. Annemarie Schimmel mentions the custom of asking forty men named Mohammed for money and then buying clothing for the child from the money received.⁶ Sometimes, among other practices, a boy will be dressed in girl's clothes so that the demons are led astray from thinking that they have a boy before them.

2. Circumcision for Boys and Girls

Circumcision, which the Qur'an nowhere explicitly demands, is obligatory for boys in the entire Islamic world and is celebrated with a family festival, usually when the boy is between four and ten years of age. Afterward, the boy belongs to masculine society and is gradually made acquainted with the duties of his religion.

Despite its official state prohibition in most Muslim majority countries, the circumcision of girls is practiced to a greater or lesser extent in several states, primarily in southern Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan, as well as by the Bedouins of North Africa. The Qur'an provides no basis at all for this custom, which has survived in only a few Muslim majority countries, where traditional groups defend it stubbornly as a means of preserving the chastity of unmarried women. Some Muslim states condemn the circumcision of girls as reprehensible, but cannot effectively prevent its practice in certain places or levels of society. This custom may have its origins in African religions. In Egypt, the circumcision of girls was already being carried out during the time of the Pharaohs⁷ and was implemented in Islamic culture after the conquest of Islam. Thus, the circumcision of girls should not be considered as specifically Islamic, although Islamic tradition does contain a few positive statements about the advantages of the "mild form of circumcision" that makes a blatant condemnation of female circumcision unacceptable for traditional voices within Islam.

IV. Customs and Laws

1. The Veil

Although in all Muslim majority countries some of the women practice full or partial veiling, the command to wear the veil is not at all so easy to establish from the Qur'an, which says merely that women should cover

⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, "Traditionelle Frömmigkeit," in Munir D. Ahmed et al., *Der Islam III: Islamische Kultur, Zeitgenössische Strömungen, Volksfrömmigkeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), 242–66, esp. 244.

⁷ Frank Bliss, *Frau und Gesellschaft in Nordafrika: Islamische Theorie und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit* (Bad Honnef: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung, 1986), 118.

themselves in a virtuous way for their own protection:

Oh, Prophet! Speak to your wives and daughters and to the women of the believers that they should draw their garments down low over themselves. Thus it is most readily ensured that they are recognized and not molested. God is, however, compassionate and ready to forgive. (sura 33:59)

For some of these instructions, it is not easy to decide from the context which form of “garments” are meant. Of course, one could assume inhabitants of the desert covered their heads in the extreme heat of the day.

The veil, or the headscarf, should according to traditional theology be worn from about the age of puberty. The woman then can show herself unveiled only before the men of her extended family. The Qur’an gives no clear instruction about whether the “veil” means merely a headscarf worn over the usual clothing, as is frequently usual in Turkey, or a full-length veil that leaves the face free or provides only slits for the eyes, as is currently usual in Afghanistan.

2. Punishing the Wife for Her “Rebellion”

Most Muslim theologians agree that the Qur’an concedes to the man the right in certain situations as the last step to punish his wife (or wives) in case of her disobedience:

The men take precedence over the women because God has honored them more than the others and because they give (to their wives) from their property. ... And if you fear that the wives rebel (against you), then remove yourselves from them in the marriage bed and beat them. If they then obey you, then undertake nothing further against them! (sura 4:34)

The husband, as it seems, is given the right to resort to means of corporal punishment if he fears that his wife could rebel against him. He can use such punishment to compel her to obedience if admonishment and the refusal of marital intercourse have not moved her to relent. Whoever examines the exact wording of the Qur’an verse could even say that the man not only has the right but even the duty to punish, for sura 4:34 is formulated as a command to husbands: “Beat them!”

This is not to say that in every Muslim family the husband beats his wife and in any non-Muslim family he does not! Many Muslims today, some Muslim theologians, and also some female feminists are opposed to the idea that the Qur’an allows the husband to beat his wife by arguing that the traditional application of sura 4:34 is simply wrong, claiming that Mohammed had never supported the idea of wife-beating. However, up to

today these critical voices do not seem to be influential enough to shake the arguments of mainstream Muslim theologians who have not moved away from the traditional interpretation of sura 4:34. This is also the case because not only the Qur'an but also the texts of Islamic tradition underline the husband's right to discipline his wife in case of discord, and as there is still no officially recognized historical-critical hermeneutics applied to the texts of the Qur'an and tradition today, it is still difficult to argue on principle for the inapplicability of sura 4:34.

So there is also just as little justification for claiming that men in the Islamic world would not avail themselves of this right. Nada Tomiche mentions, for example, that the right of punishment is legally established in Egypt. There are said to be courts there that concern themselves with the permissible length of the stick with which the woman can be beaten.⁸ "Moderate" punishment by the husband will hardly be a cause for legal action against him, since the wife is culturally assumed to be fundamentally responsible for the success of the marriage and, in the case of punishment, the assumption is of abnormal behavior on her part.

In the tradition, it is reported of Mohammed himself that he confirmed the right of punishment for the case that a wife received as a guest in her home someone whom the husband is not able to abide:

But, she should not allow anyone to sit in your private quarters who you do not like. If she, however, does this anyway, then you are permitted to punish her, but not too hard. Her rights in regard to you are that you provide her in an appropriate form with food and clothing.⁹

The famous theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (died 1111) demands that the "malice" of the wife be treated with "discipline and severity,"¹⁰ and, in the case of "disobedience on the part of the wife," he advocates "forcibly returning [her] to obedience."¹¹ If her husband punishes her and, as a last resort, beats her, then

he should beat her without causing her injury ..., that is, he should cause her pain, but not so that one of her bones is broken or she bleeds. He also is not permitted to strike her in the face; that is forbidden.¹²

⁸ Nada Tomiche, "Mar'a," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 6:466–72, esp. 471; Bliss, *Frau und Gesellschaft in Nordafrika*, 69.

⁹ Talib Y. Fehhhaber's translation is cited in Ahmad von Denffer, *Wallfahrt nach Mekka: Das Wichtigste über umra und hadsch*, Schriftenreihe des Islamischen Zentrums München 15 (Munich: Islamisches Zentrum, 1987), 84, unfortunately with no source reference.

¹⁰ Bauer, *Von der Ehe*, 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹² *Ibid.*

3. Adultery

Adultery in general is considered in Islam to be a serious offense; the Qur'an requires 100 lashes for the man and the woman (sura 24:2) and warns explicitly against leniency and compassion. In Islamic law, however, death penalty by stoning has come to be accepted for married adulterers, since the tradition mentions this punishment and it is assumed that earlier the Qur'an also once contained this "stoning verse."

However, four witnesses are required to provide proof of adultery, a circumstance that is likely to be extremely rare. If this condition cannot be fulfilled, then the charge is interpreted as a false accusation, which, according to Islamic law, likewise is punishable. A wife can ward off the accusation of adultery made by her husband that cannot be proved by the evidence of four witnesses, by calling upon God four times as her witness that her husband is lying and the fifth time swearing to God that she is innocent and imploring God that he otherwise might punish her with his curse (suras 24:6–9).

So these are the legal provisions that offer only a few possibilities for legal proceedings. It is quite another question how adultery, or the suspicion of it, is punished in practice. One can certainly assume that women are not very frequently charged with adultery in courts of law; rather, much more frequently the family of a woman who has fallen into "disrepute" takes on itself the responsibility of punishment and metes it out quite severely.

It appears that, in practice, the proven case of adultery is not always required for the punishment of a woman, but rather that only minor deviations from socially accepted behavior are sufficient. For an unmarried woman, this immoral behavior would exist, for example, in a conversation with an unrelated man. The woman then gains a bad reputation and thus has fewer chances for marriage. A girl who once has exchanged a few words with a young man in a public place can be shut up completely at home and constantly monitored until she is married.

Jürgen Frembgen reports from his experiences gathered during several lengthy stays in Pakistan:

Among the Pakhtun and Baluch, the forbidden glance of a woman in the direction of a strange man, or a short conversation, already can be interpreted as unchaste behavior and adultery, which makes further life together with her husband impossible and often enough means the killing of the wife.¹³

¹³ Jürgen Frembgen, *Alltagsverhalten in Pakistan* (Berlin: Express Edition, 1987), 32.

Further, “contacts between a man and a woman who are not married to each other can ... be interpreted as adultery and result in a vendetta.”¹⁴

4. Divorce and Repudiation of the Wife

The tradition, to be sure, records that Mohammed characterized divorce as the most reprehensible of all permitted actions. However, divorces in Islamic law were and are very simple for the man and, accordingly, in some countries quite frequent. According to sharia law, the husband can repudiate his wife at any time and without naming his grounds for it by repeating the divorce formula (e.g., “I repudiate you!”) three times. If he pronounces the formula only once or twice, then the divorce is still revocable: he takes his wife back again before the “waiting period,” the period in which a possible pregnancy would become evident, has run out and consummates marital intercourse with her, which amounts to a repeal of the divorce. If, however, the divorce formula has been spoken three times, then the man can marry this particular woman again only after she has become the wife of another man and again has been divorced from him (suras 2:228–30).

This regulation of the three-fold divorce formula is intended actually to protect the woman from impulsive divorces that are pronounced in annoyance, intoxication, or just in fun. Divorce, however, remained even in the Islamic era a comparatively uncomplicated process for the husband, since his decision alone is sufficient.

Today, however, this simple divorce has been made *de facto* more difficult in several Muslim majority countries. Often (but not everywhere), legal proceedings in a court of law are necessary. In some cases, too, the man must initiate legal action in order to obtain a divorce; sometimes, he is urged to undertake attempts at reconciliation. A particularly common ground for divorce today is still likely to be the infertility of the wife or the birth of several daughters and no son.

In most Muslim majority countries today, a wife too can obtain a divorce in some instances, but always with the help of a formal trial. Among the grounds that a wife can present before a court are several years’ absence of her husband from the home and his presence at an unknown location, the neglect of his obligation to pay support, a term in prison extending over several years, continued impotence, neglect of marital duties for at least three years, mental illness, dangerous, contagious, or repulsive diseases such as leprosy or elephantiasis, exceptional cruelties on the part of the husband, robbery of the wife’s property, hindrance of the wife in the practice of her

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

religious duties, verifiably unequal treatment of wives, seduction of the wife to immorality, and a permanently immoral lifestyle (individual “lapses” are not grounds for divorce¹⁵). The principle of irreconcilable differences in the marriage also is applied today under certain conditions.

According to Islamic law, the children from a divorced marriage always belong to the father. They can remain with the mother until they have grown out of infancy, that is, girls until ten or twelve and boys no older than seven. Afterward, the children come to their father or his family and belong to him alone. The wife then no longer has any rights in regard to her children, including visitation rights.

V. *The Islamic Women’s Movement*

The model and goal of the women’s movement in the Islamic world, which is active in all countries at different levels of intensity, is not the adoption of what in the Islamic view is considered to be the decadent and morally reprehensible Western social order, nor is it liberation from the regulations of the Qur’an. The women’s movement argues that neither the Qur’an nor the tradition is correctly interpreted today, that Mohammed’s wives possessed a more privileged position than women today, and that women today would experience greater freedom and society more justice by a fresh interpretation of the qur’anic texts. A call for the assertion of women’s rights in the framework of a suspension of Islam would have no chance of being heard on a broad scale in the Muslim majority countries. Women’s rights advocates who would issue such a call would be most probably charged with being godless and Western. Thus, women in the Islamic world have repeatedly tried to sue for their rights by “correctly interpreting” the statements of the Qur’an and the tradition.

VI. *Differences from Christian Marriage*

Islamic marriage differs from Christian marriage in many respects. Through the provision for the security of the bride with the evening portion, the Islamic marriage in a certain sense already reckons at the marriage ceremony with the possibility of a later divorce and of the man marrying additional women. A promise on the part of the marriage partners with God’s help to remain faithful to each other until death does not exist. Marriage in Islam

¹⁵ So Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege; Oxford University Press, 1949/1955), 145–47, for at least the Indo-Pakistani sphere.

is generally a contract in civil law that determines mutual obligations and is not an eternal bond founded by God and blessed by him. The fear of a threatened divorce is quite real for many Muslim women when they do not fulfill the expectations of her husbands in the management of the household and the number of children.

The Christian marriage, in contrast, is intended as a lifelong companionship with only one partner. Precisely because marriage involves commitment, it is compared in the Bible again and again with the exclusive covenant between God and human beings for eternity. Married Christians swear an oath before God that only death should separate them. Also, in contrast to Islam, mental illness, prison, or the impossibility of finding a sufficient livelihood would not be a ground for divorce according to the Bible, for it is precisely here that it ought to be demonstrated that Christian marriages are maintained not only so long as the marriage partners “function” flawlessly, but especially in those instances when one of them most urgently needs counsel, help, and support.

The Christian marriage vow to be there for the partner in “good as well as evil days” obligates self-sacrifice on the part of each partner for the other precisely in times of need. The Bible speaks in many places of the fact that love for the neighbor or the marriage partner is not just a feeling, but there must be a decision of the will for love, and love means devotion and sacrifice (cf. Eph 5:25–31). The Bible repeatedly exhorts husbands and wives to exercise love in the marriage. It is not the codification of certain obligations in the marriage, such as provision for the family or the care of children, that forms the chief component of Christian marriage, but rather the intellectual-spiritual communion of the marriage partners in their relationship to God and the mutual completion of two, in nature, different human beings borne by love and forgiveness. The story of creation already makes this especially clear. Adam misses a partner that is like him, who does not stand under him like the animals and does not stand over him like God, his Lord. After he has given all the animals a name, he rejoices at the creation of the woman, for God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18 *ESV*). Divorce was an “abomination” to God already in the Old Testament (Mal 2:11, 14–16) and was only allowed because of the “hardness of heart” of the people (Jesus in Matt 19:8 and Mark 10:5). Divorce in the biblical understanding thus is intended to be an absolute exception, not to be reckoned as part of the design from the very beginning. Based on this idea of lifelong companionship, divorce in many Western countries, too, is still a quite tedious affair that “enforces” an entire year to reconsider, even in severe cases of irreconcilable

differences. If only one marriage partner desires the divorce, then even several years can pass before the divorce is finalized.

On the other hand, the Qur'an nowhere speaks explicitly about the intellectual and spiritual communion of marriage partners and, to my knowledge, this component remains practically unconsidered among the commentators on the Qur'an and in the literature on questions concerning marriage and the family. Since Islam has no ecclesiastical structure encompassing all the faithful and the mosque offers women only a limited sphere of activity, a woman can live out her faith only in private. She is not called, however, to intellectually and spiritually shape her environment and culture with her husband as a service of God. For many Muslim women who have become Christians, the respect and love Jesus Christ has shown to women as reported in the New Testament has proven tremendously attractive to them.

Healing the Wounds of Trauma and Abuse

DIANE LANGBERG

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to bring an understanding of trauma and abuse, of the different types of abuse that may occur, of their prevalence in the world and in the church, and of their effects on a life. It is critical to understand the damage of abuse in order to serve victims well. Failure to know what trauma does to humans and how to respond to victims results in doing further damage to a vulnerable human. We will look at three components of healing that are both basic and easily used across cultures: talking, tears, and time. We will also see that responding to trauma in the lives of others is participation in the life of Christ, who came in part to heal the brokenhearted.

Some years ago, I was in Ghana, speaking on violence against women and children. While there we visited Cape Coast Castle. Hundreds of thousands of Africans were forced through its dungeons and then the door of no return onto slave ships. There were five dungeon chambers for males. The descent into the darkness to one of those dungeons brought on claustrophobia. Two hundred men shackled and chained together stayed in that dungeon for about three months before being shipped across the Atlantic.

We stood in one of the male dungeons, listening in the darkness, when our guide said this: “Do you know what is above this dungeon?” Our heads shook. “The chapel,” he said. Directly above two hundred shackled men—some of them dead, others screaming, all of them sitting in filth—sat God

worshippers. They sang, read Scripture, prayed, and, I suppose, took up an offering for those less fortunate. The slaves could hear the service; the worshippers could sometimes hear the slaves, though there were those making them behave so as not to disturb the church. The evil, the suffering, the humiliation, and the injustice were overwhelming, and the visual parable was stunning. The people in the chapel were numb to the horrific trauma and suffering beneath them. In fact, they were actively complicit.

Under the *form* of worship in that chapel in Ghana lay the darkness of slavery, oppression, and tyranny—all things that blight and destroy humans created in the image of God. But I think you know Christianity does *not* look like being folded up with evil and worshiping on top of dungeons. Following Christ *does not* look like complicity with a system that butters our bread and fills our coffers built on the back of those created in the image of God. It does not look like praying and singing and giving money on top of screams, unspeakable suffering, filth, and death. Our guide pointed up to the church above and said, “Heaven above; hell below.” But I would argue that heaven was *not* above, for that is not what heaven does. And it is what heaven does that is the reason we serve others. Heaven leaves the chapel and goes down into the dungeon to bring those so enslaved out into light and freedom so that they in turn can go back and bring more. Heaven uses all power to bless.¹

I invite you to enter the dungeon of abuse with me. We do not have to go far—it is in our homes, our schools, our military, our neighborhoods, and our churches. When I first started working with victims of abuse forty-six years ago, the church largely ignored and often actively denied the dungeon of abuse. We did not believe it really existed and were certain it never occurred in the homes represented in our pews, the lives of our parishioners, and never, never within the church itself. Sadly, it has taken the media and the courts to make it abundantly clear that sexual abuse is in all such places and has even been perpetrated or covered up by some we have held in high esteem. I am grieved that it has been the media and not the voice of God’s people that has dragged it to the light.

Like our Lord—who was anointed to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, and to set captives at liberty—you and I are called to leave the comfort of our chapels and enter into the devastating suffering of those who have been shattered by the evil of abuse. Jesus demonstrated in the flesh the character of God; his church is to do the

¹ Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015), 4–7. Parts of this article build on this earlier work.

same. When God's people worship above and separate from and untouched by dungeons, they are *not* worshipping the God of the Scriptures. There is *nothing* in the Scriptures to suggest that being indifferent, uncaring, and deaf to the cries of suffering humans is godly.

God has sown his life in you and me. In this dark and fallen world, filled with blasted and ruined humanity, he has sown his life in us and flung us out. He has, however, also made it clear that the enemy has sown seed as well, and it is growing and maturing right in there with the wheat. *It is with us*—not just out there. God has said so, and he has said it will be so until he returns. The Cape Coast dungeons were *under* the chapel. They were not a separate building and were not outside the walls of the fort. Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, the man in the Corinthian church who had sex with his mother—they were part of the church. They were not out there; they were on the inside. As we consider the topic of abuse, we must be aware that it is not a problem just out there in the world—it is also among the people of God. We fail to understand and believe our Lord's teaching if we think otherwise.

I. *Statistics*

So let us look into this dungeon of shattered, wounded, and confused humans our God so loves—some of whom attend our churches.

1. *Global Statistics about Abuse*

- 20% of women report being sexually abused²
- 35% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence
- 42% of those women report an injury as a result of the violence
- 38% of murders of women are committed by male partners³
- 51% of human trafficking victims globally are women
- 75% of trafficked females are girls
- 15 million adolescent girls have experienced forced sex
- 87 thousand women globally were intentionally killed in 2017
- Less than 40% of women who experience violence seek help⁴
- Almost 8% of men report being sexually abused as a child

² "Child Maltreatment," *World Health Organization*, last modified September 30, 2016, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>.

³ "Violence against Women," *World Health Organization*, last modified November 29, 2017, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

⁴ "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women," *UN Women*, last modified November 2018, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

- 41,000 children under 15 die by homicide annually⁵
- Homicide is among the top three causes of death in adolescents
- 80% of both victims and perpetrators of homicide are boys⁶

2. Rates among Sexually Abused Males

- 4 times more likely for major depression
- 3 times more likely for bulimia
- ≥ 2 times more likely for antisocial personality disorder
- 1.5–14 times more likely to attempt suicide (does not include age range)
- 2 times more likely to use alcohol
- 5 times more likely to use drugs
- Sexually abused 6th grade boys were 12 times more likely to engage in multi-substance abuse
- Sexually and physically abused 6th grade boys were 44 times more likely to engage in multi-substance abuse.⁷

These numbers are staggering, and the damage to people created in the image of God is clear. Many of you are part of institutions that bear the name of our Lord Christ. When we say something is “in his name,” that should mean that it bears his character. We are called by our God to care for the afflicted, to open our mouths for the mute, to be a light in the darkness and a place of sanctuary for those around us. These abuses happen with shocking frequency in our churches and Christian organizations.⁸ To cover up sin “for the sake of the institution” is the equivalent of hiding a cancerous lump in your body to preserve your life. Stop and think about the statistics in the context of your country, your community, and your church or institution, and you begin to grasp the prevalence of these crimes. Given the impact of abuse on an individual life, society, and the church, and the frequency of its occurrence, it is crucial that the church not be silent. Not only does God call us to speak, but he also calls his church to be a refuge and a place for hope and healing. Anything less is a failure to demonstrate his character in this world.

⁵ “Child Maltreatment.”

⁶ “Violence against Children,” *World Health Organization*, last modified June 7, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>.

⁷ William C. Holmes and Gail B. Slap, “Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management,” *JAMA Pediatr.* 280.21 (1998): 1855–62, doi.org/10.1001/jama.280.21.1855.

⁸ Robert Dowen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, “Abuse of Faith,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019.

II. *Three Stories*

How can we, both individually and corporately, be a sanctuary for those who have been wounded by abuse? To do so, we must first grasp what it means to be a victim. Here are three stories of abuse that will help us do that.

Picture a woman who grew up in a home where she felt loved though life was a bit chaotic, and her parents were stressed. There were many children, money was tight, and mom suffered from significant depression. The little girl was lonely. A friend invited her to come to her church. They had a great youth group, and the young pastor who ran it was energetic and warm and had a pretty wife. She loved it, so she attended weekly for months. The youth pastor was fun and taught them about God. She was hungry to know more. He paid attention to her and offered to teach her individually so she could learn more about God. He would take her to the local deli and get her a sandwich and listen to her and answer her questions. It was wonderful; she felt special; she felt like she mattered to the youth pastor—but even more to God.

Then one day, it got strange. The youth pastor started talking about how special she was and how he wanted to see more of her. He started touching her. She did not like it, but was afraid to say so, thinking maybe she just misunderstood. Eventually, one day, he drove her home and, on the way, forced her into sex. She was terrified and in pain. She was thirteen years old. She tried to tell her friend from church. The friend's mother told the pastor, but he never called her, and no one asked her questions. A woman at church said she probably should not keep coming to the church because they did not want her to damage the youth pastor's reputation. Her friend quit talking to her, even at school, so she disappeared.

She read in the paper years later that the youth pastor had been arrested—it turned out she was not the only one he had treated this way. No one came to speak with her about it. She never told her story again. Twenty years later, she sits in a pew in your church still hungry for the God she longed for at thirteen and yet terrified, certain her search will result in more hurt and denial and silence. It took tremendous courage even to cross the threshold and sit in the pew. She will hear you teach and wonder what you would say if you knew her story. She is afraid to hear what God thinks of her and yet remains hungry for his love. Will she ever hear truth about sexual abuse from the pulpit or in a class? How do you think she would feel if, as a pastor, you asked to meet with her?

What were the lessons of the church for this woman? That church is a place of worshipping God? A refuge? A sanctuary? That sheep can safely

graze inside its walls? That truth is taught and desired? That godliness is sought after, and sin is dealt with no matter where it is found? That the Good Shepherd says to let the little ones come to him without hindrance?

Here is another story. Michael went away to overnight camp at age seven. He was scared and homesick. He did not know any of the other boys. His counselor paid him special attention. It made him feel important. But then it got strange and scary. The counselor would teach the Bible study at night and then take Michael for a walk and make him do things he did not like. It kept happening every night. He tried to tell the camp nurse. She told him he must be wrong—his counselor was the son of the director and was such a nice kid; he would not do anything like that. Michael is now thirty-five, married with two children, and attending your church. He has never told his story. He is terrified others would question his sexuality—he has always feared that response. He has a significant pornography addiction that no one knows about, not even his wife. He does not understand why he cannot stop.

What does he think about men in power in the church? How safe does he feel about telling the truth? How comfortable is he in the men's ministry—especially when they talk about things like transparency? What might he believe God thinks of him? He is hurting himself and his wife, he is full of shame, and he feels like he has no place to go where he can speak truth. What will you speak in your sermons, your teachings, your small groups, that might give him hope?

Finally, Sarah and her husband attend your church. He attends faithfully and counts money from the offering. Sarah is quiet and does not say much. She assists in Sunday school classes. They have two children who are also quiet and very polite. One day Sarah comes to the pastor's office. She is obviously very nervous, cannot look him in the face or hold her hands still. She says she is afraid. He says it is okay and waits to hear what she wants to say. Eventually, she says "My husband gets angry sometimes." Over time you learn that her husband batters her until she is bruised where it cannot be seen, bites her, holds a gun to her head, and terrifies the children. You are stunned. You cannot imagine that the man who helps out at church could be such a vicious and dangerous man. What will you say? Will you encourage her to return home and treat her husband better—thus endangering her health and her life? Surely, you think, she has misunderstood. Will her safety be tossed aside so that you can keep your assumptions about this man safe instead? How does she think about God? You sing about God as a refuge. Will you be one for her? She has heard you teach about marriage. Has she ever heard anyone at church teach about abuse in marriage and how God thinks about it? What will you do to protect her and the children?

III. *Analysis*

We need to explore the experience of abuse if we are to understand what victims such as these endure. Historically, when someone has endured a traumatic event, they have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹ In recent years, as our understanding of trauma has grown, we have come to realize that many people do not experience a one-time event but instead live with relentless, ongoing trauma. They are, as it were, marinating in evil. Ongoing sexual abuse, domestic violence, verbal battering, and growing up in a violent neighborhood all mean living with continuous trauma. Enduring that trauma shapes humans in grievous ways. The stressors are repetitive and chronic. They usually involve direct harm or neglect by those who should have been caregivers. How the brain works, how the body works, how the self is understood, how thoughts are organized, how the world is labeled, how emotions are named and regulated, and how relationships are understood and conducted all have their roots in the life-destroying acid of trauma.

As a result of chronic interpersonal abuse, the individual develops vigilance, constant anticipation of danger, chronic anxiety, and terror. They are never at ease. All of the person's psychological energy is bent *by necessity* toward coping, surviving rather than learning or growing. So rather than learning, imagining, experimenting and growing, they are instead learning to fear, to hide, and to self-protect. They have been betrayed by or separated from those who should be caring and nurturing and cannot find or seek assistance and safety, as there is no safe person in their world.

Many have experienced or witnessed atrocities. They bring those memories into our churches, often hidden away but very alive. Some have or will experience such things within our churches or institutions. All of these things—things we find difficult to comprehend are endured by human beings. They result in traumatized human beings. Victims live with the recurring, tormenting memories of atrocities witnessed or borne. It infects their sleep with nightmares, destroys their relationships and their capacity to work or study, torments their emotions, shatters their faith, and mutilates hope. Trauma is indeed extraordinary, not because it rarely happens but because it overwhelms normal human coping. It swallows up and destroys normal human ways of living. It does not take much thought to see what these things would do to a person who is trying to learn or manage a life.

⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-V* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The usual response to atrocity is to try to remove it from the mind. Those who have been traumatized want to flee the memory, and we who hear find that we want to flee also. We find it too terrible to remember and too incomprehensible to put into words, and so we choose not to believe the story. That is why we use the phrase unspeakable atrocities. The great tension is the futile attempt to forget the unspeakable—while it continues to live on and sometimes scream in the mind. That push-pull between the need to forget and the need to speak is the central dialectic of trauma, and that tension is experienced not only by individuals and families, but also by churches and schools and nations. It is experienced not only by the traumatized but also by those who bear witness to the trauma.

I know something of this tension. I have seen this push-pull in my clients who are terrified to remember and speak but who cannot forget. I have seen families, churches, institutions and yes, nations, deny both the existence of evil and trauma in their midst and its impact. I also know this tension exists in those who bear witness, for it exists in me. We see it on television or the Internet; someone tells of an atrocity, and soon after we look for ways to remove ourselves. Such stories threaten our comfort, our position, or our system. The stories are vile and messy and very disruptive. We prefer they stay in the dungeon. Traumatized people need attention and assistance, often for a long time. We are busy people doing important things. The trauma stories of our families, institutions, and organizations get buried, and geographical distance and the push of a button enable us to do the same with entire nations. Ask Rwanda.

Ongoing abuse in a life results in a broken identity. We believe that every human was knit together by God in their mother's womb. We believe that each one is created in the image of our God, no exceptions. You cannot be repeatedly abused and not have that shape your personhood. Abuse teaches people they are trash, expendable, shameful, and bad. Abuse is crushing, oppressive, and silencing. *Any abuse* does spiritual damage. It hides the love of the Father. It renders any idea of refuge impossible to hold. It shatters any thoughts of a safe shepherd, let alone one who gives his own life for the sake of his lambs.

IV. *Shepherding the Traumatized*¹⁰

Our God describes a good shepherd when he says, "I will feed my flock and ... lead them to rest I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up

¹⁰ The following section builds on Diane Langberg, "Helping the Traumatized," *CareLeader*, September 20, 2016, <https://www.careleader.org/shepherding-traumatized/>.

the broken and strengthen the sick” (Ezek 34:15–16 NASV). As pastors and leaders, many of you are shepherds of God’s sheep. It is an eternally significant task and often fraught with difficulties. One of the crucial things necessary for doing your work well is that you must know your sheep. You cannot care for or guide those you do not know.

Given the statistics we have listed, it seems safe to conclude that all pastors have trauma victims sitting in their pews. Most of them are silent about what they have endured. Trauma has a profound spiritual impact. Trauma raises questions about who God is: his character, his faithfulness, his purposes, and his capacity to keep us. That victims struggle is evidence of faith. It is essential that we understand these struggles and not silence them or treat them as a failure of faith. When we silence victims of trauma and their questions, we do further damage and in fact become an obstacle in the work that God can and wants to do in a life battered by trauma and evil.

People who are suffering long for help and comfort. It is an open door for the church to bend down, like her Lord bent down for us, and enter into traumatized lives with help and companionship and comfort. As we do so, we will begin to see, like Israel of old, the trauma wilderness in which many dwell, the valley of trouble, becoming a door of hope (Hos 2:14–15). The church of Jesus Christ is called to bring light to dark places, love to damaged souls, and truth about who our God is—he who entered in so *that* we might know him and be like him.

V. How to Enter into Traumatized Lives

How can God’s shepherds enter into traumatized lives and lead their people to do the same?

Of first importance is an understanding of what suffering does to humans. If you know someone full of cancer or battling chronic pain, you know that suffering reduces a person. It lessens all of their capacities, not just physically but also mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. They become less themselves. That is just as true for unseen wounds as it is for physical diseases. It is true for a combat vet, a rape victim, an incest survivor, a domestic violence victim, or a survivor of war. They may look fine, but the mind and heart wounds run deep and affect them profoundly. If we attempt to enter into the life of someone who is reduced, limited, altered by their suffering, we must reduce ourselves as well. That is why we are quiet in a hospital room. For those suffering trauma, fewer words, quiet voices, and patience are vital to our entering in so we do not bring further harm. In doing so, we are following our Savior, who was made flesh, greatly reduced

from his eternal glory so as to enter in and become like us. It is, in fact, Christ-like to lower ourselves in the face of another's suffering. And then, when sufferers are slow to speak, slow to listen, or slow to change, our responses are also to be like our incarnate Savior's toward us. It is in part how those who are suffering begin to see, in the flesh, a bit of who our God truly is with his creatures when they are reduced, overwhelmed, helpless, or slow. We bring him to them by who we are with them in their worst places.

At the same time, a truth I did not see for some time became stunningly clear to me as the years went by. God is always working both sides. I am not just present to sufferers so that they can receive comfort or grow. I am there because God is exposing to me where I am unlike him so that I can run to him and have him teach me where I am wrong and what he would do in me to make me more like himself. It is a principle applicable to all of life. All God's people are called to Christ-likeness. Our failures in that area, which are many, teach lies about who he is and damage both us and those with whom we interact. Typically, in painful situations, humans react with attempts to change either the other person or their circumstances. This can be particularly true when hearing a story of overwhelming evil and suffering. We want them to get better so we can both feel better. However, God uses ministry to the traumatized to change caregivers as much as victims.

Following a traumatic experience, every human being must make the heartbreaking adjustment to a new world full of losses. People who experience trauma feel alone, helpless, humiliated, and hopeless. They turn inward, away from life, because the memories and the feelings are all that they can handle. This is not wrong; it is necessary for a while. However, eventually, if life is to go on, the person must return to the outside world. What kinds of things are needed to help people face what is inside, to remember well, and yet still be able to return to us and to life in a way that is good?

VI. *What Does Healing Look Like?*

Recovery involves a reversal of the experience of trauma. Trauma brings silence because victims feel like there are no words to describe what happened. Trauma brings emotional darkness and aloneness because victims feel like no one cares and no one could possibly understand. Trauma makes time stand still because victims get so lost in what happened they cannot see forward and have lost hope. Three main things must occur to reverse this experience and bring about recovery. All three must happen.

Talking is part of being human. It is how God made us. He meant for us to talk, to express ourselves, to dialogue together with him and with each

other. When someone does not talk, something is broken. There may be something physically wrong, or they may be emotionally wounded. Sometimes when people do not talk at all or do not talk about a particular event it is because the pain is so great that they cannot find the words—or they keep saying the same thing over and over again trying to find the right words and get relief.

First, talking is necessary for trauma healing, and that means the victim talks—not the helper! The helper is there to invite talking, to listen, to bear witness, and to restore dignity. What happened matters. Even though words are not enough to describe terrible things, they still must be spoken. To remain silent is to fail to honor the event, the victim, and the memory. Honoring the memory means speaking the truth about it, saying it really happened, saying it was evil, and saying that it did damage. It dishonors victims when we are silent about their experience or pretend it did not occur or was not important. It leaves them alone, afraid, and full of lies about what happened and about themselves. Talking says, “I am here. What happened was wrong. I am damaged by it. Justice is needed, and so is care for my broken heart.” At the beginning, “talking” might not be done using words. Sometimes people only moan or sigh or cry or scream. It is the beginning of giving voice to that which cannot be spoken. Many times, people need us to sit with them in silence. It is a way of joining with them so they are not alone in their experience of struggling to find words. Eventually, words will come. Trauma stories do not first come out with a beginning, middle, and end. They come out in broken pieces, disordered, and often unclear.

Trauma silences victims. It isolates them. They feel helpless. Talking is about telling the truth. It connects the survivor to another person. It restores dignity because their story matters. It gives them choice because they can decide when to speak or be silent, and victims get to choose their own words. It is the reversal of what happened during the trauma. It gives them a voice in a safe relationship where they are helped back into life. Injustice, violence, and abuse teach us lies. Such events suggest we are worthless and do not matter. Talking tells the truth and gives dignity because the story matters, as does its impact. Violence and abuse disconnect us from caring relationships. We are alone, and we are not considered. Telling the story gives a place of caring connection that helps the soul. Trauma recovery requires talking, and as the story is repeated over and over, strength to state and grasp the truth grows.

Second, trauma recovery also requires tears. Facing a new world full of losses brings grief. Many emotions are the companions of trauma: fear,

sadness, aloneness, shame, despair, anger, and grief are some of them. These are strong emotions, and they are hard to experience. These are not feelings any of us want. However, like words, they must be expressed. Feelings tell the story as much as words. Feelings express what the trauma did to the victim just like blood shows what a cut did to the skin. It is like seeing and acknowledging the physical wounds on the body after an accident. Feelings are the expression of the wounds of the heart, and they too need to be seen and heard. Feelings are part of how our hearts “talk.”

Many survivors try hard not to feel and will often say things like, “If I start crying, I will never stop.” Or, “If I feel the grief or hopelessness I will fall into a black hole and never get out.” Many will try hard not to feel anything, and often people will use alcohol or drugs to help them feel numb. They try to stay drunk or use drugs to keep the memories and feelings away. Or they go numb and just sit and stare. When people do such things, they spend their lives still controlled by the trauma because everything they are doing is about running from it. It is just as much in charge of their lives as when it was occurring.

At the same time, all of us need to remember that telling a trauma story—facing the truth and expressing the deep and painful emotions—takes tremendous courage. Most people cannot do it alone. They need connection with a caring and patient person to help them have the courage to face the truth of what happened and how it hurt them. A companion in tragedy or difficulty always helps us have courage.

Psalms 56:8 (ESV) says, “You (God) have kept count of my tossing, and put my tears in your bottle. Are they not also in your book?” This is an essential truth because often we are uncomfortable with strong emotions. Some cultures say strong feelings are not proper, religious teachings may say such feelings indicate unbelief, or family teachings may suggest we should just be strong, or that feelings are alright for women but not for men or for children but not for adults. Somehow strong emotions are seen as a sign of weakness. This verse says that the God who created us considers our pain, pays attention to it, collects our tears in a bottle, and writes them in his book because we matter, what happened matters, and our feelings about it matter to him also. He is recording our story and our tears for us. We will help others if we learn to be like him in the way we treat feelings. We honor others and help them record the story of their trauma by listening to their words and their tears. Tears require strength and courage because it means facing pain.

Dealing with trauma is often repetitious. Survivors will say the same things over and over: “How could my father do that to me?” They will be

repetitious in dealing with their emotions: “I am so angry that” And they will repeat their losses again and again: “I cannot believe so-and-so is dead.” Expect it and sit with it. The weight of the trauma is so great that repetition is necessary. The mind cannot imagine what happened. It cannot hold such a thought. Bearing the intensity of emotions is impossible, and so the feelings must be tried on again and again. These are attempts to bear what cannot be borne. The victim is trying to learn “how to wear” what feels frightening and brings great pain. They keep wanting to throw it off. They are struggling to integrate into life what hurts and does not fit. Be patient and then be patient some more. Telling and retelling help to reduce the size of the memory. Talking or telling the story and expressing the feelings are instruments in the hands of the survivor that they can use toward their healing. It is a way of gaining mastery over fear and helplessness; it is a choice toward life rather than death. To hear a story is to be taught, but to tell a story is to be master over it. To tell that story with all the emotions that accompany it in a way that can be heard and understood by another is to have learned how to speak truth and contain it so it does not swallow you up.

A third thing must occur for trauma recovery to begin and grow, and this third thing we have no control over. We cannot make it happen and cannot stop it from happening. It is time. Trauma recovery needs talking, tears, and time, and it must have all three. If you do not tell the story there will be no recovery. People will stay stuck in the past and controlled by the trauma—either because they use tremendous energy to keep it away or because it controls their sleep, their relationships, their feelings, their actions, and their faith. It must be spoken over and over again. Trauma recovery needs tears. Tears honor the victim and the awfulness of what occurred. Tears express buried emotions that haunt sleep and disturb life. Tears honor those who have been lost—they are worth crying over. Tears are a way of remembering. Expressing emotions, finding words for them is also a way of gaining mastery over them. In both talking and tears, the victim is staring down the trauma as one might stare down an enemy and saying, “I am alive. I will speak what is true. I will be in charge of my own story rather than having the trauma control me. I will give it the space and honor it is due. It mattered then, and it matters now.”

It takes time for these things to happen. It takes time for words to come. It takes time to listen and understand. It takes time for feelings to be expressed and understood. Recovery from anything takes time. If you fall off some steps and break a bone, it will take time for the doctor to understand what bone is broken and how to heal it. He will need to listen and explore so he understands exactly what the problem is. You will hurt. You will be in pain.

Even after the doctor does some things to help the bone reset; it will still hurt. You may want your leg to be better tomorrow. You may want the pain to be over. It will not change the pace at which time proceeds. It always goes by one minute at a time, and there is nothing you can do about it. Time is needed for recovery. It is not the same amount for each trauma survivor. Some take longer than others. There are many reasons for this. But no matter how strong someone is; no matter how hard they work to tell their story and express their feelings; it still will take time. And there are two things I can tell you about time: there is nothing we can do to make it go faster, and when we are in pain that is exactly what we want it to do!

We know from research that as time passes, trauma survivors end up carrying a smaller piece of the whole—especially if the story has been told. As life goes on around the survivor, new experiences and new relationships affect them, and they can learn new responses to their past instead of those the trauma taught them. Some of those new experiences are found in the ways you treat them when they sit with you.

Conclusion

Here are the words of a genocide survivor in Rwanda who lived through unspeakable atrocities and trauma: “I saw only evil. I no longer believed God to be good. The church was not a sanctuary for my family; it was a cemetery. But then you came, you listened, and you heard my broken heart. And now I think I can believe that God too is listening and hears my pain and will be my sanctuary because I have gotten a taste of him through you.”

The Word was made flesh for you and me. Now you and I are called to do the same for the world. We are to flesh out the character of God for others. When you, as a shepherd of the sheep, name the unspeakable things for your people, gently call them to begin to speak the truth about their lives and the wounds they bear, then over time you can teach your people to go with you into the dark places of great suffering in your pews and around the world.

Jesus went through villages and cities, teaching, preaching, and healing. And “*seeing* the people” he was moved with compassion (cf. Matt 9:36). They were distressed, wounded, bleeding sheep. He saw what others did not see. They were fainting, fleeced by wolves, and without a shepherd’s care. In response to what he saw, he said to his disciples, “Harvest ...” (v. 37). These seem to be contradictory figures, mixed metaphors. A flock of sheep wounded and fainting and harvest. Harvest is usually about a robust, healthy, flourishing crop. Here is the profound truth about Jesus’s mission: human need, distress, and trauma constitute harvest for him and his

workers. Where the day is darkest and the need is sorest *there* the fields are white to harvest. Trauma is a significant mission field of the twenty-first century. He did not say such devastation was hopeless; he said that it was a plenteous harvest. It is a place of service for God's people, and in that place, God will use the horror and the evil of trauma to transform both victim and caregiver. In Isaiah 61:4, God speaks of rebuilding ruins, raising up what is devastated, and restoring what is desolated. Such work is healing to those who have been devastated. That work also is used by God to make his people, who are called by his name, bear his image more clearly in this world.



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Women, Sex, and a Question of Double Standards

KATHLEEN B. NIELSON

Abstract

This article examines the subject of women and extramarital sex as addressed in Old Testament law—and ultimately by Jesus himself. It is a revised excerpt from a book that aims to show God's good care and purpose for his female image-bearers from beginning to end of the Bible's story (*Women and God*, 2018). A focus on Deuteronomy 22:13–30 shows that women are not only held equally responsible for sexual sin but also carefully protected, especially in cases of mistreatment and sexual abuse. The ultimate care and purpose revealed in the Scriptures for women and men alike is God's gracious redemption through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction

A few introductory comments will provide a framework for the developments that follow.¹ First, the original context of this article, the book *Women and God*, asks a question of the Bible from beginning to end: *How does God view women?* The question arises in a world full of struggle and pain in regard to gender and sexuality. In particular, with increasing light shed on

¹ This article is a revised version of chapter 6 in Kathleen B. Nielson, *Women and God: Hard Questions, Beautiful Truth* (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2018), 93–108. Reproduced with the permission of the Good Book Company.

the abuse of women globally and even in Christian communities today, we do well to ask what all this looks like in the eyes of heaven.

We ask this question on the foundation of God's inerrant Word, aiming to dig deep into every part and to hear the voice of the God who made us and redeems us through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. As believers, we can dig into every part of the Scriptures and expect to find God's redemptive purposes at work in the lives of both his male and female image-bearers. But we must do the digging, and we must teach the rising generations to do the digging, especially with many challenging voices and views all around.

The digging begins, of course, in the first chapters of Genesis, which hold the seeds for the whole biblical story. It does little good to mine New Testament texts for answers to our questions about men and women without studying the Old Testament accounts that those texts consistently and insistently reference. The following discussion grows out of a focused study of women in creation, in the fall, and on into the early generations of God's unfolding redemptive promises to his people. Both in the order of creation and in the disorder of a world invaded by sin, everywhere we look, we see God's unceasing care for women and his regard for them as bearing a crucial role in his redemptive plan. In this particular discussion of the Old Testament law, as it treats women and sexual sin, we find the Lord's protection and purpose for his female image-bearers again.

Second, it will be helpful to note not just the context of my writings but the broader context of my intended audience. In general, I aim to offer not an academic treatise but a winsome study of God's Word on women accessible to any lay person with a Bible and a desire to explore it. I have many friends who have told me they wish they could understand and explain clearly what the Bible teaches about women and men—not only for themselves but also for challengers and questioners all around them. This attempt to shine light on the Bible's gracious teachings is one limited articulation, one with debts to many teachers and scholars, but one that above all aims to listen humbly and well to the Bible's words and to share them with clarity, compassion, and joy.

Third, I would mention an even broader context, one already alluded to: that of our world of disruption in matters of gender and sexuality. The twenty-first century has left the creation order far, far behind in regard to sexual practice in general. In relation to cases of sexual abuse, the "Me Too" movement has flooded minds and media, as women from all circles join the call for light and justice. Church denominations are coming alive to the topic: The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, has declared that the American

church is facing an abuse crisis and has called for an immediate and urgent response.²

Of course, the issue of abuse is not limited to one group or country or time. Even as we rush with urgency to bring healing and justice and change, whenever and wherever we meet it, we believers rush with an urgency spurred on by gospel-centered faith. We know the beginning and the end of the story, and so as we give ourselves to the work of justice, we do not despair when the evil seems too great. We do not enlarge ourselves as especially good or especially evil, knowing the history of fallen human beings redeemable finally and only through Christ's death and resurrection. Most important, through the gift of faith we know and follow the Lord God, who is redeeming a people for himself through his Son.

Biblical passages like the ones discussed here can help us cultivate the perspective of faith as we confront the evils of sexual sin all around us, including that of abuse. Centuries ago, the Lord God saw and named these evils. He does not and has not ever overlooked them. They are written down in his revealed Word for all to see. "From the beginning it was not so," Jesus said, when confronted with the law's allowance for divorce (Matt 19:8 ESV). And in the end, it will not be so. In the end, all the sinful brokenness of God's created order will be restored through Christ who took our sin upon himself and died bearing God's wrath in our place.

In the meantime, we live by faith in the One who died and rose again. We live naming and confronting the evils named and confronted in his Word. We live humbly, knowing our own need for a Savior from our sin. We live with urgency, sharing with others the good news of this Savior. And we live in hope, pointing to our Savior, who will come again to judge all and to reign with his people forever.

In these contexts, then, the following excerpt delves into the subject of women and extramarital sex as addressed in the Old Testament law—ultimately as addressed by Jesus himself.

I. *Evangelicals and Infidelity*

"So much for 'thou shalt not commit adultery.'" The *New York Daily News* offered this verdict in 2014, reporting on survey results from "Ashley Madison," a web-based service that helps married people find partners for extramarital affairs. The survey revealed that a quarter of their users self-identified as "evangelical"—by far the highest percentage among all

² See <http://www.caringwell.com>.

responders.³ The truth was painfully evident when in 2015 Ashley Madison's online accounts were hacked, and names of over thirty million users of their services were publicly shared.

People were shocked and embarrassed by all this, but not *that* shocked or even *that* embarrassed. We have seen too much. How many dozens of movie and TV scenes have drawn in even Christians, numbing our minds to the fact that we were watching extramarital sex? (Not only watching but feeling happy for heroes and heroines in love who consummate something that is not a marriage.) What of our friend the successful Christian business owner who left his wife for another woman—but who maintains his success, gives generously to the community, and provides good jobs for many people? Do we tend, after a while, to minimize or forget about his adultery? What of the many students who cannot understand why Christians would hold on to antiquated sexual standards that represent only repression—and that seem unnecessary with the advent of birth control?

American-based websites that quantify such behavior generally report that in around one-third of all marriages, one or both of the partners say they have “cheated” on the other.⁴ One United Kingdom news source reports that barely a third of British men and women think an extramarital affair puts a strain on the relationship; in other words, it is not that big of a problem.⁵ But if you are reading this and you have experienced adultery in one way or another, you know statistics do not tell it all. You may be experiencing the grief of being betrayed or perhaps the guilt of having betrayed. You may be in a relationship, not married, and struggling to figure out how sex and commitment go together—or do not go together. Or perhaps you have suffered the agony of sexual abuse. God's Word speaks to it all.

We have seen in Genesis the God who designed us male and female from the beginning; we know he cares about these issues in detail. We know he set up marriage between a man and a woman and blessed that union. We know the seventh of the ten commandments, plain and unadulterated: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14). And yet we Christians struggle with issues of sexual ethics; we struggle with living out sexual purity, and we struggle with talking about it. We might waver: in the Ashley Madison era,

³ Victoria Taylor, “Evangelicals Are the Least Faithful When It Comes to Spouses, Survey Suggests,” *nydailynews.com*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/survey-reveals-faiths-unfaithful-article-1.1815733>.

⁴ “Infidelity Statistics 2017: Why, When, and How People Stray,” February 1, 2017, <https://www.trustify.info/blog/infidelity-statistics-2017>.

⁵ John Bingham, “Adultery Not a Problem for Most Britons,” *The Telegraph*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11408328/Adultery-not-a-problem-for-most-Britons.html>.

are we just way too judgmental? Should we continue to hold the view that sexual relations are a gift from God intended only for a man and woman within the bonds of marriage? We might wonder: should these issues perhaps just be resolved privately and individually before God, who surely understands our needs and desires our happiness? Even as we acknowledge that sexual abuse is a great evil, we ask: how shall we regard the spectrum of sexual sin?

It is with all this in mind that I want to invite you to join the crowd surrounding Jesus as a woman is dragged alone before him—a woman deserving death by stoning, say her accusers, according to the Law of Moses. Their question to Jesus hangs in the air: “So what do you say?” (John 8:5). And there she stands, this woman, head down, waiting for his response.

II. *What Kind of Mercy?*

Although this passage, John 7:53–8:11, does not appear in the earliest manuscripts, most of our Bibles include it, as most scholars take these verses as a true encounter, if not a legitimate part of the Scriptures. The scene takes place in the temple courts, with all the people gathered around to hear Jesus teach. It is a vivid, emotion-filled scene—probably a shocking one for many today, who might find it hard even to imagine a woman being stoned for adultery. But in come the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (all the Old Testament experts) with this woman, whom they set before the whole group and accuse of being caught in the act of adultery. Most of us might have for many years taken without question the Pharisees’ words: “In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women” (John 8:5).

The Pharisees were experts in the Old Testament law.⁶ And yet we must ask: Are they representing well God’s instructions given through Moses? The scene feels brutally harsh. Questions inevitably arise. Here is this woman dragged alone in shame before this group in the temple courts and accused of a sin that clearly involved two people. When she was “caught in the act” (v. 4), there must have been a man with whom she was acting! Did he run off? Did they let him go? Are they telling the truth? Why do these men say only that the law condemns such *women*?

Jesus does not condemn this woman. He bends down and starts to write on the ground with his finger. He is quiet, but the proud law-enforcers keep

⁶ By “Law,” the Pharisees would have been referring to the Torah—what we call the Pentateuch, or the Books of Moses. They were also referring to the law given within that Law: that is, the set of laws given by God to his people.

demanding a response. They do not really care about this woman or about keeping the law; they are just baiting Jesus, “to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him” (v. 6). How ironic: we know that the Old Testament law reflects the character of the God who gave it. Here in this scene is the very Lord God, in the flesh, and these men aim to use his law to undermine, accuse, and destroy him. But their trap remains unsprung. Jesus finally straightens up and speaks: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). With that, he is right back down writing on the ground, ignoring them. They slip away one by one. And then comes mercy. “Has no one condemned you?” he asks the woman. “No one, Lord,” she says. “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (vv. 10–11).

But wait—before we embrace Jesus’s gentle mercy here (and it is gentle mercy), we must ask about the law. According to the Old Testament, should not this woman have been stoned? Why did Jesus, the Son of God, spare her? Did his merciful response imply that the Old Testament laws on adultery were bad, or wrong? Let us go back and find two important truths about the Old Testament law and its treatment of women involved in extramarital sex.

III. *Responsible Together*

Deuteronomy 22:13–30 is a key passage, offering a series of scenarios and related laws that help us make clear observations concerning women and extramarital sex. The first is that women and men were in general held equally responsible for the sin of extramarital sex. The woman was not exempt from responsibility, but neither was she held more responsible. She shared both the guilt and punishment.

Deuteronomy 22:13–19, first, is all about protecting a wife falsely accused and slandered by her husband, who claims he found her not to be a virgin when he married her:

If a man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, “I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity,” then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate. And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, “I gave my daughter to this man to marry, and he hates her; and behold, he has accused her of misconduct, saying, ‘I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity.’ And yet this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.” And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take

the man and whip him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days. (Deut 22:13–19)

The scenario is complicated, and we will not go into the details, but the point is that the woman must be given an opportunity to prove her innocence (apparently by showing a cloth stained with the blood of her broken hymen from her wedding night). With her innocence proven, she cannot be divorced or disgraced but must be cared for as a wife in her husband's house. We are looking into scenarios of sin here; the man in this case is perpetrating evil, slandering and mistreating his wife. The law names, reveals, and punishes his evil while protecting his wife from it.

Those nine verses protecting a falsely accused wife are followed by two verses (vv. 20–21) condemning a guilty one—a wife who had indeed been falsely presented to her husband as a virgin, with no evidence to the contrary. She was to be stoned. (We will go on without comment at this point, and come back to the nature of this severe judgment. First, we need to hear the rest of the chapter, in order to take these verses in context.)

The very next verse (v. 22) prescribes that, if a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man and the woman must die. The difference between this scenario and the previous one is obviously that concrete evidence exists in this case against both the man and the woman. Both are present and guilty—and punished by death. (Again, we will come back to the severity of the judgment—here, we need to notice the equality of the judgment.) Without concrete evidence against a man, a woman condemned by evidence was alone put to death. With evidence against both, the two shared the same guilt and judgment.

The next section of Deuteronomy clarifies further, with another scenario of equally shared guilt (vv. 23–24). To understand, it helps to know that in that culture, a betrothed woman was not just engaged to be married in the way we think of it; she was committed, as good as married. She was considered the man's wife. These two verses picture a town scene in which a man sleeps with a woman betrothed to another man. The implication is that the sexual act was consensual: this is the point of noting that the woman did not cry out. In a town with open-air dwellings in close proximity, others would have been sure to hear her if she had. She is guilty for agreeing, and he is guilty "because he violated his neighbor's wife" (v. 24). They are both to be stoned.

The Pharisees in John 8 were referring either to this scenario or the previous one, depending on whether the woman was betrothed or actually

married. In either case, the law stipulated that *both* the man and the woman were to die. However, as that woman is dragged before Jesus, the man is ... nowhere to be seen. Obviously, if she was indeed caught in adultery, the man must have been caught there, too. The Pharisees were telling at best partial truth, both about the incident and about the law. Their partial truth reveals sexism—but only on their part, and not on God’s.

Even as we are shocked by the severity of the punishment in Deuteronomy 22, we can see that the punishment does not unfairly single out women. In the whole scope of these laws, women participating in extramarital sex are respected as equal partners in the sexual act, bearing not more but equal responsibility. We all know, however, that women too often are not equal partners but forced sexually against their will. We must keep reading.

IV. Protection for the Abused

Numerous laws in the Old Testament protect women (wives unjustly accused; women captured in battle).⁷ Deuteronomy 22:25–29 deals with scenarios specifically involving sexual abuse. Here is our second observation: Old Testament law protected women in cases of sexual abuse. I wish I could sit down and talk this through with you as you are reading this. Both adultery and abuse are subjects that can rub hard against unhealed wounds, with deep hurt. If you know such wounds personally, I pray God’s Word will bring healing, not hurt, to your soul. I pray that even these hard Old Testament passages will reveal grace as you read them, the grace of our God who has redeemed a people for himself through his beloved Son. It is his Son, our Lord Jesus, who best knows what it means to be shamed and publicly violated.

From the next scenario (vv. 25–27) emerges one of the strongest and, I think, most encouraging laws to be seen about this subject. In contrast to the town setting, this sexual act takes place “out in the country” where no one would be able to hear a woman cry out for help. In this case, the betrothed woman is given the benefit of the doubt: she can be assumed to have cried out when found and violated by a man. Most literally translated, as in the English Standard Version, the man in this case “seizes her and lies with her” (v. 25); the New International Version (2011) appropriately calls this “rape.” Only the man is to be put to death. Verse 26 reiterates: “You shall

⁷ Chapter 4 of *Women and God*, for example, examines Deuteronomy 21:10–14, a challenging passage but one which shows God’s hand of protection on women from other nations who undergo the humiliation of being taken captive by Israelites in war; see Nielson, *Women and God*, 61–70.

do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death” (ESV). Verse 27 defends the woman further, acknowledging her plight: “though the betrothed woman cried for help, there was no one to rescue her.” God sees and steps in to defend.

Even in recent times and in many Western countries, it has often been difficult to prosecute a man who raped a woman because female victims of rape have commonly been portrayed as seducers, guilty of inciting men to actions that in some way the women must have desired. So a guilty man could himself play the role of victim, rather than being convicted for the crime of rape against an unwilling woman. In some countries and cultures today, a female victim of rape is considered dishonored and is even sometimes killed to protect the family’s honor. It is good to find that the Bible is clear from the beginning in condemning the evil of rape, punishing men who do it, and protecting women who suffer the ravages of it.

The chapter’s next (and even more challenging) scenario involves a man who rapes an unmarried virgin (vv. 28–29; see the similar passage in Exod 22:16–17). *Another* scenario, you might say! If we do not regularly spend much time reading God’s law in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we might be amazed at the detail of all these different scenarios in God’s inspired revelation. But we should expect such detail, for the subject of sexual relations is central and crucial to human experience. We human beings think about all these things in detail; how revealing and encouraging that God likewise pays so much attention and tells us so.

The sexual union in these verses does not break an existing marriage bond; the solution offered is marriage. This case does not resolve all well for the woman: she evidently will be offered her rapist for a husband, who gets off by paying fifty shekels to her father (along with the lifelong obligation of marrying and caring for her). There are nuances here that offer a bit more light on the subject. Daniel Block suggests that the verb in verse 29 (“He shall pay” NIV) could well be translated “may pay”—which would offer the woman’s father a choice as to whether or not to accept this potential son-in-law.⁸ As the extramarital sex in any case would make it difficult for this woman to be accepted by another husband, the required money and the security of marriage in themselves are meant as a help to the woman who has been violated and who is viewed not as the guilty one but as the one to whom reparation must be made. At the least, the woman is covered by certain protections that were available to her and her family.

⁸ Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 525–26.

All these Old Testament laws take place within a distorted patriarchal system. In a patriarchal system, the husband holds authority over his household. All sorts of practices grew up around patriarchy in ancient times: for example, a wife usually went to live in the household of her husband, and her role in bearing children to carry on her husband's line was crucial. Unmarried women were often unprotected and unrespected. Married women were often mistreated. Practices of polygamy developed. When we use the word "patriarchy" today, it is almost impossible to separate that word from all sorts of ungodly and sexist practices that have come to cling to it like barnacles to a seaside dock. In many contemporary contexts and cultures, lots of the barnacles still cling. The fulfillment of Genesis 3:16 is everywhere in evidence in this fallen world of sin. As Jesus said, the hearts of people are hard, and "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8).

Jesus knew the beginning of this story; he was there. Then he entered the story to save law-breakers. But through the Old Testament law God was mercifully revealing himself. The law points relentlessly to the truths God established from creation, in particular, the value of women and men alike as God's image-bearers, worthy of his attention, provision, and mercy. In a world full of sin and shame, laws such as the ones we have discussed served the merciful purpose of restraining sin and protecting and providing for the most vulnerable in the midst of it. That would often be the women. Hence the existence of so many specific laws focused on protecting them from the abuse of men.

V. God's View of Extramarital Sex

Even as we see that God treats women as equally responsible and protects women when abused, we still might have a good deal of trouble accepting the harshness of the punishment. Stoning? Death? For adultery? This is hard indeed. What is clear is that God views extramarital sex as a grievous evil, not to be tolerated among his people. This is evident from the refrain that comes after many of the scenarios in Deuteronomy 22, commanding the people to "purge the evil" from among them (vv. 21–22, 24). Extramarital sex in God's eyes is evil first and foremost because of God's established order in creation: one husband and one wife should become one flesh. Jesus makes clear not only that this is God's established order but also that to break it apart is an offense against God. It was Jesus, not some pastor or priest, who first said: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6; Mark 10:9).

The sober details of the laws we have seen, including the shocking extremity of the penalties, tell us that in messing with God's establishment of sex within marriage, we are messing with the way he has set up his world to work. To reject his creation order is to reject our Creator personally—breaking apart what he himself created.

This is why sexual sin is just as grievous to God today as it was centuries ago. As with all sin, it brings sickness of soul—not only in agonizing cases of overt abuse but also in the more common and increasingly accepted instances of disregard for God's design for sexual union within marriage. If we could see through to spiritual reality, we would probably tremble to contemplate the careless breaking apart of God's good and holy design for human sexuality. These breaks bleed death, although all the wounds are not always visible right now.

When a couple engages in sex outside of marriage, they often do not feel the impact of their sin in the moment, or sometimes even in a lifetime. Husbands or wives who commit adultery might feel satisfaction, sometimes guilt, but not usually the heat of God's hatred for sexual sin as an evil to be purged. When women and men claim sexual independence, rejecting marriage bonds, they often do not realize the harm to their souls (and the harm to others) that comes with calling good what God calls evil. And those women and men include all of us; Jesus nailed every one of us when he explained that when we even look at another person lustfully, we have already committed adultery with that person in our heart (Matt 5:27–28). All our hearts are broken.

It is hard for us sinners to see through to spiritual reality, especially while enjoying pleasure or power. Stoning is shocking; perhaps the shock of it helps open our eyes. God's Word, by God's Spirit, does open our eyes to the sin that infects all of us—and by his grace, we are drawn to bow in repentance before a holy God and find the mercy that he is always ready to extend. God is a God of justice who holds the sexually unfaithful to account. He is a God of compassion who protects the vulnerable and abused. And he is a God of mercy who forgives the guilty who turn to him for cleansing.

There is another aspect of the grievous evil of sexual sin: it infects not just one person but the community of God's people. God gave this Old Testament law to these offspring of Abraham to set them apart as his people. He had grown them into a great nation just as he promised. He had redeemed them from Egypt. Now they were to live as his "treasured possession," a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). This was the people through whose offspring God would bless the world, in the promised Christ. That offspring was not to be defiled.

Today, those who live in Christ are by faith part of that offspring, and we inherit that call to holiness—now to praise together our God who has redeemed us in Christ: “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” (1 Pet 2:9). Our holiness, including our sexual purity, is not just for our good. As the Scriptures unfold, we see that marriage is a divinely given picture of Christ and the church. The ultimate end for keeping marriage pure is that we his people might shine forth the glory of our Savior. God gives such stark prohibitions about the holiness of marriage in order to protect something beautiful and precious—a picture of his own Son.

VI. *Redeeming Gomer*

In the end, sexual unfaithfulness reveals the unfaithfulness of our sinful hearts before God. Which brings us to a woman named Gomer, who lived in Israel in the eighth century B.C. (by this time, God’s people were split between two kingdoms—the northern one called Israel, the southern one Judah). Gomer was a “promiscuous woman” whom God told the prophet Hosea to marry to live out the story of God’s mercy toward his unfaithful people. God’s initial message through Hosea was that “the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” (Hos 1:2). The New International Version clearly explains this verse: God’s people were “like an adulterous wife, guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.”

So Hosea the prophet married Gomer the promiscuous woman—it was a living parable. God told them to name their three children “God Scatters,” “No Mercy,” and “Not My People,” showing God’s impending punishment on his rebellious, idolatrous people (Hos 1:4, 6, 9). This is not a happy story. Gomer eventually left Hosea and their three children for another man.

And what did God tell Hosea to do? “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods” (Hos 3:1 ESV). And so Hosea bought back his wife, paying the bride-price customarily paid to the family left behind by a woman when she married. This was a bride who had deserted her family; Hosea bought her back and took her home.

This is a picture of God; he tells us so. God promises ultimately to make a way for the people he called “No Mercy” to receive his mercy. To the people he called “Not My People” he will say, “You are my people,” and they will say, “You are my God” (Hos 2:23).

That is how merciful God is. I am Gomer. You are Gomer. We are Gomer—spiritual adulterers. But from the beginning God had a plan to buy us back, and that plan has been accomplished. The God who loves us has redeemed us, bought us back, through the blood of Christ. We his redeemed people are pictured finally as Christ's bride, and we will one day be given "fine linen, bright and pure" to wear to our wedding (Rev 19:7–8).

What is God like? Look at Jesus. Look again at Jesus standing before that woman caught in adultery. Jesus has mercy on her. He calls her to turn from her sin. He has come to redeem her from that sin through his sacrifice on the cross on her behalf. She does deserve death. But that is not the whole story. Every woman and every man deserves death, the wages of our sin. But that is not the whole story. The hope of the Scriptures, for every woman and every man, is that Jesus came to offer us mercy. Through faith in his death on our behalf, we receive full forgiveness and new life in him, now and forever. That is the whole story.

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“How Firm a Foundation” and the Westminster Confession of Faith

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Abstract

The Protestant and Reformed view of Scripture over against the Roman Catholic view is that Scripture attests its own authority. This view does not, however, mean that there are no arguments available that point to Scripture's self-attesting authority. The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms in chapter 1, section 4, that Scripture is its own foundation, then in the following section gives a helpful list of arguments that provide useful indications of Scripture's divine authority. These arguments are reviewed and explained in the following presentation.

I. “How Firm a Foundation” and Scripture

Most people know the hymn “How Firm a Foundation.” Even though its author remains anonymous, it has had significant influence in the church since it appeared in the latter part of the eighteenth century. (It was originally sung, at least in the United States, to the tune of *Adeste Fideles*.)

In its opening stanza, the hymn moves directly to the character of Scripture: “How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in *his excellent Word*.” Then, considering the excellent Word that is our only

* This lecture was originally delivered on September 20, 2018, at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, as the Herrell Lecture.

foundation, the writer asks, “What more can he say than to you he has said, *to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*”¹ What we call the *sufficiency* of Scripture reminds us that in the church, all that is needed is what God has said. There is no need in our personal lives or in the church to add anything to Scripture; we have all that we need if we desire to do and to be what the Lord expects of his children.

However, this hymn has much more in view than an affirmation of the doctrine of Scripture’s sufficiency, vitally important as that is. It continues by applying the notion of the sufficiency of God’s Word in order to reach the very recesses of our hearts. Notice *how* the hymn expounds on what it means for Scripture to be sufficient. Its sufficiency means that we flee to Jesus for refuge in the firm foundation of his Word:

Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed;
For, I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with you your troubles to bless,
And sanctify to you your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

The hymn moves from an *affirmation* of the firm foundation in the excellent Word to the *practice* of that affirmation. The sufficiency of Scripture, in other words, is meant to provide the Lord’s people with strength and comfort through times of trial and testing: *because* the Lord is sufficient for you, his Word is sufficient for you.

The hymn takes its cue from Isaiah 41 and 43, where the prophet says,

Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isa 41:10)²

¹ Emphasis in the quotes in the lecture has been added by the author.

² All Scripture references are from the ESV.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you. (Isa 43:2)

The *sufficiency* of Scripture does not mean only that the Lord has *said* all that he needs to *say* until Christ comes again, but also that in and through the sufficiency of the Word, as our firm foundation, we are graciously enabled to endure the deep waters, the rivers of sorrow. Those things will not overwhelm, but sanctify by and through his grace. We can walk through the fiery trials, and the flame will not hurt us, because of the all-sufficiency of his Word and his grace. Those fires will consume our dross and refine us into the image of the beloved Son.

II. *Westminster Confession of Faith: Background*

The deep and rich reality of the Word of God, recognized through the deep waters and fiery trials of the Reformation, attests the *glorious riches* of the Word. We tremble at the thought of leaving, dismissing, or, even worse, denying the all-sufficient Word the Lord gave to his church. The supreme character of that Word is portrayed by one of the most exquisite paragraphs ever written about it—a paragraph not inspired or infallible, but so close to it that it deserves our full attention. According to B. B. Warfield, it is a paragraph “of almost unsurpassed nobility of both thought and phrase.”³

Warfield is referring to section 5 of chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), which is vitally important for us. It takes its cue from the previous section, which articulates concisely and wonderfully what it means to confess that the Word of God is our ultimate authority.

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. (WCF 1.4)

Firstly, in section 4, the Confession focuses on the *authority* of Holy Scripture, specifically *from what or whom* Holy Scripture *derives* its authority. This was a pressing issue during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has been a pressing issue since Satan first asked the question, “Has God really said...?” (cf. Gen 3:1), and it remains so today. Since the Confession

³ B. B. Warfield, “The Westminster Doctrine of the Holy Scripture,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 2:566.

wanted the church to recognize its proper place, it began with the negative. The first thing Protestants affirm is that “the authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or church” (WCF 1.4).

This was important during the time of the Reformation, because the issue of authority was of paramount importance for obvious doctrinal reasons, and its importance had deep and abiding personal and ecclesial consequences. Francis Turretin, for example, put it this way:

Still it is certain that the more common opinion of the Romanists is that of *uncertainty*, especially among the Jesuits, who teach that no one without a special revelation can be sure (with the certainty of divine faith) that his own sins have been pardoned because they perpetually suppose that this certainty rests upon one’s own infirmity and indisposition. Hence they conclude that the certainty of justification is only conjectural, opinionable, deceitful (i.e., *really no certainty at all*).⁴

If the authority of Scripture is derived from the church, the certainty of justification is uncertain. Think of that! To the question as to whether or not we can stand guiltless before God, the answer is, “it is impossible to know such a thing. The best we have available is conjecture.” No wonder that a commitment to such a church produces unremitting guilt and sadness. There is no possible way to know our standing before a holy God. We can guess at it, but our guess is only as good as our current disposition and as solid as our last sin. How can we be certain that the Lord will sustain us through the deep waters and refine us through the fire when we can never be certain if he has accepted us?

However, it is not just in Roman Catholicism that uncertainty is promoted. One prominent evangelical, who considered his Christian commitment to be informed by Thomas Aquinas, argues that we must first *demonstrate* that the Bible is the Word of God if we are going to trust what it says.⁵ If this is the case, then the truth of the matter is that the authority of Scripture depends on us; it cannot be trusted until *we* adequately demonstrate it. That is just another version of the Roman Catholic view, with an individualistic twist. It means that Scripture’s authority is dependent on man or church. Once that is conceded, confidence in Scripture’s supremacy is inevitably lost.

This is what the Confession has in view in section 4. The *practical* and *pastoral* significance is that if my standing before God depends on me to

⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 2:616 (15.17.1).

⁵ Norman Geisler, “Reviews,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* 11.2 (Fall 2013): 173.

demonstrate it, or on others to confirm it, then confidence in my ability to stand before a holy God is only as strong as my confidence in myself or other people. No matter how confident we might appear at times, deep down we know that we are sinful and stained to the deepest recesses of our hearts. To look to ourselves as the foundation of confidence will produce nothing but anxiety and sadness. We cannot bear a load like that. To think that any person, or institution, is our “firm foundation” is to stand on quicksand; we will, inevitably, sink into the morass of human sin.

Secondly, the positive focus that section 4 sets out is that the authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends “*wholly upon God* (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be *received* because it is the Word of God.”

How can we know that we can stand guiltless before God, that we will be sustained and refined in the trials of God’s good providences? Not because the church says so, or because we possess the proper evidences to trust what is in Scripture. We can know because God has told us so, as Turretin affirms: “Thus Scripture, which is the first principle in the supernatural order, is known by itself and has no need of arguments *derived from without* to prove and make itself known to us.”⁶

In Christ, we can be certain of our present and future righteousness before the throne of God above. Again, to quote Turretin, the Scriptures “have a theological and infallible certainty, *which cannot possibly* deceive the true believer illuminated by the Spirit of God.”⁷ Because Scripture is the very Word of God, it comes to us with all of the certainty and veracity of God, who is truth himself. If there is one thing we know about God, it is that God is not to be doubted. He does not offer promises tentatively and hesitantly or tell us that *maybe* we will be accepted if we are in Christ. Our acceptance is inextricably linked to the acceptance of the only begotten Son and his work of redemption in our behalf.

As glorious as this statement is in section 4, we might imagine that it has a possible problem attached to it. Some fear that when Scripture is affirmed in this way we will have no sure way of knowing that Scripture is the Word of God. We might think that our faith in the truthfulness of Scripture is a blind faith, with no arguments to support it. It is the height of irrationality and a groundless commitment—or so we we might think.

The Confession anticipated this kind of objection. Those who wrote of the absolute authority of Holy Scripture recognized that we need to put

⁶ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:89 (2.6.11).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:69 (2.4.22).

some *content* into this affirmation. If we cannot trust ourselves or the church to *establish* a firm foundation, who can we trust? I broached this topic in *Know Why You Believe*, and that motivates me to expand on it here.⁸ The apologetic and theological implications of this question are crucial. How *can* we know that this book is from God himself?

III. *Westminster Confession of Faith 1.5*

We are now prepared to enlarge on our topic. In section 5 the Confession says:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the *heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, ARE ARGUMENTS* whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.

In his discussion of this section, Warfield reminds us of its potency. He writes,

Sect. 5 has been strangely appealed to as outlining the Confession's mode of determining the inspiration and consequent canonicity of Scripture The Confession ... is here professedly treating an entirely different matter, namely, *how we are brought practically to yield to it the authority which this inspired and canonical book ought to exercise over us*. ... The Confession devotes a paragraph of almost unsurpassed nobility of both thought and phrase, to indicating *how sinful men may be brought to a full practical persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture*.⁹

In other words, this section is not pointing to the *establishment* of Scripture's authority, attempting to go behind Scripture as our firm foundation. It is outlining the *strength* of our confession of Scripture's authority—a strength so powerful that it ought to cause us to surrender when we grasp its legitimacy. Like a Greco-Roman wrestler, these arguments are meant to pin us down so that we are compelled to yield to their strength, unable to move until we give in.

Section 5 provides a categorical list of *arguments* so that we can see with the eyes of faith the evidence of Scripture's authority. Those arguments cannot be outside the foundation, nor behind it. If they were, then the foundation would need a foundation. Instead, the arguments are embedded

⁸ K. Scott Oliphint, *Know Why You Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 13–30.

⁹ Warfield, “The Westminster Doctrine of the Holy Scripture,” 562, 566–67.

in the foundation. They are the elements that are poured into the rock-solid foundation of Scripture and give it a substance strong enough to support everything else that is built upon it, including what we confess and believe.

So, we can indicate the “arguments” that the Confession uses for the authority—the majesty even—of Holy Scripture, those elements that make our foundation so gloriously *firm*. As we look at these “signs” we should be asking, “Is this what I really think of my Bible? Do I take this book and open it with this in mind?” If not, then a refresher course on the “signs of Scripture’s supremacy” will help us see the divine content contained in this book and help us recognize what it means to lean wholly on Christ for all that we think and all that we are.

1. “*The heavenliness of the matter*”

After recognizing the testimony of the church as an external testimony to Scripture’s authority, the Confession turns to a series of internal arguments, firstly “the heavenliness of the matter.” Thomas Boston says that the heavenliness of the matter is “the sublime mysteries therein revealed, which nature ever so much elevated could *never* attain to the discovery of.”¹⁰ The heavenliness of Scripture finds expression in those doctrines which could never be conjured up by the efforts of mere mortals. These are matters that are and remain beyond our ability to comprehend. As the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9–10:

As it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

What Paul is giving to the church, under the inspiration of the Spirit, are those truths that we could never see, hear or imagine of ourselves. Of this passage, Charles Hodge says,

The meaning of this verse is plain. ... Paul had said, he preached the hidden wisdom of God, which none of the princes of this world knew; he taught what no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. That is, he *preached truth undiscoverable by human reason*.¹¹

¹⁰ Thomas Boston, “An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion, Part 1,” in *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M’Millan (Aberdeen: George & Robert King, 1848), 1:28.

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 37.

The “heavenliness of the matter” reminds us that it is not possible, by human wisdom, to conjure up a religion that would have, as its central focus, the glory of the Triune God and the salvation that he offers in Jesus Christ. No other religion has ever come close to these heavenly truths.

In one of his most articulate and inspiring moments John Owen was able to describe for us what “heavenliness” entails. The first, long sentence alone is worth a few hours of contemplation. Owen puts it this way:

There are some doctrines of the Scripture, some revelations in it, so sublimely glorious, of so profound and mysterious an excellency, that at the first proposal of them, nature startles, shrinks, and is taken with horror, meeting with that which is above it, too great and too excellent for it, which it could desirously avoid and decline; but yet, gathering itself up to them, it yields, and finds that unless they are accepted and submitted unto, though unsearchable, not only all that hath been received must be rejected, but also the whole dependence of the creature on God be dissolved, or rendered only dreadful, terrible, and destructive to nature itself. Such are the doctrines of the Trinity, of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the resurrection of the dead, of the new birth, and the like. At the first revelation of these things nature is amazed, and cries, “How can these things be?”.... But when the eyes of reason are a little confirmed, though it can never clearly behold the glory of this sun, yet it confesses a glory to be in it above all that it is able to apprehend. I could manifest, in particular, that the doctrines before mentioned, and several others, are of this importance; namely, though great above and beyond the reach of reason, yet, upon search, found to be such, as, *without submission to them, the whole comfortable relation between God and man must needs be dissolved.*¹²

The “heavenliness of the matter” in Owen’s language means that the teachings of Scripture are “so sublimely glorious, of so profound and mysterious an excellency, that at the first proposal of them, nature startles, shrinks, and is taken with horror, meeting with that which is above it, too great and too excellent for it.” The “heavenliness of the matter” is *not* reserved for the scholarly. As Boston puts it, “The light of nature improved by the learned to the utmost advantage, could not teach these things; yet a few fishermen plainly delivered them.”¹³ Holy Scripture alone, as the very speech of God, is the place in which heavenliness is given, and given for all, the learned and the unlearned alike.

2. “The efficacy of the doctrine” and “the consent of all the parts”

In Luke 24:25–32, two “arguments” for Scripture’s authority go together, “the efficacy of the doctrine” and “the consent of all the parts.” In this passage,

¹² John Owen, “Of the Divine Original of Scripture,” in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 16:339–40.

¹³ Boston, “An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion,” 28.

two disciples are on a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on the third day after the crucifixion, and Jesus begins to walk alongside them. They cannot recognize him, and so he begins to question them, as if he has not heard of the resurrection. They explain what they have heard about the resurrection, but they remain perplexed. So, Jesus says to them:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:25–27)

What, then, is the “efficacy of the doctrine” in this passage? The first focuses on the resurrected Christ himself, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, and *in all the Scriptures*! In other words, Jesus shows the two disciples who he is. Luke highlights the fact that they could not recognize who Christ was as he walked beside them, but they see Christ in *all of Scripture* when Christ revealed himself to them through the Old Testament. Even after their eyes are opened to see him for who he is, they do not say to themselves, “Wasn’t that great when all of a sudden we recognized who he was?” Instead, they say, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the Scriptures?” In other words, it was the *effect, the efficacy* of Scripture doctrine that caused their hearts to burn within them. This is no ordinary emotion. It is a glorious “heart burn” as the Word of God itself, interpreted to them by the One of whom the entire Word speaks, causes their hearts to burn with a passion for Christ and his glory: the efficacy of the doctrine.

This passage also directs us to “the consent of all the parts.” Luke wants us to recognize that this preeminent lesson in hermeneutics from the risen Savior was not a random “pick and choose” lesson from Scripture. Jesus did not select specific passages from the Old Testament to show them who he was. Instead, “*beginning* with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in *all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself” (v. 27). The necessary conclusion that forces itself upon us is that the entire Old Testament agrees in its testimony concerning Christ. Jesus showed these two disciples “the consent of all the parts.” He used that very argument in interpreting Scripture to them. “Look,” he said in effect,

“see how what has happened over these three days is all given to you in the Old Testament!”

Jesus said something similar to the Jews, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and *it is they that bear witness about me*” (John 5:39), and then he said, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; *for he wrote of me*” (v. 46).

The consent of all the parts means that it all points to Christ; the Old Testament points us forward to him, as Jesus himself made clear to those disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the New Testament points back to him, as well as forward to our life with him now and into eternity. It all comes together in him. This one passage includes the efficacy of the doctrine and the consent of all the parts.

3. “*The majesty of the style*”

There is a reason why the Bible is the most quoted book in the world; indeed, it has sold almost four billion copies in the last 50 years. That fact may be related to this particular “argument”: the majesty of the style. Boston puts it this way:

There are in several passages of the Old Testament such a loftiness of style, so grand an assemblage of bold images and representations, such a collection of noble and majestic sentiments, and so much magnificence and pomp of language, as cannot be found in any human writings whatever. There is something so truly majestic and sublime, so grand and magnificent in the style of the sacred writings, as has forced heathen philosophers to acknowledge it At the same time let it be observed, that there is nothing affected, no flights of false eloquence, no exertions of a luxuriant genius, no laboured strokes of a warm imagination, no forced images, no distorted metaphors, no quaint allusions, or unnatural comparisons which are frequently found in the most admired productions of ancient and modern writers; but the utmost *plainness and perspicuity, a noble simplicity, and an elegant familiarity*, level to the capacity of the illiterate, reign throughout the sacred volume. So that its style must engage the attention and regard of the learned philosopher and poet, and delight the unlearned peasant.¹⁴

The Bible possesses a “noble simplicity” and “elegant familiarity.”

How about this for “noble simplicity” and “elegant familiarity”: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps 23:1)? We hear this Psalm in all kinds of contexts—even staged funerals in movies or on television. It may have become *so* familiar to us that we can miss its nobility and elegance. At a time and in a place where the role of “shepherd” was so familiar and so well-defined, what do we read? “The LORD is *my* shepherd.” What better

¹⁴ Ibid., 28–29.

way to imagine our relationship to the Lord than this? He is the shepherd; he is the one who cares for us. We are the sheep, too inept to properly care for ourselves. Further, if “the LORD is my shepherd,” what is the result of his care? “I shall not want”—there is nothing that I lack. If you are one who lacks something that you think is essential to you, then the Lord is not your shepherd. If he is your shepherd, you shall not want.

Or, concerning the noble simplicity and elegant familiarity, how about this passage as well: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33)? A simple statement, but a statement so majestic that a lifetime of meditation could not unravel it. The very statement itself points to our lack of ability, while it highlights the incomprehensible character of the one we worship. It is a simple statement, a statement of praise, and the praise is directed to what we *cannot* comprehend. That is true majesty that, by definition, transcends all that is mundane, including our own thoughts.

4. “The scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God)”

This one should be most familiar to us, though it can be one of the most difficult to grasp for many. What is the point of it all? What is the proper scope of Scripture? “The scope of the whole,” the glory of God, should be most familiar to us, though it can be difficult to grasp for many. Notice, for example, how Paul’s words give glory to God in Ephesians 1:3–14, or how he glorifies God in his explication of that difficult doctrine of eternal election in Romans 9:21–24, or how the book of Revelation elevates God and Father: “to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5–6). The end of our history and the beginning of our eternity will include the glory of God, giving light to our eternal existence in the new heavens and the new earth: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, *for the glory of God gives it light*, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:22–23). Or, should we desire noble simplicity and elegant familiarity combined with the scope of the whole, nothing is better than Romans 11:36: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” The scope of it all is to give glory to God. It all points to him; it never, ultimately, points to us.

The Westminster Confession expresses this so well when it articulates the doctrine of God’s eternal decree:

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory,

out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto: and *all to the praise of his glorious grace.* (WCF 3.5)

Much more could be said, but this proper emphasis on “the scope of the whole” should prompt us to ask if we cherish and maintain that emphasis in our lives, or are we too focused on ourselves to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” as it shines “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6)?

This great truth should comfort us if we see it properly. Even in those things—and there are many of them—where we cannot see the point or discern the reason, our first thought should be, “This is all, somehow and in some way, to the glory of God.” When we come across a passage of Scripture that is difficult for us, we should remember “the scope of the whole” as we wrestle through it. It is always and everywhere about the glory of God.

5. “*The full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation*”

Even from the entrance of sin, the clear and stunning truth is that if man is going to be saved from the sin that we brought into God’s good creation, God himself would have to do it. Adam and Eve made coverings of fig leaves to cover their shame after they had sinned. Nevertheless, even as God pronounced judgment on them, he made clothing for them from animal skins. If Adam and Eve were to be properly clothed, only God could provide covering for them. Fig leaves were woefully insufficient. In this act of the Lord clothing his sinful creatures, according to John Bunyan, “the Lord God *did preach* to Adam and to his wife.”¹⁵ He preached to them that he alone could solve their problem. If they were to escape their guilt and shame, they could not do it by fig leaves. The Lord God himself would have to cover their shame. In providing them with skins, the Lord preached to them that proper clothing could only come through the shedding of blood so that our sinful condition can be covered. *We* could not do it; *the Lord* himself would have to do it. The rest, as we know, is history. Throughout subsequent redemptive history, the resounding refrain is that God must accomplish what we cannot. Our sin has so radically damaged us that unless God intervenes and covers us, we will be lost, for eternity.

God spends the entirety of history intervening. What he continues to demonstrate is that if *he* does not save, there is no salvation, and he demonstrates that he *will* intervene. Instead of us trying to save ourselves with the

¹⁵ John Bunyan, “An Exposition of the Ten First Chapters of Genesis,” in *The Works of That Eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan* (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, & Cochran, 1769), 6:331.

weakness of fig leaves, *he* will save us through the blood of an acceptable sacrifice, and that sacrifice, if it is going to be acceptable, would have to be undefiled. There is only one who can accomplish this.

God accomplishes the exodus through the mediation of Moses. But what has to happen if the Lord's people are to be brought from slavery in Egypt to the promised land? The final plague has to happen—the firstborn sons have to die. There must be the shedding of blood, the blood of a son, if there is going to be redemption from Egypt. And the shed blood is the mark that causes the angel of death to “pass over” the Lord's people. No wonder Jesus reserved his harshest words for those who were supposed to be experts in the Old Testament: if they really believed Moses, they would believe him.

The clarity of the gospel is given throughout redemptive history and Scripture. However, despite that clarity, it remains one of the most difficult things for us adequately to absorb. Our strong tendency is to descend again into some idea that it is up to us to save ourselves. We must constantly return to that most profound of all teachings, which was “delivered to you as of first importance ...: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3–4). Moreover, when Paul says, “in accordance with the Scriptures,” he means that this gospel has been taught since the inception of redemptive history. The “full discovery of our salvation,” which is an “argument” for Scripture's authority, has always been that “salvation belongs to the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). If we are to be saved, only *he* can save us.

6. “The entire perfection thereof”

The final “argument” that the Confession gives us is the recognition that Scripture does not lack anything that we need as Christians in order to live lives that are pleasing to our Savior.

A distinction has been made, historically, between what is called *perfectio essentialis* (essential perfection) and *perfectio integralis* (integral perfection). *Perfectio essentialis* applies to what the text says, but the argument that the Confession is concerned to highlight here is the *perfectio integralis*, which means that Scripture is complete; there is nothing that needs to be, or should be, added to the Word of God.¹⁶

This truth has deep and profound implications for the way we view Scripture. Do we view it as a kind of general roadmap for Christian living, to

¹⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 222.

which must be added specific “words of knowledge” or a “still, small voice” on occasion so that we can know what the Lord *really* wants us to do? If Scripture is *perfect*, then there is no such need.

The Westminster Confession goes on to say, in chapter 1, section 6,

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added.

In other words, Scripture is perfect; it is complete. So Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

This one “argument,” as it is given in the Westminster Confession, could have taken up the entire lecture. There are so many ways in which the perfection of Scripture is undermined and denied that it is crucial for us to recognize its foundational import. It was, after all, one of the most central arguments to be lodged against the Roman Catholic church, as it sought routinely to “add” to Scripture by way of papal and church authority.

Conclusion

Two more brief, final points can be made. Now that we have seen and contemplated all the “arguments” that are listed in this noble paragraph, are we convinced? We should be, but the Confession goes on to recognize a most necessary point. Because of the depth of our sin and depravity, there are *no* arguments, not even thoroughly biblical arguments, that, in and of themselves, can convince us. The problem is not in the arguments but in ourselves. So, section 5 of the first chapter of the Confession concludes, “Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”

Only by the Holy Spirit does the bright light of Scripture pierce through our blindness and open our eyes to the beauty of its warm and glorious rays. Apart from the Spirit’s work, the “arguments” given in this Confession are to us foolish and without merit. We recognize, then, that, as powerful and substantial as these “arguments” are, they require the Spirit of God to work in us, or we will suppress them and count them as nothing. The arguments are available to every person—arguments that testify to the majestic character of the Word of God, including its intrinsic authority. If you are

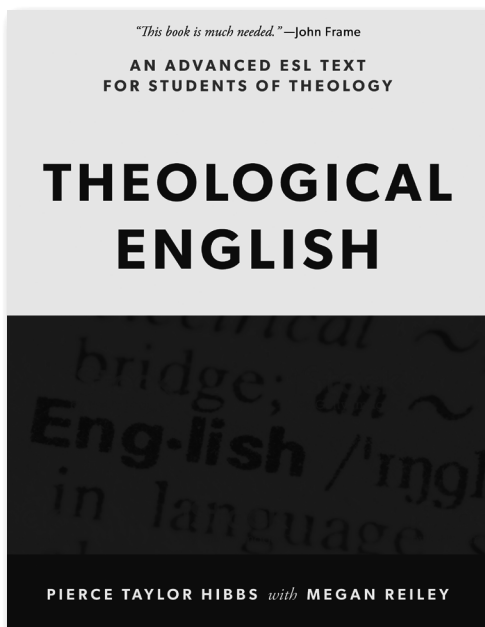
convinced by these “arguments,” then praise the Lord for the work of his Spirit in you.

Finally, we should see that all of these “arguments” for Holy Scripture could be applied to Christ himself. These characteristics of the Word are meant to point us to *the Word himself*, the Lord Jesus Christ. In him we see the heavenliness of the matter as he comes down from heaven to save his own. We see his efficacy as he himself says to his Father, “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). We see his majesty as he alone is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah; we see in him that perfect example of what it means to give all glory to God so that he alone can say to his Father, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4); we see in him the full discovery of the only way of our salvation, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6); and finally, we see in him the perfect completion of God’s revelation so that the Lord’s people lack nothing, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1–2a).

God has spoken. He has spoken in heavenly, majestic, perspicuous, and perfect ways. He has spoken in and through his Word, and that Word, if indeed the Holy Spirit works by and with it in our hearts, points us now, and every day, into eternity, to that Word who took on flesh so that we might have perfect fellowship with him. Moreover, Scripture is sufficient. It is sufficient for all doctrine. It is fully and perfectly sufficient for you, when the deep waters threaten and the fire rages. In all of it the Lord has spoken. He has, finally and completely, spoken through his majestic Son.

What more can he say than to you he has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“This book is much needed.” —John Frame



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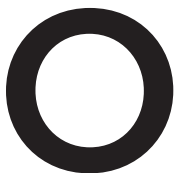
— CHERI PIERSON

Beza's Pastoral Calling: Combat, Encouragement, and Duty

OTTAVIO PALOMBARO

Abstract

Too often in current debates of Reformed theology the focus seems to be solely upon great figures at the expense of their successors. Theodore Beza should have his proper place in the spread of Calvinism. Beyond the constant struggles between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, Beza saw greater battles between God and the forces of darkness. In this context, he developed the Calvinist doctrine of political resistance. Far from being a dry Scholastic systematizer, Beza supported a pastoral use of the doctrine of predestination. Ultimately, Beza as faithful shepherd risked his life to care for the flock. In this essay, several French sources are rediscovered in order to point out Beza's personal experience and historical context behind the theological doctrines that he discussed.

ne of the biggest challenges for a leader is the choice of a suitable successor, one to whom the baton can be entrusted, who will carry on the work and the name of the predecessor. Moses had his Joshua, Paul his Timothy, and John Calvin his Theodore Beza. Beza's task was to consolidate what was begun in Geneva, which had become the "Jerusalem of the Reformation" thanks to men such as Guillaume Farel and Calvin.¹ Often the memory of

¹ Fernand Aubert and Henri Meylan, eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 1, 1539–1555 (Geneva: Droz, 1960), 245.

such theological giants leaves their disciples in the shadows. Beza's theology, though in harmony with that of his predecessor, was no mere copy. He achieved his own Reformed synthesis by refining and extending certain areas of thought through careful definitions, systematic constructions, and reasoned explanations that opened the way for the future fruitful development of Reformed Scholasticism.² Much of the Calvinist heritage existing today is therefore indebted to Beza. But why did Calvin choose Beza as his successor? What did he see in Beza to entrust him with such a weighty task after his departure? As a counterpart to Philip Melancthon in the Calvinist Reformation, Beza once wrote to Heinrich Bullinger, a fellow Reformer, saying,

I see myself charged with a triple task, for the accomplishment of which I plead you to ask the Lord to help me. I have to examine all the papers of our dear Master Calvin. ... Also, I will consecrate myself with all my heart to the service of my country [France].³

He expressed a sacrificial concern for the preservation of what his teacher left and the good of his French homeland. The third dimension was that of the shepherd whose pastoral concern for the good of the church was evident in all that he did.

Despite the great foundation from which he drew, Beza faced many challenges. The Catholic armies under the Savoy leadership were waiting to besiege the vulnerable city, Lutherans attacked his view of the sacraments and predestination, and the future of the Academy of Geneva was in jeopardy—not to mention the horrors of the Black Death and the persecution of his compatriot Huguenots in France. The pressure on his shoulders was more than the weight of just the problems of the previous generation. For Beza the Reformation was not over, and the church needed always to keep reforming, not just theologically but also ethically, to provide direction in a specific time and place. In light of these historical challenges, we will seek to evaluate the pastoral legacy of Beza's writings, preaching, and personal life as he engaged in spiritual warfare, trusting in God's sovereignty and fulfilling the duties of a true servant of Christ.

² Ian McPhee and Clare Hall, "Conserver or Transformer of Calvin's Theology? A Study of the Origins and Development of Theodore Beza's Thought, 1550–1570" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979), 3.

³ H. V. Aubert and Eugene Choisy, "La Réforme Française après la mort de Calvin: Extraits de la Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, 1564–1575. Théodore de Bèze à H. Bullinger," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 49.2 (February 1900): 87–88. Unless indicated, translations into English are my own.



THEODORE BEZA
1519-1605

I. A Pastor's Spiritual Combat

Despite the fact that the great Reformers, such as Calvin, Farel, and Beza, had been expelled from France, the Catholic authorities were not able to stop the significant advancement of the Reformed faith, especially in the south. This situation led to an aggravated relationship between Protestants and Catholics in a series of open conflicts. Beza played an active and exhortative role, not only in writing but also in action during the three civil wars. It is for this reason that the pastoral heart of Beza must be seen first and foremost toward his nation in the context of Christian civilization (*Corpus Christianum*) today largely lost. The church, according to this perspective, is to speak to the government, the magistrate, in bringing true religion in society as a whole. The second-generation Reformers, unlike the Anabaptists, kept working together with the civil magistrates, addressing crimes and promoting godly decisions, together with the matters of the church. In this sense, Beza's theology went hand in hand with his actions, as he used the covenant as a theological basis for his conviction concerning resistance to political authorities.⁴ His view made room for addressing moral reform in the public sphere, while guarding society against the subversion of justice by some Anabaptist extremists, where the church took over all matters of life into its hands and created a separation between religious and civil spheres with the effect that, as in much of modern society, ethics are no longer a matter for the public sphere. Instead, the Reformed sought a state of affairs where the two spheres were to go hand in hand for the good of society. Beza was a good example in his deep commitment to the cause of the Huguenots as chaplain, diplomat, propagandist, and secretary of the Prince de Condé in Orléans (1562–1563).

Behind these events taking place in France Beza saw a decisive battle between the forces of God and Satan; his teaching must therefore be framed in the language of watchfulness and spiritual warfare. Commenting on the reproach and afflictions experienced by the church, he stated, "You fought both closely and at a distance. You felt what it is to fight for the gospel."⁵ The religious wars were also spiritual combat. In his correspondence with Elizabeth I of England, who well knew the damage that might be wrought by the seemingly invincible Catholic Armada, Beza informed the queen that "Satan and his henchmen afflicted Geneva," but God turned their

⁴ John F. Southworth Jr., "Theodore Beza, Covenantalism, and Resistance to Political Authority in the Sixteenth Century" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003), 5.

⁵ Théodore de Bèze, *Cours sur les épîtres aux Romains et aux Hébreux, 1564–1566* (Geneva: Droz, 1988), 306.

schemes to nothing but “shame, loss, and pain.”⁶ Beza’s role was to bring back the leaders of the nations of his days so they submitted to the Lordship of Christ instead of plotting in vain against the Lord and against his anointed, Christ (Ps 2:1–2). Such was the challenge Beza faced in the social context of the French Wars of Religion, which risked bringing about a collapse of a civilization. Beza offered ethical guidelines in these dark times.

Beza in his writings urged European Protestants to stand firm amid this spiritual battle raging against them with the confidence that God’s truth will finally prevail despite all the obstacles Satan would put in the way.⁷ His writings became a key source for justifying political resistance against the increasingly hostile French authorities and for preserving the true Calvinist faith. According to this view, as expressed by Beza in *Du droit des magistrats sur leurs sujets*, once tyrannical princes fail to preserve public morality and piety, they lose their legitimacy; therefore, subordinates or “lesser magistrates” have the right to resist, as long as such resistance is led by governmental members.⁸ This view of obedience to government in light of ethical issues flows from the application of the *sola Scriptura* to all of society. In particular, it concerns the ethical issue of how not to violate the sixth commandment in relation to both oneself and others. Legitimate force has a place as a means of defense, though not in rebellion or insurrection, but under the control of a lower magistrate.

The most decisive moment for the French Calvinists came when Henry of Navarre, the “lower magistrate” Beza might have had in view, born of a Huguenot family, was brought to the throne of the Kingdom of France after the death of the Valois king. Beza saw this event as an act of providence, since God had miraculously used a monkish assassination to send from heaven Henry as God’s chosen instrument to resolve the French crisis.⁹ Beza had known the future king since childhood through Henry’s devout Huguenot mother, Jeanne d’Albret, and had, as chaplain, supervised the studies of the future king. Throughout Henry’s reign, Beza had confidence in him and always encouraged him to follow the path of truth. He exhorted the king to pray without ceasing for guidance, to discern among his friends the just from the unjust, and to establish a group of counselors composed

⁶ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 43, 1603–1605 (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 6.

⁷ Alexandre Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze, poète et théologien* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), 571.

⁸ Richard C. Gamble, “The Christian and the Tyrant: Beza and Knox on Political Resistance Theory,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 132. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* 4.20.31.

⁹ Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 200.

of Protestants and Catholics in equal number.¹⁰ He also urged the admiral Gaspard de Coligny to rely upon the faithful heavenly Leader. For his part, Henry sought counsel from the Reformer.

In one of his letters, despite Henry's enactment of the Edict of Nantes, Beza laments over "overt disrupters of the kingdom, mercenaries employed for the destruction of the poor [Protestant] Churches which cannot be charged with any rebellion, nor deserve to be disturbed."¹¹ Beza wished the king to make known through his actions in France that Protestants are no political rebels, while at the same time guarding the right of legitimate defense should the government act against God's law.

Henry's reign was looked at by some at first with expectation as a model kingdom able to restore the pure worship in the incorruptible seed of the true church of God. This vision is seen in Beza's diplomatic as well as devotional writings. In his sermon on the Song of Solomon, he describes the true church of God as clothed with Christ, the spiritual bridegroom who awaits the final consummation of all things. This true church, however, with her infallible marks must be distinguished from the false church with its superstition and idolatry.¹² The sermon vividly depicts the situation of Geneva and France, in a fragile peace in both church and state. Catholicism and the papacy had subverted the nature of the true church and threatened to quench the efforts of the Reformation on French soil. Beza sensed this and lamented over the spiritual conditions of the church, issuing a call to orthodoxy and Reformed purity.¹³

A critical event for reformation in France was Beza's speech at the colloquy of Poissy in 1561. There he took the opportunity to seek reconciliation, appeasing the troubles caused by matters of religion in France, while also defending the antiquity and Scriptural basis of the Reformed faith before the royal court.¹⁴ The French Reformer started his series of speeches on his knees, identifying with the sins of his people. He used the confession of sins from Calvin's liturgy and freely declared in front of the court the need to

¹⁰ Alain Dufour, "Conseils de Bèze à un nouveau Roi," *Lettre de la Société Henri IV* 17 (December 2007): 2.

¹¹ Théodore de Bèze, "Instructions du Roi de Navarre à Théodore de Bèze: Son envoyé près les villes évangéliques de Suisse, 1586," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 11.1/3 (January 1862): 28.

¹² Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1587), 7.

¹³ Tadataka Maruyama, *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza: The Reform of the True Church* (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 150–51.

¹⁴ Paul M. Minus, review of *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Tome 3, 1559–1561*, by Théodore de Bèze, ed. Hippolyte Aubert, *Church History* 34.3 (September 1965): 356.

repent, to repair the temple of God (the Reformed church), and to aid God's scattered flock (the Huguenots).¹⁵ He enumerated the past and present afflictions of his brothers, taking a defensive approach in favor of Protestantism in the midst of frequent interruptions by the cardinals.¹⁶ On this occasion, Beza found it better to avoid dealing with controversial issues such as the Lord's Supper, but in other writings he considered transubstantiation as a "filthy forgery and device of Satan."¹⁷

One can also see the weight of these matters in Beza's commentaries on the Psalms of David and in his French translations of the psalter made while in Lausanne (1549–1551). The Psalms occupied a great place in the spiritual walk of Beza as he translated them, making practical meditations on the margins. One time he recorded how as he listened to a congregation singing Psalm 91 in their common French tongue he was

so strengthened as if God himself addressed me with comfort in the midst of the sickness and suffering, not only because of the plague that will afflict me three years later or as this sickness will attack my family but also for many other trials.¹⁸

As he translated the Psalms, Beza thought of Catherine de Medici and Charles IX as "new Sauls" and Henry IV or Gaspar de Coligny as "new Davids," representing the faithful remnant of the Huguenots. This is what perhaps resonated so strongly with Beza. Like David, Henry had the difficult task of restoring the purity of religion in the wicked environment of the de Medici family and preserving the people of God from attacks. History, however, later showed this to be a failure. Even when talking about David's downfall with Bathsheba, Beza seems to have in mind Henry's abjuration and embrace of Catholicism, as he considers that even the most virtuous can make terrible mistakes and give in completely. More realistically, in his paraphrases of Ecclesiastes, Beza compared the auspicious beginnings of Solomon and those of Henry IV, both being blessed by God with wisdom but in the end brought to temptation and idolatry because of their wives.¹⁹ Beza wrote the king, urging him to stand firm in the face of the temptation

¹⁵ Théodore de Bèze, *Orations at Poissy* (London: Powels, 1561), 19.

¹⁶ Anne Marsh-Caldwell, *The Protestant Reformation in France: History of the Huguenots* (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), 261.

¹⁷ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper* (London: Robert Walde, 1588), 59.

¹⁸ Auguste Bernus, *Théodore de Bèze à Lausanne* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1900), 41.

¹⁹ Kirk M. Summers, *Morality after Calvin: Theodore Beza's Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 346.

to betray the Reformed faith.²⁰ Concerning the abjuration of King Henry, Beza declared, “The French spirit is repugnant toward Calvinism Among the Huguenot party, how did they receive the defection of Henry IV? Was he trapped or was it a calculated adherence? Or have they mourned as for a mortal wound?”²¹ Despite this betrayal, Beza remained faithful to Henry IV; even late in his life, the correspondence witnesses Henry trying to call a national council to discuss the differences with the Catholics in matters of religion.²²

However, the greatest wound to the Huguenots in France came during the night of the Feast Day of Saint Bartholomew, August 23–24, 1572, when the regent King Charles IX ordered the massacre of the Huguenot nobility in Paris. This became an indiscriminate murder of Protestants and Protestant sympathizers throughout France.²³ Beza warned Admiral Coligny of the eventuality of such a catastrophe. After receiving the news of the massacre that took place in Paris, Beza wrote,

We are in mourning and groan. May God have mercy on us! Never we have seen such perfidy and atrocity. ... Our city, where the plague and the fever still reign, is filled with the most miserable people of the earth All were killed like sheep sent to the slaughter with the pretext of a conspiracy. Lord, you saw those things, and you will judge them! Pray for us that may have to face the same fate.²⁴

Struggling with the plague, the number of refugees flowing from France, and the news of this massacre, Beza had a lot to bear. His pastoral use of Psalm 52, occasioned by Saul’s massacre of innocent priests at Doeg’s suggestion, is evident in his comments throughout the letter on how kings or princes persecute pastors and churches among the innumerable poor lambs of Christ sent to the slaughter in the kingdom of France.

²⁰ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 33, 1592 (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 411.

²¹ C. R., “L’abjuration de Henri IV et le parti réformé: Lettre inédite de Théodore de Bèze communiquée par M. J. Bonnet,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 1.1/2 (June/July 1852): 37.

²² Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 42, 1601–1602 (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 13.

²³ Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1572* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 111.

²⁴ Tuus Beza, “Deux lettres de Théodore de Bèze: Sur la Saint-Barthélemy, 1572,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 7.1/3 (June 1858): 16.

II. *A Pastor's Consolation*

Beza has been caricatured as a rationalist systematizer for his predestinarian theology. He explored and refined Calvin's doctrine of predestination in tune with his predecessor while also opening the way for the schematic formulation of later Reformed Scholastic theology.²⁵ However, in light of the previous contextual considerations, this doctrine serves as ethical guidance for appeasement in times of warfare. Once again, the historical background of Beza helps us to see how he used God's sovereignty to comfort and strengthen the common man in his parish so that he might find true rest. In the midst of persecutions from without and sickness from within, and under the threat of all sorts of darts from the evil one, the only anchor for a scattered church was the comforting assurance of being among the elect. This is more visible in his sermons on the doctrine than in the theological discourses. In a plain, experiential style of preaching, Beza used homely language to edify his audience. He believed it essential to apply the medicine to patients through consolation, exhortation, and reproof.²⁶

This approach was particularly evident when Beza dealt with predestination. His supralapsarian doctrine, according to which God's decree of election logically precedes the decree of the fall, was christocentric, grounding assurance in the contemplation of faith in Christ rather than leading, as some critics suggest, to a "practical syllogism" where assurance must be rooted in good works.²⁷ As in other points of Beza's doctrine of predestination, such as the causes of reprobation, his intention was not to go against his master Calvin but to further define terms while maintaining the original pastoral intent. Defending the supremacy of God's decrees, he insisted that God does not elect whom he loves but loves those whom he has elected.²⁸ According to Beza, election is essentially a pastoral doctrine, a source of comfort for those struggling with various temptations whether through the plague, persecution, or other challenges of life. Predestination was intended to be a fountain of consolation for the downcast, who must look beyond

²⁵ Michael G. Thomas, "Constructing and Clarifying the Doctrine of Predestination: Theodore Beza's Letters During, and in the Wake of, the Bolsec Controversy 1551–1555," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 4 (2000): 10; Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin, Beza, and Perkins on Predestination," *Unio cum Christo* 3.2 (October 2017): 71–88, doi:10.35285/ucc3.2.2017.art4.

²⁶ Michel Delval, "Orthodoxie et prédication: Théodore de Bèze," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 134 (October 1988): 694.

²⁷ Shane Rosenthal, *Faith and Assurance in the Theology of Theodore Beza* (Crawfordsville: Reformation Ink, 2001), 2.

²⁸ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 13, 1572 (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 404.

their circumstances to find their identity as saved, chosen before the foundations of the world. Beza wanted his parishioners to find in God's sovereignty their ultimate source of joy, assurance, and salvation amid the battles raging around them. This had a huge impact on the ethics and life-style of people who lived under such preaching, as well as many of the French Reformed who were facing persecution, helping them to persevere in the trials they had to endure. He passed on to his people the advice once received from his master Calvin in one of his letters: "The reward of your labours is more certain with God, in proportion as you shall see these labours detested by the Devil."²⁹ Although tossed to and fro, the persecuted Huguenots need to rest in God's wisdom despite the evils coming from the Catholic enemies.³⁰ The doctrine of predestination, therefore, is essential to Christian comfort. It is the nerve center of Beza's theology and of priceless value in seeking peace in times of war.³¹

III. *A Pastor's Duty*

Lastly, Beza's call to duty and personal commitment to true discipleship are crucial for understanding him as a pastoral theologian. Commenting on the right use of afflictions, Beza reminds the Christian of the call to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ in order to be a true disciple. One must bear the afflictions and miseries of this life for the cup of bitterness to become a spiritual medicine to "purge the leaven of sin."³² Beza himself was a French noble who upon leaving Catholicism was banished from France under threat of being burnt at the stake. He left behind his titles and fortune for the Reformed faith. He saw this earthly life as a pilgrimage marked by spiritual conflict in which one must carry the cross, following the Son, and cheerfully submit to God's providence. His life story emerges in the poetical work *Abraham Sacrifiant*. Through the depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac he recalls how he had to abandon his country where he was persecuted, finding his only comfort in the Word of God:

²⁹ Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of John Calvin* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1858), 3:379.

³⁰ Shawn D. Wright, "The Pastoral Use of the Doctrine of God's Sovereignty in the Theology of Theodore Beza" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 54.

³¹ See John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975), 70; Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 187.

³² Théodore de Bèze, *Household Prayers* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1607), 77.

after the time that you called me out of the country where you are not worshiped [France], leaving my goods, my parents and their gods. There [in Geneva] I lived seventy-five years following the path of the predestined. ... And between a thousand dangers among strangers every day we were in great need.³³

The parallel here between Abraham and many Huguenots is further evident as Beza amplifies the biblical story of trial and faith under tragic testing, a well-suited theme to the political situation of his time.³⁴ Similarly, Beza wrote his sermons on the Passion to encourage his Genevan compatriots against the Catholic threat of the Dukes of Savoy. Geneva in the most critical period of its history stood alone against the Savoyard armies, and Beza encouraged the city to persevere in this necessary warfare by looking at the struggle through the light of faith, understanding that God in his providence sends trials to bring about their conversion.³⁵ Beza draws a parallel between the context of persecution under the Catholic powers and the biblical story of Exodus:

My people, what did I do to you and how did I torment you? Answer me. From what slavery have we been set free? Which Moses and Aaron have been sent to us by God? From which immorality of Egypt have we escaped? What Red Sea of persecutions have we gone through? ... Oh God of hosts, come back, I pray thee, look down from heaven and see and visit this vineyard.³⁶

Beza saw himself and the church during the Reformation as paralleling biblical Israel, freed from the idols of Egypt with deliverance from the popish bondage, or as the Babylonian captivity of Israel, with the church now expatriated far from the French motherland. There is such a thing as a just war, says Beza in effect, and if God demands our lives in sacrifice for his glory, in such a defense of the Lord and our country, so be it.

However, the greatest pastoral test for Beza came during the spread of the Black Death. Ministers who visited the sick often died. It was a dangerous job with almost certain death, so none of the members of the company of pastors was eager for the position, and the majority left the area. Beza himself was not immune from the disease, as he was struck once by it in 1551 while his wife Claudine and his brother Nicholas were dying of it. All this involves

³³ Théodore de Bèze, *Abraham Sacrifiant: Tragedie Françoisé* (Geneva: A. Julien, 1920), 16.

³⁴ Irena Backus, ed., *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): Actes du Colloque du Genève* (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 415.

³⁵ Michel Delval, "La prédication d'un Réformateur au XVI Siècle: L'activité homilétique de Théodore de Bèze," *Mélanges des sciences religieuses* 41.2 (1984): 70.

³⁶ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons sur l'histoire de la passion et Sepulture de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Geneva: Iean le Preux, 1592), 17.

weighty spiritual questions: Why did God allow this? What is the appropriate Christian response to the plague? Beza did not question the goodness of God. Instead, commenting on Psalm 23, Beza writes that even while he is going through the darkest and dreadful valley of death, the Lord is “my shepherd, I need not fear any famine.”³⁷ Commenting on Psalm 6, he writes that when overwhelmed with evils, “I suffer ... [the] death of this miserable body,” but one must look to heaven and pray, “O Creator of man, behold Thy creature quite disfigured.”³⁸ The Genevan Reformer with pastoral wisdom answers the questions in his *Treatise on the Plague*, seeing behind the plague God’s punishment while acknowledging its natural causes. In a Christian response to the plague, Beza emphasized the conscience’s call to duty to the neighbor more than fear of death or the preservation of life.³⁹

According to Beza, one must examine one’s calling before God, considering that it is almost always better to stay than flee. Does not leaving imply a failure to love those God calls us to care for? Since eternity is near, duty calls to remain and make sure the afflicted receive the right care. Pastors, in particular, should not leave when the plague strikes but care for the afflicted until the end.⁴⁰ He declared at the end of his treatise, “I do not flee; and for faithful pastors to forsake but one poor Sheep at that time when he most of all needeth Heavenly comfort, it were too shameful, nay too wicked a part.”⁴¹ The theological and exegetical rationale of John 10:11–18 is brought to bear on concrete ethical cases in the practice of Pastor Beza, even in the worst of situations. In light of this, he defines good shepherds as those pastors who possess piety, exemplary lives, and humility; at the same time, from the Scriptures, he discovers and applies the doctrines of the text for the consolation and reproof of the flock. Pastors are to be heavenly minded. Their way of life must not hinder the spread of the gospel. He earnestly prayed, approaching his death (1598), this way: “O Christ, give me to represent in your church the true image of a pastor in the same degree as the ‘anonymous painter’ has deteriorated my face and all my appearance.”⁴² His sermons on the resurrection reveal his ability to preach to human experience as he

³⁷ Théodore de Bèze, *Psalmes of David Truly Opened and Explained* (London: Richard Yardley, 1590), 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁹ Shawn D. Wright, *Theodore Beza: The Man and the Myth* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2015), 170.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴¹ Théodore de Bèze, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665), 18.

⁴² Jeltine Lambertha Regina Ledegang-Keegstra, “La présence de Théodore de Bèze dans les ‘Albums Amicorum’ (1559–1605),” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 155 (April 2009): 439.

describes the disciples not wanting to “leave the sepulcher,” wanting like us to know the truth about the coming happiness of eternal rest. He comments, “What beautiful text and full of consolation” for a suffering and dying people under so many challenges.⁴³

As infirmities increased, Beza’s last thoughts were toward his beloved Geneva, as he asked, “Is the city in full safety and quiet?”⁴⁴ Even on his deathbed, the concern of this Reformer was for the welfare of the city where he was exiled from his motherland, praying on its behalf, not only for the church but also the wider community. In one of his last letters before his death written to a believer from Moravia, Beza declares his faith:

Thus, it is high time, when our Lord desires, that as I have worked for others, I may obtain the rest that I await from his mercy The great servants of God must die standing, in order that in turn they may sit in the heavenly places, in the eternal houses and dwellings that are prepared beside their head.... We hope that this great God, who has begun [a work in us] and brought about so many miracles, will not abandon us in the midst of danger, but will complete this great work for his glory.⁴⁵

In his funeral poem, Beza was described as “exiled from his country” in order to freely follow God as a “fugitive.” “It pleased Christ to let him die there” as a pilgrim in the land where Calvin began a work now brought to further completion.⁴⁶ The pastoral legacy of Beza is indeed that of a shepherd who out of duty gave his all for the sheep chosen and preserved by God in the midst of warfare. He stood on the shoulders of Calvin and was able to reach even new heights. To label Beza a rationalist systematizer is to detach him from his historical background and its challenges, as well as from the crucial personal factors that influenced his theological production.

Many lessons can be drawn from Beza’s model of reform, not least how behind the relation between church and state Beza saw the enactment of a serious struggle. The context of the civil wars in France among his fellow Huguenots reminded him of that constant parallel between the earthly and the heavenly conflicts. Beza saw at first the advent of a Huguenot king in France as the advent of a new David, and throughout his life, he acted

⁴³ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons sur l’histoire de la resurrection de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Geneva: Iean Le Preux, 1609), 34.

⁴⁴ Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519–1605* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 350.

⁴⁵ Théodore de Bèze, “A un seigneur de Moravie [Geneva, October 18, 1603],” in “Les derniers jours d’un réformateur: Quatre lettres de Théodore de Bèze, 1599–1604,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 19/20.4 (1870/1871): 162.

⁴⁶ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Tome 41, 1600* (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 167.

like Nathan to provide spiritual guidance to Henry. In this sense, he was not oblivious to Henry's moral and political failures to fulfill that task, but grieved and rebuked the French king when necessary. Beza not only showed great tact at Poissy but also expressed profound lament on the occasion of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. As I have emphasized, Beza was an experiential preacher. He stresses God's sovereignty and predestination at the heart of his theology, pastorally to comfort and strengthen a troubled people.

Ultimately, Beza's pastoral call to duty is chiefly expressed in his sacrificial example of discipleship and experience of the plague. In this crisis, he rebuked pastors who fled from their duties and, despite his high position, stayed in the midst of it to comfort the sick, so giving an example of a good shepherd. The struggle, lament, comfort, and hope that emerges from his writings and sermons are clearly connected with his life experiences. Further, Beza compared biblical stories with his and his people's practical experiences. Out of his pastoral concerns, Beza brought what Calvin had started into completion through his many writings and actions. Beza's dedication and sacrifice left a legacy that is often neglected in Reformed circles. This exemplary consecration was for the good of a church that had received many blows but which, in the end, in Beza's own words, stood as an "anvil that has worn out many hammers." The Reformation must continue from Calvin to Beza and from Beza to our days.

The Value of Marshall's *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*

T. MICHAEL CHRIST

Abstract

Pastors and theologians alike have praised Walter Marshall's *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* for its value in articulating a theology of sanctification. John Murray thought it to be "the most important book on sanctification ever written," yet very little scholarly attention has been given to what Marshall actually says. This article summarizes his historical context and explains four aspects of his approach to sanctification that make his work particularly useful within the Reformed tradition.

Throughout the seventeenth century, conflict erupted in the church in England. The clash concerned how Christians understood the relationship between faith and good works—or, we could say, how they reconciled the gratuitous nature of salvation with the nonnegotiable need for holiness in those who claim to be saved. Some held tightly to the freedom of grace and interacted awkwardly with exhortations to holiness; these were labeled "antinomians" because they were perceived as going against the law. Others held tenaciously to the need for a renewed life at all costs; they were called "neonomians" out of fear that they had reduced the gospel to a mere "new law."

Unfortunately, this kind of conflict is not isolated to the seventeenth century. The clash between Isaak da Costa and Hermann Kohlbrugge, the

Lordship controversy, and the New Perspective on Paul—to name a few—show that the heirs of the Reformation have often debated the meaning of believers' good works. The emphasis on justification raises fears one has diminished sanctification, and a robust doctrine of sanctification raises the suspicion that one has abandoned the Protestant principle of *sola fide*.

One work has often been hailed as uniquely helpful for articulating a Reformed approach to sanctification: *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* by Walter Marshall. He intended this work as a theoretical and practical guide to sanctification that steers safely around the antinomian and neonomian factions of his day. Joel Beeke and Mark Jones call it “the Puritan classic on sanctification.”¹

Despite this lavish praise, very little scholarly attention has been given to understanding what Marshall actually said. Joel Beeke has contributed the most extensive exposition of Marshall in a helpful introduction to the most recent publication of *Gospel Mystery*. This work explains sanctification in light of union with Christ and briefly locates Marshall in the antinomian/neonomian context.² This article aims to further our understanding of Marshall by identifying four factors in his work that I believe account for its unique usefulness within the Reformation tradition. I hope that this will inspire further reflection on his work.³

I. Background

First, who was Marshall? Marshall was born in 1628, the son of a minister. Marshall's education at New College Oxford would have exposed him to Puritan theology and pastoral care.⁴ He pastored in Hampshire throughout the turbulent period of the Civil War, but was ejected from his pastorate by the Act of Uniformity (1662) and spent the rest of his life shepherding independent churches.

At some point during his pastorate, he had what his biographer N. N. called a “disquieted spirit.” N. N. writes that Marshall was “much exercised

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 942, n. 76.

² Joel Beeke, “Introduction,” in *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1954; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage, 1999), v–xxv, esp. vii–viii.

³ For a more extensive interaction with Marshall, see T. Michael Christ, “A New Creation in Christ: A Historical-Theological Investigation into Walter Marshall's Theology of Sanctification in Union with Christ in the Context of the Seventeenth-Century Antinomian and Neonomian Controversy” (PhD diss., University of Chester, 2016), Online: <https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/620373>.

⁴ Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.

with troubled Thoughts, and that for many years, and had, by many mortifying methods, fought [for] peace of conscience; but notwithstanding all, his troubles increased.”⁵ It is nearly certain that Marshall’s spiritual melancholy was occasioned by the writings of Richard Baxter, the most verbose proponent of neonomianism in England in the seventeenth century. No doubt, Marshall knew Baxter’s writings well.⁶ Marshall also seems to hint at a troubling encounter he had with Baxterian theology when he says, concerning a view held by Baxter, “For my part, I hate it with perfect hatred, and account it mine enemy, *as I have found it to be.*”⁷

Marshall sought help, or perhaps clarification, from Baxter himself. N. N. records Baxter as saying that Marshall “took [his writings] too Legally.”⁸ After visiting Baxter, Marshall sought counsel from Thomas Goodwin, cataloging to Goodwin the sins “that lay heavy on his conscience.”⁹ Goodwin reminded Marshall that he must take seriously the greatest sin of all, namely “unbelief in Jesus,” and that he should look to Jesus for “the full remission of sins and provision for the sanctifying nature.”¹⁰ After his conversation with Goodwin, Marshall’s peace was restored, and Marshall set about preaching Christ with a particular concern to articulate how believers ought to make use of their union with Christ to grow in holiness.

Marshall died August 1, 1680, in “full persuasion of the truth and in the comfort of the doctrine, which he had preached.”¹¹ His last words were a quotation from Paul in Romans, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:23).¹²

It was through Marshall’s own search for comfort that he came to write *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Those who knew him well—such as his friend Thomas Woodcock—commend his writings because they were born

⁵ N. N., “The Preface to the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification,” in Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (London: The Bible & Three Crowns, 1692), Aa 2. See also David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808* (London: Printed for the Authors and Sold by Williams and Smith, 1810), 3:455.

⁶ N. N., “Preface,” Aa 3.

⁷ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Opened in Sundry Practical Directions, Suited Especially to the Case of Those Who Labor under the Guilt and Power of Indwelling Sin, to Which Is Added a Sermon of Justification* (London: The Bible & Three Crowns, 1692), 127 (emphasis added). For the reader’s convenience, in addition to citing the pagination of the 1692 edition of Marshall’s work, I also give the location on an online pdf copy of Marshall’s work available here: <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/GospelMystery.pdf> (6.2.5).

⁸ N. N., “Preface,” Aa 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Aa 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

out of a character that sought Christ. The subtitle of Marshall's work, *Suited Especially to the Case of Those Who Labor under the Guilt and Power of Indwelling Sin*, indicates that he wrote for those who found themselves in a similar state as he was before his conversation with Goodwin. Moreover, Marshall explains that in writing *Gospel Mystery*, he aimed to "save some one or another from killing themselves" and to "enlarge the hearts of many by it to run with great cheerfulness, joy and thanksgiving in the ways of His commandments."¹³ Thus, union with Christ and free justification motivated him to assist others. He labored to see others respond to these truths in the same enthusiastic way.

II. *Marshall's Theology*

Four aspects of Marshall's work make it a notable contribution to the theology of sanctification within the Reformed tradition. They are: (1) an awareness of the pendulum swing between legalism and licentiousness, (2) a robust doctrine of union with Christ, (3) a rejection of rationalism, and (4) a pastoral as well systematic approach.

1. *Awareness of the Pendulum Swing*

Marshall was aware of the pendulum swing between antinomianism and neonomianism. Moreover, he believed that the two errors played off each other, driving the factions further apart. The swing is perpetuated, Marshall says, by the human tendency to take refuge in one error in order to avoid the other. Antinomianism was spurred on by the neonomian doctrine of "sincere gospel works,"¹⁴ and the teaching of some pastors that that assurance was grounded in one's works fueled the fire of antinomianism. However, then to counter antinomianism, there arose a more strident works-based neonomianism.¹⁵ Marshall's analysis seems to concur with recent historiography. Tim Cooper has argued that Baxter was significantly motivated by fear.¹⁶ Antinomian writers also betray a similar dread of a return to Rome (and given the inroads Arminian theology was making, these fears were not entirely unfounded). Thus, fear drove both sides further apart. To counter this, Marshall made the brilliant move of confronting both errors at the same time.

¹³ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 13 (1.2.8).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106 (6.1.3).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127 (6.2.5).

¹⁶ Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemics in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 193.

2. Union with Christ

The way he countered both errors is also significant for Marshall's approach. He did so with a robust doctrine of union with Christ. Broadly similar to John Calvin and John Owen, Marshall argues that justification occurs only in Christ, and to be in Christ for justification necessitates also being in Christ for sanctification. Calvin's *duplex gratia* is very much a part of Marshall's thought, the latter also similar to Owen's covenantal structure.¹⁷ However, Marshall also translates this concept into practical terms. The doctrine of union with Christ provided him with two limiting concepts that counter antinomianism and neonomianism.

First, to counter antinomianism, Marshall proposed *the organic connection between justification and sanctification*. That believers enter into salvation by grace apart from works is affirmed; but that believers live out salvation apart from works is rigorously denied. Holiness is an essential part of salvation, not because it is a condition for it but because it is a part of it:

We then conclude that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity, as part of the end itself. Though we are not saved by good works, as procuring causes, yet we are saved to good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace, which God has prepared that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). It is, indeed, one part of our salvation to be delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works; but the end of this is not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery), but that we may fulfill the royal law of liberty, and that we may serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 7:6).¹⁸

This necessity of holiness in salvation is evident in the foundational structure of Marshall's theology, which he develops out of salvation history. Adam and Eve were created for holiness in the very core of their nature as the image of God.¹⁹ They lost their moral likeness to God in the fall, and this ushered in a multitude of sinful acts.²⁰ Therefore, complete rescue from the fall (i.e., salvation) requires a new nature in which humans are renewed in the image of God (i.e., sanctification).

Marshall also recognized that believers receive this nature in union with Christ²¹ in the context of an eschatological framework.²² The believer is

¹⁷ John Owen, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith (1677)," in *Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 5:231.

¹⁸ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 150 (8.2).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 (2.1.3).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36 (2.4.1).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 193–94 (11).

²² *Ibid.*, 331 (14.5.7).

fully in Christ and thereby decisively new in Christ, but what being in Christ entails is only partially realized.²³ The full salvation, including complete holiness, must await heaven, when the believer's union with Christ is openly manifested.²⁴

The partial realization of this union manifests itself even in the present in acts of holiness in this life as the believer lives according to his or her real nature by faith.²⁵ This wedding of holiness and future glory in a partially realized eschatological framework prevents any sense in which salvation by grace can be pitted against the need for holiness in this present life. To reject holiness is to reject salvation. It is a package deal. Borrowing language from Jeremiah Burroughs,²⁶ Marshall concludes his work with this line: "Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun, as glorification is sanctification perfected."²⁷ Clearly, sanctification and glorification are part of the same reality.

This limiting concept plainly counters the antinomian teaching of John Eaton, Tobias Crisp, and John Saltmarsh, who were prone to speak of justification as the totality of salvation.²⁸ But we can also notice more subtle differences with Martin Luther, who realized the organic connection between salvation and holiness to some degree, especially if his use of marriage as a metaphor for salvation is given due weight,²⁹ yet whose theology contains tensions from which antinomian inferences can be drawn.³⁰ For Luther, the accent fell on the benefits of faith: "Now let *faith* come between them [i.e., Christ and the believing soul] and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's."³¹ Luther then explicates how believers receive the benefits of righteousness and eternal life from Christ, the bridegroom. But Marshall emphasizes that through union with Christ, believers actually receive the bridegroom. Christ himself—who

²³ Ibid., 45 (3.2).

²⁴ Ibid., 48 (3.3.1).

²⁵ Ibid., 73 (4.4.2).

²⁶ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners to Come to Him for Rest* (London: Peter Cole, 1659), 281.

²⁷ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 331 (14.5.7).

²⁸ John Eaton, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London: Printed by R. B. at the Charge of Robert Lancaster, 1642), 65.

²⁹ Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 603.

³⁰ Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*, 20–22.

³¹ Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 603. For similar ideas in Luther, see Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26:132, 167–68, and Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses (1518)," trans. Carl W. Folkemer, in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 31:189–90.

became incarnate, died, and rose again in glory—is the central benefit of this union.³² By faith, the believer is brought into Christ. Marshall—like Calvin—recognizes that Christ's becoming “for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption” is the substance of salvation.³³ Thus, the benefits can in no way be separated from the person.³⁴ Marshall's theology holds together justification and sanctification because the chief benefit of salvation is Christ, who, in his person, brings both gifts to the believer. The framework of union with Christ allows Marshall to dwell at length on the implications of justification without justification becoming the central benefit in salvation and therefore eclipsing the need for sanctification in one's life. Luther never denied this structure, but his emphasis on the benefits that the marriage with Christ brings to the believer slightly diminishes the organic connection between those benefits and the groom.

Sanctification, however, does not eclipse justification either, because Marshall's other limiting concept is that *some sense of assurance precedes sanctification*. This notion prohibits neonomianism. Marshall derives this concept from the nature of real holiness in union with Christ. Either holy acts are performed out of love for God and by faith in his promises or by definition they are not holy. Furthermore, holiness consists in desiring God's attributes—his mercy and grace as well as his justice and righteousness—to be increasingly present in one's life.³⁵ In other words, a central aspect of holiness is communion with God, and this communion presupposes union with Christ.

Moreover, because human beings in their fallen condition know themselves to be under the wrath of God, it is impossible for them to move voluntarily toward God without first experiencing a change that relieves them from fearing God's wrath any longer. Apart from reconciliation in Christ, a person can no more love God than a criminal can love his executioner. Thus, before believers display any holiness, they must have confidence in God's disposition to look upon them favorably. This confidence is obtained only through the knowledge of union with Christ and its accompanying justification.

We must stress *knowledge* of union and justification because the conditions necessary for holiness include not only a right standing with God, but also an epistemological framework that allows this good standing to be known—

³² Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 43–44 (3.2), 50 (3.3.2).

³³ *Ibid.*, 323 (14.2.4).

³⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 61.

³⁵ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 1–4 (1).

that is, assurance. In short, one must be persuaded of God's good favor and be confident of heavenly reward before any holiness is possible. At the very outset of his book, Marshall shows that holiness requires certain endowments, which include an element of assurance of present and future favor. Here Marshall is strikingly similar to Calvin, who maintains that the believer has in heaven not a judge, but a loving father,³⁶ and that assurance of the fatherly love is what allows the believer to respond to God in a familial way. Calvin uses this argument to confront the Roman Catholic teaching that discouraged assurance.³⁷

Marshall uses this argument to confront Baxter, arguing that Baxter's doctrine of sincere obedience prior to salvation could never produce real holiness because it fails to provide any confidence in God's favor by which a sinner could move toward God as Father: "The doctrine of salvation by sincere obedience [neonomianism], that was invented against antinomianism, may well be ranked among the worst antinomian errors."³⁸ Marshall assumes that only through the gospel of free grace can one be in union with Christ, and only in union with Christ is real holiness possible. Therefore, if one takes away the gospel of grace—even with the aim of more rigorous law keeping—the result will be increased sin. This reality is why neonomianism is, at root, an antinomian error.

Marshall's uniqueness is also evident in the way he inverts the typical question related to assurance: instead of asking, "How do I get the kind of sanctification that will give me assurance?" he asks, "How do I get the kind of assurance that will give me sanctification?" Marshall admits that the first question—which puts assurance after sanctification—is legitimate because there is a sense in which assurance flows from sanctification,³⁹ but he leads with the idea that a sense of assurance is grounded in faith because he sees assurance as a precondition for sanctification. By doing this, Marshall averts both prominent errors of his day: he avoids neonomianism by stressing that assurance is possible and foundational; he also avoids antinomianism by showing that the goal of assurance is not merely to leave people assured but to lead them into holiness.

This limiting concept—*some sense of assurance precedes sanctification*—also pits Marshall against one closer to his camp, namely, Anthony Burgess.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.2.15. See also, Anthony N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 47.

³⁸ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 127 (6.2.5).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 155–56 (9).

Burgess's lectures, directed "especially [against] Antinomians," outline a doctrine of justification identical to Marshall's. Also, like Marshall, Burgess recognizes an inherent proclivity in all people toward both antinomianism and legalism—so he, too, acknowledges the pendulum swing. Yet differences emerge. In a warning against antinomianism, Burgess instructs Christians, "Follow holiness as earnestly, as if thou hadst nothing to help thee but that."⁴⁰ In other words, one must work for holiness as if one's work were the only basis for one's acceptance before God. Marshall, it seems, would not endorse this kind of exhortation; he would say instead that the moment one feels one has nothing but one's own holiness for support, one is utterly incapable of performing any true holiness because one has no solid basis by which one can come before God as Father. In other words, one has no union with Christ upon which one could commune with Christ, and this communion is essential for holiness. Burgess's approach would be tantamount to sanctification according to the flesh and would actually promote antinomianism. Granted, Burgess immediately says that one must also "rely upon Christ's merits as fully, as if thou had no holiness at all."⁴¹ Thus, Burgess does not advocate legalism consistently. Nevertheless, Burgess bifurcates the Christian life by juxtaposing these two systems: there is one for promoting holiness and another for promoting comfort. This bifurcation will lead to tension, confusion, and despair.

Marshall, in contrast, integrates the systems for confronting legalism and licentiousness under the single heading of union with Christ, calling believers to seek holiness precisely through the comfort and assurance of the gospel and to recognize that comfort and assurance of the gospel poises one for performing good works. His limiting concepts—(1) the organic connection between salvation and sanctification and (2) assurance before holiness—prevent the kind of dialectic tension that is programmed into Burgess's theology.

3. Rejection of Rationalism

Marshall also saw that antinomianism and neonomianism shared an essential common feature: rationalism. Marshall rejects rationalism in favor of the epistemological approach that was normative among the Reformed orthodox.

Rationalism shows up among the antinomians in the way they forced certain conclusions upon the believers' relationship with God, which they

⁴⁰ Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis or a Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians*, 2nd ed. (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647), 48.

⁴¹ Ibid.

drew from the doctrine of union with Christ. For them, the finished character of union diminished human agency, and this view led to a kind of hyper-Calvinism, where the actions of God left little room for the actions of humans to have any weight.⁴² The antinomians were known for “flying to God’s decrees.” That is, they defended their system by extrapolating specific implications from the eternal covenant within the Trinity.

Baxter’s rationalism led him to the opposite conclusion. The submission to Christ demanded from all people, combined with the high significance of human action that Baxter saw in Scripture, disallowed any aspect of real union before the kind of behavior that would create that union in the believer’s actual history. For Baxter, union was relative, consisting only in the comparative relationship between two parties:⁴³ believers do not commune with Christ because they are united; rather, they are united because they commune. Communion with Christ—epitomized in one’s submission to him as Lord—constitutes union. Union was the result of the believer’s response to Christ, not the cause of it. This is what James Packer calls the “rationalism of [Baxter’s] ‘political method.’”⁴⁴

In contrast, Marshall’s doctrine of union with Christ resisted rationalism. For Marshall, union with Christ “does not fall at all under the judgment of sense” because it is a spiritual union.⁴⁵ Marshall is not arguing that reason has no role in theology. For instance, in his argument for the necessity of assurance, he says, “Now let right reason judge . . .”⁴⁶ Marshall’s scholastic method makes extensive use of reason; but, for Marshall, reason was not magisterial. Scripture was the *principium cognoscendi* (principle of knowledge). Thus, Marshall began his understanding of union with Christ by recognizing that it—like the hypostatic union and the Trinity—is “beyond our comprehension” and that “we cannot frame an exact idea of the manner of any of these three unions in our imaginations.”⁴⁷ Because these unions are beyond human comprehension, the human “judgment of sense” cannot be the final arbitrator concerning the truth of them. “Yet,” Marshall insists,

⁴² For example, see Nicholas Couling, *The Saints Perfect in This Life or Never* (London: Printed for Giles Calvert, and Art to Be Sold at the West End of Pauls, 1647), 32.

⁴³ Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter’s Confutation of a Dissertation for the Justification of Infidels* (London: By R. W., 1654), 254. Cited from Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 234. See also, Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (London, 1650), 28; and Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory* (London, 1673), 818.

⁴⁴ James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 160.

⁴⁵ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 45 (3.2).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157 (9.1.1).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 43 (3.2).

“we have cause to believe them all because they are clearly revealed in Scripture.”⁴⁸ He then proceeds to explain the Scriptural evidence for union with Christ.⁴⁹ This theological method, which recognized the magisterial authority of Scripture, prevented him from following one implication of union with Christ in such a way that it would contradict or overshadow another. Thus, Marshall fought a two-front war against antinomianism and neonomianism with a robust theology of union with Christ and a theological method that rejected rationalism in favor of a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture.

Moreover, when Marshall looked to Scripture, he saw not merely the fact of union with Christ but the eschatological structure in which the union functioned. This is particularly important because, for Marshall, the eschatological structure meant that the parameters of union did not need to fit the human conception of time. For both the antinomians and Baxter, the sequencing of union relative to salvation history proved to be the sticking point. The antinomians diminished the instrumentality of faith because they saw in Scripture that one is united to Christ in election and, therefore, before faith. They were willing to speak of salvation “by Christ” but not “by faith.”⁵⁰ Baxter, in contrast, minimized any union prior to the life of faith in order to give priority to the biblical teaching on the instrumentality of faith and obedience. In contrast to both, Marshall’s system is not encumbered with questions such as how the benefits of Christ are obtained for the believer before he or she exercises faith. For Marshall, the overarching chronological factor concerning union with Christ is the eschatological reality of resurrection penetrating the present. As noted earlier, he concludes his work by saying, “Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun as glorification is sanctification perfected.”⁵¹ The human mind is utterly at a loss to explain the mechanics of this structure, yet one must believe this structure because of the clear evidence for it in Scripture.

Believing this structure has clear implications for the believer’s experience of sanctification as well. If union with Christ is a mystery, then everything based on union with Christ would be equally mysterious, including the process of sanctification. Hence, “the gospel mystery of sanctification” is a way of sanctification that submits ultimately to Scripture and not to the dictates of reason. Marshall’s system of sanctification requires that the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48–57 (3.3.1–3.3.3.5).

⁵⁰ Timothy Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 62.

⁵¹ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 331 (14.5.7).

believer submit to the Scripture's promise "peremptorily"—that is, at the most foundational level—even when it seems contrary to the evidence of one's reason.⁵² Thus, embedded in the structure of Marshall's theology is a principle that resists rationalism; to comprehend sanctification—and, even more, to experience it—one must first and foremost believe in the promises of God and then secondarily consciously submit to the authority of Scripture.

To clarify Marshall's position further, we should point out that his rejection of rationalism is not quite the same as the mystical approach to assurance that we see in Owen. Jonathan Master has argued that Owen relies upon a subjective sense of assurance vis-à-vis one's experience of being loved by God in Christ.⁵³ Marshall certainly wants to lead his readers into a subjective experience, especially in their participation in the Lord's Supper.⁵⁴ However, he maintains an objective anchor to assurance in the finished work of Christ. Thus, Marshall's antirationalism does not lead to subjectivism. Rather, it grounds believers in the authority of Scripture and the objective promise of salvation for all who trust in Christ. The reality that Christ died for sinners—the likes of which include even the worst of all sinners—and the promise that whosoever will believe will be saved provide an objective basis for assurance and the whole experience of sanctification.⁵⁵

4. *Pastoral Theology*

Finally, Marshall's work is also remarkable for the way it weaves together systematic and pastoral theology. Not only is Marshall not content with recognizing the pendulum swing of his day and simply offering a systematic formula that is theoretically resistant to such a swing, but also he offers a pastoral theology that leads the reader by the hand into a proper experience of sanctification. His goal is to teach people how to be holy.⁵⁶

This pastoral theology is important. The antinomian/neonomian controversy of the seventeenth century teaches us that there is a world of difference between affirming an orthodox definition of sanctification and actually applying it. The charges of antinomianism and neonomianism were often

⁵² Ibid., 214 (11.2.1.5).

⁵³ John Owen, "Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (1657)," in *Works of John Owen* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 2:241–42. See also Jonathan Master, *A Question of Assurance: The Doctrine of Assurance after the Westminster Confession* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 141–70.

⁵⁴ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 260 (12.2.7).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 178 (10.1.4).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1 (1).

made not in theological explication but in pastoral application. Marshall's work is remarkable in that it attempts—and, in my judgment, succeeds—in integrating theology and application consistently. Indeed, his whole work is a manual for becoming holy and thus can hardly be accused of tending toward antinomianism. Further, his whole work is also aimed at comforting people in the gospel so that they have a sure basis for work towards holiness, and so his approach mitigates the charges of neonomianism and antinomianism simultaneously.

A critical part of Marshall's pastoral theology appears in the last section of the body of the book, in which he gives directions for living a sanctified life by faith. He begins direction 13, the penultimate one, by stressing the centrality of faith. Holy actions are not accomplished by brute force but through the skill of living by faith.⁵⁷ He also explains faith's role in the Christian life, given the overlap of the ages.⁵⁸ Believers belong to the new age, and yet they live in the old. They must exercise faith in the future promise, even as their experiences fall short of the full glory to come. Understanding this provides believers with the ability to be concerned about their sin, but not to let their sin overwhelm them.

In direction 14, the last, Marshall explains how to strengthen one's faith by the means of grace. These "means" include prayer, Scripture reading, fellowship with other believers, and the sacraments. These practices strengthen believers in their faith, which thereby increases them in holiness.⁵⁹ Again we see remarkable balance. Marshall avoids the antinomian devaluation of the means of grace by stressing that the practices are necessary to strengthen our faith; but he also avoids a legalistic devotion to the means by emphasizing that what they promote is faith, a faith that brings believers into greater awareness of the gospel. Thus, the goal of the means of grace is to make one more aware of the gospel. More could (and should) be said about Marshall's pastoral theology. The point of interest here is that he coaches believers on how they are to practice the means of grace. In order to skirt the errors of antinomianism and neonomianism it was not enough to provide a theoretical theology of sanctification; he also needed to train believers in the proper skills of living by faith for them safely to reach their goal.

Conclusion

Having explored four aspects of Marshall's work that make it useful within the Reformed tradition, we now make some comments about how to actually

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 230–35 (12).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 244 (12.2.1).

⁵⁹ See all of direction 14, *ibid.*, 315–32.

use Marshall's theology in the contemporary discussion on sanctification. We begin with a brief comment regarding one possible reason for conflicting articulations of sanctification in the church.

It is natural for anyone articulating a theology of sanctification to have more fear of either the antinomian or the neonomian type of error, and it is normal that this fear would make one more sensitive to any theological system that contains a trajectory in the direction of the error one fears more. Likewise, one should not be surprised if those speaking about sanctification differ with one another regarding those aspects of sanctification that they feel needs to be stressed at any given moment. (Is it the absolute need for holiness in the redeemed? Or is it the gift-character of the holiness and the instrumentality of faith?) One should note that these differences can arise even within the same tradition and that they do not necessarily indicate a radically different theological structure but can reveal a different assessment of the need of the moment. Of course, the divergent assessments of the moment's need are driven by particular theological constructs. Thus, though theological differences are not absent, they are perhaps not as great as they may at first appear.

It is of interest for understanding Marshall to note that theologians who differ on sanctification appreciate his approach, for example, Andrew Murray, John Murray, Lane Tipton, and John Fesko.⁶⁰ They articulate sanctification differently, yet they all commend Marshall. Of course, this does not necessarily commend Marshall's work. It could be that he is so ambiguous that one can read a wide range of positions into his book. However, this is unlikely, given Marshall's careful scholastic approach. It is more likely that a wide range of thinkers appreciate him because he affirms some aspect of sanctification that they appreciate and because he shuts down the possibility of an erroneous view of sanctification that these thinkers also reject.

Our analysis of Marshall suggests that he successfully prevents both antinomian and neonomian errors. He stops the pendulum from swinging by refusing to answer one error with the other, but instead, he answers both simultaneously with a robust theology of union with Christ. As a result,

⁶⁰ Andrew Murray says, "There is but one book in the language admitted by all to be the standard one on 'sanctification.' It is the work of the Rev. Walter Marshall, published in 1692, 'The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification.'" Andrew Murray, "Introduction," in *Sanctification; or the Highway of Holiness an Abridgment of the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, with an Introductory Note by A.M.*, ed. Andrew Murray (London: Nisbet, 1884), v. As already noted, John Murray is reported to have said of *Gospel Mystery* that it was "The most important book on sanctification ever written." John Fesko, "Sanctification and Union with Christ: A Reformed Perspective," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34.3 (2010): 117. Lane Tipton encouraged reading Walter Marshall in class.

neither side needs to worry that Marshall will lead to the error it fears. Marshall stresses the gratuitous nature of our salvation in Christ without easy-believism and emphasizes the need for holiness without abandoning grace. As we saw, grace and holiness are not competitors for Marshall, but they exist in joyful cooperation.

Thus, whatever aspect of sanctification one is predisposed to stress, one can find that aspect supported in Marshall. However, in order to remain true to Marshall's intention, we must do more than quote those sections that support our emphases. We must also recognize that whatever side of the Christian life we want to stress is tied to the other because everything is tied to union with Christ. For instance, if I am attracted to Marshall because he stresses the need to be holy, I should recognize that holiness can only happen in the context of free forgiveness in Christ. Or, if I appreciate Marshall because he stresses the reality of assurance arising directly out of faith in Christ, I should also recognize that this assurance is never an end in itself, but always the necessary context whereby I can pursue holiness and find even more assurance.

Marshall's theology is, indeed, a blessing to the church, but only if we wrestle with the deep structure of his thought, for there we will find themes in sanctification that not only comfort us but also challenge us. May we take up his work and read.

On Earth: Relational Anthropocentrism in Creation Care¹

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Abstract

In evaluating environmental ethics in Western thought, the definitions and arguments of greatest importance come from consequential, deontological, and ecocentric approaches. These approaches have strengths and weaknesses. This article aims at addressing the issues at stake by introducing the concept of relational anthropocentrism based on multiperspectivalism.

I. *Anthropocene*

Human presence on earth is so extensive and its activity so massive that it significantly conditions the planet's internal cycles. It is estimated that today's world population is around 7.6 billion people, with a gradually increasing concentration in metropolitan urban areas. In 1950 the world population was around 2.5 billion; estimates say that it will almost quadruple within the next century.²

¹ The following is an adaptation of Alessandro Piccirillo, "Sulla Terra: Elementi per un'etica della cura del Creato," *Studi di Teologia: Supplemento* 16 (2018): 4–30.

² See Population Division, "The Speed of Urbanization around the World," *Population Facts 2018.1. The United Nations*, Online: https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-PopFacts_2018-1.pdf.

When one tries to manage numbers of such magnitude, it becomes clear that the problem of resources is a concrete challenge. The issue is not just how to feed everyone in environmental scenarios that are increasingly subject to major climate changes.³ It is also essential to understand the ecological sustainability of such an anthropic presence on the planet. The footprint left by human activities has changed the face of the earth, together with its interdependent balances, to such a degree that the planet's capacity for adaptation and resilience has been altered. Faced with a large-scale and irresponsible demands for land resources, the earth system has no time either to reproduce what has been removed or to re-create the previous conditions of comparative abundance. The loss of these resources constitutes a failure to provide not only for immediate human needs but also for those of other entities whose existence is increasingly threatened.

A visible example is Lake Aral, located between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the fourth largest lake in the world, with a surface area of over 68 km². Since 1960, this navigable lake has experienced one of the greatest human-made environmental disasters. During this time, it has gradually and almost completely dried up. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union (USSR) carried out major operations to tap the Aral waters to irrigate the Uzbek cotton plantations. However, the water withdrawal was so disproportionate that the formerly moderate continental climate of the lake area has become increasingly extreme, with very wide temperature ranges (104° F in summer, -4° F in winter), and significantly arid. This development has led to sand storms and the gradual sedimentation of salt and toxic substances (heavily used in crops), creating a poisonous mix that has made the lake and the surrounding area unsuitable for life. Aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna have diminished dramatically. Local populations have experienced a sizeable increase in respiratory and renal diseases.⁴ The region now made inhospitable has created environmental refugees, especially among those who made a living from fishing—a work network of about forty thousand people who provided one-sixth of the fish consumed in the former Soviet Union. This disaster was not only to be expected, but it was also premeditated and included in a subsequent plan of conversion of the area into rice paddies. However, since the 1990s, with cotton cultivation in freefall, crumbling infrastructure, and unfulfilled agreements, the collection of water already in short supply has become an instrument of political tension and dispute

³ See FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, et al., *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018: Building Climate Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition* (Rome: FAO, 2018), 37–78.

⁴ Augusto Spuri, *Cambiamenti climatici: Tra facili allarmismi e pericolose sottovalutazioni* (Turin: Claudiana, 2018), 91.

between the states of the former Soviet Union. The total disappearance of water is expected by 2025.⁵ A framework of sociopolitical instability has emerged as a fitting conclusion to this ecological disaster.

Another example is in Syria. Among the various studies on the factors that caused the ongoing civil war, there is one published by the National Academy of Sciences (USA) that investigates the significant climate change in an area struck by abnormal drought between 2007 and 2010. This drought, the worst ever recorded in Syria, caused a massive loss of subsistence crops that generated an extensive migration of farming families (about 1.5 million people) to urban centers, many of which were already crowded with Iraqi refugees (estimated at around 1.2–1.5 million). The inevitable result was the escalation of social tensions due to increasing scarcity of resources, efficient infrastructure, and jobs on the one hand, and the increase in crime, illegal activities, and disinterest on the part of the Assad regime on the other. These were key ingredients for the ensuing sociopolitical conflict. By studying climate trends over a century (rainfall, temperatures, atmospheric pressure), the researchers collected data and results that give a clear picture: the drought is of human origin. The cause? An aggressive agricultural policy that depleted the territory and the hydrogeological resources. The government of Hafez al-Assad advocated unsustainable policies to increase agricultural production and irrigation projects (with subsidies in the form of oil quotas to its supporters). These policies exploited the limited land and water resources to such a degree that the groundwater was dangerously reduced by draining rivers and making crops dependent on rainfall alone. Once the aquifers or groundwaters were exhausted, at the first sign of drought, there were no water reserves left, and agricultural production in the northeast collapsed. Almost all the livestock was lost, the vegetation was devastated, and the population started to suffer from diseases linked to malnutrition. To make matters worse, Bashar al-Assad began to cut funds and subsidies.⁶ Migration was the only solution.

These two different examples present several related critical issues caused by the decisive action of man on the natural cycles leading to pollution, impoverishment, and instability. In both cases, a particular type of behavior towards the environment caused social injustice, and a specific type of social

⁵ Michael Wines, "Grand Soviet Scheme for Sharing Water in Central Asia Is Foundering," *New York Times*, December 12, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/09/world/grand-soviet-scheme-for-sharing-water-in-central-asia-is-foundering.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶ Colin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark. A. Cane, et al., "Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112.11 (March 17, 2015): 3241–46, doi:10.1073/pnas.1421533112.

injustice exacerbated the ecological crisis. The interaction is very close. This is not a particularly new phenomenon: the ancient Romans also polluted and devastated the environment with massive deforestation. What makes it contemporary are its immense proportions and the contribution of advanced technology, which combined to produce sudden and unpredictable effects on the environment.

II. *Pollution and Deforestation*

There is still some resistance in the scientific community to the theory of human activity as the origin of climate change. However, the data that prove it are continually accumulating. The first major cause of this is the thinning of the ozone layer at the poles, which causes the passage of harmful UV rays into the atmosphere, thereby increasing the polar thaw. Other factors undoubtedly contribute as well, such as air pollution (produced by domestic, industrial, and transport combustion gases), water pollution (produced by the spillage of toxic materials and liquids into water basins), and soil pollution (produced by pesticides, herbicides, and domestic and industrial waste). It is the quantity and the quality of the pollution mix of our times that represent a significant step backward, compared to the situation in previous centuries. The earth system is resilient and capable of absorbing and degrading waste, but only within certain limits. In these three cases, pollution produces imbalances both in the carbon cycle and in the water cycle, which, in turn, interfere with the mechanisms of “defense” from the sun’s rays and from the earth’s “heat mining.” With this unexpected increase in heat (caused not by the position of the earth in relation to the sun, but by anthropic factors), the consequences can be highly problematic, such as, for example, the average rise in the level of the oceans.

Also, we are witnessing a high rate of deforestation (with consequent soil erosion), which drastically decreases the carbon absorption capacity in the form of CO₂, leading to an increase in the greenhouse effect. Trees are fundamental not only for the carbon cycle but also for maintaining air humidity, generating clouds that protect from the sun and produce rain.

In addition to destroying biodiversity, deforestation undermines the stability and the organic richness of soils. There are generally two reasons for deforestation: agricultural and residential. In the first case, the problem arises when expanses of forest are put to intensive monocultures. We are witnessing the rapid exhaustion of natural resources and soil erosion to the

point of desertification.⁷ But there is also a social cost. In Africa, Asia, and South America, massive deforestation repeatedly affects small local communities and subsistence farmers who, when dispossessed, are relocated elsewhere, generally in relatively infertile areas. Those displaced are therefore forced to adapt to soils with which they are not familiar and which they cultivate with unsustainable agricultural methods (doing more harm than good), often depending exclusively on high yield seeds and expensive technological products that drain virgin areas. Unfortunately, the dispossessed farmers are not always given other possibilities, since the only options are subsidies or expedients.⁸

Finally, with pollution and deforestation, the extinction of species has intensified. This is by no means of minor importance, since many species that live in symbiosis with their habitat contribute directly to balance the dense biotic network by their presence.

III. *Technological Development and Commodification of Nature*

Two other factors significantly impact the environment: technological development and the commodification of nature. Technology is not in itself a threat to environmental health, but it is the underlying concept of both nature and environment that can make it threatening.

Neither the increasingly advanced technological applications typical of societies transitioning first to agriculture and then to industry nor the constant search for new territories to colonize that is typical of modern capitalism have been anthropologically or environmentally painless.

The conceptual bases are to be found in a progressive detachment from a divine cosmology, which more or less kept together *ontos* (being) and *telos* (goal), heaven and earth, scientific investigation and religious morality, in a frame of reference that appeared relatively organic and interconnected. From William of Ockham onwards, the world of rationality and divine purpose started to fall apart. The impossibility of really knowing the rationality and will of God in the realm of nature led to the deprivation of the world of evident rationality and order. *Telos* (goal) and *ethos* (character or nature) are

⁷ See J. Donald Hughes, *Ecology of Ancient Civilizations* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975); and Clive Ponting, *The Green History of the World* (London: Penguin, 1988).

⁸ See Richard North, *Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto for Progress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 48; Paul Harrison, *The Third World Tomorrow: A Report from the Battle Front in the War Against Poverty* (London: Penguin, 1981), 4546, referred to in Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

no longer self-evident in the natural world, which may now be rediscovered with new paradigms. With the definition of the fundamental laws of physics, Isaac Newton laid the foundation of a mechanical cosmology. Immanuel Kant, for his part, concluded that from the physical world and its internal laws it is not possible to derive the *telos* of a good God, which would have made it possible to elaborate a moral law for civil life. If God is not comprehensible through a “natural” way, but only through an act of faith in his existence, then faith and morals are divorced from science and reason and remain confined to the private sphere. The order in nature is no longer tied to God, and there is in nature no longer evidence of a divine end to which it aims. Nature, on the other hand, is incomplete and can be remodeled. Kant and Newton thus created the presuppositions for an atheistic cosmology that removes God from the cosmos and places its purpose in individual human perceptions: the world is ready to be transformed and directed by human action.⁹

Moving on from medieval thought, every form of relationship between the parts of nature (or even just the notion) is reset. If in the Middle Ages the deep interconnections were wrongly conceived of, now they are completely rejected according to rationalistic reductionism and atomistic thought.¹⁰ This pattern is clear in Cartesian thought, where reason (*res cogitans*) becomes a major discriminating element in human understanding and corporeality is reduced to a pure extension of it (*res extensa*). Disenchantment and demystification of creation follow, the typical product being the anthropocentric Enlightenment. The environment is perceived as pure and simple matter, tangible, and recombining. The objective is simple: to dominate nature with increasingly refined technological tools, *de facto* elevating scientific thought to a secular paradigm of salvation.¹¹

When nature is demystified, it also becomes subject to commodification and appropriation. In premodern Europe, nature was God’s property, and therefore earth and work were conceived within a clear directional divine order. However, when a monetary economy becomes dominant, the forms of exchange and economic relations rooted in the previous order are reformulated. Money allows spatially distanced and temporally deferred transactions to be carried out and shifts the centers of power from those

⁹ John H. Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 204–6, referred to in Northcott, *Environment*, 59.

¹⁰ See Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 52.

¹¹ See also Alessandro Piccirillo, “Animalia: La questione animale tra etica delle prospettive e antropocentrismo relazionale,” *Studi di Teologia: Supplemento* 11(2013): 7.

who have land and take care of it to those who have currency and assets: corporations, banks, and institutional investors. The new mobility and the concentration of social power in monetary wealth contributes to the breaking up of traditional authorities and the mechanisms of shared exercise of power in local communities. Distancing and abstraction from human relations become the dominant form of economic relationships. These relationships are separated from divine restraints, from the traditional moral obligations of good neighbor relations, from justice, and from care for other people and creation, and they alienate people from the natural world.¹² Money becomes the parameter for measuring value, and well-being is measured in terms of the monetary economy and not in broader terms. Profit becomes the real driving force of technological development and investment policies. So when nature is demystified and commodified, then the kind of productive policy adopted will not have much interest in preserving that asset, but will have interest in exploiting it.

In a biblical vision of the world it is difficult to imagine care of creation under these conditions. It follows that care of creation and ecological commitment are put into practice not simply through individual behavior on single issues (an atomistic approach), but in global and realistic terms. If we do not understand the underlying structures and the dynamics involved, we may be well intentioned, but we will not be effective. But what are the existing paradigms?

IV. *Environmental Ethics*

The ethics presented here are based on a selection of modern moral paradigms: consequentialism, deontology, and ecocentrism.¹³ We will present them in a summarized form, and one should also understand them as overlapping at times.

1. *Consequentialism*

A place of pre-eminence in consequentialism is occupied by Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism.¹⁴ Like any good utilitarian, Singer aims at promoting pleasure and reducing suffering, and not so much at defining rights *per se*, as they are not always helpful in attaining the maximum good. A

¹² Northcott, *Environment*, 78–79.

¹³ For a helpful summary of these traditions, see *ibid.*, 90–115. For other ethical paradigms not dealt with here (ecofeminism, religious anthropocentrism, and religious theocentrism), see *ibid.*, 116–63.

¹⁴ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Cape, 1990).

right could prevent the achievement of the maximum good, proving to be legal but unfair. The promotion of good is extended to all beings who have interests (e.g., in not suffering and in surviving), who are conscious of themselves as distinct entities, and who are able to prefer one option to another. If a being (animal or human) suffers, such suffering must be considered together with the suffering of others. If the sum of all the reasons for not suffering implies that the actions chosen to obtain the least possible suffering for the whole include a certain amount of suffering for some, then those actions are justifiable. Singer's consequentialist functionalism undoubtedly exposes him to the criticism of reductionism, because it results in a sterile economic cost-benefit (pleasure-suffering) calculation, and because the notion of good cannot be exhaustively explained by the pleasure-suffering dynamic (which is essentially subjective). This kind of consequentialism is hardly operative, given that the calculation of the best choice between good and evil is in fact a logical fiction because of self-evident space-time limitations and its lack of predictive force. Another considerable critical aspect of Singer's utilitarianism is that its true area of application is the animal world, while it is virtually oblivious to the moral interests of nonsentient beings and the more extended community of life, thereby showing a seriously limited scope for environmental ethics.¹⁵

2. Deontology

Deontological approaches attribute *a priori* inherent values to subjects. Based on these *a priori* values, Tom Regan postulates the existence of natural rights for animals.¹⁶ The first foundation for these rights lies in the concept of "value-in-itself." This value is an individual objective element for every living being that entitles a living being to rights by granting it dignity and respect. Regan links "value-in-itself" to being sentient and (self) conscious. This requirement is possessed by all moral agents (adult humans, rational, responsible, and self-conscious) and by all moral patients (conscious and sentient individuals, responsible or not, rational or not). This guarantees the attribution of positive, direct, inviolable, and extended rights to both human and nonhuman animals, typically sensate mammals. These rights are life, freedom, and well-being. One marked difficulty of this approach is accounting properly for one of its strongest assumptions, the value-in-itself, which is taken as self-evident. The entire structure may be dangerously

¹⁵ See Piccirillo, "Animalia," 12–13.

¹⁶ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1988). A similar Christian approach can be found in Linzey's "theos-rights." Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SCM, 1987); Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM, 1994).

flawed by a form of naturalistic fallacy in attributing respect to an individual only because there is a state of consciousness. Furthermore, the categories of moral patients and moral agents have fairly clear boundaries, but the reason and place of such boundaries can be arbitrary. This implies a reduced extension of rights to a few protected subjects and does not look at the protection of entire ecosystems.

Holmes Rolston's deontological approach acknowledges an intrinsic value to both individuals and collectivities that is based on a purpose not dependent on human perception.¹⁷ Rolston speaks of "objects-with-will," referring to all the living beings with objective and autonomous character. Rolston therefore defends the complete otherness of natural objects and their claims to the right to flourish, and he also includes communities and ecosystems. Having said that, Rolston builds a hierarchy of values between different life forms with "richer" features so that they are able to make real choices. Although this deontological approach is by far the most operative, it still does not address the systemic issues and the forms of alienation from nature of modern civilizations.

3. *Ecocentrism*

The ecocentric paradigms of Aldo Leopold and Baird Callicott seek to address both the purely ecological dynamics and the state of alienation previously mentioned.¹⁸ They do so by looking at the earth as an integrated whole. At the same time, they attribute a moral significance to ecosystems defined as a community of interdependent lives (human and nonhuman). In particular, the land ethics of Leopold emphasizes the community of all life forms, forcing individuals to preserve biotic equilibria and restore their integrity when they are undermined. A biotic unit can contain predators, and this place must be preserved to ensure the integrity of the ecosystem. Humanity is obliged to limit overpopulation of animal or plant species and preserve those balances. According to Callicott, this means that a certain degree of suffering must be factored in, contrary to the utilitarians and proponents of animal rights. At the same time, humans are called to moderate their lifestyle so as not to threaten the rest of the biotic community.

This form of ecocentrism sees the ethics of the integrity of the earth primarily as a guarantee of the stability of the ecosystem, which includes

¹⁷ Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); J. Baird Callicott, *In Defence of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

human society. This perspective contrasts with a biblical vision, which claims that when human and social life is in line with the Mosaic law and the ethics of Jesus, then both earth and ecosystems prosper. Usually social injustice precedes ecological disaster. A sound earth ethic must be able to manage this structural datum to be effective and to be applied universally instead of being valid only in national parks and wildlife reserves.

The Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock is based on a biochemical model that sees the world as a living entity. This entity sustains itself and has its own intelligence that makes the biosphere livable.¹⁹ Gaia is the product of thought that combines reductionist elements (scientific knowledge) and holistic elements. According to this, the more humans exercise their influence, the more they take responsibility, so the moderation of their impact is a key element. If humans put Gaia's life at risk, she will find a way to readjust, even eliminating humanity if necessary. To avoid reaching this point, urbanized humans and scientists in particular must recover their being in connection with the natural world. Lovelock's hypothesis includes a notion of planetary egalitarian democracy, where humanity is a partner of planetary forces rather than an owner or a steward.

Another model of ecocentrism is *deep ecology*, represented by Freya Matthews and Matthew Fox.²⁰ In this paradigm, the real differences between human and nonhuman are eliminated, thus producing a universal mystical unity. This approach suffers from a form of pantheistic monism²¹ and risks promoting a homogenization of nature for purely human purposes that instead of protecting it puts it at risk. If we imagine a unified and nondiversified world, we will be prone to resetting it in a human image.

Arne Naess's ecosophy is very similar to land ethics and the Gaia hypothesis.²² If the problem of Western humans with nature is their atomistic conception of self and preoccupation with their own interests, Naess says, they must rethink their self-interest starting from ecology. In doing so, individuals and societies will pursue the positive qualities of personal commitment and responsibility, combined with mutual dependence, in a form of relational self-realization. The subjectivism of this position does not consider the real differences between human and nonhuman beings and

¹⁹ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²⁰ Freya Matthews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991); Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1983).

²¹ David T. Williams, "Trinitarian Ecology," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18.2 (2000): 151–52.

²² Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153 and ch. 2.

ends up incorporating the other into one's self for self-realization. Even so, we are faced with a process of homogenization of differences and relationality that becomes a rhetorical device.

Adapting the interpretative framework of multiperspectivalism (norm, existence, and situation, see below)²³ to the paradigms briefly presented, we may note that deontological ethics are highly normative, while the utilitarian, ecophilosophical and deep ecology models have strongly subjective-experiential traits. Looking further into the Gaia hypothesis, we note that the model has normative and subjective elements. Leopold and Callicott's ecocentrism, with their emphasis on the ethics of the integrity of the earth and their investment in relational structures, has a more normative-situational approach.

V. Relational Anthropocentrism

The ethics we have seen thus far encourage us to find an overall paradigm that can hold together at the same time the issues of safeguarding the environment and the framework of the human-nature relationship, consisting of power dynamics, justice, and social ties. Such a platform would make it possible to build an ethic that is based on the doctrine of creation in relation to the Trinity (norm), on the profound essence of the *imago Dei* and participation in the community of creation (existence), and, finally, on the dynamic reality of conservation and service (situation). We call this paradigm *relational anthropocentrism*.²⁴

1. Creation

Creation does not belong to man; it is not his. It is created by God for his own pleasure and delight. It is God's property, and he claims sovereign jurisdiction over it. Creation is not sustained by human beings. The laws that keep the planet running, the food that animals consume, the life lived

²³ See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1987); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008). In Italian Reformed evangelicalism, the multiperspectival approach in ethics has been consistently applied in Leonardo De Chirico, "La pratica dell'uno del molteplice: Etica delle prospettive," *Studi di Teologia: Supplemento* 34 (2005): 156–65; CSEB, "Aborto: Un documento del Centro Studi di Etica e Bioetica di Padova," *Studi di Teologia: Supplemento* 6 (2005): 3–15; Leonardo De Chirico, "Eutanasia: Un documento del Centro Studi di Etica e Bioetica di Padova," *Studi di Teologia: Supplemento* 1 (2005): 2–12; Alessandro Piccirillo, "L'antropologia del 'seno materno' nel personalismo relazionale di Leonardo De Chirico: Per una ridefinizione dello statuto dell'embrione," *Bioetica: Rivista Interdisciplinare* 19.1 (2011): 75–96.

²⁴ For a good summary of these perspectives, see John M. Frame, *Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1990), 50–54.

by the created beings; all depend on God's providential support. God, after the creation, is active in the care, management, maintenance, and nourishment of every living species (animal or plant). This providence is significant because it reflects the value that God sets on his creation. In dealing with ecosystems that are not in direct contact with man and that do not depend on the presence of humans but exist independently, God emphasizes his centrality in creation so that much flora and fauna exist regardless of whether they are useful to man. Thus, creation does not reflect us but the Creator, and God is a God of order. The account of creation in Genesis 1 is indicative of the fact that the world was made *ex nihilo*, but it was made with an order that permeates the profound structure of creation. Chaos and chance are excluded. In separating the waters from the dry earth, God places order and limits on the uncontrolled and destructive power of oceans and seas (cf. Jer 5:22). In separating day and night with the positive interference of stars and planets, God regulates time, declaring "let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years" (Gen 1:14).

The God of the Bible is also the God of covenants and alliances. In establishing order in the creation, God makes an asymmetrical covenant in which the minor contractor (the created world) will be kept in order and the laws that govern it will not be suspended. That he has established a covenant with the day and the night and the laws of heaven and earth implies that there is a form of stable and primordial covenant with the creation. This creation also includes human society, with which God has made several covenants throughout history. Further, there is an extremely close connection between the covenant with creation and those made more specifically with human societies, as Jeremiah 33:20–21 makes quite clear. This passage refers to the cosmic aspect in the Davidic covenant and the natural order that recalls the social order, as both natural and social order represent the Creator. The prosperity of the social order is founded on the keeping of the cosmic covenant; the prosperity of the natural order is marked by man's respect of the covenants between God and human society.²⁵ Isaiah 24:4–6 and Jeremiah 5:23–25 indicate the consequences of breaking the covenants between God and man. The covenantal harmony underlies the created order and is the basis of the ecological stability of the earth.

In the covenants and the stipulations between God and humanity, there is also an appeal to justice that is not exclusively moralistic; rather, it is an integral call to unite justice and adoration. Adoration is to be addressed to God alone, and not to the natural created elements, and it is because of this

²⁵ See also Psalm 72:1–6.

adoration that social ethics and harmony with the environment flourish. The prophets of Israel repeatedly underline the direct relationship between religious infidelity and social collapse, combined with a subsequent subversion of the natural order.²⁶

Conceiving creation in these terms helps to orient and hold together ecological sensitivity and the dynamics of political and social power. The regulatory framework of reference is effectively the covenant made by God with his creation, which is closely connected with the other covenants made with humanity as a specific part of creation. Another highly qualifying aspect of this bond is the institution of the Sabbath of the earth²⁷ and the Jubilee. Rest for the earth is not merely an exercise of precaution and faith but also a real form of respect and ecological safeguard for the natural order. The exploitation of the earth is controlled, and the regenerative capacities of the ecosystem are allowed to act. The redistribution of the land among tribes was a reference to God as the sole landowner and Israel as delegated owner. It allowed for the exercise of justice and social mercy to safeguard the members of society from constant exposure to vulnerability. Moreover, if the earth is not owned by individuals for an indefinite period but belongs to God and is entrusted to people in wider social contexts (the tribe and redistribution of land at the Jubilee), it implies that the earth represents a common intergenerational heritage. An approach to land management and ownership completely different from the current economic order emerges.

2. *Imago Dei*

If God is Triune, and if his people are equal in essence (sharing a common creatureliness) but distinct in function, this Trinitarian structure of multiplicity and unity is also reflected in the creation in the way God intended. Descriptions of what it means to be in the image of God must take into account the Tri-unity.

One of the first dimensions to be grasped is the incarnation. When the second person of the Godhead becomes body and matter within his own creation, then it becomes even clearer that redemption is not *from* corrupt matter (but from sin) because it is *in* matter that the second person of the Trinity is incarnate. Redemption does not come by eliminating matter, but by redirecting it to a creational trajectory oriented to God's purposes. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand that the Trinity itself implies a

²⁶ See Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992).

²⁷ Northcott, *Environment*, 187–93.

positive conception of the created world, not only because it was declared good at creation, but because it is declared good in the redemptive incarnation and in view of God's eternal purposes. A clear understanding of this dimension of the Trinity in creation allows human beings to recover a relational ethic between human and nonhuman. Moreover, if creation also explicates the Triune Creator, it will also express the deep and stable interconnections between the three persons of God, through the harmonious interdependence of its parts. The eschatological perspective aims at this restoration.²⁸

Francis Schaeffer, in his 1977 work *Pollution and the Death of Man*, refers to these aspects when he says,

It follows that if we return to the Reformation's Biblical view that nature is worth painting, so the nature which we paint is also worth something in itself. This is the true Christian mentality. It rests upon the reality of creation out of nothing by God. But it also follows that all things are equally created by God. All things were equally created out of nothing. *All things, including man, are equal in their origin*, as far as creation is concerned.²⁹

Then, describing the relationship between an infinite God and his finite creation, he says,

On the side of God's infinity everything else is finite and equally separated from God; but on the side of his personality, God has created man in His own image. Therefore, man's relationship is upward [as being in the image God] rather than downward [as being part of the natural creation]. ... Man is separated, as personal, from nature because he is made in the image of God, that is he has personality, and as such he is unique in the creation; but he is united to all other creatures as being *created*. Man is separated from everything else, but that does not mean that there is not also a proper relationship downward on the side of man's being created and finite. ... Christians reject the view that there is no distinction—or only a quantitative distinction—between man and other things; *and* they reject the view that man is totally separated from all other things.³⁰

Humanity is not given a choice between *upward* and *downward*; it must relate to these dimensions in an integral way, in different yet interconnected relationships.³¹ There is no room for dualism that attributes more value to the dimension of the spirit than to matter. In other words, these divisions

²⁸ See Romans 8:19–23.

²⁹ Francis Schaeffer and Udo W. Middelmann, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48–50.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

are overcome in the biblical worldview, because it is integral and integrated. As the Creator values the created world (in creation, the incarnation, and redemption), and takes charge of it, so must humanity reattribute this value and live it out in concrete ways.

So, the *imago Dei* as a subjective or experiential element facilitates the adoption of an anthropocentrism before and under the Creator. It is in itself a by-product of theocentrism. Man will take on his covenantal responsibilities, valuing his creatureliness as God values it. A relational anthropocentrism challenges the biocentric objection that views the *imago Dei* as an imperialist pretext. It does so because, while it does not eliminate the distinction, it can appreciate its own creatureliness by learning how to relate effectively with other creatures.

3. Conservation and Service

Humanity is placed within the natural order and has the function of dominating it (*radah*, Gen 1:26) and subduing it (*kabash*, Gen 1:28). This is strong language, but it must be contextualized to avoid poor misinterpretations. If the sovereign Creator values his work by repeatedly saying “It is good,” then when he orders humanity to dominate and subdue, he adopts the royal language of a lord addressing one of his representatives, charging him to go to every corner of his kingdom to assess its progress, report it, and actively contribute to its conservation, management, and restoration. In performing this function, humanity is called on to support techno-scientific enterprise (naming animals, doing taxonomy, producing scientific knowledge), to innovate (developing new techniques and new skills), and to manage (“and subdue it”). If the words *radah* and *kabash* continue to sound strong, this is balanced by the seemingly incongruous order of Genesis 2:15, to work and care for the earth. More specifically, the wide meaning of the terms covers the sense of serving, working for someone (*abad*) and taking care of and safeguarding (*shamar*). *Abad* and *shamar* indicate an action done in the name of and in favor of creation and not on behalf of human beings as such. Responsibility for control passes through service and attention to and caring for the suffering, the damage, and the delicate balance of creation on God’s behalf. A good way to safeguard is to strive as much as possible to favor a harmonious shalom for the ecosystem through both sustainable development models and productive policies, urbanization, and landscape management.

Returning to the commands concerning domination and service, we can use the apparent oxymoron *servant dominion*. This understanding is useful for an environmental ethic because it contains a balance between the

dimension of responsibility and that of care and conservation. This allows us to have the best tools to face the different circumstances in which we operate, getting as close as possible to God and Christ. It is, in fact, in the incarnation of Christ and redemption that we see this tension resolved. Thus, Christ's incarnation asserts the value of creatureliness, and redemption qualifies this value by pointing to the end of creation. At the same time, Christ embodies the servant king who controls reality while also serving to the point of sacrifice. Now, *mutatis mutandis*, the dominion that humans can implement is that of knowing and valuing reality and making responsible decisions about the management of creation.

In this sense, we have often talked about environmental *stewardship*, administration, and custodianship. Over the years, this definition has required further specification in light of problems arising with the interpretation of this concept. Stewardship, in particular, implies a condition in which humans are practically in control of nature when in reality they are not. Criticism has also been made that this concept leads to an attitude that is too top-down and not very participatory, as in the case of those who manage the assets of others with a certain detachment. In other words, if you are not the owner, then there is little incentive in showing real interest and being responsibly involved. We are seeing more and more that the tables are being turned: individual ownership of land is often connected with a purely commodified view of the earth, and this has repeatedly led to the environmental crisis in which we find ourselves in the present.

Having said that, the problem of participation remains, and the value of stewardship cannot be completely overlooked. At this point, it is worth reinforcing this concept, with the awareness that men and women are members of the biotic community, members of the community of creation, or co-creatures.³² If we link this concept to that of the covenant mentioned earlier, we see how in the biblical framework humanity, which is represented by the people of God, and the natural order, which is represented by the earth (promise), are both parties in the cosmic covenant that God established with Israel at the time of Moses, but which still has its full paradigmatic value even now.

Returning to servant dominion, which is carried out by co-creatures as part of a cosmic covenant, service completes (and is completed by) domination, because it entails taking responsibility for the needs of creation and caring for it without a "superiority complex" in relation to the elements of

³² See Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), chapter 3.

nature. Dominion and service therefore concretely dissolve the claims of mindless exploitation of creation, and together they assume the responsibility of coming into contact with other creatures without awe but with humility.

Conclusion

It is clear that creation care, once the many dimensions involved are understood, is realized through very different projects, since much work is to be done. A known risk one should be aware of is that, due to a lack of coordination, many human-resource-draining projects will be activated. It therefore becomes crucial to know the context in which one intends to operate and to work with a clear understanding of the past. Once we recognize that commitment to creation care is a call addressed to all humanity, not just parts of it, we must assess how effective pioneering or reinforcement actions are possible at a collective level.

Often the actors giving the initial impulse are the intermediate bodies. A flexible and dynamic organization will make building around a core of strong ideas possible, but without institutional and bureaucratic rigidity. It is through actions of associations, committees, and lobbies that institutions are called on to implement regulatory measures to achieve ecological objectives. When this happens, new spaces open up for further interventions and further demands on politics, education, and culture.

As we have seen, for an environmental ethic in the care of creation, it is necessary not only to verify how a paradigm responds systemically to ecological urgencies, but also to assess what degree of planning and management can have an effective long-term influence in moral and political choices. Careful observation will recognize how environmental issues necessarily have direct relationships with the dynamics of social, economic, and political justice, and with a plurality of world views.

The Relevance of Calvin's View of Work and Calling to Christians in Newly Industrialized Countries

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Abstract

In the context of the economies of Newly Industrialized Countries, this article surveys the understanding of work in Islam and Hinduism and contrasts them with John Calvin's notion of work and calling. The author analyzes Islamic traditions, classic Hindu texts, and Calvin's *Institutes* and *Commentaries*. While Islam puts a premium on religious work, and Hinduism defines work in light of its caste system, in a Reformed worldview, God values all types of work, and workers are God's stewards. This notion is of particular relevance to those involved in economic development.

In recent years a group of nations has been recognized as Newly Industrialized Countries. These countries are moving from agrarian to industrialized economies, and they are successfully harnessing the strengths of their workforces to produce and export products, thereby improving both their economies and standards of living. Some of these countries, such as India and China, may have an overall low *per capita* income due to their large populations, yet they have thriving economies.

In the late twentieth century, the sudden industrial expansion of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan led to their being described as

Newly Industrialized Countries. Other countries, such as Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Indonesia, China, and India, whose industries grew in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, also came to be considered in this category.¹ This phenomenon of industrialization brings with it great opportunities for people in all sectors of work, as industry impacts every area of labor.

In such contexts the issue of work becomes prominent. More jobs are created, and a new understanding of work and the dignity of labor arises. In class- and caste-conscious India, for example, Japanese investment in various industrial sectors, such as automobile manufacturing, brings a new understanding of the dignity of labor. There is a conscious attempt to make blue-collar workers understand that their role in the production process is crucial. This breaks down the feeling that the working class is not as important as the management sector.²

In Newly Industrialized Country economies the question may arise whether a person engaged in a particular work is doing something that is God-honoring, especially in Asian contexts, where there is a clear distinction between secular and sacred, the common and the holy, and laity and priests. A clear understanding of work, as a calling approved by God, is vital for the Christian.

John Calvin's contribution to the understanding of work and Christian calling can be applied to the growing industrial economies around the world, some of which have a significant Christian presence. Though generally remembered as a theologian, his view of the Christian life was not limited to spiritual issues; it encompassed all areas of life and society.

We propose broad surveys, first of work, its hierarchical features, and its relation to slavery; second, work in Islam and Hinduism; third, Calvin's understanding of Christian calling as it relates to all occupations and not just ecclesiastical calling; and finally, some evaluation.

I. The Understanding of Work

The hierarchical aspects of work in ancient times are best considered against the background of slavery. In the Old Testament, the Israelites became slaves

¹ "Newly Industrialized Country (NIC)," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/newly-industrialized-country>.

² The many multinational corporations that are coming into the country with the liberalization of its economy have brought with them a new understanding of the importance of work. The best known of these are the American fast food chains such as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Domino's Pizza.

in Egypt as a result of political changes, in which the rulers saw them as a threat to their nation. Conditions were increasingly difficult for them (Exod 1:8–22). In the Pentateuch, Moses warned the Israelites to treat slaves humanly. They were to remember that they too were slaves in Egypt. There were situations in which Israelites would become slaves to their own people. In such cases, there was an onus on masters to treat their slaves in a dignified and God-honoring manner (Lev 25:39–46; Deut 15:12–18).

In the New Testament, the presence of slavery is accepted, and no attempt was made to abolish it as part of the social order. Paul writes to slaves and masters about their responsibility to each other. The slave ought to obey as unto the Lord (Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–25), and the master needs to treat the slave kindly, as he himself is under God, the greater Master (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1).

Slavery and work went together in ancient times. Slaves were often spoils of war and made to work for their captors. As slavery became a recognized institution, the professions of slaves underwent complex changes. Slaves were not merely engaged in physical labor; some were literate and skilled and held different professions despite their social status.³ The different abilities, gifts, and learning of slaves gradually led to a hierarchy in occupations.⁴ Manual labor was on the lowest rank, while priestly, mental, and martial “work” occupied higher positions. This hierarchy is found in both religion and society.

The idea of priests being set apart for religious duties is common in most religions. A good example is the change that took place in the Roman Empire after Constantine became emperor. Jacob Burckhardt considers the exaltation of Christian martyrs as a force that challenged the imperial edicts, and with this came the organization of the church with hierarchical distinctions. “The choice of spiritual leaders or at least their confirmation remained in the hands of the communities, but these became more and more definitely to be distinguished from the *laity* as *clergy*.”⁵ This feudalistic structure is seen in ancient religion as well as society in medieval times. Medieval society was divided horizontally, with the king at the top followed by priests, knights, and peasants.⁶

³ “Slavery, Serfdom, and Forced Labour,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1974), 16:857.

⁴ An example is Tiro (who died in 4 B.C.); he was Marcus Tullius Cicero’s slave and freedman, and as his secretary helped to publish his works.

⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, trans. Moses Hadas (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 113.

⁶ Philip Schaff, *The Middle Ages*, vol. 5 of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907), 45–47.

II. *Work in Islam and Hinduism*

1. *Islam*

Islam claims to have a positive view of work. However, the 113 references to “work” in 108 verses of the Quran in the Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation refer primarily to work in the sense of righteousness or good work.⁷ In order to see “work” as an action it is necessary to go to the Hadith, or Islamic tradition that records the sayings and practices of the prophet Mohammed gathered by followers; of these the most authentic traditions are by Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, and it is these that will be considered. The following examples reveal Islam’s understanding of work.

Work is closely connected with charity or good works. For example, in response to a statement that every Muslim should give charity, a tradition answers that they should engage in work.⁸ The emphasis is not so much on work itself but work as a means of performing charitable deeds. A similar reference speaks about the necessity for every Muslim to give *sadaqa*, which is “voluntary charity.” The importance of *sadaqa* is shown in that one who cannot work can still give his share of charity by passive abstinence from evil. Even if one cannot work, he may acquire merit by passive abstinence.⁹ Similarly,

Narrated Al-Miqdam: The Prophet said, “Nobody has ever eaten a better meal than that which one has earned by working with one’s own hands. The Prophet of Allah, David, used to eat from the earnings of his manual labor.”¹⁰

Rather than good works, the accent here is on “working with one’s own hands.” Although the reference to David is cryptic, the point is that one may

⁷ Quran, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, <https://www.searchtruth.com/search.php?keyword=work&translator=2>.

⁸ “Narrated Abu Burda: from his father from his grandfather that the Prophet said, ‘Every Muslim has to give in charity.’ The people asked, ‘O Allah’s Prophet! If someone has nothing to give, what will he do?’ He said, ‘He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns).’ The people further asked, ‘If he cannot find even that?’ He replied, ‘He should help the needy who appeal for help.’ Then the people asked, ‘If he cannot do that?’ He replied, ‘Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds and this will be regarded as charitable deeds.’” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 24, Hadith 524, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=24&translator=1&start=40).

⁹ Sahih Muslim, Book 5, Hadith 2202, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=5&translator=2&start=60.

¹⁰ Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 34, Hadith 286, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=34&translator=1&start=20.

enjoy the blessings of his labor. Another reference to work in general is this:

Narrated Al-Aswad bin Yazid: "I asked, 'Aisha, What did the Prophet use to do at home?' She said, 'He used to work for his family, and when he heard the Adhan (call for prayer), he would go out.'"¹¹

History tells us that Mohammed was the founder of Islam as well as a warrior. If this hadith is authentic, it shows that he did not shun work that was not in keeping with his identity as a warrior and that prayer takes precedence over work, which is suspended during times of prayer.

Islamic tradition holds that even work done for religious purposes can be remunerated. A duty performed towards God is entitled to a reward.¹² When payment is made, the receiver may use it or give it in charity; this is a call to share what was received. For example, Fatima is advised to perform religious duties instead of being given additional assistance for her housework.

Abu Huraira reported that Fatima came to Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) and asked for a servant and told him of the hardship of household work. He said, "You would not be able to get a servant from us. May I not direct you to what is better than the servant for you? Recite Subhaana Allah thirty-three times, al-Hamdu li-Allah thirty-three times and Allah-o-Akbar thirty-four times as you go to bed." This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Suhail with the same chain of transmitters.¹³

This implies that work assigned to a person has to be done. The recitation expected of Fatima is puzzling, as it does not lighten her work in any way. As in the above instances, religious duties are more important than ordinary chores, and they in some way ease the burden of physical labor, although it is not clear how this is accomplished.

¹¹ Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 64, Hadith 276, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=64&translator=1&start=10.

¹² "Ibn al-Sa'di Maliki reported: 'Umar b. Khattab (Allah be pleased with him) appointed me as a collector of *Sadaqa*. When I had finished that (the task assigned to me) and I handed over that to him (to 'Umar, he commanded me to (accept) some remuneration (for the work). I said: I performed this duty for Allah and my reward is with Allah. He said: Take whatever has been given to you, for I also performed this duty during the time of the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him). He assigned me the task of a collector and I said as you say, and the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said to me: When you are given anything without your begging for it, (then accept it), eat it and give it in charity." Sahih Muslim, Book 5, Hadith 2275, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=5&translator=2&start=140.

¹³ Sahih Muslim, Book 35, Hadith 6580, https://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=35&translator=2&start=100.

2. Hinduism

The Hindu religious tradition in India is the soil in which the complex social order of the rigid caste system is rooted.¹⁴ This caste system led to the prosperity and happiness of the higher castes and the oppression of the lower. Robert Antoine describes caste as

a theocracy ruled by divinely appointed kings (*Kṣatriya*), who were assisted by priestly ministers and interpreters of the traditional code of behavior (*Brāhmins*), while cultivation and trade were in the hands of a third class (*Vaiśyas*). These three upper classes were the ruling classes of invaders who reduced the original settlers (*Sūdras*) to the state of serfdom.¹⁵

Though the last statement is debated, caste and its implications for Indian society have continued for millennia. The fourth servant caste of *Sudras* is oppressed in many ways, and their duties are spelled out in the ancient law book of the Hindus, *Manusmṛti* or the Laws of Manu:

IX.334. To serve brahmins who are learned in the Vedas, householders, and famous for virtue, is the highest duty of a sudra, which leads to beatitude.

IX.335. A sudra who is pure, the servant of his betters, gentle in his speech, and free from pride, and always seeks a refuge with brahmins, attains a higher caste.

IX.413. But a sudra ... may [be compelled] to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent [Lord] to be the slave of a brahmin.

IX.414. A sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate in him, who can set him free from it?¹⁶

From these laws it appears that the *sudras* are forever trapped in a hopeless situation. Even though IX.335 seems to imply that there is a way out

¹⁴ "Caste is a very complex reality which it is difficult to define. The best we can do is to try to enumerate the distinctive characters which may be said to apply to all castes: (i) A caste is a closed social group theoretically based on heredity; everyone belongs to the caste in which he is born. (ii) It possesses an independent organization, a head and a council, which may meet on special occasions. (iii) It has common festivals and common usages particularly in matters of marriage and food. (iv) Its members usually practice the same profession or trade, or at least related profession. (v) It has power to impose penalties on its members, the most grievous being expulsion from the caste." Robert Antoine, "Hindu Ethics: Special Ethics," in *Religious Hinduism: A Presentation and Appraisal*, by Jesuit Scholars, 2nd rev. ed. (Allahabad: St. Paul's Publications, 1964), 114.

¹⁵ Antoine, "Hindu Ethics," 115.

¹⁶ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), quoted in "The Laws of Manu, c. 1500 B.C.E.," Hanover College History Department, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/261manu.html>. See also *The Laws of Manu*, trans. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and Brian Smith (New York: Penguin, 1991).

for them, in reality it seems improbable. Though other castes do have to do some work, the *sudras*' fate seems sealed, and work is a perpetual, hereditary yoke. The *sudras* are fortunate compared to the *dalits*, who fall outside the four principal castes. *Dalit* is a word meaning downtrodden or oppressed, and *dalits* until recently were termed "untouchable" because of the menial work that they did but that no one else would do. When religion segregates human beings into classes according to tradition, and identity is bound with the kind of work done, there is no idea of dignity of labor.

In chapter 3 of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, written later than the *Laws of Manu*, work appears as a means of salvation. Work is not physical, but the performance of duty for salvation, presented as *Karma Yoga*, one of the paths of salvation in Hinduism.¹⁷

In Hinduism work has negative connotations viewed in terms of the caste system. Whereas the three ruling castes enjoyed the benefits of respectability in their occupations, the *sudras* had to serve the others. The plight of the untouchables is greater. These unfortunates were (and still are, in some places) compelled to work in subhuman conditions because of heredity. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi tried to elevate their social standing by calling them "children of God," or *harijan*, but, unfortunately, this term became another means of identifying them as inferior.

The oppressive caste system continues to have a bearing on India as a nation. The government, in its desire to accommodate the caste system, has introduced social benefits to some lower castes in the form of reserved jobs and study opportunities. This has brought unrest and dissatisfaction among the other castes. There are occasional cases of higher castes trying to pass as low caste in order to receive government benefits. A dire fact is that even today, after decades of independence, lower castes are prohibited from worshipping in Hindu temples or drawing water from village wells. Caste clashes often result in sporadic violence, including murder, rape, and arson.

In recent years the Christian church has begun to address the issue of caste by fighting for the cause of the *dalits* and the oppressed classes in Hindu society.

III. Calvin's Understanding of Calling and Work

During his second stay in Geneva, from 1541–1564, Calvin applied some of his experiences in Strasbourg "to address the issue of Christianity in the

¹⁷ A. C. Bhaktivendanta Swami Prabhupada, ed., *Bhagavad-Gita: As it Is*, rev. ed. (1872; repr., Mumbai: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986), 163–213.

public arena.”¹⁸ His thought on calling and work is significant. Work was not to be shunned for something higher, such as monastic life and meditation. In his understanding, work and calling are closely related. We work because God has called us to work.

Both Martin Luther and the Genevan Reformer saw work as something positive, though with differences.¹⁹ For instance, Luther believed that a person called to a particular occupation should remain in it for life. Calvin, however, provided for learning another trade and changing occupation.²⁰ Ian Hart observes that for Calvin, “the purpose of calling was that each one should serve his fellowmen, and in turn be served by them. ... Work there is a bond which unites a man to his neighbors; work provides mutual contact and communication.”²¹ This notion provides a foundation for an ideal community. Another major area of difference was usury. While Luther rejected interest and trade itself, Calvin had a positive view of business and lending of money on interest, with safeguards. He made a distinction between the prohibition of taking interest in the Old Testament and the taking and giving loans in Geneva. Whereas the former was because of poverty, in Geneva, loans were taken for investing in business and making a profit. Calvin says, “I conclude that it is necessary to judge usuries not according to some certain and particular statement of God, but according to the rule of fairness.”²²

Calvin was so broadminded in his understanding of the importance of trade and economic progress that he transformed Geneva into a model city, not simply as a haven for refugees, but as a hub for business and banking. Philip Schaff writes,

Efforts were made to give useful employment to every man that could work. Calvin urged the Council in a long speech, Dec. 29, 1544, to introduce the cloth and silk industry The factories were forthwith established and soon reached the highest degree of prosperity. The cloth and silk of Geneva were highly prized in Switzerland and France, and laid the foundation for the temporal wealth of the city. When Lyons ... surpassed the little Republic in the manufacture of silk, Geneva had already begun to make up for the loss by the manufacture of watches.²³

¹⁸ Alister McGrath, “Calvin and the Christian Calling,” *First Things* 94 (June/July 1999): 31–35, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1999/06/calvin-and-the-christian-calling>.

¹⁹ Ian Hart, “The Teaching of Luther and Calvin about Ordinary Work: 2. John Calvin,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 67.2 (1995): 121–35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²² John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989), 191–92, quoted in Hart, “The Teaching of Luther and Calvin,” 131.

²³ Philip Schaff, *The Swiss Reformation*, vol. 8 of *History of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 516–17. For a purely sociological explanation of the

Here was a Reformer who was willing to view life holistically. Many followers of Calvin have caught this vision.

Despite the trials he endured in Geneva, Calvin sees a “high calling” before him and writes to Sadolet,

I readily agree with you that, after this sanctification, we ought not to propose to ourselves any other object in life than to hasten towards that high calling; for God has set it before us as the constant aim of all our thoughts, and words, and actions.²⁴

This high calling is to be with Christ and is expressed in a prayer for suffering Christians in Europe:

In a particular manner, we commend unto thee our unhappy brethren who live dispersed under the tyranny of Antichrist, and deprived of the liberty of openly calling upon thy name ... that thou wouldst deign, O most indulgent Father, to support them ... so that they may never despond, but constantly persevere in thy holy calling.²⁵

The “holy calling” is faithfulness to God. However, calling is also to Christian living: “Now, although being called to do good works, we produce the fruits of our calling, as it is said, (Luke 1:75), that we have been redeemed in order to serve God in holiness and righteousness, we are however always encompassed with many infirmities while we live in this world.”²⁶

Calvin sees a general calling of God for all Christians, but also the role of pastor as a specific call to the task of the ministry. In discussing auricular confession from a biblical perspective, he writes,

Now I say that they [pastors] are better fitted than the others because the Lord has appointed them by the very calling of the ministry to instruct us by word of mouth to overcome and correct our sins, and also to give us consolation through assurance of pardon (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23).²⁷

flourishing trade and commerce in Protestant Europe, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958).

²⁴ John Calvin, “Reply by John Calvin to Letter by Cardinal Sadolet to the Senate and People of Geneva,” in John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 1:99.

²⁵ John Calvin, “Forms of Prayer for the Church / Catechism of the Church of Geneva,” in John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 2:101.

²⁶ John Calvin, “Brief Form of a Confession of Faith, for the Use of Those who Desire to have a Compendium of the Christian Religion Always at Hand,” in John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 2:139.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis

A pastor, by virtue of his call, is “better fitted” for the ministry.

Nevertheless, Calvin criticized monks for considering their calling unique and leading to perfection. Commenting on 2 Thessalonians 3:9, he states,

Indeed, in giving it this name [a state of acquiring perfection] they distinguish it from other ways of life as by a special mark. And who can bear such a great honor being given to an institution nowhere approved by even one syllable; and that all other callings of God are regarded as unworthy by comparison, though they have not only been commanded by his own sacred lips, but adorned with noble titles? And how great an injury, I beg of you, is done to God when some such forgery is preferred to all the kinds of life ordained by him and praised by his own testimony?²⁸

This judgment is to be viewed against the inordinate importance given to monastic orders and ascetic practices, which had a special place in the Roman Catholic Church and whose practitioners were honored for their seemingly meritorious actions. Calvin opposed the idea that monks have a superior calling compared to other people.

Similarly, referring to the admonishing of the lazy in Thessalonica (2 Thess 3:10), he says that there are different ways of working:

For whoever aids the society of men by his industry, either by ruling his family, or by administering public or private affairs, or by counseling, or by teaching, or in any other way, is not to be reckoned among the idle. For Paul censures those lazy drones who lived by the sweat of others. ... Of this sort are our monks and priests.²⁹

This is clarified when he explains the incident of Mary and Martha and the visit of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:38–42. Jesus commends Mary’s devotional attitude in contrast to Martha’s fretting over hospitality:

As this passage has been basely distorted into the commendation of what is called a Contemplative life, we must inquire into its true meaning, from which it will appear, that nothing was farther from the design of Christ, than to encourage his disciples to indulge in indolence, or in useless speculations.³⁰

He goes on to explain:

Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1940), 3.4.12 (1:535–36).

²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* 4.13.11 (2:1265–66).

²⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians*, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 44.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 2:104.

Luke says that *Mary sat at the feet of Jesus*. Does he mean that she did nothing else throughout her whole life? On the contrary, the Lord enjoins his followers to make such a distribution of their time, that he who desires to make proficiency in the school of Christ shall not always be an idle hearer ... for there is a time to hear, and a time to act.³¹

He then points out Martha's two mistakes: she went beyond what was necessary to entertain the Lord, who would have been satisfied with a simple meal, and by her actions she forfeited the opportunity to benefit from Jesus's visit, being distracted by "much serving."³² Once again, the distinction between contemplation and action is distinguished. If it appears that the Lord approves contemplation and devotion, he chides Martha for overdoing hospitality.

As far as common calling and work are concerned, Calvin refers to Genesis to show that work is an expectation of God. Commenting on Genesis 2:15, he writes,

Whence it follows that men were created to employ themselves in some work, and not to lie down in inactivity and idleness. This labor, truly, was pleasant, and full of delight, entirely exempt from all trouble and weariness; since however God ordained that man should be exercised in the culture of the ground, he condemned in his person, all indolent repose. Wherefore, nothing is more contrary to the order of nature, than to consume life in eating, drinking, and sleeping, while in the meantime we propose nothing to ourselves to do.³³

Ordinary work is essential for Calvin. God is the source of our gifts, and there is no place for considering spiritual callings superior to ordinary work:

Even the artisan with the humblest trade is good at it only because the Spirit of God works in him. For though these gifts are diverse, they all come from the one Spirit; it pleased God to distribute them to each one (I Cor. 12:4). This does not refer only spiritual gifts, which follow regeneration, but to all the sciences which concern our use of the common life.³⁴

Concerning the practical outworking of the knowledge of the call of God, Calvin says,

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 2:105.

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 66–67.

³⁴ Calvin commenting on Exodus 31:2, quoted in Hart, "The Teaching of Luther and Calvin," 127. Exodus 31:2 refers to the Bezalel to whom the Holy Spirit gives skill to produce artisan works. Though 1 Corinthians 12:4 seems to point to spiritual gifts, Calvin applies it to all callings and gifts.

The magistrate will discharge his functions more willingly; the head of the household will confine himself to his duty; each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God. From this will arise also a singular consolation: that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight.³⁵

For Calvin, knowledge of the call of God ought to help a person perform work faithfully and sincerely. This is relevant to working in industrial situations. Often there is a tendency to downplay the role and importance of those who work in blue-collar contexts; when such an attitude is present, payment tends to be lower than reasonable. Calvin believed in honest dealings and was opposed to the exploitation of labor, especially taking advantage when there is high unemployment and a significant number of people trying to find a means of sustenance. In another passage, Calvin writes,

When a man works in his labour to earn his living, when a woman does her housework, and when a servant does his duty, one thinks that God does not pay attention to such things, and one says they are secular affairs. ... If a chamber-maid sweeps the floor, if a servant goes to fetch water, and they do these things well, it is not thought to be of much importance. Nevertheless, when they do it offering themselves to God ... such labour is accepted from them as a holy and pure oblation.³⁶

This has particular reference to those whose service involves serving others. In a broad sense, all occupations involve service to others. When Calvin refers to chambermaids and water-fetchers, he extends the application to all walks of life, not just privileged callings such as those of magistrates, businesspeople, landlords, and other influential callings. This is particularly applicable to societies with hereditary categorization of labor, such as in the Indian caste system. It does not mean that those from castes marked for service to others are barred from a different category of work. Calvin elsewhere makes provision for even them to advance.

In his exhaustive study on Calvin's economic and social thought, André Biéler makes some critical observations on work. For Calvin, there is an intrinsic connection between man's work and God's work: "God's providential activity does not suppress man's free activity but on the contrary provides the foundation for it. Working freely is what God himself does."³⁷

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.10.6 (1:725).

³⁶ Calvin, "Sermon on 1 Cor 10:31–11:1" quoted in Hart, "The Teaching of Luther and Calvin," 128.

³⁷ André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, trans. James Greig, ed. Edward Dommen (1961; repr., Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches / World Council of Churches, 2005), 347.

Biéler finds a further link between the two by asserting that to fully understand work, we need “to grasp the profound meaning of the day of rest offered to human beings so that they may realize the meaning of God’s work and God’s forgiveness, apart from which no work is effective in God’s sight.”³⁸ This profound interrelationship between divine initiative and human response extends even to the salvific dimension. Commenting on Calvin’s thoughts on Exodus 20:8 (“remember the Sabbath day”), Biéler concludes, “The institution of the Sabbath therefore has as its aim not the stopping of human work first and foremost, but man’s sharing in divine sanctification—his involving himself in the activity through which God guides and saves the world.”³⁹ He concludes from Calvin’s observations,

Liberation from the yoke of oppression that weighs heavily in labour relations is a religious—not merely a social question. As reflecting God’s work, in which it is embodied, human work must be a labour of love, a labour of service and sacrifice, not work that enslaves.⁴⁰

Similarly, Biéler observes that “Calvin points out that the curse does not wholly do away with the blessing that was attached to work in the beginning. ‘Signs’ remain that give man the taste for work.”⁴¹ Calvin sees work as a calling:

Scripture uses this word “vocation” to show that a way of living can only be good and approved if God is its author. And this word “vocation” also means a calling, and the calling carries with it that God is beckoning with his finger and saying to each and every individual, “I want you to live in this way or that.” This is what we call “stations in life”—that is to say that one is not to work at what God condemns through his Word.⁴²

The close relationship between God’s work and man’s instills believers with confidence that God himself endorses their calling. Moreover, God’s example of work and rest reminds believers they can emulate this pattern.

For Calvin, there is no dichotomy between secular and sacred callings. Writing on divine providence and secondary causes, he observes, “Joab, though recognizing the outcome of the battle to be in God’s hand, has yielded not to idleness, but diligently carries out the duties of his calling.”⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 346–47.

³⁹ Ibid., 347.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 349.

⁴¹ Ibid., 354.

⁴² Calvin, Sermons LXI on *Deuteronomy* 8:14–20, *Calvini opera* 26:360, quoted in Biéler, *Economic and Social Thought*, 357.

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.17.9 (1:222).

Calvin sees the identity of Joab as a soldier as a calling of God. Calling for Calvin is not restricted to spiritual callings; it extends to all occupations.

Writing to the Duchess of Ferrara the year of his death (1564), Calvin tries to clarify David's sentiments for his enemies:

But when he [King David] says he holds the reprobate in mortal aversion, it cannot be doubted that he glories in an upright, pure, and well-regulated zeal, for which three things are requisite: first, that we should have no regard for ourselves nor our private interests; next, that we should possess prudence and discretion not to judge at random; and finally, that we observe moderation not to exceed the bounds of our calling.⁴⁴

Calvin's use of calling here is inclusive; the king should observe the limits of his calling as king of Israel. Similarly, in discussing man's natural endowments not being completely erased, he writes, "For why is one person more excellent than another? Is it not to display in common nature God's special grace which, in passing many by, declares itself bound to none? Besides this, God inspires special activities, in accordance with each man's calling."⁴⁵ When he says "each man's calling," he refers to every person having a divine calling.

Writing about the eighth commandment, "Thou shall not steal," Calvin comments, "For he who does not carry out what he owes to others according to the responsibility of his own calling both withholds and appropriates what is another's."⁴⁶ Here again, "calling" is used to describe any occupation that is done by men and women.

In a passage discussing the need to fulfill our callings, Calvin writes,

Finally, this point is to be noted: the Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling. ... And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living "callings." Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life.⁴⁷

Knowing the call of God keeps us from vacillating, as it gives us confidence to fulfill our calling, knowing that it is God who has called us. William Bouwsma writes, "His doctrine of the calling contributed in various ways to the efficiency of work, notably as it promoted the division of labor."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ John Calvin, "Letter 664, to the Duchess of Ferrara," in John Calvin, *Letters 1559–1564*, vol. 7 of *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, John Calvin Collection, version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1998), 366.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.17 (1:276).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.8.45 (1:409).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.10.6 (1:724).

⁴⁸ William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199.

In discussing the views of Philipp Melanchthon and Calvin on the role of the civil magistrate, Steinmetz writes, “While Melanchthon grounds the state in both human reason and divine ordination, Calvin stresses divine ordination alone. ... Rulers must be obeyed, not on the grounds of human necessity, but on the grounds of obedience to God.”⁴⁹ John McNeil observes that “among the vocations, none is more honorable than that of the magistrate.”⁵⁰

Calvin sees the success of work as being due to God’s blessings. However much we put effort into work, it is of no use unless God blesses it. Hart refers to Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain”:

The Lord does not want us to be like logs of wood, or to sit idle. He expects us to put to use whatever abilities we may have But ... he warns them that hard work wins success only so far as God blesses our labour. ... Whatever they attempt will quickly come to nothing, unless the grace of God alone sustains it and makes it to prosper.⁵¹

Similarly, in Calvin’s Genevan Catechism, in answer to why Christians should ask God to “Give us this day our daily bread” (question 276), he writes,

Though we are to labour, and even sweat in providing food, we are not nourished either by our own labour, or our own industry, or our own diligence, but by the blessing of God by which the labour of our hands, that would otherwise be in vain, prospers. Moreover, we should understand that even when abundance of food is supplied to our hand, and we eat it, we are not nourished by its substance, but by the virtue of God alone. It has not any inherent efficacy in its own nature, but God supplies it from heaven as the instrument of his own beneficence.⁵²

This understanding of daily provision as coming primarily from God gives calling and work a different perspective, since the blessing of God makes our labor fruitful. Hart believes that this idea flows from “Calvin’s belief in providence which is active not just in a general way but even in the smallest details of each person’s activities.”⁵³ On the unfaithful steward in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:26–30), Calvin comments,

⁴⁹ David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 204–5.

⁵⁰ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 224.

⁵¹ Quoted in Hart, “The Teaching of Luther and Calvin,” 129–30.

⁵² John Calvin, *Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Being a Form for the Instruction for Children*, http://www.reformed.org/documents/calvin/geneva_catechism/geneva_catechism.html.

⁵³ Hart, “The Teaching of Luther and Calvin,” 130.

Christ means that there will be no excuse for the indolence of those who both conceal the gifts of God, and waste their time in idleness. Hence also we infer that no manner of life is more praiseworthy in the sight of God, than that which yields some advantage to human society.⁵⁴

IV. Evaluation

The idea of work in Islam and Hinduism is contingent on each religion's understanding of the future life. Islam has a linear idea of history: humans live in submission to Allah because they have to give account to him on the last day, and this is why work in Islam is oriented to attaining spiritual merit. Prayer and religious duties take precedence over work. Although Islam does not have a clear-cut understanding of work, Islamic societies have produced some outstanding examples of art, calligraphy, and architecture. In many ways, Islam equates work with deeds of righteousness. There are descriptive references to work, but there is no philosophy of work and its necessity for daily living. Prayer and other religious duties take precedence over work. The goal of all work is spiritual, to please Allah. However, work may be substituted with passive abstinence from evil to achieve merit, and it is closely linked with voluntary charity or *sadaqa*.

Hinduism, unlike Islam, has a cyclic philosophy of life with its teaching of transmigration, the cycle of birth and death, from which humankind can be free when *moksha* (release from the cycle of rebirth) is attained. This idea offers another chance in the hereafter to make good what was lacking in this life, but in theory, only the three higher castes are closer to liberation than others.

In contrast, calling and work go together in Calvin's understanding. He uses the word "calling" in different ways, referring to spiritual matters but also to God calling believers to their occupations. It is wrong to exalt religious callings over the secular callings in society. The exaltation of contemplative religion as superior to ordinary calling, so prevalent in the sixteenth century, is unbiblical. Ordinary work is vital because God has called people to do it. When he blesses humans, they become good stewards. There are various callings, some of which are higher than others, but each plays a unique role in society. The success of work depends not on the labor of humankind but on the blessing of God.

Calvin's understanding of calling and work is relevant to Newly Developing Countries. In these economies, Christians find themselves taking employment opportunities ranging from investment, management, administration,

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, 2:331.

and human resources to skilled and unskilled labor. The question is often asked, “What is the importance of my occupation in the wider scheme of God’s work in the world today—especially in my country and in my society?” Calvin provides a fresh prism through which to view work. God calls his people to a variety of occupations in which they serve the common cause of glorifying God. Each person has a calling to a particular occupation by God, yet there is room for changing from one occupation to another. Ordinary work of any kind takes on new importance, as it is *God* who has called the Christian to the task. No amount of hard work will produce any result unless God blesses it.

Such an understanding of work transforms Christians’ attitudes toward their occupations, and Christians who have this understanding will work harder, be more faithful to their employers, have a positive attitude to work, seek to be a positive influence in society, and actively be part of it. They will understand this once they understand that God has indeed called everyone to work irrespective of the nature of that work. Henry Van Til rightly states, “Every man has a divine calling to fulfill the cultural mandate, for all things are ours, but we are Christ’s. However, we must exercise moderation, patience, and fidelity in our daily vocation, working as unto the Lord before the face of God (*Coram Deo*).”⁵⁵

This vision transmits a message of hope to each person in God’s plan. Anyone serving in any industry, commerce, or business, in whatever profession, benefits from knowing God calls them to their work. The church should emphasize that work and rest go together. Moreover, work should not be viewed as something to be done slavishly but as something that believers engage in wholeheartedly. Realizing this truth, they will work diligently and discover their important calling in the higher purpose of the kingdom of God.

⁵⁵ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 109.

Corruption, Bribery, African Concepts of God, and the Gospel

PHILLIPUS J. (FLIP) BUYS

Abstract

Corruption and bribery have become a disastrous problem in Sub-Saharan Africa. A survey of the regular reports of Transparency International reveals how this societal ill has reached pandemic proportions. Although several governments and organizations talk a lot about corruption and appoint special commissions to investigate it, there is a widespread perception that so far only a few branches of the huge tree of corruption and bribery have been lopped off and very little has been done to root out corruption from society. To get to the root of the issue, this article endeavors to compare the ethical implications of African traditional religious concepts of God with God's self-revelation and to apply this comparison to corruption and bribery.

Introduction

Professor Patrick Lumumba, who served for several years as the director of the Kenyan Anti-Corruption Commission, delivered the keynote speech at the third Anti-Corruption Convention in Kampala, Uganda, in 2013. He sounded the alarm and stated that one of the main reasons why Africa remains the poorest continent on earth is that Africa tolerates high levels of corruption.

According to him, “Africa has been invaded by its own sons and daughters who are forever looting its resources in the name of governance and democracy.”¹ About the corruption and bribery among leaders, he said, “We elect hyenas and expect them to take care of the goats.”² Finally, he raised the question, Are we children of a lesser God? Although he did not explore the relationship between corruption and African concepts of God, his remark indicated the need to consider the relation between the two.

What is corruption? According to a standard definition, corruption is “the abuse of public or private office for personal gain.” Vishal Mangalwadi defines it this way:

Corruption involves abusing one’s power to harass, coerce, or deceive others (individuals, institutions, or the state) to acquire value (money, service, goods, ideas, time, property, or honor) without returning proportionate value to them.³

A survey by Transparency International states, “Nearly 75 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to have paid a bribe in 2015—some to escape punishment by the police or courts, but many [are] forced to pay to get access to the basic services that they desperately need.”⁴

In his book on the roots of sin, Professor Yusufu Turaki⁵ from Nigeria convincingly argues that you cannot kill a tree by cutting off a few of its branches. You need to dig down and cut off its roots. Turaki uses Holy Scriptures as spade and ax as he digs down to examine the roots of sin. His knowledge of traditional African beliefs and values adds depth to his discussion of the origin, nature, effects, and power of corruption in the lives of African people. He shows the relevance of each member of the Holy Trinity to our struggle against the root sins of self-centeredness and pride, greed and lust, as well as anxiety and fear. He lists bribery as one of the outstanding examples of a branch of the deeper-lying sin of greed, which is caused by being alienated from the Triune God of Scriptures.

¹ Patrick L. O. Lumumba, “Corruption in Africa: Keynote Speech at the 3rd Anti-Corruption Convention in Kampala, Uganda,” December 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cbEuwqKKqE>.

² Ibid.

³ As quoted by Dwight Vogt, “What’s the Big Deal about Corruption? Applied Biblical Worldview,” Disciple Nations Alliance, <https://www.disciplenations.org/article/whats-big-deal-corruption/>.

⁴ “People and Corruption: Africa Survey 2015—Global Corruption Barometer,” Transparency International, December 1, 2015, https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/people_and_corruption_africa_survey_2015.

⁵ Yusufu Turaki, *The Trinity of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 74.

The multiple cases and embarrassing scale of corruption currently surfacing in the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture in South Africa⁶ (publicly referred to as the Zondo Commission) and other related enquiries, placed the Republic of South Africa seventy-third out of 180 countries that participated in a Transparency International (TI) survey. This survey ranks participating countries according to their perceived levels of corruption in the public sector. Based on information emerging from the Zondo Commission's proceedings, political analyst Marianne Mertin recently published an article in which she revealed that state capture in South Africa during the second term of president Jacob Zuma's administration hovers around R1.5 trillion of the budget for 2019:

Put differently: State Capture has wiped out a third of South Africa's R4.9-trillion gross domestic product, or effectively annihilated four months of all labour and productivity of all South Africans, from hawkers selling sweets outside schools to boardroom jockeys.⁷

The *Corruption Perceptions Index* 2018, which gave South Africa a score of 43 out of 100, was shared by Corruption Watch. Corruption Watch's executive director, David Lewis, said that "South Africa's experience of state capture was a textbook example of the relationship between corruption and the undermining of democracy."⁸

In a new report, titled *Corruption in Uniform: When Cops Become Criminals*, the civil society group Corruption Watch received 1,440 reports of corruption against the police between 2012 and 2018 in South Africa, with instances of bribery, abuse of power, and failure to act leading the complaints. The report released on June 13, 2019, analyzes the claims lodged against the South African Police Service (SAPS) with the antigraft group since its 2012 establishment, describing "alarming levels of corruption" across the country.⁹

⁶ <https://www.sastatecapture.org.za/>.

⁷ Marianne Merten, "State Capture Wipes out Third of SA's R4.9-Trillion GDP—Never Mind Lost Trust, Confidence, Opportunity," *Daily Maverick*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-03-01-state-capture-wipes-out-third-of-sas-r4-9-trillion-gdp-never-mind-lost-trust-confidence-opportunity/?fbclid=IwAR0TwXZAZimecYx9Y5ie2o-C5AAfuj4OdejbLrAC7V7blJqXugw39YmPFc94#.XPPIKexVB2J>.

⁸ Sizwe Orkonneyyoo Banzi, "Global Corruption Survey Releases Devastation Stats of Corruption in South Africa," *Daily Trends in South Africa*, January 29, 2019, http://www.trends-daily.co.za/trending/global-corruption-survey-releases-devastation-stats-of-corruption-in-south-africa/?fbclid=IwAR2IE8CsG5wcXOfmbmAMQ7RhTZCU3ATe5G_wp8A6yUUiuSm664l5gXQdwn4.

⁹ Greg Nicolson, "Corruption Watch: Bribery, Abuse of Power Lead Reports of Police Corruption," *Daily Maverick*, June 13, 2019, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-06-13-corruption-watch-bribery-abuse-of-power-lead-reports-of-police-corruption/?tl_in-

Even though African leaders declared 2018 as the African year of anti-corruption, that commitment has not yet translated into concrete progress.¹⁰

I. Four Personal Experiences

I have worked for 25 years as a cross-cultural missionary and theological educator in one of the old “homelands” in South Africa. In that homeland, I was told by locals that the tribal king rules over everything. If you want to see him to get permission to work in the area, you first had to respect him with a “gift.” I was told, “This is our culture: You won’t get his ears if his eyes have not first seen the gift that you have given to his indunas.”

Then, however, I quickly learned that this rule also applies to all other levels of government. For instance, we once had a youth group from abroad who wanted to come and help a local church erect a church building. The local church had to find a suitable site in the township. Even after months of struggle, I had not succeeded in finding a site; the local municipality told me that all the sites were already taken. When I told the church that I was going to inform the group from abroad that we would have to cancel their trip and drop the plans for their visit, a lady from the church pleaded that we had to give the church one more week to look for a site. After three days she phoned me to inform me that she had found a site and that I must go with her and the treasurer of the church to the municipal offices to fill out all the necessary documents and pay for the site. When I went there, we filled out all the formal documents to buy the site, which was sold for a very reasonable price. When we got ready to depart, the official asked the lady: “Now when do I get my ‘cool drink’ money?” I then realized that she secured a site for building a church by offering to pay the municipal clerk a bribe.

An African pastor in another township told me that his church had to pay a bribe to a municipal councilor of the ruling political party of the township to receive a site to erect the church building and orphanage that they were planning to serve their community.

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¹⁰ Banzi, “Global Corruption Survey Releases Devastation Stats of Corruption in South Africa.”

I once traveled by car from South Africa to Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in a conference. A friend warned me to make extra copies of all the car's official documents and take them along. He had had the experience of his documents "disappearing" when he handed them in at the customs office at the border and then having to pay a bribe to be allowed entrance into the country. I am glad that I was forewarned because I had the same experience. At one counter in the customs office, the official requested my car's documents and instructed me to go and wait at the next counter. At the next counter, the official again asked to see my car's documents. When I told him that I had handed them in at the previous counter, he said that he had not received them and made it clear that the problem could be solved with some "cool drink" money. He was not happy when I pulled another set of copies of the documents from my bag and handed them to him and he had to let me proceed without paying him "cool drink" money.

Many more such experiences in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda have taught me that the culture of bribery and corruption is deeply rooted in Africa. These practices have led me to research the worldview and especially the traditional African concepts of God that are at the root of widespread bribery and corruption.

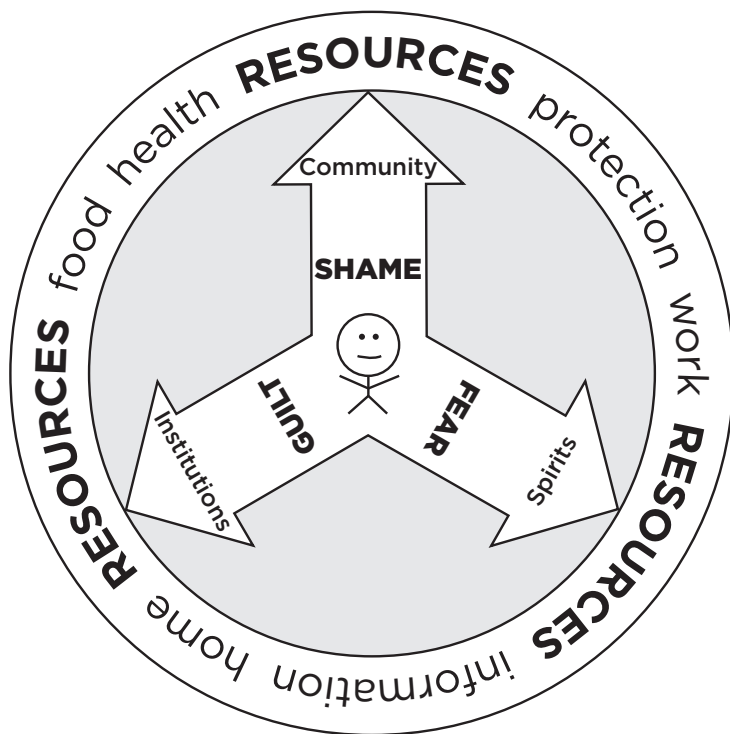
II. Corruption and Bribery in Various Cultures and Worldviews

Several authors have revealed the influence of worldview and culture on poverty, corruption, and bribery in different parts of the world but pointed out that it grows from different roots in various cultures.¹¹ Jayson Georges explained that guilt, shame, and fear in the worldview of people are the moral emotions that they use to organize the distribution of resources between people.¹² With a circle illustration (see Figure 1), Georges visually depicts how a person (in the center) acquires essential resources (the outer ring), and the three potential emotional barriers to acquisition.

¹¹ J. A. Van Rooy, "The Christian Gospel as a Basis for Escape from Poverty in Africa," *In die Skriflig* 33.2 (1999): 235–53; Darrow L. Miller and Stan Guthrie, *Disciplining Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle WA: YWAM Publishing, 1998); B. J. van der Walt, *Kultuur, lewensvisie en ontwikkeling: 'n Ontmaskering van die gode van onderontwikkelde Afrika en die oorontwikkelde Weste*, Reeks F2: No. 76 (Potchefstroom: Wetenskaplike bydraes van die PU vir CHO, 1999).

¹² Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Kindle Edition, 2014).

Figure 1. Illustration showing how guilt, shame, and fear in the worldview of people are the moral emotions they use to organize the distribution of resources (Jayson Georges).



Dr. Tom Julien, Executive Director Emeritus of Encompass World Partners, summarized it well in his endorsement of Georges's book:

Sin is the universal malady of mankind. For some cultures sin brings guilt; others feel shame; still others, fear. An understanding of the roots of the symptom provides the path to the solution, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹³

It is not the intention of this article to make a comparison between African and Western European or Asian ethics on corruption and bribery. Traditional European ethics is not superior to traditional African ethics. On the contrary, the influence of modern European ethics, with its deeply ingrained individualism and disregard for the value of the community and for parental authority, is a severe threat to transparency. There is also truth

¹³ Ibid.

in the argument that colonialism was a selfish exploitation of Africa's wealth.¹⁴ The reports of Transparency International also reveal even worse statistics of corruption and bribery in other parts of the world.¹⁵ The corruption index of Transparency International shows that the corruption in many countries is worse than in South Africa and other African countries.¹⁶

Heather Marquette has concluded in several research papers that academics and activists are unlikely to be able to prove a direct causal relationship between religion and corruption—either positive or negative—and certainly not with the methodologies employed so far.¹⁷ She does acknowledge that in many parts of the world, religion maintains a primordial hold on people's values, attitudes, and behavior that democratic institutions simply do not have, and for that reason it remains an important potential source of power. Unfortunately, she failed to do intensive research on aspects of the traditional African worldview and especially concepts of God that may open the way for corruption and bribery.

This article wants to explore how the traditional African mindset determines the nature and extent of African responses and views about life in general, and specifically how African concepts of God provide roots for corruption and bribery. In this regard, it is crucial to acknowledge that the

¹⁴ The views of Oginga Odinga, a prominent Kenyan politician, deserve more in-depth consideration. He was interviewed by Professor Henry Oduka, an expert in the sage philosophy or worldview of Africa. Cf. Henry Oduka Oduka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Henry Oduka Oduka, *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs* (Nairobi: Initiatives, 1992). Odinga was regarded as a philosophical sage who raised critical questions about what people usually take for granted, and he played a vital role in the struggle for the independence of his country. However, three decades later, he regarded post-independence as in most cases wasted years and asked for a second liberation—this time from not white but black domination. According to him, independence was given formally but not in reality. The previous colonial powers still applied indirect economic rule by winning the cooperation of greedy African leaders. Real freedom, however, required also cultural and economic freedom from the outside world. According to Odinga, the first liberation instead brought economic stagnation, mismanagement, inefficiency, a lack of accountability, political dictatorship, and more. To him, colonialism was like a naked poison being forced into one's mouth while one is struggling to reject it. Post-independence, on the other hand, is like a poison mixed with your favorite drink like greed. But the aim of both was the same.

¹⁵ For a similar perspective, see J. A. van Rooy, "Scriptural Ethical Principles and Traditional African Ethics," *In die Skriflig* 31.1–2 (1997): 94.

¹⁶ See the graph "Corruption in the World," in "The 2014 Corruption Perception Index," Eyewitness News, <http://ewn.co.za/Media/2014/12/03/The-2014-Corruption-Perceptions-Index>.

¹⁷ Heather Marquette, "Whither Morality? 'Finding God' in the Fight against Corruption," (International Development Department, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham, Birmingham: Working Paper 41—2010); Heather Marquette, "Corruption, Religion and Moral Development," Pre-print chapter submitted for the *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Matthew Clarke (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, January 2013), https://www.academia.edu/2643869/Handbook_of_Research_on_Religion_and_Development.

religious mindset, conditions, and molds define and shape traditional African conceptions, perspectives, beliefs, values, morals, behavior, attitude, views, and practices.¹⁸

As most of the biblical references to corruption and bribery refer to God's revelation of his character and the relation between him and his people—as will be indicated later in this article—the main focus in the summary of African traditional religion and worldview will now focus on traditional African concepts of God.

III. African Concepts of God and Their Implications for Ethics and Stewardship

Although speaking of “African Culture and Worldview” entails an enormous generalization, several researchers have pointed out that there are typical aspects of African culture found on the continent of Africa.

Turaki, along with many other scholars, identifies five fundamental beliefs that are found throughout Africa as the building blocks of African traditional religion, philosophy, and worldview.¹⁹ These five fundamental theological beliefs in African traditional religion are beliefs in (1) impersonal (mystical) powers; (2) belief in spirit beings; (3) belief in divinities/gods; (4) belief in a Supreme Being; and (5) belief in a hierarchy of spiritual beings and powers.

Based on his research over many years, J. A. van Rooy also indicated how the idea of limited cosmic good is intertwined with the five beliefs listed by Turaki.²⁰ Cosmic “good does not refer ... in the first place to goods in the sense of material possessions, but rather to vital force, power, prestige, influence, health, and good luck.”²¹

Although all these fundamental beliefs are related, I will now focus on Africa's belief in a Supreme Being and belief in a hierarchy of spiritual beings and powers.

It is significant that theologians who defend Africans' “knowledge” of God before the Christian gospel came to Africa base their arguments on the

¹⁸ In this regard very valuable insights have been gained from Yusufu Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods: A Method in Theology* (Potchefstroom: Scientific Contributions of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1999).

¹⁹ Turaki, *The Trinity of Sin*; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969); John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1970); Gabriel M. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986); Gabriel M. Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho Tswana* (Rotterdam: A. Balkema, 1976).

²⁰ Van Rooy, “The Christian Gospel as a Basis for Escape from Poverty in Africa,” 235–53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

African belief that God is like a great African chief, so awesome and unapproachable that petitioners cannot reach him except through his intermediaries. Turaki writes,

The God who is above the lesser gods seems “not to be intimately involved or concerned with man’s world. Instead, men seek out the lesser powers to meet their desires.” This leads people to turn to impersonal powers, divinities, ancestors, and spirit beings for help. God (the Supreme Being) is only occasionally mentioned, remembered, or approached.²²

This belief seems to foster a form of spirituality that does not stress intimacy with God but with the lesser beings, divinities, or ancestors. It weakens the development of a robust Christian spirituality and one’s intimate relationship with God. Researchers on African ethical codes²³ agree that the

code of norms is not related to any personal communion with God, and therefore has a strongly *legalistic* character. “It is not done,” “It is taboo,” is sufficient motivation for declaring an action forbidden. Tradition is sufficient authority. For the same reason this code of norms is *strongly negative*, concerned with what is forbidden rather than with positive behaviour.²⁴

Spirituality without a strong sense of the presence of God lacks a strong concept of the holiness, righteousness, presence, and intimate care and grace of God.²⁵

It follows that the only persons worthy to approach the great chief directly are those nearest to him in rank. In the same way, the beings who can approach God directly are the glorified ancestors or the great deities who are nearest to him. Church leaders of African-initiated churches (AIC) then also compare the rituals of sacrifices to deities with the practices of sacrifices prescribed in the Pentateuch and Old Testament.²⁶

²² Yusufu Turaki, “Sharing the Burden of Defending the Gospel,” World Reformed Fellowship, <http://wrfnet.org/resources/2008/01/sharing-burden-defending-gospel>.

²³ Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); John S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (London: SPCK, 1975); Malcolm J. McVeigh, *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity* (Cape Cod: Claude Stark, 1974); Emefie I. Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981); Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana*.

²⁴ Van Rooy, “Scriptural Ethical Principles and Traditional African Ethics,” 95.

²⁵ Turaki, *The Trinity of Sin*, 25.

²⁶ Nicolas Nyawuza has shown through empirical research how many pastors of AIC churches use Numbers 19 to include typical traditional African cleansing rituals (called *hlambulula* in the isiZulu language) in their Christian worship services. Cf. Nicolas Nyawuza, “Purification in an African Context from a Missio-Dei Perspective: Empowering Pastors of African Independent Churches at Leandra to Interpret the Cleansing Rituals of Numbers 19 from a Christ-Centred

Harry Sawyerr, a Catholic Church Canon, writes,

First of all, we must remember that life among Africans is communal and therefore we must accept the notion that their God is thought of in terms of the communal system to which they belong. ...

In relation to this, we have to bear in mind that, in African communities, there is a clear practice of rule by kings or chiefs, and that these chiefs are not easily approachable and are therefore reached only through intermediaries. For all practical purposes, the chief is distant from ordinary men. Even if the chief is present, a petitioner would request the intermediary to pass his plea to the chief.²⁷

Sawyerr then suggests that the African's attitude to God is a reflection of his experience of his relationship with his chiefs, influenced in certain respects by his attitude to the ancestral spirits.²⁸

Van Rooy argues that "since the cosmic good is limited," Africans believe that

the amount of good possessed or controlled by a particular person or people can only be increased at the expense of others. ... Power and influence may be legitimately increased by a chief or leader, since such persons are regarded as the incorporation of the communal good, the pivotal point of the vital force of the group. This idea is projected onto prestigious church leaders.²⁹

This is the same projection that often happens with leaders in prosperity gospel churches. Africans believe that it is the right of a chief to be wealthy and that the more they sacrifice themselves to enrich the chief or tribal leader, the more they themselves will have life force.

Rooy adds,

Power is sought for its own sake, not for doing good to anyone else, but only for doing good to oneself. This not only implies that people seek power for themselves, but also that people admire power for its own sake, and are impressed with power more than anything else. People do not admire self-sacrifice or devotion to noble ideals. They tend to regard that as foolishness, or suspect people who maintain those principles and follow those ideals of having sinister hidden motives. In an ethic where power has become the highest norm, suffering for what is good and right and noble does not make sense. Moral good as conformation to a universal

Redemptive Perspective: A Case Study" (Master's diss., Campus of the North-West University, Potchefstroom, 2013).

²⁷ As quoted by Leonard Nyirongo, *The Gods of Africa or the Gods of the Bible? The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Series F2: Brochures of the Institute for Reformational Studies 70 (Potchefstroom: Scientific Contributions of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1997), 16.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Van Rooy, "The Christian Gospel as a Basis for Escape from Poverty in Africa," 238.

norm for the common good or for the sake of obedience to God does not make sense [in traditional African thinking]. ...

One of the manifestations in Africa of this obsession with power for its own sake is the many dictatorships, presidents-for-life and perhaps even the many one-party states. There are still many dictatorships in Africa, and African peoples put up with whatever these dictators do with a remarkable degree of long-suffering, because the power of these people impresses them.³⁰

African Christians sometimes believe that they share in the power and prestige of the big chief. Therefore, chiefs or people higher up in the hierarchy will seldom be held accountable for corruption and bribery.

In Africa ethical norms, rules of conduct, are not regulated according to a supposed divine law, but according to several other principles, such as the striving after power, the balance of cosmic good, obedience to the ancestors and their traditions.³¹

In his research on poverty in Africa, van Rooy came to the following conclusion:

I would venture to say that, if all other factors change for the better, and this factor of an unbiblical worldview does not change, Africa will remain chained in poverty. On the other hand, if none of the other factors change, but this one factor does change radically, Africa can become a shining example of freedom from poverty.³²

IV. *God's Self-Revelation, Corruption, and Bribery*

It is significant that when God introduces himself and his character, he immediately refers to bribery:

The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.” (Deut 10:17–18 ESV)

On the one hand, his absolute sovereignty, majesty, and holiness are introduced: He is “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome.” On the other hand, he has tender care for the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner, and for their daily needs. Such a description does not admit to the reality of other gods but emphasizes the absolute

³⁰ Ibid., 244.

³¹ Ibid., 249.

³² Ibid., 251.

uniqueness and incomparability of the Lord and his exclusive right to sovereignty over his people (cf. Deut 3:24; 4:35, 39). As Lord over all, he cannot be enticed or coerced into any partiality through influence peddling (v. 17) and is the special advocate of defenseless persons who are so often victims of such unscrupulous behavior (v. 18).³³

The standard commentary of Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch summarizes as follows:

To set forth emphatically the infinite greatness and might of God, Moses describes Jehovah the God of Israel as the “God of gods,” i.e., the supreme God, the essence of all that is divine, of all divine power and might (cf. Psalm 136:2),—and as the “Lord of lords,” i.e., the supreme, unrestricted Ruler (“the only Potentate,” 1 Timothy 6:15), above all powers in heaven and on earth, “a great King above all gods” (Psalm 95:3). Compare Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16, where these predicates are transferred to the exalted Son of God, as the Judge and Conqueror of all dominions and powers that are hostile to God. The predicates which follow describe the unfolding of the omnipotence of God in the government of the world, in which Jehovah manifests Himself as the great, mighty, and terrible God (Psalm 89:8), who does not regard the person (cf. Leviticus 19:15), or accept presents (cf. Deuteronomy 16:19), like a human judge.³⁴

The fear of God and transparency before people are criteria for godly leadership avoiding corruption and bribery. The words of Exodus 18:21 are clear:

Moreover, look for able men from all the people, *men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe*, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. (Exod 18:21 *esv*; emphasis added)

As Douglas Stuart comments on this text, “Contrary to the Israelite priesthood or the ancient Near Eastern monarchy, the Israelite judiciary was to be appointed on the basis of honesty and ability rather than occupy an office automatically by reason of being born into a hereditary role.”³⁵ Keil and Delitzsch add, Moses “was to select able men (אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִּל, *men of moral strength*, 1 Kings 1:52) as judges, men who were God-fearing, sincere, and unselfish (gain-hating).”³⁶

³³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 203–4.

³⁴ Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:899.

³⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006). 418.

³⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:377.

The primary meaning of the fear of God is veneration and honor, reverence, and awe. John Murray writes, “The fear of God is the soul of godliness.”³⁷ It is the attitude that elicits from our hearts adoration and love, reverence and honor, focusing with awe not primarily upon the wrath of God but upon the majesty, holiness, amazing love, forgiveness, and transcendent glory. This concept is often given as a key to a holistic godly life and is not an option, as the following passages show:

- “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10 ESV)
- Live in the fear of the LORD always (Prov 23:17)
- “Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28 ESV)
- In all things obey, fearing the Lord (Col 3:22)
- “Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers in reverent fear” (1 Pet 1:17 NIV)

True fear of God is a childlike fear. The Puritan Wilhelmus à Brakel speaks of a filial fear that children have for their parents: “They cannot bear to hear someone speak a dishonouring word about their parents; it grieves them at their heart and they will defend them with all their might.”³⁸

To fear God is a combination of holy respect and glowing love. It is at the same time

- a consciousness of being in the presence of true Greatness and Majesty,
- a thrilling sense of privilege,
- an overflow of respect and admiration,
- and perhaps supremely, a sense that God’s opinion about my life is the only thing that really matters.

To someone who fears God, his fatherly approval means everything, and to lose it is the greatest of all griefs. To fear God is to have a heart that is sensitive to both his God-ness and his graciousness. It means to experience great awe and a profound joy simultaneously, understanding who God is and what he has done for us.

³⁷ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 229.

³⁸ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Escondido, CA: The Ephesians Four Group, 1999), 2:430.

1. Childlike Fear of God Produces Integrity

Nehemiah is described as a model of integrity. The governors of his time reigned through bribery and corruption. Nehemiah 5:15 says that the preceding governors “placed a heavy burden on the people Their assistants also lorded it over the people. However, out of the fear of God, [he] did not act like that” (NIV). Where leaders share this sense of awareness that we live *coram Deo*, before the face of God, a new honesty will mark their speech and make them stand out in the world.

2. An Antidote to the Fear of Others

A holy fear is a source of joy (Ps 2:11) and a fountain of life (Prov 14:27). Therefore it produces boldness and bravery. In times of persecution, the fear of God will dominate the fear of man and cause God’s children to speak out, although fear of man bids them be silent (Acts 4:18–21). Many Christians are afraid to show that they are followers of Christ. Here is the answer to our lack of courage in witness! Following his exhortation in Matthew 10:28, Jesus says, “But if anyone publicly denies me, I will openly deny him before my Father in heaven” (Matt 10:33 TLB). The great reformers in history all acted with undaunted bravery. For example, friend and foe alike said of John Knox that he feared no man because he feared God.

3. Violation of Covenantal Identity and God’s Curse

When Moses and the priests spoke to the assembled multitude on the brink of their entrance to the promised land, they reminded them that they are the people of the Lord and that it was for this reason that their obedience was so crucial (Deut 27:9–10). In the list of curses that follow violation of specific covenant stipulations, they are specifically warned about the seriousness of the consequences of bribery: “‘Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (Deut 27:25).

Because bribery is such a grave sin before God, Samuel called him in as witness that he had absolute transparency and never took bribes, and the people affirmed God as a witness. A living and existential relationship with Yahweh is the real antidote against corruption and bribery:

Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.” And he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.” (1 Sam 12:3–5 esv)

Other biblical texts confirm this teaching on bribery. In the defense of his righteousness before God, Job also claimed that he never took bribes from anyone (cf. Job 6:22). Only a person “who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent, is allowed to sojourn in [God’s] tent [and] dwell on [his] holy hill” (Ps 15:1). In the book of Proverbs bribery is described as wicked: “The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice” (Prov 17:23). Bribery is both acknowledged (Prov 17:8) and warned against (Prov 15:27) in the wisdom tradition, and it is condemned in the Law (Exod 23:8; Deut 16:19). It is a temptation that can overcome even the wise.³⁹

The admonitions do not appear only in biblical texts; many ancient Near Eastern wisdom (particularly Egyptian) texts affirm that those who hold political power should shun all corrupt practices. “Still, when people see how pervasive abuse of political power is, that it is indeed so common that it is impossible to function in politics without being tainted, bribery also undoes the work of wisdom in that it corrupts the heart.”⁴⁰

When the prophet Isaiah summons God’s people into a courtroom, so to speak, he begins his message by summoning the heavens and the earth to witness to the charges God has against his people.⁴¹ In this context, Isaiah underscores the seriousness of corruption and bribery as rebellion against God, and God is represented as burdened with their crimes. God has been pained and grieved by their crimes; his patience has been put to its utmost trial. Now he seeks relief by inflicting punishment on them.⁴²

Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them. Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: “Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.” (Isa 1:23–24)⁴³

When Paul paints a whole downward spiral of corrupt Christian leaders, he emphasizes the necessity of godliness with contentment because

³⁹ Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A (Dallas: Word, 1992), 64.

⁴⁰ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 320.

⁴¹ Terry R. Briley, *Isaiah* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000–2004), 39.

⁴² Johann P. Lange, Philip Schaff, C. W. E. Nägelsbach, S. T. Lowrie, and D. A. Moore, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Isaiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 49.

⁴³ Cf. also Isaiah 5:23; 33:15; Amos 5:12; Micah 3:11–12; 7:3 to see how the prophets declare the anger of God against the corruption and bribery of leaders in Judah and Israel.

those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Tim 6:2–10 ESV)

This is part and parcel of Christian servant leadership that is needed to avoid corruption, bribery, and bad leadership that exploits and manipulates followers for personal gain.

Conclusion

God reveals himself as the sovereign God. He does not need anything from any creature he has created. Therefore, no man or spirit can bribe him (Deut 10:17). His *aseity* makes him radically different from traditional African concepts of the Supreme Being. In his aseity, “he has his existence in and through himself (*a se*), rather than being dependent in any way on another for his existence.”⁴⁴

Louis Berkhof provides a good overview of the issue:

Reformed theologians quite generally substituted the Latin word *aseitas*, meaning *self-originated* with the word *independentia* (independence), as expressing, not merely that God is independent in His Being, but also that He is independent in everything else: in His virtues, decrees, works, and so on. ... As the self-existent God, He is not only independent in Himself, but also causes everything to depend on Him. This self-existence of God finds expression in the name Jehovah. It is only as the self-existent and independent One that God can give the assurance that He will remain eternally the same in relation to His people.⁴⁵

Berkhof further explains the *aseitas* of God as follows:

Additional indications of it are found in the assertion in John 5:26, “For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself”; in the declaration that He is independent of all things and that all things exist only through Him, Ps. 94:8 ff.; Isa. 40:18 ff.; Acts 7:25; and in statements implying that He is independent in His thought, Rom. 11:33, 34, and in His will, Dan. 4:35; Rom. 9:19; Eph. 1:5; Rev. 4:11, in His power, Ps. 115:3, and in His counsel, Ps. 33:11.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Alan W. Gomes, “Glossary 1: Technical Terminology,” in William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 952.

⁴⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Wayne Grudem provides further helpful comments on the topic:

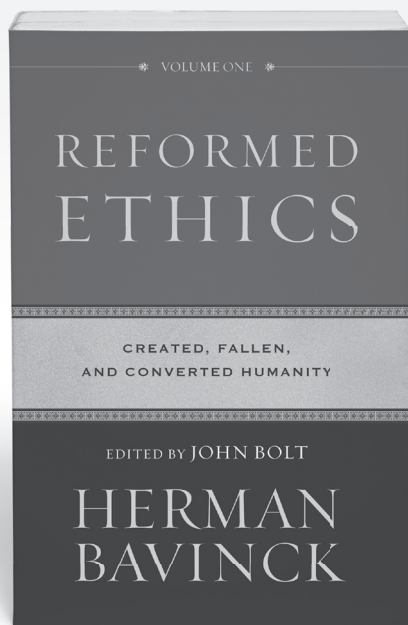
Scripture in several places teaches that God does not need any part of creation in order to exist or for any other reason. God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. Paul proclaims to the men of Athens, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, *nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24–25). In this way God’s self-revelation is the starting point of Paul’s proclamation of God over against any traditional thinking of God.

God asks Job, “Who has given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11). No one has ever contributed to God anything that did not first come from God who created all things. Similarly, we read God’s word in Psalm 50, “every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for *the world and all that is in it is mine*” (Ps. 50:10–12).⁴⁷

Biblical ethics and the fight against widespread corruption and bribery must flow from humans created in the image of God and therefore have to reflect God’s character of holiness and justice. To strike to the deepest roots of corruption and bribery in Africa, it is essential to study and proclaim God’s revelation of himself in Africa over against traditional African concepts of God. Only when people develop an intimate personal relationship of a childlike fear of God will they have the spiritual and moral strength to fight corruption and bribery.

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem, “Independence of God,” Monergism, 2018, <https://www.monergism.com/independence-god>.

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Reformed Business Ethics—A New Approach to How Organizations Can Flourish

CHRISTOPHER D. STEED

Abstract

In light of the workplace crisis and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, this article aims to provide perspectives on how organizations can flourish. Reformed business ethics (e.g., John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper), with its notions of work ethics, common grace, and sphere sovereignty is uniquely positioned to address these concerns. The author develops an approach to wise leadership that strives not only for quantitative and financial success but also for qualitative values—organizations that value individuals in their relationships with the help of three principles: look, involve, and dignify (LID). Finally, Reformed theology reinforces and enriches this approach with its recognition of human fallenness and the restoration of the image of God in union with Christ.

The modern workplace is a highly driven, stressful environment. For high flyers and millions with mental health problems alike, it is an insult to body and soul. If you cannot handle the stress of working in a low-pay world, it is always and only your fault. It is time that that presumption change. Culture is fundamental. Businesses with positive cultures enjoy larger profits, better performance, and happier employees. But how do you create this kind of culture? The

zombie workforce, an army of employees who are failing to find inspiration at work, are the “working dead,” haunting offices and factories where once they were valuable staff members, full of life and great ideas. There are legions of them. According to an annual study by the consultancy Aon Hewitt, less than one-quarter of the world’s employees are classified as “highly” engaged in their jobs, while only forty percent admit to being “moderately” so. Disengagement among workers seeps out to infect society at large. When engagement levels among employees are low, businesses report a higher staff turnover, greater absenteeism, and lower customer satisfaction. Turn that around and a five percent increase in staff engagement results in a three percent increase in revenue.¹ Lack of dignity and respect also has a strong impact.

We will explore a new approach to making organizations positive places and seek to bring that under the remit of a business ethics that can be described as Reformed. The approach is part of an innovative project—the Shared Business Value Initiative—to articulate how the value and worth of human beings can function as a social dynamic, traced through domains such as economics, social theory, leadership, and psychology. In the area of management and leadership, my *Smart Leadership, Wise Leadership* articulates three principles for people to flourish in the workplace: look, involve, and dignify (LID; see under section III).²

Business can be a positive agent in society. Christians ought to value the transformative action that business can provide. Relevant to this, there has been a strong tradition in Reformed theology to stress common grace arising from the work of Abraham Kuyper and grounded in John Calvin. Business is not neutral. It is the arena in which most of us make a living and find the work that sustains life. As the Shared Value Business Initiative proclaims, to do well, a business has to do good. What is a good place to work or be in? What does it mean to be a good person? What are enduring qualities and not just transient skills? How do societies nurture the empathy and creativity that industry leaders say will survive the technological weather? These are valid questions because they undergird how human societies work. The perspective in this article is that the value and worth of human beings can be operationalized—“given legs” as it were, rather than just function as ethical aspiration. The recovery of degraded and devalued humanity in the

¹ Aon Hewitt, “Trends in Global Employee Engagement,” 2011, http://www.aon.com/attachments/thought-leadership/Trends_Global_Employee_Engagement_Final.pdf.

² Christopher D. Steed, *Smart Leadership, Wise Leadership: Environments of Value in an Emerging Future* (London: Routledge, 2017).

image of God is fundamental to redemption. Reformed commentary on business ethics has been mainly about recognizing business as a legitimate sphere of human action under the authority of God. What does this mean for the culture of an organization?

Introduction

It is commonplace knowledge that the Protestant work ethic made Western capitalism successful. The idea that accumulating wealth arose from hard work and self-denial was conceptualized by the German sociologist Max Weber and associated with Calvin's religious revolution. Released from the crushing burden of commending oneself to God, the converted soul could demonstrate election by immersion—immersion in good deeds and works of grace, immersion in application and dedication. Business was a legitimate sphere for activity by the godly. Attention is paid these days to business ethics, that is, it matters *how* one makes money. Business ethics is generally concerned about the validity of means. Responsible business means ethical investment, not going into an enterprise that is damaging or potentially dangerous to human beings. Acting ethically means acting honorably and to the highest standards of scrutiny. It means too that the culture of a business or organization is conducive to human flourishing. This is not just about acting honorably in the sense of acting honestly but setting up cultures where humanity can flourish under God.

I. *Reformed Perspectives*

All this matters hugely on the contemporary scene, but is it distinctively Reformed? We do well to quote Calvin here:

Still, the surest and easiest answer to the objection is, that those are not common endowments of nature, but special gifts of God, which he distributes in divers forms, and, in a definite measure, to men otherwise profane. For which reason, we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature; though we cease not to hold that both are placed under the universal condition of human depravity. All we mean is that God has conferred on the one a special grace which he has not seen it meet to confer on the other. When he was pleased to set Saul over the kingdom, he made him as it were a new man.³

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (1845; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.3.5 (252–53).

Although some have critiqued the view that Calvin held to general natural endowments that enabled human society to flourish, Calvin answers that objection and rejects it. The work of God in the world does not lose its capacity to generate recognition and praise because it results in prosperity. God is the author and source, though so often unacknowledged despite such palpable demonstrations of his providence, as the commentary on Psalm 107 indicates:

But prosperity, and the happy issue of events, ought also to be attributed to his grace, in order that he may always receive the praise which he deserves, that of being a merciful Father, and an impartial Judge.⁴

Only the elect are favored with the grace of regeneration, yet Calvin could not see any reason why

[God] should not grant the reprobate also some taste of his grace, why he should not irradiate their minds with some sparks of his light, why he should not give them some perception of his goodness, and in some sort engrave his word on their hearts.⁵

Fresh from the Geneva school, John Knox taught that

the Holy Ghost maketh a plain difference betwixt the graces and mercies which are common to all, and that sovereign mercy which is immutably reserved to the chosen children.⁶

What purposes God is working in the world that do not lead to faith and salvation has been the subject of considerable discussion. Contemporary Christians have much to say about the scope of the kingdom of God and not just the church. Although the theological language has changed, this emphasis on saving some room for divine grace has been there in Reformed theology from early on. For example, the Westminster divine Robert Harris said,

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 4:245.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 138 (commentary on Heb 6:5).

⁶ John Knox, "On Predestination," in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1845), 87.

There are graces of two sorts. First, common graces, which even reprobates may have. Secondly, peculiar, such as accompany salvation, as the Apostle has it, proper to God's own children only. The matter is not whether we have the first sort of graces, for those do not seal up God's special love to a man's soul, but it must be saving grace alone that can do this for us.⁷

"Common graces" (note the plural)? The language has mostly been expressed in terms of "common grace." Glenda Mathes summarizes some of the history:

In 1924 ... the Christian Reformed Church Synod determined that, in addition to the saving grace imparted only to the elect, there exists a "common grace" which is manifested to all people in the bestowal of natural gifts, the restraining of sin in human affairs, and the ability of unbelievers to perform deeds of civic good.

The reaction against their "Three Points of Common Grace" led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, which affirmed that these "Three Points" were contrary to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. The issue never went away. In a more recent debate about this in 2003 at Sunshine Community Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the question "Is the doctrine of common grace Reformed?" was standing room only.⁸ Speaking in defense of the doctrine of common grace was Richard Mouw. "When we show compassion to the unbelieving," he said, "we are expressing a love that flows out of the heart of God." He cited the example of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as "a profound glance into the heart of God." Richard Mouw's book *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace*, sums up his stance.⁹

As a fair summary of what common grace denotes, Louis Berkhof suggested that it

curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men.¹⁰

⁷ "The Westminster Standards and Divines on Common Grace," Reformed Books Online, <https://reformedbooksonline.com/topics/topics-by-subject/common-grace/the-westminster-confession-on-common-grace/>.

⁸ Glenda Mathes, "3000 People Attend a Debate on Common Grace," *Banner of Truth*, December 5, 2003, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2003/3000-people-attend-a-debate-on-common-grace/>.

⁹ Richard Mouw as quoted in Mathes, "3000 People Attend a Debate on Common Grace." Cf. Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 434–35.

Is not everything in that list applicable to business? The answer must be a resounding yes! Business is more than an alien activity practiced by unscrupulous people. It is the lifeblood of humanity. It is where the common wealth (I use the term on purpose) is created. Before we go to a key reference point on this in Reformed theology, Kuyper, some context needs to be given regarding the contemporary business context and how these proposals relate.

II. *The Present Climate*

The world stands at the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is a transition to a network economy that has become social, to networked individuals, “to a new set of systems, bringing together digital, biological, and physical technologies in new and powerful combinations.”¹¹ Much will change fundamentally in the emerging network economy, including organizations and the role of their leaders in the nurture of enabling environments. Henrik Storm Dyrssen states, “The challenges of our time require strategies and solutions that span private, public and civil sector spheres.”¹² According to Keith Breene, “Digital technologies are unleashing new economic and social dynamics.”¹³ A country’s industrial might no longer determines its future. The prizes will go to highly adaptive leadership, leadership with spirit, leadership with purpose.

The leadership for this day and age is the leadership of cross-sector experience and collaboration. ... But where will we find these leaders when our universities still offer siloed professional programmes such as business, engineering, law or medicine? How will such medical schools train the doctors needed to develop user-experience-design for medical technology that will make many doctors obsolete? What business school programme helps students acquire the socio-political business savvy needed to develop legitimate participation for private enterprise in welfare sectors without sacrificing trading quality for profits? What about the socially conscious engineers needed to develop scalable technologies to support social development and catastrophic relief efforts?¹⁴

Equipping organizations to tackle the future will require a management revolution no less momentous than the one that spawned modern industry.

¹¹ Keith Breene, “What Is ‘Network Readiness’ and Why Does it Matter?,” World Economic Forum, July 6, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/07/what-is-networked-readiness-and-why-does-it-matter/>.

¹² Henrik Storm Dyrssen, “How Millennials Will Save Us from Our Broken Economic System,” World Economic Forum, April 15, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/how-millennials-will-save-us-from-our-broken-economic-system/>.

¹³ Breene, “What Is ‘Network Readiness’ and Why Does it Matter?”

¹⁴ Dyrssen, “How Millennials Will Save Us from Our Broken Economic System.”

As Gary Hamel described in his “Moon Shots for Management,” most of the fundamental breakthroughs in management occurred decades ago.¹⁵ “Work flow design, annual budgeting, return-on-investment analysis, project management, divisionalization, brand management—these and a host of other indispensable tools” were all part of the application of scientific principles to management. Yet “management, like the combustion engine, is a mature technology that must now be reinvented for a new age. With this in mind, a group of scholars and business leaders assembled in May 2008 to lay out a road map for reinventing management,” charting a new, communitarian approach to capitalism that will work as long as leaders imbue it with a social purpose. The assembled leaders asked, How in an age of rapid change do you create organizations that are as adaptable and resilient as they are focused and efficient? How in a creative economy where entrepreneurial genius is the secret to success do you inspire employees to bring the gifts of initiative, imagination, and passion to work every day? Their answer: “To successfully address these problems, executives and experts must first admit that they’ve reached the limits” of the industrial age paradigm “built atop the principles of standardization, specialization, hierarchy, control, and primacy of shareholder interests.” Further, “tomorrow’s business imperatives lie outside the performance envelope of today’s bureaucracy-infused management practices.” Chief among the tasks of revisiting the philosophical foundations of management is the reality that “in tomorrow’s interdependent world, highly collaborative systems will outperform organizations characterized by adversarial win-lose relationships.”

As a *Harvard Business Review* article points out,

Leaders find it tough to ensure that their people adhere to values and ethics. The prevailing principles in business make employees ask, “What’s in it for me?” Missing are those that would make them think, “What’s good, right, and just for everyone?”¹⁶

The notion of “the wise leader,” not just a “smart leader,” is receiving more attention today, though this attention is hardly mainstream. In addition,

people behave less ethically when they are part of organizations or groups. Common rationalizations, such as that you are acting in the company’s best interest, or justifications, such as that you will never be found out, lead to misconduct.¹⁷

¹⁵ Gary Hamel, “Moon Shots for Management,” *Harvard Business Review*, February 2009, <https://hbr.org/2009/02/moon-shots-for-management/>.

¹⁶ Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi “The Big Idea: The Wise Leader,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-big-idea-the-wise-leader>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

“Capitalism” and “the free market, with its gospel of globalization and the primacy of growth and GDP as a measure of happiness,” is under siege.¹⁸ Against the background of the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath, the questions keep coming.

The impact of the global financial crisis has not only been profound, but enduring. The crisis has not led to any fundamental reappraisal of the nature of capitalism, or how to “govern” it. For the majority in work conditions have deteriorated, while those without employment have been subject to ever more punitive sanctions. Inequalities are increasing and working lives becoming more precarious.¹⁹

Perhaps it took the crash and crisis to create the conditions of mass youth unemployment, austerity, poverty, and growing inequality that arguably were the precursor to the new business models of digital start-ups and sharing economy platforms. I argue elsewhere that for the future societies to work, we need to get rid of our endemic emphasis on what work and jobs mean to our self-worth.²⁰ Yet for all the talk of the meaning and purpose of our jobs being a prime means through which we are validated through the dignity of work, most employees see them just as a means to an end. According to a massive global survey by Gallup, only 32% of employees in North America say they are engaged (worldwide, the number is 13%).²¹ Perhaps the very nature of work that allowed families to prosper and individuals to build a sense-of-self is under attack. Work might be losing its value to people. Yet it is undoubtedly a sphere from which human beings derive tremendous value (or not).

Even in a high-tech age, leadership remains vital. As the developing Fourth Industrial Revolution transforms the technological foundations of global enterprise, the phenomenon of firms growing at extremely rapid rates has become unprecedented. What is labeled “hypergrowth” has moved out of Silicon Valley and gone global, from high-tech start-ups to companies both old and new. Challenges facing hypergrowth firms have a huge impact in today’s global economy. Yet from talent shortages to regulatory impediments, growth challenges are a consistent management priority. “According

¹⁸ Dyrssen, “How Millennials Will Save Us from Our Broken Economic System.”

¹⁹ British Sociological Association, “Work, Employment and Society 2016 Conference: Abstract,” University of Leeds, 2016, <https://lssi.leeds.ac.uk/events/work-employment-and-society-conference-2016/>.

²⁰ Christopher D. Steed, *A Question of Worth: The Quantification Principle* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

²¹ Annamarie Mann and Jim Harter, “The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis,” Gallup Workplace, January 7, 2016, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236495/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx>.

to *Mastering Hypergrowth*, the World Economic Forum's study of nearly 200 companies around the world, over half (55.6%) of CEOs say that finding, motivating and keeping the best people is one of their most pressing challenges."²²

How can we ensure that organizations are engaging places, not the kind of toxic environments that are all too frequent?²³ And how can we continue to ensure that organizations are humane places when the future of work is an issue that becomes hugely challenging in the wake of the gathering flood of what may well be the job-killing Fourth Industrial Revolution? What kind of smart leadership is needed to cultivate the human dimension in a digital era? What does it mean to cultivate "leadership with spirit"? Can wise, ethical, and responsible leadership that is not off-balance become the default position and not just "smart leadership"? We will explore the idea that leaders should be wise, lifting organizations to a higher dimension than just the technocratic through engendering humane environments that, under certain conditions, best translate the value of people into their collective endeavors.

This article presents a new construct about leadership and how organizations flourish. It is the task of leaders to facilitate a workplace culture where the value of people is best expressed. Our term for this will be an "environment of value," an organizational "community of practice" that draws out the inner value of its participants and translates that into external, added value for the enterprise. It acts as a catalyst for the conversion of internal value into the purposes of the organization. It seeks to build value precisely because it works with the conditions by which a valuing environment can be cultivated. An environment of value therefore digs into motivational drivers because it mobilizes the factors that will encourage people to give of their best.

New perspectives on creating positive organizational changes are much needed. As I write, Siemens has just offered a report about the reasons for the productivity puzzle in the United Kingdom: United Kingdom workers seemingly produce for longer hours than the United States or European counterparts, but their output is up to 20% less. Siemens suggests that 75% of the deficit is due to poor leadership and practices that do not make the most of the potential of their staff.²⁴

²² "Which Regions Will Build the Silicon Valleys of the Future," World Economic Forum, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/06/what-is-standing-in-the-way-of-hypergrowth-in-your-region/>.

²³ Oliver James, *Office Politics: How to Thrive in a World of Lying, Backstabbing and Dirty Tricks* (London: Vermillion, 2013), 92.

²⁴ "The World at One," BBC Radio 4, July 14, 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/worldatone.

A generation ago, Peter Drucker, the leading guru of management, argued that we were in the middle of a great social transformation akin to the Renaissance. The computer was the symbol of this immense change whereby the primary resource is no longer capital, land, or labor, but knowledge (hence “post-capitalist”). Drucker argued that knowledge had become the means of production, creating value by “productivity” and “innovation” when applied to work. The new class of post-capitalist society was now made up of knowledge workers and service workers. This presented a significant challenge for society. How should we preserve the income and dignity of service workers (who cannot become knowledge workers but constitute the majority of the workforce)?²⁵ Many lament that there are no quality jobs anymore.

More recently, the financial journalist Paul Mason wondered if we are not on the brink of a change so big, so profound, that this time capitalism itself has reached its limits and is changing into something wholly new. It is the information technology revolution, Mason argued, that has the potential to reshape our familiar notions of work, production, and value utterly; and to destroy an economy based on markets and private ownership—in fact, he contended, it was already doing so.²⁶

As the Age of Capitalism yields to what is called the “knowledge society” and now to the digital economy, the radical affects it will have on society, politics, and business now and in the coming years are far reaching. Now that far fewer people in the West have been working in factories since about 1980—and even China is busy de-industrializing—we have already moved from a society based on capital, land, and labor to a society whose primary source is knowledge and whose key structure is the organization.

In the digital future, environments of value will be different from the old industrial era institutions that created public services. It will not necessarily be the case that an organization that is well managed is also well led. Future organizations will not be cranking out just quantity but also quality. Creativity and empathy have not been really needed except for the creative or caring industries. In the future, they will be vital for all enterprises. The leadership needed to foster such environments will be different from the old top-down style in which instructions are given. They will be open, transformative processes, where we no longer speak about bosses and workers, processes based on subject-object relations, but creating space for

²⁵ Peter Drucker, *Managing the Non-profit Organization* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 63.

²⁶ Paul Mason, *Post Capitalism: A Guide to the Future* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 79.

all involved, if not in equal relation then in creative dialogue. This is surely the workplace of the future, not one that follows old hierarchical models but one in which creativity and empathy fuse to generate all-around shared value. The future of work will still entail successful organizations, those employing worthwhile people doing worthwhile jobs and tasks.

Values-driven ethical leadership, not just technocratic competence, is emphasized in the leadership literature of recent times. What that needs to be complemented with is the dimension of spirit and soul that translates managerialism from smart leadership into wisdom for rushing executives whose own inner world is so often off-balance.

Axiomatic in what follows is that human beings are strongly shaped relationally not only by their own agency, but by their social environment and by forces that structure their life and work. A workplace is a very particular form of social environment. If the circumstances and context are right, people will give of their best. That seems commonplace until it is realized that the experience of so many is that the organizational environment and culture is not conducive to human flourishing. Rather than engendering engagement, it is demotivating and devaluing.

III. *A New Lens on Human Action*

This article is based on a theological reflection on the experience of participants in the workplace. It is based on client experiences at work and the way they reflect bigger, deeper questions about what it means to be human. There are strong lessons to be learned about the contribution that theology, specifically an applied Reformed theology, makes to the common grace of how people thrive in the contemporary workplace. Hopefully, this breaks new ground, following my *Smart Leadership, Wise Leadership*.

Some years ago, I engaged in a research exercise that illuminates the factors that generate inner worth being drawn out and harnessed (or shut down, as the case may be). Crucially, looking at issues of human worth through their contrast—what it means to be devalued or trashed in the workplace—lent greater analytical clarity. Empirical observation in therapeutic contexts and organizational study of both the popular and academic literature showed me that circumstances giving rise to reports of feelings of devaluation can be summed up as threefold through the experience of being diminished, of being disregarded, and of not being given dignity:

- *Lack of purposeful engagement (indifference)*—not being seen, noticed, recognized or listened to

- *Lack of honor (inequality, insult)*—being diminished rather than enlarged through discriminatory practice; not having one's full humanity included
- *Being invaded (indignity)*—being assaulted or set aside
- Lack of involvement, inclusion, and dignity results in a deficit of the significance that people look for in the workplace.

Case Study

Whose fault is it if you cannot cope with the stress of work? The answer used to be simple: "It is yours, and you are probably a shiftless weakling for even asking the question." But a landmark case in France has shifted public opinion:

Following an inquiry into the suicides of more than 30 employees at France Télécom (now Orange) between 2008 and 2009, prosecutors in Paris have recommended that Didier Lombard, a former chief executive of the company, and six other senior managers be put on trial for psychological harassment. Union officials and prosecutors have suggested that France Télécom's strategy may have been designed to nudge employees into quitting of their own accord, sparing the company the expense and bad publicity of laying them off: workers were shunted from office to office, forced to work long, impractical hours, and subjected to conditions that few employers would risk in a nation with relatively easy access to firearms. Instead, facing unemployment in a recession, employees continued to work, and dozens killed themselves. ... These managers saw little wrong in pushing their employees to the brink of breakdown in the name of profit. That this case may be taken to a criminal court is far more shocking than it should be.²⁷

We are dealing with the black box of applied power. Reformed people surely need a fine-grained concept of power and how sinfulness operates through cultures of all kinds. When it comes to corporate culture, there will always be problems between managers and employees, even in the most benign situation. Many difficulties are the result of people's responses to authority and stress. Some difficulties are the result of company policies. There is, as observed, much good management and leadership out there. Nevertheless, experience shows that people keep coming back to these same factors *again and again*. Moreover, statements in practitioner literature indicate that these can be replicated. There does seem to be an issue not just with narcissistic managers but with the culture of many organizations. It is the culture and practice on the ground that shapes behavior and nearly

²⁷ Laurie Penny, "For Millions with Mental Health Problems, the Modern Workplace Is an Insult to Body and Soul," *New StatesmanAmerica*, September 9, 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/economy/2016/09/millions-mental-health-problems-modern-workplace-insult-body-and-soul>.

always vitiates against “official” strategy and so often makes it practically irrelevant. Discerning such negative factors for disvaluing environments leads to turning these back on their head “to lift the LID” on an organization, release dynamism and address disengagement through a positive workplace culture:

- Honor humanity—**L**ook, learn, and listen
- Engage with purpose—**I**nvolve and include to elicit significance
- Set up a nonintrusive environment—**D**ignify

This awareness translates into direct benefit to leaders and managers to understand how to build a strong culture in their organization in which people can flourish. Using these principles, *Smart Leadership*, *Wise Leadership* has been translated into a seminar series used at an MBA graduate college. It is therefore useful knowledge precisely because it goes with the grain of what makes for human flourishing. This is where theology meets organization theory and psychology. And why not, if we truly claim to have profound insight into human behavior on account of our reading of Scripture?

There is psychological theory here relevant to our inner motivations and the circumstances in which people thrive.²⁸ The grounded theory is this:

- There is a strong association between the sense of inner world value held by staff or workers as they participate in an organization *and* the added, external value they generate that furthers its purpose, whether financial or not.
- Wise leaders understand it is in the interests of the organization to optimize those factors (proposed here as essentially threefold) that enable a valuing environment to translate inner value into added value.

This is profoundly theological. Under common grace, the worker translates his or her value into the dignity of labor. The craftsmanship reflects the person who crafts; ultimately, it reflects the Maker. Kuyper would no doubt approve.

At first glance, this is about how organizations flourish. There is, however, a construct being developed here that potentially provides a lens on the drivers of human action. Getting the best out of people, not just extracting the most, requires attention to the circumstances in which their sense of themselves and their value is translated into their projects.

²⁸ Cf. Steed, *Smart Leadership*, *Wise Leadership*.

What advantages are there to employers and leadership in commercial, nonprofit, or faith-based organizations in setting up work environments where the primary goal is not making money and optimum performance? After all, the law does not say leaders must look after their staff and make them feel valued. However, it is surely a strategy of self-enlightenment to discern what the ingredients of a high-value environment are. Even when ratios of capital to labor shift, about 90% of the overhead of an organization is still staff salaries. People continue to matter—to both the workforce and God.

But if my proposal is theological, can it claim to be Reformed in any sense?

IV. Business Ethics through a Kuyperian Lens

Following Calvin, the reference point in Reformed circles is usually that of Kuyper, and it is through his lens that the rest of this article applies common grace to the culture of business. This scholar-minister, who founded the Reformed Church in the Netherlands as well as the Free University of Amsterdam, was also Prime Minister from 1901 to 1904. Kuyper contended vigorously that theological modernism would eventually prove as useless as “a squeezed out lemon peel,” but traditional religious truths would survive.²⁹ In his lectures at Princeton in 1898, Kuyper argued that Calvinism was more than theology. It provided a comprehensive worldview and indeed had already proven to be a decisive factor in the development of the institutions and values of modern society.³⁰ There is an intrinsic connection between this position and the laws he influenced or enacted. His theological and political views are linked, proposed legislation after 1901 to improve working conditions witnessing this fact.³¹ Is this purely a realm for business? In contrast to the ideas of sovereignty through the individual (the French model) or derivation from the State (the German model), Kuyper advocated the notion of “sphere sovereignty,” in which schools and universities, the press, business and industry, and the arts are sovereign in their own spheres.³² The sovereignty of business? A curious thought a century later in an age of robust compliance procedures!

²⁹ Arie L. Molendijk, “‘A Squeezed Out Lemon Peel’: Abraham Kuyper on Modernism,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91.3–4 (January 2011): 396–411, doi:10.1163/18712411-1X609397.

³⁰ Arie L. Molendijk, “Neo-Calvinist Culture Protestantism: Abraham Kuyper’s Stone Lectures,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 88.2 (2008): 235–50, doi:10.1163/187124108X354330.

³¹ James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

³² Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty (1880),” in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–90.

Reformed theology is relevant for institutions in the present for two reasons.

Firstly, more than it has been perhaps, it ought to be a cardinal principle of Reformed theology that the soul has infinite value and worth. The high view of God that this perspective espouses surely leads to the outcome that humankind made in the *imago Dei* ought not to be trifled with. Handle with care! The greater honor and dignity accorded to humanity (even though that honor and dignity has been grievously compromised in the fall), the greater the respect shown to the Creator, who made us in the mirror of divinity. If this principle is accepted, it surely needs to take legs. It is not a theoretical view only.

Secondly, redemption and *unio cum Christo* ought to be understood as a recovery program whereby our full humanity is restored. It does not lead to an artificial humanity, but tends towards a full restoration of what we lost that is now gloriously reframed in Jesus Christ; we do not become less than human when we encounter the divine grace of redemption, but return to humanity as it should be. The new man is renewed after the image of the one who created him (Col 3:19). We are told to put on the new man who after God is created (Eph 4:24).

The so-called Protestant work ethic arises because the subjects produced by Calvinism are disciplined foot-soldiers, not just for church work directly but in society. Work is not redeeming so much as it reflects a redeemed life made serious by being allied to a sense of purpose. Life is to be dedicated to God, not indulged or wasted.

Yet the reality is that this high ideal is compromised every day by a workplace that trashes the lives of its workers and by organization cultures that diminish people, disregard them, or fail to dignify them.

Redemption is not the imposition of a false humanity but a life approximating far better the life of fellowship with God. It can never take us back to before the fall, but it can direct our lives after the fall, shaping them in the image of Jesus, the trailblazer of the new humanity. Jesus was a working man for the vast majority of his life. Apprenticeship in his father's business was reality at a practical level, as well as that of divine sonship (Luke 2:21).

Kuyper was surely on the right ground when he grasped that his Reformed theology should translate into the organization of society and of the workplace where so much of life is lived. The emphasis here on the value and worth of human beings did not seem to loom large as a driving principle, but given what we know about the worth of God and value of a soul, it surely resonates.

As Calvin observes, “the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and the heart, or in the soul and its powers.”³³ Reformed theology should go further than upholding the worth people have by being made in the *imago Dei*. Our identity is not, after all, solitary. We are relational. The turn to relationality in science and social philosophy has often been noticed in recent years. Calvin’s notion of a reciprocal relationship between our ideas of God and our self-understanding takes us in that direction,³⁴ though he does not underline the way that our relations to others mediate our knowledge of God and the self. That turn is of recent progeny.

Our identity is dispersed, formed, and re-formed in interaction with God and others. A high proportion of that interaction takes place in organizations and the workplace. Human worth and significance does not, though, live by itself. We need others to give us that meaning. Those around us in the sphere in which we live, move, and have our being are needed to affirm our value. The culture of where we work shapes us. When that goes wrong, and people do not function at their optimum, the impact is negative.

The three principles advanced here as genuine insights into how organizations can work to their optimum are derived from human fallenness. They are the mirror image of the negative factors that erode people, that diminish and degrade humanity. Sinfulness paints dark colors on the workplace.

V. A Theological Project?

This article reflects a body of work³⁵ that traces the value and worth of people into various domains: psychology, social theory, organizations, and contemporary politics. It offers a coherent theological framework that derives human worth from the worth of God that is conferred upon us. This matters.

It is not just people in a negative workplace; God can also be devalued. Giving God the honor due to his name is vital to worship and Christian liturgy. It was emphasized much in the Reformation. “Let God be God”! Divine worth is about worship, “worthship.” To worship is to accord worth, to recognize something as being of highest and truest value, to recognize and give respect for the highest worth it has. “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev 4:11 NIV).

³³ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (164).

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1–3 (37–39).

³⁵ For ease of reference, the reader is referred to the author’s website, www.christopher-steel.co.uk.

The divine Lord is the supreme valuer, the one who bestows worth on his craftsmanship. We are his poem, his work (Eph 2:10). There is work to be done to show how the value of personhood connects the two and signposts the existence of God in a way that resonates profoundly with the psychological realities of our times. The theological project under discussion projects divine worth into the one-off incarnation of Jesus, who embraces the human situation as just slightly lower than the angels (Heb 2:7–8). Stepping into humanity, the Redeemer connects with human experience in a way that the church urgently needs to come to grips with.³⁶ The culmination of “the identification principle” is the astonishing atonement. A symbolic exchange is set up—characteristic, as I argue, of violence generally. Payment has to be exacted somehow. The devalued and degraded man stands forth as the representative of living humanity to offer himself up to death. Taking the place of the trashed and clothed with indignity, Jesus confers his value on the unworthy ones of the earth (2 Cor 5:21). Such is the exchange of status we call justification. Through this lens, atonement makes sense. It is not some alien doctrine but utterly true to life, to psychological reality, and to God!

LeRon Schults grounds a “reforming theological anthropology” in the implications of a relational turn in late modernity in such spheres as social sciences and developmental psychology. The way that connectivity is central to who we are illuminates Christian revelation. Vital to this project is the importance of personhood as it is played out at work.³⁷ Christianity is working!

VI. *Summing Up ...*

It is some way from the atonement to business ethics and the life and times of contemporary organizations. Yet with its sharp understanding of fallen power and endemic sinfulness, Reformed theology should surely endorse the proposition that under common grace, wise and loving leaders are concerned to build organizations in which human beings can flourish.

Making organizations and the workplace more humane places—with the Internet already organizing economy and society in a different way, a premium will be placed on factors to do with the human “touch,” such as creativity, empathy, and entrepreneurial flair, that cannot be replicated by algorithms. There is a vital association between inner value and external, added value that is there to be drawn out under optimum conditions.

³⁶ Christopher D. Steed, *The Identification Principle* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019).

³⁷ F. LeRon Schults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Leaders are often unsure about how to mobilize the participation and engagement of their people so they are productive and contribute effectively. That is true anytime, anywhere, but in the Fourth Industrial Revolution even more so if it deprives us of our heart and soul.

Vital on the contemporary scene is an understanding of value that is broader than the economic. Perhaps a sense of true value in a context where humans can flourish and do their best work provides a link between Reformed theology and business ethics. Human valuing is not just rooted in individuals but in interaction with others. The workplace is a vital sphere where the validation of our worth is performed. Deeply compromised by invisible power as it is, where we spend so much of our lives is of prime ethical concern.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Christopher Yuan

PETER A. LILLBACK

(December 20, 2018)

PETER LILLBACK: *It is a privilege to interview Christopher Yuan, whose concern is to address sexual ethics and Christian witness in light of biblical theology. He has written Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationship Shaped by God's Grand Story.¹ Let us begin with a word of prayer:*

Father, thank you for your providential care that has allowed us to meet together. We pray that this interview might be uplifting to those that read it. We pray, Lord, that you will bless our friend Christopher as he shares his wrestling with your Word in his personal experiences and that he will continue to have a fruitful ministry that advances your kingdom. Thank you, Lord, that we can commit ourselves to you afresh and be reminded that the gospel is the hope of every human being, regardless of who we are or what we have done. Thank you for the greatness of your forgiveness and the amazing grace that is our hope. Amen.

Christopher, you are a graduate of and teach at Moody Bible Institute. Tell us a little about your theological preparation to be a teacher and a writer.

CHRISTOPHER YUAN: I was not raised in a Christian home. I did not have any theological background growing up in Chicago, but I wrestled with my

¹ Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story*, foreword by Rosaria Butterfield (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2018).

sexual identity from a young age and “came out” when I was in my 20s. Through that crisis, my mother and father came to faith. We talk about that in a memoir I co-authored with my mom, *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God, A Broken Mother’s Search for Hope*. Through my parents’ faith and newfound witness, they began to reflect Christ to me although I was running from God. I was pursuing my doctorate in dentistry in Louisville, Kentucky. I got involved in partying and drugs and was expelled from dental school three months before I was to receive my doctorate. I moved to Atlanta and kept doing what I knew how to do best, which was selling drugs, and finally was arrested by the federal government. I was facing ten years to life, and while I was in jail, God began miraculously and graciously drawing me to himself. I found a Bible in the trashcan and started reading it. All my friends had left me, and my parents were the only ones who were there for me. It was really interesting, because we get these narratives from the world saying that Christian parents reject or do not love their gay children. I had the exact opposite experience. Before they came to faith, my parents could not accept it when I came out as gay. It was only after they became Christians that they realized they needed to love me as God loved them.

PL: *Would you say that you heard the gospel for the first time clearly from your parents? Or was it reading the Bible from the trashcan?*

CY: Before I became a Christian, no one ever shared the gospel with me, although I had some Christian friends. It was not my parents either, because they knew how antagonistic I was to anything to do with religion or God. I thought, “That’s fine for you, but don’t push it on me.” They had to live the gospel before they had any chance to preach it. Their quiet testimony, not any individual, ministry, or evangelistic system, led me to pick up that Bible. It was simply God’s Word.

PL: *Are you comfortable with the phrase “sovereign grace”? That God somehow decided to call you to himself?*

CY: One hundred percent. I look at my life and my mother’s conversion, and it is the only explanation. She hated Christians and wanted nothing to do with God. God had to miraculously invade her life, tear it apart with my coming out; at the same time, my parents’ marriage was a disaster, and they were about to divorce. It was only sovereign grace that wooed us.

PL: *As you were facing potential prison time, what happened as the Lord started to move in your heart?*

CY: Finding a Bible in the trashcan—how can that be anything other than

God's irresistible grace? With nothing better to do, I began reading God's Word, and initially, it was not good news. I was convicted as a sinner, rebellious against God, my parents, society—and that was without touching the issue of sexuality! Then I got some really bad news. I found out I was HIV positive. That was the nail in the coffin, the lowest of lows. After that, God never left me. One night in my prison cell, I saw someone had scribbled something on the metal bunk above, and it said, "If you're bored, read Jeremiah 29:11": "I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope." I honestly had no clue what it meant, but God gave me just enough faith to get through that one day and the next.

As I studied God's Word, one of the things that was transformative was that God had to change my wrong thinking about identity before I could realize that same sex relationships were sinful. It is one of the first chapters of my book, and one of the core aspects that Christians are missing in conversation with the gay community. If one believes being gay is a matter of who one is, sinful behavior is inseparable from who one is. I needed to be radically enlightened with God's truth: sexuality is not *who* you are but *how* you are. That was revolutionary. Once I was able to grasp that "I am gay" is a wrong statement, I was able to move forward. In prison, I realized that we pigeonhole ourselves into a framework of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, categories that are insufficient to articulate God's calling of sexuality. I read through God's Word and realized that God has called us in two ways: chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage. I coined the term *holy sexuality* to represent that. God called me to full-time ministry while I was in prison. I got out of prison, applied to Moody, then went to Wheaton to get an MA. I was invited to teach at Moody soon after I graduated from Wheaton in 2007, and I finished a DMin in 2014.

PL: *As you look at the whole experience of your life—you were without Christ growing up in the United States—are you from an ethnic family?*

CY: My parents were born in China before it was Communist China. They were among the fortunate ones to flee to Taiwan; they were raised and met in college there before coming to the United States for graduate school. My mother just wanted to get married. So she gave up her full-ride scholarship and supported my dad through school. I am a cross-cultural kid, born in America, but I am not American, some people will say. I am Chinese, but I am not Chinese. I am sort of this in-between, culturally more American but ethnically Chinese. I can speak Mandarin, and that is my heart language and my ethnic background.

PL: *So in your formative years, one influence on your life was the immigrant status, that Asian educational work ethic. You are also in America with all the opportunities and dangers and temptations it brings. Where did the interest in the gay movement come in?*

CY: I would say same-sex attractions. They developed early on, as I was exposed to pornography very young. No one should ever be exposed to pornography at any age, but nine is very young. Unfortunately, that has become the norm with it being so easily accessible and free on the Internet.

PL: *Was it an internet source where it happened for you?*

CY: No, it was in 1979, when I was nine, before the Internet. It was surprisingly at a trusted family friend's home. He had hidden it. Being a nosy kid, you unfortunately find stuff you are not supposed to and are awakened to things that are not supposed to be awoken. You often will hear that same-sex attraction stems from issues in our past: our parents, an absentee father, or dominant mother. However, a good theological anthropology needs a proper doctrine of sin. In Adam we all died (cf. 1 Cor 15:22) and our nature has been corrupted, perverted from birth, and that is the only primary root cause. Other factors do come into play, not so much as causative agents but as catalysts.

PL: *Would you say then that because we all have a broken and fallen nature, same-sex attraction is a universal possibility, rather than something that you are born to or that circumstances force you to be? We all have the potential just because we are in a state of rebellion to God? Or is that too strong?*

CY: The sinful nature is universal, although it may be differently expressed in different people. It is a predisposition, not as a predetermination. A person might be born with a predisposition toward alcoholism, gossiping, even a heterosexual lust problem, pornography, or same-sex attraction. The universal aspect comes from original sin, expressed differently in different people; but the core is still the sinful nature, which points right to the only core answer, Jesus Christ. This is why in my book I talk about God's grand story—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation—a broad framework for understanding sexuality.

PL: *How when you were a young person did the attraction to the drug scene come, and was that simultaneous or different from same-sex attraction? Did they just happen to mesh in your experience?*

CY: I was a really good kid growing up; my older brother was the rebellious one. He knew how to push my parents' buttons. He excelled in everything.

I was an average, nice kid. In my early 20s, when I moved to Louisville, I felt, “This is who I am.” I did not see it as rebellion. There is a lot of bad logic in that, but it seemed logical to me at the time. I felt that I was the victim. I got involved in drugs because I was thinking postmodern, deconstructionist: If I had been taught to believe that same-sex relationships are wrong but they are not, then maybe all the other things I thought were wrong really were not. So who says doing drugs is wrong? The whole secular morality framework says as long as I am not hurting anyone, it is my choice, and we justify it. When you give in on one issue, you give in on another. That might have been my thought process.

PL: *What has given you the freedom to talk and write so openly about this? Is it therapeutic, or redemptive? Is it a mission God has given you? Why is it so vital for you to share?*

CY: Growing up, I kept the most significant thing about me secret for so long. When I came out, I thought, “I have been keeping this down for so long, I am going to tell everyone.” That might be why our gay friends appear to be throwing it in our faces. If you have had to hold something down for decades, you feel, “I can finally not have to hold it down” and want to tell everyone. So I was transparent to the point of being obnoxious. One of those Christians would say, “Why are you throwing your gayness, your same sex relationship, in my face?” Also, Asians do not share. It is not natural for us to be transparent. Chinese do not want to lose face; there is that shame base. When I first came out, we decided that we were not going to hide it but be open and not ashamed. God has so blessed my dad, my mom, and me in being faithful to witness about the glory of God and the power of his grace.

PL: *Your story gives you the ability to speak theologically in a unique way because these are truths that you have had to learn to live and apply. Some say that if you have a same-sex attraction, you cannot be a Christian. How do you respond from a theological perspective?*

CY: We need to be consistent. How does one come to faith? It is by grace through faith in Christ, and these are core doctrines. But what does it look like to be a Christian? Can a Christian still be tempted? The answer is obviously yes. The way Paul writes in Romans 7, “I do what I do not want” (v. 1), describes a real struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. The idea that a person who has the Holy Spirit abiding in them cannot be tempted by same-sex attractions does not line up with Scripture’s understanding of original sin, indwelling sin, and actual sin. The confusion comes from the term “same-sex attraction.” In my book, I indicated that “same-sex

attraction” is not clear enough and decided not to use it when talking about God’s sexual ethic. Rather, I chose to use the biblical terms “temptation” and “desire.” Rewording your question: Can a person be tempted with sin and still be a Christian? I would say yes, Jesus Christ himself was tempted “in every respect,” the writer of Hebrews says, but was “without sin” (Heb 4:15). The critical question is whether an individual is in unrepentant serial sin. I would define same-sex desire as sin and same-sex behavior as sin. Then the question we need to ask is, Is that person truly redeemed, converted, or not? If the Holy Spirit is abiding in them, they should not be in bondage to sin, or if they are, the Holy Spirit should be convicting them of sin.

PL: *Is homosexuality the unforgivable sin? If you have been involved in a same-sex relationship, is there no forgiveness? How does the gospel address this?*

CY: Yes, that is an excellent question although the majority of Christians answer no. But we need to ask ourselves, have our actions at times wrongly communicated that we actually do view homosexuality as the unforgivable sin? We only know one instance in the New Testament that has been clearly identified as being the unforgivable sin, and that is grieving the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31–32 and parallels). So all other sins can be covered by the blood of Christ, including mass murder, as committed by Paul, prostitution, or adultery. These sins indeed can be forgiven, and so even same-sex relationships or multiple-same-sex relationships can be covered by the blood of Christ.

PL: *Those struggling to become new persons by identity with Christ feel the temptation and desire and sometimes succumb. How do you counsel them from a Christian perspective, desiring “holy sexuality” and recognizing that Christians are not always holy?*

CY: Those wrestling with same-sex attraction often feel the stigma of being “the worst of sinners.” Paul calls himself that but then argues, “For this reason, I received mercy so that others would come to know him” (cf. 1 Tim 1:16). I want people to realize that they are not much different from everyone struggling with sin. It might be a different sin, but it is still a sin struggle. The goal is not the eradication of temptation; that is not biblical or realistic. Sanctification is instantaneous, progressive, and future, not a one-time done deal and you are never tempted anymore. I notice in myself that the more I fixate on my sin temptation and struggle, on simply not sinning, it can become overwhelming, and I miss out on Christ. Our goal is daily intimacy and union with Christ, and to apply it to sexual identity and same-sex attraction. However, if you focus on union with Christ and how to grow in spiritual depth

and intimacy with Christ, exercising the habits of grace, you will not only be able to receive Christ but also to have victory over the bondage of sin.

PL: *How does a person learn to see themselves not as a sinner, or a person with a history of a gay or pornographic lifestyle, but as someone who can say, “That’s maybe what I’ve done but that’s not who I am”?*

CY: Identity in Christ is correlated with union with Christ. I still live in the vestiges of my former identity and the body memories and its consequences. Thus, I daily need to mortify sin, but my identity is not in my indwelling sin. Identity in the personhood of Christ has priority. Our identity in Christ restores that image of God distorted by the fall and guides us every day, moment, and our every thought. We talk about what is normal or abnormal, and honestly, what is normal and easy is to go on autopilot and let your flesh go its way. What is abnormal is to die to self, mortify the sin nature and indwelling sin, and surrender to Christ. That is the difficult path to take. God has called us to do that and, more importantly, has given us the Holy Spirit who empowers us and undergirds our sanctification.

PL: *In the gay community and beyond one argument is “I am born this way, this is my nature, I cannot change. There is no way of being other than who I am, and I need to accept it.” This is the world’s perspective against the idea that I can define myself in a new way in Christ. How do you look at your fellow gay friends and say, “No, I can be different”? How do you engage their arguments?*

CY: The secular approach does not look to the Word of God as the foundation for truth. Their epistemology is what they call facts and science. However, scientifically there is nothing conclusive to date to say that people are born gay, although there is good evidence saying that being gay is multifaceted. Being gay could have a genetic or hormonal factor, but it could also have developmental or sociological factors. We do not know, so we need to begin with a theological anthropology. We are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), but that image has since been distorted. Although the majority think that people are born gay, the Lord Jesus Christ said in John 3 that you must be born again to be a new creation in Christ. People say, “I was born a (you fill in the blank),” but Jesus Christ told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7).

PL: *How does knowing the history of redemption help someone who is engaging the issues of a gay lifestyle? How do you tell that story in a way that speaks to their lives?*

CY: God created us in the image of God, and it is imperative to start there

to address the gender identity issue. And what does the image of God mean? As we look at Genesis 1:27, there are three lines of parallel poetry: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” There is a direct correlation between the image of God and male and female. “Male” and “female” is not a biological or psychological reality; it is a spiritual reality, essential to who we are as God’s good image with value and dignity before God. The fall has distorted us; this reality points to the need for the redeemer who came to restore humanity. Understanding the need for Christ helps to see that same-sex sexual desires, same-sex behavior, and same-sex romantic desires are sinful. Then, if that is the problem, the sole solution is Christ. An anthropocentric answer has been the solution sought over the past few years. Focusing on support groups and a psychoanalytical approach is not the right approach for dealing with this sin issue; rather, God can miraculously take away the struggle and temptation of same-sex attraction. If he does, that will be replaced with some other sin struggle, as our sin nature cannot be eradicated this side of glory. The Holy Spirit gives victory over the sin nature but not complete eradication. So temptation continues, but not more than we can bear (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). Having eternity in mind when we think about singleness and marriage helps those with same-sex attractions have a more correct understanding than what the world thinks.

PL: *What is a good working definition of what you call “holy sexuality”?*

CY: Holy sexuality has two paths: If you are single, it means being faithful to God by being sexually abstinent. If you are married, you are faithful to God by being faithful to your spouse of the opposite sex. Holy sexuality is chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage. For most, singleness is not a choice, it is default, a reality for everybody at some point in their life, sometimes more than once. As true Christians we are defending the sanctity of marriage, but sometimes we do so without truly understanding what Paul says in Ephesians 5. It is the mystery of Christ and the church (v. 32). As John Piper says, “Marriage between a man and a woman here on the earth is just a shadow of the eternal reality of Christ being wed to the church. So when that becomes actualized in the end times, there is no more need for a shadow.” The purpose is a reflection of Christ and the perfect marriage of Christ being wed to his bride.

PL: *The practical ethical challenge that we are facing today is, What is the problem with chastity in a monogamous same-sex relationship? Is it better than being promiscuous?*

CY: Marriage should in no case be viewed as the cure for sexual immorality, whether it is an opposite-sex biblical marriage or same-sex marriage. I wrote an article with Rosaria Butterfield, “Something Greater Than Marriage,” to counteract the idolatry of marriage both in the world and as Christians.² The most deceptive form of idolatry is to worship something good. Good things are not meant to be worshiped; only God is. Marriage is not the highest ideal of love, but an expression of love, because God himself is the highest ideal of love. Many world religions claim their god is loving, but the God of the Bible is love as an ontological reality. Marriage does not have a monopoly on love, but it is one expression of love, and certainly not the greatest. God’s love is followed by our love for God. Furthermore, the Old Testament emphasizes marriage, family, children, offspring, tribes, and clans, and the New still emphasizes family, but even more the church, as the body of Christ, the spiritual family, and the local church. In 1 Corinthians 13, read many times at weddings, the context of what Paul was talking about is not the love between a husband and a wife, but how we are called to love each other in the body of Christ. So when people say, “Why can’t they love each other?”—loving each other as a brother or sister in the Lord is the relationship that will last eternally. Marriage is not the only way to experience intimacy.

PL: *How do you counsel people who have a family member or friend who will be entering into a same-sex marriage, since it is legal and part of our culture, and who are wrestling with the question whether they should or should not go to witness and participate? Do you have guidance, or is it a matter of conscience?*

CY: I have heard both sides of the story. For me personally, it would be extremely hard. There are too many things at stake in a relationship with a loved one or friend who is gay. Do they know what we believe, not merely on biblical sexuality but our understanding of the gospel, and have we communicated that to them? But the other thing is, do they know we still love them? If you do not go, what you believe is clear, but whether or not you love them is unclear. On the other hand, if you do go, it is clear you love them, but what you believe could be misunderstood. There is tension on this issue. I encourage people to pray and fast. I think it is more an issue for the individual conscience. It is not God’s will, and it is a sin to marry this way, but what about going to the celebration? If God calls you not to go, I

² Written after the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision of the United States Supreme Court in 2015. Christopher Yuan and Rosaria Butterfield, “Something Greater than Marriage: A Response to the SCOTUS Decision,” *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, June 30, 2015, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/something-greater-than-marriage-a-response-to-the-scotus-decision>.

suggest that you not tell that individual through an email, a text, or a phone call, but do your best actually to go out of your way to tell them face-to-face. Show by your actions that they are important to you. And this is a tough decision; it is most difficult for parents who have gay children because that decision could be a make-or-break decision. Not going might have decades of ramifications, or forever. Parents have to communicate what they believe to their children. Everyone at a wedding is there to celebrate, but sometimes that is not the case. Sometimes in-laws go even though they do not approve of the wedding. They have communicated it, but they are present because of their love for their child, not because they approve the union. The pinnacle wedding in the Bible is Christ and the bride. Weddings are not something to be played with or just a ceremony. I would have a hard time going, but I leave it up to the parents. Parents who are having a difficult time may consider not going to the ceremony but going to the reception.

PL: *What advice do you give to Bible-believing churches about effective ministering to those who are in a same-sex relationship, whether married or not, to engage them with both authentic love and Bible teaching?*

CY: As a proponent of expository preaching, I do not think there needs to be a focus on specific topics. God's sovereignty leads you to address this appropriately in preaching his Word, as sexual immorality is touched upon many times. People ask me, "Should we allow gays in our church?" That is kind of a nonquestion, because of course, they can sit next to the other sinners! When a gay couple comes to your church, imagine all they went through to walk into an evangelical, Bible-believing, gospel-centered church. So welcome them even if they look out of place.

Then the question shifts to serving and membership. We have to be biblical and consistent. Membership in a church has to be based upon conversion; unconverted people do not become members. It is complex because the church has to be different. The issue is not whether a member is sinning or has sinned but whether that individual is in unrepentant serial sin. So if a member has sinned, there needs to be individual biblical restoration, as in Matthew 18. If it comes to the church level in the discipline of unrepentant serial sin, maybe probationary membership will be the outcome. Disciplinary action practiced should be restorative, as that is its goal. The same approach needs to be applied for someone who wants to become a member or serve in leadership: any unrepentant serial sin needs to be addressed before a person can move forward in serving or in leadership. I would want to do what I can to have an unrepentant individual to stay at that church and allow the Holy Spirit to continue working in them.

Sometimes pastors ask what to do if a gay couple comes up after the sermon and asks, “Will you marry us?” Obviously, my answer is negative, but I would not tell them so right away, because I want to continue in dialogue with them. Rather, I would say, “Can I take you out to lunch? I want to hear more of your story.” That would be my answer to anyone who asked, including a heterosexual couple. If we really and truly believe in the sanctity and the goodness of marriage, let us treat it in that way.

PL: *Is it the work of the church to try to encourage someone who has left a gay relationship to find a heterosexual relationship, or should we leave it in God’s hands? Instinct says, “Let us do something to make it biblical,” and maybe that’s wrong.*

CY: Yes, we should not push and should be consistent with all single adults. We should avoid pushing them into marriage because if biblical marriage is good, biblical singleness is also good. If you are single, praise God and serve God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. If God provides a potential partner, first get to know one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, be friends, and serve together in the Lord. God will make it apparent whether to marry or not. We should not hold marriage up as some success.

PL: *Do you have a final thought that maybe you did not address that you would like to add?*

CY: I am excited about my new book *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*. There are many good and excellent books on sexuality, in particular by Rosaria Butterfield.³ I want to build on those, and one of my hopes is to remind us that as we address the topic of sexual identity and minister to unbelievers who have same-sex attractions or identify as gay, we need to highlight not only the centrality of Christ but also the body of Christ. We cannot have Christ apart from the body of Christ. Sometimes our focus on what to do or not and practical theology eclipses the importance of the local church. The Great Commission commands us to “go and make disciples” (Matt 28:19): disciples, not converts. The context God has provided for discipleship to happen truly is not a support group or a parachurch group, but primarily the body of Christ, the local church. Parachurch organizations can be helpful but are not the solution that Christ offers. That is the takeaway as we address this topic or any other topic.

PL: *How should we pray for you? You mentioned you are HIV positive. Is it a*

³ See, e.g., Rosaria Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2015).

challenge that we should be lifting up as you continue to serve, or other aspects of your life?

CY: Thank you, Dr. Lillback. Definitely my health: God has been so gracious. I know I have a promise from Isaiah 53 that by his stripes I am healed, whether it is on this side of glory or the other. God has given so much wisdom to the researchers and doctors who have given us great medication, so I am doing all right; my life and health are in God's hands. Pray for my parents and me. This is not my ministry, but it is our ministry. My parents and I travel together—as I have a policy of never traveling alone—so they also speak with me. They are getting older: my father is 78, and my mother is 76. So pray for God's will, that God will give us the years he wants us to serve together, and we will do that with joy and power and energy. Also pray that with my book coming out, that when I am attacked by gay activists, that it will not take away the joy, and I might be able to respond and speak and write with truth and grace.

PL: *I do want to conclude in prayer for you and respond to your wonderful ministry: I praise God for you, Christopher. Thank you, it has been great to have been with you.*

Lord, I thank you for my brother in Christ who has been remarkably drawn to you, who has been given deep insight into Scripture and into the unique needs of our neighbors in some of the most challenging parts of human relationships that are negatively and diversely viewed in your church. Thank you for the work that Christopher has been called to do with his parents. Would you bless them, would you extraordinarily multiply his ministry of speaking with his parents as well as the forthcoming book and other books they have written. Would you do abundantly more than we could ask or think, for this need is so substantial. We pray that you will help us all, and may Christopher's leadership be anointed by your grace. We pray, Lord, for the barbs, the fiery darts, the criticisms, the assaults, and resistance that may come in innumerable ways. Would you help him to be strong and grounded in Christ, filled with your joy and persevering strength that his life might bring hope to many. We lift him up to you with gratitude. This we ask, Lord, that you will use this interview and the things that come from it to bless many for your kingdom's sake. We pray it all through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Book Reviews

Alan Jacobs. *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Times of crisis naturally provoke intense reflection and soul-searching. The occasion for Augustine's *Civitas Dei* was at least in part the impending collapse of the Roman Empire. Oswald Spengler wrote *The Decline of the West* just after World War I. Not all those who reflect have been intent on preparing the way for the future, particularly if they did not think there would be one. Yet soberly anticipating the years following the crisis is surely as important as discerning the nature of the crisis itself. It could be argued that after the pioneering days of the Reformation, most leaders were concerned to lay the groundwork for the future. Admittedly, some, like Martin Luther, were not sure there would be much more time before the end. But when they did think about the next generations, often their attention turned to *education*. Thus, Jan Amos Comenius, the Czech Reformer, advocated learning as the only sure way to preserve and develop any gains. The same was true in Geneva, where John Calvin, and especially Theodore Beza, took pains to consolidate the advances made by the Reformation in that city by means of schools and the university.

We can also think of the consequences of failing to plan as well. Examples abound of leaders who never quite faced the issue of succession and whose movements paid the price. When things are going well, we do not tend to worry about the future as much as when they are not.

Important voices spoke out during one of the greatest crisis periods of our time, or any time, World War II. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, near the end of 1942, a dreadful year for European civilization by any account, declared, "The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to

extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live” These words, and the sentiment they contained, appear as a leit-motif throughout this remarkable volume by Alan Jacobs. In his own words, “the primary task of this book is to explore this [previously described] model of Christian humane learning as a force for social renewal” (51).

The book is an extensive, learned examination of the views of five Christians, who, from very different backgrounds, address the question of the aftermath of the most global war in history. What they hold in common is the view that the principal location for the deciding way forward will be education. This does not entirely distinguish them from their more secular peers. What does is the view that without the Christian faith the outcome will be fruitless.

The five authors examined are Jacques Maritain, T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, and Simone Weil. Others, like Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr, have walk-on parts, and a short afterword is devoted to Jacques Ellul. At first blush, one might wonder how such odd bedfellows could be on the same page about the future. In numerous details, they are not. But what Jacobs manages to do is find commonalities that, when combined, give weight to the central message. If they generally agree that somehow education within a Christian worldview is going to be crucial to the survival of civilization after the war is over, they also appear to unite on the diagnosis of the danger to be faced. In a word, it is *force*. In different ways, all five interlocutors worried about systems. Eliot railed against repetition. Weil, though a Christian, could never quite join the church, fearing institutional “spiritual totalitarianism.” Auden wrote against “the planned society, caesarism of thugs or bureaucracies, paideia, Scientia.” He famously sparred with Harvard’s president James B. Conant, who wanted the college to become a powerhouse of science and technology, downplaying the humanities.

The authors all want to see the humanities kept alive amidst threats of various kinds. Lewis delivered his remarkable sermon, eventually titled “Learning in War-Time,” at Saint Mary the Virgin, the University Church in Oxford, six weeks into the war. The question was obvious: what good is it to engage in studies when the country is at war? His answer is compelling: “The war creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we no longer can ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice.” A life of learning is good but is only one of many lives we can live—that is, as long as we do it, as well as all things, to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Perhaps, as Jacobs speculates, Lewis not only has students in mind but himself. Cultural pursuits may matter, or they may not. It simply depends on what you do with them whether in wartime or not.

Lewis began to write *The Abolition of Man* in 1942, arguing that science, or an imperialistic view of it, was about to triumph over the other disciplines. “Man has nature whacked” he said, quoting a friend, warning of the dangers of the conquest of nature, which in the end is always driven by a few men. In this same book Lewis argues with the authors of a text on English grammar, which he calls *The Green Book*, who claim that when someone says, “That waterfall is beautiful,” they are really saying they have a subjective feeling of beauty; that is because no object can be intrinsically beautiful. Lewis retorts that the viewer might have feelings of humility before the cascade but not of beauty. The grammarians are making the philosophical mistake of saying objects cannot have objective beauty, but we can have feelings about beauty. It would be like reducing any declaration of an action as unfair to a feeling of unfairness. But in fact, if we have any feeling about it, it would be from our sense of justice, which is an assertion that there are objective standards.

Maritain pleads for the recovery of true humanism in an age where all around it is being crushed. He is the only one of the five who thinks the term *humanism* ought to have a wholly positive connotation. He argues that Thomas Aquinas supplies the tools for authentic humanism. In fact, he laments the “dissolution of the Middle Ages” and says that today “humanism” has become the opposite of Thomas’s view. Today we have the cult of humanity, which has produced the Nazis and other perverse forms of oppressive régimes. Yet he is not pessimistic. In *The Twilight of Civilization* he explains that the present trials are but a prelude to a rebirth of true humanism.

Interestingly, he admires Karl Barth but finds him in the end dismissive of anthropocentric humanism. Barth’s theology of grace does not vivify but leaves man in his annihilated state. We need much more. We need the true humanism of the Christian worldview, which centers on man as God’s image-bearer. We need a God who meets us with grace, not with dialectical encounter.

Weil may be the least known of the five, although she wrote extensively and is enjoying something of a revival today. She shares Maritain’s sense of a decline but differs radically on his assessment of the Middle Ages. The high point for her was the Romanesque era. Unlike many art lovers, she does not care for the Gothic, with its heaviness and scaffolding. Such a totalitarian mindset allowed the church to crush the faith of simple folks. Humanism, even the humanism of the Renaissance, which may have begun in an attempt to free people from the “evil” thirteenth century, was in the end incapable of turning humanity toward a God of grace.

Eliot's masterpiece, "The Four Quartets," is, among other things, a kind of lens onto the war through spiritual eyes. After the remarkable turnaround at Dunkirk, when 350,000 soldiers were freed from nearly certain captivity, all eyes were on Winston Churchill, who was able to claim not victory, but temporary resistance against the dark powers in air and fire. Eliot, who had become English for all intents and purposes, declared that the best we can do is to "keep alive aspirations which can remain valid throughout the longest and darkest period of universal calamity and degradation" (101). Jacobs comments that the ethic undergirding this extraordinary poem is "homely": do your duty without grumbling in circumstances that are anything but propitious.

Auden gets as much attention as any of the five, perhaps because Jacobs has spent so much of his life studying him. His marvelous book, *What Became of Wystan: Change and Continuity in Auden's Poetry* (1998), showcases the author's skill in deciphering and then exhibiting the poet's artistry to the average reader. Auden wrote four long poems during the war years. One of them, "The Age of Anxiety," describes some of the psychological results of war, particularly the "displaced person." Intriguingly, the poem describes four New Yorkers, who, like Auden himself, have been spared the horrors of war, at least directly. One of the four, Rosetta, is Jewish and has escaped the harrowing realities of the Shoah. The best she can say about God is that somehow, despite all appearances, he is there. "His Question disqualifies our quick senses / His Truth makes our theories historical sins / It is where we are wounded that is when He speaks" After the war, the displaced persons are more qualified to address ultimate questions, though the answers may be elusive.

These brief words cannot adequately describe the remarkable cataract of insights in this book. They combine to form a real symphony of perceptions about the human need to defend *humanity* in a time of crisis. That may only be hoped for within a Christian framework.

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Elizabeth Agnew Cochran. *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics*. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

With her latest work, Elizabeth Agnew Cochran continues her project of retrieving virtue for Protestant theological ethics. In particular, she argues that an ethic of constructive virtue emerges from the works of magisterial

Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards when we consider the affinity that they have—not with *Aristotelian* and *Thomist* notions of virtue, but with *Stoic* virtue.

For the most part, Stoic virtue is overlooked within contemporary conversations on virtue because (1) Calvinism has often distanced itself from Stoicism to avoid charges of determinism, and (2) Alasdair MacIntyre and others have wrongly characterized Stoicism as noneudaimonist or ateleological. For Cochran, both of these are red herrings. In the first case, there is a documented influence of Roman Stoicism on the Reformers, especially Calvin. Thus, it makes sense that the two traditions would demonstrate affinity with each other. In the second case, recent studies of Roman Stoicism clearly demonstrate that Stoics are concerned with questions of human flourishing and teleology. For that reason, the Stoic tradition has more in common with Aristotelian accounts of practical reason and moral formation than MacIntyre suggests. Indeed, not only can Stoicism account for these things, it can go beyond Aristotelian accounts of virtue because it conceives of virtue in a nonlinear, or transformative, fashion. For this reason, it is uniquely suited to address Protestant commitments to the essential tenets of justification by faith alone and divine providence.

Cochran focuses her retrieval on the Roman Stoics (Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius) because, unlike the ancient and middle Stoics, the Romans are more interested in questions of practical reasoning and ethics. For the Roman Stoics, virtue is “a unified, singular, and transformative good” (55). First, virtue is unified because for the Stoics, to have virtue is to possess all of the virtues simultaneously. The “truly virtuous moral agent” possesses “practical intelligence” and is, therefore, able to act virtuous in any given circumstance (56). Second, virtue is singular because, unlike in Aristotelian thought, happiness is independent of external circumstances. The cultivation of virtue alone is sufficient for flourishing. Finally, virtue is transformative because the acquisition of Stoic virtue occurs instantaneously, not progressively through habituation. This instant acquisition occurs through transformation.

Virtue is exemplified in Roman Stoicism by the disposition of assent to divine providence. The person who accepts that the world is governed by a rational divine principle is the one who more readily accepts the external circumstances they confront. This acceptance, in turn, enables the virtuous person to focus on the internal circumstances that are within her power to change. Thus, for Stoicism, virtue means a person putting her trust in the basic moral order of the universe, living with a sense of gratitude for her place in the world, and developing within herself an impartial love for all people.

For Cochran, this basic account of Roman Stoicism demonstrates promising affinities with Protestant Christianity. In the first instance, Cochran argues that the Protestant emphasis on the centrality of faith is compatible with the Stoic concept of assent. Both faith and assent have cognitive and moral components. In each case, the agent must become aware of God's goodness and governance. Then, trusting in her newfound understanding, she acts in the world in accordance with God's goodness. This means that for Protestantism, faith, not love, is the central virtue of the Christian life.

A second important convergence between Protestant and Stoic thought concerns the question of moral transformation. Cochran argues that the Stoic insistence on the unity of virtue is compatible with the Protestant emphasis on justification by grace through faith alone. In particular, the sort of instantaneous transformation that Protestants attribute with conversion to faith is similar to the type of instant transformation that the Stoics describe when one goes from being vicious to being virtuous. In both instances, the instantaneous nature of the transformation can account for divine agency. Furthermore, this sort of account of moral transformation best describes the Christian experience of being transformed while remaining a sinner.

The similarities that Cochran draws out between Roman Stoicism and Protestant Christianity are undeniable; but even then, Cochran tempers our enthusiasm, reminding us that some fundamental differences remain. First, virtue is something that follows naturally in the Stoic account. For Christians, God's gracious action is the precondition for the Christian pursuit of virtue. Second, because Stoic virtue is instantaneous, there is no emphasis on moral formation after the transformation event. Christianity, on the other hand, is deeply concerned with questions of moral formation after conversion.

Overall, Cochran's argument is compelling. It should push the agenda to develop a Reformed virtue ethic forward by pressing questions about whether or not Reformed theology is that radical of a break with Thomist and Aristotelian moral thought. Recent studies of Reformed orthodoxy—especially on the question of natural law—seem to suggest otherwise. If there is one looming concern, it is the question of whether Protestant Christianity and Stoicism are commensurate with each other. Kevin Rowe has recently made the compelling case that they are rival traditions of moral inquiry (*One True Life* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016]). While Cochran addresses Rowe's argument, I do not think she really overcomes it. Her appeals to Jeffrey Stout's argument that all moral arguments are bricolage is anticipated by Rowe, who argues that this pragmatic account

of moral reasoning postpones the question of the truthfulness of either Christianity or Stoicism.

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Frances Luttikhuizen. *Underground Protestantism in Sixteenth Century Spain: A Much Ignored Side of Spanish History*. Refo500 Academic Studies 30. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

Dr. Frances Luttikhuizen's book, *Underground Protestantism in Sixteenth Century Spain: A Much Ignored Side of Spanish History* is a timely addition to the Reformation story. 2017 was the five-hundredth anniversary of the start of the Reformation, when on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door on All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany. History is important, and the document that Luther shared, meant only to be a topic for theological discussion among theologians, shows how events that seem unimportant at the time can change the world, as these theses that challenged the Roman Catholic Church were soon spread throughout Europe. Luttikhuizen's book records this dramatic historical change and how "new ideas" even made their way to Spain, where the Inquisition soon took action to quash any changes, so much so that "Lutheranism" became a catchphrase for any and all heresy. While this account is a dark story of the scandal and evil within the Roman Church during the Reformation era, it is a complete and honest presentation that needs to be integrated into the history of both Spain and the Christian church.

Luttikhuizen has offered a well-researched study of this era, which required the huge task of sorting through the Inquisition records, archives, and publications, much of it hidden until recently or not available in English. The author takes us from the glory days of Spain to the struggles of Charles V and Philip II to contain the growing influences of humanism and new theology; these efforts changed Spain from a tolerant, openly progressive power to an isolated peninsula dominated by dogmatic thugs. Luttikhuizen quotes on page 117 from Ernest Shafer's research that there were up to 2100 cases of persons who appeared before the Inquisition, of whom 220 were burned at the stake and 120 were burned in effigy. This book of 434 pages represents a herculean effort and offers a well-translated documentation of what took place over many generations in Spain and beyond.

This book is quite readable despite the complicated history of the Inquisition and its many victims, whom the author carefully highlights. It brings

the Inquisition to life to show how it dealt with real people, their lives, and their families, from the highly placed to the lowly; it shows how quickly this institution could change a life and career. The author also highlights not just the men endangered for their theological and philosophical views but also in chapters 7 and 10 how the Inquisition had no tolerance of free-thinking women. Literally, no one was safe, within or outside of Spain.

The treatment of Dr. Augustin de Cazalla was an example of the capricious nature of the Inquisition. Cazalla was the court preacher and personal chaplain to Charles V from 1543–1553 but became the main attraction of the *auto-da-fé* (the execution of heretics by burning at the stake) of 1559. His fall from grace is outlined on pages 111–13 and later on pages 118ff.

Bartolome de Carranza is another example (129–36). Carranza was the archbishop of Toledo, as well as a professor at various universities in Spain. As an early follower of Erasmus's humanism, he too became the target of an investigation that led to his demise. He had the respect and ear of Emperor Philip II, yet that did not save him. However, he and Cazalla are only a few of many highly placed church leaders who were disgraced, arrested, and died at the stake or in poverty and shame.

The most dramatic chapter for me was chapter 6, "The Evangelical Circle of Valladolid." This chapter especially outlines the very detailed *auto-da-fé* (116–28). On Sunday, May 21, 1559, "31 heretics and Lutherans were condemned to the stake." The author outlines each heretic and his crimes against the church. This very well organized all-day public trial of "Lutherans" was presided over by twenty-one-year-old Princess Juana, the youngest daughter of Philip II. This chapter recounts the pomp and ceremony at this public worship service and lists those present. Those who were executed were found guilty of any of twenty different heresies, among them number two: "To claim that men were justified through the death of Christ," a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. One can only imagine attending such a local event.

I was led to this book by my interest in historic Lutheranism outside of Germany in the sixteenth century and especially the work of Francisco de Enzinas, one of the first translators of the New Testament from Greek into Spanish. As a Lutheran pastor, I have been ministering to Hispanic Americans for the past forty years from Florida to Iowa. I have been fascinated at how God brought young Francisco de Enzinas from Burgos, Spain, to Wittenberg, Germany. At the University of Wittenberg, Enzinas studied New Testament Greek under Philip Melancthon, Luther's assistant and the author of the Augsburg Confession of 1530, the doctrinal foundation of Lutheranism to this day. At the age of twenty-three, Enzinas finished his translation of the New Testament and had it published at his own expense.

He presented it personally to Charles V, only to be imprisoned for his gift to his country and the empire. It is an amazing story of intolerance to Scripture translations during the sixteenth century that has been lost for so many years. Thankfully, in November and December of 2017, the Congreso Internacional highlighted and honored the memory and the work of this young Reformer with a special exhibit and with many presentations in Burgos, Spain, Enzinas's hometown.

Along with Enzinas, the author highlights the other well-known Spanish Lutheran (a follower of the Augsburg Confession), Cassiodoro de Reina, whose translation of the whole Bible in 1569 (revised by Cipriano Valera in 1602) is well known and used throughout our Hispanic Protestant Churches.

I believe this book is important because the divisions created by the Inquisition still linger and so do the Reformation doctrinal struggles that they sought to quash. Even to this day the Reformation has been misunderstood even by Protestant churches that do not seem to appreciate the power of those simple but profound Reformation themes, the *solas* emphasized by Luther and other Reformers: *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), and *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). At this time of world persecution against Christianity and the struggle for religious freedom, the faith of the Bible that the Reformation sought to restore is more crucial than ever.

May this book be a reminder of what can happen even to the Christian church when we diminish, destroy, and attack the sacred truths of Holy Scripture for man's power and control. But may we also remember and cherish the truth that the church is eternal, and as this book demonstrates, it will survive the most intense persecution to give glory to God. For the church is Christ's alone; he is the head (Eph 1:20–23 ESV), and salvation comes only through him (Acts 4:12), by faith (Rom 1:16–17; 3:28), and by his grace (Eph 2:8–10).

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Herman Bavinck. *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) is the most important continental and confessional theologian of modernity, and his works have captured the imagination of a plethora of Reformed scholars and pastors of late. Perhaps the most

exciting news for the Bavinck readership since the final publication of *Reformed Dogmatics* in 2008 was that, in the very same year, Dirk Van Keulen found, by happenstance, an enormous manuscript in an archive in Amsterdam that appeared to be Bavinck's handwritten lectures on Reformed ethics. These pages had never been seen by any contemporary eyes as far as can be known and had certainly never been published. In 2019, the Bavinck readership may now hold in its hands the first of three planned volumes derivative of this eleven-hundred-page manuscript. The first volume in English spans 493 pages of prose. It is important to note, however, that Bavinck decided not to publish this work, that it was never finished, and that it is from the hand of the early Bavinck during his Kampen years. While the manuscript was not in final form when found, the editor promises that these volumes are the "genuine" voice of Bavinck.

If one might summarize the entirety of this first volume, Bavinck's argument is that the ethical ideal, the Good, is the ideal of being truly human. The ideal or true human would be (apart from the pollution of sin) the norm for morality. This moral life is one in which a human both in being and becoming is exactly what they are and should be as the image of God. And the only hope for this form of life, the good life, is to be moved from the Adamic and sinful state of the broken covenant of works into the fullness of the spiritual life by the Spirit of God (20). He offers a very similar argument in his early essay "The Kingdom of God, the Highest Good" and continues his life-long motif of the organic (here, the organism of the harmonious self to all its external relations).

This brief description of an ethical position dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit coincides with an unsurprising approach offered in the introduction: Bavinck sharply separates the task of Christian ethics from mere philosophical ethics. Christian ethics asks how responsible human beings use the gifts of creation, accept the gospel of grace, and are regenerated, as well as how the whole person in intellect, feeling, and volition is directed toward the fulfillment of God's law. The framework of these questions assumes the prior work of Christian dogmatics and treats Christian ethics as a work of practical theology. Christian ethics views the human being in relationship with God. Philosophical ethics finds a foundation in nature, utilitarian logic, custom, intuition, and the demands of an evolutionary view of the origins of humanity. Christian ethics is theological ethics and depends upon one foundation of knowledge: the disclosure of God's viewpoint (26) in the rule of doctrine and life, the Holy Scriptures.

For Bavinck, the essence of humanity is the image of God. This is the most important point of the first six chapters ("Humanity before Conversion"),

which provide the dogmatic structure for the rest of his construction. Moral obligation arises because human beings are created to display God, to display his communicable attributes. It is in fulfilling the task of being what a human being is—while being unable to do exactly so because of the total corruption of the self—that feelings of unmet duty, obligation, and therefore guilt arise. It is only the Christian religion that can determine the essence of the moral obligation, because that obligation is birthed in a theology of creation and then fall from the Triune God. From creation, and even after the fall, because of the common grace of God poured out to all, three domains of obligation exist based upon the three relations in which all humans exist: the self to other humans, the self to nature, and the self to God. In the summary of the moral law, the Decalogue, God offers this fact in brief in the very structure of the tablets: first, obligation in relation to God and second, moral obligation in relation to Creation. The first table delineates the demands of true religion and the second of morality. While morality, as obligation towards nature and neighbor, is apparent and obliged of all of humanity, only the truly religious can perform actions that are not merely in agreement with the moral law, but that are properly “good works.” This is so because good works as defined by Scripture are those actions worked in the people of God by the Holy Spirit (69).

Perhaps the most helpful moment of this work is Bavinck’s taxonomy (or “phenomenology,” as he puts it) of sin found at the conclusion of part one. The organizing principle of all sin, according to Bavinck, is egoism, or self-divination, or idolatrous self-love. One of his most prophetic moments is his claim that the sin of his contemporary culture is respect for oneself, self-esteem, which births a terrible subjectivism, a vanity, and destroys the possibility of objectivity (133). This section is one of the most meticulous modern accountings for the vast domain of possible sins. At its end, Bavinck addresses the question of natural law, a topic much deliberated in contemporary Reformed theology and even in Bavinck scholarship. His approach here is to affirm the reality of natural law but to locate its source not *first* in the possibility of human reason (hence, its moral demands are not first discovered by the intellect), but in an immediate revelation of God to the human conscience, to the feeling aspect of knowing (see his *Foundations of Psychology* in *The Bavinck Review* 9 [August 23, 2019], https://bavinck-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/BR9_Foundations.pdf) and as a gift of God’s common grace (220–35) Provoking the reader to deep conviction, part two turns (and just in time) to the hope of life in the Spirit.

His work in book two, “Converted Humanity,” accomplishes one pivotal goal: to turn the modern Christian back to the historic emphasis on the

imitation of Christ. The spiritual life of converted humanity calls the self to imitate Christ. Christ is truly human, possessing a “completely harmonious character, the masculine and the feminine, the lion and the lamb” (337). Jesus Christ is, therefore, first the turning point of history and the means of salvation and also *the* exemplar of the spiritual life for the whole of humanity, men and women alike.

As is typical of a Bavinck work, the reader cannot help but be impressed by the scale of scholarly interaction with the Greeks, the patristic fathers, the theology of Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages, the Protestant fathers and their Reformed scholastic progeny, and especially the German, Dutch, and French scholarship of the nineteenth century. Bavinck does indeed reveal some of his own cultural moment in several sweeping statements that would be most unwelcome to the twenty-first century ear: that the sin of the Germanic peoples is drunkenness (119), of the Greeks the lust of the eyes, and of the Romans the pride of life; he also has a somewhat absolute approach to the nature of women and men as, respectively, emotional and reasonable (419). But these moments are brief. One of the most significant benefits of this work is its devotional quality, as well as its service as an aid to the preacher looking for guidance on ethics and application.

Thanks are due to Dirk Van Keulen, John Bolt, and others, for their work translating and editing this significant volume. Besides some editorial oddities in this English edition (like citing Wikipedia on occasion), one of the best decisions was to include the significant original Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, and Dutch terms in the footnotes. This adds immense scholarly possibility to an exclusively English edition and is an addition not present in the *Reformed Dogmatics* in English. The significance of this work is hard to measure. It in a way fills out *Reformed Dogmatics* to bring Bavinck’s theological reflection closer to completion.

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John Murray’s *Principles of Conduct*—Some Personal Reflections

I deeply appreciate the invitation from the editors of *Unio Cum Christo* to contribute some brief reflections on John Murray’s book *Principles of Conduct*. It has now been in print for over sixty years. But given the intervening exponential growth in Evangelical publishing (not least *academic* publishing—how impoverished theological students of the 1950s were by comparison!), it is possible that a generation has arisen that “knows not Murray.”

In the interests of transparency, I should “come clean” and acknowledge an immense personal debt to Professor Murray. I was an eighteen-year-old second-year university student when I first heard him speak. He was recently retired from Westminster Seminary, so I was familiar with him only through reading *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*. He gave an address at our InterVarsity meeting on “The Obedience of Christ.”¹ It proved to be a night of major theological awakening for me. From that point on, I devoured everything I could find by him and with my friends had the privilege of hearing him regularly, if not frequently (how privileged we were!). Checking the date written into my *Principles of Conduct*, it appears my own copy has now celebrated its fiftieth birthday!

On one occasion, we asked Professor Murray to speak on “Christian Ethics.”² I recall him stressing at the beginning of his address that we should speak more properly of “the Christian *ethic* [singular].” In other words, there is only one standard for Christian living, one pattern with many applications. Something of that notion is apparent in the book: the subtitle of my edition is “Aspects of Biblical Ethics,” but it is not long before the singular swallows up the plural because one purpose of the studies (a developed form of his Payton Lectures at Fuller Seminary in 1955) was to explore “the basic unity and continuity of the biblical ethic.”³

From the outset, Murray thus signaled his debt to the tutelage of Geerhardus Vos (once described by him as the finest exegete he had been privileged to know). He proceeds on the basis of careful exegesis and a sensitivity to biblical theology and the history of redemption. This perspective is coupled with Murray’s rich appreciation of the theological riches of the Reformed tradition. Herein lies its strength.

Murray wrote long before many of the particular ethical debates of our time had surfaced. It might be thought, therefore, that the work is passé. Granted that he provides no discussion of many of the medical-ethical issues of the twenty-first century, or of the specific forms of gender crisis that are now so dominant, his work retains its strengths.

The reason for this is that Professor Murray adopted the approach of the

¹ I believe the substance of this address was later published as John Murray, “The Obedience of Christ,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976–1982), 2:151–57. But the relatively brief text gives only an impression of the spoken address and its power.

² The substance (but again not the extended address) is, I believe, published as John Murray, “The Christian Ethic,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* 1:174–81.

³ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Tyndale Press, 1957), 7. While a teacher of *systematic* theology, Murray had already ventured into ethical debate with his monograph *Divorce* in 1953.

Lord Jesus Christ himself. Asked about the ethical issue of divorce, our Lord responded not with a discussion of divorce as such but by pointing to God's original ordering of life "from the beginning of creation" (Mark 10:6). Following that pattern, the first half of *Principles* is devoted to an exposition and exploration of creation ordinances (chapter 2) and, in particular: marriage and procreation (chapter 3), work (chapter 4), and the sanctity of life (chapter 5). Here Murray exegetes and expounds the fundamental building blocks for thinking biblically and Christianly in any generation. With considerable prescience, as well as a well-honed biblico-theological system, he includes a discussion of the sanctity of truth (chapter 6), before solid chapters on Christ's teaching (chapter 7), and law and grace (chapter 8). Five appendices provide discussions of Genesis 6:1–4; Leviticus 18:16, 18; and 1 Corinthians 5:1, as well as slavery and antinominism. Throughout it is one of the book's virtues that the reader is led on step by step in the thinking process—a great advantage in working through any author's writing, since it enables the reader to follow his or her reasoning and to identify and assess any points of divergence.

All these chapters we might expect in such a work, since such topics are central to ethical discussion in any era, even if some of the questions arising in our day have a new twist. What is noteworthy in *Principles of Conduct*, however, are the two concluding chapters whose themes are much more likely to be overlooked. But they take us to the heart of Murray's thinking on the actual living out of the Christian ethic.

Chapter 9, "The Dynamic of the Biblical Ethic," is a careful exposition of the theme of union with Christ. Readers of *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (which had been published two years previously) would have already been familiar with Professor Murray's emphasis that *unio cum Christo* lies at the very heart of things. Later the theme would re-emerge, especially in the first volume of his commentary on Romans⁴ and in his contribution "Definitive Sanctification" in *The Calvin Theological Journal* (1967).⁵ But in many ways, the almost thirty pages of exposition in *Principles of Conduct* was a landmark that has often been overlooked. Now, half a century later, perhaps only within the last decade or so has there been a broader revival of interest in the doctrine, producing a bookshelf of literature on the theme. There can be no doubt that to an entire generation John Murray showed the way—albeit leaving us with the intriguing question whether it was for pedagogical rather than theological reasons that his chapter on union with

⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965).

⁵ John Murray, "Definitive Sanctification," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* 2:277–84.

Christ in *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* came at the end!⁶

If I may speak personally, few paragraphs in Murray's works have made a deeper impression on me than his powerful exhortation to "fully appreciate the strength of Paul's statement, 'we died to sin'":

We are too ready to give heed to what we deem to be the hard, empirical facts of Christian profession, and we have erased the clear line of demarcation which Scripture defines. As a result we have lost our vision of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Our ethic has lost its dynamic and we have become conformed to this world. We know not the power of death to sin in the death of Christ, and we are not able to bear the rigour of the liberty of redemptive emancipation, "We died to sin": the glory of Christ's accomplishment and the guarantee of the Christian ethic are bound up with that doctrine. If we live in sin we have not died to it, and if we have not died to it we are not Christ's. If we died to sin we no longer live in it, for "we who are such as have died to sin, how shall we live in it?" (Romans 6:2).⁷

Perhaps even more likely to be omitted in a work on developing a Christian ethic today, however, is chapter 10, which has all the quintessentially Murray style, flavor, and yes, *gravitas*. Its simple title: "The Fear of God." To interject a final, personal note, I feel I have gone many miles sustained and challenged by its opening aphorism: "The fear of God is the soul of godliness."⁸ The entire chapter is worthy of separate publication and widespread distribution in our churches, for *timor Domini* has itself come to be feared. We have lost a taste for what the early church knew well (Acts 2:43). We have become insensitive to the paradox that it was when "great fear came upon the whole church" and "none of the rest dared join them" that believers were "held ... in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:11, 13–14).

If there is one thing I could have asked Professor Murray to add, it would have been a treatment of the *imago Dei*. There is no discussion of it, and as far as I can recall, the book contains only one reference to Genesis 1:26–28 (and that in the context of procreation). Sixty years on from the publication of *Principles of Conduct* it is apparent that one of the greatest failures in the Evangelical church over the last century and more has been a virtual indifference to this foundational biblical answer to the question, "What is man?" Ink spilled on discussions of the length of the creation days in Genesis 1 makes the attention given to the *imago* seem a tiny raindrop by comparison with an ocean. Yet, clearly, Genesis 1:26–28 is the *telos* to which the whole

⁶ John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161–73.

⁷ Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 205.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

creation narrative moves. As such, it is foundational not only to our understanding of creation but also of the fall, the history of redemption, the incarnation, as well as regeneration, sanctification, and final restoration. It is not that Professor Murray gave no attention to the doctrine.⁹ But I wish he had given us more.

Reflecting again on a book that is now past its sixtieth birthday and perhaps overlooked in favor of contemporary treatments reminds me of the TV advertisement for a well-known brand of cornflakes. A youngster sits at breakfast with a bowl of them before him, takes a mouthful, and comments, “I had forgotten how good they tasted.” Rereading *Principles of Conduct* will have that effect on those who are already familiar with it. And for those who have never read it, the life-changing words Augustine heard in the garden seem appropriate: *Tolle lege*. So, pick it up (or if it is not on your bookshelves, buy it!) and read it.

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⁹ See John Murray, “Man in the Image of God,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* 2:34–46.

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Max Weber," *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 7.2 (Fall 2017): 25–45; "Certitudo Salutis and Perseverance of the Saints: The Missing Piece in the Weberian Puritan Ethic," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 13.12 (October 2017): 1–25.

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- Tushima, Cephas T. A. The Paradigmatic Role of Genesis 3 for Reading Biblical Narrative about Desire. 5.1:87–102.
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- Waters, Guy Prentiss. Review. 2.2:255–58.
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