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Editorial Introduction



Adam Harwood, Ph.D.

Adam Harwood is Associate Professor of Theology, occupying the McFarland Chair of Theology; Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry; Editor, Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

This issue of the journal features five articles from the fields of historical and systematic theology, and sixteen book reviews from the fields of apologetics, world religions, biblical studies, biblical theology, and systematic theology. The first article was written by Dongsun Cho, Assistant Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His publications include “Ambrosiaster on Justification by Faith Alone in His Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 74.2 (Fall 2012): 277-90. In the present article, Cho argues that fourth-century theologian Marius Victorinus is the first Latin father who identified in Paul’s writings the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Joe Early is Associate Professor of Theology at Campbellsville University. Among his many publications, he is the author of *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys: The First English Baptist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009). In the second article in this issue, Early compares the theology of the earliest progenitors of the Baptist movement, John Smyth (1570–1612) and Thomas Helwys (1575–1612).

Robert E. Picirilli served as Academic Dean and Professor of Greek and New Testament at Free Will Baptist Bible College (now Welch College) in Nashville, Tennessee. He served as General Editor of the Randall House Bible Commentary and contributed five commentaries to the series. Also, he is the author of several books, including *Grace, Faith, Free Will* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002). In this issue’s third article, Picirilli interacts with traditional, systematic treatments of the doctrine of providence in order to offer a non-deterministic construction of the doctrine.

The fourth article is a transcript of a conversation between Paul Helm and William Lane Craig on Calvinism and Molinism which was recorded by “Unbelievable?” with Justin Brierley (Premier Christian Radio) on January 4, 2014. Helm, Teaching Fellow at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, has authored several books on Calvinism, including *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Banner of Truth, 1982) and *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, California,

and Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University in Houston, Texas. His publications include an extended case for middle knowledge, also known as Molinism, in *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge & Human Freedom* (Baker, 1987). The article includes colloquialisms because it is a conversation rather than an academic presentation. Both men are respected advocates of their respective views, and it is a delight to publish this conversation for a wider audience.

In the fifth article, Steve W. Lemke, Provost at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, examines the historical-theological background of the seminary's first confession of faith, the *Articles of Religious Belief* (1918). A version of this article was delivered as the Founder's Day Address at the NOBTS Chapel in October of 2013. Lemke has made a significant contribution to the field of Baptist studies; I am unaware of another article which traces the historical-theological roots of this important confessional statement.

May God be glorified by these articles and reviews, and may they enrich your knowledge of and service to God.

Justification in Marius Victorinus' Pauline Commentaries: *Sola Fide, Solo Christo, and Sola Gratia Dei*



Dongsun Cho, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Alister McGrath claims in his magnum opus, *Iustitia Dei*, “Justification was simply not a theological issue in the pre-Augustinian tradition To be sure, he [Paul] is honoured and quoted, but—in the theological perspective of the west—it seems that Paul’s great insight into justification by faith was forgotten.”¹ For McGrath, Augustine is the first Latin theologian who presents a meaningful doctrine of justification, although Augustine’s doctrine of justification is similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification and does not anticipate the Reformers’ instantaneous and declarative justification based on imputed and alien righteousness.² According to McGrath, no one can find an antecedent of the Reformational understanding of justification among the church fathers prior to and even in Augustine.

Recently, however, some Protestant scholars have attested to a meaningful development of a patristic doctrine of justification by faith prior to Augustine. Thomas Oden, in *The Justification Reader*; Nick Needham, in “Justification in the Early Church Fathers”; and Daniel H. Williams, in “Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine” and “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith,” show that some patristic exegetes indeed held to justification by faith apart from human, meritorious works.³ Williams attributes McGrath and other Protestants’ failure to recognize an early, patristic

¹Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34. *Iustitia Dei* has become a classical monograph on the historical development of the doctrine of justification. Despite some disagreements with McGrath, N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 79, recommends *Iustitia Dei* as “required reading for anyone who wants seriously to engage with” the history of the doctrine of justification.

²McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 38–39, “Augustine’s doctrine of justification is the first discussion of the matter of major significance to emerge from the twilight of the western theological tradition.” For McGrath’s evaluation of Augustine’s doctrine of justification, see *ibid.*, 43–49.

³Thomas Oden, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Daniel H. Williams, “Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57.4 (2006): 649–67, *idem*, “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith According to the Gospel of Matthew,” *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007): 445–61;

doctrine of justification by faith to their “outmoded view that post-apostolic Christianity was corrupted by the vagaries of Hellenism.”⁴ The three scholars’ common observation of the ancient writers’ teaching of *sola fide* does not necessarily indicate their agreement concerning how much theological affinity may exist between the ancient writers and the Reformers on justification.

Oden proposes a provocative thesis that there is substantial textual evidence of the theological “consensus” with regard to *sola fide* between patristic writers and the Reformers.⁵ The popular assumption that the early church quickly departed from the doctrine of justification by faith alone is “an intemperate idea,” which is “neglectful ... of many ancient consensus-bearing texts.”⁶ Among the three scholars, Oden may be the staunchest advocate of a theological consensus between the patristic writers and the Reformers. Needham demonstrates the stream of a patristic understanding of justification by faith alone by presenting “the evidence for justification language bearing a forensic meaning” and the equation of justification with “forgiveness, remission, pardon, or acquittal” in patristic literature.⁷ However, Needham does not assume a unitary form of a patristic doctrine of justification by faith alone. By using the definition of the Regensburg Colloquy (1541) of justification, Williams also contends that some pre-Augustinian, Latin patristic writers—in particular, Hilary of Poitiers—teach the Pauline doctrine of “*fides sola iustificat*.”⁸ In contrast to Oden and Needham, Williams insists that the early patristic theological tradition of *sola fide* did not teach “the imputation of an alien or external righteousness to the sinner.”⁹ Unlike the early church fathers, the Reformers impoverished the richness of New Testamental soteriology by restricting it to “a single vision” of the imputation of alien righteousness.¹⁰

The implication of the above three scholars’ work is that both Catholics and Protestants have misread patristic writers regarding justification. Catholics have failed to recognize a, if not the, theological tradition of *sola fide* in the early church, one thousand years before the Reformation.

Nick Needham, “Justification in the Early Church Fathers,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 25–53.

⁴Williams, “Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine,” 652.

⁵Oden, *The Justification Reader*, 35–38, 43, and 49.

⁶Ibid., 16.

⁷Needham, “Justification in the Early Church Fathers,” 29–30.

⁸The Regensburg Colloquy produced an article on justification based on the theological agreement between the Roman Catholic leaders and the Protestant counterparts. Williams, “Justification by Faith,” 649–67. Marius Victorinus, Ambrosiaster, and Hilary of Poitiers might be those pre-Augustinian, Latin exegetes who mentioned the necessity of the righteousness of God through faith, apart from meritorious good works, in justification. Among the three exegetes, for Williams, Hilary alone “explicitly formulates *fides sola iustificat*.” See *ibid.*, 649, 658–60.

⁹Williams, “Justification by Faith,” 667. Therefore, he warns contemporary Protestant readers in the following: “If we expect the ancients’ articulation of justification by faith to mirror the terms by which the sixteenth-century Reformers formulated it, we will be disappointed and will have committed gross anachronism.” See *idem*, “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith According to the Gospel of Matthew,” 461.

¹⁰Williams, “Justification by Faith,” 667.

Protestants have unjustly blamed early Christianity for abandoning or forgetting the Pauline understanding of *sola fide*, while praising the Reformation as if it was the restoration of the Pauline doctrine of justification since the New Testament era. Despite the contributions that Oden, Needham, and Williams have made in the historical theology of justification, their research does not come to an agreeable conclusion concerning the exact nature of *sola fide* presented by the pre-Augustinian, Latin interpreters of Paul's doctrine of justification, except that the early Latin Pauline exegetes indeed held the Pauline concept of *sola fide*.

Survey of Scholarship on Victorinus in the Doctrine of Justification

The three contemporary scholars have not paid proper attention to Marius Victorinus, a contemporary of Hilary of Poitiers and the first Latin exegete to produce Pauline commentaries in the Latin Church. Victorinus, born in Africa, was a renowned professor of rhetoric in Rome, but became a Christian around 355 by his public confession and baptism. In the *Confessions*, Augustine testified that Victorinus' public and bold profession of his faith in Jesus Christ influenced his own conversion. Oden, in his work, notices Victorinus' teaching of *sola fide* without providing a theological analysis of the ancient commentator's doctrine of justification.¹¹ In his article, Needham just mentions Victorinus as an occasional reference without attempting to examine the Latin theologian's doctrine of justification. Williams does recognize Victorinus' use of *sola fide* and emphasis on the grace of God. Following the Catholic scholar Robert B. Eno, however, Williams falls short of confirming Victorinus' consistent and thorough arguments for justification by faith alone based on the sufficiency of the redemptive ministry of Christ.¹² Williams asserts, "Victorinus does not seek to investigate any further what justification as saving faith means for the Christian" other than merely using the phrase *sola fide*.¹³ Instead, Williams presents Hilary of Poitiers, contemporary of Victorinus, as the first Latin theologian who taught a meaningful doctrine of justification by faith.

Then, one may ask how scholars have not recognized such an important ancient commentator in the history of biblical hermeneutics with respect to the doctrine of justification. In his preface to the commentary on Galatians, Jerome devaluates Victorinus' Pauline commentary: "Caius Marius Victorinus, ... commentaries on the apostle [Paul]; but that he, busy with learning in secular letters, was entirely ignorant of the Holy Scriptures. And no one, however eloquent, can argue well about what he does not know."¹⁴ Jerome's negative evaluation of Victorinus'

¹¹Oden, *The Justification Reader*, 48.

¹²Robert B. Eno, "Some Patristic Views on the Relationship of Faith and Works in Justification," *Recherches augustiniennes* 19 (1984): 7. See also Williams, "Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith," 452n35–36; "Justification by Faith," 657n30. It seems that Williams just accepts Eno's Catholic reading of Victorinus instead of analyzing the Latin exegete's Pauline commentary on his own.

¹³William, "Justification by Faith," 657.

¹⁴PL 26:332: "*Caium Marium Victorinum... edidisse Commentarios in Apostolum; sed quod occupatus ille eruditione saecularium litterarum, Scripturas omnino sanctas ignoraverit: et nemo possit, quamvis eloquens, de eo bene disputare, quod nesciat.*"

commentaries should not be taken as an indicator of Victorinus' poor quality in his Pauline commentaries. Jerome's critique of the first Latin Pauline exegete could be due to the former's jealousy of the latter for the title of the first Latin exegete. Or it may be due to the two exegetes' different understandings of a commentator and a commentary on biblical writings. Unlike Jerome, who believed a commentator should introduce his readers to a variety of interpretations that had been suggested before his commentary, Victorinus intended to provide what he believed the text clearly said without leading his readers to other exegetical traditions. Victorinus' goal in his commentary project was to produce a "simple commentary" with "simple words" based on "the historical and literal exegesis" of the text in order to communicate as clearly as possible a reliable picture of what the apostle said and did.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Jerome's harsh critique of Victorinus may have resulted in "almost complete neglect" of Victorinus in the history of biblical exegesis.¹⁶

More than a century ago, European scholars such as Gore, Schmid, and Harnack noticed the theological importance of Victorinus' exegetical basis for justification by faith alone.¹⁷ For instance, Harnack considers Victorinus as "Augustine before Augustine (*Augustinus ante Augustinum*)" not only because Victorinus attempts to explain the mystery of Christianity in light of his Neo-Platonism prior to Augustine, but also because Victorinus' influence upon Augustine is very obvious in the doctrine of predestination and justification by faith "in opposition to all moralism (*im Gegensatz zu allem Moralismus*)."¹⁸ A few contemporary European scholars have also noticed Victorinus' contribution to the patristic tradition of *sola fide*. In his monograph *Marius Victorinus Afer*, Werner Erdt attests to Victorinus' Reformational understanding of justification by faith alone.¹⁹ In his essay "Salvation *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia* in Early Christianity," Riemer

¹⁵"*simplici expositione*" and "*commentationem simplicem*." See Eph 1.11 [CSEL 83/2:18.25]; Eph 4.8 [CSEL 83/2:60.16]. Stephen Cooper, "Philosophical Exegesis in Marius Victorinus' Commentaries on Paul," in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Bagdad*, Josef Lössl and John W. Watt, eds. (Burlington, VA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 71.

¹⁶Stephen Andrew Cooper and Marius Victorinus, *Marius Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 109. See also Giacomo Raspanti, *Mario Vittorino esegeta di S. Paolo* (Palermo: L'epos societa' editrice, 1996), 94.

¹⁷Charles Gore, "Victorinus," in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Vol. 4 (London: John Murray, 1887), 1129–38; Reinhold Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin* (Kiel: Druck von E. Uebermuth, 1895); Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 5th ed., Vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1910).

¹⁸Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengechichte*, 3:34–35n1. See also Bernhard Lohse, "Beobachtungen Zum Paulus-Kommentar Des Marius Victorinus Und Zur Wiederentdeckung Des Paulus in Der Lateinischen Theologie Des Vierten Jahrhunderts," in *Kerygma Und Logos: Beiträge Zu Den Geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen Zwischen Antike U. Christentum: Festschr. Für Carl Andresen Zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Carl Andresen and Adolf Martin Ritter (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979), 355. Concerning Victorinus' understanding of predestination, see 11–12.

¹⁹Werner Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer, Der Erste Lateinische Pauluskommentator: Studien Zu Seinen Pauluskommentaren Im Zusammenhang Der Wiederentdeckung Des Paulus in Der Abendländischen Theologie Des 4. Jahrhunderts*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, ser. 23, Theologie (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang,

Roukema describes Victorinus as “the most Protestant interpreter of Paul” on justification in early Christianity, while not providing a sufficient theological assessment of the Latin commentator’s view on *sola fide*.²⁰ Most recently, Stephen Andrew Cooper attests in his work *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians* that the African theologian’s exegetical defense of *sola fide* anticipates the Reformers’ theology of justification.

I will argue—unlike Eno and Williams, and based on Jewish soteriology in Victorinus’ commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians—that Victorinus is the first Latin father who uses phrases such as *sola fide*, *sola fides*, *fidem solam*, *per fidem*, *ex fide*, and *ex fide, non ex operibus legis*, and that he sees justification by faith alone as Paul’s theological response to his opponents’ works.²¹ Victorinus teaches *sola fide* unequivocally by condemning the addition of either the observation of the Mosaic law or meritorious works subsequent to *sola fide*, while urging his audience to live in holiness. *Sola fide* is the sole condition in appropriating justification as opposed to merits not only prior to but also subsequent to faith.²² For this African commentator, “faith alone [*fides sola*] in Jesus Christ is sufficient [*sufficiat*] for our justification [*iustificationem*] and liberation,” and also for all other blessings of salvation such as reconciliation and sanctification.²³ To believe in Christ is identical with receiving “immortality and to eternal life.”²⁴ Therefore, Victorinus summarizes the overarching effect of faith in this way: “faith alone in Christ is salvation for us.”²⁵ As Williams notes above, it is anachronistic for contemporary readers of Victorinus to present his view of *sola fide* as if it is exactly identical with the Reformational view of *sola fide*. In this paper, however, I will argue that Victorinus displays a considerable theological affinity with the Reformers in the doctrine of justification. That Victorinus does not speak of all major Protestant elements of justification with the same degree of emphasis and clarity should not be a hermeneutical bias that keeps us from reading a patristic doctrine of *sola fide* in his Pauline commentaries. In contrast to Oden and Needham, I attempt to present a substantial

1980), 135.

²⁰Riemer Roukema, “Salvation *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia* in Early Christianity,” in *Passion of Protestants*, eds. P. N. Holtrop, Frederik de Lange, and Riemer Roukema (Kampen: Kop, 2004), 47.

²¹See Gal 1:13–14; 2:15–16; 3:2, 7–9, 20–26; 6:10; Eph 1:15; 2:14–15; 3:16–17; 6:13; Phil 1:29. Victorinus’ commentary on Galatians will be the primary source for our discussion on his doctrine of justification, not because this commentary provides his more advanced view of justification than his other commentary on Ephesians, but because it provides more exegesis of our subject than the other two commentaries.

²²It is not hard to find Victorinus’ explicit references to justification by faith alone found in his commentary on Galatians. For instance, Victorinus’ exegesis of Gal 2.10, 15, 17, 20 is full of expressions such as “*non secundum operas iustificemur, sed secundum fidem*” or “*non ex operibus legis iustificemur, sed ex fide et fide in Christum*.”

²³Gal 3:22 [CSEL 83/2:22–23]. Our reconciliation with God is “not by our labor (*non nostri laboris*)” “but by faith alone in Christ (*sed sola fides in Christum*)” (Eph 2:15); Gal 3:2 [CSEL 83/2:127]; Gal 2:15–16 [CSEL 83/2:122.12–22]: “For faith itself alone grants justification and sanctification [*Ipsa enim fides sola iustificationem dat et sanctificationem*].”

²⁴Eph 4:20–21 [CSEL 83/2:68.10–12]: “*credere in Christum immortalitatem consequi est et vitam aeternam mereri*.”

²⁵Eph 2:14–15 [CSEL 83/2:37.18–19]: “*sola fides in Christum nobis salus est*.”

analysis of Victorinus' doctrine of *sola fide*. Faith is both a necessary human response to the gospel and a divine gift of God. Despite my great appreciation of Cooper's work that presents considerable evidence of Victorinus' theological defense of *sola fide*, I contend that the Latin exegete's constant appeal to the exercise of our will to believe is not an indicator of his synergism. I will also attempt to produce a more comprehensive and systematic theological evaluation of Victorinus' view on justification than what Cooper presents in his excellent monograph.

Analysis of Victorinus' Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone in Pauline Commentaries

The Nature of Justification

Without denying Victorinus' teaching of justification by faith alone, Schmid argues that the most important term describing Victorinus' soteriology is neither reconciliation nor justification, but "liberation from the body" [*Befreiung vom Leibe*].²⁶ Schmid's claim is, however, problematic because justification is a more prominent soteriological theme than liberation in Victorinus' Pauline commentaries, although he sometimes explains the nature of justification in close association with liberation.²⁷ Victorinus' close association of justification with liberation is due to the fact that justification in his theology means liberation from sins, or the forgiveness of sins through justification, one of the main purposes of the "mystery of Christ."²⁸ By bringing out righteousness for sinners to be accepted by God as in the case of Abraham, justification liberates them from "the law of slavery" that demands them to observe the works of the law for their righteousness.²⁹ Furthermore, Victorinus makes a distinction between justification and liberation but presents them as the simultaneous results of *sola fide* in Christ's redemptive

²⁶Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 62.62. "Der beste Ausdruck für das in Christus dem Menschen gegebene, ist weder Erlösung noch Versöhnung oder Rechtfertigung, sondern Befreiung vom Leibe, von den Sinnen und ihren Trieben, und Erleuchtung des Verstandes, obgleich natürlich die andern Worte oft genug vorkommen."

²⁷For an instance of a close association between justification and liberation, see Gal 3:24 [CSEL 83/2:135.9–11]: "That we might be justified by faith: it is not by the law, but by faith, he says, that we might be liberated. This means that we might be justified and might grasp inheritance and promise [*Ut ex fide iustificemur: non ex lege, sed ex fide, inquit, ut liberemur, hoc est ut iustificemur et hereditatem promissionem que capiamus*]." Nonetheless, a simple comparison of frequency of the terms "justification" and "liberation" in Victorinus' Pauline commentaries will easily attest which theme is more prominent in them.

²⁸Gal 1:3–4 [CSEL 83/2:99.17–20]; 6 [CSEL 83/2:99.7–9]. The "mystery of Christ" is Victorinus' technical phrase referring to Christ's incarnation, teaching, passion, death, and resurrection for our redemption. See Eph 1:4 [CSEL 83/2: 9.93–94]; 2:7 [CSEL 83/2:33.9]; 2:14–15 [CSEL 83/2: 37.13]; Gal 3:7 [CSEL 83/2:129.6–8. Therefore, the Mystery of Christ is also called the "Mystery of salvation [*mysterium salvationis*]," or "all salvation [*omnis salvation*]." See Eph 1:2 [CSEL 83/2:4.18]. Cooper calls the "mystery of Christ" "the totality of the Christ—event—or, more specifically, eternal life." See idem, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 152.

²⁹Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130.4]: "*Iustificari autem liberari a lege servitutis*."

ministry: “Faith alone in Jesus Christ is sufficient for our justification and liberation.”³⁰ God’s promise for Abraham based on *sola fide* was “obviously a promise of liberation, justification, and inheritance [*promissio quippe liberationis et iustificationis et hereditatis*].”³¹ Therefore, a works-based hope necessarily means “no justification, no liberation, and no inheritance [*nullam iustificationem, nullam liberationem, hereditatem nullam*].”³²

For Victorinus, justification is a matter of how sinners could be righteous before God. Faith alone in Christ, neither the observation of the law nor meritorious works, could give them the righteousness that makes them acceptable to God. To many contemporary scholars’ surprise, our ancient Pauline commentator shows a concept of the alien righteousness of justification long before Luther. In his exposition of Phil 3:9, Victorinus unmistakably elaborates that the righteousness of justification belongs to God alone and has nothing to do with believers’ inner holiness. If we earn justifying righteousness by “living without blame [*sine reprehensione viverem*],” in other words, “by our moral behaviors [*moribus nostris*],” we could call the justifying righteousness “my or our righteousness [*mea iustitia est vel nostra*].”³³ However, Victorinus points out that “the righteousness of God [*iustitiam dei*]” in justification is “not the righteousness which is by the law and which is in works and by the discipline of flesh but the righteousness which proceeds from God [*procedit ex deo*],” that is, “righteousness by faith [*iustitia ex fide*], faith in Christ.”³⁴ The same phrases “the righteousness that proceeds from God” and “righteousness by faith in Christ” reoccurs as a pair in his theological exegesis of justification in Phil 3:11. If neither our blameless morality nor our religious self-denial can be causative to the righteousness of justification, the righteousness that proceeds from God alone, Victorinus concludes, then the justifying righteousness of God must be appropriated only through faith in Christ.

Victorinus is also emphatic about the imputed nature of justification. Victorinus reminds his readers how Abraham was justified before God. When Abraham believed God, his faith, not his works, was “imputed to him as righteousness (*reputatum est ei ad iustitiam*).”³⁵ Therefore, the blessing of Abraham is nothing but the imputed righteousness of the believers by faith.³⁶

³⁰Gal 3:22 [CSEL 83/2:134]: “*fides sola Iesu Christi sufficiat ad iustificationem liberationem que nostrum*.” See also Gal 3:20 [CSEL 83/2:132.36–38]: “*Ergo per Christum iustificatio et liberatio, non per legem factorum*.”

³¹Gal 3:20 [CSEL 83/2:132.6–9].

³²Gal 3:20 [CSEL 83/2:133.11].

³³Phil 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:206.4–5]. Therefore, Cooper rightly sees Victorinus’ pre-Lutheran concept of alien righteousness in the Latin exegete’s comment on Phil 3:9. See Cooper, *Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians*, 156n111.

³⁴Phil 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:206.8–12]. “*quae est ex fide Christi, quae est fide Christi, quae procedit ex deo, iustitia ex fide: hanc ergo iustitiam, inquit, habet, non illam quae ex lege est, quae in operibus est, ut dixi, et carnali disciplina, sed hanc quae ex deo procedit. Quae illa est? Iustitia ex fide. Quae est fide? Ex fide Christi*”

³⁵Gal 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:129.3].

³⁶Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130.2–3]: “*Hoc est benedicentur, quod est ad iustitiam illis reputabitur et a deo benedicentur; benedicentur autem a deo iustificati*.”

Victorinus' usage of *reputatum* shows theological affinity with the Reformers' understanding of imputed righteousness.³⁷ If we have faith in Christ and his work, not only our sins are forgiven, but also "our entire life will be imputed to us as righteousness (*id est reputabitur nobis omnis vita ad iustitiam*)" for justification.³⁸ Schmid concludes, therefore, that Victorinus' argument for imputed righteousness for the entire life, not merely the initial stage of the Christian life, is his "most explicit Pauline-Lutheran [theological] expression" of justification.³⁹ Likewise, Cooper contends that Victorinus' exegesis of Galatians "held to an understanding of justification as an imputed, passive justification, to use the familiar Reformation terminology."⁴⁰

The Nature of Faith

Before we examine the theological characteristics of *sola fide* in Victorinus' commentaries, we need to respond to two major challenges to the nature of faith in the theology of Victorinus. The first challenge is whether he really has a substantial understanding of the Pauline concept of faith. Williams insists, "Rather rigidly attached to the wording of the Pauline text, Victorinus does not seek to investigate any further what justification as saving faith means for the Christian."⁴¹ In other words, Victorinus does not elaborate on the role of faith in justification, in spite of his frequent use of the term "faith." We will see that Victorinus has an explicit and mature understanding of the Pauline doctrine of faith, more than what Williams acknowledges. The second challenge is whether Victorinus' definition of faith is Pauline. Schmid asserts that faith in Victorinus' commentaries is merely the "knowledge (*Erkenntnis*)" of salvation without having "humility (*Demut*) or self-denial (*Selbstverleugnung*)."⁴² In other words, Victorinus presents faith as intellectual agreement with the gospel, failing to include personal trust in Christ in his definition of faith. Unlike Schmid, we will see that Victorinus defines faith as both the true knowledge of Christ and his ministry, and a personal union with Christ in a way that sixteenth-century Reformers would later affirm.

Let Victorinus defend himself against these two scholars' charges. For Victorinus, saving faith consists of two elements: "to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God" and to believe in his atoning death and resurrection for our forgiveness.⁴³ To believe is not merely a matter of knowledge about Christ and his ministry. Faith entails not only the objective knowledge of

³⁷Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 290n164.

³⁸Gal 3:7 [CSEL 83/2:129.12–13].

³⁹Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 63: "wohl der bestgelungene Ausdruck für die lutherisch-paulinisch."

⁴⁰Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 154.

⁴¹Williams, "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," 657.

⁴²Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 67. Schmid also describes faith in Victorinus' commentary as "a purely rational faith [*der reine Vernunftglaube*]."

⁴³Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:100.27–23]: "*Christum credere dei filium esse, Christum cum passione sua et adventu in carne et resurrectione [passione] solvisse omnia peccata, vicisse mortem, corruptionem omnem exterminasse, hoc est solum evangelium.*"

Christ, but also believers' personal union with Christ through their existential participation in his mystery. To believe in Christ is "to perceive spiritually [*spiritualiter sentire*]," "to be raised up from the fleshly and material desires [*tolli a desideriis carnalibus et materialibus*]," and "to unite us with and join us to Christ [*nos iungit et sociat Christo*]."⁴⁴ Since we are united with God through Christ and his mystery, there is no hope for our salvation except to believe in Christ.⁴⁵ Faith enables believers to appropriate existentially and to participate actually in all the blessings of the "mystery of Christ."⁴⁶ Those who believed in Christ died and rose again, not only "with him but through Christ [*cum eo, per eum tamen*]."⁴⁷ This appropriation and participation in the Mystery of Christ by faith alone made Abraham accepted by God in the matter of righteousness.⁴⁸ Faith functions not only in the mind but also in the soul when we believe in the promise of God: "God produces [spiritual] powers [to overcome persecutions and temptations] when faith begins in the souls of believers, a faith that believes what God promised."⁴⁹ In Victorinus' Pauline commentaries, to live by faith is "a mode of being in the world characterized by the hope for a life beyond the limitations of this world."⁵⁰ Faith not only makes the benefits of the mystery of Christ available to all believers, but also makes the indwelling of Christ in their souls possible.⁵¹

Besides the argument for the absence of a mature Pauline understanding of faith, Schmid sees Victorinus' view of faith as an "utterly naïve Pelagian [*ganz naiv pelagianisch*]" perspective, because of his strong emphasis on the necessity of exercising faith in justification and in other areas of

⁴⁴Eph 1:4 [CSEL 83/2:9.97–100]. See also Phil 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:206.2, 12]: "... in eo esse et fide illi iungi ... Quae est fides? Ex fide Christi, id est ex nobis in Christum.

⁴⁵Eph 1:4 [CSEL 83/2:9.100–101]: "Per Christum enim deo iungimur neque spes ulla saluti nostrae nisi Christum credere."

⁴⁶Eph 3:14 [CSEL 83/2:50.13–15]: "Tunc enim proderit nobis eius mors et eius resurrectio si fidem in eum habeamus, quod omnia propter nos et fecit et passus est." See also Gal 3:7 [CSEL 83/2:129.2–7]. See also Eph 1:4 [CSEL 83/2:9.93–96]: "Ergo mysterio, quod hic inplevit et carne et cruce et morte et resurrectione, subventum est animis, et, si in Christum fides sumatur, ille suscipit huiusmodi animas et adiuvat et liberat."

⁴⁷Gal 5:6 [CSEL 83/2:160.8–11]: "Quia fidem in eum suscepimus et quia promissa eius credimus et quia ex resurrectione eius nos quoque resurgimus et omnia cum eo perpessi sumus et cum eo ad vitam, per eum tamen, resurgimus."

⁴⁸Gal 3:7 [CSEL 83/2:129.2–7]: "Ipse autem ex fide acceptus est ad iustitiam. Ergo quicumque sunt ex fide, hi sunt filii Abrahae, ut saepe admonuimus. Omne mysterium, quod a domino nostro Iesu Christo actum est, fidem solam quaerit. Tunc enim pro nobis actum et in nostram resurrectionem actum et liberationem, si fidem in mysterium Christi et in Christum habeamus."

⁴⁹Gal 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:129.3–5]: "Ita deus operatur virtutes cum fides provenerit in hominum animis et fides ut in deum credant."

⁵⁰Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 284.n.143. See Gal 2:20 [CSEL 83/2:124.10–13].

salvation.⁵² Victorinus repeatedly urges one to believe in the sufficiency of the redemptive works of Christ for salvation. Faith is something we should do in order to be justified and redeemed. In his commentary on Phil 2:12–13, Victorinus pinpoints the human capability to believe: “the power to work out our salvation lies in us [*in nobis potestas sit nobis salutem operari*].”⁵³ Since neither the observation of the law nor meritorious works can justify us, “almost nothing is left to us, except to believe [*Nostrum paene iam nihil est, nisi solum credere*]” in Christ.⁵⁴ In order to make a clear contrast between the law and the gospel, Victorinus promotes the easiness of faith, not “easy believism.” To exercise *sola fidem in Christum* is “in our power [*in potestate*]” and, therefore, believing is “neither labor nor difficulty [*nullus labor est, nulla est difficultas*].”⁵⁵

Based on Victorinus’ consistent appeal to people for their exercise of faith, Schmid argues that Victorinus’ faith belongs to a natural gift, not necessarily a special grace of God without which one cannot even believe.⁵⁶ Unlike Schmid, Cooper explains that “justification is part of the continuum of faith, a cooperative act between the forgiven sinner and God” in the theology of Victorinus.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Cooper suggests, “Victorinus probably remained within the bounds of the synergistic understanding of the relationship between divine grace and the human will.”⁵⁸ Williams also comments that “for Victorinus, justification is part of the continuum of faith, a cooperative act between the forgiven sinner and God.”⁵⁹ Erdt summarizes Victorinus’ view of faith as semi-Pelagian: “Therefore, man directs his return to God from his own strength ... but is completed only by the influence of the divine grace.”⁶⁰

However, a comparison between Victorinus and Augustine on the same text shows that the above critiques of the former could be applied to the latter. Augustine reminds his readers in his exegesis of Phil 2:12–13 that God’s grace does not remove free choice and God “commands”

⁵¹Eph 3:16–17 [CSEL 83/2:53.13–17]: “*Quomodo autem habitet Christus in interior homine subiecit: per fidem, inquit, in cordibus vestries ... fides sola inplet tantum munus et tantum beneficium. Quid? Ut in cordibus nostris Christus habitet; Eph 3:18–19 [CSEL 83/2:54.18]: “Christum habitantem per fidem in cordibus vestries.”*

⁵²Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 64.

⁵³Phil 2:12–13 [CSEL 83/2:195].

⁵⁴Eph 2:16 [CSEL 83/2:38.25].

⁵⁵Eph 6:13 [CSEL 83/2:87.10–12]: “[*Sola enim fides in Christo*] est autem in potestate, quippe fidem in Christum habere et plenam fidem habere nullus labor est, nulla est difficultas.” See also Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:100.20–23]: “*Non enim magnum est gratiam eius consequi, si modo eum sequamur credentes mysterio suo ista praestitisse et id gratis et sine labore et sine magnis operibus.*”

⁵⁶Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 66.

⁵⁷Williams, “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith,” 453.

⁵⁸Cooper, *Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians*, 169.

⁵⁹Williams, “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith,” 453.

⁶⁰Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer*, 159–60: “*Leitet der Mensch somit auch aus eigenen Kräften seine Rückkehr zu Gott und die Erlösung ein, so ist diese Möglichkeit des Glaubens doch erst durch Christus geschenkt worden und wird die eigentliche Rückkehr der Seele doch erst durch das Einwirken der göttlichen Gnade vollendet.*”

his people to use their free choice.⁶¹ The bishop of Hippo even admits that Phil 2:12 seems to teach our salvation depends “on account of our will,” not because we do not need the grace of God but “without it we cannot do what is right.”⁶² We should not consider a biblical command for us to respond to the gospel positively and actively as synergism. We are responsible for the exercise of our will to believe, although God works in us for our salvation. We should not take his emphasis on the necessity of working out our salvation as an indication of synergism, since Victorinus repeatedly points to the impossibility of salvation and justification by works. While we need to work out our salvation with our own will, we should not forget that “the working of salvation itself is from God [*ipsa operatio tamen a deo est*].”⁶³ “It is God,” not our will, “who makes us desire and accomplish his good will [*Deus est enim qui operatur in vobis et voluntate et efficacia pro bona voluntate*]” since “God’s will works in us [*velle a deo nobis operator*]” and, consequently, “we have both working and will out of God [*ex deo et operationem et voluntatem habeamus*].”⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, Augustine later repeated what Victorinus presented above: “We, then, will, but God also produces in us the willing; we, then, work, but God also produces in us the action in accord with good will ... let everything be ascribed to God.”⁶⁵

Victorinus tries to preserve the paradoxical relationship between faith as a human obligation and faith as a free gift of God.⁶⁶ Contrary to the arguments for Victorinus’ Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, he teaches the divine cause of our faith. Victorinus refuses to call our power to believe our merit. Instead, he depicts it as “the grace of God [*gratia dei*]” coming “from the mercy of God [*ex dei pietate*].”⁶⁷ God’s grace is not his reward or payment for our works empowered by faith: “For he [God] did not repay us in accordance with our merit certainly because we do not accept [the immeasurable riches of his grace] by our merits, but by the grace and goodness of God.”⁶⁸ Since God grants us his immeasurable riches out of his sheer desire to display his goodness eternally, no one should assume what he receives is a reward for his merits.⁶⁹ Since God requires nothing but our faith, we have been saved not by our merit but by the grace of God.⁷⁰

⁶¹Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice*, 9.21 [WSA I/26:85]

⁶²Ibid., *Nature and Grace*, 27.31 [WSA I/23:240]

⁶³Phil 2:13 [CSEL 83/2:195.26–27].

⁶⁴Phil 2:13 [CSEL 83/2:195.24–31].

⁶⁵Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance*, 13.33 [WSA I/26:212]

⁶⁶Schmid also notices this tension between the divine and human sides of faith. However, Schmid takes an agnostic view on the identity of the initiating agent of faith in Victorinus’ commentaries. See Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 65. Unlike Schmid, Erdt contends that for Victorinus, faith begins from “the power of natural man [*der Macht des natürlichen Menschen*]” although man needs God’s grace to complete the process of salvation. See Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer*, 146.

⁶⁷Gal 5:4 [CSEL 83/2:2–4]: “*Omnis enim virtus in Christum credentis in gratia est dei. Gratia autem non ex meritis, sed ex dei pietate est.*”

⁶⁸Eph 2:7 [CSEL 83/2:33. 3–4]: “*Non enim nobis reddidit meritum, quippe cum non haec meritis nos accipimus, sed dei gratia et bonitate.*”

⁶⁹Eph 2:7 [CSEL 83/2:33. 6–7]: “*ostenderet futuris saeculis et supervenientibus divitias suas. Quas divitias? Gratiam bonitatis super nos.*”

⁷⁰Eph 2:8 [CSEL 83/2:33.1–4].

Therefore, J. N. D. Kelly rightly states that Victorinus “most plainly” teaches “the very will to do good is the work of God and owes its existence to the operation of His grace.”⁷¹ The ancient Pauline exegete explicitly ascribes our believing will and action to the divine grace and power, not to his own decision or capability:

Eph 3:7 [CSEL 83/2: 46. 6–11]: “Indeed, nowhere we receive this [gift of God’s grace] by our merits, but by the grace of God, Paul reminds that whatsoever grace is given, it is from the giver, not the receiver. However, as far as he added that ‘according to the working of his power,’ and he also attributed this to God, so that if I should work anything, it is of the power of God. For not my own power but the power of God works in me.”⁷²

The grace of God does not result from our merit, since “the gift accepted [the redemption of adoption] is great beyond our merit.”⁷³ Therefore, the grace of God results from the one who granted it, not to the one who received it.

Faith in Victorinus’ commentaries is “the free offer of God [*ein gratis Angebot Gottes*]” and “in opposition to meritorious earnings [*in Gegensatz zum Verdienst*].”⁷⁴ Victorinus points out in his explanation of Gal 5:8 that the grace of God initiates faith by the divine persuasion: “Whatever is persuaded to you by me or whatever has been already persuaded to you by God, what has been persuaded is indeed by God who called you as is above said, who called and predestined.”⁷⁵ Victorinus also gives attention to the fact that God accepted Abraham, based on his faith, concerning righteousness (*Ipse autem ex fide acceptus est ad iustitiam*) without appealing to the divine foreknowledge of good works subsequent to initial faith.⁷⁶ Here Victorinus explains that divine grace is the effective cause of faith and the result of divine predestination. Did Victorinus already teach the doctrine of predestination based on God’s will, even before Augustine? Schmid denies that Victorinus teaches the Pauline doctrine of predestination, and the concept of the “irresistible grace” of God for the elect was “alien” to Victorinus.⁷⁷ Schmid does not see any exegetical or theological influence of Victorinus upon Augustine; therefore, it is very hard for him to expect this early development of the doctrine of predestination. However,

⁷¹J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357.

⁷²“*Ubique enim non nos meritis nostris hoc accipere, sed gratia dei, memorat Paulus, ut dantis sit, non accipientis, quicquid gratiae datur. Quod autem adiunxit secundum operationem virtutis eius, et hoc quoque deo tribuit, ut si quid ego operer, virtus dei sit. Non enim in me mea virtus operatur, sed dei.*” Hilary also points to both the necessity of the divine grace for the righteousness of sinners and human capability to respond to the gospel. Hilary is not alone in the Latin Church tradition concerning this paradoxical truth. “Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Novatian, and other Westerners” held this co-existence of the divine grace and human obligation in the matter of salvation. See Williams, “Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith,” 458.

⁷³Eph 1:14 [CSEL 83/2:19.9]: “*Ultra enim meritum munus magnum quod accipitur.*”

⁷⁴Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer*, 48.

⁷⁵[CSEL 83/2:161.1–4]: “*id est quod vobis vel suasum a me est vel quod ipsi iam suasum habetis a deo, suasum vobis est et a deo qui vos vocavit, sicuti supra dictum est: quos vocavit et praedestinavit.*”

⁷⁶Gal 3:7 [CSEL 83/2:129.2–3]. Cf. Cooper, *Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians*, 290n168.

⁷⁷Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 65 and 79.

Harnack refutes Schmid here and contends that Victorinus indeed influenced Augustine in the doctrines of justification by faith and predestination. According to Harnack, Victorinus teaches the doctrine of predestination “against Manichaeism [*dem Manichäismus gegenüber*]” without losing an emphasis on “the freedom of the will.”⁷⁸ Certainly, Victorinus presents the predestination of God as the cause of the sanctification of the souls in Eph 1:4: “Therefore, God predestined and chose them [souls] before the foundation of the world in order that they might be sanctified, that is, strengthened by accepting the Spirit, and become spirits when all the vices, which could fall upon them, have been put aside.”⁷⁹ Victorinus never uses the term “irresistible grace” as Augustine did; yet, Victorinus’ interpretations of Eph 1:4, 3:7, and Gal 5:8 make it hard to deny the theological continuity between Victorinus and Augustine on the effect of predestination that leads us to faith and growth in righteousness.

Despite his recognition of Victorinus’ doctrine of justification by faith, for Harnack, the theological importance of Victorinus lies in his successful “combination of Neo-Platonism and highly orthodox Christianity” that became a model for Augustine.⁸⁰ Victorinus’ Neo-Platonism led him to embrace both the two doctrines of predestination and *sola fide*, since Neo-Platonists were attracted to Paul and John rather than James.⁸¹ Schindler also offers a similar conclusion on Victorinus’ doctrine of predestination and Neo-Platonism. Victorinus’ doctrine of predestination reflects the “Neo-Platonic determinism [*neuplatonischen Determinismus*],” that is, Plotinus’ modified Stoic determinism, which provides some meaningful room for the human will.⁸² Similarly, other scholars claim that Victorinus’ emphasis on *sola fide* also comes from his Neo-Platonic reaction to moralism, not necessarily from his biblical understanding of Paul. Workman notes, “Neo-Platonism had prepared Victorinus for the doctrine of justification by faith alone in opposition to moralism, and from Victorinus it passed to St. Augustine.”⁸³ Without denying the fact that Victorinus teaches justification by faith as the gift of God, Quasten undermines the fourth-century commentator’s contribution to the doctrine of *sola fide* by accusing him of “Platonizing” the relationship between faith and works, and for writing his Pauline commentaries still “in the context of the Arian controversy.”⁸⁴ As a result of Victorinus’ Platonization of Paul, the value of good works and merit was downgraded, and salvation became a matter of knowledge of the mystery which Paul taught in Ephesus.

⁷⁸Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3:35.

⁷⁹[CSEL 83/2:11.156–59]. Victorinus never implies that the divine predestination is conditioned by the divine foreknowledge of a human response to the gospel. Instead, he highlighted the divine “initiation” in choosing men to holiness. See Cooper, *Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians*, 168.

⁸⁰Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3:36n.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 3:35n.

⁸²Alfred Schindler, “Gnade Und Freiheit: Zum Vergleich Zwischen Den Griechischen Und Lateinischen Kirchenvätern,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 62.2 (1965): 186.no. 2 (1965)

⁸³Herbert B. Workman, *Christian Thought to the Reformation* (New York: Scribner, 1914), 59.

⁸⁴Johannes Quasten, *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature*, vol. 4 of *Patrology* (Norte Dame: Christian Classics, 1986), 75.

The assumption that Victorinus' teaching on *sola fide* results from his Neo-Platonic dualism between spirit and matter might have resulted from a failure to recognize his "real concern about Judaizing Christians in his own environs."⁸⁵ If Victorinus was merely a baptized Neo-Platonist, he could have approached the Bible with a spiritual exegesis that would have promoted Platonic spirituality. In contrast to heretical Christian groups which were influenced by Neoplatonism or Gnosticism, however, Victorinus valued water baptism, a rite of the Church, and an institutional religious organization. His ecclesiology shows that his Neo-Platonic dualism had been more or less overcome. Loshe does not see Neo-Platonic philosophical digression in Victorinus' commentary on Galatians. Since Victorinus strongly condemned those who admitted only Christ having come with flesh but denied Christ having been in the flesh (Phil 3:19–20), it is hard to accept that this Latin exegete's Pauline theology was seriously twisted by Neo-Platonism.⁸⁶ Quasten also ascribes Victorinus' anti-Judaism in his Pauline commentaries to his "insufficient knowledge of the Old Testament" and, ultimately, to his subjugation to the influence of "the Marcionite prologues to the letters of Saint Paul."⁸⁷ Cooper states, however, that "Anti-Judaism in early Christian writers" is "rather the rule" because reading the Old Latin prologues, the gospel of John, and second-century church fathers such as Ignatius, Justin, or Tertullian "could itself sufficiently account for Victorinus' anti-Judaism without recourse to the hypothesis of allegedly Marcionite prologues and tendencies."⁸⁸ Victorinus' commitment to the Pauline epistles comes from his conviction that Paul teaches the identity of the true Christian faith, which is to believe and worship Jesus Christ as Scripture testifies about him.⁸⁹ Victorinus interchangeably used justification by faith with justification by Christ because "faith for Victorinus entails believing that Christ alone is the source of human salvation."⁹⁰

The sufficiency of *sola fide*

Victorinus accentuates the three major theological aspects of *sola fide* in his commentaries. First, the Pauline doctrine of *sola fide* rejects any attempt to be justified by the works of the law whether they are the observation of the ceremonial laws, good deeds for neighbors, or personal inner holiness. Second, *sola fide* results from *solo Christo*.⁹¹ Third, *sola fide* consequently condemns "faith plus works" as a false gospel that makes the "mystery of Christ [*mysterium Christi*]," or

⁸⁵Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 181.

⁸⁶Bernhard Lohse, "Beobachtungen zum Paulus-Kommentar des Marius Victorinus und zur Wiederentdeckung des Paulus in der lateinischen Theologie des vierten Jahrhunderts," 361.

⁸⁷Quasten, *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature*, 75.

⁸⁸Stephen Andrew Cooper, *Metaphysics and Morals in Marius Victorinus' Commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians: A Contribution to the History of Neoplatonism and Christianity*, American University Studies Series V, Philosophy, vol. 155 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 148.

⁸⁹Bernhard Lohse, "Beobachtungen zum Paulus-Kommentar des Marius Victorinus und zur Wiederentdeckung des Paulus in der lateinischen Theologie des vierten Jahrhunderts," 365.

⁹⁰Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 262n57.

⁹¹Victorinus does not use *solo Christo*, but uses the phrases such as *ex Christo*, *ex Christo iustificatio fit*, *iustificari hominem sed ex Christo*, *ex Christo*, and *ex Christo iustificatio fit, non ex lege neque ex operibus*.

Christ's entire redemptive work, meaningless.

Concerning the first characteristic of 'faith alone' as opposed to the observation of the law in the matter of justification, Victorinus makes an unambiguous contrast between faith, or the gospel, and the law, a contrast which is found later in Luther. It suffices here to provide a few clear references to Victorinus' emphasis on faith as the sole condition of justification and to his strong rejection of the works of the Mosaic law:

Gal 1:13–14 [CSEL 83/2: 107.69–75] "Believing by faith in Christ, they might be justified by faith, not by the works of the law [*per fidem in Iesum Christum credentes iustificentur ex fide, non ex operibus legis*] ... in order to correct the Galatians so that they should follow the gospel, not following Judaism. The gospel is one and true: to have faith in Christ and to be justified by him is not by the works of the law [*in Christum fidem habere et ab eo iustificari, non ex operibus legis*]."

Gal 2:15–16 [CSEL 83/2:122.12–22] "We know that people are not justified by the works of the law but justified by faith and faith in Jesus Christ [*non iustificari hominem ex operibus legis, sed iustificari per fidem et fidem Iesu Christi*]. Since we knew this, therefore, says he [Paul], we believed in Jesus Christ and we believe so that we might be justified by faith, not by the works of the law, because no flesh, that is, a human who is in flesh, is justified by the works of the law."

Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130. 3–8] "Also that they will be blessed by God means that they have been justified [*benedicentur autem a deo iustificati*]. To be justified means to be liberated from the law of servitude [*Iustificari autem liberari a lege servitutis*]. Therefore, those who will be by faith will be blessed because Abraham was blessed by faith. Therefore, faith is everything [*Totum igitur fides est*] ... blessing and justification come into being only by faith, not by works [*tantum ex fide non ex operibus benedictio provenit et iustificatio*]."

Since no human could be justified by the observation of the law, we should stop laboring our salvation but rest on Christ by faith.⁹² To those who labor their observation of the law such as Sabbath and circumcision as the ground of justification, Paul warns, "(I)f you put your justification in the law [*in lege iustificationem vestram ponitis*]," you are "cut off from grace and alienated from Christ [*excidistis a gratia et evacuati estis a Christo*]."⁹³

Victorinus' *sola fide* also rejects meritorious works, whether personal morality or religious piety, as the condition of justification.⁹⁴ The reason Paul condemns any hope of justification by the law is because such a false hope makes God's promise of justification by faith useless and

⁹²Eph 2:15 [CSEL 83/2:37.17–19]: "Therefore, it is not by our labor, as I often remind, that we should release us [from the desires of the world], but faith alone in Christ is salvation to us [*sola fides in Christum nobis salus est*]."

⁹³Gal 5:4 [CSEL 83/2:159.3–7].

⁹⁴Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor*, 63: "Und nicht blos die Zeremonial werke des jüdischen Gesetzes fallen unter den Fluch, sondern auch die guten Werke des Christentums."

turns God's promise into "an issue of merit, not faith."⁹⁵ "Justification by merit [*iustificationem merito*]" simply means that we are justified by our accomplishment of all works necessary for justification, not by depending on faith alone.⁹⁶ Therefore, good works, even subsequent to initial faith, should not be a condition of justification. Peter's addition of the necessity of good works for the poor to the gospel ministry of Paul (Gal 2:10) is not the former's correction of the latter's doctrine of justification by faith alone. Good works cannot contribute to salvation.⁹⁷ Both apostles agreed, according to Victorinus, "the hope of salvation is not to be found in that matter [of works] if we do services for the poor."⁹⁸ Charity for the poor is to be a moral obligation for all Christians but not to be viewed as something about which we should be always anxious, as if salvation relies on our holding on to that obligation.⁹⁹ Not only "merit based on [the fulfillment of] a moral obligation [for the poor]," but also "merit based on religious observation of chastity and abstinence" is futile in salvation, since "we are saved by the grace of God [*salvi sumus, gratia dei*]" which is "a gift of God [*dei donum*]."¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the grace of God is to make us believe in him.¹⁰¹

In order to lay a theological foundation of the second characteristic of *sola fide*, Victorinus notices how Paul urges us to realize that it is by Christ, not the works of the law, that we are justified.¹⁰² *Sola fide* means that the totality and exclusivity of Christ's redemptive ministry alone could justify sinners.¹⁰³ Since we, whether Jews or Gentiles, cannot conquer our sins by the law, Christ came and liberated us from sins.¹⁰⁴ The law did not suddenly become incapable of justifying sinners because of the appearance of Christ. The law has never been able to justify human beings. The incarnation was to "bear our penalties by placing our sins on himself and to die on our account."¹⁰⁵ Believers were once alienated from God because of their sins; now

⁹⁵Gal 3:21 [CSEL 83/2:133.20]: "*evacuat promissionem facit que meritum esse, non fidem.*"

⁹⁶Gal 3:21 [CSEL 83/2:133.21]: "*operibus omnibus factis iustificationem merito consequamur, non fide sola.*"

⁹⁷Gal 2:10 [CSEL 83/2:117.1–118.21]. Victorinus misread Peter here. What Peter asked Paul was to help the poor believers in the church of Jerusalem, not to make charity for the poor one of Christians' universal obligations.

⁹⁸Gal 2:10 [CSEL 83/2:117.9–12]: "*non operas admitti ad salutem... Ita et ipsum consentiunt non ibi esse spem salutis, si in pauperes operas efficiamus.*"

⁹⁹Gal 2:10 [CSEL 83/2:117.13–118.17]: "*Non uti consumamus omnem actionem nostram, sed ut non habentibus id, quod possumus habere, commodemus: memores tantum ut simus pauperum, non in hoc curam et sollicitudinem ponamus totam que virtutem salutis nostrae retinendae.*"

¹⁰⁰Eph 2:9 [CSEL 83/2:33.13, 6–7].

¹⁰¹Phil 1:29: "Therefore he has given us a gift so that we would believe in him. The gift is great, however, if by faith alone in him we obtain [literally, *deserve*] so much grace [*igitur donum nobis dedit ut credamus in eum. Magnum autem donum si sola in eum fide tantam gratiam meremur*]."

¹⁰²Gal 1:13–14 [CSEL 83/2:107.74–76]: "*in Christum fidem habere et ab eo iustificari, non ex operibus legis ... quia ex Christo iustificatio fit, non ex lege neque ex operibus.*"

¹⁰³Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer*, 145.

¹⁰⁴Eph 4:32 [CSEL 83/2:75.13–16];

¹⁰⁵Gal 2:21 [CSEL 83/2:125.6–15]: "*me a peccatis liberaret per peccata in se punita...sin autem etiam post adventum Christi per legem iustificari me credo, non est mortuus Christus propter me et gratis mortuus est, id est*

they have been “close to [*prope*]” and are “in Christ by the blood of Christ and yet still by faith [*per sanguinem Christi in Christo sumus, per fidem tamen*].”¹⁰⁶ By Christ’s penal substitutionary death, we receive the forgiveness of our sins and justification.¹⁰⁷ Believers are justified, not by their righteous deeds, but “by Christ and on account of Christ [*a Christo sit et propter ipsum*].”¹⁰⁸ Not only the cross but also the entire mystery of Christ—the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection—“paid off all sins, conquered death, and expelled all corruptions.”¹⁰⁹ Paul urges the Christians of Ephesus to experience “nothing but Jesus Christ in whose name they are sanctified and faithful,” since faith in Christ who “overcame all things” brings out “full salvation [*plena salvatio*].”¹¹⁰ All aspects of salvation—forgiveness of sins, justification, adoption, liberation, sanctification, etc.—are appropriated by faith in Christ alone, not in men.¹¹¹ To depart from Christ’s gracious work for them and to attempt to be justified by the works of the law is to dishonor him.

On the other hand, Victorinus admits that the law produces a sort of righteousness that is different from the righteousness of justification by faith alone. The righteousness of the law is related to “deeds [*factorum*].”¹¹² Paul had the righteousness of deeds, which are “without blame [*sine reprehensione*].”¹¹³ What is the nature of righteousness according to the law? The Mosaic law teaches that “the behaviors and life” of a human justifies him.¹¹⁴ Paul had such righteousness ‘according to the Jewish law’ since he did not commit a sin by violating any command of the law. The Jews consider this blameless observation of the law’s requirements as righteousness.¹¹⁵ However, this ethical and legal righteousness, according to the Mosaic law, is not the righteousness

sine causa mortuus est.”

¹⁰⁶Eph 2:13 [CSEL 83/2:36.9–10].

¹⁰⁷Eph 4:32 [CSEL 83/2:74.10–75.11–12]: “*In Christo autem, ut frequenter diximus, quia pro nobis Christus mortuus est; ergo in Christo donata nobis peccata sunt*”; Gal 2:21 [CSEL 83/2:125.16–18]: “*Cum enim lex ex operibus suis non iustificaret hominem, idcirco Christus venit ut morte sua iustificatio homini fieret*.” Kelly notices that Victorinus understands the cross as redemption and substitution. See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 388.

¹⁰⁸Phil 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:205.16]. See also Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:99.5]: “Nothing besides [*nihil praeterea*] Christ can save both the Jews and the Gentiles.”

¹⁰⁹Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:99.9]; Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:100.27–31]: “*Christum cum passione sua et adventu in carne et resurrectione [passione] solvisse omnia peccata, vicisse mortem, corruptionem omnem exterminasse, hoc est solum evangelium*.”

¹¹⁰Eph 1:1 [CSEL 83/2:4.45–47]: “*ostendit illos nihil aliud sentire debere nisi Iesum Christum, cuius nomine sancti sunt et fideles*”; Eph 2:16 [CSEL 83/2:38.26–29]: “*Haec est enim plena salvatio, Christum haec vicisse, Christum ideo in cruce sublatum esse, Christum ideo resurrexisse ut nobis in eum credentibus salus, aeternitas et caelorum gloria pararetur*.”

¹¹¹Gal 3:26 [CSEL 83/2:135]; Gal 4:5 [CSEL 83/2:142].

¹¹²Gal 3:21 [CSEL 83/2:133.3–4].

¹¹³Phil 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:205.5–6].

¹¹⁴Phil 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:205.12]: “*hoc est per mores et vitam, unde homo iustificatur*.”

¹¹⁵Phil 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:205.13–15]: “*Cum essem sine reprehensione: ut nullum crimen admiserim fecerim que omnia quae lex iussit. Ipsa est enim iustitia apud Iudaeos ex lege*.”

that Christians should seek. Unlike the righteousness of the Jews, the righteousness of Christians is “from Christ” and obtained “on account of him” alone.¹¹⁶ The righteousness of Christ, therefore, is not based on one’s moral perfection achieved by one’s observation of the law, but based on Christ’s perfect accomplishment of our redemption. We are counted as righteous because of what Christ did for us. For Victorinus, justification by faith in Christ alone is not a human idea, but the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The source of the gospel of faith in Christ alone is “neither from men nor by man [*non ab hominibus neque per hominem*],” including Peter.¹¹⁷ Nor did he receive it according to human custom, in other words, according to a fleshly manner [*carnaliter*].¹¹⁸ Instead, Paul received the revelation of Christ alone “spiritually [*spiritaliter*]” because the Holy Spirit, not a man, revealed it to him and taught him about it.¹¹⁹ The gospel revealed by Christ has more credit (*plus fidei*) than any human instruction or even more than the Mosaic law.¹²⁰

The first and second characteristics of “faith alone”—the rejection of the observation of the law and meritorious works – necessarily lead to the last characteristic of *sola fide*, that is, the rejection of “faith plus works” theology. This “faith plus works” theology is exactly the heart of the problem in the church of the Galatians. They never denied the necessity of faith in Christ for their justification and, yet, they added the observation of the law and meritorious works to the gospel that requires “faith alone” in Christ.¹²¹ However, “(W)hoever hopes for help in another way besides Christ, even if with Christ, does not have faith.”¹²² For Victorinus, the addition of the law of Moses to the gospel is “betrayal of Christ (*Verrat an Christus*).”¹²³ Paul could not help but condemn justification by “faith plus works” because it is nothing but “justification by works [*ex operibus iustificationem*].”¹²⁴ To depend on the law even after Christ’s vicarious death is not only to confirm justification by the law but also to argue that “Christ died in vain.”¹²⁵

“Faith plus works” is to “return to Judaism, from which we passed over in order that we might

¹¹⁶Phil 3:6 [CSEL 83/2:205.15–16]: “*Verum cum iustitia nunc nobis Christianis a Christo sit et propter ipsum iustificemur.*”

¹¹⁷Victorinus uses the phrase “*non ab hominibus neque per hominem*” more than 10 times in his commentary on Galatians.

¹¹⁸Gal 1:12 [CSEL 83/2:104.10–11]: “*Nunc vero quod evangelizo non secundum hominem accipiendum est, id est non carnaliter...*”

¹¹⁹Gal 1:12 [CSEL 83/2:104.11–14]: “*sed spiritaliter, quippe cum hoc sit argumentum, quod non accepi. Si enim a spiritu accepi et a spiritu doctus sum, spiritaliter debeo intellegere, et hoc erit non secundum hominem.*”

¹²⁰Gal 1:12 [CSEL 83/2:104.15–16].

¹²¹Gal 5:2 [CSEL 83/2:158.17–19].

¹²²Gal 5:9 [CSEL 83/2:161.11–12]: “*fidem non habet qui praeter Christum aliquo modo auxilium, licet cum Christo, sperat.*”

¹²³Ludwig Fladerer, *Augustinus Als Exeget: Zu Seinen Kommentaren Des Galaterbriefes Und Der Genesis*, Sitzungsberichte, vol. 795 Bd (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010). Sitzungsberichte, vol. 795 Bd (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010).

¹²⁴Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130.11].

¹²⁵Gal 2:21 [CSEL 83/2:125]: “*sin autem etiam post adventum Christi per legem iustificari me credo, non est mortuus Christus propter me et gratis mortuus est.*”

be justified not by the works of the law but by faith and faith in Christ.”¹²⁶ A theological “return to the law after faith in Christ [*legem reditus fit post fidem in Christum*]” implies that “Christ died in vain” and “has done nothing for us [*gratis... Christus mortuus esse... nihil nobis praestiterit*]” since a return to the law assumes that the law was “already fulfilling [*iam praestabat*]” the promise of justification, even before the coming of Christ.¹²⁷ Peter, Barnabas, and James, the brother of Jesus, showed how powerful the temptation of Christians’ return to Judaism was among Christians and the seriousness of their sins. Initially, Peter and Barnabas shared with Paul the same gospel of Christ alone as the basis of salvation. However, Peter and Barnabas did not show their loyalty to the gospel and fell into hypocrisy when they left the Gentile brothers because of the presence of the Jewish brothers from James. Paul rebuked their temporal departure from the gospel and “temporal agreement [*tempus consensionem*]” with the Judaizers, although they never abandoned their Christian faith in Christ.¹²⁸ Adding the law to faith simply demonstrates “no faith in Christ [*fides nulla in Christum*].”¹²⁹ That people depend on the law and works even after believing in Christ is nothing but their disbelief in the sufficiency of Christ in the matter of salvation. After explaining that the blessing of Abraham is the imputation of righteousness to him, Paul reminds the Galatians that whoever denies the sufficiency of faith alone by depending on works is “contradictory to the blessing [*contrarium benediction*]” of justification “under a curse [*sub malediction*]” and “commit[s] a sin [*peccat*]” by becoming “a stranger to the truth [*alienus a veritate est*].”¹³⁰ No one should add anything to faith in Jesus Christ in order for one to be more worthy. Not only the Gentiles but also the Jews should be justified “neither by works nor by the observation of the Jewish law, but by faith [*non ex operibus neque observatione legis Iudaeorum, sed iustificatur ex fide*].”¹³¹ “Therefore, faith is everything,” claims Victorinus, in the matter of justification.¹³² If neither the observation of the law nor meritorious works can justify us, “almost nothing is left to us, except to believe [*Nostrum paene iam nihil est, nisi solum credere*]” in Christ.¹³³

Justification, Sanctification, and Merit

Not only justification but also the sanctifying life comes from *sola fide*. “Faith alone suffices, alone withstands, alone strengthens” believers so that they can conquer sins.¹³⁴ However, Schmid contends that Victorinus’ comment on Eph 6:14 displays that his understanding of justification

¹²⁶Gal 2:15–16 [CSEL 83/2:122.16–22].

¹²⁷Gal 2:21 [CSEL 83/2:125.18–20].

¹²⁸Gal 2:14 [CSEL 83/2:121.14]; Gal 2:13 [CSEL 83/2:120.57–58]. Victorinus read Paul’s rebuke to Peter literally. Unlike Jerome, Augustine also accepted that event as a historical event.

¹²⁹Gal 5:2 [CSEL 83/2:158.25].

¹³⁰Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130.2; 17]; Gal 1:6 [CSEL 83/2:99.11–12].

¹³¹Gal 2:15–16 [CSEL 83/2:122.16–22].

¹³²Gal 3:9 [CSEL 83/2:130.9]: “*Totum igitur fides est.*”

¹³³Eph 2:16 [CSEL 83/2:38.25]

¹³⁴Eph 6:13 [CSEL 83/2:87.14–18]: “*Sola sufficit, sola obsistit, sola munit.... Ergo fides sincera vel pura fides, inquam, in Christum et fides in deum, adversum tot illas potestates nobis arma praestabit.*”

is not fully Pauline because he speaks of the real righteousness of a believer, not the righteousness of Christ, as something completing faith.¹³⁵ In his comment on Eph 6:14, Victorinus undeniably speaks of the necessity of personal righteousness subsequent to faith:

And put on the breastplate of righteousness. He [Paul] adds another command besides faith so that we preserve righteousness.... As a matter of fact, the righteous man lives by faith. Nevertheless, because this disposition of faith is also to be complete in order for us to be righteous (for, then, faith will be beneficial to us and there will be true faith if we are righteous and righteousness is beneficial if faith joins it), therefore, he added after faith: "Put on the breastplate!"¹³⁶

Schmid states, "For Victorinus, righteousness is the condition of actually being righteous or good, which condition must first be earned on a foundation of faith, righteousness being something that comes along later and brings the faith itself to completion."¹³⁷ According to Williams, Victorinus does not see any proper distinction between justification and sanctification, and, as a result, proposes that the completion of justification "ultimately" depends on "works."¹³⁸

However, Victorinus maintains a theological distinction between justification and sanctification: "Faith itself alone grants justification and sanctification [*Ipsa enim fides sola iustificationem dat et sanctificationem*]."¹³⁹ Without conflating justification with sanctification, Victorinus preserves the close association between the two graces of God. Faith is the inner disposition of the soul, but can be seen through righteous actions if it is true faith. If one has true faith, therefore, it should join righteousness. According to Victorinus, the breastplate of righteousness that we should put on after faith is personal righteousness, not the righteousness of justification. He points to the righteousness of the "works of Christian religion [*opera christianitatis*]" not to be rejected, but "commanded by apostles to be fulfilled by every Christian [*opera ab apostolo omni Christiano implenda mandatur*]" eagerly.¹⁴⁰ Righteousness by Christian works is fundamentally different from righteousness by the works of the law in that the former functions as "witnesses in Christ [*testes in Christo*]" of the truth that we have been saved by God's grace.¹⁴¹ For Victorinus, justification by *sola fide* does not mean freedom from Christian moral obligations such as charity for the poor. The divine forgiveness, based on Christ's vicarious death, demands Christians to

¹³⁵Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 65.

¹³⁶Eph 6:14 [CSEL 83/2:88.38–45]: "Et induti lorica iustitiae. Adiungit aliud praeceptum praeter fidem ut iustitiam servemus ... etenim iustus ex fide vivit. Tamen quia est et hic adfectus implendus ut iusti simus (tunc enim fides nobis proderit et tunc vera erit fides si iusti simus et iustitia proderit si accedat fides) ergo adiunxit post fidem: induite lorica iustitiae."

¹³⁷Schmid, *Marius Victorinus Rhetor und Seine Beziehungen zu Augustin*, 65.

¹³⁸Williams, "Hilary of Poitiers and Justification by Faith," 453.

¹³⁹Gal 2:15–16 [CSEL 83/2:122]. See also Roukema, "Salvation *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia* in Early Christianity," 42.

¹⁴⁰Gal 3:10 [CSEL 83/2:130.8–9].

¹⁴¹Eph 2:10 [CSEL 83/2:34.8–9].

be the imitators of God [*imitatores dei*].¹⁴² As forgiven by God through Christ's sacrificial death, Christians ought to love others in the same way to the point of "suffering [*passionem*]." ¹⁴³ Paul's command—to love others by imitating Christ's sacrifice for another's sake—is not a condition for Christians to appropriate the grace of the divine forgiveness. Rather, Christians' obligation to live out the love of Christ is a necessary result of their enjoyment of his sacrificial love.

When Victorinus uses the term *mereri* (to merit) in relation to eternal life or grace, we should not take it as a mark of his teaching of justification by works empowered by faith. Following J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink on the Latin fathers' usage of *mereri*, Cooper observes that, like Tertullian and Cyprian, Victorinus also uses the verb *mereri* in a *sensus laxior* and a *sensus strictior*.¹⁴⁴ The verb *mereri* could mean merely "to obtain" in a *sensus laxior* but could also mean "to obtain 'deservedly'" in a *sensus strictior*. Victorinus always refutes merit in a *sensus strictior* whenever it is related to justification and salvation. The *sensus strictior* of *mereri* is in the following:

Gal 1:7 [CSEL 83/2:100.2–4]: "For there is no other [gospel], salvation is not earned deservedly [*merei*] by works. The gospel, which is our salvation, is neither by the observation of Sabbath nor by circumcision [*aliud enim non est, neque ex operibus mereri salutem neque ex sabbati observatione neque ex circumcisione evangelium est, id est salus nostra*]."

Gal 1:10 [CSEL 83/2:102.14–15]: "As a matter of fact, to please humans, as seen in many things, is not to earn deservedly the grace of God [*Etenim placere hominibus, sicuti multis rebus ostenditur, non est gratiam dei mereri*]."

Eph 2:6 [CSEL 83/2:32.14–17]: "This is holy and full mystery, and let us have faith in Christ so that we should not now earn deservedly the rising up or the heavenly realms, but when Christ was raised, then we were raised. [*Hoc sanctum plenum que mysterium est, et fidem habeamus in Christo non nos nunc mereri suscitationem vel regna caelestia, sed cum Christus suscitatus, tunc nos suscitatos*]."

The *sensus laxior* of *mereri* is in the following:

Gal 6:15 [CSEL 83/2:5–6]: "(H)e [Paul] reminds what the mystery carried out; that in Jesus Christ no one has any discrimination; all, who follow Christ, obtain eternal life equally [*monet*

¹⁴²Eph 5:1 [CSEL 83/2:75.2]. Victorinus presents that love for God and for other humans "makes our faith rooted and founded" Eph 3:16–17 [CSEL 83/2:53.25–27]: "Haec radicatam efficit fidem nostram et fundatam]." Does Victorinus mean here that justification begun by faith must be completed by love, as the Council of Trent [the Sixth Session, Chapter VII, Quid Sit Justificatio impii] claims? I do not see that this single comment should violate the consistent message of Victorinus in his entire Pauline commentary—justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Rather, we need to recognize that Victorinus highlights love for God and for fellow humans in the context of sanctification, not justification.

¹⁴³Eph 5:2 [CSEL 83/2:75.9–11].

¹⁴⁴Cooper, *Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians*, 162. For J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink's research, see "Mere(o)r and meritum in some Latin Father," *Studia Patristica* 3 (1961): 330–40.

quid egerit mysterium, quod in Christo Iesu nulla persona sit, nulla discretio, omnes aequaliter, qui Christum sequuntur, aeternam vitam merentur].”

Gal 6:17 [CSEL 83/2:172.14–16]: “From which he [Paul] shows what he himself would suffer, and how much he would obtain from Christ, and what we also have to suffer if we want to be with Christ [*Ex quo ostendit et quid ipse patiat, quantum mereatur a Christo et quid etiam nos pati debeamus si volumus esse cum Christo*].”

In Gal 6:15, Paul points to the equality of all Christians in enjoying the blessings of Christ’s redemption, and the verb *mereri* theologically implies that no Christian is more or less worthy than another in the matter of salvation. In Gal 6:17, Paul does not mean that he deservedly earned his suffering but simply displays all Christians’ necessary participation in the suffering of Christ. They are expected to receive suffering, too. Their receiving suffering has nothing to do with their deservedness.

Eph 1:8 [CSEL 83/2:15.57–16.62]: “However, the soul, among all things, obtained [*meruit*] more from God and the greatest gift and great riches, when knowing God, nevertheless by the will of God infused into it by Jesus Christ, it deserves [*meretur*] to be accepted among the sons of God and to be near to God and to the Son, that is, Jesus Christ; Still, by Christ Jesus himself, the soul, made co-heir of eternity and majesty and power, obtains [*meretur*] the name and power of son [*Anima tamen inter omnia plus a deo meruit et maximum munus et magnas divitias, cum cognoscendo deum, dei tamen voluntate infusa sibi per Christum Iesum, meretur ut inter filios accepta deo vicina sit et filio, id est Iesu Christo; per ipsum Christum tamen veluti coheres aeternitatis et maiestatis et potentiae effecta, meretur filii nomen et potestatem*].”

The soul was not worthy to deserve special gifts from God when it was created. Nor does the soul have anything boastful of its acceptance as a son of God because it cannot know God and become a co-heir of heavenly inheritance unless it was aided by the will of God and Jesus Christ himself. What the soul possesses is not something that it caused. The soul simply received the undeserved grace of God. Here the verb *mereri* simply connotes “to obtain.”

Conclusion

Contrary to McGrath’s thesis, Victorinus presented a substantial understanding of the Pauline concept of justification by faith prior to Augustine. The African theologian’s doctrine of *sola fide* shows exegetical and theological affinities with the sixteenth century Reformers more than with the medieval Roman Catholics. The first Latin Pauline commentator is emphatic about *sola fide* as the only condition of the appropriation of the redemption of Christ. Christ’s penal substitutionary death is central to Victorinus’ *sola fide* doctrine. Victorinus never fails to point out the uselessness of observing the law and personal merits in the matter of justification. Even modern readers of Victorinus will notice his theological references to the alien and imputed righteousness of justification. No one achieves righteousness that makes him acceptable to God, since it proceeds from God. Since God justified Abraham simply because of his faith, regardless of his future moral behaviors, righteousness was imputed to Abraham based on his faith, not

by his works. The mystery of Christ, the entire redemptive ministry of Christ, is the grounds of justification. Faith is not merely a true knowledge of Christ but also a personal union with Christ, who dwells in the souls of believers. Faith alone could appropriately enable believers to enjoy all the blessings of salvation, such as justification and sanctification, by participating in the passion and resurrection of Christ. Faith is both a pure grace of God from the mercy of God, as well as a human duty. It is not difficult for humans to believe in Christ, but believers should not boast about their faith, because the power to desire and the very action of believing comes from God himself, not from our worthiness. Despite the obligation of our believing in Christ, faith is ultimately not the product of our goodness or desire, but the grace of predestination by which God wants to display his goodness. Justification and sanctification are presented as distinct realities, although they are never separate from each other in Victorinus' commentaries. Love does not complete justification that faith initiates, but attests to our genuine appropriation of justification by faith alone in Christ, who demonstrated his love for us by suffering and dying on our account.

There are three apparent differences between Victorinus and the Reformers. First, the former does not substantially expound the instantaneous and declarative aspects of justification although he uses the phrase "imputed." We cannot find a meaningful analogy or illustration of justification as a judicial process, which we could easily detect among the Reformers. Second, the patristic Latin exegete does not speak of the "sweet exchange" between Christ and believing sinners, an analogy of imputation which is found not only in Luther, but also in the second century Christian literature, *Letter to Diognetus*, 9.3–5. Third, Victorinus presents faith almost as an obligation of sinners and does not hesitate to point to the easiness of believing, lessons that one will not find in Luther and Calvin.

However, we should not hastily consider the absence of explicit and profound exegeses of those Protestant legal aspects of justification as evidence of Victorinus' immature understanding of the Pauline doctrine of justification. His commentary on Romans, if still extant, could have provided some explanations of those issues. Even if it did not provide enough material to determine how he viewed the judicial aspects of justification, it is hard to conclude that he would have favored the progressive nature of justification or the completion of justification by works empowered by faith. Victorinus does not imply the progressive nature of justification at all. Nor does he subsume justification under sanctification. Rather, his appeal to the alien and imputed nature of justification and his emphatic rejection of good works subsequent to faith as the condition of justification lead us to suppose that the ancient Pauline interpreter would not be surprised with the Reformers' stress on the judicial perspective of justification. Concerning Victorinus' strong emphasis on the necessity of faith as a human response to the gospel, we should not forget that he ascribes saving faith to the initiating work of the free grace of God, not to human efforts. In the theology of Victorinus, justification is *sola fide*, *solo Christo*, and *sola gratia dei*.

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys: Theological Differences



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John Smyth (1570–1612) studied at Cambridge from 1586 to 1593 and served as a fellow from 1594 to 1598. At this time, many of the great Cambridge professors such as William Perkins, William Ames, and Francis Johnson were ardent Puritans. Like so many Cambridge students in this era, Smyth came to believe the Church of England maintained too many Roman Catholic practices. He then embraced Puritanism and began to denounce the Anglican Church's spiritless worship, use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and ecclesiastical structure. While city lecturer of Lincoln, he made his stance known to his congregation and was dismissed in 1602. This event and several similar later encounters hastened his movement from Puritanism to Separatism.

Thomas Helwys (1575–1612) was a member of the landed gentry and from 1592 to 1595, studied common law at Gray's Inn in London. His family believed that a degree in common law would help him better administer their large estate, Broxtowe Hall, in Nottinghamshire. Helwys had no formal theological training, but he would have known of the public executions of Separatists John Penry, John Greenwood, and Henry Barrow in London in 1593. These executions may have elicited his sympathy and interest in their convictions. Upon returning to Broxtowe Hall in 1595, he invited Separatist-leaning Puritans such as Richard Bernard to preach at his estate. Helwys then extended the privilege to other Puritan ministers. Smyth first met Helwys in 1600 when Helwys permitted Smyth to preach at Broxtowe Hall. His first meetings with Helwys coincided with Smyth's transition from Puritanism to Separatism. Over the next several years, Smyth was Helwys' frequent guest. In 1606, Smyth contracted tuberculosis and spent several months convalescing under Helwys' care. Smyth then convinced Helwys that the Anglican Church was beyond repair and brought him into the Separatist fold.

Later that year, Smyth became the pastor of a growing Separatist congregation that, for reasons of safety, split into two groups. One met at Gainesborough and the other at Scrooby Manor in Nottinghamshire. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys led the Gainesborough group; Richard Clifton and John Robinson headed the Scrooby Manor members. Both churches, however, bound themselves to a mutual covenant, considered themselves a single congregation, and accepted Smyth as their pastor. Out of fear of persecution and a desire to worship according to their conscience, Smyth relocated both groups to Amsterdam, Holland, where upon arrival they would worship as one congregation. Since Holland had no state religion, Amsterdam was a logical choice. The Anabaptists found Amsterdam more hospitable than most cities, and many flocked to it. In fact, the Smyth group found their first home in the bake house of Jan Munter,

a Waterlander Mennonite. The friendship that developed between Smyth and Munter proved influential in Smyth's theological development. Other British Separatists were also in Amsterdam. Francis Johnson, Pastor of the Ancient Church, was among the more prominent Dissenters who had fled London and now called Amsterdam home. A former professor at Cambridge, Johnson may have been one of the dons who instilled Separatist inclinations in Smyth. One would think that in this Dissenter haven, these Separatist churches would have a common bond or even unite into one congregation, but this was not to be the case.

Smyth's congregation and the Ancient Church did not unite, for several reasons. The first reason was church ministry. Francis Johnson's Ancient Church followed the Calvinistic model of a threefold presbytery of pastors, teachers, and two types of elders. Smyth and Helwys believed in a uniformed ministry with only the offices of pastor and one type of elder. The officers in this twofold ministry were to be indistinguishable.¹ His congregation perceived Smyth as first among equals.²

The second reason was Smyth's peculiar belief concerning books. All books were set aside during times of spiritual worship, which included praying, tithing, prophesying, the singing of psalms, baptism, and partaking of the Lord's Supper.³ For Smyth, books used in spiritual worship were anathema because they were similar to *The Book of Common Prayer*, which he believed "quenched the spirit."⁴ During the parts of the service such as preaching and expositing the text, the Hebrew and Greek translations were permissible, if translated by voice. The congregation could not use vernacular translations, as only the original Greek and Hebrew texts were inspired.

Third, the Smyth and later-Helwys church differed from the Ancient Church in matters of finance. Smyth maintained that tithing was an ordinance. Therefore, since the unredeemed did not partake in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, neither should they tithe.⁵ The Ancient Church was not so particular in matters of finance. They frequently accepted contributions from friends in England.

In a letter written to his family back in England on September 26, 1608, Helwys reiterated Smyth's rationale as to why their congregation failed to join one of the other Separatist congregations of Amsterdam. Helwys wrote:

We differ in part in ministry, worship, government, and treasury. Their ministry consists of pastors and teachers or of pastors only, and we approve of no other officers in the ministry but that of pastors. As part of worship, they read chapters of text to preach on and Psalms out of the

¹John Smyth, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, in Whitley, vol. 1 of *Works*, 307–14.

²James R. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1991) 51.

³John Smyth, *The Differences*, 276–80.

⁴*Ibid.*, 277.

⁵*Ibid.*, 318.

translation. We lay aside the translation in praying, prophesying, and in the singing of Psalms. We suppose that we will yet prove the truth that all books even the originals themselves must be set aside in the time of spiritual worship. Yet, we still retain the readings and interpretations of scripture in the church for the preparation of worship, judging of doctrine, deciding of controversies as the ground of faith and of our whole profession. And thus we refuse to use the translations, holding them much inferior to the originals. And this we profess and I desire that you take notice, and to give notice to as many as possible so you can know that this is the true cause of our controversy, whatsoever you hear to the contrary. And assure yourselves in this if you think there is any truth in me. Now concerning the government, they hold that the presbytery consist of pastors, teachers, and ruling elders. We hold that it consists of pastors only. The treasury with which they suffer makes them unable to help those who are unable to communicate with them. They do not sanctify their alms with prayer. We separate our alms from the gifts of strangers which we thankfully receive. And we sanctify the whole action by prayer, before and after, as all the ordinances of God should be. Concerning these things, if God permits, you shall hear a great deal more about later.⁶

Even though the Scrooby Manor congregation formed a covenant with the Gainesborough congregation and were in actuality a single church, they did not unite into one body in Amsterdam. John Robinson was now the pastor of the Scrooby faction, and it appears that Smyth's rigidity in the aforementioned differences were also too much for him. In effect, the Scrooby congregation sided with the Ancient Church against its own Gainesborough brethren. With this action, the Gainesborough congregation became the Smyth church. Within six months, Robinson took his new church to Leyden. He hoped to eliminate any of Smyth's remaining influence and to avoid any potential defections to the Anabaptists who were attempting to proselytize his members.⁷

Other than these peculiarities, the Smyth-Helwys church worship services were similar to those of most Separatist churches in Holland and England. Hughe and Anne Bromheade, members of the Smyth church, sent a letter to their cousin, Sir William Hammerton, in which they described one of their typical services. The letter reads:

The order of the worship and government of our church is 1. We begin with a prayer, after someone reads one or two chapters of the Bible given the sense thereof, and confer upon the same; that done we lay aside our books, and after a solemn prayer made by the speaker, he propounds some text out of the scripture, and prophesies out of the same, by the space of one hour, or three Quarters of an hour. After him a second speaker stands up and prophesies out of the said text in the like time and space; some time more, some time less. After him, the third, fourth, and the fifth and as time will give leave. Then the first speaker concludes with prayer as he began with prayer, with an exhortation to make contributions to the poor, with a collection being made and then concluding with prayer. This morning exercise is observed in the afternoon from two of the clock until five or six of the

⁶Thomas Helwys, "Letter on Church Order," 26 September 1608, ms. 709, fol. 117, recto and verso, in Lambeth Palace library. Cited in Joe Early, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 53–54.

⁷Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 58.

clock. Last of all the execution of the government of the church is handled.⁸

The most dramatic move taken by the Smyth church was the adoption of believer's baptism. Smyth concluded that one must confess Christ before accepting baptism. This nullified the baptism he had received by the Church of England and, in actuality, all infant baptism. Moreover, Smyth argued that the Church of England was not a true church; therefore, it could not dispense the true ordinances. For Smyth and Helwys, the true church was a local, visible church composed of two or three members bound by a confession of their personal faith, followed by baptism.⁹

Though there were several local dissenter and Anabaptist congregations, Smyth and Helwys did not believe a true church existed in Amsterdam. Therefore, the Gainesborough Church took another dramatic step. Scrooby pastor John Robinson described what happened next: "Mr. Smyth [sic], Mr. Helwys and the rest having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former Church, state, and ministry, came together to erect a new Church by baptism, unto which they ascribed so great a virtue, as that they would not so much as pray together before they had it. And after some straining of courtesy, over who should begin...Mr. Smyth baptized first himself, and next Mr. Helwys, and so the rest, making their particular confessions."¹⁰

Despite Smyth's best efforts to defend his self-baptism and his congregation's recent baptism, questions, complaints, and condemnations continued to inundate his church by members of other Separatist churches. Richard Clifton informed Smyth that if everyone self-baptized, then churches could be composed of individuals, leading to nothing short of chaos. Smyth replied that no true church in Amsterdam practiced believer's baptism, so he was compelled to take this unprecedented action. Baptist historian William Whitley stated that it was John Hetherington, one of Smyth's friends, who wrote to ask him why he did not seek baptism from the Mennonites. Hetherington wrote, "It was [a] wonder that you would not receive your baptism first from one of the elders of the Dutch Anabaptists."¹¹ After some investigation, Smyth came to realize that the Waterlander Mennonites, whose landlord Jan Munter was a member, might meet these qualifications, and thus be a true church. Within a year, he had determined that the Amsterdam Mennonites were a true church, had a true baptism, and he had erred by not approaching them for baptism. Therefore, Smyth and thirty-two members of his congregation desired "to unite with the true church of Christ as quickly as possible."¹²

⁸"Letter of Hughe and Anne Bromheade," cited in Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 22.

⁹Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 287.

¹⁰John Robinson, vol. 3 of *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers with a Memoir of Annotations by Robert Ashton, Secretary of the Congregational Board, London* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851), 168.

¹¹Whitley, vol. 1 of *Works*, xcvi.

¹²"Application for Union with the Waterlander Church in Amsterdam," in Whitley, vol. 2 of *Works*, 681.

Thomas Helwys objected to the idea of joining the Mennonite Church and pled with Smyth to reconsider. Helwys believed that they had finally come to the end of their search for a true church. He maintained that if they were to seek baptism from Mennonites, then the baptism they so recently received would be considered invalid and an error. Helwys may have also realized that if the English church became a part of the Waterlander Church, it would lose its identity and never return to England.¹³ Smyth apparently believed that their immigration to Amsterdam was permanent, and his group had no desire to return to the persecution in England. Helwys clearly believed that their self-imposed exile was temporary, and that they would return home when there was a possibility of greater religious toleration. Helwys and ten followers refused to follow Smyth and the majority in their desire to join the Waterlander fold.

Smyth ignored Helwys' pleas, and Smyth and his followers moved ahead in their bid to join the Waterlanders. Smyth sent the Waterlanders *A Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles*, written in Latin. He hoped that the Waterlanders would see the similarities in their belief systems and quickly accept them. To slow down the process, Helwys sent the Waterlanders a letter written in Latin that warned them of being too quick in accepting the Smyth church into their congregation. Helwys told the Waterlanders that Smyth and his followers had been "justly excluded" and were impenitent in their sin. Despite this unequivocal statement, Helwys does not define the nature of this sin. He also told them "not to receive such things [the Smyth church] by which you may be defiled, whereby it is best that you know little of corrupting the entire mass that may be corrupted."¹⁴ The tone of the letter is congenial. He was not castigating the Waterlanders for considering Smyth, but attempting to explain what Helwys and his followers had done to Smyth and his adherents. Along with this letter, he sent them his *Synopsis of Faith*, a nineteen-article Latin confession of faith. Since neither was fluent in Dutch, and since Latin was known by most scholars, Latin was the easiest language for both men to use in order to communicate with the Dutch-speaking Waterlanders.

An examination of both confessions shows that Smyth's views deeply affected Helwys. Fifteen of the twenty articles in Smyth's *Confession* are almost identical to Helwys' *Synopsis of Faith*. The wording may differ, but the theological meaning is the same. They are in complete agreement on the Trinity, the creation of man, the rejection of infant baptism, church officers, and the Lord's Supper. The effects of the novel system of Holland's own Jacob Arminius (c. 1551–1609) and living in a Waterlander community is apparent in the theology of Smyth and Helwys. They had moved away from the Calvinistic/Puritan soteriology and embraced a more Arminian soteriology. Helwys, however, gave less importance to free will than did Smyth.

Significant theological differences are in Articles 7 and 10 of Smyth's *Confession*, which

¹³William R. Estep, "Thomas Helwys: Bold Architect of Baptist Policy on Church-State Relations," *Baptist History and Heritage* 20.3 (July 1985): 27–28.

¹⁴Thomas Helwys, "Letter to the [sic] Consistory of the United Mennonite Church at Amsterdam," 1610. Cited in Early, 55.

correspond to Articles 6 and 7 of Helwys' *Synopsis*. Smyth's Article 7 and Helwys' Article 6 concern Christology. Smyth states, "That Jesus Christ, as pertaining to the flesh, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, afterwards was born, circumcised, baptized, tempted, etc."¹⁵ While not overtly, Smyth is espousing, or at least not refuting, the Hoffmanite Christology that was prevalent among the Mennonites.¹⁶ Hoffmanite Christology stressed that Jesus did not have a human body but was a purely divine being with celestial or angelic flesh. Jesus' body passed through the Virgin Mary as water passes through a pipe. Helwys eliminated the Hoffmanite concept by stating, "That Jesus Christ manifested in the plenitude of time, in flesh, made from woman, conceived and born from her, etc."¹⁷ Helwys made it clear that Jesus had human flesh.

Smyth's Article 10 and Helwys' Article 7 concern justification. Smyth states, "That the justification of man before the divine tribunal (which is both the throne of justice and of mercy), consists partly of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ apprehended by faith, and partly of inherent righteousness, in the holy themselves, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, which is called regeneration or sanctification; since any one is righteous, who does righteousness."¹⁸ Helwys states, "That the redemption of man before God can only consist of obedience to Christ and justice through faith, it is dead if it is understood as excluding works."¹⁹

Articles 12, 14, and 17 of Helwys' *Synopsis* are independent of Smyth. Article 12 pertains to relationships within the church. Helwys is concerned that churches may become so large that all the members cannot know each other and properly care for each other's needs. He stressed that in order for the elders to perform their ministries properly, they must know each member of the church. Article 14 reflects Helwys' Puritan understanding of the Sabbath. He maintained that on each Sabbath, all the members must refrain from secular work and gather together in the worship of God.²⁰ In Article 17, Helwys states that no arbitrary dicta should be forced on the church or members of the church.²¹ Scripture was to be the basis for all church teaching, and not in caprice. In a letter sent to the Waterlanders on March 12, 1610, Helwys claimed that succession was the most important obstacle to the reconciliation of the disparate churches. Helwys now insisted that "the whole cause in question being succession (for it is indeed and in truth) consider we beseech you, how it is the anti-Christ's chief hold, and that it is Jewish and ceremonial, an

¹⁵John Smyth, *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles*, cited in Lumpkin, 100.

¹⁶Estep, "Thomas Helwys," 27.

¹⁷Thomas Helwys, *Synopsis Fidei, Verae Christianae Ecclesiae Anglicanae*. [A Latin "synopsis" of faith of the "true English Christian Church" at Amsterdam under the leadership of Thomas Helwys, delivered (probably between February and 12 March 1610) to the Waterlanders there with thanks for the teaching they had given them.] (Amsterdam: n.p., 1610). Hereafter, *Latin Synopsis of Faith*. Cited in Early, 61.

¹⁸Smyth, *Short Confession*, 101.

¹⁹Helwys, *Latin Synopsis of Faith*. Cited in Early, 61.

²⁰Ibid. Cited in Early, 62–63.

²¹Ibid. Cited in Early, 63.

ordinance of the Old Testament but not of the New.”²² Succession is the belief “that there should be an orderly transmission, elders ordaining elders, and baptisms only to be received only from people already baptized.”²³ Even though this letter followed closely on the heels of his *Synopsis*, Helwys had made no previous reference to succession. According to Helwys’ *Synopsis* (Article 9)²⁴ and Smyth’s *Confession* (Articles 12 and 13),²⁵ they both held to local autonomy and the gathered church principle. Helwys believed that the baptisms performed by Smyth and himself were valid and did not need the approval of any other church. Helwys apparently believed that the Waterlanders and Smyth were advocating their own version of the Roman Catholic apostolic succession.

Evidently, Helwys’ letter led to a conference among the Waterlander elders, Smyth, and himself on May 23, 1610. There are no records of the activities of this conference. James Coggins, a leading Smyth biographer, believes that Smyth joined the Waterlander fellowship at this time. Other historians believe the meeting was inconclusive. Whatever the outcome, Helwys was not pleased with it.

By 1611, Helwys had come to the understanding that the Smyth church did not intend to abandon their plan to join the Waterlanders. He may also have believed that the differences between his church and Smyth’s church were now too stark for reconciliation to be possible. These realizations seemed to launch Helwys into a frenzy of writing. In 1611, he wrote a new confession of faith and three books. The first work was his *Declaration of Faith of the English Church Remaining in Amsterdam*. This declaration is the first true English Baptist confession of faith and reveals the maturation of Helwys’ stance in the wake of his definitive break from Smyth.

Helwys also penned *An Advertisement or Admonition unto the Congregations, Which Men Call the New Fryelers, in the Lowe Countries*.²⁶ In this work, which was dedicated to Hans de Ries, a Waterlander who was trying to help the Smyth congregation, Helwys outlined four objections to Smyth’s and the Mennonites’ theology. These objections concerned Hoffmanite Christology, Sabbath observance, the magistracy, and succession. These four issues would continue to surface in many of Helwys’ writings. Despite their differences, Helwys thanked the Waterlanders for pointing out the errors.²⁷ Helwys, therefore, acknowledged the influence of the Waterlanders on his own thought.

The differences in Helwys’ *Synopsis* of 1610 and his post-*Synopsis* writings, in particular his 1611 *Declaration of Faith*, are significant. The *Synopsis* had been largely dependent upon Smyth.

²²Thomas Helwys, “A Vindication of the Position Assumed by the English Baptists.” Cited in Early, 57.

²³Whitley, *Thomas Helwys*, 249.

²⁴Helwys, *Latin Synopsis of Faith*. Cited in Early, 62.

²⁵Smyth, *Short Confession*, 101.

²⁶Thomas Helwys, *An Advertisement or Admonition unto the Congregations, Which Men Call the New Fryelers, in the Lowe Countries* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1611).

²⁷*Ibid.* Cited in Early, 94.

The *Declaration*, *A Short and Plaine Proof*, *An Advertisement*, and *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* demonstrate that Helwys had moved away from Smyth in some areas and was beginning to form his own positions. In Article 2 of the *Declaration*, Helwys affirmed original sin, saying, “his sin was imputed to all; and so death went over all men.”²⁸ He continues his discussion on original sin in Article 4, where he states “men are by nature the children of wrath and born in iniquity and in sin conceived.... Yet God giving grace, man may receive grace or may reject grace.”²⁹ Whereas in Article 5 of his *Synopsis* he had not renounced free will, he now repudiated what he considered free will to be by removing it all together from his *Declaration*. In fact, in his *Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, he called free will “that most damnable heresy.”³⁰ Helwys delineated his position on free will in the conclusion of his *A Short and Plaine Proof by the Word and Works Of God that God’s Decree is Not the Cause of Any of Man’s Sins or Condemnation*:

If their meaning is free will in Christ and that we have free power and ability through Christ to work out our salvation and that through Christ we are made able to do every good work, such a free will we hold. But that man has any free will or power in himself to work his own salvation or choose life, we utterly deny having learned that of the apostle (Ephesians 2.8.9). “That by grace men are saved through faith and not of themselves, but it is the gift of God not of works less any man should boast of himself.” But this grace of God, (which his mercy by Christ) God has given to all, but all do not receive it. (John 1.10.11) “He was in the world and the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him.”³¹

In Article 8 of the *Declaration*, Helwys denounces Hoffmanite Christology, but in much stronger language than in Article 6 of the *Synopsis*. He states that Jesus was “manifested in the Flesh, being the seed of David, and of the Israelites, according to the Flesh. The Son of Mary the Virgin made of her substance.”³² He reiterates his defense of the body of Christ in *An Advertisement*. With very strong biblical precedents, Helwys demonstrated that:

now in that Christ’s body was mortal and died, it was not a heavenly, glorious, spiritual, powerful body, but it was an earthly, natural weak body, and had the same infirmities that our bodies have (sin excepted, as showed in Hebrews 4.15). We do not have a high Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of infirmities, but was tempted in all things in like sort, yet without sin. Also in Chap. 5.2 we see that he is succinctly able to have compassion on them that are ignorant and that are out of the way, because he is also compressed with infirmity. And his infirmities appear in that he was hungry (Matthew 4.2). He was weary (John 4.6). He was troubled, and his soul was in great heaviness (Mark 14.33.34). He confessed his flesh was weak (Matthew 26.41). All of these infirmities or any infirmity could not come from heaven because in heaven there are no imperfections or imperfect things. We demand can heavenly bodies be weary, can they be hungry,

²⁸Helwys, *A Declaration of Faith*. Cited in Early, 68.

²⁹Ibid. Early, 69.

³⁰Helwys, *An Advertisement*. Cited in Early, 152.

³¹Helwys, *A Short and Plaine Proof*. Cited in Early, 91–92.

³²Helwys, *Declaration of Faith*. Cited in Early, 70.

can they be troubled, and can their souls be in heaviness, or are they weak and mortal?³³

Shortly before his death in 1612, Smyth wrote his *Last Book*. While discussing the nature of Christ, Smyth implied that Helwys misunderstood his teachings because he did not have the medical knowledge that Smyth had acquired as a practicing doctor.³⁴ Smyth stated that all children receive their nature from their father and only nourishment from their mother.³⁵ In Article 19 of Smyth's *Defense of the Short Confession*, Smyth claims that he had not denied the physical nature of Christ coming from Mary but stressed his spiritual nature more frequently because it was more important. Even though Smyth claimed that his interpretation of the nature of Christ was different from that of the Waterlanders, he did not deem it worthy of making it a test of fellowship.³⁶

Articles 11 and 12 of the *Declaration* expand *Synopsis*, Article 9, and repudiate succession. Helwys strengthens Article 9 of the *Synopsis* in Article 11 of the *Declaration* by elaborating on the concept of the gathered church as constituting the true church. He stated that "though they are but two or three," they have Christ with them and may "administer the holy ordinances."³⁷ Article 12 of the *Declaration* claims that no church has Christ alone, but every church has Christ.³⁸

Succession was the primary topic of *An Advertisement*. His descriptions of succession allege that the practice was nothing but Roman Catholicism in disguise. A key to Helwys' defense was the question of where true baptism began. He noted that to "come to your ground, this is the sum of that which you say. Baptism was once raised up by one unbaptized person, after this act, none did. It is neither lawful for any unbaptized to baptize, but all must have it from him, and so you follow on with our proportion from baptism, to the church and ministry."³⁹

Helwys then pressed the question of whether after the first baptizer, John the Baptist, performed his task, if anyone else had permission to perform the ordinance. Answering his own question, Helwys stated that John was "unbaptized (or rather not being of any other first baptized). If his example is a particular for one man only (as you say) then it was abolished when your predecessor had once begun to baptize. So is that example now of no use?"⁴⁰ If the Waterlanders were correct, every person who received a true baptism must somehow be able to trace the lineage of those in their baptismal line back to John the Baptist. In Helwys' opinion, this was no different from having to receive baptism by a priest standing in apostolic succession for one to be a member of

³³Helwys, *An Advertisement*. Cited in Early, 96–97.

³⁴Smyth, *Last Book*, in Whitley, vol. 2 of *Works*, 758; Burgess, *John Smyth, the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England* (London: James Clarke, 1911), 265–66; Coggins, 124.

³⁵Smyth, *Last Book*, in Whitley, vol. 2 of *Works*, 758.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 759.

³⁷Helwys, *Declaration of Faith*. Cited in Early, 70–71.

³⁸*Ibid.* Early, 71.

³⁹Helwys, *An Advertisement*. Cited in Early, 110.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* Early, 111.

the Roman Catholic Church.

Helwys maintained that if succession were true, then no new churches could be formed without permission from an established church with elders who could baptize them and approve their church. Therefore, everyone must come to that church, in this instance the Waterlander Church, for acceptance. Helwys perceived this as unbiblical and impossible. He noted that the Waterlanders would:

have all people, and nations, and tongues come to you, and your beginnings for the ordinances of Christ: No people may have power to administer in the holy things except they first join themselves to you, and be one with you and receive power and all the holy things from you. Herein do you with the man of sin exalt yourselves above all that are called of God, and you take to yourselves above all that are called of God, and you take to yourselves that preferment under the gospel that God gave only to the Jews under the law.⁴¹

Helwys believed that to hold succession in such a manner was arrogant. It was as if they were saying, “All people and nations must then come to you, and receive all the holy ordinances from you.”⁴²

Invalidating succession was very important to Helwys, but in all actuality, he may have been reading too deeply into Smyth’s desire to join the Waterlander Church. In his *Last Book*, Smyth stated that he never believed in succession. He believed that he had erred by performing his own baptism when a true church, the Waterlanders, had been present. He only sought baptism to maintain some semblance of order within the church.⁴³

Completely new to the *Declaration* is Article 24, concerning the magistracy. Helwys added this article because Smyth discussed the magistracy in his second version of *A Short Confession*,⁴⁴ issued soon after Helwys’ *Synopsis*. Following the Waterlander belief, Smyth states in Article 35 that Christ has not “called his disciples or followers to be worldly kings, princes, potentates, or magistrates.... This then considered (does not fit the crucified life of the Christians) ... so hold we that it beseems not Christians to administer these offices.”⁴⁵ Helwys disagreed with his interpretation. Helwys states in Article 24 of the *Declaration* that magistrates “may be members of the ‘Church of Christ’ retaining their magistracy, for no one Holy Ordinance of God debars any from being a member of the Christ’s Church.”⁴⁶ Helwys continued his defense of allowing magistrates membership in the church in his *An Advertisement*:

⁴¹Ibid. Cited in Early, 104.

⁴²Ibid. Cited in Early, 108.

⁴³Smyth, *Last Book*, in Whitley, vol. 2 of *Works*, 756–57.

⁴⁴Most historians believe that Waterlander leader Hans de Reis (1553–1638) wrote this confession. See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 102.

⁴⁵John Smyth, *A Short Confession*, in Lumpkin, 111–12.

⁴⁶Helwys, *Declaration of Faith*. Cited in Early, 73.

It is made most plain that the power and authority of the magistrates is the holy ordinance of God. They are further called, the ministers of God, and their administration is set down to take vengeance of those that do evil, and to praise those that do well. And the instrument that is used to punish evil doers is the sword. And in all this they are the ministers of God for good and for the good of God's children. Therefore they are commanded to pray for them. Thus, their power (being of God) is holy and good being (as it is showed here by the Apostle) appointed of God for good, who does, nor can appoint nothing but that which is holy and good, and pleasing to him. God is holiness and goodness, and he cannot appoint anything that is contrary to himself.⁴⁷

When comparing Helwys' 1610 *Synopsis* to his 1611 *English Declaration* and his other post-*Synopsis* works, it is apparent that his rupture with Smyth was complete. Helwys repudiated every tenet of Waterlander theology that Smyth now maintained and that had been included in his *Synopsis*. Helwys now affirmed original sin, the magistrate's ability to be a member of the church, and oath taking. He denied what he considered free will and Hoffmanite Christology. Helwys' soteriology was now a mix of Calvinism and Arminianism. In matters of original sin and the will, he became more Calvinistic than Arminian. Yet, in matters of atonement and the perseverance of the saints, Helwys remained strictly Arminian. Helwys was making a clear statement that his group was different from both Smyth's church and the Waterlanders.

There may have also been some personal differences between Smyth and Helwys. In Smyth's *Last Book*, he took offense at Helwys' allegations that he had not given his share of money to the Amsterdam congregation and had been living off the common fund. Smyth replied that "concerning a secret imputation, which Mister Helwys by way of imitation suggests as though I had received much help of maintenance from his company or from that company of English people that came over together out of the North parts with me, I affirm this much: that I never received of them all put together the value of forty shillings."⁴⁸ Smyth and Helwys also differed over purpose and mission. While Helwys was debating Smyth, he concluded that it was wrong to have fled persecution. He knew he had to return to England. As Helwys penned all of his 1611 writings in Amsterdam, he could not have returned to England before the end of 1611. The more probable date is early 1612, when he organized the first Baptist church in England in Spitalfields outside the city walls of London.⁴⁹ Smyth had no desire to return to England; he was content to remain in Amsterdam and become a part of the Waterlander fellowship.

While a member of Smyth's congregation in England and Holland, Helwys was deeply indebted to his pastor for much of his theological and ecclesiological development. Helwys dutifully followed Smyth in his progression from Puritan to Separatist, and finally Baptist with no apparent theological disagreements. Moreover, Helwys went so far as to follow Smyth into the unthinkable act of self-baptism. Their breach occurred only when Smyth continued his search for further light by rejecting their self-baptisms, positing baptismal succession, and seeking

⁴⁷Helwys, *An Advertisement*. Cited in Early, 129.

⁴⁸Smyth, *Last Book*, in Whitley, vol. 2 of *Work*, 759.

⁴⁹Payne, *Thomas Helwys*, 1.

membership into what he deemed a true fellowship. Helwys retained much of the theology they gained up to their Baptist stage, but from this point onward, he formed his own positions that became uniquely General Baptist. Smyth, therefore, deserves the moniker of the first Baptist, but Helwys deserves the title of the first permanent Baptist.

Toward a Non-Deterministic Theology of Divine Providence



Robert E. Picirilli, Ph.D.

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*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
- William Cowper*

In his history of the Northern Free Will Baptists, I. D. Stewart writes of the denomination's founder: "[Benjamin] Randall's horse stumbled and precipitated him upon the ground. He acknowledged the hand of Providence that kept himself from injury, but the loss of his horse, by a fracture of the shoulder, was a loss indeed, since he was unable to supply its place, and, without one, he could no longer travel and blow the gospel trumpet."¹

Similarly, when my wife died not long ago, all five of my daughters were for other reasons present in the city (where two of them did not live) and with us in the room. I said, more than once during the next few days, that it was *providential* that all of them were there. I am confident that it was.

Randall and I could have added, of course, that it was just as providential that he lost the horse on which he depended and that I lost my wife of almost fifty-nine years. But we do not usually attribute negative things to providence. And therein lies the need for a more thorough study of a subject that does not receive the attention it deserves. As Albert C. Outler—not a friend to a Biblicist theology—has observed, "Belief in the providence of God as the ultimate environment

¹I. D. Stewart, *The History of the Freewill Baptists, for Half a Century, with an Introductory Chapter: Volume I. from the year 1780 to 1830* (Dover, NH: Freewill Baptist Printing Establishment, 1862), 144. There never was a volume II.

of human existence” is “the linchpin of traditional Christian doctrine.”² Providence is, he writes, “God’s active ‘presence’ *in this world*—personal and gracious—in the continuance of creation, in the vicissitudes of history, as the divine love in which we live and move and have our being.”³

Introduction: The Traditional Doctrine

I turn first to Louis Berkhof, as I often have since those days long ago when I first encountered him in graduate school. His is a substantial work, and he devotes a chapter to providence, appropriately, as part of his treatment of the doctrine of God. He observes that “the word ‘providence’ has come to signify the provision which God makes for the ends of His government, and the preservation and government of all His creatures.”⁴ That is rather broad, as is the Bible: “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 45:9–10). Among other things, Berkhof sets the Christian view of providence in contrast to both fatalism and chance, as well as to the view of secular science “that the world is controlled by an iron-clad system of laws.”⁵ For the Christian, God is at work in everything that happens, guiding it all to His desired ends.

Berkhof also makes the traditional distinction between *general* and *special* providence. The former denotes “God’s control of the universe as a whole” and the latter “His care for each part of it in relation to the whole.” But he is quick to observe that these are not really “two different kinds of providence, but the same providence exercised in two different relations.” He adds that *special providence* sometimes “refers to God’s special care for His rational creatures,” and that some theologians define a *very special* providence “with reference to those who stand in the special relationship of sonship to God.”⁶ G. C. Berkouwer adds the helpful note that in this very special providence “the *love* of God is revealed particularly.”⁷

Finally, Berkhof analyzes the doctrine of providence to include three main parts.⁸ (1) *Preservation* is the doctrine that God maintains the existence, nature, and powers of all things he created. (2) *Concurrence* is the doctrine that he is at work in all the acts of his creatures, so that nothing ever occurs “independently” of God. (3) *Government* is the doctrine that he works in everything so as to accomplish his purposes.

²Albert C. Outler, *Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 6.

³*Ibid.*, 17.

⁴Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 165.

⁵*Ibid.*, 165–66.

⁶*Ibid.*, 168.

⁷G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 180.

⁸Berkhof, 169–76.

Berkouwer, citing the Heidelberg Catechism, comments that the third, government, speaks especially about “the purpose or end to which God leads all things,” while the first, preservation, may also be indicated by words like upholding, sustenance, or maintenance.⁹ He adds that sustenance includes “the entire process in which all things move toward God’s arranged end,” which leads him to observe that these two aspects of providence cannot finally be “viewed as two separate deeds.”¹⁰

In principle, these three doctrines seem an appropriate division of the material and belong to a larger discussion of providence. Berkhof’s treatment, as I have summarized it, is sufficient as an introduction to the subject. My purpose here does not include discussion of all the issues traditionally involved. There are many of these, including how God’s sovereign government of the world relates to human freedom, how God’s foreknowledge is involved in providence, how the presence of evil in the world can be justified in light of the goodness of an all-powerful, all-controlling God (theodicy), the relationship between miracles and natural processes, and so on.

Some matters, therefore, I will touch on only in passing. Those that concern me most I will give greater attention. It will be obvious to any informed reader, for example, that some of the issues will be those about which Calvinists (like Berkhof) and Arminians historically disagree. Indeed, some discussions of providence sound very much like traditional arguments about sovereignty and free will. I see no need to labor again, over issues that I have treated elsewhere,¹¹ even though I will give this some attention in discussing how God’s providence involves human sin and relates to foreknowledge.

The Meaning of Providence

I begin with the word itself, which—like Trinity—does not appear in the Bible but is certainly grounded in the book.¹² *Providence* is the activity of *providing for*. As Paul Helm expresses this, “‘The providence of God’ is a rather formal way of referring to the fact that God *provides*. And what could be more practical, relevant or down-to-earth than that?”¹³ James Spiegel begins his discussion of providence by explaining, “Generally speaking, the doctrine of divine providence affirms that God ‘provides’ for his creatures. The Lord not only created the entire universe—he also prudently manages it.”¹⁴ Thomas P. Flint states, “To see God as provident is to see him as

⁹Berkouwer, 50.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace Faith Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002). When discussed under the heading of providence, the issues are broader than those discussed in soteriology, although the principles are the same.

¹²At least, *providence* does not appear in the Authorized Version; I cannot guarantee, of course, that it does not appear in any contemporary English versions.

¹³Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 18.

¹⁴James S. Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 19.

knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature toward the ends he has ordained for them.”¹⁵

Etymologically from the Latin, the word has two parts. The *vide* means to see, and the *pro* means in behalf of or before. The word means about the same thing we mean when we speak of *foresight*, at least when we use it not merely to mean looking ahead but looking ahead in such a way as to plan prudently and make provision for what we see coming. But etymology does not determine the meaning of a word, and *providence* (like all other words) means exactly what it is used to mean: namely, God’s active care for his created order (including human beings) so as to uphold, provide for, oversee, govern, and guide them toward the ends he has appointed for them. Pascal P. Belew defines providence as: “That activity of the Triune God by which He conserves, cares for, and governs the world which He has made.”¹⁶ In this definition, “the world” includes everything in existence in the natural realm.

In this all-inclusive sense, the word Providence (with a capital letter) is often used as a reverent way of identifying God himself, in the same way that other words so closely attached to the nature and works of God can stand as names for Him. For example, we sometimes say, “Heaven knows,” when we mean that God knows. We do this on a human level, too, when we address a judge as “your honor” or refer to a king as “his majesty.” The Bible also uses such indirect names,¹⁷ as when Heb 1:3 says that Jesus “sat down on the right hand of *the Majesty* on high” (also Heb 8:1). In the same way, people sometimes say *Providence* when they mean God himself. The reason for this is that God alone is capable of exercising an all-encompassing providence over the world.

The Extent of Providence

Ultimately, God’s providence encompasses everything that transpires. Martin Luther said, “All things are done and guided, not planlessly but by divine providence.”¹⁸ Berkouwer defines providence as “God’s rule over *all things*,” as “God’s embracing in His prescient government all that occurs in the universe.”¹⁹ He also notes, “All the apparent surprises and accidents [in our lives] fall within the wide circle of God’s providential order.”²⁰ This is harder for us to grasp without confusion, and this is a matter I wish to discuss at greater length because it especially involves one of the critical issues.

The book of providence is, in fact, the story of everything that takes place in the cosmos. As Rom 8:28 puts it, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God,

¹⁵Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁶Pascal P. Belew, *The Philosophy of Providence* (Butler, IN: The Higley Press, 1955), 11.

¹⁷These are sometimes called *circumlocutions* or *periphrases*.

¹⁸Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 1:25.

¹⁹Berkouwer, 9, 10 (emphasis his).

²⁰*Ibid.*, 32.

to those who are the called according to His purpose.” *All* things? Yes, and God’s providential control of them is exercised for the certain accomplishment of His purpose for those who know Him. “Those who love God” and “those who are called according to His purpose,” are references to His children. So, everything ultimately fits into the concept, to be discussed further below, of God’s providence exercised in caring for His people; some have called this very special providence.

We have no problem seeing that this is so for all the things we recognize as good, but this includes all the bad things, too, whether 9/11 or the Holocaust or my wife’s death. God is providentially in control even over the wickedness of human beings! “Man’s activity falls, as the smaller of two concentric circles, completely within the greater circle of God’s purpose.”²¹ As William Plumer said, “Without Him atoms and planets, angels and devils, saints and sinners can do nothing.”²²

This is the area where confusion easily sets in, and so some clarification needs to be offered. To begin, *control* does not mean that God actively performs or desires or causes everything that is done. To see that control is all-inclusive, one needs only to consider what it would mean to say that God is *not* in control, which is biblically unacceptable. Surely nothing goes on in this world that is *out* of God’s control. He has not lost control, and no other force in the world can wrest control from Him or otherwise defeat Him. The purposes that He has ordained will be achieved. Also, His purposes include the existence of evil in the world, whether we think we understand that or not. I do not think I understand the matter, more than an occasional glimmer that I have difficulty putting into words; and writing a theodicy (a justification of God’s goodness in the face of evil and suffering) is not within my present purpose.

When one of His moral creatures does wrong, God does not cause or actively desire that misdeed: that much is clear. Nothing God does makes it necessary for that person to sin. Here is where the Calvinist is likely to be careless in defining *concurrency*, as is Berkhof when he writes on that subject, “In every instance the impulse to action and movement proceeds from God”; and, “Each deed is in its entirety both a deed of God and a deed of the creature”; and “The divine concursus ... *determines him* [the person sinning] *efficaciously* to the specific act.”²³ To be fair, he also says, “The act is man’s alone, though its occurrence is efficaciously secured by God. And the sin is man’s only.”²⁴ But the other statements make this ring hollow.

Concurrency may be given some lesser meaning, but it is not a good word to use in this way, and it will inevitably be taken to mean that God and man perform together the same action—as, indeed, Berkhof’s own words seem to affirm. These words, in the ears of many of us, sound like God effectively fixes things so that the sin is necessary. And if that is the case, then God is in

²¹Ibid., 92.

²²William S. Plumer, *Jehovah-Jireh: A Treatise on Providence* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1993, reprint from 1865), 15.

²³Berkhof, 173, 172, 175 (respectively).

²⁴Ibid., 175.

some sense the *cause* of the sin. It is but a short step, then, to say that God actively concurs in the committing of sin, and that simply will not fit the biblical teaching.

The way out of this dilemma is to understand, first, that the committing of sin is always a matter of motive and will. It is not a sin, for example, to plunge a knife into another person's chest; surgeons do that all the time.²⁵ What is sin is for one person to *intend* harm to another by such an act. The sin lies in the willful intention of the sinner. Yes, God in His providence upholds the molecular structure of the murderer's bullet as it leaves the gun and takes the victim's life. But God does not uphold the sinful intention of the killer. *God concurs with no sinner in his sin.* (Some things are better to say than others, and it is better to say this than to say that every deed is entirely a deed both of God and of the creature, as above.) The intention to sin is one "event" in the world in which God's providence, although in control, is not concurrent.²⁶ Alvin Plantinga—by no means Arminian in his sentiments—appropriately suggests that the doctrine of concurrence, at least as traditionally understood, "is metaphysical overkill—little more, really, than an attempt to pay God unnecessary (and unwanted) metaphysical compliments."²⁷

This leads to the second key to understanding the dilemma: namely, that God is not the only actor in the universe. Some Calvinists have recognized this. Charles Hodge, for example, rejected the doctrine of concurrence on this very ground, saying that it "is founded on an arbitrary and false assumption. It denies that any creature can originate action." He goes on to characterize concurrence as an unnecessary inference made "in order to secure the absolute control of God over created beings. ... That we are free agents means that we have the power to act freely."²⁸ God intentionally created human beings in his likeness, with wills of their own, free (within limitations, of course) to act in accord with their own motives and decisions. The *possibility* of

²⁵This is true also for virtue, as my friend Paul V. Harrison reminds me: Virtue does not inhere in the *act* of putting money in the offering plate, but in the intention of the giver.

²⁶Berkouwer, 134–37, discusses the distinction I have drawn (although not exactly as I have drawn it) as a distinction between *form* (the sinful intention) and *matter* (the physical activity), and rejects it, pleading (with Calvin) "no need of a perspicuous synthesis" (137) and so resorting to *mystery*. And yet he affirms that "Divine activity ... is always wise and good" (137), which has to mean that God never participates in sin, as the word *concurrence* inevitably suggests. Berkouwer, 137–141, likewise resists the usual (even among Reformed theologians) resort to the notion of *permission* in order to absolve God of guilt. Even so, he appropriately notes, "When permission is really used to indicate the manner of Divine ruling, by which He grants room *within* His ruling for human freedom and responsibility, then the line of Biblical thinking has not been wholly abandoned" (140). Precisely: in such thinking, the Biblical line has not been abandoned at all! For a better treatment of permission, see Helm, 171–73.

²⁷Alvin Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 132. Flint, like Plantinga, holds to the Molinist view of providence, which relies heavily on the doctrine of God's middle knowledge (which will not be discussed here); Flint's treatment of concurrence, 87–94, is stimulating but highly philosophical.

²⁸Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 604. Paul Helm, 171–82, appears to ignore the doctrine of concurrence and to give more credence to divine *permission*, but his treatment leaves me somewhat unsure.

sin lies entirely within that realm and nowhere else. Nothing else in the created order sins, not even the vicious lion that kills and devours the helpless gazelle. As I said, then, this freedom to exercise one's will and to sin is one area of activity in the cosmos where God's providence is *not* concurrent with the sin involved in what transpires. When humans determine to sin, God does not sin with them; he does not uphold them in their intentions and so in the sins that lie in those intentions.

To be sure, a person cannot carry out sinful intentions without Him. One cannot sin independently of God. As Thomas Oden has said, "One cannot even sin without providence."²⁹ Were it not for God's providential upholding of one's physical being, he or she could not pull the trigger to kill, could not utter blasphemy or a lie, could not look on the pornographer's non-art. But the sinning does not lie in the physical properties of such acts, which God's natural laws uphold—for reasons and in ways that He alone understands fully. The sin lies in the wicked intentions of the moral agents who do such things, and the God who providentially upholds their existence and energies does not sustain those intentions. That is one reason we insist so strongly on freedom of the will, because it is in the will that sin occurs. God enables our choices for good or bad; He does not make the choices with us.

Berkouwer, who affirms a Reformed perspective, takes human responsibility seriously. He writes,

Anyone who does not take both this Divine ruling and human responsibility seriously can never rightly understand history. He will always assume one or the other of two basically erroneous perspectives: either he will make man the lord of history, creator of events, holding history in his hand ... or he will make history a Divine game in which human beings are pushed about like chessmen, void of responsibility.³⁰

Does the fact that God enables our disobedience mean that God created evil? Well, what it means is that God, when He created moral beings with wills of their own, created them capable of sin—and, yes, knowing that they would do so. That is how sin came to be part of the human experience, beginning with Eve and Adam. We leave it to God to explain that, confident that He can, that He had good and sufficient reason for doing so, reason that He has not deigned to reveal to us.³¹ Like the psalmist, we do not proudly concern ourselves with "things too profound" for us (Psa 131:1).

There is a third aspect of understanding this dilemma: namely, the teaching of 1 Cor 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." God's providence not only includes

²⁹Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 1:283.

³⁰Berkouwer, 141.

³¹One common theory is that God knew that a greater good would result in a world where evil was possible than in one where it was not. While this may be true, it is human speculation and not biblical revelation.

the circumstances of our temptation, but it also includes the way to avoid sin in *every* such set of circumstances.

Indeed, this truth only “works” in the context of free, moral agency. God never allows His children to be in circumstances that make sin *necessary*. In every set of circumstances, there is a way to avoid sin. Consequently, every instance of sin in a believer’s life involves *freely* choosing against the way of “escape” that God provided—when the believer *could* have chosen the way God provided and avoided the sin. Surely God did not at the same time provide the way to escape and the *necessity* of choosing against the escape.³²

I note, with appreciation, that Spiegel distinguishes between high and low views of providence, with the high view being “that God’s control of the cosmos is absolute” and the low view being that God not only does not foreordain everything, but He also does not even foreknow everything and therefore is often surprised at a given turn of events and may even be mistaken in his estimates of what people will do!³³ He proceeds to note that Arminius and Wesley (unlike himself and other Calvinists) make God’s exhaustive foreknowledge logically prior to His foreordination of things in order to preserve libertarian human freedom, but he acknowledges that this approach, too, holds to the high view of providence.³⁴

I now leave this excursion into the differences between Calvinism and Reformation Arminianism, satisfied that the account I have briefly suggested is superior to the traditionally Reformed way of expressing matters of concurrence with the sins of human beings. Even so, we must not lose sight of the main point: namely, that God’s providence includes everything that takes place, including evil. We recognize the hand of providence in all the events that shape us and our world.

Aspects of Providence

Is there more than one *kind* of providence? Probably not, but perhaps this does not matter. In

³²For a full discussion of the implications of 1 Cor 10:13, see Paul A. Himes, “When a Christian Sins: 1 Corinthians 10:13 and the Power of Contrary Choice in Relation to the Compatibilist-Libertarian Debate,” *JETS* 54.2 (June 2011): 329–44; Steven B. Cowan, “Does 1 Corinthians 10:13 Imply Libertarian Freedom? A Reply to Paul A. Himes,” *JETS* 55.4 (December 2012): 793–800; Paul A. Himes, “First Corinthians 10:13: A Rejoinder to Steven Cowan,” *JETS* 55.4 (December 2012): 801–06.

³³Spiegel, 19, 15.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 27. He then proceeds, 27–29, to provide effete arguments against the Arminian view of simple (but exhaustive) foreknowledge. Helm, 39ff, prefers to distinguish a “no risk” view of providence (comparable to Spiegel’s “high” view) from a “risky” one. While he does not say so, apparently the “no risk” view could include classical Arminianism, and the “risky” view would include primarily those who deny God’s exhaustive foreknowledge. It is common for Calvinists to object that if a person’s choices are truly “free” (indeterministic), God cannot possibly know them; see Helm, 55f. The Arminian view is precisely that God foreknows even indeterministic choices *intuitively*. For a helpful (primarily philosophical) defense of the traditional view of providence *and* of a libertarian account of freedom, see Flint, 11–34.

God's all-inclusive providence there are different kinds of work. As already noted, it is traditional to distinguish between general and special providence. Some such distinction appears to be needed, at least to organize discussion. I prefer to treat certain *aspects* of providence.

Providence in natural law

Berkhof was right to indicate, as cited above, that in the Christian view of things, natural law is not all-controlling. Natural law itself is an expression of the will of God and, as such, is an important aspect of his providential care for the created order. Indeed, this is important enough to warrant some extended discussion.

The material universe (cosmos) is constructed to operate by natural law and does so function. There are many laws that make up natural law, and they are all ordained by God as part of His creating and sustaining activity. The so-called law of gravity is a well-known example. "What goes up must come down," they say. Or, if you combine two molecules of hydrogen with one molecule of oxygen, you get water. Our eight planets (too bad, Pluto!) orbit the sun according to definable laws, with centrifugal force keeping them from plunging into the sun and burning to a crisp. Indeed, everything in the physical world functions according to natural law. God established these laws as part of the nature of the cosmos He created. He set them up to function as they do, and they uniformly function that way. As Spiegel notes, "Providence assures us that there are indeed 'laws' of nature; so our belief that nature is uniform is not mere instinct or custom but is justified and hence rational."³⁵

In earlier times, Deism was a popular worldview, insisting (with some oversimplification) that once God established the cosmos according to natural law, He then had nothing further to do with it. The Christian doctrine of providence is against that view, insisting that God actively continues to uphold the natural laws by which the universe operates and is, in fact, exercising his providential care for the created order in that very fashion. Furthermore, God continues to be active within the cosmos in ways that transcend natural law.

That introduces an important facet of the discussion. One does not violate the law of gravity, for example, by stepping off a tall building and expecting to float gently to the ground. To leap from the Empire State Building, in the providence of God, will result in death. No exceptions. I am not saying, of course, that God is not able to make a man fly, only that unless He acts in a way different from His usual way of acting (natural law), the jumper is doomed. The point is, of course, that God doesn't usually suspend natural law. As Gen 8:22 promises, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Most certainly God can work miracles, and probably we should include the suspension of natural law as part of our definition of a *miracle*—at least insofar as we understand natural law and what it means to "suspend" it. Berkouwer approvingly cites Abraham Kuyper to say that,

³⁵Spiegel, 120.

in the end, a miracle “means nothing more than that God at a given moment wills a certain thing to occur differently than it had up to that moment been willed by Him to occur.”³⁶ Paul Helm says that a miracle is “simply the way in which God has chosen to uphold the universe at that moment,” thus “giving some aspect of it a character which is (by human experience) unprecedented.”³⁷ C. S. Lewis appropriately distinguishes between miracles and natural events by saying that the former are events that are *not* “interlocked with the history of Nature in the backward direction”—that is, they are not part of the regular cause-effect continuum—while natural events are.³⁸ That seems to be a helpful distinction.

When Jesus walked on water, He did so miraculously. Except for Peter, as far as we know, no one else has ever done so, and even Peter soon sank (Matt 14:25–33). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He worked in a way that is different than what we observe in natural law (John 11:41–44). But this difference has been made only a few times in the history of the world, and even Lazarus had to die again.

How often does God, in His providential care for people, operate in ways that are not according to natural law? I do not know. No one knows. I suspect that it is not as often as some think. I referred earlier to my wife’s death. She died as a result of a number of things. She was born with a mitral valve that did not work properly, and so the doctors noticed early that she had a heart murmur—one we need not be concerned about, they said. Years later, she had breast cancer and had cobalt treatments (an earlier form of radiation therapy), which were successful but also negatively affected the tissue of the heart, so that later she was not a candidate for surgery. As she aged, the mitral valve defect worsened. Then her aortic valve hardened and malfunctioned. Finally, given all the circumstances, it was too late to do anything. All of that, mind you, was the evidence of natural law at work, and natural law is the active work of God in his providence.

Natural law seems inexorable. If you are exposed to the virus that causes a bad cold, and your organic circumstances are just right (just wrong?), then you will develop a cold. Under other “right” circumstances, you get prostate cancer. If your bad cholesterol clogs up your arteries, and your heart does not get enough oxygen, then you will have a heart attack. And so on. In all these things, and in everything physical, natural law is active—in the providence of God.

God willed the universe to operate according to natural law, and He upholds the laws He himself instituted. To be sure, natural law is not all-controlling; only God is that. But He uses natural law in exercising that control, and He uses it faithfully. Like the rest of His creation, natural law is good—except that some of the consequences of the fall affected nature negatively, and so we have thorns and disease and death.

³⁶Berkouwer, 196.

³⁷Helm, 82–83.

³⁸C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 208. My thanks to Dr. Darrell Holley for pointing me to this source.

Positive or negative, then, natural law is the most basic way God *ordinarily* governs the world in his providential care for it and for us. The regularity of natural law is, ultimately, good for us. Even disease and death serve to remind us of the seriousness of sin and call us to turn from our wickedness, escape the infinitely worse eternal death in hell, and experience what Milton called *Paradise Regained*. God knows what He is doing in the world by natural law, and what He is doing is *providence*.

Providence in caring for the created order

This is another aspect of natural law, but it needs to be mentioned in its own right, given that the natural order is not independent of God but is an arena in which He is always at work. And He is at work not simply to maintain order but to *provide for* the world He created, to provide for the welfare of all His creatures, whether plant, animal, or human.

The Bible has all sorts of things to say about this, and Psalms 104:10–31 is especially powerful:

He sends the springs into the valleys, which flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart. The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted, where the birds make their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees. The high hills are for the wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers. He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knows its going down. You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God. When the sun arises, they gather together and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. There the ships sail about; and there is that Leviathan which You have made to play there. These all wait for You, that you may give them their food in due season. What you give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in His works.

All this is Providence, pure and simple. And it is good.

Among many others, one also notes Psalm 29, which reveals that the voice of the Lord is heard in all aspects of the natural order. Verses 7–9 report, “The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; ... The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.” As Berkouwer observes, concerning this passage, “This is Israel’s understanding of natural events.

For Israel's eyes are trained on Him."³⁹

The words of Jesus are simpler but no less powerful: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45)—a provision that includes, by the way, droughts and floods.

Consider Matt 10:29–31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." God's providence extends to the little birds and the hairs of one's head, and so all events lose their "power to fill the believing heart with dread."⁴⁰ William Gurnall said, commenting on this: "Every event is the product of God's providence; not a sparrow, much less a saint, falls to the ground by poverty, sickness, persecution, &c., but the hand of God is in it."⁴¹

Similar is Matt 6:26: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" In respect to this truth, the ancient John of Damascus said, "Providence, then, is the care that God takes over existing things."⁴²

Paul, in Acts 14:17, says that God "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling out hearts with food and gladness." Such is the providence of God in caring for the created order, effected by natural law. And it is clear that, in this sense at least, God's providence applies both to those who fear Him and to those who do not: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45).

Providence in providing for God's people

Gurnall was right to say, "Divine providence is a large volume, written thick and close with mercies from one end of our life to the other."⁴³ Perhaps this aspect of providence comes in the category of what Berkhof and others call *very special providence*. I am more inclined to refer to it as *circumstantial providence*, and to categorize all providence as manifested either in natural law, as above, or in the management of the circumstances of those who know Him as their Father. Helm observes that "it is highly likely that the average Christian tends to think that divine

³⁹Berkouwer, 87.

⁴⁰Ibid., 181.

⁴¹William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: A Treatise of the Saints' War against the Devil*, with biographical introduction by J. C. Ryle, two vols. in one; first pub. in three vols. between 1662 and 1665 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 1:96.

⁴²John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 9:41.

⁴³Gurnall, 2:453.

providence has to do, not with every detail, but chiefly with special 'providential' occurrences."⁴⁴ He is probably right in this and definitely right in insisting that such special provision is only part of the all-encompassing providence of God. He notes, appropriately, that "it is a mistake to think that 'general' and 'special' are two labels for two separate boxes"; and that it is more accurate to think "of one providential order of amazing complexity within which God is working out different purposes for the different people within it."⁴⁵

I feel no need, by the way, to discuss whether God exercises this special or circumstantial kind of care for those who are not His children. I suppose He does. But the characters in the Bible, in whose lives we see the clearest manifestation of this kind of providence, are His people. Indeed, we are the ones who are likely to recognize His provision in the circumstances of our lives. And the biblical affirmation that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14) allows for the idea that God exercises special care for His children. Even Rom 8:28, mentioned above, makes those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose, the target of His working all things for good. This kind of providence, by the way, usually calls for no suspension of or exception to natural law. It involves God arranging circumstances in such a way that His people ought to recognize His care and provision for them in those circumstances.

Is this actually a different *kind* of providence? Probably not, if we understood just how God exercises His providential control over all things. From our perspective, this sort of provision is different from the regularity of natural law. For one thing, even though it requires no exception to natural law, as noted, neither is it achieved by natural law alone. In providential circumstances of this sort, there is often no way to explain what "happened" except as something God arranged in His own way. Here is where the presence of my five daughters at the time of my wife's death fits in. Ordinarily, not all of them would have been here at that particular time. Nor did I arrange it; I did not know enough to do that.

Are we always aware of such providential management of our circumstances for our good? No. It may be that we are not even *usually* aware of it.

Lewis resists some of this, finding it "difficult to conceive an intermediate class of events which are neither miraculous nor merely 'ordinary.'" He therefore abandons "the idea that there is any special class of events (apart from miracles) which can be distinguished as 'specially providential.'" In this, He is simply affirming that "all events are *equally* providential."⁴⁶

What strikes me is this: if providence, in every aspect of it, is nothing more than the sum total of everything that takes place, then life might almost be as well conceived as without God, or

⁴⁴Helm, 18–19.

⁴⁵Ibid., 95.

⁴⁶Lewis, 208 (emphasis mine).

entirely fatalistic, or subject to the randomness of chance. If God's people cannot see the hand of God in the arrangement of the circumstances of their lives for their good, in a way that is not produced by natural law, then the doctrine of providence winds up with little value. Indeed, the Bible does not support such a view of life.

Instead, the Bible is replete with accounts of this sort of divine management of circumstances, and so it represents an aspect of providence that is of great significance. Consider Joseph, who could finally say to his brothers after the long, bitter trials he endured: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen 50:20).

Was it not providential that Abraham's servant, on his arrival in Haran, was met at the well by Rebekah, the very one who would become Isaac's wife (Gen 24:12–26)? Verse 21 is key: he "remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." Indeed, the Lord had done so, and His providential arrangement of things showed this to be the case.

Abraham himself experienced such providence. He believed that God would *provide* the sacrificial animal on Moriah (Gen 22:8), and when he had proved his faith in God in the offering of Isaac, "there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns" (v. 13). As a result, Abraham called the place Jehovah-Jireh: "The-Lord-will-provide"—*providence*, indeed.

The story of the raising up of Moses to lead Israel out of bondage begins with just such a manifestation of providence. When Jochebed put the baby in the bulrushes, who would come by but Pharaoh's daughter (Did God whisper in her ear that she needed a bath, as someone has eloquently suggested?), who looked and took compassion on him, rearing him and preparing him—unintended by her, of course—for the role he would play (Exod 2:2–6). Coincidence or accident? Indeed, not.

And it was surely no accident that Xerxes, on the very night before Haman came to ask permission to hang Mordecai, could not sleep and asked for the records to be brought and read to him. He was thus reminded of Mordecai's service, and this led to the deliverance not just of Mordecai but of the Jews (Esth 6:1)—of which Richard Sibbes wrote, "God oft disposeth little occasions to great purposes."⁴⁷ Such examples could be multiplied many times over.

Some Practical Issues

There are several "practical" issues involved in the doctrine of providence. I will discuss those that seem important for my purposes.

⁴⁷Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, reprint of 1862–64 edition, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1:206–07.

How we know what is providential

An important truth follows from the preceding discussion: We can only read the hand of providence *after the fact*. Those who use philosophical terminology would say that we must read providence *a posteriori*—after the event, in other words. We do not know *a priori*—in advance of history—what God’s providence will look like.

Perhaps this is overstated. If so, the reason is that it applies especially to *circumstantial providence*, as described above. We *do* know what natural law will look like, at least in some measure. If your dentist injects your gums with Novocaine in the right place, then you will not feel pain when he fills the cavity. However, even our knowledge of natural law is essentially after the fact. We have learned how it works from observing how it works, and from the regularity of its effects we discerned a way to state it (“empirical method,” in other words). $E=MC^2$, Einstein said, and we assume that he was right even if we do not understand it—although some questions are beginning to arise, once again showing that science is knowledge “after the fact.” God has not given us, in the Bible, a physics textbook by which we define the providence manifested in natural law. Our science has to figure that out.

Regardless, I am referring here primarily to *circumstantial* providence. I did not know, in advance, that all my daughters would be here when my wife died. Nothing in God’s promises to care for His people signaled that He would arrange for that, or for the fact that Benjamin Randall was not injured when his horse stumbled “and precipitated him upon the ground.” But when such things occur, we look back and see how God exercised His providence in caring for us.

In the end, all we can do with providence is gather the facts and determine how we see God at work in them. In truth, we are not always astute enough to know whether a given event was arranged for our benefit, regardless of whether it seemed beneficial at the time. Perhaps it would be better to say, in light of Rom 8:28, that we do not always know *how* it was for our benefit. I do not ever expect to know *how* my wife’s death was for my final good, but I accept that it was and rejoice in my daughters’ comforting presence and in the assurance that God was and is at work.

There is an important caution in all this: namely, we must avoid hasty selectivity in our identification of the hand of providence in the events of our lives. It is easy to think that in some way God has singled us out, or some institution dear to us, in His arrangement of things that affect us. As already noted, God’s providence includes *everything*, and we must take a long look before we conclude that he has worked on our behalf, especially when the events analyzed involve things with historical breadth.

Berkouwer, in discussing this issue, cites a Russian theologian who welcomed Stalin as “the divinely appointed leader of armed and cultural forces.” He also reminds us that there were German Christians who welcomed Hitler’s rise as similarly providential, and then he cites the German theologian Kittel as insisting that “the Church under the Spirit and Word of God is

not so weak that she does not have the authority to speak out as to whether the decision of these days is from God or from Satan.”⁴⁸ Yes, but one must be very careful in interpreting the ways of providence, and whether a work is God’s or Satan’s. God’s providence is over all. Berkouwer rightly observes, “The interpretation of an historical event as a special revelation of Providence too easily becomes a piously disguised form of self-justification.”⁴⁹

Berkouwer, again: “The selection of events which are revelatory and the manner of interpreting them is basically left to individual and subjective judgment.”⁵⁰ While that is unavoidable, it signals that we must be cautious, using what Berkouwer calls “a norm according to which the particular events are both selected for judgment and judged.”⁵¹ That norm can be nothing more or less than the clear principles of the written Word, discerned and applied in faith: “The event speaks only because God speaks first.”⁵²

Furthermore, what God has spoken and the “facts” of history must be read in faith: “Without faith, without constant listening to His explanatory Word, man is not able to distinguish basically between the exodus of Israel and the exoduses of Syria and Philistia. . . . We shall never recognize God’s finger in history without first meeting Him in the fullness of His revelation.”⁵³ In that light, Berkouwer explains that “one can accept prosperity as the gift of God, and adversity as God’s hand graciously leading him to greater faith.”⁵⁴

All this said, the technical discussion need not lessen our appreciation for the hand of providence in the circumstances of our lives. Our minds need to be attuned to discern that hand and to give God thanks.

Foreknowledge and providence

A few years ago, when neo-Arminian “open theism” had its fling among evangelicals, John Sanders made his case for denying the exhaustive foreknowledge of God in a book titled *The God Who Risks*. Interestingly, the sub-title was *A Theology of Providence*.⁵⁵ Indeed, God’s foreknowledge has important implications for understanding providence.

I will not delve again, here, into the logical problem that arises when people view foreknowledge as making everything in the future necessary, given that I have already pursued this elsewhere.⁵⁶ It

⁴⁸Berkouwer, 163–64.

⁴⁹Ibid., 166.

⁵⁰Ibid., 169.

⁵¹Ibid., 170.

⁵²Ibid., 171.

⁵³Ibid., 177.

⁵⁴Ibid., 179.

⁵⁵John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).

⁵⁶Robert E. Picirilli, “An Arminian Response to John Sanders’s *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Provi-*

must be sufficient to say, for now, that God's foreknowledge does not limit future, free choices. The key to understanding this is to realize that foreknowledge only assumes the *certainty* of the future, not its *necessity*. Free choices are related to contingent events, events that can go one way or another. That God knows what a person will choose in the future does not make that choice necessary. Indeed, God knows it only *if* the person will choose it.

But how does this relate to providence, and why did Sanders think his denial of foreknowledge would impact the traditional theology of providence? It has always been assumed that if God sees the future, then He can exercise what I have called circumstantial providence and act to provide for His children who will be affected by it. Sanders, however, turned this on its head. He said that if God sees the future, then even He can't change anything. For example, if God sees that I am going to have a wreck on the streets tomorrow, then He cannot bring about any circumstances to avoid the inevitable. His hands are tied by His knowledge.

As soon as we say something like that, we know instinctively that something is wrong. Indeed, something is very wrong with that line of argument. For one thing, it overlooks that the knowledge depends on the (future) facts, not vice versa. For another thing, it skips over all the contingencies that can go one way or another as a result of free, human choices. God knows the difference between contingencies and necessities. He knows that I will have that wreck tomorrow only as a result of many choices that will be made between now and then, including the choices of both drivers. He knows "all possible worlds" (as the philosophers like to express this), and that means He knows everything that will happen if any of the contingent choices of everyone involved are this or that. He knows what will happen if I take this street or that one, or if I leave early or am delayed, or if any of a thousand other things come into play. Knowing that a careless driver will run a stop light and hit me, *if* all the circumstances are right, leaves Him free to influence changes in the circumstances for my benefit—*if His plan for me calls for that*. Obviously, this means that His plan for me may work better, however, if I will indeed have that wreck. Only then will He know that wreck as a certainty, because He has determined to allow it in His circumstantial management of things.

What strikes me as an excellent illustration of how this works is found in 1 Samuel 23. David is on the run from Saul and, with his fighters, has gone to Keilah to deliver that city from the Philistines. He learns that Saul knows where he is and proceeds, through the priest (using, apparently, the Urim and Thummim), to seek the Lord's direction. He asks two questions: Will the people of Keilah betray him to Saul? And will Saul indeed come after him there? To both questions the Lord answers yes. So David leaves and avoids any such encounter (vv. 10–13). It is self-evident that the Lord knew exactly what would happen *if* David stayed in Keilah, and that by his revelation he enabled David to avoid both of those contingencies. (I hesitate, but will suggest that this is a better lesson about foreknowledge than any philosophical-theological treatment of the subject that has appeared.)

dence," in *JETS* 44.3 (September 2001): 467–91.

And this is the reason that God's foreknowledge is essential to His providential control over the circumstances of our lives. Most believers instinctively understand that God's providential management of their circumstances assumes His foreknowledge of all contingencies, and that His management is all the better for that. Anyone who thinks that foreknowledge prevents God and man and circumstances from interacting with each other in time will be better off, biblically, by putting foreknowledge out of his thinking.

In order to properly understand the Bible, one must accept that God—regardless of His marvelous attributes—interacts with human beings and their circumstances in real time. Two important biblical events are clear grounds for this. One is the creation: God made, in time, a real world that did not exist before.⁵⁷ Another is the incarnation: the second person of the Trinity entered the world in time and space by means of the birth of the God-man. God, although not limited by time and space, can operate in the time and space realm He created and controls.

Beyond these two most important facts, the Bible is filled with other things that likewise underscore this truth. Consider, for example, the tablets of stone that Moses brought down from Sinai. They were “written with the finger of God” (Exod 31:18). They were not engraved by God in eternity, regardless when He made the decision. God acted in time and space to write in stone the “ten words.”

First Samuel 15 (like almost any chapter in the historical books) is another good illustration. The timeline is: (1) Yahweh instructed Samuel to tell Saul to destroy the Amalekites; (2) Saul and the people spared Agag and livestock; (3) *then* Yahweh said to Samuel that He was sorry he had made Saul king and Samuel wept through a night; (4) Samuel met Saul and informed him what Yahweh had said *that night*, and that Yahweh had torn the kingdom from Saul *that day* and given it to a better man. If a sophisticated philosophical or theological reading of this accounts results in confusion because of foreknowledge and the Lord's decisions in eternity, and so causes readers to wonder whether God and men and circumstances were really interacting in time, then that reading has weakened the biblical teaching. These acts of Yahweh were not performed in eternity, regardless of God's timelessness. God spoke to Samuel, announced His regret for having made Saul king, and took the kingdom from Him then and there. God acted *because* and *after* Saul had acted wrongly. Unless the theologian can help the church understand foreknowledge in these terms, he or she does the church a disservice to confuse the issues with sterile foreknowledge.

Does God answer prayer?

This is an important question about providence. Do our prayers make any difference in how God providentially manages our circumstances? We can pick up the illustration used above to frame this. Let us suppose that God knows that a number of contingencies will occur, depending on the choices of everyone involved, which will lead to my having a wreck tomorrow if they are not changed. Suppose, then, that I, or someone else, prays for me to have a safe trip, or even

⁵⁷This is usually called *creation ex nihilo*, creation from nothing.

more generally for my welfare. Can God answer that prayer and bring about circumstances that will lead to different choices and so to my avoiding a wreck?

Yes, He can. Will He certainly do so? Not necessarily. We will know what God has done by observing what transpires.

Lewis affirms that our prayers have an effect on things, discussing the “problem” that supposedly arises when we also affirm that God knows for certain, in advance, every event in history. Rather than regarding such answers as “special providence,” Lewis believes that God, in eternity, foreknew our prayers and arranged natural law in such a way as to incorporate the answer. Consequently, “(S)omething does really depend on my choice. My free act contributes to the cosmic shape. That contribution is made in eternity or ‘before all worlds’; but my consciousness of contributing reaches me at a particular point in the time-series.”⁵⁸

The Calvinist’s explanation is similar, as Spiegel indicates. The difference is that my prayer in time was *decreed* by God before it was foreknown, and so it is a “secondary cause for the accomplishment of his will”—thus pleading again that God’s decrees include the means as well as the ends.⁵⁹ He cites Thomas Aquinas’ well-known observation that “we pray, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate [ask for] that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers.”⁶⁰

Such discussions are needlessly clouded by the confusion humans find in discussing human freedom and divine foreknowledge, as discussed above, but they lead to the sound conclusion that our prayers do, indeed, make a difference in how God acts. God may know and decide things in eternity, but *He acts in time*. The connection between our prayers and His acts are as real as if He had never known or planned them. I find it helpful, and believe it accurate, to say that the interaction between our prayers and the active working of God is exactly the same as it would be if He did *not* know the future in advance—except that then He would truly be limited and lose control.

God can bring about circumstances that change people’s minds, by the way, without interfering with their freedom. I may plan, for example, to go work in my garden tomorrow. He can send rain and I will change my plans, but He will not have infringed on my freedom in doing that.⁶¹

Every affirmation in the Bible about prayer, then, makes clear that God takes into account our prayers. In that case, it is clear that prayers can affect God’s exercise of providence. As Helm notes, “Nothing can be allowed to detract from the teaching of Scripture and the conviction of

⁵⁸Lewis, 214.

⁵⁹Spiegel, 52.

⁶⁰Ibid., 52n7.

⁶¹This observation involves what some philosopher-theologians call *middle knowledge*. I am not persuaded that the concept adds much to the discussion and have no desire to pursue it here. For a complete (but highly philosophical) presentation of middle knowledge and providence, see Flint, especially 35–71.

Christians that God brings about certain events because people ask him to (Jas 1:5).⁶² James 5 is helpful: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (v. 15), and “the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (v. 16). Prayer may not be the *only* thing that God considers when acting, but it most certainly makes a difference in what He does and does not do. Belew observes that “God does in and through and for one whose heart is conditioned by prayer what He otherwise will not do,” citing as biblical examples the prayers of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage, which “God heard” and acted on (Exod 2:23–24); and God’s revelation to Daniel, which came in answer to prayer, so “that Daniel and his fellows should not perish” (Dan 2:18).

Does prayer sometimes make a difference in what God would otherwise do providentially by natural law? Apparently so. James 5 affirms that Elijah prayed that rain be withheld from Israel, and there was no rain for three and a half years; and then he prayed for rain, and rain came (vv. 17, 19). This brings us back to *miracle*, of course, where God acts in a way other than by the regular course of nature. For that matter, so does the healing in verse 15—if, indeed, it is an instant reversal of the course of disease. Not all healing is such a reversal, of course. Miraculous reversals of natural law, always possible in God’s providential work, are relatively few and far between, and my purpose in this treatment does not include giving further attention to miraculous activity.

Some Practical Applications

No doctrine is meant solely for intellectual stimulation or satisfaction. All expressions of the word of God, including those we call “theological,” are meant for our Christian faith and behavior. That is true of the doctrine of providence, and I am exercised by the realization that anyone reading this treatment will immediately consider how it applies to his or her own experiences.⁶³ In that regard, I want, first, to raise a very important and practical question: *How does the doctrine of providence apply when life is bad and Christians suffer?*

Some Christians’ lives are tragically and devastatingly bad—and as a result of what appears to be random events. Consider the case of a faithful believer who as a result of no carelessness of his own is injured in an accident, is paralyzed from the neck down, is subsequently divorced by his wife, and spends the rest of his life subject to abuse from his caretakers. But one does not need to imagine the very worst circumstances possible: many Christians suffer in one way or another most of their days, and without anyone apparently being “responsible.”

In other cases, suffering may come as a result of the wrongs others inflict, entirely undeserved by the one suffering. In still other cases, we may suffer as a result of our own failures or wrongdoing. It is all too easy for us, whatever the reasons for people’s suffering, to recite Rom 8:28 and proclaim that God’s *providential care* is being exercised in their behalf. But we must not be glib. We are not

⁶²Helm, 153.

⁶³I thank a special friend, Mrs. Norma Trout, for reminding me of this.

knowledgeable enough about the active ways of our God to be able to say just how providence is at work in their lives. Neither we who observe nor they who experience such difficulties may ever be able to see how God's providence was exercised in their behalf. While we will *believe* that, in ways we cannot understand, God is at work in all the circumstances of their lives to bring about His good purpose for them, we must leave it to God himself to show how this can be true, and He may very well not reveal that until redemption is final. Sometimes, we have to acknowledge that there are no answers to our questions. Suffering does not always "make sense."

Whenever wrongdoing, whether by ourselves or others, causes suffering, we can be sure that God did not desire or cause the wrong. As I have indicated earlier, He has not concurred in any sin. He permitted it, of course, and for His own good but undisclosed reasons. The fact that He incorporates human wrongdoing into His purpose for us does not in any way excuse that wrongdoing.

Furthermore, the doctrine of providence does not mean that we will always, or even usually, escape the consequences of our actions or the actions of others. God's "laws" are at work in such matters, too. Even so, our understanding of providence means that even in these consequences, God graciously undertakes to work in such a way that His good purpose for our lives, and for His government and glory, will be accomplished.

In conclusion, I have chosen three important implications for emphasis. As Spiegel insists, "A doctrine of providence should be assessed according to its moral impact."⁶⁴

Faith

Embracing the all-encompassing providence of God in all the things that affect us is meant to strengthen our faith. This will be manifested in at least two closely-related ways: in submission to His providential control over all things, and in a settled confidence, even courage, in the face of unexpected or undesirable circumstances in our lives. We human beings, by nature, want to run our own lives. Appropriating the doctrine of providence means that in faith—that is, in obedient and loving trust—we put our lives in His hands and bow to His rule. As Robert Adams has said, we do this "without having a blueprint of what he is going to do," which "entails a loss of control of our own lives."⁶⁵

If God is in control and He works all things for the good of those who are His, as Rom 8:28 informs us, and if we trust Him, then there is no alternative but submission under His hand. This is not a blind submission, but the confident submission of those who are assured of God's love and care for them, and of His management of the affairs of their lives in that love. Calvin

⁶⁴Spiegel, 213. His final chapter, "Moral and Devotional Applications," provided some of the stimulus for my concluding section.

⁶⁵Robert Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19–20, cited by Spiegel, 216.

rightly stated that “ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it.”⁶⁶ Theodor Zahn was also right: “Faith is sure that no evil, either great or small, from the slightest mishap in everyday life to the most terrible calamity, can befall us without the will of God.”⁶⁷

This does not mean that we are passive. God has revealed to us the ways He expects of us. In those ways we are to seek, as our first priority, “the kingdom of God” (Matt 6:33). That entails pursuit of many things, including (but not limited to) obeying his commands, our own spiritual wellbeing, the conversion and edification of others, the advancement of the gospel, the building of the body of Christ, showing mercy to those in need, and the unhindered worship of God.

Our submissiveness does not mean, in other words, acceptance of things as they are. But it means that we will not resist or rebel against God’s providential working in our world and our circumstances. J. C. Ryle, commenting on Luke 13:33, said first that “we ought to seek to possess a spirit of calm, unshaken confidence about things to come.” Then he added, appropriately, that “we are not to neglect the use of means, or to omit all prudent provision for the unseen future. To neglect means is fanaticism and not faith. But still, when we have done all, we should remember, that though duties are ours, events are God’s.” He goes on to say that this frame of mind will keep us from being over-anxious about things and “add immensely to our peace.”⁶⁸

None of this means, as already noted, that we do not make mistakes that we did not need to make, or that others do not make mistakes that affect us in ways we need not have been affected, or that God in fact wants everything to transpire in just the way it does. There is, after all, *evil* in the world—both moral and otherwise—that was not God’s original plan. It does mean, however, that we face life—whatever it brings us in the providence of God—with confidence, and that, too, is the face of trust.

Prayer

Prayer is one manifestation of faith. It is at least a way to signal our dependence on God. Prayer is needing God. Of course, it is more than that; it is worship, for example. But in a treatment of providence, it is especially an expression of our desires that He take a hand in matters beyond our control and guide us in matters that appear to be within our control.

In light of the discussion above, as to the fact that God’s providence has room for our effective prayers, this need not be discussed at length again. But it is important for us to understand that

⁶⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols.; vols. 20, 21 of The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.17.11.

⁶⁷Theodor Zahn, *Bread and Salt from the Word of God in Sixteen Sermons*, trans. C. S. Burn and A. E. Burn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1905), 276.

⁶⁸J. C. Ryle, *Ryle’s Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 2:138–39.

God's providential working in the affairs of men and things depends on our prayers. The Bible everywhere encourages us to pray, and to do so without ceasing.

Interestingly, Spiegel incorporates into his discussion of the moral benefits of the doctrine of providence the Christian's *right to lodge a complaint* about circumstances. But such a complaint is made only *to God*, as the one in control of all things, including the wrongs committed against us by others.⁶⁹ This may be a stretch of the doctrine itself, but one recalls that David and other inspired psalmists sometimes spoke their complaints, without sugar-coating them, to God; see, for example, Psa 44:13–23. After all, such a prayer of complaint serves to remind us that God is in control, and it is, by implication, a prayer that God will change things.

We do not pray in order to change God's mind. Instead, we pray to seek His providential actions on behalf of ourselves and others who need God to act on their behalf. This includes physical needs, although these are always less important than spiritual needs. But it is right to pray for all sorts of things, as the Bible itself gives clear evidence. We pray for God to send laborers into His harvest, for those who are physically and spiritually ailing, for persons in civil authority, and so on. And since we know that He answers prayers, we pray in confidence—and, like Jesus in Gethsemane, in submission to His will—and that He hears us and will act in the way that is best for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose for us.

Praying in submission to the hand of God in providence is a form of *patience*. And Spiegel reminds us that Christian patience is really "*patience with God*."⁷⁰

Thanksgiving

Thomas Fuller contemplated narrowly escaping death by an archer's arrow and suggested this prayer in such a circumstance: "Let me not now be such a fool as to pay my thanks to blind Fortune for a favour which the eye of Providence hath bestowed upon me. Rather let the narrowness of my escape make my thankfulness to thy goodness the larger, lest my ingratitude justly cause, that, whereas this arrow but hit my hat, the next pierce my head."⁷¹

Spiegel discusses the philosophical justification for gratitude, concluding (in agreement with Fred R. Berger) that it is "a proper response to a benefit freely and intentionally granted to a person for his or her own good."⁷² Assuredly, the good things God providentially does for us meet all three criteria: He acts freely and on purpose and for our ultimate good. And it is a sin to fail to thank Him for such benevolence.

⁶⁹Spiegel, 220–23.

⁷⁰Ibid., 219 (italics original).

⁷¹Thomas Fuller, *Good Thoughts in Bad Times and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 5.

⁷²Spiegel, 223–24, citing Fred R. Berger, "Gratitude," *Ethics* 85 (1975): 298–309.

This may be the most important practical application of the doctrine of providence. In the broadest sense, providence means that we can thank the Lord in everything, as the Bible requires. In light of the discussion above, my conclusion is that we do not thank God *for* everything. Rather, we thank Him *in* everything, as the Bible says we should. I have not directly thanked Him *for* the death of my wife, for example, although I have thanked Him for His providential control in that, and for His loving work to bring that about, along with everything else, in accord with His eternal and benevolent purpose for everyone who is touched by that loss.

But we need not leave this as only general. We also need to cultivate the habit of thanking God for his circumstantial management of specific things in our lives. This means, first, that we pay attention to His hand at work. All too often, we take for granted the apparently “accidental” things that affect us. There are no merely accidental things in the lives of God’s people. We should condition ourselves to look at the good things that happen to us that *we* did not arrange, the things that might have been otherwise that were for our benefit, the things that seem “arranged” but we cannot explain how.

And when we have seen these things, we should thank God for them as tokens of His providence. While I was engaged in this writing, I visited my older sister in South Carolina, who is recovering from a stroke. One day on a side trip, as the weather chilled, I noticed that my car’s heater was not putting out warmth, and I dreaded the long trip back to Nashville, the next day, in the cold. When I got back to my sister’s room, one of her sons “happened” to be there, and I just “happened” to mention to him my predicament. He gave me directions to a mechanic friend of his, and the next morning I was there when he opened for business. I told him my problem, and how I came to be there, and asked him to take a look. He decided that the only thing wrong was that I was low on coolant. He put in nearly a gallon of the stuff and would not take a penny in payment. Was God’s providence at work in all those “happenings”? I think so, and I enthusiastically thanked both the mechanic and the Lord.

To express these three benefits of the doctrine of providence yet another way, we only need to cite 1 Thess 5:16–18:

Rejoice evermore.
Pray without ceasing.
In everything give thanks:
For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.⁷³

⁷³I am grateful to Paul V. Harrison for providing me with a number of pungent citations regarding providence, including the ones cited in this paper from Calvin, Cowper, John of Damascus, Fuller, Gurnall, Luther, Oden, Ryle, Sibbes, and Zahn.

Calvinism vs. Molinism:

Paul Helm & William Lane Craig



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Editor's Note: Below is a transcript of a conversation hosted by "Unbelievable?" with Justin Brierley (Premier Christian Radio) on January 4, 2014. The transcript (which omits commercial announcements and edits contractions) was produced by Reasonable Faith and is used with permission. The original conversation is available at: www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Calvinism-vs-Molinism-William-Lane-Craig-Paul-Helm-Unbelievable.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Welcome along and today a fascinating discussion for you as we ask two views of divine sovereignty: Calvinism and Molinism are debated on the show today. Does God preordain the future, including people's eternal salvation? Well, that is certainly a way of looking at Calvinism. If that is true, it raises the question as to whether people have free will.

We are going to be looking at an alternative view today, as well, called Molinism. And two leaders in the field who join me on the program today. I am so pleased to welcome into the studio William Lane Craig—well known as a Christian philosopher and theologian. He is an author and speaker [and has] debated many leading atheists around the world. We recently had him on reviewing his debates with Lawrence Krauss in Australia, and Bill is the founder of Reasonable Faith.

Paul Helm is a leading Calvinist scholar and theologian. He is a teaching fellow at Regent College, Vancouver, and he is defending the historic Calvinist view today. So, welcome gentlemen, both, to the program.

Well, let us introduce you in turn. Many listeners, Bill, are very familiar with your name. You have been on the show a number of times and of course well known in the world of

apologetics. Perhaps, though, less well known is the fact that you are, effectively, the leading champion of what is called Molinism—a particular view of divine sovereignty and many people may be unfamiliar with the concept altogether. We are going to have you explain that but just for the record we are recording this while you are over in the UK talking at a C.S. Lewis Symposium—around the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis’ death. Has Lewis had a big impact on your life, apologetically speaking?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I would say that Lewis, as a model for doing Christian apologetics, has had a great impact on my life—less so as a thinker; however, I would say in all candor. For me, Lewis serves as a model of the Christian apologist in being willing to resist cultural currents that go contrary to Christianity, to have boldness to march to the beat of a different drummer. I think he is a model, as well, in the importance of producing a body of published work that can outlive oneself. The legacy of C.S. Lewis are these published works that have reached far, far more people for Christ since his death than he ever reached during his life. I think in that sense, he is a real model for us today, and in his defense of what he called “mere Christianity” as opposed to the fine points of doctrine—I think that is a model. So, in one sense, the discussion that we are having today goes beyond what Lewis’ apologetics would have involved, which was just a mere Christianity.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: [...] Let me introduce Paul. Paul, thank you for joining me on the program today. When did your interest in Calvin begin? Do you want to take us back to how it all started for you?

PAUL HELM: Well, it is inseparable from my childhood and my upbringing, really—an interest. But a scholarly interest, that is something that has developed more recently. I wrote a small book in 1982 on Calvin and the Calvinists, but more recently I have written fuller books on which philosophical ideas have impacted Calvin and I am more or less finished with that. I think I have said everything I want to say in this area.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: If you said everything you wanted to say, at the end of all those studies, how have you come to view the issue of God’s sovereignty? If you could put it in a nutshell, what is the way God acts and predestines in the world today?

PAUL HELM: Well, it is a strong view of divine sovereignty. When the apostle Peter spoke of the death of Jesus he talked about it being by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Calvinists, or Augustinians, or a Pauline thinker will think not only the death of Jesus being predestined but of all events being in the hand of God. That does not mean to say that God determines the acts in the way in which you and I are determined. Nonetheless, He is in control, and in control, perhaps, in ways that we cannot fully grasp or understand.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Calvin himself did not just write on predestination, though that is often the thing people associate him with. How important is his legacy, generally?

PAUL HELM: I think it is very important, and I think you are very correct in saying that he is not a sort of one-theme theologian. He is a catholic [small ‘c’] theologian and predestination is one of those elements as it is for Aquinas or for Anselm or for Augustine—the three A’s. They

were all predestinarians just as bit as much, I believe, as Calvin was. In a sense, Calvin inherited a tradition and he certainly lived with it and ran with it but he certainly did not invent predestination; nor did he give it any particular twist of his own, in my view.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: There is, these days, what is sometimes been termed a neo-Calvinist sort-of stream—New Calvinist stream—within the churches where people are championing, even among young fashionable pastors—Calvin’s doctrines and so on. Do you welcome that? Do you think that is a positive thing?

PAUL HELM: Yes, I think it is! I think that the term *Calvinism* can be used in a broader and narrower sense. It can be used, of course, to incorporate, not simply his theology but also his ecclesiology. But you can also narrow it to what he has to say about matters to do with Christian salvation, and it is *that*, I think, these people have taken an interest in recently.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Bill, coming back to you—Molinism. Now this may be a term that many people are not familiar with. Would you like to explain what it is and how you came to arrive at the decision that you are a Molinist?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes! Molinism derives its name from Louis de Molina, who was a sixteenth-century Jesuit counter-Reformer. Unfortunately, Molina thought the central point of the Protestant Reformation was the denial of human libertarian freedom in favor of God’s being the all-determining reality. And so what Molina was constrained to do was to offer an alternative to Luther and Calvin that would affirm the same sort of sovereign, divine control that Paul spoke of a moment ago, but without denying libertarian freedom. The view that Molina enunciated came to be called Molinism, after his name. It eventually entered into Protestant theology through Jacob Arminius and there is a kind of bastardized Molinism that goes under the name Arminianism today, though it usually is somewhat different from what Molina said.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So you would not describe yourself as an Arminian in that sense?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, I would in the proper sense but these names or labels can be very misleading, and therefore it is very important that we define what we mean when we call ourselves a Calvinist or a Molinist or an Arminian.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Now, before you lay out the Molinist view, I am sure you would affirm lots of other aspects of what those Calvinists and Reformers were doing.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes! In fact, as Paul spoke a moment ago I thought, “I believe everything he just said!” which would make me a Calvinist. The Molinist has this very, very strong sense of divine sovereignty and meticulous providence. Molina said, “Not a leaf falls from the tree but that it does so either by God’s will or permission.” And if he were living today I think he would say that the tiniest motion of a sub-atomic particle cannot occur but without God’s direct will or permission. So, this is a very strong view of divine sovereignty and control.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: You recently contributed to a book on four views of divine providence and divine sovereignty, and there are other views out there—we are not representing everything

in the public sphere at the moment. For instance, there has been a lot of debate over Open Theism—like Greg Boyd.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Right, and I think Paul and I would be united in rejecting that revisionist view.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Quite, but I think that is, perhaps, another debate for another time. Today we are looking at, specifically, the distinctives between Calvinism and Molinism. So, Bill, can you explain how Molinism reconciles human free will and God's foreknowledge?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes. The key to understanding Molinism is Molina's doctrine of what he called *middle knowledge*. This is God's knowledge of everything that *would* happen under various circumstances, and he called it middle knowledge because it is in between, so to speak, God's natural knowledge, which is His knowledge of everything that *could* happen, and His free knowledge, which is His knowledge of everything that *will* happen. So, in between everything that could happen and everything that will happen is everything that *would* happen under different circumstances. The doctrine of middle knowledge says that God knows what you would have freely done if you had been in the Apostle Peter's shoes. He knows whether you would have denied Christ three times or whether you would have been faithful or what. And so the key to Molina's doctrine of providence is that by means of His middle knowledge God knows what free agents would freely do in any set of freedom-permitting circumstances that God might put them in. So, by creating those circumstances and putting the agents in them, God then, so to speak, takes hands off and He lets the agent freely choose what he wants but He knows how that agent *would* choose.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: How they will use their free will...

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, more than how he *will* use it! Remember that is free knowledge. It is how he *would* use it if he were in those circumstances. And so then by creating the circumstances and putting the agent in it, God's free knowledge falls out automatically. Then He knows how he will act and can control human history.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Okay. Now how does this then apply to, for instance, the issue of salvation? How does God then organize the world with this doctrine of middle knowledge in mind?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: For Molina, divine election to salvation is simply that aspect of divine providence that relates to salvation. And so what he would say is that the circumstances in which God puts a person include various gifts of divine grace, various solicitations of the Holy Spirit, and God knows how you would respond, for example, to the gospel if you were born and raised under such and such circumstances or you were to hear the gospel preached in such and such a way. And so by putting people in various circumstances God can elect certain persons to salvation without abridging their free will.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Okay, and so in that instance do you believe that God has so ordered the way that the maximum people who *would* believe and accept His salvation will do so?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: That is not part of Molina's doctrine, Justin. Molina said that God is free to choose whatever sort of world He wants with whomever He wants to be saved. Again, it is a very strong view of sovereignty. My *own* inclination is to think that God does want as many people to be saved as possible and therefore He would try to create people in circumstances, which would be conducive to the greatest number being saved and the least number being lost, which is consistent with human freedom. But that is an idiosyncrasy of my own view. That is not Molina's view.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: It is fascinating and it is a bit difficult to get your head around. It is a bit more of having to think through those concepts—perhaps explaining why it is not as widely accessed by the general Christian population. Do you feel it is becoming a more mainstream view that is gaining acceptance?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I think it definitely has momentum on its side. When you look at the debate over divine providence it is very interesting that some Calvinists now are talking about Molinistic-Calvinism. Some of the Arminians are talking about Open Theism that affirms God's middle knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. So, the extremes are being sucked, I think, towards the center of gravity in the middle, which is Molinism. Dean Zimmerman, who is a prominent Christian philosopher, recently said that "of the plethora of views available on divine providence Molinism probably has the largest percentage of Christian philosophers who would support it."

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Paul, you are very familiar with the Molinist view. Why has it not convinced you?

PAUL HELM: For a number of reasons, one is that I think that it is an unnecessary theory. What is done by God's natural knowledge and His free knowledge—what those terms cover—covers all that William Craig wants to apply to middle knowledge. It is unnecessarily complicated. But that is for theological reasons. In Calvinism, there is a stronger view of sin and the way in which it binds the will such that God's grace cannot only be offered to man. It has to be imparted to them for these men and women to become reborn and to become liberated from their sin. What Molinism does is to postulate, in common with the other views available, a very strong sense of human freedom. And God must respect that sense of human freedom in the way that Bill has been describing. One question is: Do they have that freedom? And: If they do have that freedom in the strong sense, then how can God know it in advance? Bill seems to think, "Well, God knows it in advance in the sense of He has this sort-of movie of it and reality will run in accordance exactly with the movie, as it were, in His head." But if these people are free, and free in the strong sense that Bill indicates, then how can God know how they will act in these circumstances?

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Do you believe that in some sense Molinism collapses into a form of Calvinism?

PAUL HELM: Well, I think it collapses into a form of Arminianism. Arminianism is the view that God's foreknowledge is compatible with this strong sense of human freedom and Bill's view is that, with the Molinist's twists to it. It boils down to a kind of Arminianism.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Because if creatures are truly free, as far as you are concerned, that means God cannot know what they will choose.

PAUL HELM: Well, we have different senses of freedom at work here, right? A Calvinist will affirm that human beings are frequently free...

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: What kind of freedom do you affirm?

PAUL HELM: The sort of freedom that you have as you are speaking to me now—responding to remarks that I have made, responding to the situation that we are in, doing so in an uncoerced way. These are, as it were, cases of freedom for the Calvinist, typically. Of course, people can be coerced but the strange view of freedom that people have—they have wills such that in exactly the same situation they are in now they could have, as it were, chosen differently in precisely that situation—this, the Calvinist thinks—is an acceptably strong or an unbiblically strong sense of freedom and one ought not to allow one's theology to orb around this view of freedom.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Does that cohere with the way you might understand a Calvinist might view freedom, Bill?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes, I think that Paul has correctly delineated the differences. One major difference would be with regard to your doctrine of grace. For the Calvinist, grace is irresistible. For the Molinist grace is not irresistible; it becomes efficacious only when it meets with an affirmative response from the human agent. Another difference would be the notion of freedom. I do think that a person in identical circumstances could choose one way or another. And I think that is biblical. You know the verse in Scripture when it says that in situation in which we are tempted God will provide a way of escape so that we will be able to endure it. Now what that means is in any situation in which a person succumbs to temptation and gives in, it was possible for him to take the way of escape and to endure. So, I think that it teaches that in those circumstances: sin, temptation, or falling to temptation is not inevitable, that person could have made the way of escape. So, I think that this doctrine of freedom is consistent, biblically.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Now, Paul's criticism here, though, is that you described it as being like a movie playing out.

PAUL HELM: That is right. My worry at this point is that if God knows what would happen in these circumstances where Jones had the freedom we have just been talking about, why is not Jones free to actually exercise that freedom when it comes to pass?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, isn't it just what I said a moment ago? In identical circumstances, a person has the person the ability to choose A or not-A. It seems to me that is what Scripture affirms and I do not see any reason to think that that is not true. That makes us responsible for sin because we freely choose sin. So, given that, it does not seem to me that Molinism is deterministic. It is at the heart of this view that by His middle knowledge God knows how people *would* freely choose in circumstances and He does not make them choose that way and the circumstances are not deterministic. They are freedom-permitting. He just *knows* how they would choose.

PAUL HELM: But how can He know them if in the actual circumstances the people have this very strong view of freedom to choose alternatively in a given set of circumstances? Why cannot they go off [script]?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, they *could*.

PAUL HELM: So, there is a world in which they do! And you have a problem, I think. Bill has a problem at this point, just as Arminians have a problem with divine foreknowledge and human freedom. He can say, “Well, God just does,” and we would have to accept his word for it. God just does—but there is a mystery there.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, if I might address that issue: How does God know how free agents would act in any circumstances? I think it is because there are these subjunctive, hypothetical propositions, which are true or false. These are *if-then* statements in the subjunctive mood—grammatically. For example, if I were rich, I would buy a Mercedes. Now, I may not be rich and so I do not buy one. That is a subjunctive conditional. And I think we use these *all the time* in planning.

If I were to ask the boss for a raise, he would tear my head off! If I were to pull out into traffic now, I would make it. If we were to send the army around the left flank, we would prevail. These kinds of subjunctive conditionals are inherent to rational planning and activity and more importantly, I think, Justin, just for our purposes today, the Scripture is full of these kinds of subjunctive, conditional statements. So, anybody who believes in verbal, plenary inspiration has to affirm whether these are true or false. Now, let me just give one example. Second Corinthians 2:8, Paul says, “If the rulers of this world had understood this they *would not* have crucified the Lord of Glory.” Now that is a subjunctive conditional that I think, as Christians, we want to say is true. And if that is true, then God must know it because God is omniscient and He knows all true propositions.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Let us come back to that, because obviously Paul gave another verse, which he believes suggested the opposite. You started off with that verse about Jesus’ crucifixion being foreordained, foreknowledge, and so on. So, we obviously have verses that could be applied in both directions, haven’t we?

PAUL HELM: I am not denying—no one would deny—that there are such things as subjunctive conditionals. As Bill said, the world is filled with subjunctive conditionals—things we might have done, things we would have done, if we had that—and so on. The question, however, is to be interpreted. What gives them their truth-value? Is that truth-value dependent upon this very strong sense of freedom that Bill espouses? That is what makes the difficulty for a Calvinist. If they are *so free*, how does God know that what they are going to do, or what He thinks they are going to do, at some time in eternity or some time in the past, will actually take place? Why does not God have the power to choose the alternative and indeed exercise that power on occasions?

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: For you, [Bill], as I have said, this reconciles the issue of human freedom and God’s foreknowledge...

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: And foreordination! I want to make it clear, Justin, lest I be misunderstood. I think God does preordain everything. Molinism has a strong sense of sovereignty. You cannot deny, biblically, preordination. It is in the New Testament—προορίζω (*proorizō*). God has foreordained. But the Molinist perspective is that His foreordaining things takes account of human freedom and what He ordains, and therefore His foreordination does not annihilate human freedom. I would not want people to think I do not believe in foreordination.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: And for you that presents a problem because the issue concerns whether God is the author of evil, for instance, whether human sin is something that is chosen by us or we are not actually ultimately responsible. These are the big problems that Calvinism, for you, throws up. Is that correct, Bill?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes, I think that is right and particularly for me, an anguishing difficulty would be that I take, at face value, the passages in the New Testament about the universal salvific will of God. God *really* does want all persons to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, as Paul the Apostle says. And I think that if we take these passages at face value, it either leads to Universalism, which we know is not true, or it means there is something that impedes God's perfect will being done because all persons are not saved—and that seems to me to be human freedom. God will not coerce or overpower someone in order to save them. He will respect their freedom of choice as an individual, and some persons freely choose to separate themselves from God forever, despite His will that they be saved and His every effort to save them.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Feel free to chip in, Paul. What is your response to the way that Bill sees salvation, people's free choice?

PAUL HELM: One thing, a multitude of people do not have the opportunity to hear the gospel. It is not as if the gospel sounds to everybody and each person has an opportunity, in a kind of clear-headed and deliberate way, to say yea or nay. That is not our world. Our world is one in which there are millions of people who have never heard of Christ. So, I do not see that description to begin with. And the other is the Calvinist, equally with Bill, wants to affirm the wickedness of people under certain circumstances. It is by wicked men that Jesus was crucified, as Peter says. He did not say, "Oh, well! Because God has foreordained this, these people were not wicked." He holds together both the foreordination of God and the wickedness of people.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Can it be wicked if the person did not ultimately choose? It was actually something that they were always going to do because God had foreordained it.

PAUL HELM: Well, *they were the choosers*. It was not God who chose that, in the sense in which the wicked men chose it. Bill uses the phrase, you use the phrase, I think, that God is the author of sin, and I have never really been able to understand what that phrase means. Does it mean that God is a sinner? Does it mean that God has somehow the malevolent wishes of a sinner? That He is somehow selfish in some way, which is despicable? I do not understand what the phrase means to begin with. So, I do not see there is a charge to be resisted at that particular point.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Let me respond, first, to the problem of the geographical expanse of the gospel over the twenty centuries of the Christian movement. It seems to be that here middle knowledge and Molinism provides a very attractive understanding of this. Namely, that God has so providentially ordered the world that persons who would respond to the gospel if they heard it are born at times and in places at which they do hear it. So that those who fail to hear it are only persons who would not have responded to it even if they had heard it. And thus no one is lost because of historical or geographical accident. And I find that this view is very biblical because in chapter seventeen of the book of Acts, Paul says that from one man God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the face of the whole earth, and He determined the exact times and places that they should live. He did this that men might seek after God and reach out for Him and find Him because He is not far from every one of us. For in Him, we live and move and have our being.

That, to me, is consonant with a Molinist perspective. By contrast, on the Calvinist view, you have to say that God has just elected—for most of Christian history so far—people living in Western Europe or the United States and just overlooked the rest of these folks. So I find Molinism, again, to provide an answer to this question that is difficult for all of us as Christians.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: And now, the second point that was phrased there about God being the author of evil...

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: That, I think, depends on how the Calvinist explains divine providence. Many Calvinists that I have spoken with understand divine providence and sovereignty to mean that God *causally* determines everything that happens. And that is why it all unfolds the way He wants to, because *He is* the one who causally moves the will this way or that. If that is the case, that means that God moves some people to sin, and that would make Him the author of sin both in the sense that the reason the person wills to sin is because God is the one who moved his will to do that. He is like the puppeteer who pulls the strings on the puppet's arms to make him do what He wants. But it would also impugn, or make God the author of sin in a more profound sense in that it would seem terribly, morally wrong to do that. To move another person to sin and then to hold that person morally responsible for that—that seems to impugn the goodness of God.

PAUL HELM: Well, to start with what Bill began starting with, I think it is bread and butter for the Calvinist that God has determined the nations and the ways in which the nations develop, and the culture of those nations, and so on. That is a very strong statement to divine sovereignty, it seems to me in Acts there.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Bill, though, just to stay on that issue, is saying that the problem is that it seems terribly unfair on a Calvinist view of that inasmuch as these people had no...

PAUL HELM: Yes, but you see, I personally reject any kind of human analogy between the divine relationship to His creation, and that of a puppeteer, or a programmer. These are all, as it were, creature to creature relationships. But I presume that the infinite God has resources at His disposal that are, as it were, beyond the resources that human beings have at their disposal

at this particular point. And, of course, Calvinists have always made a distinction between God's relationship to evil and His relationship to good. He permits evil. It is under His control, but He permits it.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: But if, as Bill suggests, God is literally causing people to do wrong things, evil things, does God then not become, as it were, the author of evil in that sense? In what sense is it just permitting if God is the one who has caused it?

PAUL HELM: Because He is nonetheless respecting the wills of people who act their agency so that when I tie my shoelace it is not God who is tying my shoelace. It is me tying my shoelace. And I have sets of beliefs and a situation in life that is not that of God, but is my own set of circumstances, no doubt given to me by God but not His—mine nonetheless.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I want to affirm what Paul says about God having resources for providentially ordering the world that go beyond puppetry and causal determinism. But what I want to know is why couldn't that resource be middle knowledge? Middle knowledge will do the trick, and so I find that when I read the Westminster Confession, I resonate with virtually everything that is in it, except for one clause. There is one clause that says God's providence is not based on how He knew people *would* respond and so it is clearly an anti-Molinist...

PAUL HELM: Bill could not subscribe to the very strong statements of the Westminster Confession on the bondage of the will to sin. There is a stronger doctrine of grace in that confession—I do not have it committed to memory, but it is there.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: You have raised this already—this strong bondage to sin that the Bible speaks to us confirmed in this confession. Is that a problem for you, Bill?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, I do not think it is because I, with I think virtually all Christians who are not Pelagians, will affirm the need for prevenient grace. Natural man does not seek the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to Him. So, no one apart from God's initiative would ever come to God, and I think that is the bondage of the will of which Paul speaks. We are lost in sin, and therefore it needs to be God's prevenient grace that reaches out and begins to draw people through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to Himself. But the difference would be, again, that whereas the Calvinist sees that calling and drawing as irresistible, I would want to say that somewhere along the line that it is resistible. As Stephen said to the Jewish persecutors of his day, "You hard-necked people! You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Now, in that sense, those hard-necked people doing the resisting, that is in some sense ordained by God that they would resist.

PAUL HELM: He leaves them to their own sinful devices or their own sinful desires. That is the way I understand it. But you see, there is more to grace than the prevenience of it. It is rather like a kiss of life. The grace of God coming to us all is like a kiss of life, or it is like the dragging of a person who cannot help themselves out of an icy pond that they have gotten in trouble into. In other words, it is a monergistic, unilateral activity on the part of God.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: And does Bill's view, the Molinistic view, undermine that in some way, inasmuch as it takes away something of the all-pervasiveness of God's grace if humans have a hand in their own salvation, inasmuch as they freely choose?

PAUL HELM: Yes, for me it does. It goes some way, of course, but it does not go, for the Calvinist, all the way that they think the Scriptures require of us. That many are called—that is, there is, of course, a universal call of the gospel—but few are chosen. This choice is this irresistibility that Bill has mentioned but that he does not want to go so far as simply talking in terms of God's encouragement of people, and His prompting of people. But there is more to it, I think, to that.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, I would strongly reject the charge that Molinism or Arminianism leads to some kind of synergism where we are partly to credit for our salvation. When Paul says in Ephesians 2:8 that by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast. The word *this* is in the neuter gender in Greek. Faith is feminine. So Paul is not referring to faith as the gift of God; rather, commentators will say it is the whole process of salvation by grace through faith, which is the gift of God. And nowhere does Scripture speak of faith as a work, which we perform, which merits salvation. Over and over again Paul opposes faith to works. Faith and works are opposite to each other and I think that one of the mistakes Calvinists make is thinking that if we exercise faith in God we have somehow performed a work. That is a very non-Pauline point of view.

PAUL HELM: I have not said anything about a work but you are causally contributing, nonetheless, to your salvation. It may not be something that is praiseworthy or meritorious in some kind of medieval sense, but nonetheless without the contribution of the strong sense of freedom you will not receive the grace of God effectively.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Right, and I would affirm that.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: But for you that does not undermine the idea that it is all God's initiative? In the same way that you can receive a gift from someone. You do not do anything to receive that gift; you just open yourself up to having it.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Right, because it is not meritorious—Yes, it is the passive acceptance of what someone else has done on your behalf.

PAUL HELM: Another question is, what energizes the response of faith? Is it the person himself with Bill's very strong sense of libertarian freedom doing something of which he can give and then withdraw—give and then withdraw, as it were, that there can be no irresistibility about it. It can be an in-out, in-out business. Tuesday and Wednesday I could be a Christian. Thursday and Friday not—then Tuesday and Wednesday he can be a Christian again. Open to his faith to do that.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Yes, does it present a sort of problem with once saved always saved?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Now that is an additional issue to talk about, and here I think that

persons who affirm freedom would probably differ on whether or not a regenerate person can apostasize and lose salvation. There is the doctrine that when we are regenerated by God, we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit and sealed by the Holy Spirit for salvation. So, I think that there is a diversity of perspectives.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Well, let's not chase that rabbit trail. That perhaps is beyond the realm of this program. Let's go to a typical [Calvinist] passage: Romans 8 is often used by Calvinists as a typical example of predestination, election of a certain people to salvation, and so on. Paul, do you want to just explain?

PAUL HELM: I think you are thinking about what is sometimes called the golden chain in Romans 8: whom He did foreknow He did predestine, whom He predestined he did also call, whom he called He also justified. What should we say to these things? If God is for us who shall be against us? And so on in that chapter. That chain, of course, is a staple for the Calvinist, certainly.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So, we do have, here, a tricky text for the Molinist, Bill. It appears that God fully...

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, the first link in the chain is foreknowledge, right? Προγινώσκω (*Proginosko*), whom He foreknew, and if that encompasses middle knowledge, then there is just no problem. And I would say the same about the text from Acts 4 that Paul quoted at the beginning of the program, where the church at prayer says to God, "Truly, in this city we are gathered against thy servant Jesus. Both Herod and Pilate and all the people to do exactly as thy will and thy plan had foreordained." This is according to God's foreknowledge. He knew what Herod would do if king. He knew what Pilate would do if prefect in first century Palestine. He knew that the people would call for the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus. So all of this unfolds according to God's plan, according to His foreknowledge.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: But they are free within that plan?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Right, because it is based upon how He knew they *would* freely act if placed in those circumstances.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Now, I suppose a question that occurs to me is, "Well is that not just Calvinism one removed?" Because it is still going to happen.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: This is what Open Theists will say because it has such a strong affirmation of divine sovereignty, but I take that to be a good thing, a biblical thing. But the huge difference is, as I said before, on this view, grace is not irresistible. The person really can do differently in those circumstances if he wants to. It is just that he cannot escape God knowing how he freely would choose. But God takes hands off and says, "All right, it is up to you. Do what you want."

PAUL HELM: I do not see that the foreknowledge of God is spectator-like. I think the foreknowledge of God is simply what He knows with respect to His own mind. It is what He Himself knows what He wants to happen. In accordance with that foreknowledge, He

predestinates, which is simply the means to the end of the predestinating. You have, as it were, this continuous sequence of connected events of the golden chain leading to the glorification of the people of God.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: In that sense, when it talks about the election of people to salvation that is God, very specifically, choosing some people for salvation and, by the same token, other people are evidently bypassed and hence will be lost. I think that, for a lot of people, seems wrong.

PAUL HELM: Let me say a word about that. We think of God's goodness as His omnibenevolence, right? Though the facts do not look that way, do they? The facts of the world do not look like the world of an omnibenevolent God in quite that way. That is how I would come at it, really.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So, we do not experience the world so we need to somehow understand that God's benevolence is not necessarily the same as we would understand.

PAUL HELM: The whole fabric of the Bible has to do with His choice—His choice of a people. Does He bypass the other people when choosing the Jews and choosing Abraham? Yes, of course he does. In choosing Abraham, He not chooses the others. In choosing Jesus to be, as it were, the elect Redeemer, other ways of salvation are bypassed.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Well, as I said earlier, I take at face value the passages in the Scripture teaching the universal salvific will of God, that He wants all people to be saved. Even in the Old Testament, being a part of the corporate nation of Israel was no guarantee of salvation. If a person were an evil, wicked person—just being a Jew was no guarantee. And there are non-Jews in the Old Testament who clearly have a relationship with God. Job would be a perfect example. Job was not a Jew. He was from [Uz]. He was a non-Jewish person, yet clearly Job knew God.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So, in that sense, then, when Romans 8 speaks of people being elected to salvation (when you also believe that God wants all people to be saved) in what sense is God electing individual people, then, in that passage?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I would say, in a secondary sense. The primary sense of election is corporate. God has called out a people to Himself and then, if you want to be a member of that elect body, you need to freely choose. So, you have all these corporate images in Scripture: the olive tree with branches grafted in or broken off, the building of living stones, the priesthood of believers, the body with its different members and parts, the nation of Israel, the commonwealth, all these corporate images...

PAUL HELM: I was making a really simple point, really. Bill is going on about it, but I was making a very simple point that the fabric of our faith depends upon God's choice and His not-choice. That is fundamental to the Bible as a document. It is fundamental to its character, to what it contains, that He chose a people and that, through them, the Messiah came; and that in choosing them, effectively choosing them, not choosing them in a kind of washy sense, but choosing them because He works all things out of the counsel of His own will. This included. In choosing A, He does not choose B.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: I know that one thing you wanted to bring up before we finished up today, Paul, is that you think Molinism has other aspects to it that get rather confusing and messy. Did you just want to explain one concern?

PAUL HELM: If I can very briefly. It concerns where it leaves God's sovereignty. The situation as I understand it is somewhat messier than we have discussed so far in our program. That is to say, that the conditions that God chooses to actualize—there are certain worlds that He chooses which are feasible worlds, and there are certain other worlds He which cannot possibly choose because they are not feasible. So, the worlds that He does choose may contain exercises of human freedom which inhibit other exercises of human freedom. So, it is very messy.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So, when we are talking about possible worlds in which God can see that in this particular world people would choose to do this under these conditions and in another do that under another set of conditions, not all of those possible worlds are open to God choosing. I am sure you understand the origin of this.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Right, and I think this is a very significant distinction and, I think, has great theological fruitfulness. So, the Molinist will want to affirm that there are some worlds which are infeasible for God to actualize, and I suggest that one of these would be a world of universal salvation. Perhaps in any world of free creatures that God might create, *some* would freely reject His grace and separate themselves from Him forever. So even though it is *logically possible* for there to be a world of universal salvation, perhaps it is infeasible for God, given these subjunctive conditionals that we talked about.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Yes, because there may not be a world in which everyone would choose freely to be saved.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Exactly, so I do say that, or I do affirm that, and I think that you can get great theological mileage out of that distinction.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: As far as you are concerned, God is more concerned with the human freedom than having a world in which everyone gets saved. That would be the choice, as it were, that God is making.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: Yes, yes, I suppose that is right—that He would not exercise a sort of divine coercion in order to save people, that He will respect people's wills and say, "I am not going to make you go to heaven. If you choose to reject me and my grace and my love for you, then I will allow you to do so."

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: I think Paul's concern is that by there being worlds which are not feasible for God to choose, that somehow undermines God's sovereignty because that suggests...

PAUL HELM: But it weakens, it weakens it. You see, the emphasis now is not on God choosing me because He wanted me to be His child eternally and unconditionally and by His grace, but He has chosen a *world*, and I happen to be a part of that world.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So you are sort of a byproduct where He is trying to maximize, say, the most number of people saved.

PAUL HELM: Whatever His conditions of feasibility are, there are certain worlds that are ruled out where that is clear but coming, as it were, close to the center what the conditions of feasibility are seems to be what we could not possibly be clear on. That would have to remain a mystery. Nonetheless, His love for me is not, as it were, direct and personal. It is because I am part of a world, which is a world of all He wants.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I do not see that at all! I would not agree with that at all! God loves each and every individual and wants that person to be saved, and He will choose to create a world *of individuals*. The world is not primary; the individuals are primary. And they build together a kind of world as you accumulate individuals. But, what the Molinist does say that I think the Calvinist finds objectionable is that God is not in control of which subjunctive conditionals are true. He does not determine the truth-value of these subjunctive conditionals. That is outside His control, and the Calvinist finds that objectionable.

PAUL HELM: That is right. The whole notion of middle knowledge, as portrayed by Bill, is objectionable to the Calvinist, as I said in the beginning. He can shunt all of this stuff into one of God's other two sources of knowledge.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: I think that is a very helpful distinction to have at the end. A point at which this actually breaks in terms of the view of God for a Molinist and a Calvinist because in the end, in that sense, God—Would you say God is in some sense limited by the fact that He has chosen a world in which human freedoms will...?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: No, not quite just yet. Actually, it is consistent with middle knowledge that this world is totally determined. It is possible that God looked at all the indeterministic worlds that have freedom in them and said, "Oh, those are lousy worlds! I do not want any of them! I am going to choose one in which I determine everything!" So, middle knowledge is actually consistent with causal determinism *but...*

PAUL HELM: Molina would turn in his grave if he heard that!

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: But where it does presuppose libertarian freedom is, again, that these subjunctive conditionals are not within God's control. That is correct.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: But that doesn't undermine God's sovereignty?

PAUL HELM: Well it does and it doesn't...

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: There are worlds that are *infeasible* for God in virtue of these subjunctive conditionals.

PAUL HELM: Maybe it may be a condition of Him choosing the world He has chosen that people do not get as much freedom in that world as they would in other worlds, for example. I might trample on their toes. I am chosen—I may be chosen as someone who freely tramples on their toes.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: So, your freedom may be at the expense of another person's freedom.

PAUL HELM: Yes indeed, and there is nothing He can do about it except choose a different world. That is why *worlds* are preeminent in this, not individuals. He does not *love*—Paul says, “He loved me and gave himself for me.” I do not know if we could say that in quite the unqualified way that I think he does say it.

JUSTIN BRIERLEY: Okay, I think we are going to draw that to a close. Bill, thank you for being on the program, Paul as well. Just, in conclusion then, you would encourage people who have struggled with human free will and God's foreordination to embrace Molinism, presumably. You think that is a biblical and an intellectually satisfying way of reconciling this.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG: I think it is *a* biblical and intellectually satisfying view. I am not claiming that it is *the* one view, but I am saying it provides a model that integrates human freedom with divine sovereignty in a way that is biblically consistent and intellectually satisfying. And therefore this model is one that shows that these doctrines are coherent and credible.

PAUL HELM: And I think that it is intellectually mystifying to introduce this very strong sense of human freedom in the way discussed earlier, and it is not a price worth paying, and it is not biblical.

CLOSING STATEMENTS BY JUSTIN BRIERLEY

Articles of Religious Belief: The Confession Authored by the Founders of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary



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Editor's Note: An earlier version of this article was delivered as the NOBTS Founders' Day Address on October 1, 2013.

Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. For some men, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into promiscuity and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord. – Jude 3–4 (HCSB)¹

The Creation of the *Articles of Religious Belief*

In 1917, Southern Baptists did something they had never done before—they authorized the creation of a new seminary. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) were launched without convention authorization and were later adopted by Southern Baptist Convention. However, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), then named Baptist Bible Institute (BBI), was the first seminary to be created by an act of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Many important steps were necessary in creating a new seminary, such as crafting a vision for the new seminary, securing a viable location, recruiting the founding faculty, and raising money to fund the new venture. But before the first class was taught, the Board of Directors of BBI made the development of a doctrinal confession for the Seminary a high priority. At the same time as many of these other formative steps were being authorized by the Board to create BBI, the Board of Directors appointed a committee on April 9, 1918, to “draw up a statement of principles to be presented at the next meeting.”²

¹All biblical quotations are from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

²*Minutes*, Board of Directors, Baptist Bible Institute, April 19, 1918, cited in Claude L. Howe Jr., et al., *Seventy-Five Years of Providence and Prayer* (New Orleans: Jostens, 1993), 19.

Of course, Southern Baptists had not formally adopted any written confession in 1918. The first version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* was not written and approved by the convention until 1925. SBTS utilized its *Abstract of Principles*, authored by its founding faculty in 1858. SWBTS, at its inception just ten years earlier in 1908, had adopted the *New Hampshire Confession* as its doctrinal statement.³ Therefore, since there was already a precedent for Southern Baptist seminaries authoring or adopting their own statement of faith, the action of the Board of Directors was clearly appropriate.

The committee appointed to “draw up a statement of principles” was made up of two Board members, B. E. Gray and I. J. Van Ness, and the new President of BBI, Byron Hoover DeMent.⁴ However, in neither the papers of President DeMent in the archives of the John T. Christian Library of NOBTS, nor in the papers of Van Ness (who was then the Corresponding Secretary or CEO of the Baptist Sunday School Board) in the Southern Baptist Historical Archives, are proposed drafts of a statement extant. It would seem that the burden of writing the proposed doctrinal statement fell primarily to President DeMent.

President DeMent recruited one of the founding faculty members of BBI, W. E. Denham Sr., to help draw up the confessional statement sometime between April and August of 1918. On August 28, 1918, their drafts of a proposed confession were presented to the founding faculty for discussion. After receiving their input, the confession was referred to DeMent to finalize the language of the confession. The new *Articles of Religious Belief* were presented the next day, August 29, 1918, at a called meeting of the BBI Board of Directors, and the confession was approved.⁵

The original BBI faculty signed the *Articles* the evening of October 1, 1918, which is the basis for NOBTS celebrating Founders Day around the first of October each year.⁶ The signing was preceded by a weeklong conference with some of the best-known leaders in the SBC speaking, including the following:

- J. B. Gambrell on “Christianity and the Making of an Army”
- J. F. Love on “Preparing a Nation for Its Mission”
- E. Y. Mullins on “The Gospel and the World War”

³*Minutes*, Board of Trustees of SWBTS, November 1908 (Fort Worth: Archives of the Roberts Library), 21–22, cited in Malcolm Yarnell, “Calvinism: Cause for Rejoicing, Cause for Concern,” in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 82–83. The SWBTS faculty reaffirmed the *New Hampshire Confession* in 1921 when under the assault from J. Frank Norris. See also Robert A. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1908–1983* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 142–43.

⁴*Minutes*, Board of Directors, Baptist Bible Institute, April 19, 1918, cited in Howe, *Providence and Prayer*, 19.

⁵Howe, *Providence and Prayer*, 30.

⁶*Ibid.*, 28, with a photograph of the event.

- Lee Roy Scarborough on “An Evangelistic Ministry”
- Byron H. DeMent on “The Bible Coming into Its Own”⁷

From the titles of some of these presentations, the nation’s engagement in World War I obviously weighed heavily on the minds of the speakers. On Sunday, September 29, two of the best-known figures in the SBC, E. Y. Mullins (President of the SBTS) and Lee Roy Scarborough (President of SWBTS) delivered their messages. DeMent’s inaugural address on “The Bible Coming into Its Own” was delivered on October 1, followed by the founding faculty signing the *Articles of Religious Belief*. NOBTS is in possession of a picture of that event as well as the original typed copy of the *Articles* with the signatures of the original faculty. Since 1918, all 397 Trustee-elected NOBTS faculty members have signed the same *Articles of Religious Belief* doctrinal statement.

The Persons Who Authored the *Articles of Religious Belief*

Who were the key persons who authored the *Articles*? As noted earlier, the BBI Board of Directors appointed a committee of President DeMent and two Board members to author a doctrinal confession. But the extant letters of DeMent and Van Ness contain no discussion of a confession. The burden of authoring the confession, therefore, fell on President DeMent and, to a lesser extent, faculty member W. E. Denham.

W. E. Denham Sr.

W. E. Denham Sr. served as an Old Testament professor on the founding faculty of BBI. Born in South Wales in 1881, Denham earned a Diploma from Moody Bible Institute, the Th.M. and Th.D. from SBTS, and an M.A. degree from Tulane while a faculty member at BBI. Denham pastored churches in Illinois while attending Moody Bible Institute, as well as churches in Columbia, South Carolina (Second Baptist Church); two churches in New Orleans, Louisiana (Coliseum Baptist Church and Carrollton Baptist Church); Kansas City, Missouri (Eustis Baptist Church); Montgomery, Alabama; and Miami, Florida (First Baptist Church of Miami). He was a well-known conference speaker around the SBC, particularly on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.⁸

⁷“Program of the Opening Conference of the Baptist Bible Institute,” and a letter from Byron Hoover DeMent to I. J. Van Ness dated September 24, 1918, both available in the Southern Baptist Historical Archives collection at the SBC Building in Nashville, Tennessee.

⁸“Personalalia,” *The Christian Workers’ Magazine* 17.1 (September 1917): 67; Maynard Uriel Vick, *A History of Coliseum Place Baptist Church*, Dip.Th. thesis at NOBTS, May 1934; “W. E. Denham, Sr. Dies in Kentucky,” *Baptist Press*, April 26, 1976, available at: <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/4184,26-Apr-1976.pdf>; *Minutes*, Orleans-St. Tammany Baptist Association, Fifth Annual Session (September 3–4, 1918), 20; Sixth Annual Session (September 9–10, 1919), 18; Ninth Annual Session (October 10–11, 1922), 16; Tenth Annual Session (October 16–17, 1923), 19; Eleventh Annual Session (October 14–15, 1924), 20; *Minutes*, the New Orleans Baptist Association, “Church Property Table,” First Annual Session

As a teacher, Denham had the unique privilege of serving as a faculty member of three different Bible Institutes. In addition to BBI in New Orleans, he served on the founding faculty and as Dean at BBI in Florida (now Baptist College of Florida) and at Clear Creek Bible Institute in Kentucky.⁹ He published two New Testament surveys and a Bible survey, but probably his greatest contribution was a book on the Holy Spirit, *The Comforter: A Brief Discussion of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*.¹⁰ Denham's son, W. E. Denham, Jr., was also a pastor of significant SBC churches in Tennessee, Georgia, and Texas, and was an early leader among Southern Baptists in taking a stand for civil rights.¹¹

Byron Hoover DeMent

The primary author of the *Articles of Religious Belief* was the first President of BBI, Byron Hoover DeMent. He was born in rural Tennessee during the Civil War in 1863. He was a precocious young man, memorizing the New Testament by the age of 17 (he memorized the genealogies in Matthew and Luke last), and was baptized at the age of 19. DeMent attended Peabody College (now Vanderbilt) and the University of Virginia. He was a star member of the debate team at Virginia until his poor health forced him to withdraw from school. He earned the Th.D. degree from SBTS.¹²

DeMent served as pastor of several rural churches in Tennessee and Virginia, then at Twenty-second and Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky; First Baptist Church in Waco, Texas; and First Baptist Church of Greenwood, South Carolina. First Baptist Church of Waco was one of the “megachurches” of the time. B. H. Carroll, founder of SWBTS, and his brother J.

(October 13–14, 1925), Second Annual Session (October 28–29, 1926), Third Annual Session (October 7–8, 1927), and Fourth Annual Session (October 25–26, 1928). The *Minutes* of both the Orleans-St. Tammany Association and the New Orleans Association are available in the John T. Christian Library of NOBTS; and Howe, *Providence and Prayer*, 29.

⁹“W. E. Denham, Sr. Dies in Kentucky,” *Baptist Press*, April 26, 1976, available at: <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/4184,26-Apr-1976.pdf>.

¹⁰W. E. Denham, Sr., *Synthesis: The Bible by Books* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1922); Idem, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1925); Idem, *New Testament Studies* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1934); Idem, *The Comforter: A Brief Discussion of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1935), 16–20, 24–49.

¹¹“William E. Denham, Jr. (1945–1951),” in the “Our Pastors” web pages of First Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia (available at: <http://www.fbcxmacon.org/pastor-history/2011/5/29/william-e-denham-jr-1946-1951.html>); Idem, “Christian Affirmations,” *Baptist Student* 24.4 (February 1945): 22; Alan Scott Willis, *According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race (1945–1970)* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 93–94, 219.

¹²The primary sources for the bibliographical information on DeMent were: Ethel C. Holcomb, *The Life and Labors of Dr. Byron Hoover DeMent*, M.C.T. thesis at Baptist Bible Institute, 1935, available at the John T. Christian Library of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (presented at an early Founders' Day celebration); J. M. Price, “Byron Hoover DeMent,” in *Baptist Leaders in Religious Education* (Nashville: Broadman, 1943), 48–56; and Howe, *Providence and Prayer*, 16–20, 26–49.

M. Carroll were DeMent's immediate predecessors as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco. The iconic sanctuary and other facilities at First Baptist Church were built during DeMent's pastorate.

DeMent taught: at Doyle College, at Baylor's Religion Department (which was an early prototype for SWBTS), as Professor of Sunday School Pedagogy and Hebrew at SBTS, and as Professor of New Testament and Bible Doctrine at BBI. In his position at SBTS, DeMent was the first Christian Education professor in the SBC. He worked closely with the Baptist Sunday School Board, writing numerous Sunday School lessons and materials. J. M. Price, the first Dean of the School of Christian Education at SWBTS, credited DeMent as impacting the development of that school. In celebrating the most important people in the history of Christian Education in Southern Baptist life in his book *Baptist Leaders in Religious Education*, Price wrote an entire chapter on DeMent for his contribution to Christian education, not as a professor or seminary President, but for his work with Sunday School.¹³

In addition to writing numerous Sunday School lessons, DeMent authored *Life of Christ* as well as a number of articles in scholarly journals (particularly the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*) and dictionaries. DeMent published some articles in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, most of which are still included in the recent edition edited by Geoffrey Bromiley.¹⁴

DeMent was considered a highly respected and gifted leader in the SBC in his era. One day while teaching at Baylor, he was presented with three separate opportunities for ministry, each one of which would have been a career goal for anyone in ministry. He was invited by B. H. Carroll to be on founding faculty of SWBTS. He was invited by First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, to follow Carroll and his brother as Pastor of the church. Also, he was invited to teach at SBTC by its President, E. Y. Mullins. DeMent chose the pastorate in Waco.¹⁵

DeMent also had multiple opportunities when he came to be President of BBI. In fact, DeMent was not aware that he was being considered for President at BBI until after he was

¹³Price, "Byron Hoover DeMent," in *Baptist Leaders in Religious Education*, 48–56; Holcomb, *DeMent*, 16.

¹⁴Byron Hoover DeMent, *The Bible Readers' Life of Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1928); "Bible Terms for Sin," *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 1.4 (Jan. 1918): 25–33; "The Deity of Christ," *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 2.4 (Oct. 1918): 18–29; "Making a World," *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 5.4 (October 1921): 3–16; "The Destruction of the Race," *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6.2 (April 1922): 13–24; "Lecture on Genesis," *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6.3 (July 1922): 39–51. DeMent's articles in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr, John Nuelson, and E. Y. Mullins (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915); most of which were still utilized in the revised edition by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), including the following: s.v. "Hanan" (2:1333 in the 1915 ed., 4:609 in the 1988 ed.), "Hanani" (2:1333 in the 1915 ed., 4:609 in the 1988 ed.), "Hannah" (2:1336 in the 1915 ed., 4:613 in the 1988 ed.), "Hamor" (2:1332 in the 1915 ed., 4:608 in the 1988 ed.), "Hanun" (2:1336 in the 1915 ed., 4:613 in the 1988 ed.), "Repentance" (4:2558–59 in the 1915 ed., 4:135–37 in the 1988 ed.), "Teach, Teacher, Teaching" (5:2921–23 in the 1915 ed.).

¹⁵Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 118; Holcomb, *DeMent*, 9–10, 14–15.

already elected. A committee of the Board of Directors, including I. J. Van Ness, was formed to tell DeMent that he had been elected. At the time, DeMent was serving as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina, but was being recruited to become the first President of a college now known as Union University. After visiting Jackson, Tennessee, however, he did not feel led to do so. Traveling through Nashville on his return to South Carolina, DeMent stopped by to see his friend, I. J. Van Ness. Van Ness asked DeMent if he had accepted the position at Union. When DeMent said no, Van Ness informed him that he had been elected President of BBI. After some days in prayer, DeMent accepted this unanticipated mantle of responsibility.¹⁶

Possible Sources for the *Articles of Religious Belief*

Some Baptist confessions echo earlier confessions. For example, the wording of the *Philadelphia Confession* was virtually the same as the *First London Confession* and *Second London Confession*, which followed (with some significant changes) the *Westminster Confession*. Likewise, all versions of the *Baptist Faith and Message* have utilized much of the language of the *New Hampshire Confession*. This could lead one to ask: Can any prior Baptist or evangelical confessions be discerned in the language of the *Articles of Religious Belief*? DeMent and Denham would have been aware of some prominent Baptist and evangelical doctrinal confession statements. Did they draw any language from them in crafting the *Articles of Religious Belief*? For example, both DeMent and Denham were graduates of SBTS, and DeMent was a former faculty member of that institution. Clearly, then, DeMent and Denham were aware of the SBTS *Abstract of Principles*, and DeMent would have affirmed it as a faculty member.¹⁷ However, there is no notable similarity in language between the *Abstract of Principles* and the *Articles of Religious Belief*. Also, the *Articles* differ significantly from the *Abstract* on some important theological issues. It does not appear that DeMent and Denham relied on the *Abstract of Principles* in developing the *Articles of Religious Belief*.

In 1918, the most widely accepted and approved Baptist confession was the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833). After being approved by New Hampshire Baptists in 1833, it was approved by the important Sandy Creek Association in North Carolina in 1845, which moved them away from their more Reformed “Principles of Faith” that they had affirmed in 1817.¹⁸ More importantly, every major Baptist church manual or book on Baptist beliefs from 1853 through 1913 (though they were clearly aware of the *Philadelphia Confession* and the *Abstract of*

¹⁶Holcomb, *DeMent*, 20–21.

¹⁷The *Abstract of Principles* is available at: http://www.baptistcenter.net/confessions/1858_Abstract_of_Principles.pdf.

¹⁸An example of this rather short transition was the “Principles of Faith” of the Sandy Creek Association, adopted in 1816, that was more Reformed in language (available at: <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccf/sandycreekconfession.htm>), which was superseded just 29 years later by the “Declaration of Faith” of the Sandy Creek Association in 1845 which closely followed the less-Reformed language of the *New Hampshire Confession* (available at: http://www.baptistcenter.net/confessions/Declaration_Of_Faith_Sandy_Creek_Association_1845.pdf).

Principles) promulgated and recommended the *New Hampshire Confession* as the best articulation of the perspective of Baptists. These widely used church manuals and statements of Baptist beliefs which recommended the *New Hampshire Confession* include the following:

- J. Newton Brown, *Baptist Church Manual* (1853), which sold over 1 million copies, amazing at the time of its publication.¹⁹
- Dudley C. Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination, Its History, Doctrines, and Ordinances* (1857). Haynes defended his use of the *New Hampshire Confession* as follows: “Among the numerous Confessions of Faith in use in the denomination, we have been not a little perplexed in making a selection. We have finally decided to adopt that prepared by Rev. J. Newton Brown, D. D., Editorial Secretary of the American Baptist Publication Society. These articles of faith were prepared several years ago, and are now in very general use.”²⁰
- Edward Hiscox’s publications, such as *The Baptist Church Manual* (1859), *The Baptist Directory: A Guide to the Doctrines and Practices of Baptist Churches* (1868, 1876), and *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* (1890).²¹
- J. A. Pendleton’s *Church Manual, Designed for Use by Baptist Churches* (1867).²²
- J. M. Frost, ed., *Baptist Why and Why Not* (1900).²³
- O. C. S. Wallace, *What Baptists Believe* (1913), which sold over 200,000 copies.

¹⁹J. Newton Brown, *Baptist Church Manual* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853), 5–22.

²⁰Dudley C. Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination, Its History, Doctrines, and Ordinances; Its Polity, Persecutions, and Martyrs; Facts and Statistics of Its Missionary Institutions, Schools of Learning, Etc.; the Indebtedness of the World to Baptists, and Their Duty to the World* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, and Co., 1857), 61–62.

²¹Edward Hiscox, *The Baptist Church Directory: A Guide to the Doctrines and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1859; 1888 reprint), 154–76; *The Baptist Directory: A Guide to the Doctrines and Practices of Baptist Churches* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1876), 154–76; *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publications Society, 1890), 58–76; *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1894; 16th printing, 1941), 538–63. All of these variously renamed and repackaged publications by Hixson, with numerous reprintings, sold a total of more than 100,000 copies, and all recommended the *New Hampshire Confession*.

²²J. M. Pendleton, *Church Manual, Designed for Use by Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1867), 44–61.

²³J. M. Frost, ed., *Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1900).

Wallace said he recommended the *New Hampshire Confession* because “it is the formula of Christian truth most commonly used as a standard in Baptist churches throughout the country, to express what they believe according to the Scriptures.”²⁴

Likewise, as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, DeMent was aware of the *New Hampshire Confession*, since his predecessor B. H. Carroll had made it the church’s official confession. In the 1897 history of the Waco Baptist Association, which also affirmed the *New Hampshire Confession*, B. H. Carroll affirmed the confession, which had been approved by the association in 1860, with these words:

The Articles of Faith are the most widely accepted compendium of Baptist principles known to me. They were adopted by Waco Association before Pendleton’s “Manual” was published and only one year after the publication of the first edition of Hiscox’s “Directory.” ... If I were asked to suggest a needed declaration of Baptist principles, I would not go further than the Articles of Faith of the Waco Association. Of course these Articles are popularly known as the *New Hampshire Confession*.²⁵

Furthermore, as a faculty member of the prototype of SWBTS at Baylor University, and having been invited to serve on the founding SWBTS faculty, DeMent would also have known that Carroll made the *New Hampshire Confession* the doctrinal statement of SWBTS in 1908, just ten years earlier than the *Articles of Religious Belief*.²⁶ However, despite the great familiarity that DeMent and Denham would have had with the *New Hampshire Confession*, the *Articles of Religious Belief* reflect virtually no dependence or verbal similarity on the *New Hampshire Confession*.

What about the confessions of other evangelical Bible colleges? DeMent went to several Bible institutes to get information about how to shape the new BBI, and modeled it after Moody Bible Institute.²⁷ Denham was a graduate of Moody. However, Moody Bible Institute’s doctrinal statement was not approved until 1928, and its language differs significantly from the *Articles*.²⁸

After searching Baptist doctrinal affirmations and searching the internet for key phrases in the *Articles*, there appears to be no prior doctrinal confession whose language is echoed in the *Articles of Religious Belief*. Therefore, the only viable perspective is that the *Articles of Religious Belief* was created by DeMent and Denham as a unique and new confession.

²⁴O. C. S. Wallace, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1913), 4.

²⁵B. H. Carroll, “Introduction,” in J. L. Walker and C. P. Lumpkin, *History of the Waco Baptist Association of Texas* (Waco: Byrne-Hill Publishing House, 1897), 5–6. Introducing the Waco Association’s variation of the *New Hampshire Confession* (printed on pp. 18–22), the authors wrote, “There is no more complete uninspired compendium of Baptist faith to be found in all literature” (p. 18).

²⁶*Minutes*, Southwestern Board of Trustees, November 1908; cited in Yarnell, “Calvinism: Cause for Rejoicing, Cause for Concern,” 82–83, and Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 142–143.

²⁷Howe, *Providence and Prayer*, 18.

²⁸Moody’s doctrinal statement is available at: <http://www.moody.edu/doctrinal-statement/>.

There is a seminary with a confession which is similar to the *Articles*. Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, founded by former NOBTS faculty member B. Gray Allison, has a statement also named the *Articles of Religious Belief*. Although some substantial revisions have been made in the MABTS version of the *Articles*, its wording is fundamentally based on the NOBTS *Articles of Religious Belief*.²⁹

The Content of the *Articles of Religious Belief*

There are ten articles in the *Articles of Religious Belief*. Below is a brief survey of these articles:³⁰

- Article 1 – “Sole Authority of the Scriptures,” affirms a high view of the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture.
- Article 2 – “The Triune God Who Is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” is a strong affirmation of all three members of the Trinity.
- Article 3 – “Satan and Sinful Man,” affirms a real Satan and the fallenness of humanity.
- Article 4 – “Christ, God’s Way of Atonement,” affirms the substitutionary atonement offered for all persons.
- Article 5 – “Christ the only Savior from Sin, without Whom All Men Are Condemned,” asserts that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.
- Article 6 – “Conversion includes Repentance, Faith, Regeneration, and Justification,” affirms a high view of repentance. In both the *Articles* and in the writings of DeMent and more particularly Denham, “easy believism” is denied.³¹

²⁹The *Articles of Religious Belief* of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary is available at: <http://www.mabts.edu/sites/all/themes/midamerica/uploads/pdf/2013-14%20Catalog.pdf#page=9>, and at <http://www.mabts.edu/why-mid-america/about-mid-america/articles-belief>.

³⁰The *Articles of Religious Belief* are available at: http://www.baptistcenter.net/confessions/NOBTS_Articles_of_Religious_Belief.pdf, or in the NOBTS annual catalog, available at: <http://www.nobts.edu/resources/pdf/GraduateCatalog.pdf#page=7>.

³¹“Repentance implies a deep and sincere change of thinking, feeling, and willing toward sin and God, and faith is the surrender of the entire personality, thought, feeling, and volition to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Regeneration is the act of the Holy Spirit by which the sinner is born again, and his whole being is radically changed so that the believer becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus” (Article 6).

Likewise, Denham, *The Comforter*, 34–35, wrote that “true repentance” requires a total reorientation of life: “Repentance is a word altogether too much lacking from the lips of many of our present-day preachers. The idea that man is good in himself, and only needs the right environment to develop into perfection, and find no place for repentance; but the Bible speaks of it, and it was a dominant note in the preaching of the New Testament.”

Denham, *The Comforter*, 22, 26, wanted no part of an “easy believism” that did not bring total transfor-

- Article 7 – “The Final Resurrection of All Men,” affirms a physical resurrection upon the return of Christ.
- Article 8 – “A New Testament Church Is a Body of Baptized Believers, Observing Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” presents a strong Baptist ecclesiology.
- Article 9 – “The Lord’s Day and Christian Support of Civil Government,” affirms both the practice of Sabbath rest and the significance of religious liberty.
- Article 10 – “Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines,” is fairly unique among Baptist doctrinal statements, affirming both the distinctiveness of Baptist doctrines and a willingness to cooperate with other denominations on non-essential beliefs.

Three Background Issues that May Have Shaped the *Articles of Religious Belief*

Having surveyed the content of the *Articles of Religious Belief*, how shall we analyze or characterize it? Any such analysis must read it in light of the theological issues being confronted at the time of its writing, not imposing our contemporary doctrinal interests. What doctrinal issues were the hot topics of that day? The *Articles of Religious Belief* appear to be interacting with at least three theological discussions that were contemporaneous with that day: the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, the “Baptist Distinctives” literature, and the Calvinist/

mation of the whole person:

“[Humans have] been described as a threefold being, with mind and heart and will, and every worthwhile choice for decision must have his whole personality entering into it. Too much effort is often directed to the securing of an emotional response that is not based upon the choice of the whole personality, with the result that not only are the decisions which are secured shallow and impermanent, but we have also weakened the personality and left easier for another emotion to sway it, regardless of the nature of the emotion. To secure a right choice, the mind must first be convinced of the worth of the choice. To ask for choice where this has not been done is to ask for blind decision; and blind decision, obviously, may be wrong just as readily right. In spite of the many times we seek to secure these emotional decisions, the fact remains that they are wholly unsatisfactory. In a proper decision there is the cooperation of all three factors. The mind must be convinced of the wisdom of the choice asked, the heart must feel the desire to make the choice, and the will must act to make the decision. For the head to move alone means ultimately cold cynicism. For the head and emotions to act without the will brings spiritual death and atrophy. For the emotions to stir the will without the mind commending the act means uncertainty and lack of permanence. Choice worthwhile includes the approval of mind as well as other factors...

Belief in Jesus, as the Scripture views it, is no mere intellectual assent to the facts regarding His earthly life or even to the fact of His Deity, nor a weak and superficial acceptance of certain doctrinal positions, but such a clear and strong conviction of these facts as leads one to act on them, so that our decisions and lives are molded by them. It is something so strong and convincing that it changes our whole attitude of life to Christ and His teachings.”

Arminian discussion. This analysis will describe how the Articles interacted with each of these theological discussions.

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

Probably the most significant theological issue in 1918 was the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, which impacted the *Articles of Religious Belief* and was a primary cause for the writing of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925. The fundamentalist movement was spurred by the Niagara Bible Conferences and the publication of *The Fundamentals*, 12 volumes edited by A. C. Dixon and R. A. Torrey (1910–15), which outlined the five fundamentals of the faith.³² These were on the minds of all scholarly evangelicals in 1918. The five key fundamental beliefs were:

- Biblical Inspiration, Authority, and Inerrancy
- The Virgin Birth of Christ
- The Substitutionary Atonement purchased by Christ on the cross
- The bodily Resurrection of Christ
- The coming physical Return of Christ³³

The *Articles of Religious Belief* affirmed all five of these fundamentals.

- Regarding Biblical Inspiration, Authority, and Inerrancy

“We believe that the Bible is the Word of God in the highest and fullest sense, and is the unrivalled authority in determining the faith and practice of God’s people; that the sixty-six books of the Bible are divinely and uniquely inspired, and that they have come down to us substantially as they were under inspiration written” (Article 1).

- Regarding the Virgin Birth of Christ

“The Son is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary...” (Article 2).

- Regarding the Substitutionary Atonement by Christ on the Cross

“The Son . . . died to redeem man” (Article 2).

“That Way is Jesus Christ, whose death atoned for our sin” (Article 4).

³²R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, 2005–10).

³³Jerald C. Brauer, *Protestantism in America: A Narrative History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 246–47.

- Regarding the Bodily Resurrection of Christ

“Jesus Christ ... rose from the dead to justify the believer, is now at the right hand of God as our Advocate and Intercessor” (Article 2).

- Regarding the Coming Physical Return of Christ

“(A)t the time the Father keeps in His own power, He will return in visible, personal and bodily form for the final overthrow of sin, the triumph of His people and the judgment of the world” (Article 2).

- Regarding Creationism vs. Evolutionism

Another key tenet of fundamentalism, though not one of *The Fundamentals*, was disbelief in evolution and belief in a divine creation. However, when the *Articles of Religious Belief* were written, the Scopes “Monkey” Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, was still seven years in the future, so creation and evolution are not discussed in detail. The *Articles* do, however, affirm that God is “Creator and Sustainer of all things” (Article 2).

Baptist Distinctives

The second most prominent discussion in Baptist life in 1918 centered on Baptist distinctives. Baptists of the early 1900s sought to distinguish their own doctrine at specific points from that of other Protestants, and did so by creating literature that focused on distinctively Baptist beliefs.³⁴ DeMent and the early BBI faculty were aware of and interacted with this movement, especially given their setting in New Orleans in which Baptist views were in a small minority. In addition to the aforementioned Baptist church manuals, this focus on Baptist distinctives was voiced in popular books such as Frost’s *Baptist Why and Why Not* and Mullins’ *Baptist Beliefs*.³⁵ DeMent worked closely with Frost in his Sunday School efforts and knew well and interacted with E. Y. Mullins.

The *Articles of Religious Belief* shows an appreciation for distinctive Baptist beliefs. Consider these statements as examples:

- “We believe that a New Testament Church is a voluntary assembly, or association of baptized believers in Christ” (Article 8). This expresses a bedrock belief of Southern Baptist ecclesiology.
- “We believe there are only two Church ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—and that a church, as a democratic organization, is served by only two types of officers—pastors or bishops, and deacons” (Article 8). The affirmation of two church ordinances and two church offices are in virtually every Baptist confession.

³⁴For more on the Baptist distinctives literature, see R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), and *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2005).

³⁵J. M. Frost, ed., *Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1900); E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Louisville: Baptist World Publishing Company, 1912).

- “We believe that saved believers are the only scriptural subjects of *baptism*, and that *immersion*, or dipping, or burial, in water, and resurrection therefrom is the only scriptural act of baptism” (Article 8). Baptism through the mode of immersion is a bedrock and distinctive Baptist doctrine.
- “We believe that the *Lord’s Supper* is the partaking by the church of bread and wine, *as a memorial* of the Lord’s death, and our expectation of His return. The bread typifies His body; the wine typifies His blood. We *deny the actual presence of His body and blood in the bread and wine*” (Article 8). This Baptist memorial view of the Supper was in contrast to both the “actual presence” of Christ in Catholic theology and the “spiritual presence” of Christ advocated by many in the Reformed tradition.

Article 10, “Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines,” expresses the *pièce de résistance* of Baptist distinctives.

- “We believe that *Baptists stand for vital and distinctive truths*, to many of which other denominations do not adhere, and that we cannot compromise these truths without disloyalty to the Scriptures and our Lord” (Article 10). While allowing for unity and cooperation with other denominations or shared causes, the *Articles* underscore the distinctive belief system of Baptists.

The Calvinist/Arminian Discussion

The discussion of Calvinism vs. Arminianism was not as burning topic in 1918 as it has in recent Southern Baptist life, and yet it does represent a significant moment in the time of transition in Baptist life in the mid-nineteenth century in which Baptists moved away from high Calvinism toward a balanced position between Arminianism and Calvinism. There has been no widely-accepted, high-Calvinist Baptist confession in America since the *Philadelphia Confession* (1742).³⁶ Even the *Abstract of Principles*, sometimes thought of as a more Reformed doctrinal affirmation, was identified in the recent sesquicentennial history of SBTS by its President, Albert Mohler, as being no more than a three-point Calvinistic soteriology.³⁷ Baptist theologians from

³⁶The *Philadelphia Confession* (1742) is available at: http://www.baptistcenter.net/confessions/Philadelphia_Confession_of_Faith_1742.pdf. The *Philadelphia Confession* (1742) was modeled after the *Second London Confession* (1689), which in turn followed the language of the *Westminster Confession* (1646) rather closely at points. For a comparison of the Baptist distinctives affirmed in the *Philadelphia Confession* and *Second London Confession* that differentiated these Particular Baptists from the Presbyterian/Congregationalist doctrines in the *Westminster Confession*, see Steve Lemke, “What Is a Baptist? Nine Marks that Separate Baptists and Presbyterians,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, 5.2 (Fall 2008): 10–39, available at: http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_5-2_Fall_2008.pdf#page=11.

³⁷James A. Smith, Sr., “Mohler: Southern Baptists need ‘table manners’ when discussing Calvinism,” *Southern News*, November 15, 2013, available at: <http://news.sbts.edu/2013/11/15/mohler-southern-baptists-need-table-manners-when-discussing-calvinism/>. In the Seminary’s sesquicentennial history, Greg Wills identifies the *Abstract* as being consistent with no more than four points. Greg Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1859–2009)*

the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century were still striving to articulate this more moderated and balanced position, as seen in the *New Hampshire Confession* and the BFM 1925. The *Articles* represent an effort to claim a “middle ground” between extreme views by affirming both divine sovereignty and human freedom.

So, a question to ask about the *Articles*, perhaps motivated by contemporary concerns, is: How many “points” of the traditional, five-point soteriology of high Calvinism is affirmed in the *Articles of Religious Belief*? Let us acknowledge the points that have been made repeatedly, namely: (a) Calvinism is more than the “five points” of the Canons of Dort, (b) though Baptists may be Calvinistic, none can be properly called “Calvinists” in its fullness, and (c) the “TULIP” acrostic is a recent innovation which may not adequately or accurately describe these doctrines.³⁸

With these caveats in mind, in response to our question about how many “points” of Reformed theology the *Articles* affirm, the answer is: “It depends how you count the points.” One can, and many Calvinists do, make the five points an all-or-nothing matter, such that one must either affirm these points in their entirety or not at all. If we examine the *Articles* carefully, then they would perhaps affirm just two points using this methodology, as would the *Baptist Faith and Message*. But most Baptist confessions since 1830 have attempted to strike some sort of balance between a high Calvinist and high Arminian position, and add in some distinctive Baptist beliefs as well. It would seem, then, that a more nuanced analysis is needed, one that notes both affirmations and denials of the various subdoctrines within each of the five points. For this study, a methodology is being employed which divides each main doctrine of the Canons of Dort into four component parts affirmed in that confession. The specific subpoint within the affirmations

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31–38. Wills asserts that the *Abstract of Principles* does not affirm Limited Atonement (38). Wills notes that the document went through numerous revisions as it was vetted by the SBTS faculty, a group of pastors, and a committee of Baptist educators. The majority rejected the affirmation of limited atonement (or particular redemption) in accord with the followers of Andrew Fuller. Revisions were also made to be sensitive to the views of the “New Divinity” of Timothy Dwight, held by prominent Southern Baptists such as William B. Johnson, which preferred the moral government view of the atonement over the penal substitution theory, and denied that Adam’s sin was imputed to his posterity such that persons were punished for someone else’s sin. In regard to the latter, a later revision rewrote the section on the “Fall of Man” with language that later was included (with one significant rewording) in the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message*: “whereby his [Adam’s] posterity inherit a nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors” (33–40). Note that it is a corrupt nature that is inherited, not inherited guilt.

³⁸For example, see Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 75–96; and Richard A. Muller, “How Many Points?” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28.2 (November 1993): 425–33.

or denials of the Canons of Dort will be noted for each of these subdoctrines.³⁹ In calculating their value, one-fourth of one point will be given for each of these affirmations. Although this approach is somewhat artificial, it is hoped that this methodology will produce a more accurate assessment of what the *Articles* affirm and what they deny.

Total Depravity

The doctrine of total depravity, according to the Canons of Dort, affirms:

- a) universal depravity
- b) radical depravity
- c) original sin as inherited guilt
- d) total inability.⁴⁰

Which of these aspects of total depravity do the *Articles* affirm?

(a) and (b). The *Articles* affirm *universal depravity* and *radical depravity*. “All men” are sinners (Articles 3 and 4), are “by nature children of wrath” (Article 3), and are “sinners by both nature and practice” (Article 5).

(c). The *Articles* are somewhat ambiguous regarding *original sin as inherited guilt*. The key question of interpretation turns on what the phrase “born in sin” means in both Articles 3 and 4. One could obviously read “born in sin” to mean inherited guilt.⁴¹ This could be defensibly argued to be the plain sense meaning of this phrase. Alternatively, however, “born in sin” could be understood to mean born with a sinful nature. Consistent with this reading of “born in sin,” Article 3 describes the “essence of sin” to be “non-conformity to the will of God,” Article 4 affirms that all men are sinners “under condemnation through personal sin,” and Article 5 states that persons are “sinners by both nature and practice.” The phrase “born in sin” may thus

³⁹For a more detailed analysis of the five points of the “TULIP” doctrines in the Canons of Dort, see Steve Lemke, “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” available at: http://baptistcenter.net/papers/Lemke_Five_Points_Methodology.pdf. The Canons of Dort (sometimes listed as Dordt or Dordrecht) may be found in many places online (for example, see <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/dordt/>) as well as in many books. In this study, the references to the Canons of Dort are first to the “main points” or “heads” of doctrine, followed by the specific article under that main point (i.e., “Dort 2:4” indicates heading 2, article 4).

⁴⁰For the specific references in the Canons of Dort, see the section on total depravity in “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” referenced in the previous footnote. Regarding total depravity in particular, it references the following sections of the Canons of Dort: 3/4.1, 3/4.2, 3/4.3, and error 2.5 and error 3/4.1.

⁴¹In support of this reading, W. E. Denham affirms the “natural inheritance of sin” in *The Comforter*, 25.

reflect the changing language in this transitional era used by Southern Baptists on this issue. For example, Article 3 of the BFM 1925 affirms that “(Adam’s) posterity inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin, *are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors.*” In the BFM 1963 and 2000, however, the phrase “under condemnation” is moved until after the age of accountability, so Article 3 then states that “his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin, and *as soon as they are capable of moral action become transgressors and are under condemnation.*” In other words, in this reading, although we inherit a corrupt nature, we do not actually become transgressors or under condemnation until we sin personally, which is suggested in Articles 3 and 4. So, the *Articles* could be read either way with regard to inherited guilt.

(d). Regarding *total inability*, the *Articles* affirm human “free choice” (Article 3) and that salvation begins with “conversion,” not regeneration (Article 6). In fact, regeneration is listed as the third aspect of conversion after repentance and faith (Article 6).

In summary, the *Articles* could be counted as affirming .50 or .75 of total depravity as defined by the Canons of Dort.

Unconditional Election

The underpinnings of unconditional election in the Canons of Dort are:

- a) that all persons deserve condemnation
- b) the belief in Monergism (that God alone initiates and accomplishes salvation)
- c) unconditional predestination as God’s sovereign choice
- d) covenantal salvation of infant children of believers.⁴²

How do the *Articles* line up with these teachings of Dort concerning unconditional election?

(a). The *Articles* agree that *all persons deserve condemnation*. Article 5 affirms that persons are under condemnation for their “personal sin,” and because we are “sinners by both nature and practice.”

(b) and (c). The *Articles* give all credit and glory to God for salvation, but deny *Monergism* and *unconditional predestination*. In Article 4, “The atonement becomes personally effective through [both] the foreordination and the grace of God, and the free choice and faith of man” (Article 4). In Article 5, the only way of escape from condemnation is for “those who hear and accept the gospel.” The *Articles*, then, balance the necessity for both divine initiative and human response in

⁴²See the section on unconditional election in “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” which references particularly the following sections of the Canons of Dort: 1.1, 1.5–11, 1:14–17.

salvation. In so doing, the Articles echo the *New Hampshire Confession*, which asserts, “Election ... is perfectly consistent with the free agency of man” (*New Hampshire Confession*, Article 8). By holding divine foreordination in tension with human freedom, the *Articles* also anticipate the language of the BFM 1925 that “Regeneration ... is conditioned upon faith in Christ” (BFM 1925, Article 7).

(d). The *Articles* also deny the *covenantal salvation of infant children of believers* in two ways. First, Christians must have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Second, church membership should be comprised of only baptized believers, as asserted in Articles 4, 5, and particularly 8, which limits church membership to “baptized” or “saved believers.”

In summary, the *Articles* affirm about .375 of the Dortian understanding of unconditional election.

Limited Atonement

The Canons of Dort affirm a strong view of the substitutionary atonement of Christ, but in regard to limited atonement (also known as definite atonement or particular redemption) hold to the subdoctrines of:

- a) God’s “special love” for the elect
- b) the extent/sufficiency of the atonement for the elect
- c) the limited intent of the atonement
- d) the “promiscuous,” or “well-meant offer,” of the gospel.⁴³

The *Articles of Religious Belief* also affirm the substitutionary atonement of Christ “to redeem man” (Article 2), and that the Way to salvation “is Jesus Christ, whose death atoned for our sin” (Article 4). Beyond affirmation of the substitutionary atonement, however, the *Articles of Religious Belief* do not explicitly affirm any aspect of the Dortian view of limited atonement.

(a). Regarding God’s “*special love*” for the elect, quite surprisingly, the word “love” never appears in the *Articles of Religious Belief*. However, it affirms that God has provided “a way ... whereby men born in sin may be reconciled to God” (Article 4), and thus does not endorse God’s “special love” for the elect over against other persons.

(b) and (c). In addressing the *extent/sufficiency of the atonement* and the *intent of the Atonement*,

⁴³See the section on limited atonement in “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” which references the following key sections of the Canons of Dort: 1.7, 1.10, 1.12, 1.14, 1.18, error 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, and error 2.1.

the *Articles* affirm that the atonement is sufficient for everyone, but is efficient only for those who come to Him by faith.⁴⁴ The intent of God is to provide salvation for all people who believe, and thus is potentially available to everyone, not just a “definite” or “particular” group of people. Of course, God knew in advance who would and would not come to Him by faith. Articles 4 and 5 affirm that “all men” may come to salvation, which is accomplished “through the foreordination and the grace of God, and the free choice and faith of man.” In particular, it is “those who here believe” who receive everlasting life, and those who do not believe who receive condemnation (Article 7).

(d). The “*Promiscuous*”/“*Well-Meant Offer*” of the gospel is advocated somewhat in the *Articles*—affirming the free offer of the gospel, but more for the purpose of winning the lost to salvation than discovering those who are already elect. As Article 5 states: “The pressing and inviolable obligation rests upon every church and individual to present the gospel to all men, that to all men may come the means of eternal life. Unless we proclaim the gospel we shall suffer loss, not only in this life, but in the day when we render to God the account of our stewardship” (Article 5).

In summary, the *Articles of Religious Belief* endorse about .25 of the Dortian definition of limited atonement.

Irresistible Grace

Both the Canons of Dort and the *Articles of Religious Belief* affirm the orthodox, evangelical belief of the necessary role of the Holy Spirit in conversion—that unaided humans will not find their way to conversion, but only in response to the drawing, convicting, and convincing of Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ However, the Canons of Dort define “irresistible,” “enabling,” or “serious” grace as:

- a) total inability
- b) compatibilist volition rather than libertarian freedom
- c) regeneration preceding conversion and justification by faith
- d) irresistible or “serious” grace.⁴⁶

The *Articles* do not fully affirm any of these four constituent parts of the doctrine of irresistible grace in the Canons of Dort.

⁴⁴By largely rejecting limited atonement, the *Articles* anticipated the BFM 1925, which in turn echoed similar language in the *New Hampshire Confession* that “the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel. It is the duty of all to accept them by penitent and obedient faith. Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner except his own voluntary refusal to accept Jesus Christ as teacher, Saviour, and Lord” (Article 6, BFM 1925, echoing Article 6 of the *New Hampshire Confession*).

⁴⁵See Dort, 3/4.10, 3/4.11, Article 2 of the *Articles*.

⁴⁶See the section on irresistible grace in “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” which references particularly the following sections of the Canons of Dort: error 2.3, error 2.6, 3/4.7–8, 3/4.10–14, 3/4.16–17, error 3/4.3, and 3/4.9.

(a) and (b). The *Articles* do not affirm either *total inability* (as noted earlier) or *compatibilist volition*, but affirm some form of libertarian freedom. While a high view of the sovereignty of God and a realistic view of human depravity is affirmed in the *Articles*, the confession nevertheless asserts the reality of human response and freedom. The “free choice and faith of man” plays an important role in persons appropriating the atonement (Article 4), and only those who “hear and accept the gospel” will be saved from condemnation (Article 5).

(c) The *Articles* do not appear to affirm that *regeneration precedes conversion and justification by faith* because the confession presents these aspects of salvation in a different order. Repentance and faith are listed first, then regeneration, then justification. Although the *Articles* do not insist that these “aspects” are chronological, listing these aspects of salvation in this order lends to this chronological impression and is a plain-sense reading of Article 6.

(d) The *Articles* likewise reject *irresistible/enabling/“serious” grace*, because persons are free to respond to God’s initiative of grace through their own “free choice and faith” (Article 4), so the gospel should be proclaimed that “all men” may hear and respond (Article 5), and “those who here believe” may receive salvation and eternal life (Article 7).⁴⁷

⁴⁷Not only is this rejection of irresistible grace true in the *Articles*, but W. E. Denham (co-author of the *Articles*) was explicit in rejecting irresistible grace in his own writings, as evidenced in the following quotes from *The Comforter*:

“Man is not a puppet, moved on the stage of life by God or by other unseen forces, but a creature of intelligence and choice, who is by that very fact responsible for his actions and choices” (Denham, *The Comforter*, 22).

“God ... does not coerce our wills” (Ibid., 23). “God made us as we are, and part at least of the worth of Christianity lies in the freedom of choice out of which our decision to serve Christ emerges. Any other method would take away all the moral worth of our action and leave us on the level of chessmen on the board” (Ibid.). “Of what worth is a decision that is forced and unwilling?” (Ibid.).

“There is a scene in the life of Jesus which wonderfully illustrates what I am trying to say. It is a scene well known to us all, and that moves us to tears as we contemplate it. Jesus is standing outside the city of Jerusalem and weeping as He looks down on it. The anguish of His soul breaks out at last in the cry ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not’ How wonderful that God so honors us and respects the rights of our personality that He will never force from us a decision we are unwilling to render. Someone will point to Jonah and say that God forced his decision. But He did not. All choice must face its consequences, whether it be right or wrong, and whether they be pleasant or unpleasant But we must not forget that we will inevitably reap the results of our choices, and it is the work of the Spirit to bring this home to us. How the heart of the Father must suffer, as did the heart of Jesus, when He sees us insisting on the choices that He knows, and has warned us, will bring suffering and loss to us! ...

It is for man to make his decisions when the facts have been made clear to him. And God will respect the choice he makes. Not even in answer to our misguided prayers, earnest though they may be, will God coerce the will of any man. To do so would leave the man unchanged in heart, yet would take from him that power of choice which is the highest possession of being. On the day of Pentecost ... (they) came, ‘pricked

Since the *Articles* deny every key tenet of the Dortian definition of irresistible grace, it counts as 0 according to this detailed analysis. This denial of irresistible grace in the *Articles* was consistent with an even stronger denial in the BFM 1925 published just eight years later, utilizing similar language with the *New Hampshire Confession*: “The blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel. It is the duty of all to accept them by penitent and obedient faith. Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner except his own voluntary refusal to accept Jesus Christ as teacher, Saviour, and Lord” (Article 6, BFM 1925).

Perseverance of the Saints

Perseverance of the saints is the “point” of Dort most strongly affirmed by the *Articles* and other Baptist confessions, although Baptists tend to express this doctrine with phrases such as “preservation of the saints,” “security of the believer,” or “once saved, always saved” rather than “perseverance of the saints.” The Canons of Dort define perseverance of the saints to include at least the following four constituent parts:⁴⁸

- a) God provides the assurance of election
- b) true believers will persevere
- c) believers will falter due to sin but not fall out of salvation
- d) this assurance of salvation should inspire godliness rather than presumption.

(a) - (d). The *Articles* affirm most of these teachings about perseverance of the saints. Regarding God providing the assurance of election, the *Articles* both affirm and qualify this teaching in Articles 4, 5, and 6. Although agreeing with the Canons of Dort that salvation itself is provided by God alone (Monergism), both the Canons and the *Articles of Religious Belief* also affirm the significance of the faith and cooperation of the believer. For example, the *Articles* affirm: “The life begun in regeneration is never lost, but by the grace and power of God, and the faith and cooperation of the believer is constantly brought nearer to that state of perfect holiness which we shall experience finally in heaven” (Article 6). Article 6 on conversion essentially affirms the other three components of perseverance of the saints, namely that believers should persevere, that they sometimes falter in the process of sanctification, and that they should live godly lives in gratitude

to the heart,’ and saying, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ They knew that they must make the choice ... (T)hey accepted it (and) confessed themselves also His believers and followers. So it was with Saul and Tarsus. So it was with the Philippian jailer, and so it must be for all. The rich young ruler faced the same choice. He, too, wanted something he knew he did not have. Jesus loved him. But in spite of all, he turned away from the message and from Christ” (Ibid., 23–24).

⁴⁸See the section on perseverance of the saints in “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” which references particularly the following sections of the Canons of Dort: 5:1–4, 5:6, 5:8–10, 5:12–13, error 5.2.

for God's gracious salvation. So the *Articles* would seem to affirm essentially all of the Dortian description of perseverance of the saints, and thus count as 1.0 in our scale.

In total, then, the *Articles* affirm about 2.375 of the five points of the Synod of Dort (various interpretations of it might range from 2.0 to 2.5), which is not far from where the *New Hampshire Confession* and all three versions of the *Baptist Faith and Message* would be counted. So the *Articles of Religious Belief* may be seen as another step in moderating the stronger Calvinistic doctrines which emerged in the Southern Baptist Convention in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

What Is the Significance of the *Articles of Religious Belief* for Us?

The *Articles of Religious Belief* is a statement approaching one century in age, yet it still relevant to us today. Although New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary uses the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 as its primary confession (because it was approved by our denomination as a whole), the *Articles* remind us of the following four truths.

First, doctrine matters. Having a clear doctrinal confession was a matter given signal importance by the original Trustees and faculty of Baptist Bible Institute. Sound doctrine is the basis of a sound faith and godly living for the church of the living God (Eph 4:14–16; 1 Tim 1:9–10, 4:16, 5:17, 6:1–6; 2 Tim 2:15–19, 3:13–17, 4:3–4; Titus 1:9–10, 2:1; 2 Pet 2:1–2).

Second, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is a confessional seminary. Some seminaries have broad confessional parameters, or no doctrinal parameters at all. But we are tied to a specific set of doctrinal beliefs. Our faculty must sign their affirmation of these confessions as a condition of their employment. We are not a seminary in which anybody can hold any belief. We affirm as individuals and as a confessional community what we understand to be “the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all” (Jude 3–4).

Third, we are conservative evangelicals. Our broader tradition is conservative evangelicalism, going back to the five fundamentals described by Torrey and others. The *Articles of Religious Belief* affirm these five fundamentals, and we continue to do so today. Our faculty members participate in various organizations with other evangelical Christians, for they are like-minded with us on many key beliefs.

Fourth, we are Baptist believers. While we agree with many other conservative evangelicals on most matters of faith, we also affirm some distinctive Baptist beliefs and doctrines. Article 10 of the *Articles of Religious Belief* affirms our loyalty to distinctively Baptist doctrines, and we do so now as they did at the inception of our School of Providence and Prayer.

Conclusion

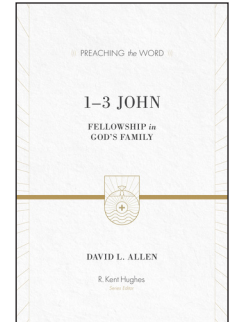
At the beginning of this paper, I cited a key portion of Scripture from Jude:

Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. For certain men, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into promiscuity and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 3–4).

As we affirm the *Articles of Religious Belief* and the *Baptist Faith and Message*, we join in that confessional lineage going back to Jude in sharing in the “common salvation” of which he spoke, and joining him in contending for “the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.” May God bless us as we enter into that effort.

1–3 John: Fellowship in God’s Family. By David L. Allen. Preaching the Word. Edited by R. Kent Hughes. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. 336 pages. Hardcover, \$32.99.

Over the last fourteen years, a number of resources on 1–3 John have been published.¹ A resource that compares to David Allen’s *1–3 John: Fellowship in God’s Family* is the expositional commentary on John’s three letters by John MacArthur (Moody, 2007). Even so, Allen’s commentary is unique when placed on a shelf beside all of these other resources. The reason is that Allen’s book is not exactly a traditional commentary on 1–3 John. Instead, this book is a collection of twenty-two sermons, twenty of which deal with 1 John. Allen suggests calling them “sermontaries” (15). He says they are “more than a sermon but less than commentary” (15). The abundance of exegetical information packed inside these sermons will surprise readers. He treats issues from textual variants to discourse structure to changes in verb tense. Allen’s training in linguistics at the University of Texas at Arlington reveals the benefit that modern linguistics can yield for Bible exposition. It is refreshing that he addresses discourse features that often go overlooked in more word-based commentaries (e.g., verbal aspect). Preparing Bible messages entails more than only doing word studies.



Allen believes in teaching paragraphs of thought, not only words and clauses (13–14). Nevertheless, he still pauses in his sermon series to discuss the meaning of a critical word or a major theological issue. The sermon on 1 John 2:1–2, for example, explains the meaning of *hilasmos* (generally translated “propitiation”) and deals with the “the extent of the atonement, an important and often misunderstood doctrine today” (14, 49–58). When teaching, how much should a pastor or teacher select for their sermon or lesson text? Is one verse too much? Three? Seventeen? This is a struggle common to Bible teachers around the world. They generally err by selecting too large a pericope. Allen disagrees. Given his extensive experience in training the next generation of teachers, what he says should be considered. Allen says preachers often “take a very short text of only two or three verses” (13). These verses are then separated from their paragraph context, which often results in meaning that is “misplaced, distorted, or lost” (13). He says, “[W]hen we preach only on short texts, we face the temptation of filling in the time with extra-Biblical material” (13).

Pastors and other teachers of the Word need to ask a couple of major questions. First, can they teach on a word, phrase, clause, or sentence within a discourse unit and not divorce it from the surrounding context? Second, are they able to adequately explain the meaning of a discourse unit in the time that is allotted to them during a teaching slot? Allen’s caution about selecting too small a text is worth noting. If teachers choose a portion of Scripture (e.g., one verse) that is less

¹These include: Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John* in PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Daniel Akin, *1, 2, 3 John* in NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2001); John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* in Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002); Martin Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004); and Robert W. Yarbrough, *1, 2, and 3 John* in BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

than the size of the discourse unit, they need to explain what is there—nothing more and nothing less. Otherwise, they risk inserting extra-Biblical material. The marks of faithful Bible teaching is not “three points, a poem, and a leg split” (as one of my seminary professors would say). Allen assumes that the problem is selecting too small a passage. However, the problem probably has more to do with the fact that whoever is “filling in the time” did not dedicate adequate study to their passage when preparing to teach. Even so, Allen’s sermons rightly includes extra-biblical material to adequately illustrate the biblical text. For example, he tells the story of a boy named Jeison, who was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine (81). He tells the story of a lexical joust between George Bernard Shaw and Winston Churchill (79). He even tells the story of a young boy who used to walk blocks to attend the church pastored by D. L. Moody (80). Each of these is found in the same sermon and requires only about thirty seconds to recite. Allen provides his readers fine examples of expository preaching and teaching.

Allen does not shy away from controversial or difficult theological topics. And he uses his sermons to motivate his audience to respond to what the Bible says. Theology for the sake of theology is vanity. All the theology in the Word of God, when applied to our minds and hearts, ought to change the way we live. There is no better example of this in the book than the discussion on limited and unlimited atonement in 1 John 2:1–2 (54–55). Allen explains the syntactical options for *peri holou tou kosmou* in 1 John 2:2. He is clear and concise in his explanation in favor of unlimited atonement. Then Allen asks, “What are the implications of these two verses for us today?” (55) and provides “five good reasons” for evangelism and missions. The greatest theology is one that spurs God’s people to share the gospel.

As with every book, there are some things that could have made this book better and more profitable for the reader. First, the use of endnotes instead of footnotes is troublesome. Readers will want to check the notes that are provided. Some of the information that really makes each chapter more than a sermon can only be found by tracking down the note. Unfortunately, readers will have to stop reading, hold their page, turn to the back of the book, find the appropriate chapter, and look for the note. Crossway should have opted for footnotes. With all that said, the content in the back of the book is well worth the short trip to retrieve it. Second, Allen occasionally quotes someone in his text and does not introduce the quote with the author’s name. For example, he includes a quote by Joseph Parker, where only the quote is given (34). If these sermons are a reflection of what he would actually share with his congregation, then his congregation would actually think those words came out of his mouth, not Parker’s. It would be better to introduce a quotation in a clearer fashion. Third, pastors and teachers should consider whether or not it is profitable to discuss the Greek while they are teaching. David Alan Black mentions leaving “the dust and debris of exegesis in the workshop.”² Doing so just might be better.

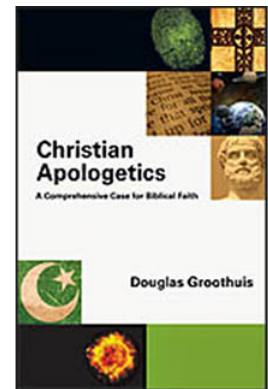
²David Alan Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 26.

Despite the aforementioned minor quibbles, this book is a great read. Anyone desiring to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will benefit from this book. There is some Greek in the book, but no one lacking a basic knowledge of Greek should fear this book. Anyone interested in the letters of John will grow in their understanding with them. This book will not replace the “exegetical” commentaries, but Allen’s “sermontary” deserves a place on your shelf next to those important resources.

– Thomas W. Hudgins, *Capital Seminary and Graduate School, Washington, D.C.*

Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith. By Douglas Groothuis. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011. 752 pages. Hardcover, \$40

For Christians, apologetics—seeking to account for the hope in them (1 Peter 3:15)—has been necessary since the beginning of Christian faith. Claims by the faithful have been ever-accompanied and matched by counter-claims of non-faith and unfaith. Now, Christians have reason to celebrate an up-to-date, comprehensive, and most-accessible apologetics. A labor of love, *Christian Apologetics* is a single composition of 700+ very readable pages, yet containing many books within its covers. Readers will have at their fingertips: (1) an apologetics primer, (2) historical surveys of apologetics literature, (3) a large core of original, modern apologetics reasoning by the author, and (4) thoughtful Christian approaches to many current issues to defenders of Christian faith. Many chapters have been printed elsewhere; Groothuis and his publisher have provided a valuable service to the modern apologist to collect such a breadth of resources in one tome.



This work should receive generous welcome by Christians who deal with modern challenges to orthodox faith by: modern manifestations of evil; radical fundamentalisms; New Atheist smack-downs; dilution of Christian core teachings by cultural influences; willy-nilly internet opinion-mongering; and sheer neglect. Given the modern challenges to faith, Groothuis’ work should be the thoughtful Christian’s first and frequent “go-to” resource for steady, historically-based and delightfully-clear argumentation.

Self-described in the Acknowledgements section as “close to a magnum opus as I will ever have” (9), this book-of-many-books contains numerous notes, two appendices, a glossary, a 51-page chapter-by-chapter bibliography, and indexes of name, subject, and Scripture. Such displays the author’s comprehensive grasp of apologetics’ many tasks. Reading this book, one can feel the passions of a life-long teacher, who believes in performing apologetics with consummate intellectual integrity. Douglas Groothuis serves as Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary. The author of a dozen books designed to help the believer in the modern world, his work is divided into three major sections.

“Part One: Apologetic Preliminaries” concludes with Groothuis’ enjoinder that Christian belief is perhaps the highest-stakes proposition in which a person could ever engage, to be accompanied with all due prudence. To reach this conclusion, he introduces the reader to the apologetics world. He situates the reader into a receptive listening mode by first suggesting that in today’s multiple scenarios of historical tragedy and existential despair, hope remains. This hope is biblically-based. One of the most important chapters for the reader new to apologetics is the chapter “Apologetic Method.” Truth is “there,” available, and worth knowing and defending. His train of thought continues on the twin (and connected) tracks, on one side the Christian worldview, and on the other the competing views offered by secular and sinful views of how the world should work. Truth is capable of dialogue with the “other tracks” of modern thinking, showing them up as incomplete, false, or misguided. A life built upon Christian truth is a life worth the risk of this dialogue because it *is* true. This sets the stage for the next section.

In “Part Two: The Case for Christian Theism,” thirteen chapters treat classic cases for: theism; Intelligent Design; arguments for God from morality, religious experience, and anthropology; the historical case for the incarnation and life of Jesus. Part two concludes with a chapter on the resurrection, the “crowning credential” of Christ’s “unparalleled divine intervention in history” as “the Rock on which the church stands” (563). This is the heart of the book, a section that will survive as the writings of C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, and Josh McDowell have survived, because it is comprehensive and winsome without being complex. Part Two concludes with several chapters on the person, claims and work of Christ, which can be read in several ways: as meditation, as history, or as theology.

“Part Three: Objections to Christian Theism” treats standard objections to Christianity’s truth and uniqueness, a section rarely found in apologetics works. Religious pluralism pulls at the threads of historical Christianity’s claims. Using the famous tale of the six blind men and the elephant, Groothuis refutes its implications that human beings are inherently and ultimately blind and agnostic. The next chapter treats the intersections where Christianity engages Islam. His concluding chapter treats the problem of evil, arguably the most overwhelming obstacle to faith, one that has rendered more believers into doubters and unbelievers. Such chapters as these are missing from many similar endeavors, and are a welcome addition to apologetics.

In chapter 2, Groothuis defined his book’s mission as follows: “Christian apologetics is the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging” (24). In his book, he fulfills this mission persuasively. In the final chapter, the author argues that apologetics is not mere mental Christian calisthenics, but a primary tool for the Christian disciple. Faith needs to be “taken to the streets” for everyday engagement, and ordinary outreach. “The best method for this holy endeavor is to present Christianity as a hypothesis that passes rational testing better than rival worldviews” (647).

“Is the Christian worldview true and rational? Is it worth believing and living out?” (23). Responding to these key questions on every page, Groothuis does not proclaim. Instead, he

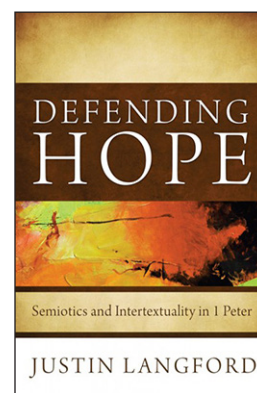
provides steady and mounting evidence—historical, philosophical, and natural—that clears away the many cases and arguments for non-faith and unbelief. He intentionally distances himself from supernatural appeals to faith (which he does not discount) in order to provide a tour-de-force mustering of “apologetic evidence that God is alive and powerful today” (650).

This reviewer strongly recommends this lively book. It is a one-stop resource for understanding the history, necessity, arguments and logic, and rightful place in Christian discipline for “always ... accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15 NRSV).

— Marc S. Mullinax, Mars Hill University, Mars Hills, North Carolina

Defending Hope: Semiotics and Intertextuality in 1 Peter. By Justin Langford. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 142 pages. Softcover, \$13.50.

In recent biblical studies, it is virtually impossible to overstate the place of the New Testament (NT) use of the Old Testament (OT), or more broadly, the focus on intertextuality throughout Scripture. The debates are lively and important, and unresolved matters still beckon scholarly attention. Justin Langford has attempted to address a foundational matter, namely methodology, within this area of study, a bold undertaking for a young scholar.



The present work is a published version of Langford's doctoral dissertation, carried on at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Langford, currently Assistant Professor of NT at Louisiana College, proposes a “new approach to biblical intertextuality as a possible resolution to the methodological problem” (xiii). The new approach is semiotics, an approach to textuality “founded upon ... the universe of discourse and the encyclopedia,” respectively the world of the text and the world outside of the text (26–27). These are the two spheres which “allow signs to function,” or communication to take place. The ultimate objective of the work is to do a “comprehensive examination of the Isaianic references in 1 Peter” through a semiotic methodology (25), thus demonstrating a method for biblical intertextual studies around which Langford hopes a scholarly consensus will emerge.

After introducing the issues and describing the scope of the book, chapter 1 provides a brief history of semiotics (“a formal theory of signs and signifying practices,” [xvii]), and overviews of intertextuality, biblical studies and semiotics, and 1 Peter and intertextuality. Stefan Alkier is the major influence in Langford's theory of textuality, involving three facets of study: intratextuality, intertextuality, and extratextuality (chapter 2). This brings Langford to the point where he can identify the three steps in the method that governs his work. Step one is to establish a theory of textuality based on semiotics. Step two requires an intratextual investigation of 1 Peter, and step three involves an intertextual investigation of the use of Isaiah in 1 Peter. All of this rests upon Charles Peirce's threefold approach to semiotics involving sign, object, and interpretant.

Chapter 3 is a brief study of the textual universe of 1 Peter. Langford accepts the literary unity of 1 Peter as a typical first-century epistle. His syntactical analysis concludes with a somewhat typical outline of the letter. This is followed by a semantic analysis showing, among other things, that the letter is bracketed “by the controlling image of *hope in suffering*” (75). The third element of this chapter is pragmatics, which results in seeing a substructural narrative of God’s story of salvation and the story of the audience as one of suffering. The intertwining of these two narratives “culminates in a message of hope for his audience” (81). Chapter 4 (the encyclopedia of 1 Peter) is a very brief study of the historical and social context of 1 Peter, as well as a slight survey of textual traditions of the OT and citation practices in play at the time.

All of the above sets the stage to examine the use of Isaiah in 1 Peter (chapter 5). Langford detects seven quotations, eight allusions, and one echo. A close examination of these intertextual correspondences reveals that all but one (the allusion to Isa 52:3 in 1 Pet 1:18) is functioning as a “sign of hope in the midst of suffering,” thus reinforcing the argument that Peter is “composing a message of hope” (124).

Langford has provided a reasonable overview of every subject he touched upon, at least as understood in narrow terms. This study certainly belongs in the conversation about Peter’s use of the OT, and the overall message of 1 Peter. Langford is to be commended for these contributions. However, since the purpose of the study is primarily concerned with method, and merely uses Isaiah in 1 Peter as a test case, a few comments along these lines are in order.

One of the certainties learned through modern studies is that a right reading is not dependent on a correct method. Interpretation is far more perspectival than methodological. Thankfully, Langford wants to retain the voice of Peter in reading his letter, as opposed to the “death” of the author as we often see in modern critical studies. Does Peter’s voice add anything about methodology? Would the encyclopedia of 1 Peter find other voices on this issue? While this was not within the scope of Langford’s study, the answer to these questions certainly has significant relevance.

Second, the method is based on an untenable separation between the textual universe of a text and its encyclopedia, or historical and social context. Langford, following Alkier, speaks of “shielding” the study of the textual universe from the encyclopedia, or historical context. That is, quite frankly, impossible. Even the use of a lexicon for the semantic survey brings in the encyclopedia. I can imagine Langford acknowledging this while suggesting there is still a level of distinction which must be maintained. Undoubtedly so, but the dialectical nature of any study or method is unclear, at best, in this work.

Third, there is a tension present within the work over method versus theory. One encounters this in the introduction when Langford writes, “Semiotics is not a method” In the very next paragraph he refers to the “philosophical background of the semiotic method ...” and again that the “semiotic method” is based primarily on the work of Peirce and Eco (xvii). I do not find that he clarifies this tension anywhere within the work.

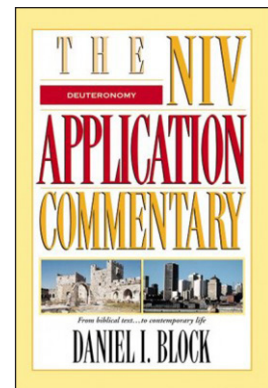
Fourth, there are various assumptions within the work which one wishes were not merely assumed. Most of them probably do not change the nature of the conclusions. However, some may. Two examples will have to suffice, one semantic and one historical. First, Langford assumes that *eis* in 1:2 should be understood as causal. This is by no means a given. If one takes it as telic or reference, this lessens the underpinning on reason for hope, places more emphasis on ethical call, and changes the tenor of the textual universe. Second, in the discussion on the historical and social context of 1 Peter, Langford assumes a somewhat sharp distinction between Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. This is highly suspect in light of Hengel's seminal work *Judaism and Hellenism*.¹

Lastly, there seems little within this study which is truly new. The method proposed is implicit within many other studies, including intertextual studies. Semiotics is more of a descriptive discipline, not prescriptive. It is difficult, to say the least, to turn a descriptive discipline into a prescriptive methodology. I doubt very seriously that Langford's approach will result in even minimal consensus, much less broad consensus. The trend at present is moving away from what we academics might want to call scientific methodologies, and toward paying closer attention to the biblical authors and the early church and how they read and use the signs of their respective texts. That, I assure you, was primarily perspectival, perhaps better described as confessional, not methodological.

– B. Paul Wolfe, *The Cambridge School of Dallas, Dallas, Texas*

Deuteronomy. The NIV Application Commentary. By Daniel I. Block. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 880 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.

Daniel I. Block is Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Many will be familiar with his work in Ezekiel, Judges, and Ruth. In addition to the current commentary under review, Block has published two well-received monographs that address a variety of issues related to the book of Deuteronomy, *The Gospel According to Moses* (Cascade, 2012) and *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord!* (Cascade, 2011).



For Block, the purpose of the commentary is to provide readers with an understandable, user-friendly interpretation, an integration of theological maxims in Deuteronomy with the rest of Scripture, and preliminary points of application (15). Due to the breadth of the commentary, this review will be divided into three sections: key elements related to Block's approach to the book; a brief summation of intriguing interpretations and arguments; and critical remarks related to the work.

Several key elements will define Block's contribution to the evangelical study of Deuteronomy. First, he likens the book to "a theological manifesto" similar to the Gospel of John and the theologically-rich letter to the Romans (25). Second, Block credits the speeches in the book to

¹Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974; second ed., 2004).

Moses; however, he maintains the final form of the book was produced later (30–31).¹ Third, like other evangelical scholars, he identifies the similarities between Deuteronomy and the second millennium Hittite suzerainty treaties (36).² Last, the most striking element is the repeated description of Moses as a “pastor” (37).

In a commentary as thorough as Block’s, one will find liberties taken with regard to interpretation and application. The comments below are not intended to excoriate specific interpretations. I have selected three key texts from Deuteronomy where Block’s interpretation might be striking for students and clergy. First, Block prefers the Lutheran and Roman Catholic numbering of the Ten Commandments—the first two commandments are grouped and combined into one and the command of “Do not covet” is divided into two (160). Second, the most famous verse in Deuteronomy, the *Shema* (Deut 6:5), is syntactically ambiguous in Hebrew. As a result, various scholarly translations and interpretations have appeared over the decades. Of particular interest is Block’s unique translation: “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone” (182).³ Lastly, Block denies the literary and theological relationship (i.e., anachronistic dependency) of the Josianic reforms (2 Kings 22–23) on the Deuteronomistic concept of centralization (310–12). For Old Testament scholars, the above examples are not avant-garde, but for non-specialists his interpretations might come as a surprise.

Overall, Block has provided the church with an academic, yet applicable, commentary to the most important book in the Old Testament. The textual and theological insights provided by Block will certainly add a credible voice to the fleeting message of Deuteronomy within the church.⁴ Even with the literary and theological sensitivities in the commentary, readers can be left wanting more interaction or thoroughness in certain areas. For example, I am not convinced that Deuteronomy represents a Hittite suzerainty treaty. This theory, though cloaked in identifying parallels, is actually driven by the desire to support and defend Mosaic authorship.⁵

¹Block provides a brief discussion on Mosaic authorship and post-Mosaic materials (30–31). Due to the nature of the commentary, space is not provided for Block to develop further this important aspect of Deuteronomy. The issue of authorship, particularly of Deuteronomy, is a growing area within evangelical studies. For a more comprehensive and erudite treatment of Mosaic authorship and Mosaic origin, see James Robson, “Approaching Deuteronomy,” in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 20, 57–59.

²Block exclaims, “No other book in the Old Testament presents as thorough a treatment of covenant relationship as Deuteronomy” (39). For other commentaries which emphasize a similar approach to Deuteronomy, see Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) and Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

³Block provides a more exhaustive defense for this translation in “How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4–5,” in *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 73–97. Most modern English translations take a different approach to the *Shema*: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (ESV, NASB, NIV, and NKJV).

⁴Along these lines, Block notes, “[F]ew books in the Old or New Testament proclaim such a relevant word of grace and gospel to the church today” (35).

⁵For example, Kenneth Kitchen is one of the most outspoken advocates of the relationship between

Such an approach sadly overshadows other viable, if not more convincing, approaches to the book, particularly Deuteronomy as polity or religious constitution and Deuteronomy as Exposition of the Decalogue.⁶ Another weakness to the commentary is Block's description of Moses as "preacher." This designation, made with good intentions, is misguided and misleading for modern readers. The office of pastor/preacher today should not be equated with role of Moses in ancient Israel. With a growing interest in reconciling the holy war/genocide of the Old Testament with the grace and mercy in the New Testament, readers will not be satisfied with Block's arguments and conclusions (481–86), especially since more comprehensive treatments can be found elsewhere.⁷ Lastly, several typographical and spelling errors are found throughout the book. The above critical remarks should not overshadow the value of the commentary. Block has provided scholars, clergy, and laity with a theologically sensitive commentary that effectively bridges the gap from antiquity to modernity. His preliminary points of application will certainly benefit all readers for years to come.

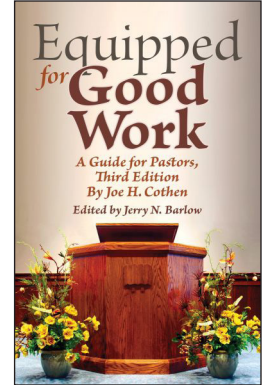
—Jeffrey G. Audirsch, Shorter University, Rome, Georgia

Deuteronomy and Hittite suzerainty treaties: "Sinai and its two renewals—especially the version in Deuteronomy—belong squarely within phase V, within 1400–1200, *and at no other date*. The impartial and very extensive evidence (thirty Hittite-inspired documents and versions!) sets this matter beyond any further dispute. It is *not* my creation, it is inherent in the mass of original documents *themselves*, and so cannot be gainsaid, if the brute facts are to be respected." See Kenneth Kitchen, *On The Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 287–88 (emphasis his). See also Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: Covenantal Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 21, 28–29.

⁶Several scholars have built upon Josephus's designation of Deuteronomy as *politeia* or a national "constitution" (*Ant.* 4.176–331). See Samuel Dean McBride Jr., "Polity of the Covenant People: The Book of Deuteronomy," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 229–44; Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 202–4, 269; Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 21–22; and Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 4–8. Deuteronomy as Exposition of the Decalogue has also garnished much scholarly writ. See Stephen Kaufman, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," *Maarav* 1 (1979): 105–10; Yehoshua Amir, "The Decalogue according to Philo," in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, edited by Ben-Zion Segal and Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 121–60; Georg Braulik, "The Sequence of the Laws in Deuteronomy 12–26 and in the Decalogue," in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, edited by Duane L. Christensen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 319–21; Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 2–7; John H. Walton, "Deuteronomy: An Exposition of the Spirit of the Law," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987): 213–25; and idem, "The Decalogue Structure of the Deuteronomic Law" in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 93–117.

⁷See Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). Christian Hofreiter has provided a more concise argument that combines biblical theology, historical theology, and philosophy. See his "Genocide in Deuteronomy and Christian Interpretation," in *Interpreting Deuteronomy*, ed. Firth and Johnston, 240–62.

Equipped for Good Work: A Guide for Pastors. By Joe H. Cothen. 3d ed. Revised and edited by Jerry N. Barlow. Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 2012. 336 pages. Hardcover, \$23.



Before his retirement, Joe Cothen was a pastor, professor, and administrator who demonstrated passion for each calling in his life, whether in the local church or at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Jerry N. Barlow also has been a pastor, and continues his roles as Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Work and Dean of Graduate Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, shaping educators, pastors, and laity, in order to advance the kingdom of God.

Equipped for Good Work presents a two-fold purpose in the preface. The first purpose of this work is “to provide insight, encouragement, and practical suggestions for those who are beginning their ministries and for those who continue in spite of the problems encountered” (xv). The second purpose is “to help the pastor find his footing and direction in a path that leads to purposeful, constructive ministry” (xvi).

The value of this resource is that the book has been shaping a generation of seminarians in pastoral ministry. In the first revised edition, Barlow updated the bibliography to include recent publications in the area of pastoral ministry. He also updated the appendix that listed state registration requirements of weddings. Further, he provided information regarding state laws about registering for the purpose of performing weddings.¹

The third edition updates every chapter in the book. In addition to these revisions, Barlow added an appendix on licensing, ordination, and commissioning, underscoring the distinction between these aspects of pastoral ministry in relationship to the local church. In addition, he added an appendix on using technology in pastoral work. These appendixes were helpful and informative, and enhanced its relevance for contemporary pastoral ministry. The chapter on communication may be one of the most thought-provoking chapters in the book. It reflects the background of Cothen and Barlow in the theory of communication. The presence of the topic of communication reminds pastors of the importance of this discipline for contemporary pastoral ministry.

The sections on preaching were valuable. Attention was given to the value of pastoral preaching and planning for the preaching event. Many books on pastoral ministry fail to address the topic of pastoral preaching. Instead, other authors seek to present alternative ways to handle various issues within pastoral ministry. However, pastoral preaching takes a special place in a pulpit ministry as the preaching event is used to enhance relationships, reach the lost, edify the church, and build an ethos for the church in the community.

¹Phone conversation with Jerry N. Barlow, March 12, 2014.

The section on planned preaching will help the pastor to focus on long-term as well as short-term aspects to the preaching event. This addition will offer the busy pastor a means to find balance and retain perspective both in the home and in the ministry context. However, a slight imbalance in these two areas existed with only one section in chapter six being devoted to the long-range preparation for preaching. This is a minor consideration when considering the wealth of material provided on the details of planning that takes into account the church calendar, revivals, and special emphases.

Also, the author presents a robust chapter on the importance of pastoral evangelism, which was a welcomed feature. However, a section on discipleship was not included. While this omission does not discredit the value of this resource, the third edition could have been strengthened, especially since many churches in the Southern Baptist Convention have diminished their focus on discipleship programs.

The book focuses heavily on the importance of relationships. This observation emerges as a strength because of a pastor's ministry in weddings, bereavements, with church staff, deacons, and public relations. In each of these chapters, Barlow updates valuable material and offers both the young and the experienced pastor a helpful resource. A section concerning pastoral counseling would be a welcome addition to a future revision. Such an addition would be a welcomed aid because pastors seek direction on this important ministry opportunity, especially in the larger church context.

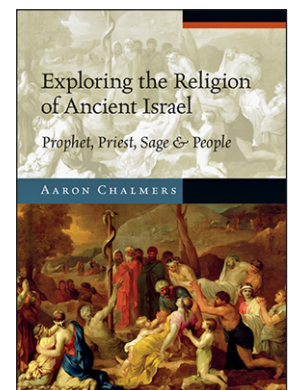
The practical nature of this work makes it a helpful resource for any student or pastor. From helping the pastor deal with budget planning to church ordinances and policies and procedures in the local church, Cothen and Barlow have provided a wealth of information that will enable the pastor to have an effective ministry. Therefore, this reviewer highly recommends this book to pastors of all ages and levels of experience who serve in a local ministry context.

– Philip Caples, Louisiana College, Pineville, Louisiana

Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel: Prophet, Priest, Sage, and People. By Aaron Chalmers. In *Exploring Topics in Christianity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012. 159 pages. Hardcover, \$30.

Aaron Chalmers is the head of the School of Ministry, Theology, and Culture at Tabor Adelaide in Adelaide, Australia. His primary focus is within the fields of Old Testament studies and hermeneutics. In addition to the current book under review, Chalmers has published numerous articles in scholarly journals.

Chalmers' love for history and culture is what led him to the study of ancient Israelite religion. Within this monograph, he seeks to bring



ancient Israelite social structures to life for modern day lay persons, students, and ministers. The focus of this book is upon ancient Israel's religious leaders (priests, prophets, sages, and kings) and on the religious experience of the common people of Israel. Within the first part of the book, Chalmers sets out to answer the questions of how Israel's religious leaders were instituted, where they could be found, and the nature of their roles. The second part of the book shifts focus to the common people of ancient Israel as it answers the questions of who, when, and where the majority of Israelites worshipped. Chalmers is explicitly clear that his purpose is to provide an introduction to the topic of ancient Israelite religion that is clear and accessible to lay readers rather than a full-scale study of the topic. Along the way, he offers in-depth blurbs on different subjects (e.g., why there were no female priests or the Minimalist-Maximalist debate) and references major scholars (e.g., Albrecht Alt, Gerhard von Rad, or Robert Wilson) and their works on the topic that may be explored for deeper study.

One of the main debates within the study of Israelite religion is over sources. There is great contention over which sources should or should not be used, and the value assigned to the different sources that are available to scholars today. Chalmers is clear from the beginning of his study that the biblical text is a valuable and reliable source for the study of Israelite religion (6). He employs the biblical texts as the primary source in his reconstruction of Israelite religious offices and practices. Chalmers also relies upon textual and non-textual archaeological remains in his reconstructive work. He assigns high value to the archaeological sources available to biblical scholars, primarily because of their varied, extensive, and (in many cases) more objective witness to ancient Israelite culture (11). Chalmers' only fault in his use of sources is his overall lack of social-anthropological material, despite the main goal of his study being the reconstruction of the social-religious atmosphere of Israel's religious leaders and common people. He explains within an endnote that he does not often employ social-anthropological research because of the gap between modern and ancient societies (4), but many scholars have made compelling arguments that these social-anthropological observations can be used to create models that are useful across the boundaries of time.¹

After his section on sources, Chalmers moves into the section of his study that is concerned with the location and purpose of ancient Israel's religious leaders. This section is made up of four chapters that explore the social location of Israel's priests, prophets, sages, and kings. Chalmers begins each chapter with an assessment of the skewed modern picture of these figures before moving on to provide a broad overview of how these religious figures actually functioned within Israel. Chalmers tackles the tough issue of seemingly conflicting biblical answers to who could become such religious officials or where such officials could serve by explaining to the lay reader that these different answers often reflect different time periods and historical situations within Israel's history. Finally, Chalmers provides a robust picture (when compared to the often-

¹For example, Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Norman K. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* (London: SCM-Canterbury Press, 1980); Thomas W. Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); and Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

anemic, modern understanding) of how these religious figures functioned within ancient Israel. For example, he demonstrates that the priests were not just guards of a static legal system or officiators of the sacrificial system; rather, they functioned as intermediaries between the people and the deity through divination, instruction, sacrificial intercession, and the pronouncement of blessings (26–31).

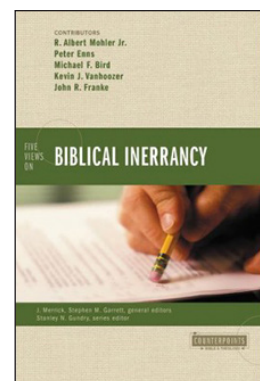
Chalmers ends his study with a section on the religious location and praxis of the common people of ancient Israel. This section relies far more on recent archaeological evidence, since the biblical text is focused primarily upon large-scale, national concerns, rather than the day-to-day practices of the common people (though a picture of these daily religious practices can be gleaned from the prophetic critiques, 98–99). This chapter is full of current archaeological research, and Chalmers covers issues such as the common worship of deities other than Yahweh (102–12),² the common use of local sanctuaries/high places and homes for cultic activity (114–20), and the regular times of Israelite worship (120–31). Chalmers admits that much of this material causes discomfort for many evangelicals, but he argues that these realities portrayed by the archaeological evidence actually corroborate the biblical text, which is often concerned with the common people's failure to correctly worship Yahweh (132–33).

In sum, Chalmers has provided a succinct and serious introduction to the study of ancient Israelite religion. His survey of Israelite religion and religious figures, on both a national and local level, is an excellent distillation of the current, major works within this field. The book is accessible and deep, for throughout its pages Chalmers has provided miniature excursions into some of the more important/debated topics within the field of Israelite religion and ancient Near Eastern studies. He provides simple, yet profound, insights into common ancient Near Eastern practices and unique archaeological discoveries. The monograph is a delightful and useful read for both lay-persons and scholars alike.

– Richard Anthony Purcell, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut

Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy. Edited by J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 328 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.

Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy, another excellent volume in Zondervan's ever-growing Counterpoints series, was edited by James Merrick, Assistant Professor of Theology at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona, and Stephen Garrett, Associate Professor of Public Theology and Philosophy of Religion at the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences in Vilnius, Lithuania. This volume traces the topic of biblical inerrancy in three directions: 1) perspectives on inerrancy and the past, 2) inerrancy in international perspective, and 3) perspectives on renewing and recasting inerrancy for today. Like other volumes in the Counterpoint



²Chalmers includes the Ugaritic textual evidence concerning El and Baal as well as the material evidence found in Israel, such as votive figurines and (probably) fertility figurines.

series, a particular author shares their view and then the other authors respond to that author.

Without doubt, inerrancy is a complex and complicated subject for evangelical Christianity. At the most basic level, Merrick and Garrett's purpose in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* is simply to move the inerrancy conversation forward, "to encourage conversations on the doctrinal rationale of inerrancy and its Scriptural warrant rather than on why it may or may not be detrimental to evangelicalism" (10). Each of the authors were asked to do three specific tasks. First, they were to discuss inerrancy in light of four topics: 1) God and his relationship to humanity, 2) the doctrine of inspiration, 3) the nature of Scripture, and 4) the nature of truth. The contributors were then asked to develop their position on these topics in relation to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI). Finally, they were asked to discuss three biblical case studies related to the biblical inerrancy discussion.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, represents the classic doctrine of biblical inerrancy. At the onset, Mohler holds nothing back. In understanding biblical inerrancy, he writes, "In affirming that the Bible, as a whole and in its parts, contains nothing but God-breathed truth, evangelicals have simply affirmed what the church universal had affirmed for well over a millennium—*when the Bible speaks, God speaks*" (29, emphasis his). Mohler asserts that without full biblical inerrancy, evangelicalism will fade, decline, and ultimately die. If the Scriptures are the very words of God, then they cannot lie because God Himself cannot lie. In looking at the test cases, Mohler affirms that the Bible must be held up as inerrant in the face of any evidence of discrepancy.

The second scholar to present his view regarding biblical inerrancy is Peter Enns. Known for his high-profile termination from Westminster Theological Seminary, Enns now teaches at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. In contrast to Mohler, Enns is on the other side of the inerrancy spectrum. Enns' perspective is that "when all is said and done, I do not think inerrancy can capture the Bible's varied character and complex dynamics" (83). In more descriptive words, he writes, "On a deeper and ultimately more important level, inerrancy sells God short" (84). Best outlined in *Inspiration and Incarnation*, Enns considers Scripture to be like Christ, both human and divine, where the text reflects more of the world in which it was written. Mohler encourages evangelicals to consider, "With inerrancy off the table, what kind of truth does the Bible convey in Enns's view?" (121).

Michael Bird is the lone representative for inerrancy from an international perspective. Bird, the Lecturer in Theology at Ridley Melbourne Ministry and Mission College in Victoria, Australia, affirms that inerrancy is a significant issue in American evangelicalism, but "it is not and should not be a universally prescriptive article of faith for the global evangelical church" (145). At the heart of his article, Bird does not refute inerrancy. Rather, his article seems to demonstrate that he holds to it but does not consider it as important as American evangelicals. Bird argues that the Bible claims veracity, or divine truthfulness, rather than inerrancy. Thus, he prefers to only use the term infallibility in describing the Bible's truthfulness.

Kevin Vanhoozer is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Like Bird, he seems to affirm inerrancy but desires to provide a more nuanced definition of the term. Vanhoozer rightly asks, “The critical question at present is whether inerrancy is a divisive distraction or an essential feature, perhaps even the rallying cry, of evangelical biblicism” (201). In defining inerrancy, he attaches himself closely to Augustine, coming to define inerrancy this way: “(T)he authors speak the truth in all things they affirm (when they make affirmations), and will eventually be seen to have spoken truly (when right readers read rightly)” (213–14). At the heart of his definition, Vanhoozer is arguing for right interpretation of the Bible, which includes a literal sense, a literary sensibility, and Spirit-given literacy (235).

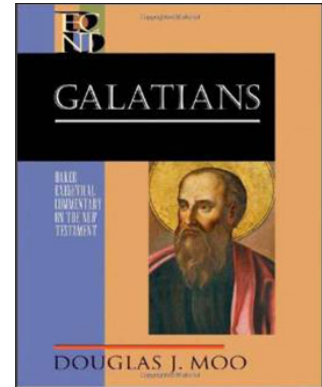
The book concludes with John Franke, a postconservative or progressive evangelical theologian. Serving as Professor of Missional Theology at Yellowstone Theological Institute, in Bozeman, Montana, Franke desires inerrancy to have a “dynamic direction more in keeping with the being and character of God and embracing its contextual plurality as an essential part of its witness” (260). Franke’s perspective is Spirit-focused in that “the Spirit’s speaking comes through the text not in isolation but rather in the context of specific historical-cultural situations and as a part of an extended interpretive tradition” (272). Inerrancy, then, emphasizes the plurality of Scripture—that the Bible can and should speak to multiple perspectives and contexts.

Zondervan’s Counterpoint series is always beneficial to both the pastor and scholar. No better resource exists than one in which a person can read multiple viewpoints on a subject as well as dissenting views. The strength of *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* is that it provides perspectives on both extremes of the spectrum while at the same time providing nuanced perspectives between those extremes. Obviously, having the opportunity to read responses from authors who disagree with one another is also insightful. This book is also helpful in that it provides the reader with various views as well as an opportunity for the reader to see how the views stand when applied to Scripture. Some might find the views of Bird and Vanhoozer as well as Enns and Franke to be too similar, but this illustrates the nuanced views regarding inerrancy. *Five Views on Inerrancy* succeeds in clearly showing that continued dialogue on inerrancy will be both necessary and complex.

—Dustin Turner, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Vintage Church, New Orleans, Louisiana

Galatians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. By Douglas J. Moo. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 469 pages. Hardcover, \$44.99.

Douglas J. Moo is Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, where he has served on faculty since 2000. He taught previously at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for more than twenty years. Moo received his Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1980. His special focus within the New Testament canon has been the Pauline and General Epistles. He has authored commentaries on Romans, James, 2 Peter, and Jude. He has also co-authored a few books and written numerous articles.



The chief concern of the editors of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament is to provide commentaries that are scholarly yet readable, exegetically detailed yet focus on the whole, and give attention to critical problems with theological awareness. Moo has met these goals in the present commentary. Due to the large number of commentaries on Galatians and their repetition, Moo has chosen to cite regularly nine commentaries on Galatians (Lightfoot, Burton, Betz, Bruce, Mussner, Longenecker, Dunn, Martyn, and Boer) while referring to others when exegetically necessary. Also, Moo provides his own translation of the Greek text while illustrating the exegetical options found in common English translations.

Among the multiple topics in his introduction, Moo includes a thorough examination of the enigmatic issues of the letter's date and destination. He presents as clear a scenario as possible concerning the problem of the Galatian agitators and Paul's epic response. The agitators were pressuring Galatian Christians to undergo circumcision and submit to the law of Moses as a means of completing their Christian experience. Paul's response to this heresy was grounded in his firm understanding of salvation history with the crucified and resurrected Christ as both its apocalyptic core and turning point.

Moo attempts to balance the broad, traditional interpretation of Galatians that was galvanized by the Reformers with the more narrow and historically-focused interpretation stressed by New Perspective advocates. Moo's attempt is well appreciated, but throughout the commentary he appears to defend the broader interpretation as he often makes cursory references to the interpretations of the Reformers. This apparent defense of the Reformed tradition is based on Moo's premise that underlying Paul's argument is his fundamental belief that humanity is innately unable to perfectly fulfill God's law and that God's grace demonstrated in the Christ-event is the only remedy to humanity's shortfall. According to Moo, the fundamental question Galatians attempts to answer is not "What is wrong with Judaism?" but "What is wrong with humanity that Judaism cannot remedy?"

Moo highlights important theological themes found in Galatians, such as salvation history

and the Apocalyptic, the gospel, Christ, the Spirit, the Law, the Christian life, the faith of Christ, and justification/righteousness. Moo spends much ink discussing these last two topics. Ironically, Moo is not in favor of the “faith of Christ” interpretation as he has so titled it. Instead, he supports the traditional understanding that Paul is referring to “faith in Christ” in passages such as 2:15–16 and 3:22. Moo also advocates forensic justification as one of the primary benefits of those who are in union with Christ. Because of humanity’s innate inability to fulfill the law of God, faith is the only means by which a person may receive this benefit. In Galatians, this benefit is presumed on the part of Paul’s hearers. Paul’s emphasis throughout the letter is therefore on maintaining this righteous status, especially in view of the believer’s ultimate justification and final vindication.

As expected with Moo, his commentary on the text itself is top quality. He provides a summary of each section, followed by his personal translation and a detailed section on exegesis and exposition. His scholarly capabilities are clearly evident in his discussion of the Greek text and interaction with fellow scholars. While the exegesis section is absolutely superb, Moo’s exposition is wanting. He makes clear what Paul meant to his original audience but he often lacks explicit connection with the reader of today. You will not find contemporary examples and illustrations, for example, with reference to specific texts.

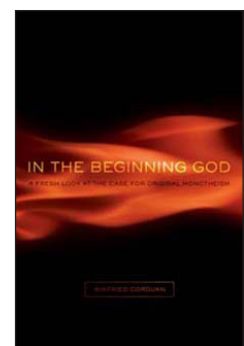
Those with knowledge of New Testament textual criticism will appreciate Moo’s “additional notes,” which often highlight exegetically significant differences found in the textual tradition of Galatians. Moo not only mentions the differences found in the manuscript tradition, he also discusses them at length and provides rationale for his preferences.

Moo’s commentary on Galatians is to be commended. Though it often seems like he is defending the traditional/universal interpretation of Galatians, his masterful handling of the Greek text has elucidated, as well as any previous commentator, what Paul said to the first-century Galatian churches. This commentary is one that seriously takes into account scholarly work on both Paul and Galatians. It is one that every serious student of Galatians should have, and it is one that I myself will use in personal study and teaching.

– David Champagne, Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi

In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism.
By Winfried Corduan. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013. 400 pages.
Softcover, \$19.99.

Winfried Corduan is professor emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. The dominant evolutionary theories concerning the origin of religion go something like this: early “primitive” humans held to animistic beliefs. Animism is the belief that everything in nature—animals, trees, creeks, mountains, literally everything—possesses a soul or spirit. These basic beliefs evolved into fetishes—the idea that certain items and places were focal points of spiritual power. These fetishes led to idolatry. Such idolatrous



worship became the gateway to polytheism—the belief that many of these spirits were deities. Polytheism morphed into henotheism—the belief that one particular deity ruled supremely over all other gods. Eventually henotheism evolved into monotheism. Thus anthropologists understand monotheism to have evolved from lower forms of religions, and that all religions are simply more or less complicated versions of animism. Corduan argues that this paradigm is wrong—egregiously, spectacularly wrong. What is worse, he contends, anthropologists hold to the evolutionary paradigm knowing that the historical evidence is against it.

Corduan presents a fascinating narrative explaining how anthropologists and ethnologists explored the question as to how religion originated. Wilhelm Schmidt and (to a lesser extent) Andrew Lang are the protagonists of this story. Schmidt, by exhaustive and meticulous research, made the case that early humanity was monotheistic. E. B. Tylor figures as the primary antagonist. He argued for an evolutionary, developmental theory to the origin of religion. Corduan argues that the historical evidence indicates that early humanity held to monotheism, but this is not the only point he makes. Corduan contends that early leading scholars of the history of religions ignored or suppressed this evidence—mainly because of ideological bias. The better part of the book is devoted to demonstrating this second point. Corduan makes little attempt to hide his disdain for those who dismissed Schmidt's work simply because his results did not conform to the reigning evolutionary consensus.

Many nineteenth-century anthropologists and ethnologists were motivated by hostility to Christianity, an attitude they openly owned. They also viewed “primitive” people groups with a contempt that colored their assessment of these tribes or perhaps even blinded them to the true level of sophistication they exhibited concerning religion and morality. Early anthropological Darwinists were more dogmatic than scientific. “Primitive” groups were considered intellectually inferior, thus capable of holding only to childish beliefs in magic. The primary underlying dogma was that early humans were not capable of monotheism.

By contrast, Schmidt and Lang demonstrated that the preliterate tribes exhibited a moral awareness for which evolutionary theory could not account. Working with the premise that the most “primitive” people groups resemble the earliest culture of the original human beings, they examined the beliefs of the Australian Aborigines, native-American tribes, early African tribes, and a host of others (Schmidt's work makes up twelve volumes). Their findings revealed three consistent qualities: monotheism, morality, and monogamy. However, the presuppositions and methodologies of the evolutionary anthropologists seemed to have blinded them to the evidence. Corduan concludes, “There is no question in my mind that one of the obvious reasons for the rejection of Schmidt is that what he found at the origin of human culture (as close as one can come to it) was marital faithfulness in monogamy, straightforward honesty, altruistic sharing while respecting another person's property, and a general aversion to shedding human blood unnecessarily” (228). Corduan acknowledges the limitations of Schmidt's research, but he also demonstrates that Schmidt's conclusions have stood the test of time.

One important question remained. If there was a universal original monotheism, then what happened? By the time of enscripured religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and the mythologies of the ancient Greeks and Romans—polytheism was the norm. Lang and Schmidt answered with the theory of degeneration. Monotheism deteriorated into polytheism and animism. The story of human religion is not one of evolution but erosion.

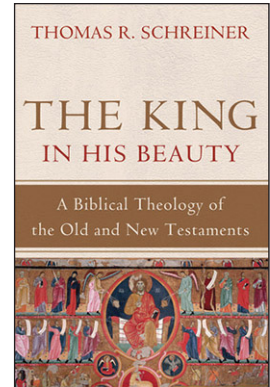
This is a surprising book. The topic is not what one might expect from the title (*In the Beginning God*) and the approach is not what one might expect from the subtitle (*A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism*). The title could make one think this is a book about the doctrine of creation, but it is actually a book about the history of religions. The subtitle helps to correct this possible misunderstanding, but it gives the impression that the book primarily is a theological or an apologetic work. Rather, it primarily is a historical account of the fierce debates within the field of anthropology during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries about the origin of religion. The narrative makes clear why Corduan has chosen such an approach and most readers will agree that he made the right choice. One simply cannot understand how anthropology could be in its present dismal state without a working knowledge of the developments of the last 150 years. The academic world today suppresses the evidences of an original monotheism by declaring the subject off limits—beyond the reach of scientific inquiry. When the subject is broached (almost always by a Christian apologist) it is “shouted down by scholarly publications” (338).

Since much of the book is a narrative of how the study of the origin of religion developed in anthropology, Corduan devotes a great deal of space to the debates and disagreements that broke out among the major figures. Corduan gives a fairly thorough assessment and critique of the arguments made by them. The upside to Corduan’s approach is that the reader gets a good grasp of how naturalistic presuppositions and anti-supernaturalistic biases profoundly affected the methodologies and conclusions of the leading anthropologists. The downside is that relatively little space is given to the historical and empirical evidence itself, a shortcoming that Corduan acknowledges (301). The first nine chapters give the narrative of the debate surrounding the origin of religions. The last two make the case for original monotheism. Professors who teach courses in missiology, anthropology, apologetics, or theology of religions will find *In the Beginning God* an essential textbook.

— Ken Keathley, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments. By Thomas R. Schreiner. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. 714 pages. \$44.99.

It is uncommon to pick up and read a scholarly book that both delights and instructs. Thomas Schreiner's *The King in His Beauty* is just such a text. Schreiner is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In this book, he tears down the dividing wall between the Old and New Testaments to bring out one majestic theme from the canon, carefully sifting through every chapter of Scripture to show how the theme of the kingdom of God is woven through the texts to form a coherent, thematically-consistent storyline.



To find the kingdom of God in every book in the canon, Schreiner uses a fairly broad definition of the term. Schreiner presents the idea of the kingdom of God as indicating the rule of God; God's rule is revealed through the abstract notion of God as king, but also through His relationship with humans and all of the created order. Thus, Schreiner is not left to look for a particular set of words or phrases in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture to find his chosen theme. For example, he is able to find God's sovereign reign in the pages of Proverbs where reverent fear of a kingly God is the beginning of wisdom.

Thankfully, Schreiner is not dogmatic about either his theme or his approach to the text. With welcome scholarly humility, Schreiner notes that "there are a number of different ways to put together the story line and theology of the Scripture that are legitimate" (xii). In other words, Schreiner presents the kingdom of God as a central theme, but not the *only* significant theme in Scripture. Also, when approaching the diverse texts within the canon, Schreiner offers a necessary variety of approaches. He notes, "Some books are examined chronologically, others thematically, and in the Psalms the canonical ordering of the books is explored" (xvi). Again, Schreiner offers his opinion that the approach he takes is fruitful, but not the *only* fruitful way to examine Scripture. In these two statements, Schreiner acknowledges that a varied approach to a multifaceted collection of texts is necessary. The book is better for it having been said.

In the pages of *The King in His Beauty*, the author guides his readers through the story of the kingdom of God, explaining how the theme unfolds through the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. Although the volume is somewhat lengthy, Schreiner trots along his path through the text, allowing the reader to observe the panoramic vistas in each book of Scripture. Now and then, though, Schreiner stops to point toward some specific detail in the grand story that particularly illustrates his chosen theme or foreshadows some fulfillment later in history. There is a combination of overview and detailed explanation that both edifies and entertains; it reminds the reader that a book on biblical theology is not sufficient for spiritual health while still pointing the reader to the richness that can be found in Scripture.

On occasion, Schreiner's overview allows for avoidance of controversy and seems to dismiss questions too quickly. For instance, if the reader disagrees with a sharp discontinuity between the Law and the gospel, then the explanation offered by Schreiner will not be satisfactory (567–70). Likewise, if the reader questions the validity of human dominion over the creation, Schreiner's brief treatment will seem insufficient (5–7). However, that is the nature of the project of biblical theology; this is not a commentary on the whole of Scripture, but an interpretation of the entire canon through one particular lens. Though the reader might not always agree with Schreiner's positions, the story line moves along and the virtues of Schreiner's holistic interpretation far outweigh such potential disagreements.

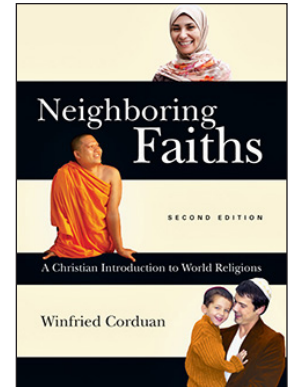
Schreiner organizes his analysis of the books of the Bible into nine parts. There are four Old Testament divisions. Schreiner begins with the Pentateuch, then groups the historical books together. Next come the poetic and wisdom books, concluding with the seventeen books by the prophets. Schreiner groups the twelve minor prophets in one chapter of analysis. This results in perhaps less attention to them than might be warranted, but is necessary to prevent getting mired in detail. Moving to the New Testament, Schreiner clusters the Synoptic Gospels, including the Acts of the Apostles in his analysis of Luke. John's Gospel and his letters are then grouped in a single chapter of discussion in Part 6. Next, Schreiner summarizes the theology of Paul's thirteen letters in a single chapter. There are few scholars that are better qualified to do so, and this chapter reflects the Schreiner's years of careful scholarship. Schreiner interprets the General Epistles in Part 8 before dealing with Revelation in Part 9. Between each of the nine parts of the volume, Schreiner provides brief summaries that recap the most significant of the ideas from the previous pages. These interludes are both helpful and necessary to keep the reader oriented to the theme of the kingdom of God as Schreiner moves quickly through the canon. The book closes with a brief epilogue, which alone is worth the price of the volume; in a very brief space, Schreiner traces salvation history and the kingdom of God through the entire corpus of Scripture, summarizing the scholarship presented in the previous six hundred pages. It is a fitting capstone to a well-written book.

This book is a rewarding read. It is both scholastically sound and spiritually beneficial. It will enrich the reader's understanding of the whole of the Bible and increase the reader's appreciation of the King of Kings. In short, *The King in His Beauty* should have a place on the shelf of any pastor or scholar.

– Andrew J. Spencer, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions, Second Edition. By Winfried Corduan. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012. 496 pages. Hardcover, \$40.

A recent survey found that atheists and agnostics know more about world religions than many of its proponents, such as Christians and Jews. A textbook on world religions written by knowledgeable authors that reflect current developments as well as an evangelical perspective is difficult to find. For those who want and need to know more about world religions, and especially for those who teach the subject, the good news is that InterVarsity Press (IVP) has released the second edition of *Neighboring Faiths* by Winfried Corduan.



Corduan's earlier work was published in 1998. Much has changed since that year, especially in the area of world religions. This 2012 edition has seen a welcome increase, from 363 pages to 496 pages. Among other additions, Corduan has added a second chapter on Islam. The first chapter covers the basics of Islam, while the second chapter deals with the aftermath and proper response to the events of 9/11. The rest of the book has been thoroughly revised and updated as well.

Corduan is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. He has written multiple articles as well as authored many books. The heart of Corduan is seen on every page of this book. He argues that believers must understand the beliefs of others in this world if they are going to reach them for Christ. Every religion is evaluated from the evangelical position and with a gracious and gentle spirit.

The first chapter is key to understanding what religion is and how religion has decayed over the centuries into its present forms. Corduan presents a strong case for Original Monotheism, demonstrating that the most ancient races began with belief in a monotheistic God, and eventually decayed into polytheism, pantheism, animism and manism. This research is consistent with conservative interpretations of Genesis 1–2 and Romans 1–2. Original Monotheism sets the foundation to understand, as well as evaluate, all other world religions.¹

The next section (chapters 2–6) examines religions that have maintained monotheism, such as Judaism, Islam, Baha'i, and Zoroastrianism. Chapter 7 evaluates religions in which magic and ritual are prevalent, such as African Traditional Religions (ATR). Chapter 8 unfolds the various beliefs of the Native American Indian, while dispelling the stereotypes of Indian religion acquired along the way. The next section deals with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism (chapters 9–12). The final section covers the Asian religions, such as Chinese popular religions, Shinto, and Japanese religions (chapters 13–14).

¹Editor's note: See Ken Keathley's review of Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), in this issue of the journal.

The positives of this book are many. First, it presents an expert analysis of each of the religions listed above, including multiple charts and pictures. Second, Corduan presents a template that he follows throughout, which is the Rites of Passage for each religion. Each religion has distinctive ceremonies and celebrations for adherents of its religion as they enter these stages of birth, adolescence, marriage, and death. This template makes it possible to understand each religion while distinguishing one from the other. Third, each chapter ends with the “So you meet a (religion of the chapter) person...” In this section, Corduan shares what to expect when we bump into these religious neighbors and how to avoid being offensive to these people. He then shares ideas for communicating the gospel to each of these people of different faiths. Here Corduan embodies the instruction of 1 Peter 3:15, seeking to engage people with “gentleness and respect.”

As a professor of apologetics and world religions, I have used the 1998 edition of *Neighboring Faith* for years with my college students. I was excited to hear about the updated edition and used it in class for the Fall 2013 semester. For the professor, teacher, pastor, and Sunday School/small group teacher, this book is a joy to use. Not only is it thorough, well organized, and gracious in tone, it offers many resources for the teacher. Besides the Rites of Passage template, each chapter ends with discussion questions which can be used for reading assignments or class discussions. Also, each chapter includes multiple term paper ideas, which totals over 140 term paper topics from which a student can choose. These topics were appealing to the students, for they could choose a term paper idea that was interesting to them rather than only one assigned by the professor.

It must be noted that while the book takes the Christian point of view, this view is not presented explicitly in the book. It is just assumed that the Christian perspective is the one the reader has. This is understandable since the book is from a Christian publisher and adding another chapter on Christian apologetics might prove unwieldy. This approach would be fine in a Sunday School/small group setting. However, in my college class, I had a mixture of believers, unbelievers, unsure, and some followers of other religions. Therefore, I found it necessary to begin the class with a basic apologetic series to demonstrate why Christianity was the credible faith. Only then was the class ready to walk with Corduan in examining the other faiths.

A plane trip is no longer required in order to encounter someone from a different world religion. Many people who hold various world religions now live in our neighborhoods, go to school with us, and work with us. To understand their religion, and to show proper respect while sharing Jesus Christ with them, one can find no better guide than Corduan's book.

– Randy Douglass, Shorter University, Rome, Georgia

Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. By R. W. L. Moberly. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 333 pages. Hardcover, \$34.99.

R. Walter L. Moberly has taught at Durham University since 1985. The former Anglican priest earned his Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1981. His dissertation was “Principle and Practice in the Study of Biblical Narrative: A Fresh Approach to Exodus 32–34.”

Although his specialty is the Old Testament, Moberly has been interested in a bigger picture. On his faculty webpage, he explains, “I seek to overcome conventional scholarly divisions between Old Testament, New Testament, historical theology, systematic theology, ethics and spirituality, and to articulate a frame of reference for understanding the Bible that includes, but is much broader than, that of ancient history.”¹ Moberly’s eighth book, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (hereafter, OTT), reflects his regard for a broader context. It is a theological analysis of the Old Testament as ancient Jewish scriptures as well as contemporary Christian canon. Moberly intended, in part, to foster dialogue between Jews and Christians.

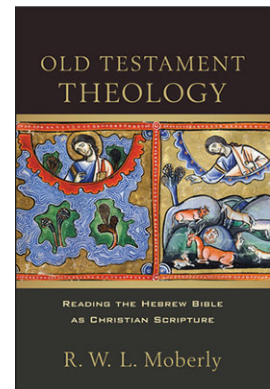
OTT consists of eight chapters, ranging from thirty to thirty-seven pages, that follow the order of the Jewish canon: Law (chapters 1–3), Prophets (chapters 4–6), and Writings (chapters 7–8). A six-page introduction and a ten-page epilogue bracket the book’s body. The remaining pages are bibliography (20 pages/361 entries) and three indexes (author, subject, and scripture) comprising 25 pages.

To appreciate OTT requires understanding what it is and what it is not. Moberly apprised readers that his book was not comprehensive: i.e., “in some way covering the Old Testament as a whole” (1). Therefore, it does not compare to Walther Eichrodt’s *Theology of the Old Testament* (SCM Press, 1961, 1967), Gerhard von Rad’s *Old Testament Theology* (Harper & Row, 1962, 1965), or Walter Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress, 2012). Moberly’s book surveys the theology of the Old Testament by focusing on select passages. Thus, in scope, it compares to Norman H. Snaith’s *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Epworth Press, 1950) or William Dyrness’ *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (IVP, 1980).

By approaching Old Testament theology textually rather than thematically, Moberly combined biblical theology and systematic theology. He acknowledged the risk that such an approach entails: “I hope that these passages are *representative* of Israel’s scriptures and allow many of its characteristics and leading concerns to emerge” (1, emphasis in the original). His book examines the following Old Testament texts:

Chapter 1: Deuteronomy 6:4–9

¹Durham University, Department of Theology and Religion, Staff Profiles, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology/religion/staff/profile/?id=671>, accessed March 21, 2014.



- Chapter 2: Deuteronomy 7:1–8 and 20:16–18
- Chapter 3: Exodus 16 and Deuteronomy 8:2–5
- Chapter 4: Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, and Jeremiah 18:1–12
- Chapter 5: Isaiah
- Chapter 6: Jonah
- Chapter 7: Psalms 44 and 89
- Chapter 8: Job 1–2 and 28

Whether or not Moberly picked the most salient passages will be debated.

In each chapter, Moberly practices sound exegesis. He exhibits knowledge of the Masoretic text without being too technical (e.g., use of transliterations), a deference to readers who may not know biblical Hebrew. His respect for the Scripture is refreshing. He understands the difference between a commentary and a work of theology.

Moberly tackles the issues that perplex both layman and scholar. Chapter 1, for example, addresses divine election as well as holy war (how the Israelites fought the inhabitants of Canaan). According to Moberly, holy war became a metaphor for practices that enabled Israel's everyday allegiance to Yahweh: i.e., avoiding intermarriage and destroying all manifestations of pagan worship. Chapter 3 features a five-page focus on historicity. Moberly borrowed two German nouns, *Historie* and *Geschichte*, to affirm the historicity of biblical narrative. *Historie* denotes any event, whereas *Geschichte* designates what that event initially meant and subsequently means. Chapter 4 answers the question, "Does God change?"² Moberly also grapples with contradictions, a related topic. Chapters 4–6 explore the hermeneutical challenges of prophecy and fulfillment. Moberly explains, "Prophetic words seek response. . . . Unconditional statements about what will happen in the future are in fact conditional, with their conditional nature being related to the response that is given" (120). He effectively counters the Christian tendency to interpret Isaiah as nothing but long-term prophecy. Chapter 7 processes disappointment with God, the psalmist's lament (conflict between creed and circumstance).

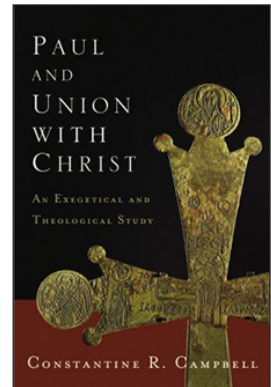
OTT is both reader-friendly and user-friendly. Moberly writes in a clear and coherent manner. For the sake of clarification, he employs a diversity of illustrations: e.g., J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (104–5), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (158–59), the *United States Constitution* (161–62), a jailed Russian punk rock band (177–78), and the 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan* (200–1). Footnotes grant readers easy access to Moberly's extensive research. In addition, throughout the book, Moberly inserts 57 excursuses, which are opportunities to learn more and to study further. OTT is a valuable addition to Old Testament scholarship and an excellent supplement to a systematic theology. One can read it from beginning to end or consult it as a resource by relying upon one of its three indexes.

– Ivan Parke, *Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi*

²Some English translations (AV and RSV) read "repent" rather than "change."

Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study. By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 479 pages. Softcover, \$ 34.99.

Constantine R. Campbell is associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, where he has served on faculty since 2013. He previously served as a senior lecturer in Greek and New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. Campbell received a Ph.D. from Macquarie University and is the author of several books on the Greek language such as *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Zondervan, 2008) and *Keep Your Greek: Strategies for Busy People* (Zondervan, 2010). His most recent work is *Colossians and Philemon: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor University Press, 2013).



The theme of union with Christ is one that has remained enigmatic yet profound. Its occurrence is prevalent in Paul's writings but it also one that he never fully explained. Campbell's desire is to answer two questions related to the issue of union with Christ. First, what is it, and second, what role does it play in Paul's theology? Campbell's present work is an exegetical and theological investigation that seeks to answer these questions. He moves from an in-depth syntactical analysis of Greek phrases and metaphors used by Paul in specific contexts to a broader understanding of Paul's theological thought. Humbly, Campbell recognizes that his methodology is somewhat circular. He chooses the label "idiom" rather than "formula" for prepositional phrases such as *en Christō* and its derivatives. He employs a canonical hermeneutical approach in order to understand union with Christ in the entire Pauline corpus rather than reconstruct a purified theology of Paul. His work is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on major academic developments related to the issue of union with Christ in Pauline studies. Part II, which encompasses the bulk of the book, focuses on key idiomatic phrases and metaphors used to express union with Christ. Part III focuses on Pauline thought through the integration of the exegetical analysis in Part II.

Campbell provides a chronological survey of significant academic contributions related to Pauline mysticism and union with Christ. His survey spans from Adolf Deissmann (1892) to Michael J. Gorman (2009). Campbell concludes that Pauline mysticism is distinct from Hellenistic mysticism and has a range of meanings. Union with Christ is a vital part of Paul's thought that pervades many important aspects of his theology including justification. For Paul, union with Christ does not mean deification of the believer nor does it allow for the identity of Christ or the believer to be blurred. Rather, the union believers share with Christ is something akin to the fellowship enjoyed by the persons of the Trinity.

In the major exegetical portion of this book, Campbell seeks to define what Pauline mysticism actually means and where union with Christ fits into Paul's theological framework. He begins by examining key prepositional phrases, and their derivatives, that express union with Christ such as *en Christō*, *eis Christon*, *sun Christō*, and *dia Christou*. Readers will benefit if they have some familiarity with Greek syntax, as Campbell discusses the various categories. One will not find in-depth contextual analysis (except with more ambiguous passages) or interaction with other scholars in this section. These chapters are also quite monotonous and repetitive. However,

the information gleaned is priceless. Campbell concludes that each of these phrases expresses a range of meanings (some more than others) and their corresponding derivatives function in a similar manner. Because of the distinctive prepositions, each of the phrases expresses a particular syntactical nuance related to union with Christ.

After examining key prepositional phrases related to the theme of union with Christ, Campbell looks at key metaphors Paul used to express the same theme. These metaphors include the body of Christ, temple and building, marriage, and new clothing. Like the prepositional phrases, each of the metaphors expresses a particular syntactical nuance related to the theme of union with Christ.

Campbell next explores the significance of Paul's conception of union with Christ and its relationships to the major spheres of Paul's thought. Drawing from his syntactical analysis in previous chapters, Campbell examines how the theme of union with Christ is connected to the work of Christ, the Trinity, Christian living, and justification. He concludes that virtually every aspect of Christ's work of interest to Paul is connected with the theme of union with Christ, that the believer's union with Christ is patterned after Christ's union with the Father, that union with Christ relates to a variety of believer's actions, characteristics, and status, that justification stems from a believer's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that imputation is the unmerited reception of Christ's righteousness received through union with Him.

Gleaning from his inductive exegetical and theological study, Campbell seeks to provide a proper definition of union with Christ. He concludes that the theme is not formulaic but expresses a range of meanings that can be summed up in the terms union, participation, identification, and incorporation. The possible antecedents to Paul's expression of the theme are found in Jewish theology, the Old Testament, and the words of Jesus, especially those spoken directly by Jesus to Paul on the Damascus Road.

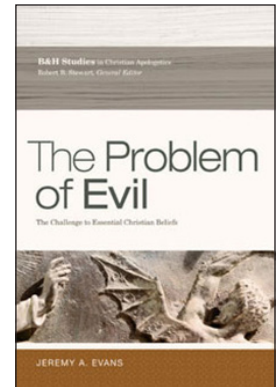
Campbell concludes that union with Christ is one of the most important themes in Paul's thought and should be viewed as a key rather than the center of Paul's theology. For Campbell, Paul's thought is shaped more like an interconnected web than a wheel with spokes pointing toward a center. Campbell's relabeling is appreciative but seems like an intentional detour from getting caught up in the debate concerning the center of Paul's thought. Maybe the center of Paul's thought is Jesus Himself, crucified and risen. According to Campbell, further areas that should be explored are union with Christ outside of Paul, Old Testament antecedents related to the theme, and pastoral and devotional implications related to the theme.

Campbell has provided much to be commended. His exegetical and theological study of the theme of union with Christ leads to an overall greater appreciation of the theme and a greater understanding of the importance of the theme in Paul's thought. Those interested in the theme and those exegeting texts that emphasize the theme must read this book.

– David Champagne, Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi

The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs. By Jeremy A. Evans. In B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics. Edited by Robert B. Stewart. Nashville: B&H Academics, 2013. 226 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.

Jeremy A. Evans serves as Associate Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. In *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs*, Evans provides a clear and systematic approach to one of the most difficult topics in theology and philosophy. He engages with the Scriptures, but his primary interlocutors and lines of support are found in appeals to works of philosophers. After defining evil and distinguishing between moral and natural evil, as well as a theodicy and a defense, Evans surveys four theodicies (ch. 1). In chapter 2, Evans raises the logical problem of evil and addresses it with the free-will defense à la Alvin Plantinga. In chapters 3, Evans raises the evidential problem of evil (the amount of evil in the world makes the existence of God less likely) via William Rowe and answers it with theological skepticism (God may have morally sufficient reasons unknown to people for allowing certain evils).



Chapter 4 may be one of the most important chapters in the book and the chapter which most clearly signals the Christian perspective of the author. This chapter addresses why the world is fallen (due to free and sinful choices of creatures) and how God has dealt with His fallen world through conversion (by reconciling the world to Himself through the death of Christ on the cross). This chapter, like the remainder of the book, depends upon a libertarian perspective. The fall of humanity and its subsequent rescue by God in Christ are best understood in terms of free will. God permits evil (47), and once evil obtains, God “direct(s) our freedom toward a loving relationship with him” (58).

Chapter 5 concerns the claim that God hides, or conceals, Himself during times of suffering. Evans answers this charge by exploring the idea that God sometimes hides Himself for the benefit of His creation. In chapter 6, Evans defends the traditional view of hell as eternal, conscious torment against both Christian Annihilationism and Christian Universalism. Chapter 7 develops Stephen Layman’s approach to natural evil, arguing that the Theistic worldview is superior to the Naturalistic worldview.

In chapter 8, Evans transitions to analytic philosophy by introducing the challenge of the deontological argument, which the remaining chapters of the book attempt to address. The deontological argument seeks to implicate God as morally culpable for acts of moral evil because He should have stopped them from occurring. Chapter 9 argues that the Theistic worldview provides an explanation for moral evil which is superior to the Naturalistic worldview. In chapter 10, Evans advocates a divine command ethic over divine will by employing insights from speech-act theory. In chapter 11, Evans suggests the Euthyphro dilemma (whether actions are right *because God loves them* or God loves actions *because they are right*) is faulty due to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Chapter 12 makes a case for God being morally free, all-powerful, and worthy of worship.

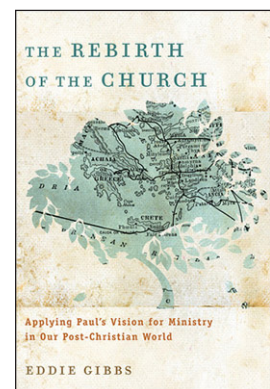
The strengths of the work include its comprehensive scope and careful treatment of subtopics under consideration. The Christian perspective of the author is found in his section on conversion, which addresses the problem of sin and the defeat of evil (49–50). His clear and concise treatment of the binding of Isaac (191–94) is worth the price of the book. Advocates of the free will perspective will appreciate: the statements on God’s permission of evil (58); Evans’ appeals to Aquinas’ antecedent and consequent will of God regarding salvation (85); human ability to choose or reject God, as well as the active and passive hardening of the heart (100–103); and the connection between God’s moral freedom and His moral agency (198–206). Evans works skillfully as a philosopher in areas which are more frequently treated by practitioners of other disciplines. For example, divine hiddenness (61–79), divine command ethics (157–75), and divine simplicity (179–91) arise in works of systematic theology; and the doctrine of hell (81–112) is addressed in works of systematic, historical, and biblical theology.

Depending upon the background of the reader, the book’s greatest strength may also be its greatest weakness. This is a technical and dense book, especially chapters 8–12, which address analytic philosophy. Readers with a strong background in philosophy will benefit greatly from the book. Readers, however, who are unfamiliar with philosophical argumentation may struggle to grasp Evans’ points. For this reason, the book may not be suitable for beginning students in theology or philosophy. With this qualification, I strongly recommend Evans’ book for advanced readers who wish to explore one of the most difficult topics in the fields of theology and philosophy, the problem of evil.

– Adam Harwood, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

The Rebirth of the Church: Applying Paul’s Vision for Ministry in Our Post-Christian World. By Eddie Gibbs. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. 262 pages. Softcover, \$21.99.

In recent decades, the Christian church in the Western world has experienced monumental numerical decline. This waning has resulted in increased marginalization and a reduction in social influence. These drops have caused researchers, pastors, and theologians to evaluate the source of the losses and the potential cures for the problem. Eddie Gibbs believes the church could be aided by implementing some of the Apostle Paul’s methods for reaching a post-Christian society which borders on paganism. As Professor Emeritus of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Society, Gibbs is qualified to write on the subject. His other works include: *I Believe in Church Growth* (Fuller Seminary Press, 1993), *ChurchNext* (IVP, 2000), *LeadershipNext* (IVP, 2005), and *ChurchMorph* (Baker Academic, 2009).



The Rebirth of the Church is divided into two segments: (I) Comparing Contexts and (II) Issues and Insights. “Comparing Contexts” investigates Paul’s context and relates it to twenty-

first century, Western culture. Gibbs begins his investigation of Paul's writings and methods by reminding readers that "we must not think we can return to that pre-Christendom period in looking for pioneering missionary strategies" (5). Further, he warns believers against idealizing the New Testament era with its impressive gains without considering the church's challenges (5–6). Growing secularism, pluralism, and individualism along with the fragmentation of society and distrust of institutions mark the present context. The remedy for these ills can be found in reestablishing communities that provide a sense of belonging, fulfillment, and self-worth, such as those that Paul established in the early church (29).

The second part of the book, chapters 3–9, considers issues and insights regarding urban engagement, birthing new churches, caring for new churches, welcoming and incorporating new members, upholding the apostolic message, relationships within the church and with the world, and mission and ministry (then and now). Chapter four, "Birthing New Churches," contains the most stimulating and refreshing insights. Gibbs clearly provides elements that will aid in starting new churches. With all the benefits of the chapter, cessationists might argue with the author's emphasis on the role of modern-day, apostolic leadership for church growth. Regardless of one's stand concerning spiritual gifts, the reader will benefit from the content in this section.

The greatest strength of this book is found in the insights drawn from the writings, ministry, and mission of Paul. The work is a handy resource for Pauline studies, detailing various aspects of Paul's theology and praxis. It provides a clear and reader-friendly overview of Paul's teachings and the connection of these teachings to the life of the church.

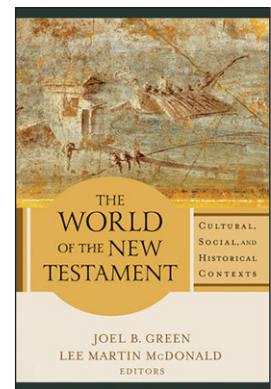
Although Gibbs skillfully assesses the problem, he offers few practical solutions. For instance, he concludes chapter six with this summary statement, "Ensuring effective strategies are in place to move members from passive presence to active engagement within the local congregation" (169). Unfortunately, the chapter arguably does not suggest any strategies for accomplishing the prescribed goal. Similarly, throughout the book Gibbs poignantly shares indictments against both local churches and Christian institutions of higher learning. Many of these critiques are valid and difficult to read because their accuracy hits a little too close to home. An example is found in chapter eight, in which he writes on the challenge of Western individualism. Gibbs observes, "One indication of the serious nature of the problem is that churches in these urban locations typically struggle to launch and maintain a small-group network. It is rare for them to be able to convince more than 30 percent of their regular attendees to join a small group. People have so many competing agendas and are involved in such a wide range of activities ... that their roots within the local community and the church they attend are tenuous at best. They are involved everywhere but belong nowhere" (204). This accurate diagnosis, like many in the work, is followed by little, if any, practical remedy. This leaves the reader disheartened by the problem, but without any suggestions for correcting it. A few pages further, Gibbs hints at a remedy as he discusses a "six-pack" men's group that a Southern California church started (210). This thought-provoking suggestion languishes alone, since Gibbs offers almost no other practical examples of solutions.

Overall, Gibbs provides a commendable analysis of the context of the early church in relation to today's context. The work offers a notable overview of Paul's church planting strategy and theology. As a resource for rectifying the present plight of the Western church, the book has merit and could prove useful in a graduate-level class. Gibbs' pertinent insights clarify for pastors and laity the contemporary church's ailments; they can read the book with profit and a desire to move forward.

—Michael Baker, *Baptist College of Florida, Graceville, Florida, and New Beginnings Community Church, Paducah, Kentucky*

The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts. Edited by Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. 616 pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.

The events of the New Testament happened a long time ago in a land far, far away; therefore, understanding its message necessitates understanding the historical-cultural context in which those events occurred. Modern individuals will instinctively read contemporary works from their own cultural perspectives, filling in the required background information and catching the intended cultural allusions (like the Star Wars allusion above). The original readers of the New Testament were also familiar with their culture and did not require assistance to understand it. Unfortunately, cultural distance has disadvantaged modern readers of the New Testament—they do not share the same cultural understanding or have the same knowledge base as the authors. Consequently, modern readers can miss information or even misread the text. Reading *The World of the New Testament* can help bridge the gap between the two cultures.



Edited by Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, *The World of the New Testament* surveys the cultural, social, and historical contexts of the New Testament world with the goal of bringing understanding to the modern reader. They have enlisted the assistance of thirty-two other individuals, some who are well known within New Testament scholarship and others who are just beginning their careers. According to the "Introduction," the idea for the book came from the Institute for Biblical Research (IBR), a group of evangelical scholars devoted to the study of the Bible. Most of the authors are members of the IBR.

The forty-four essays are divided into five major groups: 1) "Exile and Jewish Heritage" (with articles on topics like the exile, the Hasmoneans, and the Herodian Dynasty), 2) "Roman Hellenism" (with articles covering issues like the imperial cult, slaves, women, and education), 3) "The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism" (with essays discussing the temple,

Samaritans, Dead Sea Scrolls, the synagogue, and healthcare), 4) “The Literary Context of Early Christianity” (with essays about writing, literary forms, Josephus, Philo, and rabbinic literature), and 5) “The Geographical Context of the New Testament” (with essays on the various regions of the New Testament and archeology). The breadth and scope of these essays will help the reader to appreciate the distinctive character of the New Testament world and to learn how understanding these differences can enhance or even unlock the message of the New Testament.

Because many authors have contributed to the book, some material overlaps from essay to essay. This overlap sometimes emphasizes the diversity of opinions on the issues. For example, several articles discuss educational attainment and literacy. While the writers agree that the literacy rate was low (only 10% to 15%), these writers differ when discussing the abilities of Jesus, the Twelve, Paul, and others like Josephus. All these writers would acknowledge that the ancients commonly employed secretaries to aid in writing, but what does that mean for literacy? Should a modern idea of literacy, which includes both reading and writing, even be used when assessing the ancient world, when reading and writing were considered distinct tasks? By viewing the various interpretations of the data, the readers can begin to appreciate the complexity of analyzing the data for understanding the New Testament. The diverse interpretations offered in the book allow the readers to see how different scholars weigh the information and draw conclusions.

Most students and pastors will find the book accessible. Green and McDonald have presented their material in a readable, modern format with headings, black and white illustrations, maps, sidebars, a few diagrams, an annotated bibliography for each article, indexes, and a glossary. Technical terms are defined when first presented in an article, and no specialized knowledge of Greek or Hebrew is required. While the size of the volume may be daunting to the busy pastor, the individual chapters can easily be read in a single sitting.

Pastors and students alike will benefit from reading this systematic introduction to New Testament backgrounds. Since *The World of the New Testament* is an introductory volume, reading it will not make one an expert. One cannot read a book on first aid and hope to become a physician. Whole volumes have been written on the contents of each chapter or even on the parts of some chapters. Nevertheless, this volume can aid the process of studying the New Testament within its cultural, social, and historical backgrounds. For those who have already begun studying New Testament backgrounds, this volume will fill in the gaps in their knowledge and provide guidance for further research. Even those who have done significant study on the topic may benefit from an overview of current scholarship and new ways of looking at the ancient world. Overall, the book is an enjoyable, easy, and enlightening read that will benefit those who want a more accurate understanding of the New Testament.

– Samuel R. Pelletier, *Truett-McConnell College, Cleveland, GA*

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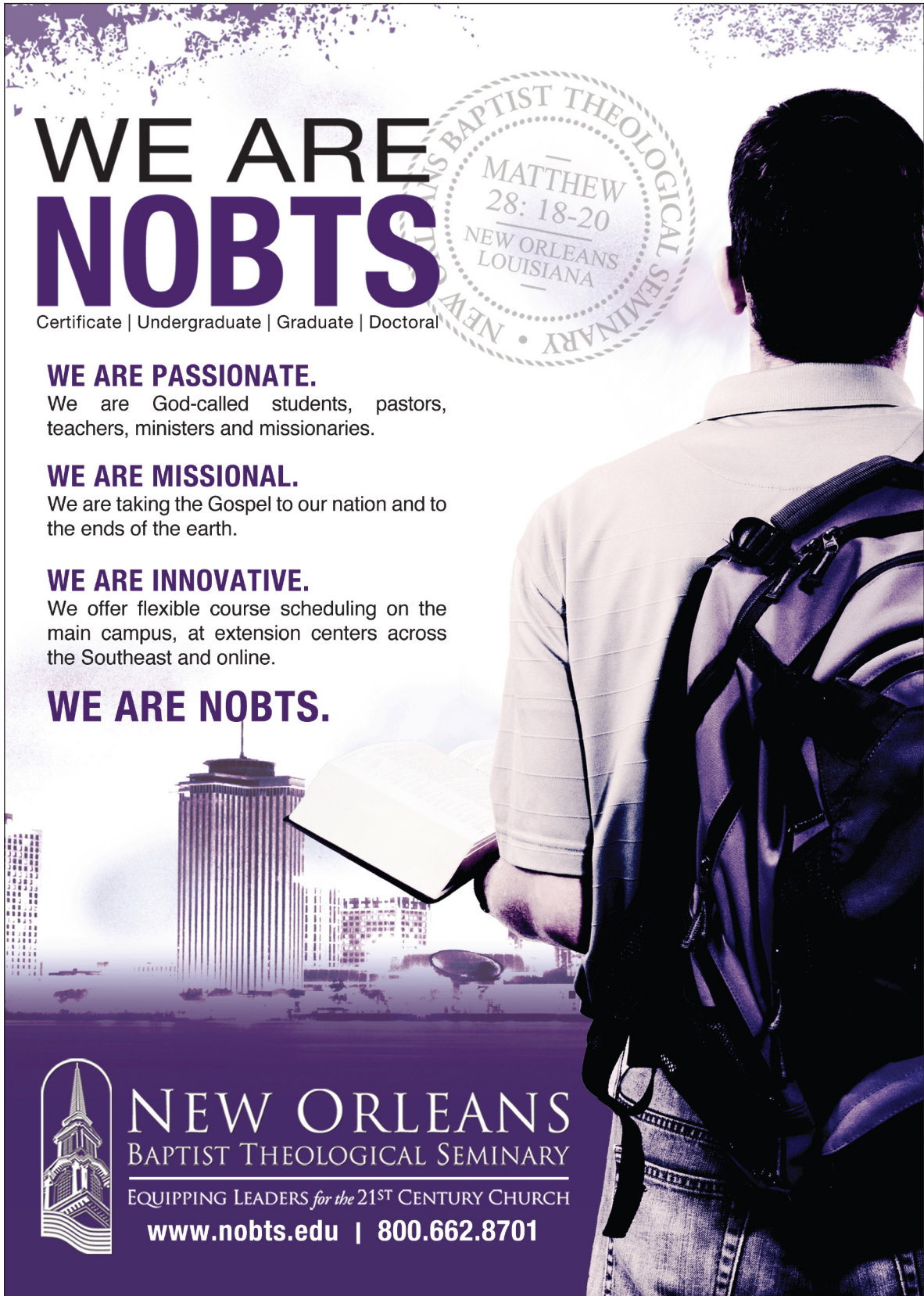
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Beisner is spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation and is also an author and speaker on the application of the Biblical world view to economics, government, and environmental policy. He has published over ten books, including *The Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*, and hundreds of articles, and has contributed to, or edited, many other books and been a guest on television and radio programs. A ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he has spoken to churches, seminars, and other groups around the country for nearly twenty years.



Bill McKibben

McKibben is currently a Scholar in Residence at Middlebury College and is the founder of 350.org, an international climate change campaign named for the safe level of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere, 350 parts per million. Bill's 1989 book *The End of Nature* was the first book to warn the general public about the threat of global warming. Bill is a frequent contributor to various magazines including *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Outside*. He is also a board member and contributor to *Grist Magazine*. He has been awarded Guggenheim and Lyndhurst Fellowships, and won the Lannan Prize for nonfiction writing in 2000.

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