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The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry is a research institute of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminary is located at 3939 Gentilly Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70126.

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Table of Contents

JBTM 21.1 (Spring 2024): 1–3

Editorial Introduction

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Tommy Doughty serves as assistant professor of theology and worldview; associate dean of Leavell College; director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry; and editor of the Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

After a year of planning, I am thrilled to release this Spring's issue of *JBTM* in honor of the Defend Conference and the leadership of Dr. Robert Stewart. As a student, scholar, and minister, Defend has benefited me personally for an entire decade by providing an incubator for apologetic considerations within the Christian worldview. This unique laboratory for college and seminary students offers interaction with leading voices in apologetics and related fields. Defend would not be possible without the vision, responsibility, and relationships of Bob Stewart. His commitment to equipping Christians of all sorts with the knowledge and passion necessary to defend the faith has surely laid a foundation of wisdom for generations of believers through the experiences of many year-in and year-out.

Since 2009, Defend has met on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, with the exception of the COVID-canceled year of 2021. In its initial year, Dr. Stewart, Rhyne Putman, Mike Edens, and others also hosted a Defend on the road at NOBTS's North Georgia extension. In January 2024, Defend thus celebrated its fifteenth iteration in New Orleans and sixteenth overall. The result is that thousands of students and church leaders have reaped the benefits of a myriad of plenary and breakout sessions. Experiencing steady growth in attendees and school-affiliated groups each year, Defend has grown from just over 130 registered in 2009 to 467 participants in 2024. God's faithfulness to this endeavor can be seen in the massive expansion of interest beyond NOBTS students to college groups and even to the general public, including attendees from states well outside the southeast.

Along with the conference's schedule comprised of plenary talks, breakout sessions, meals on campus, late night trivia, book signings, and dinner on the town with speakers [in New Orleans, this is a special treat], NOBTS and Leavell College students are able to take courses for credit. Almost every year, *Christian Apologetics*, *Christian Ethics*, and *Problem of Evil* are offered, but many other electives cycle through also: *Historical Jesus*, *Apologetic Method*, *Christianity and the Sciences*, *Destiny of the Unevangelized*, *Theology of C. S. Lewis*, *Cult Theology*, *Pulpit Apologetics*, and more. Courses overlap with featured topical sessions and guest instructors, including world-class speakers such as Gary Habermas, Douglas Groothuis, James Walker, and Timothy McGrew, each of whom unfortunately was unable to contribute to this issue. For these speakers and the countless NOBTS staff members and volunteers who help Defend operate each year, *JBTM* recognizes the joyful sacrifice of time and energy.

The contents of this issue exhibit the diversity of important topics, methods, and scholars that have made Defend a paramount conference for years. First, Rhyne Putman opens the issue with an article defending the veracity of the virginal conception with considerations of early church tradition on the topic. Rhyne has been involved with Defend from the very beginning and even directed the conference several times. Second, Tawa Anderson presents the virginal conception as a parallel to three "miracles" that skeptics like Richard Dawkins believe in. After Bob's retirement in 2024, Tawa will take up the mantle as Director of the Institute for Christian Apologetics at NOBTS and will direct future Defend conferences. Third, David Calhoun reviews a major thesis he has upheld for years at Defend: the coherence of Christianity and the sciences, both in fact and in the support of the Christian tradition throughout history. David is a native New Orleanian and has been a student-favorite plenary speaker for a long time. Fourth, Rob Bowman analyzes the faulty logic of anti-Trinitarian critics and the coherence of the Christian doctrine of God. Rob also has served as a plenary speaker from the beginning of Defend history, and his published work has served as required texts in several courses.

Our remaining contributors also have presented plenary and breakout talks through the years, and their essays in this issue testify to their long-standing exemplification of the ideals of the De-

fend Conference. First, Craig Hazen recounts a conversation with college students charting the path for a spiritual journey, establishing the wisdom of beginning with the historic religion of Christianity. Second, Richard Howe encourages the use of philosophy in Christian theology, demonstrating the need for sound reason to support faithful worship. Third, Ken Keathley considers contemporary culture through the lens of populism, exploring the likelihood that the prevalent worldview is prone to "stupidity." Fourth, Stewart Kelly examines key features of postmodernism, allowing for critique of Enlightenment rationalism while upholding the necessity of truth. Fifth and finally, Don Williams explicates the moral argument in C. S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man*, likewise establishing guardrails against postmodern relativism and subjectivism. Just like their teachings at Defend, these articles all demonstrate these contributors' expertise in valuable apologetic commonplaces.

As usual, this issue of *JBTM* closes with book reviews from students, scholars, and ministers equipping readers with expectations for new literature. Along with all the article contributors, I share my personal gratitude for Bob Stewart and acknowledge the depth of his influence on my thinking, teaching, and ministry. As the director of Defend, Bob has begun or ended recent conferences with his challenging talk, "The Most Important Thing in Christian Apologetics." Consistent with the classic biblical instigation for apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15, Bob is the model par excellence of his own advice to students, pointing to the necessity to guard one's heart, share the gospel with respect, and direct glory to God in true worship. As he retires from full-time teaching at NOBTS in 2024, we celebrate his testimony and legacy through Defend.

JBTM 21.1 (Spring 2024): 5–20

Was Jesus Really 'Born of a Virgin'? Answering Key Objections

Rhyne R. Putman, PhD

Rhyne Putman is vice president of academic affairs and director of worldview formation at Williams Baptist University and professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

I want to begin by expressing my great appreciation and deep affection for Dr. Robert B. Stewart—my teacher, pastor, colleague, and friend. I was a senior in college the first time I ever encountered him. He was lecturing at a state university about the historical reliability of the gospels. Dr. Stewart spoke about the gospel reasonably, graciously, and winsomely to a room full of people who didn't share his worldview. At that moment, I knew I wanted to study under him at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Little did I know that I would work so closely with him over the years in various capacities. I could never have imagined the impact he would have on my life over the next two decades—shaping my way of thinking, my career, and my walk with Christ.

Introduction

Critical scholars often claim that the gospels tell us more about *theology* than *history*, more about what early Christians believed that *what actually happened in the life of Jesus*. This is nowhere more apparent than in their treatments of the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke. The infancy narratives recorded in Matthew 1:18–2:23 and Luke 1:5–2:52 fall outside the normal criteria used in historical Jesus research. This historical investigation normally considers questions about the mission, message, and sayings of Jesus. These narratives have no sayings of Jesus to weigh, and scholars with an anti-supernatural bias often presume that they have little to offer by way of understanding Jesus's mission and message. Historical Jesus research typically operates apart from creedal assumptions, and many of its key proponents would disavow or ignore the creedal statement that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" and "born of the Virgin Mary."

A large swath of critical scholars typically treats the infancy narratives as a later addendum to the gospel tradition, added as an apologetic for Jesus's divinity and messianic identity by later followers with a more developed Christology. Even some scholars who affirm the resurrection of Jesus cast serious doubt on the truthfulness of these stories, charging them with being later additions to the gospel traditions.

A full historical investigation of the infancy narratives and their merit in historical Jesus research is beyond the scope of this article. Much more can be said about the specific circumstances and theology that shaped these narratives. But for now, we want to say that many of the objections given for outright dismissing these narratives can and should be rebutted.[1]

Objection #1: The Virgin Birth Tradition Came from Pagan Mythology

Contemporary mythicists subscribe to the idea that Jesus did not exist in history. According to this theory, Jesus of Nazareth is a composite of numerous mythological streams from various religious traditions and philosophies. The so-called "Christ myth theory" is a relatively late notion, emerging for the first time during the Enlightenment. Few biblical scholars and historians take it seriously, and even non-Christian scholars like Bart Ehrman have argued extensively against it.[2]

While the Christ-myth theory that reduces the historical person of Jesus to a mythological construct is a fringe idea, the claim that the infancy narratives were shaped by pagan mythology is much older and more prevalent. Trypho, the second-century interlocutor of Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), raised this objection against the virginal conception of Jesus:

> Moreover, in the fables of those who are called Greeks, it is written that Perseus was begotten of Danae, who was a vir-

[1] The contents of this article have been adapted from my forthcoming book, *Conceived by the Holy Spirit: The Virgin Birth in Scripture and Theology* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024). Answering objections to the infancy narratives is a small part of my larger project in ascertaining the Christology of these texts and the way in which they relate to the larger canon of Scripture.

[2] See Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

> gin; he who was called among them Zeus having descended on her in the form of a golden shower. And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather [should] say that this Jesus was born man of men. And if you prove from the Scriptures that He is the Christ, and that on account of having led a life conformed to the law, and perfect, He deserved the honour of being elected to be Christ, [it is well]; but do not venture to tell monstrous phenomena, lest you be convicted of talking foolishly like the Greeks.[3]

Trypho essentially argued that the idea that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills Israel's Scriptures fundamentally contradicts the claim that he was born of a virgin, a claim that he believed better resonated with pagan mythology than the Hebrew Bible.

Scholars affiliated with or influenced by the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of religions school (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) made very similar claims. Under the guise of historical criticism, these scholars were determined to prove derivative similarities between gospel accounts and non-Christian religious sources. These religious scholars avowed that the gospel authors derived their accounts of Jesus's virginal birth from similar stories of divine births across religious traditions and myths.[4]

There was no consensus among history of religions scholars as to what traditions influenced the evangelists. The German philosopher and theologian Rudolf Seydel (1835–1892) attempted to demonstrate that the Lukan infancy narratives were derived from Buddhist myths that he audaciously claimed would have been known in Judea in the first century.[5] F. Max Müller (1823–1900) claimed that the infancy narratives borrowed from the myth of Krishna's conception.[6] Wilhelm Soltau (1846–1924) suggested that the virginal conception was derived from the account of Augus-

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[3] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 67.

[4] For a catalog of these "parallels," see Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 135–86.

[5] Rudolf Seydel, *Das Evangelium von Jesu in seinem Verhältnis zur Buddhasage und Buddhlehre* (1882).

[6] F. Max Müller, *Vedic Hymns* 1, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 12 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), 1–6.

tus's birth found in Suetonius.[7] Still others appealed to Egyptian and Babylonian myths as the source of the virgin birth tradition.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), a self-proclaimed scholar of comparative religion, posited that many ancient mythologies share a common structure centered around a hero from unusual origins who must face adversity, die, and be raised again before he can benefit his fellow man. Campbell called this the "monomyth." Campbell also believed that miraculous births were part of this heroic archetype.[8] Influenced by Campbell, *Star Wars* creator George Lucas incorporated this idea into his film *The Phantom Menace*, where Anakin Skywalker was virginally conceived.

Of the objections given to the infancy narratives, the objection of pagan derivation is perhaps the least credible. The variety of potential suspects for pagan influence shows just how much these scholars wanted to demonstrate some sort of derivation, even if they could never demonstrate a credible link. These scholars were throwing spaghetti on a spinning wheel with the hope that something would stick.

Even modern historical critics who cast doubts on the reliability of the Gospel infancy narratives recognize that parallels with these legends are superficial at best. Matthew and Luke present to us accounts that are thoroughly Jewish in their character, not Greek. They are chock-full of references and allusions to Hebrew Scriptures.

Many of these myths are stories of pagan gods coming to earth and sleeping with human women. Others are stories that only vaguely sound like a virginal conception. The NT infancy narratives have numerous allusions to real-world people, places, cultures, and events—elements that are obviously missing in these pagan stories. These pagan myths lack verisimilitude, the appearance of being truth-like or real. Pagan myths and the biblical nativity stories are, as Thomas Boslooper (1923–1998) put it, "as dif-

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[7] Wilhelm Soltau, *The Birth of Jesus Christ* [*Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christi*], trans. Maurice A. Canney (London, 1903), 35ff.

[8] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3d ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 255–70. Despite his popularity and influence, Campbell's academic credibility in this area is dubious at best. Campbell, a literature professor, was not trained in folklore studies or comparative religion, but had what can best be described as a layman's interest in these topics.

ferent as . . . monotheism is from polytheism . . . and as different as the polygamous and incestuous pagan society was from the Christian teaching on morals and marriage."[9]

Objection #2: Jesus Was Illegitimate

The earliest critics of Christianity claimed that the story of Jesus's virginal conception was invented to cover up the shame of Mary's unwed pregnancy. The New Testament itself makes one possible allusion to this rumor when Jewish religious leaders told Jesus "We weren't born of sexual immorality" (John 8:41, see also Acts of Pilate 2:3). The accusation of Mary's infidelity was more explicit in the writings of a late second-century pagan philosopher named Celsus, who accused Mary of having an affair with a Roman soldier named Panthera.[10]

Jewish critics of Christianity in particular accused Jesus of being a *mamzer*—a bastard or illegitimate son. Mamzers—the children born of inappropriate or illegal relationships—were considered second-class citizens in Israel. The Law of Moses stated that "no one of illegitimate birth may enter the LORD's assembly; none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation, may enter the LORD's assembly" (Deut 23:2, CSB). Without directly referring to Jesus, a medieval Jewish text called the *Toledot Yeshu* ("Generations of Jesus") described the mamzer son of Miriam and Panthera as a powerful magician who had learned magic from his childhood in Egypt.

There are some modern variations on this objection. The feminist theologian Jane Schaberg (1938–2012) suggested that Jesus was conceived through sexual assault.[11] According to Schaberg, Matthew and Luke invented the notion of a virginal conception to navigate the complex sexual politics in their honor and shame society. As a victim of rape and sexual abuse, Mary longed for God to liberate the oppressed.

Accusations of Jesus's illegitimacy may have circulated in Jesus's lifetime, but the specific rumor that Mary had an illicit rela-

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[9] Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth*, 186.

[10] Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.28, 32, 39, 69.

[11] Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

tionship with a Roman soldier postdates the gospels by more than a century. The soldier's name "Panthera" is probably an intentional parody of the word used by the evangelists to describe Mary's virginity (*parthenos*). Most importantly, the Jewish and pagan sources of this rumor came from particularly polemical anti-Christian writings. As with most of the worst rumors in history, this rumor can be directly linked to opponents who were seeking to tarnish the reputation of Christ and his disciples.

Many of the scholars who make this objection work with the same anti-Christian bias of its second-century advocates. Presuming a naturalistic worldview, they claim that whatever happened in the early life of Jesus, he could not possibly have been conceived in this way.

Objection #3: Gospel Writers Invented These Stories to Fulfill Prophecy

Critics of the infancy narratives suggest that the virginal conception and related episodes in the infancy narratives were fabricated to prove that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills Hebrew Scripture. This objection takes on several forms—a more general claim about the nature of these narratives and more specific claims about events described in the narratives such as the census or Herod's massacre of the innocents.

The Invention of a Virginal Conception (Matt 1:22–23)

Without a doubt, the fulfillment of Scripture is a central theme in Matthew's gospel. Each of the five scenes in his nativity directly quotes or alludes to prophetic Old Testament texts. But Matthew's belief that Jesus fulfills Old Testament texts doesn't prove or entail that he resorted to fabricating stories to prove this claim.

Critical scholars like Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) contended that Matthew's whole account was an attempt at "historicizing" the prophecy of Isa 7:14 (cf. Matt 1:22–23). In other words, the evangelist created an event in Jesus's life with the distinct apologetic purpose of demonstrating that Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecy.[12]

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[12] See Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York, 1905), 100n1.

Scene	Text	Prophetic Fulfillment	Description
Prologue	Matt 1:1-17	Draws from the entire OT	Matthew's list of Jesus's ancestors which establish Jesus as the Messiah, the son of David, and the son of Abraham
Scene 1	Matt 1:18–25	Isa. 7:14	The discovery of Mary's pregnancy; Joseph's first dream
Scene 2	Matt 2:1–12	Mic 5:2	Wise men from the east visit Herod in Jerusalem, Jesus in Bethlehem
Scene 3	Matt 2:13–15	Hs 11:1	Joseph's second dream; the flight to Egypt
Scene 4	Matt 2:16–18	Jer 31:15	Herod massacres innocent children in Bethlehem
Scene 5	Matt 2:19–23	Unknown (Isa 11:1? Judg 13:5, 7?)	Joseph's third dream; the return to Nazareth

But first-century interpreters of Isa 7:14 were probably not waiting on a virgin to conceive the Messiah through supernatural means. The eighth-century B.C. context of this passage seems to suggest that the prophecy was primarily about the timetable of Aram and Israel's demise. So why would Matthew go to the trouble to invent a wild story about a miraculous conception when none of his contemporaries expected Isa 7:14 to be fulfilled in this way? A more likely explanation: Matthew didn't fabricate this story. Instead, he began with an unexpected event in recent history—Jesus's miraculous conception—and then typologically interpreted this event through the lens of biblical prophecy.

For Matthew, Christ's fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 is larger than the unusual way he was conceived. Christ "completes" this prophecy by becoming for us a new way to experience God's presence in creation. God has become part of the world he created in Christ, and Christ forever communicates his presence to us as the risen Lord seated at the right hand of God.[13]

[13] See Putman, *Conceived by the Holy Spirit*, 105–117.

Furthermore, if early Christians had invented the story of the virginal conception to prove that Jesus fulfilled Isa 7:14, why didn't Luke cite this prophecy in his account? Luke's account does not fit the critical narrative of historicizing prophecy. It seems more likely that Matthew and Luke borrowed from a common source or group of sources—I believe this to be members of Jesus's family—who merely handed down the events reported by Mary and Joseph. This interpretation of prophecy reads more like an afterthought and less like a preconceived notion in the text.

The Invention of an Empire-Wide Census in Luke 2:1–5

Other specific events in the infancy narratives are also accused of wholesale invention to serve this prophetic purpose. Why, the critical scholar asks, would Jesus of Nazareth be born in Bethlehem? The evangelists had to fabricate a way to get his Nazarene family to Bethlehem so that he would fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2: "Bethlehem . . . one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me." So, the argument goes, Luke created a fictional census to account for this inconsistency in Luke 2:1–5:

> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant (Luke 2:1–5, CSB)

Since the nineteenth century, critical scholars have accused the evangelist of fabricating this census in an effort to place Jesus in Bethlehem at the time of his birth. David F. Strauss (1808–1874), one of the most prominent voices in the first quest of the historical Jesus, was one of the first to make this claim.[14] But Emil Schürer (1844–1910) crafted the argument on which many modern skeptics still rely:[15]

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[14] David F. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, vol 1., ch. 4, §32.

[15] Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. ed., ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 399–427.

1. There is no record of any empire-wide census during the reign of Caesar Augustus.

2. No such imperial census would have required Joseph and Mary to travel back to Bethlehem.

3. A Roman census would not have been carried out during the reign of Herod the Great because Palestine was not officially a Roman province at this time.

4. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus does not mention a census under Herod and describes the census of Quirinius in AD 6 or 7 as something new and unprecedented.

5. Quirinius was never governor during the lifetime of Herod the Great.

Many of these objections (1–4) rely on the faulty assumption that we possess an exhaustive record of the ancient world. While we do not know or understand every action taken by an ancient empire like Rome, we have historical records which are at least consistent with the claims made in Luke's account.

Augustus ordered several censuses across the empire for the purpose of assessing taxes. But just like today, an empire-wide census wouldn't be a quick process. Censuses of this scale had to be administered in phases. In the first phase, a detailed registry of all people and property was created. According to Ethelbert Stauffer (1902–1979), this was the phase Luke mentions in the nativity story. In the second phase, taxes were assessed when the "bill" came due. This second phase explains the "unprecedented" element and violent reaction recorded in Josephus (*Ant.* 17.3).

Depending on the region, some censuses could take years to complete. Censuses also followed regional protocols. The Romans employed the Egyptians' already established mechanisms for assessment and taxation. It is conceivable that the Romans utilized a distinct process in Israel where men were required to report to the ancestral homes associated with their tribe, especially if they could tax ancestral property.[16]

The most problematic issue with Luke's timeline comes with the statement in v. 2 that speaks of the "first registration [that]

[16] Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Knopf, 1974), 21–32.

took place while Quirinius was governing Syria" (objection 5).[17] Quirinius instituted a controversial census in AD 6 or 7—a decade or so after Herod the Great died. The taxes levied against the Jews in this census sparked a revolt (*Ant.* 18.1.1). We also have no records of Quirinius as governor of Syria during the lifetime of Herod. Biblical scholars have offered multiple solutions to this problem:

1. *Josephus was mistaken about the years when Quirinius came to power.* If critical scholars acknowledge it is possible that biblical authors could be factually incorrect, then they must be willing to concede that Josephus—writing nearly a century after Herod's death—could be the one who is factually incorrect.

2. Quirinius gave one census as a government official in the decade prior to becoming governor and a second census when he became governor. This seems less plausible.

3. *Quirinius had two non-consecutive terms as governor of Syria.* While this is possible, there is no historical evidence that this was the case.

But the simplest solution to this problem may be grammatical. Other translations make it possible for us to consider that

1. *The adjective prōtē often translated as "first" may also be translated as "before."*

N. T. Wright believes this to be the most natural reading of the text: "This was the first census, *before* the one when Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:2, NTE). If Wright's translation here is correct, all Luke is doing is telling us that this census in Judea predated the more infamous one Quirinius conducted nearly a decade later.[18]

In his address to Theophilus, Luke expressed a desire to write an accurate and orderly account of the Jesus tradition (Luke 1:1–4). The notion that he would fabricate a tax assessment to advance his narrative seems wholly inconsistent with the skill he demonstrates as a historian elsewhere throughout the gospel and in Acts.

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[17] Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2," *JETS* 27.1 (1984): 43–52.

[18] N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014): 88–89.

Matthew Invented the Massacre of the Innocents (Matt 2:16–18)

Celsus, the second-century philosopher and critic of Christianity, charged the evangelists with inventing the massacre of the innocents.[19] Modern skeptics note that Josephus never mentions or alludes to this particular incident. But the historical portrait of the king painted by Josephus closely resembles Matthew's characterization.

Herod was never past murdering anyone he perceived to be a political threat—even "the most intimate of his friends."[20] The author of *The Assumption of Moses* added, "He will kill both old and young, showing mercy to none."[21] (6:4). Herod ordered executions of all the remaining members of the Hasmonean dynasty, including his own wife Mariamne;[22] her brother Aristobulus III of Judea;[23] her eighty-year-old grandfather, the priest Hyrcanus II;[24] and her mother, Alexandra the Macabee.[25] Later in life, Herod executed his three oldest sons—Antipater II, Aristobulus IV, and Alexander—because he believed they were plotting to kill him.[26] Of this twisted family dynamic, Octavian allegedly remarked, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."[27] Herod once slaughtered the family of a man he believed was conspiring against him.[28] Herod even devised a plan to execute members of several prominent families on the day of his own death—to ensure that someone was mourning when he died.[29]

One might wonder why Josephus failed to mention the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem if he provided such lavish detail of Herod's other atrocities. But this "massacre"—which probably resulted in the death of a dozen or so male children—probably was so insignificant that it never garnered the attention of the his-

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[19] Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.61.
[20] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.7.8.
[21] *Assumption of Moses* 6:4.
[22] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.7.3–6.
[23] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.3.3.
[24] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.6.1–4.
[25] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.7.7–8.
[26] Josephus, *Ant.* 16.11.1–8; 17.7.
[27] Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4.11.
[28] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.8; 17:3; *Wars* 1.17; 1:22.
[29] Josephus, *Ant.* 17.6.5–6.

torian. We must not belittle such a horrific event, but given Herod's many crimes, it would be easy to see why it may be overlooked. Think of it this way: contemporary historians only working from memory or the limited data they had access to would struggle to recall every mass shooting in the United States over the past decade. Even if Josephus had known about the death of the innocents, we could reasonably explain his silence on the topic.

Herod "prosecuted his own family members and friends and punished them as if they were enemies . . . out of a desire that he alone would have all the honor" as king.[30] The murder of a dozen or more children in Bethlehem doesn't seem like much of a stretch for the tyrant who killed his family, friends, and political rivals who posed a threat to his rule.

Matthew's account is consistent with what we know about Herod the Great in history. Furthermore, the claim that Matthew invented these events to prove the fulfillment of prophecy makes little sense in the light of the texts he chose to emphasize: Jer 31:15, which mourns the exile of the families of Judah, and Hos 11:1, which recounts the exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt for backslidden members of the northern kingdom. Again, the more likely explanation is that the event of Herod's massacre was interpreted typologically through the lens of Israel's prophetic tradition.

Objection #4: The Silence of the New Testament

One of the most perplexing questions—even for professing Christians—concerns the silence of the rest of the New Testament on the matter of Jesus's miraculous conception. The neoorthodox theologian Emil Brunner (1889–1966) rejected the doctrine of the virginal conception (and the historicity of the infancy narratives) on this basis:

> In the preaching of the Apostles, in the preaching of Paul and of John, as well as of the other writers of the New Testament, this idea does not play even a small part—it plays no part at all. Thus the doctrine of the Virgin Birth does not belong to the *Kerygma* of the Church of the New Testa-

[30] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.6.4.

> ment. . . . We must assume, either, *that the Apostles were unaware of this view, or that they considered it unimportant, or even mistaken*.[31]

Brunner's point is well taken. If the virgin birth tradition is original to early Christian tradition, then why is the rest of the New Testament so quiet about this topic?

We should begin by noting that first generation of Christian theologians saw no difficulty with the silence of the rest of the New Testament on the virgin birth. Second-century writers like Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus were staunch defenders of this doctrine. Never did they hint that Matthew or Luke contradicted the other evangelists or apostles because of their explicit references to Jesus's miraculous conception.

Did Mark, John, Paul, James, and other NT authors *know* of a virgin birth tradition? We have three options:

1. They knew about the virgin birth tradition and rejected it.
2. They didn't know about the virgin birth tradition.
3. They knew about the virgin birth tradition but did not speak directly of it.

Of these options (1) is the least likely, because we could expect to see a polemic against this teaching elsewhere in their writings. Some scholars have suggested that John's prologue (1:1–18) is such a polemic, but I have written elsewhere why I do not believe that to be the case.[32] Option (2) probably applies to *some* of the New Testament authors, particularly those who are writing very early on. But there are instance across the gospels, as well as the Pauline epistles and the apocalypse which seem to signal option (3).[33]

The absence of a virgin-birth tradition in the Acts sermons, Paul's letters, or even the Gospel of Mark may be attributed to its late transmission. The early church proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus before they proclaimed his virginal conception. This makes sense: the resurrection was a public event that had over 500 witnesses (1 Cor 15:6). Mary's lack of sexual intimacy

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[31] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952), 354, italics mine.

[32] Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 352–53; Putman, *Conceived by the Holy Spirit*, 203–28.

[33] See Putman, *Conceived by the Holy Spirit*, 229–50.

prior to conception was a much more private event. The number of witnesses to Jesus's birth and early childhood was a very short list:

- the magi from the east;
- Simeon, Anna, and those who heard Anna's prophecy;
- the shepherds;
- anyone who may have been present in the house when Jesus was born;
- Elizabeth and possibly Zechariah;
- Mary and Joseph.

Even with a dozen or so witnesses to Jesus's birth or infancy, *only Mary and Joseph had firsthand knowledge of the virginal conception*. We might reasonably infer that Mary confided in Elizabeth and Zechariah about this miracle as well.[34]

Many of the major players in the infancy narratives were likely deceased before Jesus's adult ministry began—and certainly more so when the gospel traditions were being circulated. Jesus's immediate family—Mary and her other sons—were likely the sources of these stories. But no one in the family would have shared these stories until after the resurrection, for obvious reasons. The holy family didn't want the attention of Herod's sons. Stories about this miracle probably would have been met with skepticism and accusations of illegitimacy.

Mary may have waited until after Pentecost to talk about these events, after Jesus's identity as the risen Lord became public knowledge. Empowered by the Spirit, Mary may have begun quietly sharing her story with those in the church who would listen, including her other children who only came to believe in Jesus after his resurrection.[35] Even presuming the virginal conception tradition came later, there is nothing within the New Testament that explicitly contradicts it—even appeals to Joseph as Jesus's father.

What Matthew and Luke write about the virgin birth is clear: Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The evangelists believed this event was anticipated in

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[34] Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 92–93.

[35] J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1930), 264–65. For more on James's dramatic conversion after the resurrection, see John 7:2–5; 1 Cor 15:7; Acts 1:14; 15:13; Gal 1:19; 2:9.

the Old Testament. Of the clarity of Scripture on this topic, even the modernist Presbyterian theologian Charles Briggs (1841–1913) admitted,

> The virgin birth does . . . rest on the authority of two of the holy gospels, and that authority must be regarded as sufficient for those who recognize their divine inspiration. It has never been regarded by the Christian church as necessary that a doctrine should be sustained by a large number of passages. It is sufficient that the doctrine be clearly and unmistakably stated. That is undoubtedly true of the virgin birth. It is impossible by any mode of explanation to remove that doctrine from these two passages of Holy Scripture.[36]

No Christian doctrine must be accounted for in every single biblical text, and there is no need for a minimum number of additional texts to affirm a doctrine where one text is sufficiently clear. As Barth declares: "No one can dispute the existence of a biblical testimony to the virgin birth."[37]

Other sources of New Testament Christology are remarkably consistent with the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke. Christ is the "Word' who became flesh (John 1:14). He existed "in the form of God" but did not exploit his rightful authority as God (Phil 2:6). Instead, he assumed the "form of a servant," the same Servant of the Lord prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 42:1) and raised up in Simeon's arms (Luke 2:28). Paul declares that Jesus took on "the likeness of humanity" (Phil 2:7). Without an alternate explanation for how he was "made" in the form of the servant, Matthew and Luke's accounts "fit." Matthew and Luke tell us *how Jesus was made incarnate*, but John and Paul tell us *why Jesus's incarnation matters*.

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[36] Charles A. Briggs, "The Virgin Birth of Our Lord," *The American Journal of Theology* 12.2 (Apr 1908), 193. Briggs was eventually excommunicated from the Presbyterian church for his rejection of plenary-verbal inspiration, but his views on the virgin birth would have been deemed to be too conservative for some of his modernist peers.

[37] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.2, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* §13–15, study edition, trans. and ed. G. M. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 185 [176].

Conclusion

We have many good reasons to take Luke and Matthew at their word when they tell us about Jesus's life and childhood. Despite what modern skeptics may claim, the Gospel-writers didn't invent these stories or steal all their ideas from pagan mythology. Other objections, such as the illegitimacy thesis, reveal an anti-supernatural, anti-Christian bias. While there are other objections to the infancy narratives that must be addressed, the ones explored here do not *prima facie* disqualify these accounts as historically reliable resources for the early life of Jesus of Nazareth.

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I Believe in the Virgin Birth … and So Does Richard Dawkins: A Cheeky Proposal

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I first met Bob Stewart in 2011, shortly after joining the Philosophy faculty at Oklahoma Baptist University. I had long admired Dr. Stewart's scholarship and quickly came to appreciate his mentorship and friendship. Bob talked me (and more importantly my Dean) into bringing a group of OBU students to Defend 2013, and I have been an addicted fixture at Defend ever since. Defend is, in my humble but definitely correct opinion, the best apologetics conference in the world. Defend draws 400-500 attendees for a full week of apologetic teaching from top apologists and philosophers from throughout North America (and beyond). It is a privilege and a joy to now be teaching alongside Dr. Stewart at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; and it is an intimidating honor to be stepping into Bob's shoes as the Director of Defend after his retirement this summer. This article, drawn from my plenary lecture at the end of this year's Defend conference, is dedicated to Dr. Stewart and his legacy at NOBTS and Defend.

As a Christian, I affirm the virgin birth of Jesus. In this paper, my cheeky intention is to demonstrate that Richard Dawkins, the famous evolutionary biologist and atheist apologist, also believes in a virgin birth.[1] I will endeavor to show that evolutionary atheists like Dawkins ALL embrace the virgin birth and other miraculous events, despite their protestations to the contrary.

Philosophy 101: Defining Terms

First things first. We need to start with two definitions. What do we mean by miracle? And what do we mean by evolution?

[1] This article was originally delivered as the closing plenary address at the DEFEND apologetics conference at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on Friday, January 5, 2024.

There are numerous definitions of miracle out there. David Hume famously defined miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature," later adding "by the volition of a deity."[2] Others also include the notion of supernatural entities or gods or deities in their definition of miracle. John Locke: "A miracle then I take to be a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine."[3] Thomas Aquinas: "Those events then are properly to be styled miracles, which happen by divine power beyond the order commonly observed in nature."[4] Among more contemporary thinkers, J. P. Moreland defines miracle as "an event or intervention that is caused by the special action of God or some other supernatural being that is an exception to the ordinary, law-governed course of nature for some specific purpose."[5] For our purposes, however, I want a definition of miracle that does not explicitly invoke or require a supernatural being.

Fortunately, there are several such definitions available. Craig Keener argues that a miracle "transcends the ordinary course of nature and so generates awe."[6] Robert Sloan Lee's excellent dissertation argues that "an event is a miracle if, and only if, it supercedes or suspends the regular working of the world."[7] Amy Hall states that "By definition, a miracle does not happen as a result of

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[2] David Hume, "Of Miracles," in David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Selections from A Treatise of Human Nature* (La Salla, IL: Open Court, 1963), 126-27.

[3] John Locke, "A Discourse of Miracles," in Linda Zagzebski and Timothy D. Miller, eds., *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 567.

[4] Thomas Aquinas, "Miracles," in Zagzebski and Miller, eds., *Readings in Philosophy of Religion*, 566.

[5] J. P. Moreland, *A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles: Instruction and Inspiration for Living Supernaturally in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 27.

[6] Craig S. Keener, *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 3.

[7] Robert Sloan Lee, *Miracles: A Philosophical Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 2004), 13.

a naturally repeating cause."[8] Putting some of these definitions together, we can define a *miracle* as "an event which supercedes or suspends the regular working of the world, does not happen as a result of a naturally repeating cause, serves as an exception to the ordinary, law-governed course of nature, and thus generates awe."[9]

It is important to note two things about my definition of miracle. First, it does not presuppose that miracles do occur, or even that they *can* occur. Rather, it just states that *if* a miracle were to occur, *then* this is the sort of thing that it would be. Second, this definition of miracle neither presumes nor requires the existence of a supernatural entity. That is, miracles could occur in a universe in which God does not necessarily exist.

So much for defining miracle. What about evolution? Again, definitions abound. On a very simple level, evolution could be understood as "the gradual development of something, especially from a simple to a more complex form."[10] With respect to living creatures, evolution can be defined as "the process by which different kinds of living organisms are thought to have developed and diversified from earlier forms during the history of the earth."[11] More specifically, evolution is "a process of gradual change that takes place over many generations, during which species of animals, plants, or insects slowly change some of their physical characteristics."[12]

For this article, however, a definition of evolution needs to explicitly include the Darwinism that pervades our cultural and academic environment—at least partly because our primary intellectual interlocutor, Richard Dawkins, is a devout Darwinist. Hence, we will define *evolution* as "the scientific theory explaining the ap-

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[8] Amy K. Hall, "Why Science Does Not Disprove Miracles." https://www.str.org/w/why-science-does-not-disprove-miracles#.Wz4MTn4nZPM. Accessed February 16, 2024.

[9] My own composite definition.

[10] Oxford Learners Dictionary. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/evolve. Accessed February 16, 2024.

[11] Oregon Sea Grant Glossary, "Evolution" (Oregon State University). https://seagrant.oregonstate.edu/menacetothewest/glossary. Accessed February 16, 2024.

[12] Collins Dictionary, "Evolution" https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/evolution. Accessed February 16, 2024.

pearance of new species and varieties through the action of various biological mechanisms (as natural selection or genetic mutation)."[13] There are two things to note about this definition. First, it does not presuppose that evolution has in fact occurred. Rather, it lays out the nature of evolution, such that *if* evolution has occurred, *then* this is the type of thing that it is. Second, this definition of evolution neither presupposes nor precludes the existence of God. That is, this type of evolution could occur in a universe charged with the grandeur of God, such that evolution is the means by which God created the universe and all within it. Likewise, however, this type of evolution does not explicitly require the existence of anything like the God of Christianity.

We have our two definitions. My goal now is to show how contemporary evolutionists like Dawkins necessarily embrace the reality of three miracles. These are three gaps that naturalistic evolution is intrinsically incapable of bridging and hence require a miracle. The three miracles are: life from non-life (the origin of a common ancestor); consciousness from non-consciousness (the origin of consciousness); and sexuality from asexuality (the origin of sexual reproduction).[14]

In many Christian apologetic circles, these three 'distinct miracles' form part of a cumulative case for Christian theism.[15] That is, these are three aspects of reality that are much more readily explained by Christian theism than by other worldviews (particularly evolutionary naturalism). I think that is a very respectable way to argue, and indeed use such abductive arguments myself. Here, however, we are going about it a different way. We are putting on the shoes of evolutionary naturalism – walking a mile in Richard Dawkins's worldview. And from within that worldview – atheism plus Darwinian evolution – we are exploring how the emergence of life, consciousness, and sexual reproduction 'fit.' In that sense, we are engaging in a bit of *reductio ad absurdum*, presuming the

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[13] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Evolution." https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evolution. Accessed February 16, 2024.

[14] The original lecture at Defend covered a fourth 'miracle of naturalistic evolution'—the emergence of agency from non-agency. For space, I have excised that miracle from this article.

[15] See, e.g., Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), Chapters 12-15 (230-327) and 18 (388-414).

truthfulness of evolutionary naturalism, and exploring its explanation of these three aspects of reality, in order to show how evolutionary naturalism cannot be consistently held. Instead, evolutionary naturalists like Richard Dawkins have to embrace miracles that do not fit within their worldview. As we walk through these evolutionary miracles, please keep in mind my dual intention. On the one hand, I aim to entertain – to set forth a cheeky and somewhat snarky hypothesis. On the other hand, I aim to illuminate – humor aside, there are serious philosophical and theological points being made.

1. Life from Non-Life: The Origin of the 'Common Ancestor'

Darwinian evolution is fundamentally an attempt to account for the diversity of life that we observe and experience on earth today. Evolution explains how the 'tree of life' came to be as broad, diverse, and complex as it is.[16] Again, for our purposes we are going to presume that the fundamental Darwinian story is true – that life has indeed evolved according to Darwinian principles to become what it is today.

But in order for the process of Darwinian evolution – natural selection operating upon random genetic mutation – to occur, you need to have *biological life*. And everyone acknowledges that biological life on earth has not always existed – that at some point in time, the first life form emerged on planet earth.[17] Moreover, that first earthly life form emerged from non-life: a biological life form emerged from a context in which there were no previous biological life forms. That is, at point T_1 there was no life on earth, while at subsequent point T_2, there was biological life on earth.

Scientifically, it seems well established and widely accepted that life cannot arise from non-life. However, people did not always

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[16] "Evolution 101: History of Life: Looking at the Patterns," University of California Berkeley, accessed February 15, 2024, https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolution-101/the-history-of-life-looking-at-the-patterns/.

[17] Gerald Bergtrom, "The Origins, Evolution, Speciation, Diversity, and Unity of Life," Libretext Libraries, accessed February 15, 2024, https://bio.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Cell_and_Molecular_Biology/Book%3A_Basic_Cell_and_Molecular_Biology_(Bergtrom)/01%3A_Cell_Tour_Lifes_Properties_and_Evolution_Studying_Cells/1.06%3A_The_Origins_Evolution_Speciation_Diversity_and_Unity_of_Life.

think so. Indeed, prior to the 19th century it was commonly believed that various critters came to exist out of inanimate matter – a theory known as spontaneous generation.[18] Aristotle postulated spontaneous generation to account for the appearance of insects on or around rotting meat, and the theory persisted for over 2000 years.[19] Ancient and medieval thinkers, then, held that biological life could arise from non-life, and indeed that this occurred with fair regularity.

Today, virtually no one accepts the theory of spontaneous generation, and for good reason. Empirical experiments successfully identified the microscopic progenitors of maggots, fleas, flies, etc., and demonstrated that truly isolated (e.g., vacuum-sealed) spoiled meat did *not* give rise to biological organisms.[20] Thus, spontaneous generation is described by Biology Dictionary as "an incorrect and obsolete hypothesis about the possibility of life forms being able to emerge from non-living things."[21] Wikipedia, that ever-reliable source, more tactfully calls spontaneous generation a "superceded scientific theory" – one that used to hold sway but is universally rejected today.[22]

In other words, scientists today agree that life cannot emerge spontaneously from non-living matter. To put it slightly differently, the emergence of life from non-life would be a miracle, that is, 'an event which supercedes or suspends the regular working of the world, does not happen as a result of a naturally repeating cause, serves as an exception to the ordinary, law-governed course of nature, and thus generates awe.' The natural world, when left to its own devices, is such that non-life begets non-life, and biological life only arises from pre-existing biological life.

But the naturalistic evolutionary story requires the emergence of biological life on earth, from a terrestrial sphere that was previ-

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[18] Peter McLaughlin, "History of Spontaneous Generation," in *Annals of the History and Philosophy of Biology* 10 (2005), 80.

[19] Aristotle, *History of Animals, Book V, Part I,* translated by A. L. Peck (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 99.

[20] Guy Bordenave, "Louis Pasteur (1822-1895)," in *Microbes and Infection* 5 (2003), 555.

[21] https://biologydictionary.net/spontaneous-generation/. Accessed February 21, 2024.

[22] Spontaneous Generation," Wikipedia, accessed February 15, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spontaneous_generation.

ously devoid of biological life. Richard Dawkins, then, holds that, at least one time, biological life arose from non-life – an event which clearly qualifies as a miracle. So evolutionary naturalists must embrace the miracle of the origin of life. We need not debate the *source* of that miracle. I am content simply to acknowledge that evolutionists affirm the miracle of biology: the origin of life on earth.

Two quick notes.

First, Dawkins might protest that he does not believe that life on earth arose from terrestrial non-life. Instead, the most likely explanation, given current knowledge, is that aliens seeded life on earth – a theory known as panspermia.[23] But this simply will not do. On the one hand, identifying advanced aliens as the source for life on earth is an entirely unevidenced and speculative hypothesis, a theory which we have no reason to accept.[24] On the other hand, panspermia doesn't do away with the miracle of biological life – it just pushes it up a notch. Rather than needing to account for the miracle of terrestrial biological life, we would now need to account for the miracle of extraterrestrial biological life.[25]

Second, Dawkins might argue that biologists are seeking to replicate the process of deriving life from non-life. He might point to the Miller-Urey experiments in the mid-1900s, which successfully produced a couple of amino acids by bombarding various chemical soups with electrical energy.[26] But this will not do either. On the one hand, the Miller-Urey experiments came nowhere near the production of biological life, and researchers have not advanced any closer to that 'holy grail' of biology in the decades

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[23] Richard Dawkins and Ben Stein, "Richard Dawkins and Intelligent Design by Directed Panspermia," published May 18, 2020, videoclip of interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb9HQyDTOK8 See also Simon Milton, "A Short History of Panspermia from Antiquity Through the Mid-1970s," in *Astrobiology* 22.12 (2022): 1379. For a book-length treatment by a proponent of panspermia, see Chandra Wickramasinghe, *Our Cosmic Ancestry in the Stars: The Panspermia Revolution and the Origins of Humanity* (Bear & Company, 2019).

[24] Jesse C. McNichol and Richard Gordon, "Are We from Outer Space? A Critical Review of the Panspermia Hypothesis," in *Genesis-In the Beginning. Cellular Origin, Life in Extreme Habitats and Astrobiology* 22 (2012): 591-619.

[25] Interestingly, Dawkins implicitly acknowledges this problem in his video interview with Stein (see footnote 21).

[26] Jeffrey L. Bada and Antonio Lazcano, "Prebiotic Soup-Revisiting the Miller Experiment," *Science*, vol. 300 (May 2, 2003), 745-746.

since: hence the continued rejection of the theory of spontaneous generation. On the other hand, even if successful, the Miller-Urey experiments would not have shown anything like 'spontaneous generation,' or nature producing life from non-life 'on its own.' Rather, the experiment would show what intelligent agents can do when directing non-living things in particular ways in pursuit of a biological goal – an argument for the intelligent design and production of life, rather than non-teleological abiogenesis.

It seems, then, that evolutionary naturalists like Richard Dawkins are stuck with embracing the reality of the miracle of the origin of biological life. Biological life emerged from non-life, an event which supercedes the normal working of nature and cannot be replicated in the lab.

2. Consciousness from Non-Consciousness: The Origin of Consciousness

Deriving life from non-life is the first miracle of evolution; deriving consciousness from non-consciousness is the second such miracle. Atheist Owen Flanagan describes consciousness as "the really hard problem" in evolutionary science.[27] Flanagan suggests that naturalistic science struggles to explain "how the amazing private world of consciousness emerges from neuronal activity."[28] Why exactly is consciousness such a tough problem? What do we even mean by 'consciousness?' Flanagan calls consciousness an "amazing private world" which includes a panoply of mental properties and states that we could consider – emotions, sensations, qualia, intentions, reflections, considerations, reasonings, etc. – each of which is interesting and problematic in its own right.

Let us focus on one facet of consciousness – the first-person experience: self-awareness, reflexivity, and inaccessible inner experience. We are all aware of going through life as unitive selves: we are holistic creatures who have a realm of experiences, encounters, sensations, etc., and process them through an enduring personal perspective. We experience life as self-aware creatures; individuals who 'own' our experiences and are more than the 'sum' of our

[27] Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

[28] Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, xi.

properties and states. In short, I exist. Not that I *exist*; but rather that *I* exist. I am a conscious being who persists through time; I am a subject who endures through significant changes. Things happen to me, but I own and reflect upon those occurrences and experiences.

Our inner conscious life truly is remarkable. Consider the eminent Richard Dawkins for a moment. He grew up in a nominally Christian home; God-talk was a part of his environment. He changed his mind in his teenage years, moving from theism to atheism. He has been married and has a daughter. But here is a truly remarkable thing. None of us know what it is like to be Richard Dawkins: none of us has experienced what he has experienced, and even if we had, we still would not know what it is like to be Richard Dawkins. Why not? Because, quite simply, none of us *is* Richard Dawkins. There is something irreducible that it is to *be* a particular conscious person.[29]

One of my favorite philosophical articles is Thomas Nagel's "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?"[30] Nagel's ultimate answer is a simple three-word "I don't know." I do not know what it is like to be a bat because I am not a bat. If a bat has a conscious life (an open question), then I cannot access that conscious bat-life. But similarly, Nagel argues, I cannot access *your* conscious life, because I am not you. Men are from Mars, women are from Venus – I cannot understand what it is like to be a woman because I am not a woman. And we can keep getting closer and closer to your own identity, and yet no one, not even an identical twin, will know precisely what it is like to have your particular conscious life. You are a unique consciousness; I am a unique consciousness. This private inner life, this subjective going-through-life experience, is a truly remarkable feature of reality.[31]

How, though, is consciousness a struggle for Richard Dawkins? Why is consciousness hard for the atheist evolutionist to explain? Why is consciousness a 'miracle'?

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[29] I acknowledge that after reading *The God Delusion*, some thoughtful observers might question the level of Dawkins's consciousness, or at least his intelligence. Nonetheless, we'll give him the benefit of the doubt and presume that he has an intelligent consciousness like our own.

[30] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83.4 (October 1974): 435-50.

[31] Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?", 436.

First, given naturalistic evolution, all that exists is matter and energy, and combinations thereof. Life is complex combinations of matter and energy. But matter and energy, natural phenomena, are theoretically (if not yet actually) explicable by scientific categories and terminology. That is, all material things can in theory be described and explained by third-person, physical, scientific means.[32] Consider volcanos, or black holes, or the human tailbone. Given naturalistic evolution, we can provide complete descriptions of the entity, along with explanations of what the entity does and how it functions. That's one of the fascinating things about geology, physics, and medicine respectively. But we are incapable, even in theory, of describing the internal experience of subjective consciousness in purely third-person, scientific terminology. My subjective experience is inaccessible to outsiders – a neuroscientist could slice and dice my brain all they like, and they are still not going to know what it is like to 'be me.'[33] But if my subjective consciousness is impossible to describe or explain scientifically, then it seems to be something more than (or other than) material.[34]

Second, given the evolutionary story, and even granting the miracle of the emergence of life from non-life, non-conscious living things are intrinsically incapable of giving rise to conscious living things. We can all, with Dawkins, acknowledge that humans are conscious critters. We can also, with Dawkins, acknowledge that many biological living things do *not* have consciousness – or, at the very least, there is no good reason to believe that they are conscious. So, for example, viruses, if they are living, are non-conscious; ditto amoeba, earthworms, and so forth. There are living things that might be debatable when it comes to the question of consciousness – octopi, starfish, dung beetles, and so forth. Then there are living things that clearly *are* conscious: human beings, of course, but also primates and cats.[35] But consciousness is not a spectrum possession; consciousness does not exist on a con-

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[32] Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 5 (May 1986): 291.

[33] Paging all neuroscientists: please do not try this experiment. I prefer my brain where and how it is.

[34] Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," 292.

[35] My proof for the latter: evil requires consciousness and volition; cats are evil; therefore, cats have consciousness and volition.

tinuum. A living thing is either conscious, or it is not. There may certainly be different capacities that conscious creatures can have – but either a living thing has an inner first-person conscious experience, or it does not.

Why does this matter? Well, once again, the non-conscious does not give rise to the conscious. Scientists have not observed a non-conscious living thing give rise to a conscious living thing. I would go one step farther and suggest that non-conscious things are intrinsically incapable of giving rise to conscious things. Hence, if Dawkins holds, as he must, that there were once non-conscious living things which gave rise in a future generation to conscious living things, then Dawkins holds that an evolutionary miracle has occurred at least that once. If a miracle is an event which supercedes the normal workings of nature, and is not replicable in empirical experimentation, then the emergence of consciousness from non-consciousness fits the bill. So, along with the emergence of life from non-life, we have a second evolutionary miracle that Dawkins must affirm – the emergence of consciousness from non-consciousness.

3. Sexuality from Asexuality: The Origin of Sexual Reproduction

But the evolutionary miracle that I want to focus on is the virgin birth. My cheeky contention is that Richard Dawkins affirms the virgin birth – he just doesn't acknowledge that he believes in the virgin birth.

Christians both believe in and celebrate the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth. But what precisely do we affirm? The Apostles' Creed declares: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his [God the Father's] only Son, our Lord, *who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary* …" and then a bunch of other important stuff.[36] Affirmation of the virgin birth points to the way in which Mary became pregnant, and Mary's sexual status at the point of Jesus' conception.

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[36] Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.

A) How did Mary become pregnant?

First-century Jews and Romans were no fools – they knew how women got pregnant. We didn't figure out the birds and the bees in the 1960s. The usual means of impregnation is sexual intercourse – humans are sexually reproductive animals. We are not, of course, the only creatures that reproduce via male and female gametes that are combined sexually. Other primates are similarly sexually reproductive, as are all mammals, birds, and reptiles.

There are other species that reproduce sexually, but not via internal impregnation. For example, fish are sexually reproductive, in that female gametes (eggs) must be fertilized by male gametes (sperm); but the male sperm are not delivered internally via sexual intercourse, but rather externally via a 'cloud'.[37]

Not all species reproduce sexually, however. Starfish and corals reproduce asexually, and some species (e.g., Komodo dragons, zebra sharks) are *capable* of asexual reproduction even though they predominantly reproduce sexually.[38] In asexual reproduction, there is no union of gametes from male and female parents, but rather the passing on of a single set of DNA via the single parent. Bacteria and plants reproduce asexually, along with single-celled and multicellular organisms like amoeba, fungi, and algae.

We need to be clear. When we say that Mary's conception and delivery of Jesus was 'virginal' and 'of the Holy Spirit', we are *not* claiming that Jesus was born the way that fungi and bacteria reproduce. Nonetheless, we *are* claiming that Jesus was not the product of sexual reproduction: Mary's female egg was not fertilized by the sperm of some human dude who penetrated her. Her pregnancy did not result from sexual intercourse.

B) What was Mary's sexual status at the point of conception [and birth]?

One of the earliest attacks against the virgin birth was the claim that Mary had either forced or consensual sexual relations with a

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[37] Bruce S. Miller and Arthur W. Kendall, Jr. *Early Life History of Marine Fishes* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2009), 16.

[38] See, e.g., Christine L. Dudgeon et al, "Switch from sexual to parthenogenetic reproduction in a zebra shark," in *Scientific Reports* 7:40537 (2017).

Roman soldier named Panthera.[39] In the Jewish community, rumors circulated that Jesus was an illegitimate child – not the product of war rape, but rather the result of teenage (or young adult) sexual experimentation.[40] Joseph and Mary, on this reading, just couldn't wait for their official marriage: they wanted to get busy, and they wanted to get busy *now*. Like many young people who love God, they gave in to sexual temptation. Either way, on this early attack, whether due to an abusive Roman soldier or an overeager fiancé, Mary was *not* a virgin at the time Jesus was conceived.

One could, at least in theory, hold that Jesus's conception was miraculous, that is, not the result of normal sexual reproduction, and simultaneously believe that Mary and Joseph had previously had sex. I don't know of anyone who actually believes such a thing, and there would seem to be no plausible scenario in which such a viewpoint makes any sense. But it is at least logically possible that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary and that Mary was not a virgin.

But that is not what Christians believe. When I affirm the virgin birth, I affirm that (a) Mary was a virgin who had never had sexual relations with a man, and (b) Mary was impregnated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was sexually mature but sexually inactive, and God directly and miraculously brought about a fully fertilized egg in her womb.

C) How Does Richard Dawkins Believe in the Virgin Birth?

Given what I've said thus far, it might seem not just implausible but blasphemous to suggest that Richard Dawkins also believes in the virgin birth. Dawkins, after all, mercilessly ridicules Christian belief in the virgin birth. From his recent (and not-very-impressive) book, *Outgrowing God*: "Everybody who ever lived had two parents, and … the line goes on back through various apes and monkeys to fish, worms, and bacteria."[41] As for Christians who affirm the virgin birth, Dawkins suggests that they are scien-

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[39] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 31-32.

[40] Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 30, translated by T. R. Glover (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 299.

[41] Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God: A Beginner's Guide* (New York: Random House, 2019), 86.

tifically ignorant and hopelessly naïve.[42] So how dare I accuse Dawkins of affirming the virgin birth? Perhaps it will help to zoom out and talk about the virgin birth more abstractly. What is going on?

First, we have the claim that Mary was a virgin when she conceived and gave birth to Jesus. Mary is the 'parent' in this scenario, and so the general claim is that we have a 'parent' who brings about an 'offspring' absent any form of sexual reproduction. Jesus is not the result of sexual reproduction; so Mary, as the parent, brings about offspring asexually. That is, the reproduction that results in Jesus's birth is not sexual in nature.

Second, we have the broader Christian claim that Jesus is not just fully divine, but also fully human. He is born as a baby boy, and grows into a grown man. But if Jesus is fully man, that also entails that he would have been capable of sexual reproduction. That is, Jesus could have had sex and made babies. (It is worth noting that Dan Brown managed to turn that contention into a multi-million dollar cottage industry.[43])

Now put these two broad beliefs together. Jesus is the result of asexual reproduction. Jesus is capable of sexual reproduction. So you have here a critter, Jesus, who is capable of reproducing sexually but was not himself the product of sexual reproduction.

Now do you see how Richard Dawkins *has* to believe in the virgin birth? I will admit to somewhat of a trick, or at least a verbal equivocation. Dawkins does not believe in *the* virgin birth of Jesus; but he *has to* believe in *a* virgin birth. After all, what does the naturalistic evolutionary story say? Dawkins claims that all living creatures are descended from a common ancestor – an original single-celled life form a couple billion years ago.[44] That original single-celled ancestor, of course, reproduced asexually; indeed, there was no other option. If it couldn't reproduce asexually, it

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[42] E.g., "The nineteenth century is the last time when it was possible for an educated person to admit to believing in miracles like the virgin birth without embarrassment." Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2006), 187.

[43] Dan Brown, *The DaVinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003); the best-selling novel was followed by a blockbuster film by the same name starring Tom Hanks.

[44] See, e.g., Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 142-43.

would not have reproduced at all, and life would have died out with its death. Early critters, then, reproduced asexually.

At some point on the evolutionary pathway, however, you had to have a parent that itself was purely asexual but produced an offspring that was *capable* of sexual reproduction – let's call this creature Dolly, just for fun (for the sheep, not the human, in case you wondered).[45] Note – we do not need to insist that Dolly *did* reproduce sexually. Perhaps Dolly possessed 'facultative parthenogenesis' – the ability to reproduce either asexually or sexually.[46] What is essential for the task at hand is Dolly's capability to reproduce sexually even though her parent (note the singular, not the plural) did not.

Here's the question for Richard Dawkins. Can we replicate the emergence of sexual reproduction in the lab? Is nature capable of bringing about sexually-reproductive creatures from purely asexual creatures? Have we ever seen such a thing occur? Do the laws of nature provide a straightforward explanation for how such a thing *could* occur? Or is the emergence of sexuality something which 'supercedes or suspends the regular working of the world, does not happen as a result of a naturally repeating cause, serves as an exception to the ordinary, law-governed course of nature, and thus generates awe'? Certainly the mystery and magic of human sexuality generates awe and wonder within us; but the emergence of sexuality and sexual reproduction ought to inspire even more awe and wonder as we contemplate the scientific impossibility of such a thing.

On the evolutionary story, it seems to me that the virgin birth story is actually more miraculous than it is in the Christian story. With Mary, you have a woman who is *capable* of sexual reproduction even though the Christ-child is not the product of such. But with the first sexually reproductive creature, you have the emergence of something brand-new which has neither precedent nor plausible pathway. Dolly is the first creature capable of sexual re-

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[45] Robert G. McKinnell and Marie A. Di Berardino, "The Biology of Cloning: History and Rationale," *Bioscience* 49, no. 11 (November 1999): 875-885.

[46] "Parthenogenesis," Parthenogenesis Definition and Examples, Biology Online, https://www.biologyonline.com/dictionary/parthenogenesis. Accessed February 7, 2024. See also Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "parthenogenesis". Encyclopedia Britannica, 2 Feb. 2024, https://www.britannica.com/science/parthenogenesis.

production; nothing like sexuality has existed in the evolutionary story prior to her appearance. Though Mary's conception is miraculous, the fact that she is pregnant and gives birth to a baby boy is not. For Dolly, however, if she were (somehow) to become pregnant and give birth to an offspring, it would have been an astounding, inexplicable, scientifically impossible event: in other words, a miracle.

So it seems to me that Richard Dawkins has to believe in a virgin birth. He might belittle belief in Jesus's virgin birth. But note this carefully. On the one hand, we Christians have the good grace to acknowledge the virgin birth in which we believe, and to profess it openly and unapologetically. On the other hand, we also have the good sense to believe in the existence of a transcendent divine power capable of bringing about the miracle of the virgin birth. Richard Dawkins lacks both that grace and that sense. He pretends that belief in a virgin birth is silly and childish while simultaneously embracing a grand evolutionary story which absolutely requires such an event. He professes that belief in God causing Mary's pregnancy is intellectually bankrupt while simultaneously embracing an atheistic worldview which absolutely lacks the metaphysical and explanatory power to bring about the virgin birth in which he must believe.

Conclusion

Hopefully this thesis has provided a suitable mix of humor and illumination. My contention that Richard Dawkins believes in the virgin birth is, ultimately, a snarky and cheeky proposal. I am not suggesting that Dawkins secretly believes in, or is metaphysically required to affirm, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

But my contention that evolutionary naturalism has to embrace a number of scientific miracles is dead serious. We have defined miracle, again, as 'an event which supercedes or suspends the regular working of the world, does not happen as a result of a naturally repeating cause, serves as an exception to the ordinary, law-governed course of nature, and thus generates awe.' I think there are a number of such miracles that are unavoidable in Dawkins's naturalistic evolutionary perspective: the emergence of life from non-life; the emergence of consciousness from non-consciousness; and the emergence of sexual reproduction from asexual reproduc-

tion. Furthermore, these miracles come about without any transcendent or non-natural agency – but, of course, if the events are impossible given the regular workings of nature, and there is nothing beyond nature to act in the universe, then the events are impossible full stop. In the inimitable words of Frank Turek: if these are the kinds of miracles required by the system, then I just don't have enough faith to be an atheist.[47] The virgin birth of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, I affirm in both good conscience and good sense. And, tongue planted firmly in cheek, so does Richard Dawkins.

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[47] Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2004).

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Are Christianity and Science at War with One Another?

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Rumors of War?

Is there tension, conflict, and perhaps even outright war between Christianity and modern natural science? One might think so. Critics have alleged numerous instances in which Christian authorities or institutions suppressed, opposed, or persecuted scientists or scientific inquiry. For example, only a few centuries after the birth of Christianity, a mob of Christians attacked, murdered, dismembered, and burned philosopher, scientist, and mathematical astronomer Hypatia of Alexandria.[2] Later scientists like Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei were prosecuted by the Roman Catholic Church, and while Galileo's advocacy for heliocentrism was punished only by years of house arrest, Bruno was burned at the stake for his speculations about worlds beyond the

[1] This paper is adapted from a presentation at the Defend Apologetics Conference at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on January 7, 2022.

[2] Hypatia's story is told by a number of authors, including Carl Sagan's influential *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980) 335-36. It is the focus of writer / director Alejandro Amenábar's film *Agora* (Lionsgate 2010). See also David Hutchings and James C. Ungureanu, *Of Popes and Unicorns: Science, Christianity, and How the Conflict Thesis Fooled the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 95-97.

one recognized by the late medieval worldview.[3] Centuries later, in the United States, the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in 1925 was the result of Tennessee state legislation prohibiting instruction in evolutionary biology primarily to protect religious beliefs.[4] Immortalized in the play and movie *Inherit the Wind*, the prosecution of biology teacher John Scopes pitted a literalistic Bible-thumping creationist against a theologically skeptical evolutionist, and thereby became emblematic of a broad conflict between religion and science.[5]

More recently, the New Atheists—Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others—made the notion of a religion-science conflict central to their crusade by sharply contrasting the worldviews of modern natural science and Christianity.[6] If the scientific account is grounded in rational theo-

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[3] The Neil deGrasse Tyson *Cosmos* reboot episode "Standing Up in the Milky Way" devotes 10 minutes of a 44-minute runtime to an animated retelling of the Bruno case, emphasizing Bruno's belief in multiple worlds. Bruno is characterized as a counterevangelist to Christianity, "spreading the Gospel of infinity throughout Europe." The cartoonishly diabolical-looking cardinal pronounces the result of Bruno's Inquisition trial: "You are found guilty of asserting the existence of other worlds" (*Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, Episode 1, March 9, 2014; writers Anne Druyan and Steven Holtzman). The Galileo case has been offered as a critical instance of Christian-science conflict by a number of writers, including Bertolt Brecht's play *Galileo* (English version by Charles Laughton, ed. Eric C. Bentley [New York: Grove Press, 1966]), which was made into the film *Galileo* (Joseph Losey, 1975).

[4] See James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 75-76.

[5] The religious people in the play and 1960 film are cruel, ignorant religious rubes who contrast poorly to the enlightened and rational defenders of science, whose view is summed up in the comment of the Clarence Darrow character (Henry Drummond, played in the 1960 film by Spencer Tracy), that "Darwin took us forward to a hilltop, from where we could look back and see the way from which we came. But for this insight and for this knowledge, we must abandon our faith in the pleasant poetry of Genesis" (*Inherit the Wind* [Kramer, 1960] 1:39:35-1:39:50).

[6] Representative works highlight the idea that science and religion are in conflict with one another: the title of Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a World without Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986) explicitly references Christian apologist William Paley's idea of God as the divine Watchmaker to counter that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist" (6); Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) begins and ends with the theme that Darwinian naturalism is a superior alternative to traditional Christian theism; Hitchens' edited anthology *The Portable Atheist* (Philadelphia, PA: Da

rizing and empirical evidence while the religious view is based on faith and religious authority (the argument goes), then we have clear reason for preferring the scientific view to the religious one. The New Atheists have also made the contrast between human activities that are "faith-based" and those that are "evidence-based" a staple of public discussion. According to their critique, religion in general and Christianity in particular is based on faith, which amounts to "belief with no evidence,"[7] a view that is celebrated in the biblical claim that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7 KJV). That purported fact provides compelling grounds to dismiss religious claims. Further, if the success and cultural authority of science is threatened by religion, then that provides a strong argument for discarding religion or at the very least diminishing its social and cultural power.[8]

The charges leveled by the "New" atheists are in an important respect not so new. They repackage, update, and expand allegations of a Christianity-science war implicit in those anecdotes of scientists persecuted by Christians. In turn, those anecdotes, and many others like them, were built on older charges of conflict from the late nineteenth century, articulated and disseminated by a number of authors, but especially in immensely popular books by John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White.[9] This shows

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Capo, 2007) is chock-full of atheist conversion stories motivated by considerations of intellectual skepticism often prompted by science. Over a brief period in 2006-2007, a series of books by these authors highlighted the idea that religion should be subjected to scientific analysis and that under such analysis it would be found wanting: Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2007); and Hitchens' *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

[7] Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?," *Humanist* Jan/Feb 1997: "Science is based on verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy, shouted from the rooftops." Versions of this charge appear in the work of many other critics of Christianity.

[8] Daniel Dennett suggests that in the name of ideological diversity we should "save the Baptists," but isolate their noxious views from social influence: "Save the Baptists! Yes, of course, but not *by all means*. Not if it means tolerating the deliberate misinforming of children about the natural world (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea* 516).

[9] John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897 [original publication 1874]); Andrew Dickson White, A *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vols. (New York: D.

that there has been a thread of authors and texts promoting the war narrative for well over a century.

Does that weight of evidence make the case? Are Christianity and science at war with one another?

I will argue here that while Christianity and science are *not* at war, and have not been even *thought to* be at war for most of the history of their relationship, the *idea* that they are in conflict *emerged* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Understanding how Christianity and science came to be thought of as being at war with one another will not only correct important misunderstandings we might have about Christianity, science, and the relationship between them, it will also equip us to respond to polemic distortions that attempt to use the privileged cultural status of science to discredit Christianity. Understanding Christianity and science and the history of their relationship is, therefore, a valuable tool of Christian apologetics.

One important clarification is important at the outset. Even though critics sometimes speak of a Christianity-science war spanning the two millennia that Christianity has been in existence, this is deeply misleading for the basic reason that what we call "modern natural science" has only existed for several hundred years. Systematic study of nature emerged in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition and was a central part of the philosophical work of the thinkers prior to Socrates and then of Plato, Aristotle, and the post-Aristotelian schools of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism.[10] However, that study and the body of literature it produced was typically called "natural philosophy" or "philosophy of nature."[11] There is a degree of continuity between ancient and medieval philosophical study of nature and the modern natural

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Appleton, 1896). White's book was a reworking of a set of arguments he offered in a series of public talks, articles, and a smaller 1876 book. White summarized the complementary though different approaches of his and Draper's book by noting that Draper "regarded the struggle as one between Science and Religion. I believed then, and am convinced now, that it was a struggle between Science and Dogmatic Theology" (*Warfare* ix).

[10] While a number of the ancient Greek texts address philosophy of nature, the most important were Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and biological works.

[11] See David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 1-3, 357-67; Ronald Numbers, "Introduction," in Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) 3.

sciences, but there are clear discontinuities as well, most notably with respect to the features that we typically regard as essential to the scientific method. Surprisingly enough, these features—systematic collection of empirical data, experimentation, theory formulation and rigorous testing in the light of empirical observation, and falsification—are of fairly recent vintage and in any case remain subject to ongoing debate.[12] This means that it is deeply misleading to speak of ancient or medieval "science."[13] However, we can ask how Christians and Christian institutions have treated the systematic study of nature in all its variegated forms throughout the last two millennia. On that score, once again, my argument will be that Christianity has been deeply *supportive* of such study, and that the question of conflict between Christianity and study of nature has only emerged in very recent history.[14]

Study of Nature in the Early Church Context

The New Testament and extrabiblical texts from the first several centuries of Christianity make clear that the priorities of the early church concerned activities necessary to grow, develop, and sustain the new Christian movement—foundational theology, especially concerning Christology, evangelism, church organization and leadership, and Christian formation and discipleship.[15] One

[12] Larry Laudan, "The Demise of the Demarcation Problem," in R. S. Cohen and Larry Laudan, eds., *Physics, Philosophy, and Psychoanalysis* (Reidel, 1983).

[13] An ongoing problem with the way Carl Sagan speaks of ancient and modern "science" in *Cosmos* is that he sees them as an aspects of an essentially continuous enterprise that was interrupted by long interregnum of Christianity and the Medieval Era, broken only by the Italian Renaissance just in time for the modern Scientific Revolution (see *Cosmos* Chap. 7, 167-93). To take just one example, however, Democritus speculatively proposed that reality was composed of "atoms," indivisible material particles. Even though modern physics borrowed his term, the original meaning has been abandoned; modern physics takes the divisibility of the atom as a fundamental premise.

[14] According to James Hannam, the first known use of the English word "scientist" to describe the person involved in the systematic study of nature, was at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1833 (*The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* [Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011] 345-46).

[15] In addition to the biblical texts, important texts would include the creeds, works of the early Church Fathers, and the Didache (see Henry Bettenson and

might think that these priorities would leave little intellectual space for speculations concerning the relationship of Christianity to the systematic study of nature. Further, the emphasis placed on "faith" as an important religious concept seems to put Christianity at odds with the rational and evidentialist orientation of either philosophy of nature or modern natural science. For example, the Apostle Paul warned of the dangers of philosophy and reasoning (1 Cor 1:20-26) and extolled the certainty that can come from faith (2 Cor 5:7), and the author of Hebrews seems to praise faith precisely because it appeals to hope and unseen evidence (Heb 11:1).

On the contrary, if we begin with the biblical texts themselves, we can see at least two separate reasons for thinking that Christianity is not broadly opposed to intellectual inquiry especially concerning the natural world. First, the same Paul who expressed suspicion of philosophy offered extensive *arguments* for his interpretive account of the Good News of Jesus (often in dense arguments such as those found in Romans 3-8). Further evidence of Paul's commitment to argument and evidence is found in the fact that he intellectually sparred with philosophers in Athens, in the process demonstrating that he was conversant with Stoic and Epicurean philosophical ideas and texts (Acts 17:16-34).[16] When Paul critiques pagan philosophy, or more broadly dismisses human reasoning, it is not because he holds a fideist account of Christian commitment, one severed from evidence or reasoning. Instead, as his letters show, his evidentiary base is God's revelation to his chosen people found in the Hebrew scriptures. His contrast to human reason is not irrational spirituality, but the Spirit-given power to understand the thoughts of God, who is the standard for truth and rationality (1 Cor 2:1-16).

A second reason for thinking that Christianity is not anti-rational more directly concerns the natural world. As Paul argues, God reveals himself through nature: "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that [men] are without excuse" (Rom 1:20 NASB). The idea that God reveals himself through his creation is of

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Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church, 4th ed.* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011]).

[16] In the course of his message on the Areopagus, Paul quotes both the Cretan philosopher Epimenides and the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus.

course already present in the Hebrew scriptures, for nature itself testifies of God's creative activity (Ps 19:1-6; Ps 8:3-4; Ps 139:13-16). Significantly, the Jewish and Christian scriptures communicate the truth that nature is good but not itself divine. Thus, the Jewish-Christian attitude is consistent with attentive study of nature of a sort rejected by both harshly dualistic or gnostic spirituality which denies the goodness and value of the natural world and the deification of nature characteristic of pantheism or cosmic religion.[17]

This view of the value of studying nature as a way of understanding the divine nature carried through to the early church beyond the period chronicled in Acts. The early Church Fathers understood the value of pagan philosophy for clarifying points of doctrine, especially with respect to problems raised by divine nature, divine attributes, and the Trinity.[18] In seeking truth, Christians might "despoil" the pagans in the same way that God's people "despoiled the Egyptians" as they left on the Exodus.[19] In *The City of God*, St. Augustine juxtaposes Paul's warning against philosophy (1 Cor 2:8) with Paul's assertion that God reveals himself through nature (Rom 1:19-20) and Paul's citation of pagan writers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28) in making the case that philosophy, when cautiously interpreted, may be used by the Christian.[20] Further still, Augustine argued that Christians have an *obligation* to be conversant about philosophy for evangelistic purposes:

> Even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this

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[17] David C. Lindberg, "Science and the Early Church," in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 30-32.

[18] Lindberg notes that by the second and third Christian centuries, for the purposes of apologetics and development of doctrine, "the logical tools developed within Greek philosophy proved indispensable" (*Beginnings of Western Science* 149; see also Lindberg, "Science and the Early Church" 24).

[19] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.40.60-61.

[20] *City of God* 8.10.

> knowledge he holds to, as being certain from reason and experience. Now it is a disgraceful thing for an infidel to hear a Christian . . . talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.[21]

What about Tertullian's famous challenge of Christian use of pagan philosophy, expressed in his question "What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem?"[22] It is true that Tertullian was concerned about corruption from pagan philosophy seeping into Christian doctrine. However, Tertullian was only able to offer sophisticated arguments *against* pagan-Christian synthesis because he had been educated in and was able to use the methods of classical pagan philosophy: "it was an *argument* that Tertullian presented, and to a very significant degree he built it out of materials and by the use of methods drawn from the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition."[23] That means that Tertullian's objection was not to pagan philosophy as a whole, but constituted a warning, rather like Paul's warnings, that Christians should be cautious about particular doctrines of pagan philosophy that conflict with Christian teaching. Thus, Tertullian's position on this matter was not significantly different from other Church Fathers, who advocated judicious use of pagan philosophical texts and ideas while cautioning about their dangers. The early Christian church clearly regarded the study of nature using philosophical tools as subordinate to spiritual, theological, and ecclesiastical concerns, valuable only when "Christianized" and serving as a "handmaid" to theology but acknowledged its value and supported it accordingly.[24]

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[21] Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (ed. Johannes Quasten, W.J. Burghardt, and T.C. Lawler, vols 41-42 (New York: Newman, 1982), 42-43; quoted in Lindberg, "Myth 1: That the Rise of Christianity Was Responsible for the Demise of Ancient Science," in Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail* 15-16.

[22] *De praescriptione haereticorum* vii, in Bettenson and Maunder, eds., *Documents* 6.

[23] Lindberg, "Myth 1," 12; see also Lindberg, "Science and the Early Church," 26.

[24] Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science* 149-50; Lindberg, "Science and the Early Church" 27-28; Lindberg, "Myth 1" 15.

Supposed Christianity-Science Flashpoints

As indicated above, critics often cite particular historical events as illustrative evidence for the claim that Christianity and science are at war. Do these cases provide such evidence?

Start with the shocking murder of Hypatia of Alexandria. The documentary evidence leaves no reasonable doubt that a Christian mob attacked, murdered, and dismembered Hypatia. Such action and those who perpetrated it deserve universal condemnation. But was Hypatia murdered because she studied nature or because her Christian attackers regarded philosophy of nature as a bad or objectionable pursuit? The straightforward answer is no. The Bishop of Alexandria, Cyril, was engaged in a campaign to increase his power in the civil affairs of the city. The Roman prefect of Alexandria, Orestes, was a Christian who was a student of Hypatia. Cyril and his allies believed, accurately, that Hypatia could be used to smear Orestes, so they started a campaign to associate Hypatia with sorcery and witchcraft. The campaign was effective in stirring up popular sentiment against Hypatia, and eventually prompted a Christian mob to attack and kill her.[25]

Maria Dzielska, a scholar who has undertaken a painstakingly careful review of the primary documentary sources regarding Hypatia's life, philosophical activities, and death, concludes starkly that her killing was "murder for a political purpose."[26] The Hypatia case had nothing to do with conflict between Christianity and science.[27]

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[25] Polemic tellings of the Hypatia story include Draper *History* 55-56; Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 4.47.

[26] Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. F. Lyra (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) 94, 104. Dzielska further notes that all of the polemical versions of the Hypatia story, including those that enlist her as a representative figure in the Christianity-science "war narrative," merely use her for the purposes of the polemicists (101). See also Hutchings and Ungureanu 108; see 95-97, 108-9 for both the mythology and historical fact concerning Hypatia.

[27] Regarding the film treatment of Hypatia's story in *Agora*, while aspects of the movie are affecting and historically accurate, it's notable that Amenábar isn't content to depict Hypatia as a brilliant mathematician. She has to advocate for heliocentrism, anticipate Kepler's elliptical orbits, and invent the astrolabe and the hydrometer just for good measure. The Christians are for the most part violent and bloodthirsty fanatics, except the handful influenced by Hypatia, who are conflicted. Whether or not it is successful cinema, it's terrible history.

Well, Sagan and fellow critics claim, even if Hypatia's murder does not count as evidence of hostility against science and reason, surely the Alexandrian Christian mob's destruction of the Library of Alexandria does. According to this story, the Great Library of Alexandria was a vast repository of the wisdom and learning of the ancient world, with thousands—perhaps even hundreds of thousands—of scrolls containing works of philosophy, poetry, drama, medicine, theology, philosophy of nature, and history. The same anti-intellectual, science-fearing throng that silenced the brilliance of Hypatia (again, as the story goes) regarded the amassing of pagan wisdom as intolerable and destroyed it just a few years before they murdered Hypatia.[28]

This charge is based on the suggestion that the Serapeum, the temple complex devoted to the Greek-Egyptian god Serapis where Hypatia and her father Theon taught in the late 300s either was identical to the Library of Alexandria founded by the Ptolemies some time around 250 B.C., or that it was a significant "daughter library" established as an annex to the Great Library. The problem is that these claims are highly speculative and based on fragmentary and conflicting evidence from antiquity. Scholars are unsure what the Library of Alexandria contained, when and under what circumstances it declined, and the precise facts about its end. In any case, the Library no longer existed during Hypatia's lifetime, and the supposed "daughter library" housed in the Serapeum is not described by any ancient sources, pagan or Christian, as having held a great number of books. So the best evidence available confirms that Christians were not responsible for the decline or destruction of the Library of Alexandria.[29]

The Hypatia murder and the supposed destruction of the Library of Alexandria are linked to a wider set of claims in the Christianity-science war narrative: that the ascent of Christianity to political power plunged Latin Christian Europe into a "Dark Age," a

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[28] *Cosmos* 333-36. Again, versions of this story are found in many sources, likely tracing back to Gibbon.

[29] Discussion of the Library of Alexandria, its relation to the Serapeum, and possible connections to Hypatia are discussed by a number of contemporary authors, including Hutchings and Ungureanu, 108-113. A significant scholarly source, P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), especially 1:305-35, concludes that the Great Library declined well before the birth of Christianity and that the relationship of the Serapeum to the Great Library is a matter of significant uncertainty.

"sleep of a thousand years,"[30] that brought the intellectual activity of antiquity to a halt. Infamously, Carl Sagan represents this view of the medieval era with a timeline that is blank from the death of Hypatia in 415, a point Sagan helpfully labels "onset of the 'Dark Ages'," until the position labeled "Columbus, Leonardo" in the late 1400s. In the legend to the timeline, Sagan comments, "The millennium gap in the middle of the diagram represents a poignant lost opportunity for the human species."[31] This "Dark Age" view of the Middle Ages was first introduced by Renaissance scholars as part of a project to ridicule the supposedly artless translation skills of medieval translators, and to emphasize the Renaissance recovery of classical culture.[32] The "Dark Age" mythology is bolstered by a set of related claims, including that medieval Christians rejected intellectual activity in favor of faith, that they discounted the value of pagan philosophy for theological reflection on the divine nature, that they substituted new forms of credulity and superstition for those held by pagans, that they believed the earth to be flat, and so forth.[33]

Despite the sensationalism of Sagan and other critics, there is no evidence that the death of Hypatia marked the end of classical intellectual culture or the spreading of a curtain of darkness across

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[30] In a discussion of the Renaissance scholar Erasmus (1466-1536) Edward Gibbon notes that his genius owed in significant part to his historical time, as Europe was emerging from the medieval era, which was a "sleep of a thousand years" (*Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon*, vol. 5 [London: John Murray] 258).

[31] *Cosmos* 335; see also 56, 189. The timeline runs from 600 B.C. to AD 2000, and about a third of it, a period of a thousand years, is completely blank. Nothing at all of scientific import, Sagan would have us believe, happened for an entire millennium.

[32] Theodore Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," *Speculum* 17.2 (Apr 1942): 226-42. Significantly, the Renaissance humanists were generally uninterested in study of nature, with the notable exception of Leonardo da Vinci (see Ralph M. Blake, Curt J. Ducasse, and Edward H. Madden, *Theories of Scientific Method: The Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960] 3-21).

[33] Claims such as these prescribe the parameters of the war narrative and thus set the scope of the war narrative mythbusting found in works such as Lindberg and Numbers, *God and Nature*; Numbers, *Galileo Goes to Jail*; and Hutchings and Urugeanu, *Of Popes and Unicorns*. The idea that the suppression of paganism by Christian emperors simply replaced one form of "credulity and superstition" with a new one is found in Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 3.28.

Europe. We have already noted that the early Church made use of pagan classical learning, including philosophy of nature. While the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 did precipitate a breakdown of civil order and bureaucratic imperial governance, and consequently of attention to the classical educational system, new civil and ecclesiastical institutions gradually arose to replace the missing imperial structures. The monastic movement began within a century after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, and the monasteries came to provide social anchors for many communities. The priority of the monasteries was the spiritual life of the monks and nuns, but necessity of literacy for Bible reading and study meant that the monasteries taught reading, collected books in libraries, and eventually came to copy books in scriptoria. The emphasis was on the Bible and theological and spiritual texts, but the libraries included classical texts as well.[34]

Concerns about poorly educated and even illiterate priests prompted Charlemagne to institute a system of schools, typically associated with cathedrals, for the education of clergy by the early 800s. Again, the priority was on biblical and theological education, but works of philosophy and study of nature were collected and taught as well. As political stability increased and urban areas expanded, some of the cathedral schools grew, and other urban schools were founded. Over time, as these schools increased in size, associations of faculty along the model of guilds emerged that formed the foundations of the great European universities, the first of which arose in the late 1100s and early 1200s in Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and other European cities.[35] The university system was a particularly important innovation, because it provided a significant level of independence for groups of scholars to set curriculum and award degrees under the charter of a political or clerical authority. Further, it expanded the thematic attention beyond spiritual studies to general education provided by liberal arts, which provided preparation for graduate studies in law, medicine,

[34] Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science* 152-55.

[35] The foundations of the oldest European universities are difficult to disentangle from what are now recognized as mythic origin stories, but there is no doubt that organized associations of faculty and students were functioning in Bologna, Paris, and other locations by the late 1100s and early 1200s (see Hilde De Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, Vol. I: Universities in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4-8, 62-65; see also Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science* 218-24.

or theology. All of these conditions situated Latin Christian Europe very well to receive in the late 1000s and early 1100s a flood of texts of ancient pagan Greece and Rome in Greek, Arabic, and eventually Latin translations. These texts shaped the universities and became the central focus of the arts curriculum that formed the core of university education.[36]

It is hard to appreciate the dramatic effect of the conjunction of universities as a context for intellectual study and exchange and the availability of classical texts providing new content for study. The 1200s marked an extraordinary period of intellectual exchange, innovation, and constructive disagreement as classical pagan texts were studied in the light of and integrated into Christian thinking. Christianity provided a broad cultural framework that fostered exchange across the full expanse of Europe from the British Isles to Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean to the northern Germany.

It is true that the introduction of Greek ideas into the medieval university curriculum involved disagreement and dispute. While Aristotle's ideas in particular provided a rich framework for understanding the range of human knowledge, Aristotle's broadly naturalist methodology challenged the rational and supernatural focus that Platonized Christianity had taken in its first millennium. Further, some of Aristotle's philosophical claims directly challenged Christian doctrines: for example, he argued that the human person likely did not survive the death of the body, and he described the divine governor of the universe as "self-reflective thought," apparently unaware of the cosmos.[37]

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[36] Gordon Leff's Chapter 10.1 in *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. I, 307-36, tells this story in some detail; see also Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science* 215-43; James A. Weisheipl, *The Development of Physical Theory in the Middle Ages* (University of Michigan, 1971) 19-26. As usual, Sagan has a fragment of the truth, but in distorted form detrimental to Christianity: he claims that the works of pagan antiquity were not rediscovered until the Italian Renaissance, some 300 years later, and thanks to Muslim scholars rather than Christians, just in time to inspire Columbus, Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler (see *Cosmos* 56, 189).

[37] As the form or structural principle of the body, the soul would not seem to survive the death of the body, though Aristotle conjectures that the principle of intellect, as divine, might survive death (see Aristotle, *On the Soul*, esp. 1.4. 408b17-29. Aristotle's discussion of the Unmoved Mover as self-reflective thought is found in *Metaphysics* 12.9.

Important scholars led by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas explored ways that Aristotelian ideas might be integrated into Christianity. So-called radical arts masters such as Siger of Brabant, Aristotelian liberal arts teachers who followed the naturalistic interpretations of Aristotle advanced by the Muslim commentator Averroes, tested the limits of what a Christian interpretation might allow. More traditionalist scholars and theologians such as Bonaventure pushed back against Aristotelian ideas. Church authorities, spurred by the traditionalists, issued a series of limitations, prohibitions, and condemnations of new ideas, especially in the flagship University of Paris, and culminating in the Condemnation of 1277, a document issued by Bishop Etienne Tempier of Paris.[38]

Should we take these prohibitions and condemnations as evidence of an intellectual opposition by Christian culture to new learning, especially learning relevant to the study of nature? In a word, no. The prohibitions and condemnations were mostly local, centered on research and teaching in Paris. Perhaps even more significant, the fact that there were *multiple* attempts to restrict study of Aristotelian ideas shows that scholars continued to study and teach Aristotle even in the face of official opposition.[39] Finally, it is important to notice that there was no clear division of parties in "the church" or "church authorities" on the one hand and "intellectuals" or "scientists" on the other. Support for, concerns about, and opposition to Aristotelian and Greek ideas were distributed across Christian intellectual culture, and in any case, most university faculty were priests or members of religious orders. While Christian-Aristotelian ideas such as those championed by Thomas Aquinas were targeted in the Condemnation of 1277, they were largely accepted by the early 1300s, and were officially endorsed by the church when Thomas Aquinas was canonized as a saint and doctor of the church in 1323.

The broad acceptance of Aristotelian ideas had a dramatic effect on the rise of observationally informed study of nature in the

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[38] Edward Grant, "Science and Theology in the Middle Ages," in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 52-55; Weisheipl, *The Development of Physical Theory in the Middle Ages* 26-27, 57-58, 62-63.

[39] Michael H. Shank, "Myth 2: That the Medieval Christian Church Suppressed the Growth of Science," in *Galileo Goes to Jail*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 24-26.

late 1200s and early 1300s. Schools devoted to particular aspects of natural study cropped up in Oxford, Paris, and Merton College.[40] The work done in these medieval scientific schools provided the foundation for work in mechanics and astronomy that made possible the innovations of later figures such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler. So important was this medieval intellectual work that some have argued against speaking of the advances of the 1600s as a "scientific revolution" at all, seeing them instead as the incremental and gradual product of medieval thinkers, whose achievements might reasonably be dubbed the "first scientific revolution of the High Middle Ages."[41]

In summary, the Medieval Era was no "Dark Age" of intellectual night, no "Age of Faith" in which theological concerns crowded out intellectual activity or attention to nature. Christianity was not at war with science in this period of history. Sensationalist claims that medieval thinkers believed the earth to be flat or that church authorities outlawed human dissection turn out to be ungrounded polemics.[42] While some historians have hazarded the strong claim that Christian assumptions were *necessary* for the rise of modern natural science,[43] we can content ourselves with the more cautious claim that Christianity contributed to the rise of science, and therefore evidently cannot be at war with it.

Two Supposed Scientific Martyrs: Bruno and Galileo

Every movement needs its heroes, and every religious movement requires saints, if not martyrs. This is true of antireligious

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[40] Weisheipl, *The Development of Physical Theory in the Middle Ages* 63-81.

[41] Identification of the scientific work of the High Middle Ages as the "first scientific revolution" is the suggestion of philosopher and historian of science Michael Tkacz. Sociologist of religion Rodney Stark summarizes the dependence of early modern science on medieval science from a number of sources in *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) 135-47.

[42] See Lesley B. Cormack, "Myth 3: That Medieval Christians Taught that the Earth Was Flat," and Katharine Park, "Myth 5: That the Medieval Church Prohibited Human Dissection," both in *Galileo Goes to Jail*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[43] See James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) ix.

movements as well. For proponents of the Christianity-science war narrative, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) are often enlisted to serve this role.

Bruno was a polymath intellectual who was condemned by the Roman Inquisition for heresy in 1600. A lapsed Roman Catholic Dominican priest, Bruno's interests ranged widely across philosophy, theology, hermetic mysticism, astronomy, and philosophy of nature, and stretched all the way to expertise in mnemonics. Among his most striking ideas was a conceptual argument for the infinity of the universe adapted from ancient Greek atomism, the idea that there were multiple worlds rather than the single enclosed spherical cosmos accepted by medieval and early modern philosophers, and defense of Copernican heliocentrism. His life ended violently, with a trial by the Inquisition, conviction, and burning at the stake in 1600.[44]

Those who hope to construe Bruno as a scientific martyr offer a straightforward syllogism: Bruno's works included claims in philosophy of nature, especially concerning the nature of the cosmos as infinite, plural, and heliocentric; Bruno was executed by the church in cooperation with state authorities; therefore Bruno was a "martyr for science."[45]

While it is likely that Bruno's scientific claims were part of the Inquisition investigation, the theological implications of his scientific views and more importantly his syncretistic and hermetically influenced religious views were the major focus of his prosecution and ultimate execution. Bruno's interest in hermetic mysticism led him to construct a unified philosophical-theological system that not only included claims about nature, but also included clearly heretical religious claims such as denial of the divinity of Christ and of the virgin birth. His religious outlook was a conscious re-

[44] See Jole Shackelford, "Myth 7: That Giordano Bruno Was the First Martyr of Modern Science," *Galileo Goes to Jail*, ed. Ronald Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 59-67; Hilary Gatti, Essays on Giordano Bruno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[45] Shackelford, "Myth 7" cites a number of authors who promote the view that Bruno was a scientific martyr. Something like the associational syllogism seems to be the implied argument of the *Cosmos* episode "Standing Up in the Milky Way." See also Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* 86, 143. Bruno appears in Draper's *History* (177-81), receives scattered mentions in White's *History*, and is mentioned in passing in Brecht's *Galileo* as having been burned at the stake for claiming that Earth is a planet.

jection of Christian theological claims in favor of a syncretistic amalgam of Hermetic mystical theology in which a divine reality interpenetrated the cosmos in a way that made incarnation and special revelation unnecessary.[46] His system *included* ideas about the cosmos, but his theological views were the final irresolvable sticking point in the Inquisition case. Bruno, therefore, was no "martyr for science."

What about the case of Galileo Galilei? Like Bruno, Galileo was brought to trial by the Inquisition for scientific work intertwined with theological implications. Is he a martyr to science?

Starting in 1609, Galileo's telescopic observations revealed a number of important facts about the heavens. Observations of mountains and craters on the surface of the moon challenged the longstanding idea from antiquity that there was a qualitative distinction between the changeable, imperfect, corrupt earth and the unchanging, perfect heavenly realm. Discovery of moons orbiting Jupiter undermined the foundational Ptolemaic principle that all heavenly bodies orbit the earth. Galileo published his observations in the *Sidereal Messenger* (1610). Later that year, Galileo's observation of the phases of Venus provided strong evidence that Venus orbited the sun rather than the earth.[47]

The cumulative effect of Galileo's astronomical observations led him to begin to question the geocentric and geostatic Ptolemaic cosmology that had been in place since antiquity and to shift his allegiance toward heliocentric cosmology.[48] When heliocentric

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[46] Shackelford, "Myth 7" 61-63, 65-67; Gatti, "Essays on Giordano Bruno," especially the Epilogue.

[47] A helpful biographical summary of key events of Galileo's life and scientific research along with a narrative timeline can be found in Maurice A. Finocchiaro, ed. and trans., *The Essential Galileo* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 1-25. This book also gathers and excerpts documents from Galileo's publications and trial.

[48] It is called the Ptolemaic cosmology after Claudius Ptolemy, a Hellenistic astronomer associated with the Library of Alexandria who lived in the middle 100s A.D. Drawing from older Greek philosophical and astronomical sources including Hipparchus, Plato, and Aristotle, and building on centuries of astronomical observations, Ptolemy worked out a cosmological model with earth at the center and the motion of the planets and sun described in terms of complex combinations of circles. The ancient prejudice in favor of circular motion as the most perfect was therefore maintained, but with adjustments that actually de-

cosmology was challenged as unbiblically heretical in 1615, Galileo's interest in heliocentrism prompted him to take an active role in addressing the concerns. He argued in a series of semi-private letters that the Bible must be acknowledged as true, but that its focus on theological questions about the human relationship with God meant that we should interpret biblical claims about nature in common-sense rather than strictly scientific terms. In Galileo's view, this meant that ordinary biblical assertions of the sun rising or setting, claims about the earth being set on solid unmoving foundations (e.g., Psalm 104:5), or the stories of the sun standing still or moving backwards (Joshua 10:12-13) should not be read literally.[49]

The head of the Roman Inquisition, Robert Bellarmine, acknowledged that heliocentric cosmology might be useful as a mathematical model for understanding the nature of planetary motion so long as it was not thought to actually describe planetary motion. He further conceded that sufficient scientific evidence could conceivably overturn a traditional reading of scripture on a question such as geocentrism, but doubted that such evidence was forthcoming regarding the question of heliocentrism.[50] The Inquisition committee endorsed this position in a formal statement that declared heliocentric cosmology unscriptural and therefore heretical, and that specified that Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* be placed on the Index of prohibited books until it could be reissued with a preface declaring heliocentrism to be a mathematical model rather than description of reality.[51] Bellarmine met personally with Galileo and certified in a short document that Galileo was in good standing with the church. The document also included a formal acknowledgment by Galileo that heliocentrism had been declared "contrary to Holy Scripture and therefore cannot be defended or held."[52]

This resolved the matter for a number of years, though Galileo continued to think about the question, and ultimately decided to

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scribed the observational data of planetary motion with high accuracy (see Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science* 99-105).

[49] Galileo, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," in *The Essential Galileo*, especially 113-20.

[50] Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, "Letter to Foscarini," included in *The Essential Galileo* 146-48.

[51] Decree of the Index, Mar 5, 1616, in *The Essential Galileo* 177.

[52] Cardinal Bellarmine's Certificate, May 26, 1616, in *The Essential Galileo* 178.

write a book on the subject, especially when he became convinced that he had discovered decisive evidence beyond his telescopic observations in favor of geokinesis: the tides. Galileo was further encouraged by the fact that the current pope, Urban VIII, was the former Florentine Cardinal Maffeo Barbarini, who Galileo knew to be interested in and conversant about current astronomy, and with whom Galileo had a friendly relationship.

Galileo's book *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* laid out the full body of evidence on the subject in the form of a conversation between a traditionalist geocentrist Aristotelian-Thomist, a proponent of the new heliocentric view, and a third neutral character. While ostensibly a dialogue exhibiting competing views, the book is transparent in its advocacy for heliocentrism. He initially sought formal approval for the book from Rome, but due to problems with travel and communication arising from an outbreak of the plague, he turned to church officials in Florence for final approval. The book, published in 1632, was welcomed by many, but drew negative attention from Church authorities in Rome almost immediately, and was suspended pending an investigation. Galileo was called to Rome, where he was questioned by an Inquisition committee for several months. He was found guilty of "vehement suspicion of heresy," a charge second only to intentional assertion of heretical claims. The *Dialogue* was prohibited, Galileo was forced to abjure or formally reject his views, and he was sentenced to imprisonment, which was commuted to house arrest for the remainder of his life.

The Church clearly acted against Galileo and was prompted to act by the publication of a book on heliocentric science. Should we conclude that the Galileo case is finally a genuine instance of Christian war on science? There are a number of reasons to resist this simple assessment. First, the majority of the trial hinged on the direct question of whether or not Galileo had violated the 1616 instruction of Cardinal Bellarmine not to "hold or defend" Copernicanism, and thus was more immediately a matter of ecclesiastical discipline than scientific research. Galileo insisted that Bellarmine's instruction allowed holding Copernican heliocentrism "suppositionally," that is, as a mathematical model rather than as a claim about the true motions of heavenly bodies, while the Committee read the instruction of prohibiting advocacy for Copernicanism in any way. Second, the Committee was concerned about

how Galileo received the imprimatur, or official permission to publish the book, initially from authorities in Rome but then through Florentine Church officials, which seemed duplicitous. Third, the Committee was unconvinced that the dialogue structure of the book effectively shielded Galileo from taking an authorial position on heliocentrism, particularly since the arguments of the book were so clearly in favor of heliocentrism.[53] Finally, contextual factors complicated Galileo's position. Galileo named the traditionalist character in the book Simplicio, supposedly in reference to the Neoplatonist commentator on Aristotle named Simplicius, and he put into Simplicio's mouth arguments associated with Pope Urban. However, the name Simplicio in Italian has the connotation "simpleton" or "fool," which could easily be construed as ridicule directed at his supposed friend and erstwhile patron.[54] Even though Galileo said nothing about scriptural interpretation in the book, the fact that the Inquisition prohibition on heliocentrism was grounded on the question of scriptural interpretation, and that the 1616 trial was just short of a century after the Protestant Reformation, meant that Church authorities likely felt compelled to make an example of Galileo. The point was not that Galileo was doing science; the Church itself supported scientists doing astronomical research, and Galileo himself continue to research and write on science for the remaining nine years of his life. The problem was a particular scientist making particular claims in the context of Church admonitions in the historical and political wake of the Reformation. Galileo insisted all along that he was a faithful and obedient Catholic, not a scientific rebel against theological truth.

If the Bruno and Galileo cases both turn out to be complex examples of the interplay between science, religion, philosophy, politics, and culture rather than straightforward instances of conflict between Christianity and science, then two of the cases most widely cited in support of the war narrative vanish in a murky cloud. We can say with confidence that the number of individuals

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[53] Galileo essentially granted this point in his Second Deposition near then end of the trial, in which he granted that upon rereading the book the arguments in favor of heliocentrism were presented "favorably to the reader as strong and powerful" (*Essential Galileo* 283). Galileo pled that his judgment here was hampered by "vain ambition, pure ignorance, and inadvertence" rather than culpable wrongdoing.

[54] See *Essential Galileo* 192.

prosecuted by Christians simply for studying the natural world is precisely *zero*.

A Surprising Non-Instance of Christianity-Science Conflict: Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Biology

Up through the early 1800s there was no widespread idea that Christianity and science conflicted. As the natural sciences began to develop and find their place in higher education, most of the people in the West who studied the natural world were also theologians, or at the very least, were committed theists.[55] One of the most influential texts of the turn of the century was theologian-naturalist William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), which offered the "watchmaker" argument for divine creative design of the natural world. Given the place that debates about evolution and creation have in the contemporary context, and with both hard-line neo-Darwinist atheists *and* Christian creationists insisting that evolution and creation conflict with one another and cannot be reconciled,[56] we might expect that the narrative of Christianity-science conflict began with Darwin. As it turns out, this is not quite true either.

Throughout his career as a public naturalist, Charles Darwin never asserted a fundamental conflict between religion and science. The details of this general assertion are quite surprising. While Darwin initially planned to follow his father's career pathway and practice medicine, he discovered rather quickly that he enjoyed examining and collecting marine creatures in the tidal pools of the Firth of Forth far more than the brutality of the operating theater at the University of Edinburgh. After consulting with his father, he decided that the best career path for him among the limited choices open to a young man of the Victorian upper middle class

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[55] See Stark, *For the Glory of God,* 160-97 for a discussion of the religious affiliations of Western scientists from early modernity to the turn of the millennium. While the evidence was unevenly reliable until very recently, Stark finds that scientists claim far higher rates of religious affiliation than we might expect.

[56] Two representative examples: Dawkins' *Blind Watchmaker* and Albert Mohler, "Why Does the Universe Look So Old?", Ligonier Ministries 2010 National Conference Live Webcast, 6/19/2010 (video https://www.ligonier.org /learn/conferences/tough-questions-christians-face-2010-national/why-does-the-universe-look-so-old). More below on the polarized present state of affairs below.

was the clergy. Neither Darwin nor his father were particularly religious, but both understood that a rural pastorate would allow the young Darwin plenty of time to explore nature when not occupied by preparing sermons and visiting parishioners. Consequently, Darwin moved from Edinburgh to Cambridge and changed his studies from medicine to pre-theology. After graduation, however, Darwin's life was fundamentally altered by an invitation to join a Royal Navy mapping/surveying ship, the HMS *Beagle*, on a voyage around the world as a gentleman companion for the ship's captain.[57]

Upon his return, Darwin abandoned his plan to become a country pastor. The *Beagle* voyage gave him sufficient public profile and engagement with concrete biological data to become a naturalist. He published a series of books detailing his observations while on the Beagle, a book on animal breeding, and a study of barnacles, all the while working on his species book, which he finally published in 1859. Darwin's *Origin of Species* is certainly a critique of the idea of special creation, the idea that God directly brought species or broad types of organisms into existence. But it is not an attack on theism. At the time he wrote the *Origin*, Darwin conceded that a divine lawgiver likely instituted the laws that govern biological processes and also "breathed life" into the first organism or small set of organisms.[58] In repeated letters he assured correspondents that there was no conflict between evolution and Christianity, though his own views gradually drifted to a quiet agnosticism.[59] When urged by a group of Marxist Freethinkers to lend his name to the cause of public atheism, Darwin demurred, arguing that "agnostic" was sufficient rather than the far more aggressive label "atheist."[60]

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[57] Helpful sources for Darwin's life and works include Adrian Desmond and James A. Moore, *Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); John van Wyhe, ed. 2002-, *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* (http://darwin-online.org.uk).

[58] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859) 482-84, 488-90 (available https://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1859_Origin_F373.pdf); see also Charles Darwin, The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882, ed. Nora Barlow (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958) 92-93.

[59] Charles Darwin, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. 1, ed. Francis Darwin (New York: D Appleton, 1896), 274-86.

[60] Desmond and Moore, *Darwin* 656-58. See also the footnote of Francis Darwin regarding Aveling, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, 286.

Of course, the aftermath of the publication of the *Origin* was full of controversy. Critics of Christianity and organized religion such as T.H. Huxley sprang into action to explore the biological affinities between humans and apes, and on the other hand, Christians such as Bishop Samuel Wilberforce declared the radical incompatibility of natural selection and human dignity.[61] However, what is striking is the range of responses, which not only included support for evolution from critics of Christianity on one side and criticism from theists on the other, but a wild variety of alternate positions in between, including significant support for evolution from Christians across the theological spectrum, not only in Britain, but also in the United States, where Darwin's greatest champion was evangelical Harvard botanist Asa Gray.[62] All of this suggests that while Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection posed important challenges to Christian understanding of creation, nature, and divine agency, the result was *not* a general conclusion by those involved that Darwin's ideas had brought *science* in general into conflict with *Christianity* in general.[63]

Science-Religion Polarization: The Birth of the War Narrative

Examination of the supposed evidence for the "war narrative" shows that there was no Christianity-science conflict prior to the late 1800s. Despite a few incidents that seemed to represent conflict between Christianity and the systematic study of nature, Christian institutions and individual Christian believers were deeply involved in supporting and conducting research on natural phenomena from the early church onward.

All of that said, it is clear that something regarding the war narrative changed in the late 1800s. What was the change, and why did it occur, and what implications follow for the war narrative?

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[61] Desmond and Moore, *Darwin* 477-99; Samuel Wilberforce, "(Review of) 'On the origin of species'," *Quarterly Review*, 1860, 257-60.

[62] Jon H. Roberts, "Myth 18: That Darwin Destroyed Natural Theology," in Ronald L. Numbers, *Galileo Goes to Jail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) 163-66.

[63] This is the sustained argument of Moore's *Post-Darwinian Controversies*. Moore particularly wants to claim that the "war narrative" is unhelpful for understanding the reception and response to Darwin in the late nineteenth century.

I contend that a series of developments in culture, intellectual culture and higher education, theology and popular religion, and biological science contributed to a gradual polarization between evolutionary biology and ordinary religion. These developments created conducive conditions for the emergence of "war language" concerning Christianity and science, particularly in the wake of Darwinian evolution, which in turn became self-fulfilling prophecy.

First, the reconception of the cosmos on the mechanical model (in significant part prompted by early modern science) created the conditions for demystifying the world and making a naturalist outlook more plausible. Deism, skepticism, and intellectual atheism both reflected and amplified the idea of a natural order conceivable independent of divine agency.[64] A series of philosophers—notably Comte, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche—provided the justification for raising skeptical questions about the truth and status of religion.[65] This broadly naturalizing tendency promoted the critical study of religion as a human and social phenomenon, of the biblical texts as products of social and historical forces, and of the central figure of Christianity (in the form of the search for the historical Jesus).

While these projects emerged in France and Germany in the mid- to late-1800s, they were imported to the United States with the flood of American scholars who studied in European Universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[66] The German model also highlighted the notion of academic intellectual professionalism, which fundamentally altered the older academic model of theological and moral formation. Still further, the German model promoted professionalizing trends among scientific faculty and researchers, who were increasingly interested in foster-

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[64] Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007) is an attempt to chronicle the cultural changes by which religious disbelief is an increasingly live option for modern individuals. Taylor believes that the "subtraction thesis" that science simply has replaced belief is far too simplistic an account.

[65] Hutchings and Ungureanu sketch out a key line of thinkers that naturalized and secularized philosophical thought from the late 1700s to the immediate aftermath of Darwin (*Of Popes and Unicorns* 29-44).

[66] George M. Marsden notes that "between 1815 and 1914 bout nine to ten thousand Americans studied in Germany (*The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994] 104).

ing and protecting their social identity and status, particularly in the face of funding support by government and business, as illustrated by the founding of the U.S. Geological Survey in 1879.[67]

At roughly the same time, in the aftermath of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, mainstream biology went through several important transitions. The immediate reception of Darwin's work was controversial but richly pluralistic, with broad agreement on the fact of biological change over time but widely divergent views on the mechanisms, spiritual dimensions, and philosophical implications of evolutionary change.[68] However, by about 1905, the time of the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics, Mendelism replaced all competing theories of heredity, thereby narrowing the range of possible interpretations of evolution. Similarly, about 25 years later, something called the "evolutionary synthesis" took place. Biologists at the time recognized that something momentous had occurred, but disagreed about precisely what it was. Historian of science William Provine argues that what took place was a "constriction," in which purposive and progressive conceptions of biological change were simply eliminated. Strikingly, at the time of the Scopes trial in 1925, the constriction had not yet occurred, and prominent evolutionist Henry Fairfield Osborn could still offer a response to the Scopes trial arguing that evolution was completely compatible with Christianity. However, some five to ten years later, after the constriction, such a view was no longer tenable: "one effect of the constriction was to make the conflict between evolution and religion inescapable, or put another way, the previously respectable compatibility of religion and evolution became less tenable…. The argument from design, which had survived in evolutionary biology as long as Darwin's natural selection was supplemented by additional purposive mechanisms, withered after the constriction."[69] In Provine's view, what biologists called the "evo-

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[67] Thomas G. Manning, *Government in Science: The U.S. Geological Survey 1867-1894* (University Press of Kentucky, 1967).

[68] Roberts, "Myth 18" 163-66; James Moore's *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* is an attempt to survey the wide scope of responses to Darwin in the late nineteenth century, and to show how this scope of responses undermines the Christianity-science war narrative.

[69] William B. Provine, "Progress in Evolution and Meaning in Life," in *Evolutionary Progress*, ed. Matthew H. Nitecki (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 62.

lutionary synthesis" was essentially settlement on an account of biology and evolutionary change that was mechanistic, materialistic, anti-spiritualistic and non-progressive or non-telelogical. In short evolutionary biology became inherently atheist. As a consequence, "progressive evolutionists" were increasingly excluded by the professional biological guild's self-policing, a process that was evident in the case of Catholic paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose posthumous book *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959) was widely panned. A century after the publication of the *Origin*, "orthodox Darwinism" had evolved to become hostile to religion.

On another track, the previously noted trends in academic theology driven by critical scholarship and university professionalism increasingly drove a wedge between intellectual and popular religion. Where universities had been theological training institutions up to the mid-1800s, by the late 1800s they were beginning to be perceived as distant from the concerns of ordinary religious people, if not outright hostile.[70] Concerns about trends in liberal Christianity and especially higher biblical criticism prompted the organization and publication of a set of essays on the "fundamentals" of Christian faith starting in 1910 titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.[71] Topics covered included the virgin birth of Jesus, the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and higher biblical criticism, with an apparent emphasis on the truth, authority, and inspiration of the scriptures. Unexpectedly, the series included contributions by known evolutionists, including some specific essays arguing for Christian evolutionism, such as James Orr's "Science and the Christian Faith."[72]

By the end of World War I, however, the movement to defend Christian fundamentals had grown more defensive and belligerent about the trends away from committed biblical Christianity, especially in universities. This new form of the movement willingly made use of martial language to describe its battles against errant theological liberalism; thus Fundamental*ism* was born.[73] A central

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[70] Marsden tracks this trend at a number of U.S. universities in *Soul of the American University*.

[71] *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, 1910).

[72] James Orr, "Science and the Christian Faith," in *The Fundamentals* vol. IV, 91-104. See also Moore, *Post-Darwinian Controversies* 70-73.

[73] Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* 68-75; Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* 317-21.

feature of this new crusade was opposition to evolution, which was now identified as the single issue at the root of the theological and moral failings of contemporary culture. The 1925 Scopes trial provided a clear cultural moment to verify the new reality: Christianity and science are indeed at war.

Are they? Must they be? While there are complex cultural, theological, and intellectual factors involved in answering these questions, some positive signs worth noting might give us reason to continue to maintain that Christianity and science are not at war.

It is worth noting that the polarization manifested by the Scopes trial did not prove that Christianity *in general* is in conflict with all forms of inquiry into nature. Rather, opposition to evolutionary biology was concentrated among fundamentalists and antimodernist Christians. Nonetheless, a large percentage of Americans—significantly more than the relatively small number of fundamentalists in the American population—regularly dismisses evolution as an account of human origins. According to ongoing polls by Gallup, over a third of Americans hold the creationist view.[74] While this might seem like irrefutable evidence of a war between Christianity and science, on one level it is completely unsurprising. If those Christians who are most committed to their faith are told by both authoritative scientists and trusted Christians that Christianity and science are at war with one another and cannot be reconciled, and thus that one must choose one over the other, they will tend to choose the faith they believe gives meaning to their lives.

On the other hand, if there are reasons to doubt the polarized view shared by fundamentalist creationists and doctrinaire Darwinists, the war narrative collapses. There are such reasons. First, while a number of scientists speak of science as a set of beliefs that provide one with a certain orientation toward the world, critics across a range of philosophical and scientific views have argued this is a basic confusion. Science is not a worldview, it is a set

[74] Respondents selecting the option "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so" in polls from 1983-2019 have ranged from 38%-47% (Gallup, "Evolution, Creationism, Intelligent Design," https://news.gallup.com/poll/21814/Evolution-Creationism-Intelligent-Design.aspx).

of procedures and canons for investigating the natural world. The fact that scientific inquiry restricts itself to naturalistic explanations for natural phenomena—"methodological naturalism"—tells us nothing about what theories of reality are true, and therefore does not prove or require materialism. The evolutionary synthesis of the 1930s *associated* evolutionary biology with a materialist and determinist view of reality, but it could no more establish the truth of philosophical materialism than Soviet cosmonauts looking out the window of their spacecraft and failing to see God "proved" atheism.[75]

Second, the claim that evolutionary biology is inherently materialistic and atheistic has been subjected to sustained criticism not only by theists but by agnostics and atheists. In a series of works, philosopher Thomas Nagel has argued that reductive materialism cannot account for human consciousness and biological life.[76] From a slightly different perspective, atheist philosopher Michael Ruse explores the possibility of Christian-evolution "accommodationism" by asking and answering affirmatively, if cautiously, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?*[77] More concretely, despite Provine's claim that practicing biologists had to be "effective atheists," no matter what they claimed, there have been theistic biologists before, dur-

[75] A number of scientists, philosophers, and theologians have highlighted the importance of distinguishing the methodological naturalism of the sciences from philosophical claims about the nature of reality. The most critical point is that no amount of empirical evidence can establish the truth of metaphysical claims (see Michael Ruse, "Thinking about Science," in Michael Peterson and Michael Ruse, *Science, Evolution, and Religion: A Debate about Atheism and Theism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017] 30-32). Philosopher Alvin Plantinga has argued that many modern scientists conflate the naturalist methodology of the sciences with a materialist outlook in such a way that their practice of science surreptitiously and insidiously presumes the truth of philosophical materialism, and thus that Christians should be entitled to pursue science with their own theistic metaphysical assumptions ("Methodological Naturalism?" Parts 1-2, *Origins & Design* 18.1-2 [http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od181/ methnat181.htm; http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm]). Ruse counters that while methodological and metaphysical natural *can* be conflated, they need not be, and the nature of science as a form of naturalistic explanation requires methodological naturalism ("Methodological Naturalism under Attack," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 24.1 (2005):44-60).

[76] Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83.4 (1974):435-450; *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinist Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[77] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

ing, and after the evolutionary constriction, including the shunned Teilhard de Chardin and acknowledged eminences Theodosius Dobzhansky and Ronald Fisher.[78]

On the theological side, Christians have moved to undermine the radical dichotomization of faith and science as well. After the cultural defeat of the strident fundamentalism of the 1920s, fundamentalists and theological conservatives worked to build new institutions for traditionalist and biblically committed Christianity, in time fostering the rise of a more pluralistic and culturally potent evangelicalism.[79] Since the mid-1900s, institutions and frameworks for integrating Christianity and science such as the Templeton Foundation, the journal *Zygon*, and BioLogos and its founder Christian geneticist Francis Collins have promoted public conversation on religion and science in constructive ways. Even if it is true that Intelligent Design Theory is repackaged creationism, it is also the case that ID is willing to engage contemporary science from a broadly theistic point of view in a way that the older fundamentalist creationism was not.[80] Beyond a doubt, biblically committed Christians have theological qualms about evolution or Big Bang cosmology, but they are not generally opposed to science as a whole. Their concerns are typically rooted in the truth, authority, and reliability of the Bible, or in the account of human distinctiveness and dignity found in the scriptures. Even in the conflict and controversy of the past century, we therefore do not find ongoing war between Christianity and science.

Countering the War Narrative

A few basic facts can help respond to those who attempt to advance the war narrative. Here's a brief catechism of just 10:

1. Is there a tradition in Christianity of promoting the systematic study of nature as a way of revealing God's glory? Yes.

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[78] Provine, "Progress in Evolution" 68; Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* 8-9.

[79] Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 540-43.

[80] Michael Ruse, "Myth 23: That 'Intelligent Design' Represents a Scientific Challenge to Evolution," in Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 206-214.

2. Does the Christian emphasis on the value of faith imply an opposition to reasoning and evidence? No.

3. How many scientists have been killed in the name of Christianity for doing science? Zero.

4. Did Christians destroy the Library of Alexandria, a vast repository of the knowledge and wisdom of antiquity, because of a general antipathy to knowledge? No: there is no evidence that Christians were responsible for the decline or destruction of the library, and therefore the history of the Library tells us nothing about Christian views of the value of knowledge.

5. Was the early Christian church broadly and generally opposed to making use of pagan classical learning? No. There were concerns about theological and ethical ideas conflicting with the Christian worldview in pagan authors, but these concerns were not sufficient to justify wholesale rejection of pagan learning.

6. Was the Medieval Era a "Dark Age" bereft of intellectual activity? No historians today think that, and most think that the "Dark Age" label is unreasonably and misleadingly polemical. Perhaps the strongest evidence that the Medieval Era was not "dark" is the emergence of universities that provided a structured way for faculty to offer effective instruction on a range of subjects to large numbers of students over centuries and that grounded rich and vigorous intellectual activity.

7. Didn't the church simply decree a specified theological curriculum for indoctrinating students in medieval universities? No, the majority of students did not even study theology, which was the most advanced discipline. Further, the vigorous controversies of the 1200s demonstrate that there was considerable latitude in approaches and interpretations of the course materials.

8. Are the prohibitions and condemnations of the 1200s evidence for Christian opposition to the pursuit of knowledge, especially knowledge about nature? While the condemnations are an instance of an impulse by Christian authorities to influence the dissemination and adoption of new knowledge, they represent one voice in a robust conversation that was taking place in the 1200s about integrating Christian and pagan knowledge, and further demonstrate that attempts to suppress inquiry are likely to be only partially successful.

9. Were important figures who promoted the study of science over the last few centuries Christians? Yes, dozens, many of whose names are well known.

10. Do the heightened tensions between many Christians and Big Bang Cosmology and evolutionary biology demonstrate that regardless of the past, Christianity and science are presently at war? I would say no. While many Christians have particular biblical and theological concerns about specific claims made in contemporary science, others do not, and in any case very few Christians are broadly opposed to the systematic study of nature as a human enterprise.

In short, we have our answer: Christianity is *not* at war with science.

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Anti-Trinitarian Argumentation: A Critical Examination

Robert M. Bowman Jr., PhD

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It seems highly appropriate to offer this article critiquing bad argumentation in honor of a scholar (and dear friend) who models good argumentation. Bob Stewart employs razor-sharp analysis in genuinely respectful engagement with those of contrary viewpoints. He teaches his students not just what to think but how to think, and more than that, the values that should guide the way they think.[1]

Critics of the doctrine of the Trinity and related doctrines (especially the Incarnation) espouse theologies that radically differ from one another. Muslims confess that Allah alone is God and that he is not to be called a father at all; Jesus is just one of many prophets. Unitarians believe that God is a solitary being called the Father in a figurative sense and that he has exalted the human Jesus with divine powers. Jehovah's Witnesses affirm that Jehovah the Father created Jesus as a lesser god called Michael the archangel. Mormons (Latter-day Saints) maintain that Elohim is the literal Father of Jesus, who is a subordinate God called Jehovah. Oneness Pentecostals teach that Jesus *is* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[2]

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[1] See Robert B. Stewart, "Judging What They Say about Jesus: Instructions for Assessing Historical Arguments," in *When Did Jesus Become God? A Christological Debate*, by Bart D. Ehrman, Michael F. Bird, and Robert B. Stewart (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2022), 1–35.

[2] The doctrines about God and Christ of all five of these religious groups are described and critiqued in Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, forthcoming late 2024). A few of the examples of anti-Trinitarian argumentation presented here come from that book.

We call these religions "anti-Trinitarian" (and not just "non-Trinitarian") because all of their founders or earliest representatives espoused alternative interpretations of biblical religion that viewed the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation as departures from the revelations given to the biblical patriarchs and prophets.[3] Despite stark differences in their own theologies, these religious groups use many of the same faulty types of argument in the defense of those theologies. In part their argumentative similarities may be due to the fact that these groups rarely respond to one another and instead focus almost all of their polemical efforts on defending their views over against the traditional Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.[4]

Trinitarians can and do commit many of the same argumentative mistakes discussed here. Adhering to the right doctrine does not make people immune from poor reasoning. This author is no exception. On the other hand, anti-Trinitarian polemics, *even at their best*, depend on flawed argumentation. One cannot offer arguments against the truth without using faulty reasoning. This article highlights just a few examples among the many that could be given. We all need to learn how to identify such mistaken reasoning and how to avoid making such mistakes ourselves.

Logical Fallacies

Logic—the set of principles for making and evaluating conclusions drawn from already acquired information—is an indispensable element in both the interpretation of Scripture and in the formation of doctrine.[5] Despite a stubborn streak of anti-

[3] Unitarianism and Oneness Pentecostalism have no single historical founders, but as movements within Christianity they have always been avowedly anti-Trinitarian.

[4] Two interesting exceptions are both critiques of Unitarian author Anthony Buzzard: Greg Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 3rd ed. (Murietta, CA: Elihu Books, 2009), 211–30; David L. Paulsen, Jacob Hawken, and Michael Hansen, "Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 3 (2010): 158–69. Stafford is a former Jehovah's Witness who still accepts most of their theology; Paulsen and his co-authors are Mormons.

[5] See, e.g., Paul Helm, "The Role of Logic in Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, edited by Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, Papers from ICBI Summit II (Grand Rapids: Zondervan-Academie, 1984), 839–58, and responses by Mark M. Hanna and John H. Gerstner, 859–78.

intellectualism in modern religion (sadly all too common in some quarters of evangelicalism), Christianity historically has insisted on the essential value of reason in doctrine and life. Even cursory acquaintance with such historic figures as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, and Pascal will confirm this fact.[6] Christ was a highly logical thinker, and Christians ought to imitate him in this regard as they seek to obey what he called the greatest commandment: to love the Lord our God with our whole being, including our mind (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).[7]

A *logical fallacy* is a misstep in reasoning or argument in which the conclusion does not follow reliably from the information on which it is based, at least in the way that information is presented. As such, logical fallacies are defects in arguments, not (in and of themselves) judgments on the truth or falsity of the conclusions. Nevertheless, identifying fallacies is important in truth seeking because the point of any argument is not merely to assert that something is the truth but to *show* that it is the truth. We shall discuss just a few types of logical fallacies that crop up repeatedly and even pervasively in anti-Trinitarian arguments.[8]

Begging the Question

"Begging the question," also known as circular reasoning, is the fallacy of "*assuming what you set out to prove*, smuggling the conclusion back into the premises, usually under different words."[9] The problem with begging the question is that it is a form of argumentation that looks insightful but really offers no evidence at all.

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[6] See Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Thinkers: 30 Christian Apologists You Should Know* (Tampa: DeWard, 2019).

[7] As a fellow frequent speaker at the Defend Conference has ably shown; see Douglas Groothuis, *On Jesus*, Wadsworth Philosophers (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002).

[8] Evangelical introductions to logical fallacies include James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1980), 75–104; D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 91–126; and Richard A. Holland Jr. and Benjamin K. Forrest, *Good Arguments: Making Your Case in Writing and Public Speaking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 31–46. For a Catholic survey, see Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles*, Edition 3.1, edited by Trent Dougherty (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2014), 68–122.

[9] Kreeft, *Socratic Logic*, 94.

Critics of the doctrine of the Incarnation routinely assume that it *cannot* be true. According to Unitarian author Anthony Buzzard, the Incarnation is an "impossibility":

> Someone who was fully God and fully man cannot be totally human. This is the root of the Trinitarian problem. It is a sheer impossibility, in biblical terms, to confuse the One God with a human being.[10]

Similarly, Muslim apologist Shabir Ally asserts that it is "impossible" for Jesus to have been both God and man:

> It is impossible for Jesus to have been perfect man and perfect God at the same time, for this would mean that he was finite and infinite at the same time, that he was fallible and infallible at the same time. This cannot be.[11]

Buzzard and Ally both claim that the doctrine of the Incarnation is false because it *cannot* be true, because it is *impossible* for God to become a man. However, they do not offer any evidence that God could not incarnate himself. Ally offers no evidence that God the Son could not unite his infinite deity with finite humanity in himself as one person. (If Christian theology taught that Christ was finite and infinite *in the same respect*, then it would be logically incoherent; but that isn't the Christian position.) Their objection thus assumes what they should be trying to substantiate. The truth is that Christians do not "confuse" God with a human being; they believe that God has done what Buzzard, Ally, and many others have pronounced an "impossibility": He has become a human being while still remaining God.

Argument from Silence

Arguments from silence are a kind of fallacy in which the lack of any mention of something is taken as refuting its truth, on the assumption that there is some compelling reason it should have been mentioned.[12] Many of the fallacious appeals to silence in anti-Trinitarian polemic focus on the lack of specific words in the Bible. For example, Buzzard points out that Jesus never claimed

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[10] Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1998), 81–82.

[11] Shabir Ally, *Is Jesus God? The Bible Says No* (Toronto: Al-Attique Publishers, 1997), 66.

[12] Cf. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 138–39.

to be God and that the New Testament never calls Jesus "Lord God" or "the Almighty."[13] The *Watchtower* magazine, the official periodical of Jehovah's Witnesses, manages to deploy four arguments from silence in three sentences:

> Search as you may, you will not find one scripture that uses the word Trinity, nor will you find any that says that Father, Son, and holy spirit are equal in all ways, such as in eternity, power, position, and wisdom. Not even a single scripture says that the Son is equal to the Father in those ways—and if there were such a scripture, it would establish not a Trinity but at most a "duality." Nowhere does the Bible equate the holy spirit with the Father.[14]

The fallacy in such arguments is easy to illustrate by simply reflecting back the same flawed reasoning against the critics of the doctrine of the Trinity. Nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus is not God or that he is only God's agent. Nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus is Michael the archangel. Such observations do not disprove those doctrines; they simply show that such lack of specific verbiage in the Bible does not immediately settle the theological disagreement. Doctrine should be based on what Scripture says, not on what it does not say.

Sometimes an argument from silence is expressed more subtly. Consider the following argument from Buzzard: "Jesus in the Gospels attributes the creation to the Father and has no memory of being the agent in the Genesis creation (Mark 10:6; Matt. 6:30; 19:4; Luke 12:28). If Jesus had really been the creator of the Genesis heaven and earth, why does he have no memory of this?"[15] What is Buzzard's basis for concluding that Jesus had no memory of creating the world? Simply that Jesus did not mention this fact when referring to creation.

Arguments from silence seem to be especially prevalent in polemics against the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is a person. For example, both Jehovah's Witnesses and Unitarians argue that the Holy Spirit must not be a person because he does not have a "per-

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[13] Anthony F. Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus* (Morrow, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2007), 2, 26, 30.

[14] "Did the Early Church Teach That God Is a Trinity? Part 1—Did Jesus and His Disciples Teach the Trinity Doctrine?" *Watchtower*, Nov. 1, 1991, 21–22.

[15] Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 169.

sonal name."[16] This argument from silence is too weak to be evidence against the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Insofar as *Yahweh* (*YHWH*, "Jehovah") functions in the Old Testament as God's personal name, there is no reason for the Holy Spirit (who is God) to be identified by a different personal name. Jesus, of course, has a different personal name due to becoming human (Matt. 1:21–23). Along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit does have a "name" (Matt. 28:19).

Similarly, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, and Oneness Pentecostals have all argued that the Holy Spirit is not a person because he is not mentioned in the salutations or opening greetings in the New Testament epistles.[17] As it turns out, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in one of the salutations (1 Peter 1:2). Even if he had not been mentioned there, however, the argument is invalid (logically flawed). There is no rule or logical principle that would require each of the three divine persons to be mentioned in all contexts. There are texts referring to the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 8:6; 2 John 3), the Father and the Spirit (Luke 11:13; 1 Thess. 4:8), and the Son and the Spirit (Matt. 12:31–32; Acts 9:31). There are also *many* New Testament texts—at least 85—that refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (most famously, Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).[18]

Straw Man Fallacy

Baptist professors Richard Holland and Benjamin Forrest offer the following description of this fallacy: "The *straw man fallacy* is one in which you create an intentionally weakened, distorted, or obviously false version of your opponent's argument, and then attack that version specifically because it is easier for you to defeat than the real thing."[19] Straw man arguments typically play a pivotal role in anti-Trinitarian polemics.

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[16] "Identifying the Holy Spirit," *Watchtower*, Jan. 15, 1991, 3; Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 228.

[17] E.g., "The 'Blessed Trinity'—Is It in the Bible?" *Watchtower*, June 15, 1987, 6; Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 228, 333; David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, Pentecostal Theology, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 2001), 207.

[18] See Robert M. Bowman Jr., "Triadic New Testament Passages and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *The Journal for Trinitarian Studies and Apologetics* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 2013): 7–54.

[19] Holland and Forrest, *Good Arguments*, 45.

It is especially common for anti-Trinitarians to attack the doctrine of the Trinity for identifying Jesus as the Father. The Watchtower Society, for example, asks, "If Jesus and his Father were really one person, why did Jesus pray to God?"[20] Shabir Ally argues, "Was Jesus the Father? No! Because Jesus said, 'Do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one father, and he is in heaven' (Matthew 23:9). Since Jesus was standing on the earth when he said this, he is not the Father."[21] One Mormon author actually set up his straw man opponent explicitly in the title of his book, *The Father Is Not the Son*.[22]

Such straw man objections provide opportunities for Christians to share the truth. To those who assume that the doctrine of the Trinity means that Jesus is the Father, we may respond: "I have some good news for you. The doctrine you are rejecting isn't the Trinity. There are people who believe Jesus is the Father, but we don't."

Isn't the Trinity Illogical?

Anti-Trinitarians commonly claim to hold the high ground when it comes to logic or rationality. It is universally asserted by critics that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are hopelessly illogical. Dale Tuggy, a Unitarian philosopher, has developed the most sophisticated critique of Trinitarianism along this line. In brief, Tuggy argues that Trinitarians must choose between two (main) options. They may affirm that Jesus is God, but since the Bible clearly says that the Father is God, such an affirmation would mean that Jesus is the Father, something Trinitarianism denies. Alternatively, Trinitarians may agree that Jesus is not God but affirm that he has a divine nature as well as a human nature, which Tuggy argues is incoherent and implies that Jesus is not really a man.[23] Two observations may be offered in response.

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[20] "In What Way Are Jesus and His Father One?" *Watchtower*, Sept. 1, 2009, 28.

[21] Ally, *Is Jesus God*, 32.

[22] Ramon D. Smullin, *The Father Is Not the Son: Godhead or Trinity?* (Sandy, UT: Camden Court, 1998).

[23] See Tuggy's opening statement in Dale Tuggy and Christopher M. Date, *Is Jesus Human and Not Divine? A Debate*, Essential Christian Debates (Apollo, PA: Ichthus Publications, 2020), 1–32.

Logical Limits to Understanding God Are to Be Expected

First, there is a difference between an argument for or against certain beliefs about God being fallacious and a doctrine about God being "illogical." There is no excuse for using fallacious arguments such as appeals to silence or straw man objections. However, *any* doctrinal issue pertaining to the nature of God or his interaction with the world runs up against logical limits—analytical problems that seem to involve contradictions. If the Creator of the universe transcends time and space, is in essence immaterial, knows all things, is present everywhere without being everything, and so on, any philosophical analysis about this Creator will encounter apparent logical difficulties. The point is not that these difficulties cannot be addressed intelligently but that they go beyond our capacity to address definitively and comprehensively.[24]

For example, Unitarians and advocates of the other anti-Trinitarian theologies we have been engaging typically accept both the omniscience of God and the freedom of God. That is, they believe both that God knows all things and that he acts freely, choosing freely what he will do. Present this claim to a group of skeptics and watch them get out their analytical knives. If God knows what he will do (they will argue) then he cannot do otherwise, because he cannot do anything other than what he knows he will do; but if he cannot do otherwise then he is not free in doing it. Is this a genuine logical contradiction? It looks like one. Perhaps it can be resolved (it makes assumptions about what it means to act freely that might not apply to the Creator). However, even if we are unsure exactly how to resolve the apparent logical difficulty, we are fully warranted in believing, on the authority of God's revelation in Scripture, both that God knows all things and that God freely chooses what he does. In the end, we may conclude that we don't fully understand how God can be what he is. Not only should we not be troubled by this outcome, but *it is what we*

[24] Introductory books on the nature of God that engage such analytical issues include Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001). The problem of God's relation to time has alone been the focus of innumerable studies and debates; see Gregory E. Ganssle and Paul Helm, eds., *God & Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

should expect to be the case. Likewise, if Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is God, we should accept this teaching and do our best to understand it while admitting that it goes beyond our means of analysis.

The logical difficulty that Tuggy finds in the doctrine of the Trinity arises because he is applying analytical concepts of identity to the transcendent, infinite God. Such concepts work fine with finite, discrete objects, with "things" that cannot share the same identity without them being identical to each other. A finite object's "identity" is defined by its boundaries, its limitations—its separateness from other finite things in the matrix of the created world. For example, Tuggy gives the example "that Peter and Paul are not the same thing/entity," despite their many similarities.[25] But Peter and Paul are separate beings because they occupy different bodies, began their existence separately, had different locations and movements as well as different experiences (thoughts, feelings) throughout their lives, had differing abilities, opinions, and interests, and so on. Unitarian author Anthony Buzzard nicely illustrates the point: "Putting two (or three) billiard balls on one spot is an impossible task. Trying to put the second one on the same spot as the first displaces the first. They will not both fit."[26] Buzzard concludes that it is impossible to view Jesus as God and the Father as God without having two Gods.

However, what if the three Persons of the Trinity are not like three finite billiard balls? What if they are in relevant ways not like Peter and Paul? What if they co-exist eternally, are incorporeal and omnipresent, are omniscient and omnipotent, and are absolutely perfect in wisdom and goodness? Then each knows every thought of the other two; each is present at all times with the other two, not just proximately but interiorly; each has all of the same abilities as the other two; and each agrees with the other two regarding all things. If three Persons share this eternal, incorporeal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent nature, then in some way that defies easy analysis (for us!) it would appear that they are ontologically one even though they are also relationally or personally distinct from one another. The attempt to apply analytical concepts of identity to three divine Persons of this na-

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[25] Tuggy, in Tuggy and Date, *Is Jesus Human and Not Divine*, 4.
[26] Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*, 154.

ture is going to run up against limitations because we are finite, our categories of analysis are finite, but God is infinite. We might dub the problem the fallacy of applying finite categories to the infinite.

Again, as with the issue of divine omniscience and volition, we do not need to be able to explain perfectly how God can be one God and three Persons in order to be reasonably warranted in believing both are true. If we have reasons to believe that the Bible is a reliable source of doctrinal truth about God (and we do), then we are warranted in believing a state of affairs that we cannot fully analyze rationally if the Bible teaches it. The New Testament customarily uses the divine name "God" (*theos*) for the Father and the divine name "Lord" (*kyrios*, standing for the Old Testament name Yahweh) for the Son (e.g., Rom. 10:9–13; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:9–11). But Christ is also called "God" several times in contexts where it conveys the same *sense* (not the same *referent*), that of the Creator who revealed himself to Israel and who is the proper object of religious devotion, while distinguishing the Son from the Father (John 1:1; 20:28–31; 2 Peter 1:1–2; 1 John 5:20). Any logical difficulty here arises from the biblical texts themselves.

Logic Used for Competing Alternative Theologies

There is a second point to be made in response to the claim that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are illogical: Anti-Trinitarians use logic to "prove" competing theological alternatives to those doctrines.

At one extreme, Oneness Pentecostal theologian David Bernard uses logic to prove that Jesus is God the Father: "If there is only one God and that God is the Father (Malachi 2:10), and if Jesus is God, then it logically follows that Jesus is the revelation of the Father." Citing Isaiah 9:6 to show that Jesus is the Father and Malachi 2:10 to show that there is only one Father, Bernard concludes that "Jesus must be God the Father revealed in the Son."[27] Bernard adduces a battery of proof texts that Christians commonly use to show that Jesus is God, but Bernard infers from these texts "that Jesus is the Father incarnate."[28]

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[27] David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, Pentecostal Theology, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 2001), 66.

[28] Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 66, 69.

At the other extreme, Unitarians use logic to prove that Jesus cannot be God. Buzzard writes, "The One God is identified with the Father in Malachi 1:6 and 2:10 and is constantly in the New Testament distinguished from Jesus, the Son of God, who is presented as a separate individual."[29] Bernard and Buzzard appeal to the same proof text, Malachi 2:10, along with other biblical teaching, but Bernard concludes that Jesus is God the Father while Buzzard concludes that Jesus is not God at all!

Of course, the way that Oneness Pentecostals and Unitarians arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions from the same starting point is that they appeal selectively to different elements of New Testament teaching about Christ. Bernard's second premise is that Jesus is God, based on texts that do support that premise, whereas Buzzard's second premise is that Jesus is someone other than the Father, again based on texts that support that premise. We may represent their arguments in deductive form as follows (P=premise, C=conclusion):

Competing Logical Arguments: Oneness vs. Unitarianism	
David Bernard (Oneness)	*Anthony Buzzard (Unitarian)*
P1. God is the Father (Mal. 2:10).	P1. God is the Father (Mal. 2:10).
P2. Jesus is God (John 20:28, etc.).	P2. Jesus is not the Father (2 John 3, etc.).
C: Jesus is the Father.	C: Jesus is not God.

The way that these two theologians attempt to avoid each other's conclusion is by laboring to refute the other's second premise. Oneness theologians such as Bernard work hard to show that the "most seemingly difficult verses of Scripture" (and there are many of them!) do not distinguish Jesus personally from God the Father.[30] Unitarian theologians such as Buzzard work hard to show that the similarly large number of biblical texts that are commonly understood to teach that Jesus is God do not conflict with his understanding of "the plain, straightforward texts" that he claims preclude such a conclusion.[31]

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[29] Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 25.

[30] Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 170, cf. 170–235.

[31] Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1.

From a Trinitarian perspective, both Oneness and Unitarian theologians construct their positions on the basis of selective evidence. They do not entirely *exclude* contrary evidence. Rather, one group of texts is privileged as positive evidence or proof for their theology, while another group of texts is treated as difficulties to be explained or accommodated to their theology. Similarly, these groups prioritize and explain differently biblical material concerning the humanity of Christ. Unitarians view all such biblical texts as evidence against his deity; Oneness Pentecostals explain them as meaning that the Father has manifested himself in the flesh. In Trinitarian theology, on the other hand, all of the major lines of evidence cited by anti-Trinitarians function as positive evidence for the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation:

- Texts asserting that one God alone created the world (happily affirmed by Muslims and Unitarians) are foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity, according to which there is only one God who made the world, not one Almighty God and a lesser god (Jehovah's Witnesses) or three Gods (Mormonism).
- Texts expressing the joint activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the works of redemption are also foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity, and not textual phenomena to be explained away (as in Jehovah's Witness and Unitarian theologies).
- Texts affirming that the Father is God or using the titles Father and God interchangeably (see P1 in both Oneness and Unitarian arguments) are positive evidence for the Trinitarian doctrine that God the Father is the first Person, the one who sent his Son as a man and his Spirit into our hearts to save us so that we might know him as our adoptive Father (see Gal. 4:4–6).
- Texts distinguishing Jesus, the Son, from God the Father, which all anti-Trinitarians other than Oneness Pentecostals agree prove that Jesus is not the Father (see P2 in the Unitarian argument), are crucial evidence for the Trinitarian distinction between the persons of the Father and the Son.
- Texts identifying Jesus, the Son, as God (see P2 in the Oneness argument) or attributing powers and prerogatives of God are all basic evidence for the Trinitarian position that Jesus is truly and fully God, both in status and in nature (contrary to Unitarian and Jehovah's Witness theologies).

- Texts expressing the humanity of Jesus are basic to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, not texts that Trinitarians need to explain away.

Anti-Trinitarians routinely caricature orthodox theology as ignoring whole swaths of biblical teaching and as being based on the rickety foundation of a few misunderstood proof texts. The reality is quite to the contrary. The orthodox theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation is the only theological system that gives full force to all of the major aspects of biblical teaching about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The resulting doctrines may be beyond full human comprehension, but that is what we would expect when seeking to understand the truth about God and his activity in our world. Viewed in that way, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are supremely logical.

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The Uniqueness of Christianity in a World of Religions

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Dr. Robert B. Stewart's life-long research and teaching in Christian philosophy and theology often landed in the domain of comparative religious studies. Even if one is convinced of Jesus' resurrection, or of his divinity, by the kinds of evidence and arguments unearthed and published by Stewart, one is then compelled to ask at least one more important apologetic question: did anything comparable take place in any of the other historic world religions? As a keen apologist Stewart himself explored this comparative path on several fronts. He has a rather deep interest in the beliefs and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints, for instance. And my experience with him demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that he has much more than a passing interest in a range of beliefs that stood to challenge traditional Christianity. To honor Bob's interest in such subjects, I want to explore some of the unique features that set Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions. In my view, Stewart is right to focus on the claims of the historical Jesus and the demonstration of the truth of those by means of the resurrection. But I don't think followers of Christ would be surprised at all to find that Jesus left for us other important points of uniqueness and authenticity that follow closely in the wake of his conquest of death.

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One afternoon I received a call in my office at Biola University in southern California from a teaching assistant at a local community college. He was contacting me on behalf of a professor in a religious studies course who was looking for representatives from

various spiritual traditions to come and speak in his classroom. The professor wanted the students to hear first-hand from a wide range of religious thinkers and devotees—an admirable idea in my view. I was free on the morning they were asking about, so I was delighted to go and address the group.

A couple of days later I found myself in the classroom and after a few announcements, the professor began to introduce me as the morning's speaker: "This is Craig Hazen and he will be interacting with us this morning from the standpoint of his religious tradition, fundamentalist Christianity."

The label caught me off guard. I thought I was coming in to talk about a much broader category such as Christianity in general, or maybe Protestant Christianity, or Evangelical Protestant Christianity—all of which I could claim as my tradition. The term "fundamentalist" used to carry a noble meaning along with it but had lost its cachet long, long ago.

In the brief introduction the professor did not mention that I had earned a PhD in religious studies at the University of California, that I had studied at the International Institute for Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, or that I had run a biology research laboratory. Perhaps he didn't mention these because they do not fit the stereotype of a fundamentalist which has come to mean, among other things, a kind of anti-intellectualism and separation from mainstream society. He knew that I was a professor of some kind myself, but probably assumed that my graduate education consisted of memorizing obscure verses from the King James Bible at "Grover's Bible College and Feed Lot."

In order to paint a more positive picture as quickly as possible I reintroduced myself and gave them a little bit of background about my interest in the study of religions from around the world, human rights, and science. This caused the students a little bit of confusion because they did not connect fundamentalists with serious academic work—especially in these kinds of subjects.

I made a snap decision really to turn the tables on them that morning by doing something much different than a standard presentation about biblical Christianity. I told them that given my background in religious, scientific, and cultural studies, I wanted to impart to them something very valuable—some practical knowledge that would help them in tangible ways.

I assumed something about the students that turned out to be correct. Many of them were taking the popular religious studies

survey class because they were very curious about the various traditions. In some respects, they were using the class to take some of these religions out for a kind of non-threatening test drive.

What I proposed to do that morning was to give them an expert guided tour on just how a clear-thinking person would go about a religious quest. Here you are at college, I told them, attempting to use analytic skills and careful reasoning to gain knowledge and insight into subjects ranging from music appreciation to organic chemistry. Why shouldn't we use those same cognitive tools to help us make sense of the seemingly crazy world of religion, especially since many of you are doing some very careful evaluation about what religion you might embrace yourself one day? In other words, how would a thoughtful person go about a religious quest?

Well, the students were genuinely interested in this idea. It did not dawn on me until later why they were so fascinated at this prospect. As it turned out, in their experience, no one had ever linked the ideas of clear thinking or rational assessment with the pursuit of religion. It is as if they were separate categories (rationality and religion) and "never the twain shall meet." Nevertheless, they really thought this was a novel idea and a great gesture. It was already toward the end of the term and the professor had never offered anything along these lines, and neither had any of his guest speakers. The students were very enthusiastic, but the whole topic had the added side bonus of helping the students to forget all about "fundamentalism." So with a willing nod from the professor of the class—who later told me he too wanted to hear what I had to say about such a novel topic—I started.

The first point I made in my impromptu presentation was actually a setback for my hope of shedding the fundamentalist label the professor had pinned on me. The students recoiled at the first proposition to come out of my mouth. In all honesty looking back, I probably said it without much in the way of nuance in order to stir things up a bit. Maybe deep down I wanted to get the students to a full and verifiable state of consciousness before I got onto the details of my talk. It worked. In fact, one sleepy surfer in the back of the room came alive after my statement and was even waving a skateboard with one hand to emphasize certain points when he joined the discussion.

What was this unsettling statement I made that attracted the momentary ire of the college class and caused the bags under their eyes to disappear? It was this: I made the unabashed claim that any thoughtful person who was on a religious quest would obviously start that quest by exploring Christianity first. In other words, a person eventually has to make a choice about where to start any kind of journey. If one is looking to buy a new car, one needs to decide if he should first visit the Daewoo or the BMW dealership. There must be some rational, objective criteria that a person uses to decide where to go first to kick the tires—price, proximity, status, reputation, quality, and a whole range of personal preferences. To at least some extent, the same should be true with religious traditions if you are intentionally setting out to explore them. Remember, I'm not trying to decide which tradition is *true* at this point, but rather with which tradition it makes the most sense to start the quest. A person has to start somewhere. I think Christianity is, by any rational measure, the obvious place for a thinking person to start the exploration.

After a few moments of mostly good-hearted heckling from the students, I told the class that I would give them four reasons why a thoughtful person on a religious quest would obviously start that exploration with Christianity. I spent the rest of my time with them that morning presenting this case with a lot of spirited interaction.

What follows is the case I made to the class. Of course, I've done a lot of thinking about my off-the-cuff lecture and have fleshed it out a bit in these pages. But the basic four points are the same.

Four Reasons Why a Thoughtful Person on a Religious Quest Should Start that Quest with Christianity

First Reason: Christianity is Testable

I told the students that morning that at the heart of the Christian tradition are some claims about Jesus—his life, his teaching, his death, and his resurrection—that are testable. What I mean by this is that these claims are such that any thinking person can examine the evidence and reasonably determine whether or not the claims are historically accurate or justified. I think this is one of the primary reasons why a thoughtful person sorting through the various religious traditions would obviously start with Christianity.

Christianity is unique in that it actually *invites* people to investigate carefully its claims about God, humankind, the universe, and the meaning of life.

There is a passage in the Bible that supports this notion—and I consider it to be one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes something that is a bit shocking given the way we normally think about religion and faith in the modern world. In this passage Paul is giving a discourse on the Christian view of life after death. But then in the midst of this he says something that seems startling to our common sensibilities about religion. He says, "if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], our preaching is useless and so is your *faith*." Maybe just to make sure we would not be confused about what he is saying here, he repeats the idea several verses later. "And if Christ has not been raised, your *faith* is futile." (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, emphasis mine).

Now why would I consider this to be one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature? For this reason: I have not been able to find a passage in the scriptures and teachings of the other great religious traditions that so tightly links the truth of an entire system of belief to a single, testable historical event. Real "faith" in these statements seems to be invariably linked to the truth of a real-world occurrence. What the Apostle Paul said here was radical in the context of most religious traditions. He was saying, in essence, that if Jesus did not come back from the dead (in his own body, as the witnesses and scriptures declared), if this did not really take place in time and space, then Christianity is bunk—our Christian faith is worthless, useless, or futile.

This idea that the truth of Christianity is linked to the resurrection of Jesus in a testable way really does set Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions in a dramatic fashion. Historic Asian religions by and large don't even argue with the point. When it all boils down, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the like, are about inner personal experience and not about objective public knowledge. There are other traditions that *seem* to be about objective knowledge until you probe a little more deeply. Mormonism, for instance, seems to be about hidden gold plates, Jesus' ancient visit to the western hemisphere, and latter-day prophets—things that could certainly be, in principle evaluated in an objective way. However, when facing evidence contrary to these claims, the

Mormon missionary, scholar, or apostle steps back and begins to talk about the special inner knowledge, a "burning in the bosom," that is the only confirmation that really counts about these unusual stories. At the end of the day, the Mormon is no different than the Buddhist in that they both rely on inner experience as their ultimate source and warrant for religious knowledge.

This is why Christianity is unique and why a thoughtful person on a religious quest would be wise to start the quest with Christianity—it really is testable. If Jesus did not come back from the dead after being executed by a Roman crucifixion team in first-century Jerusalem, then, according to the Apostle Paul, Christianity is simply not true. It openly invites people to investigate its claims objectively.

Second Reason: In Christianity, Salvation Is a Free Gift from God

Almost every time I speak on a college campus about why a thoughtful person would start her religious quest with Christianity, I wonder if I really need all four reasons. The first two reasons are so powerful that in my mind they can carry the day without much help from the other two that I present.

This isn't a hard conclusion to come to. Think about it. What if someone were to come up to you on a street corner and present to you a new path to God? During the presentation it becomes clear that the ideas being offered are in no way testable, so you can never, in principle, objectively know whether or not they are true. In addition, the picture painted of God is that he requires a great deal from you. You must strive heroically to change the way you think, feel, and behave in every corner of your life in order to please the deity and move forward on the path of salvation or enlightenment. Indeed, it might be the case that you will need to strive heroically for many lifetimes in order to reach the mark. Of course, there is a final logical twist here. If you have no way to gauge whether the basic religious system is true, you could also never know whether or not your intense striving to please the deity was enough or if you were doing the right things in the right way. Even if at the end of the day a religious system like this *is* true, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense for someone exploring the various religious options to *start* the exploration with such a system.

By way of contrast, what if someone were to come up to you on the same street corner and present to you a religious system that was testable—hence opening the door for you to do a vigorous investigation of its claims? In addition, the system set forth a picture of God as a loving Father who wants to give the free gift of salvation to anyone who will receive it. Do I need to say more? If this testable and free system accurately describes Christianity, and if the untestable and arduous system accurately describes the other religious options, then I don't see how a reasonable person would not start their search with Christianity. It seems like a no-brainer of Olympic proportions.

Christianity is unique in its offer of salvation by grace alone—a free gift from God to anyone who will receive it. In the history of religion there have only been a couple of instances of a religious movement that considered salvation or enlightenment to be a free gift from a deity. But even in those cases (such as in *Amida* Buddhism or a certain form of *bhakti* Hinduism) it is not a no-strings-attached kind of gift. There is still work to be done on the part of the devotees.

Hence, the Christian tradition stands in a solitary spot in the spectrum of world religions when the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

Salvation in Christianity is a free gift and hence it is equally available to anyone. You don't need to be a spiritual superstar, of noble birth, or highly educated. Anyone can come, as they sometimes sing at revival meetings, "just as I am." This is a very attractive and unique feature and makes Christianity an obvious choice as a starting place for a religious quest.

Third Reason: In Christianity You Get an Amazing World View Fit

If you are trying to prioritize a group of religions in order to know which one you ought to check out first, it would be extremely helpful to know which of the religions painted a picture of the world that seemed to be a very tight match with the way the world really is. If such a match could be determined, I know it would give reasonable people a lot of confidence that they were making a good choice about their starting point.

Let me come at this from the other direction. It seems reasonable to me that a thoughtful person would not want to start her religious quest with a religion that seemed to have tremendous difficulty making sense of the world that we encounter. The problem here is that the world we bump into on a daily basis is one of the only sources of data we have to work with in evaluating all kinds of claims, including religious claims.

So if you have a choice to study under a guru whose mission it is to reveal to the world that the moon's surface is made of spumoni ice cream, or under one who thinks the moon's outer layer is primarily anorthosite rock, I think a reasonable person would go with the one whose teaching seems to have the closest match to the way the universe really is. That is the general principle I am trying to communicate with this "third reason."

To say that the Christian view of the world is the best fit with the way the world really is makes a bold claim simply because there is so much that would need to be examined to find out if this assertion is justified. After all, the list of things to compare seems endless. But from my perspective, what I have learned about the various religions and about the world in general makes this claim totally plausible. Since I obviously cannot explore every aspect of the world (from cosmology to cosmetology) to demonstrate in just a few pages that this is reasonable, I shall use one very profound example to illustrate the point: the problem of evil, pain, and suffering.

Every human being observes evil and experiences pain and suffering on almost a daily basis. It seems obvious to me that any religion that does not do justice to these common human experiences should probably not be at the top of the list for a thoughtful religious seeker. How do the various religious traditions explain these phenomena or make sense of them?

Devotees of Eastern religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, certainly encounter the same kinds of evil, pain, and suffering that other people around the globe experience. But teachers, thinkers, and leaders in these movements have a very different way of dealing with the experience than we normally do in the western world. Eastern traditions normally put evil, pain, and suffering in the category of *illusion*. Suffering can therefore be overcome through the understanding of its true nature. Evil and pain will fade away as the devotee gains enlightenment about the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. As a famous Tibetan

Lama wrote to me in a letter one time after I had given a lecture on Buddhism, "Evil and suffering are real only as long as the ego believes them to be real." The Lama put it in the simplest words possible for practical purposes. His solution to evil and suffering was to change the way we believe about them. They will then cease to be real.

Well, it's time to finally ask the big question. If we are in search of a world view that matches the way the world really is, then how do we evaluate these approaches to evil? After having some dialogue with the students for a short time on this question, I gave them the following illustration.

I have twin boys and when they were babies they played a character on a highly rated television sitcom. My wife and I would be on the set quite often taking care of our kids when they were not rehearsing or filming. Several of the writers and cast members heard that I was some sort of religion professor and found it interesting to discuss some of their religious ideas with me. One time over dinner before an evening filming, I remember listening at length to one of them describing in great detail the teachings of a new guru she was following. Although some of it sounded a bit off kilter to me, it was easy to sit and listen because it was so very interesting to see how Eastern religious concepts were being enfolded into a Hollywood mindset. One of the points that this woman was making was that her guru thought that good and evil were ultimately not real and could be transcended through "right views." After I'd had several plates of food (the catered cuisine was outstanding on the day of the performance) and a couple of cappuccinos, the woman finally asked me for my reaction to all of this—and she had covered a range of topics. I only asked one question, and I didn't ask it to be provocative or cheeky. I was genuinely curious about the answer. I thought it would simply keep the conversation going. I asked, "What would your guru say about the Holocaust?"

Several things happened the moment I asked the question. I hadn't realized that a number of people sitting nearby had already been tuned into our conversation for some time. But now they weren't pretending to pick at their food anymore. They lifted their heads and turned them in our direction. It turns out that a good number of the cast, crew, and production staff were Jewish. As you can imagine, they were also very interested in the answer

to the question. The woman I was dialoguing with didn't notice an audience subtly grown around us. She was busy thinking through the implications of the question. She had a bit of a blank stare and from the look on his face it seemed as if her whole world view was imploding inside her head. You see, she too came from a Jewish family. And although she was far too young to be involved in the horror herself, and did not even practice her family's faith, she knew very well from her family, extended family, and her Jewish cultural connections that the Holocaust was a defining chapter in her own identity and approach to life. The Holocaust was real and could not be denied in any sense—not historically, not emotionally, not morally.

Somehow (and I've seen this happen often) this woman had been completely blind to a gaping hole in her view of things as she was learning from her new guru. How could she so thoroughly buy into her guru's teaching about evil being an illusion and still take seriously the unthinkable suffering that the Jews of Europe endured? She couldn't. And it certainly wasn't anything I said. I just happened to be there when she had a moment of "enlightenment" of a very different kind: a realization that a world view that attempts to dismiss such profound evil, pain, and suffering as illusion is simply not a viable guide to life.

Every religion has to attempt to make sense of evil because it is such a pervasive and serious phenomenon. And every religion struggles in the task. The Scriptures of Christianity confront the issue of evil head on starting with the first pages of Genesis. There is a whole section of the Bible, the Book of Job, dedicated to the unanswerable questions that are involved in personal suffering. Although the Bible never provides an answer to the "why" question in the cases of individual instances of suffering (such as, why did the drunk driver crash into *me*?), it does provide the most satisfactory context for coming to terms with the existence of evil.

Although I believe the biblical approach to the problem of evil to be true, I am not arguing that point here (there are many very persuasive books that do argue the point very effectively). I am trying to make the more modest claim that if given the choice between a worldview that simple dismisses pain and suffering as ultimately not real and a worldview that admits that they do indeed exist, which would you start with if you were shopping for a religion? This really is tightly analogous to the question I asked at the beginning of this section. Would you be more inclined to follow a

guru who taught that the surface of the moon was made of spumoni ice cream or one who taught that it was made of anorthosite rock? Saying that evil is an illusion is like saying that the moon's surface is made of spumoni. We can rightly claim to have knowledge that both claims are not true. A good world view deals with the obvious, it does not dismiss it.

My bold assertion at the outset was that the picture Christianity paints of the world actually matches, better than any other option available, the way the world really is. Of course, as I predicted at the beginning, I didn't even come close to proving this point because I would have had to explore so many issues in great depth. But I (and, more importantly, a whole host of people much smarter than me in our own day and throughout history) have come to the conclusion that the basic Christian view of the world is the only game in town if one is looking for the very best fit.

Fourth Reason: Christianity Has Jesus at the Center

The time I had in my guest lecture to the college students was almost over. I was talking fast all morning to try to pack in all my reasons as to why a thoughtful person on a religious quest would start that quest with Christianity. I thought I had made a pretty good case. The students were very attentive and hence I assumed interested in what I had to say. However, when I presented my fourth reason things turned unexpectedly sour for a moment. I claimed that a good reason to start with Christianity was that it had Jesus as the indisputable center point in the tradition. The student with the skateboard immediately chimed in. He remarked that it was interesting I waited until the end to slip in such a loaded "reason"—a reason that sounded a lot more like straight forward evangelism than anything else.

I looked at the professor for the class who was sitting at the far end of the first row. I asked him if he had a chance during the semester to go over the views about Jesus among the religions of the world. He said he hadn't and gave me permission to address it if I wanted to. I took him up on the offer.

I could understand why "skateboard guy" and others in the class had an initial problem with my point about Jesus. They were missing some crucial information, so they were misunderstanding where I was going with my remarks. You see, Jesus is without doubt the closest thing the world has to a universal religious figure.

Almost every religious tradition wants to claim him as its own in one way or another. My comment that "Christianity has Jesus at the center" is not a raw assertion of my own religious position. Rather it is an argument that if Jesus is such an attractive figure that the religious people of the world want to co-opt him for their own traditions, then it makes perfect sense to give special attention to Christianity, the tradition that has Jesus firmly planted at the center and claims Jesus as its founder.

This is certainly not a raw assertion of religious favoritism; just the opposite. It is another very strong reason for a thoughtful person to start their religious exploration with Christianity. Everybody wants to claim Jesus as their own.

Take Hinduism for example. There are many teachers and scholars who have proclaimed Jesus to be one of the ten *avatars* of Vishnu along side of Rama and Krishna. Vishnu is one of the major deities in the Hindu pantheon of gods, and an *avatar* is "one who descends." Hence it is not uncommon to find Jesus set forth as a kind of incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This is certainly not the documented historical picture of Jesus, but it does demonstrate the respect and influence he commands among many faithful Hindus. It is not unusual for a Hindu to revere Jesus to the point of veneration because he is such an impressive figure.

Likewise, it is not at all unusual for Buddhists of the later Mahayana traditions to see Jesus as a preeminent spiritual figure. Often he is considered to be a great "*bodhisattva*," that is, one who is motivated by compassion to step back from the brink of *nirvana* in order to help others along the path to awakening. Buddhists often believe that during his day Jesus offered all of the Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) to which his generation was open. A few even see him as the *maitreya bodhisattva*, an enlightened messianic being in the *Tusita* heaven awaiting his last reincarnation. The Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, has said on several occasions that he is not worthy to be compared with Jesus believing that Jesus is a "fully enlightened being."

Islam is an especially interesting case. One would not glean from popular treatments of Islam that Jesus even enters into the religious picture. But knowledgeable Muslims and their texts give the fuller view. If the Muslim prophet, Muhammad, and Jesus went head-to-head in a simple contest where their special attributes were tallied up Jesus would win by at least six to one. Muhammad was a prophet. According the *Qur'an* and Islamic tradi-

tion, Jesus was also a prophet. However, unlike Muhammad, Jesus was also born of a virgin, was a worker of miracles, was carried to heaven by Allah without tasting death, was called the Word of God, and will return to appear to all before the final judgment—all according to the *Qur'an*. Now clearly Muhammad is considered the greatest prophet because he carried the final message of Allah to humankind. But Jesus is a revered figure who is second only to Muhammad in honor and respect. He is certainly not considered to be divine by Muslims but is considered a pinnacle of righteousness and a non-negotiable object of Muslim belief.

Of course, the parade of Jesus enthusiasts does not end there. It is hard to find a major tradition or a minor movement that does not give him a very special place of honor and find a significant ways to enfold him into their system of beliefs. The Baha'i, the Sikhs, the Mormons, the New Age Movement, the Unitarians, Religious Science, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Jains, the Deists, and many more all find a way to put their "hand in the hand of the man from Galilee."

Since Jesus is by any measure the only universal religious person, a figure so towering that almost every religious body has to find a way to bring him aboard in some capacity, it makes perfect sense to me that anyone on a religious quest would know just where to start.

* * *

My official time in front of the class of college students had ended, but the discussion certainly did not. At least a dozen students followed me out the door and we sat at some tables outside and discussed big religious issues for several more hours. Even though my talk ended up being quite a "Christo-centric" presentation, the students were not put off by that. These are difficult issues and they seemed to appreciate not just that I took a position, but that I invited careful scrutiny of my own conclusions. As one young woman said at the end of our time together, "What are we so afraid of? We ought to be asking the toughest questions, and religious leaders and teachers should be prepared with honest answers. If there is a God, one thing is certain, he made us thinking people. As long as we are kind to each other, we should be able to discuss these things openly."

She was right, we shouldn't be afraid. Her comment reminded me of a famous saying of the Apostle Peter from the New Testa-

ment—really a command to all Christian believers. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1Peter 3:15).

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Defending the Handmaid: How Theology Needs Philosophy

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Some of this material was presented at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Defend Conference (2018 plenary, 2023 breakout). It has indeed been an honor and a privilege to be a part of this conference over the past few years. I cannot thank Dr. Bob Stewart enough for allowing me to be a part of the tremendous ministry he has had at NOBTS. Dr. Stewart is not only an accomplished philosopher and apologist, but also a Christlike and virtuous human being. Thanks, Bob, for allowing God to touch my life through you!

Prolegomena

Studying Philosophy

My experiences as a graduate and doctoral student of philosophy as well as a professor of philosophy and apologetics have given me opportunities to view a range of attitudes among my Christian friends regarding philosophy. Some were curious what one could do with a degree in philosophy, perhaps stemming from innocence about exactly what philosophy was. Others recounted their own unpleasant experience slogging through a philosophy class in college. Still other reactions ranged from suspicion (isn't philosophy the problem?) to outright hostility (philosophy is definitely an enemy!). Why would a seminary, designed to prepare men and women for ministry, need to have philosophy in any of its curricula? What need is there for this handmaid?[1]

[1] The handmaid (or handmaiden) imagery goes back at least as far as Philo in his treatment of Sarah's relationship to Abraham. Philo who uses the imagery specifically for "the intermediate instruction of the intermediate and encyclical branches of knowledge" in its service of the virtue of wisdom. [Philo, "On Mating with the Preliminary Studies." [De Congressu Quarendae Eruditionis Gratia] in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers,

Isn't Philosophy an Enemy?

These latter reactions are undoubtedly the same at heart. More than once I was reminded of the Apostle Paul's warning in Col 2:8. where he tells us to "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."[2] After all, one might say, what else might one make of Paul's admonition? According to them Paul is warning that philosophy is at the root of many of the ideas opposed to Christianity. Clearly, he is telling us to stay away from it.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that the common interpretation of this passage is correct.[3] Even given this interpretation,

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1993), 304-320 (305). See also: Albert Henrichs, "Philosophy, the Handmaiden of Theology," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 437-450 and David C. Lindberg, "The Medieval Church Encounters the Classical Tradition: Saint Augustine, Roger Bacon, and the Handmaiden Metaphor," in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7-32. Thomas Aquinas uses the term when quoting Prov. 9:3 "Other sciences are called the handmaidens of this one: 'Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower'"[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q1, art. 5, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), vol. 1, p. 3.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

[3] I think it is unlikely that Paul was thinking of philosophy as the discipline we understand it to be today. Instead, the context suggests that Paul was warning the Colossians about an insidious legalism that threatened their liberty in Christ. Regarding the grammar of Col. 2:8, Henry Alford notes, "The absence of the article before κενῆς shews the καί to be epexegetical, and the same thing to be meant by the two." This suggests a translation as "the philosophy which is vain deceit." Alford continues, "This being so, it may be better to give the τῆς the possessive sense, the better to mark that it is not all philosophy which the Apostle is here blaming." [Henry Alford, *Alfords' Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Galatians - Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 218.] Alford goes on to observe, "The φιλοσοφ. is not necessarily *Greek* … As De W. observes, Josephus calls the doctrine of the Jewish sects philosophy: Antt. xviii, 2, 1." [Alford, 218] The citation to Josephus is incorrect. It should be 1, 2 instead of 2, 1. Josephus says, "The Jews had for a great while three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essens [sic], and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions called Pharisees." [*Josephus: Complete Works* "Antiquities of the Jews," trans. William Whiston, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), XVIII, 1, 1, p. 376] The De W. Alford mentions is Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849). Alford's

I take a cue from a physician friend of mine. As a specialist in infectious diseases, he sounds the alarm about the dangers of such diseases. Being that these diseases are quite dangerous to health and even life itself, they are not to be trifled with. Instead, they should be avoided at all costs. But notice that my physician friend did not himself avoid such diseases at all costs. Indeed, he spent quite a bit of time, effort, and resources mastering the knowledge of them. He did this for two important reasons. He wanted to be able to help others avoid being infected by these diseases; and he wanted to help cure those who were already infected. As such, the greater danger would be if no one ever sought to understand and combat these diseases. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to these kinds of dangers.

By analogy, even if Paul was warning us that philosophy poses a great danger to our spiritual health, it does not follow that no Christian should seek to understand it. At the very least, it would seem that some Christians need to understand philosophy enough either to help other Christians avoid being "infected" by toxic ideas or, having already been infected, to help them be "cured." As C. S. Lewis observed, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered."[4] Lewis's advice echoes that of Thomas Aquinas who said, "But seeing that a teacher of sacred Scripture must at times oppose the philoso-

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reference is to de Wette's *Exegetisches Handbuch: Eph., Phil,. Col., Philem.,* 2nd ed. (Leipzig 1847).

A. S. Peake makes the same argument that Paul is not repudiating philosophy. He argues, "The second noun [deceit] is explanatory of the first, as is shown by the absence of the article and preposition before it and the lack of any indication that Paul had two evils to attack. The meaning is 'his philosophy, which is vain deceit.' The word has, of course, no reference to Greek philosophy, and probably none to the allegorical method of Scripture exegesis that the false teachers may have employed. Philo uses it of the law of Judaism, and Josephus of the three Jewish sects. Here, no doubt, it means just the false teaching that threatened to undermine the faith of the Church. There is no condemnation of philosophy in itself, but simply of the empty but plausible sham that went by that name at Colossae" [A. S. Peake, "The Epistle to the Colossians" in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 3, "Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians" (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 521-522].

[4] C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time" in *The Weight of Glory: A Collection of Lewis's Most Moving Addresses* (London: Harper Collins, 2013), 59.

phers, it is necessary for him to make use of philosophy."[5] Norman L. Geisler summed it up well when he said, "We cannot properly beware of philosophy unless we be aware of philosophy."[6] Thus, even if Paul's words are to be taken as an admonition to avoid philosophy, there remains the need for some among us to delve into its subject matter.

Hence, we have at least one task for which philosophy is needed for theology. Answering certain philosophical objections to Christianity might very well require an appeal to philosophy itself. In saying this, I am not suggesting that other disciplines are irrelevant. Undoubtedly the biblical scholar is aided by, for example, the archeologist who confirms the Bible's historical reliability. Examples from other disciplines are numerous. I contend that there are aspects of Christian truth that also unavoidably involve philosophy. What that role for philosophy will look like will depends upon one's philosophical orientation. No Christian philosopher would be satisfied with just any philosophical approach. There are, to be sure, appreciable differences among Christian philosophers as to what constitutes sound philosophy. But it would not be necessary for me to take sides in order to prove that theology needs philosophy of some sort in some way.

Voices from History

At the risk of seeming to commit the fallacy of appeal to authority, I should like to begin my defense of philosophy by showing that this view is not without its precedence. A number of luminaries from church history have extolled the benefits philosophy affords Christian thinking. The Church Father Clement of Alexandria (150-215) remarked, "There is then in philosophy, though stolen as the fire by Prometheus, a slender spark, capable of being fanned into flame, a trace of wisdom and an impulse from God."[7] Augustine (354-430) urged, "Moreover, if those who

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[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, Q. 2, art. 3.6, published as *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of His Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), p. 48.

[6] Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/1 (March 1999): 3-19 (18).

[7] Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, I, 17, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm, accessed 02/23/24. For an examination of Clement's use of philosophy, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Clement's Use of Aristotle: The Aristotelian*

are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it."[8] The reader will perhaps recognize the all-truth-is-God's-truth sentiment here.

Skipping later in church history, the Augustinian Canon Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), who defected to the Protestants very early on, argued:

> With such words [from Col 2:8] he seems to frighten Christians away from the study of philosophy. But I am sure that if you properly grasp the meaning of the Apostle's statement you will not be disturbed. Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about the justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: for it is the work of God, and could not be enjoyed by us without his special contribution.[9]

In recognizing that, even in our fallenness, humans are still able to discover truth, John Calvin (1509-1564) observed, "Therefore in reading the profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator."[10] More to the point, Calvin admonished, "But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the works and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics [i.e., the method of philosophy], mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly

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Contribution to Clement of Alexandria's Refutation of Gnosticism (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1977).

[8] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. from *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Book 2, Chap. 40, §60. From http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/ddc2.html, accessed 02/12/15.

[9] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Introduction to the Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*. This is vol. 4 of The Peter Martyr Vermigli Library, trans. and ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Moscow: The Davenant Press, 2018), 13-14.

[10] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 2.2.15, vol. 1, pp. 236.

punished for our sloth."[11] Lest the mention of dialectics was not clear enough, Calvin adds, "Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skillful description of nature were blind? ... Nay, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration."[12] Many other voices whose opinions cannot lightly be dismissed include John Owen (1616-1683), Francis Turretin (1623-1687), Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), and James Petigru Boyce (1827-1888).[13] The list would certainly become unwieldy in citing the many contemporary evangelical philosophers among us.

Of course, such appeals do not make my case. Indeed, for some, appeals to the contemporary examples would only fan the flames of the debate that rages today within evangelicalism regarding philosophy's role in doing theology. What is needed, then, are examples of issues that only philosophy can properly manage in establishing fundamental elements of theology.

What Can Philosophy Do for Theology?

Philosophy and the Attributes of God

Two illustrations will help to highlight the need. At least two examples are needed to show the relevance of philosophy to theology: one that makes it easy to see the problem (even if the specific example seems to make the threat far removed from evangelicalism) and one that shows how close to home and how challenging and subtle the problem can be. What both have in common is that disputes regarding the doctrine of God's attributes will require an appeal to philosophy.

Though perhaps unfamiliar to a general Christian audience, *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible* by Finis Jennings Dake has had its

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[11] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.16, vol. 1, pp. 236-237.

[12] Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, p. 236.

[13] John Owen, "The Reason of Faith," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 20; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, First Topic: Theology, Q. XIII, trans. by George Musgrave Giger, (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992, vol. 1, p. 44-45; Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 27; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's, 1975), I, II, §3, p. 24; James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 47.

influence upon certain Word of Faith teachers.[14] Because of the relative obscurity of the Dake Bible, my appeal to it for an illustration might not worry the average Christian. Certainly, there is no end to the heretical books out there. Why should anyone worry what Finis Jennings Dake had to say about anything? Dake teaches that "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all present where there are beings with whom they have dealings; but they are not omnibody, that is, their bodies are not omnipresent. All three go from place to place bodily as other beings in the universe do."[15] More startling is Dake's teaching that God has an assortment of spirit body parts.[16] One should not miss what is specifically grave about Dake's assertion. For every body part he thinks the Bible teaches God has, Dake has a biblical citation. Every verse he cites does indeed ascribe the body part to God. If Dake were with us today, I suspect that he would protest that we were the ones who were failing to take these verses seriously. If the text says that God has eyes or arms (Dake might argue), then it means that God has eyes and arms even if these parts in Dake's understanding, are not physical.

No doubt most would scoff at the fact that something as simple as a figure of speech would escape Dake's notice. After all, surely even Dake does not believe that God has wings (Ruth 2:12) or feathers (Ps. 91:4) or that Jesus is literally bread (John 6:32) or is literally a vine (John 15:1). Perhaps Dake is an extreme case. But

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[14] Finis Jennings Dake, *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville: Dake Bible Sales, 1991). Undoubtedly Benny Hinn's foray into his Trinitarian heresy of there being nine in the Godhead—the video can be seen in numerous places online—came from Dake who said, "What we mean by Divine Trinity is that there are three separate and distinct persons in the Godhead, each one having His own personal spirit body, personal soul, and personal spirit …" [Dake, *Reference Bible*, p. 280 of the New Testament].

[15] Dake, *Annotated,* in the "Complete Concordance and Cyclopedic Index," p. 81.

[16] Dake asserts: "God has a personal spirit body (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19); shape (Jn. 5:37); form (Phil. 2:5-7); image and likeness of a man (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). He has bodily parts such as, back parts (Ex. 33:23), heart (Gen. 6:6; 8:21), hands and fingers (Ps. 8:3-6; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7), mouth (Num. 12:8), lips and tongue (Isa. 30:27), feet (Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10), eyes (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18), ears (Ps. 18:6), hair, head, face, arms (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev. 5:1-7; 22:4-6), and other bodily parts [Dake, *Annotated,* (New Testament), p. 97].

I submit that adjudicating literal descriptions of God from figures of speech is not always as straightforward as it might appear.

The heresies of Dake might seem far removed from evangelicalism and, as such, seemingly posing no real threat except, perhaps, the threat posed by the Word of Faith movement as a whole. However, an illustration from the other end of the spectrum, one that is perhaps more subtle and undoubtedly more controversial, is in order. In his *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, John Sanders says, "There are the occasions where God says 'perhaps' the people will listen to my prophet and 'maybe' they will turn from their idols …. God says, 'I thought Israel would return to me but she has not.' … In these texts God is explicitly depicted as not knowing the specific future. God himself says that he was mistaken about what was going to happen."[17] The controversy over Open Theism (as the view is known) led certain members of the Evangelical Theological Society to bring charges against John Sanders and Clark Pinnock. These charges were dealt with at the 2003 national meeting in Atlanta, GA.[18] The charges maintained that both were out of compliance with the Society's stance on biblical inerrancy.[19] The charges failed to be upheld for both. While

[17] John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1998), 74. Additional defenses of Open Theism include David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity1996); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: Does God Ever Change His Mind?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); and Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994).

[18] "Regarding the charges against Clark Pinnock, the vote to sustain was 212, or 32.9%, while the vote not to sustain the charges was 432, or 67.1%. The charges against John Sanders were sustained by a 62.7% vote (388), while the vote not to sustain was 231, or 37.3%. … The result was that neither Pinnock nor Sanders were removed from membership, a two-thirds vote being required for dismissal." [James A. Borland, "Reports Relating to the Fifty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Society," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 47, no. 1 (March 2004): 171.

[19] Consider what Clark Pinnock thinks is a plausible entailment of Open Theism. "Perhaps God's agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal. … I do not feel obligated to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it. … I would say that God transcends the world, while being able to indwell it. Perhaps God uses the created order as a kind of body and exercises top-down causation upon it." [Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 33-35]. During the ETS meeting, Pinnock acknowl-

the meeting was called to specifically address the issue of biblical inerrancy and not Open Theism as such, many have concluded that the failure of the Society to oust the two prominent proponents of the view is nevertheless a tacit acknowledgement that Open Theism is compatible with evangelicalism.

Before us we have two illustrations. One is a claim that the Bible teaches that God moves around the universe with his assemblage of spirit body parts, is located in space, and is ultimately a finite being. The other is a claim that the Bible teaches that God cannot know the free actions of his creatures and can be mistaken about what He thought would happen in the future. The first certainly would strike an evangelical as unacceptable while the other has been (at least tacitly) accepted by the world's largest evangelical academic society and has, perhaps, become more acceptable among certain evangelicals.

My point here is not to settle what can be (at least with respect to Open Theism) quite an involved discussion.[20] Rather, my point is to show that, at some critical level, all sides will have to appeal to categories and methods that are characteristically philosophical. The reason is because such debates are clearly not exegetical. Remember that every one of Dake's claims about God are quotes from Scripture. The issue involves, among other things, the question of whether a given description of God in the Bible is literal or

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edged "a degree of ambiguity" regarding his book. It was not clear to me from the report exactly what that ambiguity was. The view that somehow the universe is God's "body" is known as panentheism. It is, more or less, a theological application of the Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. [See Whitehead's *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1978.] Pinnock's chapter "Between Classical and Process Theism," (written many years earlier where Pinnock defends "Freewill Theism," a phrase he borrows from David Basinger (see note 21) and is, for all intents and purposes, another name for Open Theism) provides interesting insights to how his thinking then might have led to his thinking much later. [Clark Pinnock, "Between Classical and Process Theism," in Ronald H. Nash, ed. *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 313-327].

[20] For critiques of Open Theism and Process Theology, in addition to the Nash text cited above, see Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); Norman L. Geisler, H. Wayne House, and Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001); and Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L Johnson, eds., *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

figurative. As I have already suggested, this may not be quite as easy as some might suppose.[21]

I was discussing my concerns about theology's need for philosophy with a friend, and I cited Gen 3:8 to set things up. The text tells us that Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." I asked my friend if he believed that God had legs, since it was impossible for God to walk without them.[22] He responded that he did not. I asked him why, and he said that he believed that God was a spirit, appealing to John 4:24 where Jesus told the woman at the well that "God is Spirit." I then asked him what he did with the Genesis 3 passage and he said that it was a figure of speech. I pressed him how he knew, of the two passages, that the John 4 passage was not the figure of speech. Perhaps God was figuratively a spirit and literally had legs. My point was that it is not always obvious what is and what is not a figure of speech and that sometimes further appeals to scriptural texts cannot settle the matter.[23]

Among those fellow Christian philosophers who join me in the rejection of Open Theism, there are two main methods of the cri-

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[21] Boyd suggests what I regard as an entirely inadequate method. "There are certainly passages in the Bible that are figurative and portray God in human terms. You can recognize them because what is said about God is either ridiculous if taken literally ... or because the genre of the passage is poetic" [Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118]. These criteria clearly will not work since, (1) one could not tell the genre of a passage until he understood the meaning of the passage and, thus, cannot use the genre to discover what the meaning is [see Thomas A. Howe, "Does Genre Determine Meaning?" *Christian Apologetics Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 1-19]; and (2) saying that God cannot know the future contingent propositions would strike a proponent of Classical Theology or Molinism as clearly false, if not ridiculous.

[22] Some may suggest that this event was a theophany, i.e., an appearance of Christ before his incarnation in the New Testament. Without delving into the issue of theophanies, it remains that an appeal to a theophany cannot account for every physical description of God in the Old Testament. This would certainly be the case with the above-cited verses describing God's wings and feathers.

[23] One often hears the expression that "Scripture interprets Scripture" sometimes incorrectly labeled as the "analogy of faith." For a brief but helpful discussion of the principle, see Thomas A. Howe, "The Analogy of Faith: Does Scripture Interpret Scripture?" *Christian Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 50-51. The article is available at http://www.equip.org/articles/the-analogy-of-faith, accessed 02/23/24.

tique. My point here is not to refute Open Theism. Rather, my point is that the discussion invariably involves an appeal to the methods and categories traditionally ascribed to philosophy. Indeed, not only does the case against Open Theism involve philosophy, but in some instances, the case *for* Open Theism does so as well.[24]

Broadly speaking, one can find a significant difference between the methods of contemporary Analytic Philosophy and the older method of the classical Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition (henceforth 'Classical Philosophy').[25] The analytic approach seeks to conscientiously employ both philosophy and Scripture. Regarding the issue of God's attributes, by the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy together with the testimony of Scripture, this approach seeks to establish a carefully defined notion of "perfection." On the basis of this definition, one would then identify what "perfect-making properties" must constitute a "perfect being." Since God is by definition a perfect being, God must possess these perfect-making properties. Any property that does not clearly appear in the Bible and/or is clearly not perfect-making must be denied of God. This approach is sometimes called "Perfect Being Theology." William Lane Craig succinctly describes this method:

> For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by

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[24] Open Theists seem divided on this point. Pinnock seems comfortable with employing (at least to some extent) Process Philosophy. Bassinger's defense is deliberately philosophical. In contrast, Boyd lays the problem of "classical theology" at the feet of the influence of "pagan philosophy" while characterizing his case for Open Theism as "deeply rooted in Scripture" (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 24).

[25] In the interest of full disclosure, I am an Existential Thomist in the tradition of Etienne Gilson and Joseph Owens. This means that, for me, it is not enough to defend that theology needs philosophy as such. In saying that the body needs to eat, one does not mean that one could just eat anything. Rather, one means that the body needs to eat food. But even more, one does not mean just any food (broadly defined) but nutritious food. By analogy, theology needs philosophy, but not just any philosophy but "nutritious," which is to say, sound philosophy. I have my ideas of what that looks like while acknowledging that there are God-loving, Bible-believing Christian philosophers who will disagree.

> the biblical data and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God.[26]

In contrast, the Classical approach, by the tools, methods, and categories of Classical Philosophy—a tradition that employs the thinking of Plato, Aristotle up through the thinking of Aquinas—seeks to discover what the nature of God must be like as the First Cause.[27] On the basis of this discovery, it identifies what attributes must be true of God. It then identifies those attributes as the definition of what it means to be ultimately and infinitely perfect. One will find some significate differences in the two lists of Divine attributes as well as some significant agreements.[28]

From this point, one could explore the various options to see the specifics of how they bear upon the question of God's attributes. In the case where an evangelical adamantly denies the heresies of Dake, it seems that it would be impossible for him to avoid such misuse of Scripture regarding God's attributes without some antecedent data and methodology arising from philosophy.[29] But

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[26] William Lane Craig, "Theistic Critiques of Atheism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71-72. More specifically, Craig shows how this method will lead to the rejection of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity and other attributes of God one finds in Classical, Thomistic Theism. He goes on, "most Christian philosophers today deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making."

[27] Such categories would include substance and accidents, Aristotle's Ten Categories or Predicates, universals and particulars, act and potency, form and matter, teleology, Aristotle's Four Causes, analogy of being, and essence and existence.

[28] Simplicity is rejected by many Perfect Being theologians. Many also reject the traditional understanding of immutability and impassibility, particularly as understood by Thomists. All agree that God is without beginning, is the Creator of the universe, is not material or spatial, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good.

[29] There are, unfortunately, some who think that they can settle these issues without philosophy. Certain contemporary Presuppositionalists, while not at all sympathetic to Open Theism (much less the heresies of the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*), nevertheless repudiate any role that philosophy might play regarding our understanding of God's attributes. "The first notable difference between Philosophical Classical Theism and Biblical Classical Theism … is the

even given the different philosophical approaches one will find today within Christianity, the point still stands about philosophy. So, while there might be strong disagreement as to which philosophical approach is better or closer to the truth, it should be clear that theology, with regard to certain attributes of God, needs, to an important extent, philosophy.

What about other theological concerns? Are there other aspects of theology besides the attributes of God that also need the application of philosophy? Space does not allow anything here beyond a list of topics critical for theology that could, in some circumstance, require an appeal to philosophy to define or defend. A partial list includes: the definition and nature of truth; the relationship of faith and reason; the sanctity of human life; the nature of human knowing; the existence of God; the nature of morality and its relationship to God; miracles; and principles of hermeneutics. With so many touchpoints that philosophy has with theology, it would seem that, until the Second Coming, there is quite a bit of job security for Christian philosophers.

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epistemological foundation in which they are rooted. … Revelation comes by the way of *authority*, while philosophy comes by the way of *demonstration*. Revelation is a sure foundation for knowledge because it is received by humbly submitting to the wisdom of God. At the same time, Greek philosophy is a faulty foundation for knowledge because it is built on the autonomous and contradictory notions of man's wisdom" [Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Revealed God: An Introduction to Biblical Classical Theism* (Greenbrier: Free Grace Press, 2023), 17-18, emphasis in original].

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Would Bonhoeffer Think We Were Stupid?

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It is only fitting that this issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is devoted to honoring Dr. Robert Stewart. Bob, as he is affectionately called by those who know him, is a champion of the gospel. I am glad to call him my brother and my dear friend.

Introduction

"Truth has stumbled in the public square." (Isa 59:14)

From April 1943 to April 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent the last two years of his life imprisoned in a concentration camp. He was executed a few days before the war in Germany ended. During this period, Bonhoeffer composed his thoughts, which were published posthumously as *Letters and Papers from Prison*.[1] One portion of the prologue that attracted a great deal of attention was the section entitled "On Stupidity." It begins with the assertion that stupidity is worse than malice.

"Stupidity," explains Bonhoeffer, "is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice." This is because malice can be confronted for what it is. It can be exposed, argued against, and opposed by whatever means necessary. Malice can be identified as malice. Malice can recognize itself in the mirror. Not so with stupidity; stupidity doesn't know that it's stupid.

Therefore, there is no way to respond to stupidity. Bonhoeffer laments, "Against stupidity we are defenseless." It is impervious to reason. Facts have no impact. He advises, "For that reason, greater caution is called for when dealing with a stupid person than with a malicious one. Never again will we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous."

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 9-11.

Bonhoeffer's anguish is understandable. He watched his beloved Germany descend into the nightmare of Hitler's fascism. How could such a tragedy happen in a country so cultured and civilized? In his book, *Hitler's Cross: The Revealing Story of How the Cross of Christ Was Used as a Symbol of the Nazi Agenda,* Erwin Lutzer documents that it wasn't just the nation that succumbed to mass fanaticism.[2] The Church did also.

Just a few years earlier, Austrian philosopher and novelist Robert Musil pondered the same question. In 1937 he delivered a lecture in Vienna also entitled "On Stupidity," in which he made many of the same observations as Bonhoeffer.[3] He distinguished between an individual who was merely simple and those who are truly stupid. A person with low intellect might be restricted in certain ways, yet that was understandable; even to some extent honorable. The type of stupidity Musil had in mind was communal—a collective pathology. Stupidity is a social sickness. He argued that though an individual could be dumb; real stupidity requires a community.[4]

Both Bonhoeffer and Musil agreed that there is no correlation between intelligence and stupidity. In his article, "Why Some of the Smartest People Can Be So Very Stupid," Sasha Golob builds on the arguments advanced by Musil.[5] Stupidity is "something very different and much more dangerous: dangerous precisely because some of the smartest people, the least dumb, were often the most stupid."

Golob uses the British high command during WWI as an example of how individually normal or even highly intelligent individuals can fail to grasp realities collectively. They could not adequately comprehend trench warfare. This "cognitive failing" was due to a type of "conceptual obsolescence" and since it affected

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[2] Erwin W. Lutzer, *Hitler's Cross: The Revealing Story of How the Cross of Christ Was Used as a Symbol of the Nazi Agenda* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 101-41.

[3] Robert Musil, "On Stupidity," in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1994), 268-86. Unlike Bonhoeffer, Musil and his wife fled Nazi Germany almost immediately after he gave his speech. Musil wasn't Jewish, but his wife was.

[4] This echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's famous aphorism, "In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule." I admit that Nietzsche's statement is a bit ironic given that he was a lifelong loner who spent his last days in an asylum.

[5] https://psyche.co/ideas/why-some-of-the-smartest-people-can-be-so-very-stupid

their community as a whole, their errors were reinforced rather than exposed. The community, which should have served as a check and provided a corrective critique, instead simply acted as an echo chamber. The result was years of unimaginable yet avoidable tragedy.

Golob argues that stupidity has two features "that make it particularly dangerous compared to other vices": it is a communal affliction and it is "domain specific." He explains,

> First, unlike character flaws, stupidity is primarily a property of groups or traditions, not individuals: after all, we get most of our concepts, our mental tools, from the society we are raised in….Once stupidity has taken hold of a group or society, it is thus particularly hard to eradicate – inventing, distributing and normalizing new concepts is tough work.
>
> Second, stupidity begets more stupidity due to a profound ambiguity in its nature…. It is vital to separate this point from familiar and condescending claims about how dumb or uneducated the 'other side' are: stupidity is compatible with high educational achievement, and it is more the property of a political culture than of the individuals in it, needing to be tackled at that level.
>
> We can now explain why stupidity is so domain-specific, why someone can be so smart in one area, and such an idiot in another: the relevant concepts are often domain-specific.[6]

To summarize: stupidity is 1) a group pathology rather than an individual one; and 2) has no relationship to the intelligence of the people in that group. With these ideas in mind, let's focus on the evangelical community. I believe that our community is currently undergoing a phase of "toxic populism." This term refers to the growing communal stupidity that opposes what it perceives are a galaxy of malevolent elements.

Evangelicalism as a Populist Movement

Evangelicalism has always been a populist movement.[7] At this point I'm using "populist" in the general historical sense. Later we

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 2, 61, 67. After the loss of America's major universities at the end of the 19th century, Evangelicalism in the 20th century became more stridently populist.

will look at Populism in the narrower political sense. In the political sense Populism is almost always understood to be negative thing. But historically speaking, Evangelicals have been populist in their orientation—and this is commendable. Evangelicals are a people of the people, striving to make the message of the gospel accessible and understandable to all. Evangelicalism's populist roots can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation, when Martin Luther sought to return Christianity to its original, grassroots form. America received the Reformation through the dual filters of British Puritanism and Continental Pietism.[8] Evangelicalism came into its own during the First and Second Great Awakenings of 18th and 19th centuries. This confluence of influences has given Evangelicalism its distinctive features. Let me list a few.

Egalitarian

Evangelicalism has always been egalitarian in its orientation, with its emphasis on empowering the laity and encouraging voluntary religious commitment. This has led to a strong tradition of lay leadership and lay activism. Evangelicals have always believed that every person is called by God to participate in His work in the world. This democratic impulse has helped Evangelicals to be a powerful force for good in the world.

Activist

Evangelicalism has a long history of social activism and change. They were some of the earliest abolitionists, and they were at the forefront of the temperance movement and the pro-life movement. With over 70,000 trained volunteers, the Southern Baptist Convention has a larger disaster relief team than the Red Cross.[9] Evangelical activism is motivated by confidence in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the presence of his Spirit.

Agile

Evangelicalism's egalitarianism and activism enables it to be agile. The decentralized nature of Evangelicalism makes it dynamic,

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"With the rise of the new university, evangelical thinking, which had previously existed in the tension between academic and populist styles, became almost exclusively populist" (113). Hence the rise of Fundamentalism.

[8] Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), 23-6.

[9] https://www.sendrelief.org/about/

nimble, and responsive, even opportunistic. Its populist impulses enable it to take advantage of opportunities as they arise, and quickly adapt to changing circumstances. The Southern Baptist Convention is a denomination tailor-made for rapid deployment, quick response, and mass evangelism.

Entrepreneurial

Evangelicalism has an obvious entrepreneurial ethos that responds quickly to cultural changes and market forces. Evangelicalism welcomes leaders gifted with vision, drive, and creativity. Ministries pop up, led by visionaries and innovators—from D.L. Moody to Bill Bright to Billy Graham and scores of others—evangelicals who devoted their remarkable energies to advancing the Kingdom of God.

Contextual

Evangelicals are contextual in their approach, always seeking to find the most effective way to share the gospel message in a given context. Evangelicals have been at the forefront of using new media to reach people with the gospel. They were early adopters of radio and television, and they have been quick to embrace digital media as well. This has enabled evangelicals to be some of the most effective communicators of the gospel in the history of the Church. Given America's affinity for populism, it is not surprising that Evangelicalism has done so well here. Evangelicalism is the populist version of the Christian faith.

The Downside of Populism

Unfortunately, each of Evangelicalism's commendable features has a downside. Each strength has a corresponding weakness.

Shallow and lacking self-criticism

Evangelicalism has a long history of shallow thinking and a lack of self-criticism; it is often imitative and derivative. This is evident in its susceptibility to fads and trends, its reliance on popular culture, its production of cheesy Christian kitsch, and its tendency to make pragmatic decisions without regard for long-term consequences. Evangelicalism has a weakness for celebrity culture and displays a pragmatism run amok.

Anti-intellectualism

The previous point highlights Evangelicalism's lack of intellectual rigor, but the problem goes beyond this. There has been and continues to be a significant strain of anti-intellectualism within Evangelicalism. As Mark Noll famously said, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind."[10]

This lack of intellectual rigor means that evangelicals are rarely at the forefront of new ideas or trends, but instead lag behind reactively. Noll observes, "It is of small consequence — or none — that evangelicals have no research university, or that they have no Nobel laureates. It is of immense significance that evangelicals are not doing the kind of work for which research universities exist and which is recognized by Nobel Prizes. Why? Because the great institutions of higher learning in Western culture function as the *mind* of Western culture."[11] Sadly, with a few notable exceptions, evangelicals live in an intellectual ghetto.

Anti-institutional

Evangelicals have founded many institutions through the years so it may seem ironic to describe Evangelicalism as anti-institutional. But Evangelicalism has always been an outsider movement. George Whitefield and John Wesley took to open-air preaching when they were barred from establishment churches. Let's remember that when John Wesley was not allowed to preach in his home church he then preached outside the church while standing on top of his father's tombstone.

Three of the longest words in the English language came about due to debates in the 18th and 19th centuries about state churches. Those in favor of state churches affirmed religious establishmentarianism. Those opposed held to disestablishmentarianism. Finally, those who opposed those who opposed argued for—you guessed it—antidisestablishmentarianism. Historically Evangelicals, especially those in America, and in particular Baptists, have been strongly opposed to any form of state church. The current push for Christian nationalism by some Baptists is simply surreal.

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[10] Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3.

[11] Ibid., 51.

Evangelicals, admittedly those more of an Anabaptist heritage than those of a Reformed background, have generally distrusted social institutions such as government, the press, and universities, generally seeing them as inherently corrupt. As a result Evangelicals often reject scientific consensus on climate change and a host other issues because they view scientists as part of a spiritual ecosystem that is opposed to the Christian worldview and the Kingdom of God.

Factionalism and Sectarianism

Finally, another downside to the populist orientation of Evangelicalism is its fractious disposition. Worldwide, how many evangelical denominations are there? It depends on how one defines "denomination." According to Gordon-Conwell's Center for Study of Global Christianity, the number exceeds 40,000.[12] The emphasis on individual conversion, combined with a naïve biblicism and an aversion to creeds have had the effect of atomizing believers into autonomous individuals unable to properly relate to or connect with the broader Church.[13] Evangelicals have a long history of not getting along with each other.

Evangelicalism often demonstrates a lack of wisdom in what is considered important. Missteps and errors are frequently made due to an inability to discern between trivial matters and those worthy of attention. Too many times there is a failure to properly engage in theological triage. Debates often become rancorous and thus we have the tendency to multiply by dividing. Evangelicals are known for many things, but epistemic virtue and collegiality are not among them.

The Dark Side of Populism

When political scientists or sociologists use the term "populism," they typically mean it as a pejorative. This is because there are times when the downsides of Populism turn dark, and evangelical populism is no exception. The present environment has

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[12] https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/quick-facts/

[13] Nathan Hatch, "Sola Scriptura and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*," in *The Bible in America,* Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, eds. (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1982), 59-78.

turned toxic. Sociologists search for the reasons why, but it is a bit of mystery.

There have been earlier times of social upheaval where the causes of toxic populism can be easily identified. In the years leading up to the American Civil War, the obvious issue was slavery. In Germany in the 1920s and 30s, the aftereffects of WWI and the Great Depression set the stage for the rise of fascism. In America in the 1960s the issues were the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. However, the root causes of our current polarization are not so readily evident. Even taking the pandemic into account, we collectively are not facing some great existential crisis—be it economic, political, or military. We live in a time of relative peace and prosperity. So why all the sound and fury? In his article, "Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid," social psychologist Jonathan Haidt points to the advent of social media as the primary culprit.[14] Evangelicalism's populist traits make it particularly susceptible to its toxic effects.

Social Media as Accelerant

Social media has not caused our cultural differences or disagreements, but it does amplify them. We are still trying to understand social media's role in our culture, but what we do know is that it acts as an accelerant, heightening and weaponizing social discourse. Haidt argues that social media originally was promised as a way for people to connect, but instead became a stage for people to perform. "Once social-media platforms had trained users to spend more time performing and less time connecting, the stage was set for the major transformation, which began in 2009: the intensification of viral dynamics."[15] Now social media venues are arenas for performative outrage and virtue signaling.

The Internet and social media provide rapid affinity association. Now any niche, any fetish, can be found quickly and globally. For the most part, this is not a problem. Boutique interests are, by definition, rather small affairs. The problems occur when conspiracy theories metastasize—think of QAnon. 27% of white evangelicals

[14] Jonathan Haidt, "Why the past 10 years of American life have been uniquely stupid," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 2022). https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369/. Accessed 11-02-22.

[15] Haidt, ibid.

believe the QAnon conspiracy theory is "mostly or completely accurate."[16]

Social media platforms tend to reinforce people's affinities and isolate them from differing viewpoints. This is because the algorithms running social media sort users by interests, so they only see content that matches those interests. This creates "filter bubbles" or "thought silos" where people are only exposed to information that confirms their worldview, and they are cut off from other perspectives.[17] This leads to a lack of understanding and empathy for those who hold different views, and it further solidifies and hardens preexisting views.

According to Jonathan Rauch, strong democracies have three forces that act as social glue: "social capital (extensive social networks with high levels of trust), strong institutions, and shared stories."[18] These serve as an "epistemic operating system" within our culture; however, he states that social media has acted as a universal acid dissolving this social glue and replacing trust with pervasive suspicion.

Social media has become a type of public flogging. Haidt argues that American institutions across the board—universities, journalism, government, and all "knowledge-producing institutions"--have become "stupider en masse because social media instilled in their members a chronic fear of getting darted."[19] Just one wrong Tweet can cause a viral firestorm, calls for dismissal and investigations, and a public pillorying worse than being put in stocks.

Susceptibility to Demagogues

Evangelicals display a susceptibility to demagoguery. A demagogue is a leader who preys on the emotions of the people to get them to do what he wants. He typically uses fear and anger to

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[16] https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/february/white-evangelicals-qanon-election-conspiracy-trump-aei.html. Accessed 11-03-22

[17] Peter Burns, "Bonhoeffer's Theory of the World Explains the World Perfectly," https://medium.com/lessons-from-history/bonhoeffers-theory-of-stupidity-explains-the-world-perfectly-957cbb3fbac1. Accessed 11-01-22.

[18] Jonathan Rauch, "The Constitution of Knowledge," *National Affairs* (Fall, 2018). https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-constitution-of-knowledge. Accessed 11-02-2022.

[19] Jonathan Haidt, "Why the past 10 years of American life have been uniquely stupid."

control the populace. He often scapegoats certain groups or simply stirs up hatred against them. Demagogues typically have little regard for the rule of law or for democratic processes, and they often rise to power by promising to solve complex problems with simple solutions. Lately there has been little difference between political demagogues and some evangelical pastors. They exhibit the same demeanor and utilize the same tactics. A disturbing number of evangelical leaders are reminiscent of Huey Long.[20]

As noted earlier, Evangelicals have always exhibited a tendency to sectarianism. However, there are segments of Evangelicalism where this sectarian spirit is in danger of giving way to a cult-like mentality and behavior. In fact, the distinctly American cults, such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, have a greater connection with Evangelicalism that we like to admit. Engaging with them and their arguments is a little like looking at ourselves in a funhouse mirror. The image is greatly distorted but still recognizable as a reflection of us. Too often evangelicals slavishly follow dynamic and charismatic leaders with a devotion that Bonhoeffer would describe simply as stupid.[21]

Susceptibility to troll epistemology and disinformation

Troll epistemology is a term coined by Jonathan Rauch. He defines it as a particularly pernicious form of disinformation. He explains, "There is nothing new about disinformation. Unlike ordinary lies and propaganda, which try to make you believe *something*, disinformation tries to make you disbelieve *everything*. It scatters so much bad information, and casts so many aspersions on so many sources of information, that people throw up their hands and say, 'They're all a pack of liars.'"[22] The goal is industrial-strength epistemic anarchy:

> By insisting that all the fact checkers and hypothesis testers out there are phonies, trolls discredit the very possibility of a socially validated reality, and open the door to tribal

[20] Peter Wehner, "The Desecrations of Michael Flynn," *The Atlantic Monthly* (Oct. 2022). https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/10/michael-flynn-maga-christian-trump/671852/

[21] Bob Smietana, "Tennessee preacher Greg Locke says demons told him names of witches in his church." https://religionnews.com/2022/02/15/tennessee-preacher-greg-locke-says-demons-told-him-names-of-witches-in-his-church/

[22] Jonathan Rauch, "The Constitution of Knowledge."

> knowledge, personal knowledge, partisan knowledge, and other manifestations of epistemic anarchy. By spreading lies and disinformation on an industrial scale, they sow confusion about what might or might not be true, and about who can be relied on to discern the difference, and about whether there *is* any difference. By being willing to say anything, they exploit shock and outrage to seize attention and hijack the public conversation.[23]

Trolls use social media in at least three ways. First, social media "gives more power to trolls and provocateurs while silencing good citizens."[24] Thus a small number of jerks are able to have an outsized impact.[25] Second, social media "gives more power and voice to the political extremes while reducing the power and voice of the moderate majority." This is true on both ends of the political spectrum. "These two groups are similar in surprising ways. They are the whitest and richest of the [American population], which suggests America is being torn apart by a battle between two subsets of the elite who are not representative of the broader society."[26]

Third, social media "deputizes everyone to administer justice with no due process." Thus trolls assume the moral and ethical worst about others; interpret the statements and actions of others in the worst possible way; judge others by standards they never apply to themselves; and all the while deliberately using the most provocative, insulting and derogatory language that they can get away with. As Rauch points out, there is nothing new about disinformation. In "The Art of Political Lying," Jonathan Swift described the trolls of his day, the professional liars, and the impact they had on public discourse:

> [A]s the vilest writer has his readers, so the greatest liar has his believers: and it often happens, that if a lie be believed only for an hour, it has done its work, and there is no fur-

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] A Stanford University study found that 0.1% of social media users accounted for 38% of conflicts. Less than 1% created 74% of conflicts. Social media allows a minute number of voices to have a remarkably amplified impact. Srijan Kumar, et.al., "Community Action and Conflict on the Web," https://arxiv.org/pdf/1803.03697.pdf. Accessed 11-02-22.

[26] Jonathan Rauch, "The Constitution of Knowledge."

> ther occasion for it. Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale has had its effect: like a man, who has thought of a good repartee when the discourse is changed, or the company parted; or like a physician, who has found out an infallible medicine, after the patient is dead.[27]

QAnon appears to have started out as a joke or a prank. As Swift observes, "jests" like these have a short lifespan. I suspect that ten years from now one will be hard pressed to find anyone who will admit that they fell for the prank. But the damage will already be done.

Evangelicals, unfortunately appear to be particularly susceptible to troll epistemology. Evangelicals already feel like outsiders, so they feel a certain affinity with the trolls who challenge the accepted consensus—in the areas of politics, science, cultural norms and sexual mores. But this is a devil's bargain. We claim to love and know the Truth. We proclaim fealty to the Bible because it is God's Word, the Word of Truth, the final Authority in matters of faith and practice. To practice intellectual vice is to indulge in the worst hypocrisy. It is to love darkness rather than light.

Susceptibility to herd mentality

Evangelicals display a tendency toward herd mentality. Herd mentality is a psychological phenomenon that occurs when people are influenced by their peers to think, feel, or behave in a certain way. It often leads to irrational decisions and can cause people to do things they wouldn't normally do if they weren't part of the group. In a series of classic experiments, psychologist Solomon Asch demonstrated the power of group pressure.[28] Over 75% of the time participants would give what they knew was an incorrect answer in order to be in agreement with their group.

Herd behavior should not really be surprising to us. At any given time there are more serious theological, philosophical, social, political, and ethical issues than any one individual has time to explore in thorough detail. Of necessity we take advantage of the

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[27] Jonathan Swift, "The Art of Political Lying," https://www.bartleby.com/209/633.html. Accessed 11-04-22.

[28] Saul McLeod, "Solomon Asch—Conformity Experiment," https://www.simplypsychology.org/asch-conformity.html. Accessed 11-01-22.

collective wisdom of various communities of which we have allegiance and confidence (this present meeting at ETS is a good example). We find ourselves dependent on the integrity and intellectual virtue of these communities.

But what do we do when we are faced with a situation similar to what confronted Bonhoeffer? What happens when the community to which we are the most committed is collectively stupid? As a Southern Baptist, this is not a hypothetical question. At least twice in my denomination's history—on the issue of slavery and later on the matter of civil rights—my people were wrong. Ethically and morally wrong, with horrific consequences. I'm talking personally about my family, multiple generations, back to great-great grandfathers on both sides of my family. How could otherwise good and wise people be so stupid?

I opened with an illustration from WW2; let me finish with one. Abraham Kuyper's thought is enjoying a renaissance today. In addition to his many accomplishments, this remarkable Dutch theologian served as prime minister of Holland. How many theologians can put that on their resume? I count myself as someone who appreciates many of the features of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism.

Kuyper said a thing or two that could be read as an endorsement of Christian nationalism. Let us remember that Kuyper's son, Herman Kuyper embraced the Dutch Nazi party. His son, Willem (and Abraham's grandson), took things much further. After Germany invaded Holland, he joined the German Waffen SS and was killed on the Eastern front in January 1944. So while Bonhoeffer and Musil were warning about collective insanity, and in Holland Anne Frank and Corrie Ten Boom were hiding from and resisting the Third Reich, Abraham Kuyper's Dutch grandson was serving as a stormtrooper and assisting in the round up of Jews. Before WWII was over both Herman and Willem would die for the Fuhrer.

I don't bring up these facts simply to sully Kuyper's legacy. As I said, I'm very appreciative of Kuyper and much of his thought. It needs to be pointed out that one of Kuyper's granddaughters, Johanna Kuyper, protected three dozen Jews by hiding them during the Nazi occupation. Rather, I point to Kuyper's son and grandson as warnings, as examples of what Bonhoeffer was lamenting.

There are significant Evangelical voices who are now speaking flippantly about Christian nationalism.[29] Both intellectual virtue and moral virtue require that we resist calls to extremism and maintain a firm footing on Christ and the gospel. This is not merely being moderate. This is being principled and centered, grounded in the truth, and not being blown to and fro by whatever are the political currents of the day. We live in a time in which Evangelicals are embracing ever more surreal conspiracies—flat earthers, QAnon, election denial, vaccines embedded with microchips, race-baiting replacement theories, denial of climate change, denial of the Holocaust, denial of the Sandy Hook shooting, even denial of 9/11—the list could go on.

Conclusion

The sloganeering of Populism does not lend itself to nuance and thoughtful debate. On many social issues, the line from Scripture to Christian principles is usually clear, while the line from principles to specific government policies often is not. Thinking through the best course of action often has many layers. Such multilevel discussions have plenty of room for mischief. Examples of motivated reasoning and confirmation bias are not hard to find. We must strive to have good-faith discussions, to the best of our abilities.

Many of the debates this paper mentions were already going before the advent of the Internet. And misinformation and disinformation were already a problem before social media arrived. But the present toxic environment is the context in which the discussions are being conducted and we have to take this into account. Everything has been turned up to eleven.

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[29] Michelle Boorstein, "In existential midterm races, Christian prophets become GOP surrogates, Charismatic prophets are claiming that God is calling for Christians to take control of the American government. "Longtime watchers of religion in the United States say this rise of prophetic figures is the result of multiple forces. Among them are a collapse of trust in institutional sources of information, the growth of charismatic Christianity and its accompanying media ecosystems, and a Trump presidency that brought in from the fringe spiritual figures long rejected by the political and evangelical establishments." In other words, the causes are Populist in nature. https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/11/05/lance-wallnau-mastriano-christian-prophets/. Accessed 04-18-2024.

If Haidt is correct about social media functioning as an accelerant to already preexisting conditions (and I think he is), then any attempt to deal with toxic populism must address how Christians relate to the Internet. We cannot wish social media away; we cannot return to the era of geriatric millennials. (Yes, geriatric millennial really is a thing. It refers to millennials born early enough to remember life before the Internet.)[30] At any rate, I don't want it to go away. We must disciple believers to live in this new reality. That means we need to formulate best practices for consuming and producing social media content.

As for consuming Internet content, Evangelicals need to develop epistemic virtue. If there is a silver lining to this present mess, it is that it has revealed a glaring preexisting weakness within Evangelicalism. The Bible is full of warnings about deception. For example, in the book of Proverbs, we are warned that "The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps" (Proverbs 14:15). We are also warned that "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish" (Proverbs 19:5).

The Bible is also full of exhortations to have discernment. We are exhorted to "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19) and to "test everything; hold on to the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Paul urges believers to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

As for producing Internet content, Evangelicals need to display the fruit of the Spirit. The New Testament has a great deal to say about our communications, both private and public. Everything we post; everything we tweet; everything we share should minister grace to the reader and please the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:28-32).

I'm more optimistic than Bonhoeffer was, but I'm not sitting in a gestapo prison cell. But we have a lot of work to do.

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30 https://index.medium.com/why-the-hybrid-workforce-of-the-future-depends-on-the-geriatric-millennial-6f9ff4de1d23

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Postmodernism

Stewart E. Kelly, PhD

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I met Bob Stewart in 2002, and in 2007 he graciously contacted me to work on a book in a series he was editing. For the last 15 years or so we have eaten dinner together on the first night of the annual ETS meeting. It has been a pleasure and a blessing to know him, and I write this with deep gratitude. It goes without saying that I look up to him!

The world is not what it once was.[1] In the immortal words of Bob Dylan, "Things Have Changed." For hundreds of years Western thought was dominated by what has been called Enlightenment Modernism, or Modernism for short. The Enlightenment[2] is a broad movement that swept over Europe and the American colonies beginning in the 1600's, most notably in the work of the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1595-1650). Prior to Descartes, the European worldview was dominated by the authority of the Bible, the importance of the Church, and a view of the universe in which God was at the center of things. The Enlightenment, which commences around 1660,[3] and continues all the way to 1914 and the killing fields of western Europe and the senseless slaughter of World War I (the Great War). The Enlightenment challenged a number of beliefs, including the following:

- Belief in God – Under the influence of Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), the French Philosophes, David Hume 1711-

[1] This essay is heavily indebted to Kelly and Dew, *Understanding Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

[2] There is no single, unified Enlightenment. There are many Enlightenments, varying by date, country, and various qualitative measures. So there is a British Enlightenment, a French Enlightenment, etc. See Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[3] It was then that the radical thought of Spinoza began to be influential. Spinoza cast doubt on both the reliability of the Bible and the traditional understanding of God's relation to the universe. He was a Pantheist, believing that God and the universe were one and the same.

1776), and others, belief in God came under fire. Agnosticism[4] and Atheism both became viable options, and even those who were theists gradually came to consider Unitarianism[5] intellectually respectable.

- Original Sin – Many Enlightenment thinkers, John Locke (1632-1704)[6] for example, came to reject Original Sin in favor of a more optimistic view of human nature. Humans were no longer sinners (by birth) before an unhappy God, but moral agents who possessed the ability to meet the demands of morality.[7]
- The Authority of Scripture – Prior to 1600 both Protestants and Catholics believed in the inerrancy of the Scriptures. The work of Spinoza, Jean LeClerc (1657-1736), and various German rationalists began to undermine confidence in the Scriptures.
- The Subordinate Role of Human Reason – Some thinkers[8] began to champion the autonomy of human reason. Humans should only believe what is in accord with the deliverances of human reason. Miracles, the holy Trinity, and the inerrancy of Scripture should only be believed if they are in accord with human reasoning. The Socinians,[9] for example, thought the New Testament nowhere taught the doctrine of the Trinity, and rejected it in favor of a thoroughgoing Unitarianism.

Other distinctive Enlightenment beliefs include a commitment to the benefits of science (and the progress it makes possible) and a belief in European exceptionalism, the idea that the pinnacle of

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[4] The belief that we have neither enough evidence to believe in God (theism) nor to disbelieve in God (atheism).

[5] Unitarianism affirms the divinity of God the Father but rejects the divinity of both Jesus and the Spirit.

[6] Locke and others saw original sin as not required by Scripture and as contrary to our sense of fairness.

[7] Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) famously argued that moral accountability implies moral possibility. So God cannot hold us responsible unless we ourselves have the ability to meet the demands of morality. The relevant slogan here is that "Ought implies can."

[8] John Locke and the British Latitudinarians (who took an ecumenical approach to Christianity) are the big names here.

[9] Named after their founder, Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), an Italian humanist and theologian.

human achievement is to be found in European civilization, and England in particular.

Postmodernism is not well understood in Christian circles. Many Christian writings do a poor job of defining exactly what it is. It is a complex and nuanced movement. What follows is a selective overview of its key beliefs. It is a broad intellectual movement that needs to be defined in relation to Modernism. Its two core features are that it replaces Modernism as the dominant worldview in the West, and second, it rejects the essential claims of Modernism. Postmodernism can be captured by its commitment to ten main beliefs.[10] They are as follows:

1. It challenges the Enlightenment confidence in human reason. The Cartesian quest for certainty is doomed to failure. We can only achieve certainty in a very few matters. We can know

(P) Either Caesar crossed the Rubicon or he didn't

Beliefs such as this are woefully inadequate, epistemically speaking. Probability must replace certainty as our final epistemic goal.[11]

2. The Enlightenment belief that we are neutral observers is a fiction. We are situated observers, massively enmeshed in our own *Sitz im Leben*.[12] We have biases, prejudices, blind spots, human limits, and a host of other factors that influence and shape how we look at the world.[13] The lens through which we see is not clear and transparent, rather, it is colored and, at times, cloudy.

3. Human language is not an innocent and transparent medium that enables us to easily access reality. Language itself is a political and (sometimes) unstable tool for expressing our understanding of reality.

4. Enlightenment Modernists believed in an objective reality that was discoverable by us. Postmoderns are skeptical of the language of discovery, and instead see truth as massively constructed by us observers. They point to Thomas Kuhn (1933-1996) and his work in the philosophy of science. Kuhn shows, they believe, that the scientific enterprise is shot through with human subjectivity.

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[10] See Chapter 1 of *Understanding Postmodernism*.

[11] Historians have known for some time that a historical judgment of "probable" is the best they can do on most matters.

[12] Meaning "setting in life," or "life situation."

[13] A "bias" is a point of view, and not necessarily a bad thing. It is an *arbitrary* bias that is to be condemned.

Modernism was committed to the existence of a stable and enduring self. Postmoderns entertain no such belief. They reject the idea of an enduring self. One option some embrace is the Bundle Theory of the self, where an individual is a (large) collection of particular qualities, but underneath it all there is no metaphysical self who possesses these qualities. Human existence is very much real, but the self is a fiction.

5. In the 1950s historians and social scientists still believed in what might be called methodological objectivity: the idea that utilizing carefully crafted techniques virtually guaranteed that the researcher would acquire (fully) objective knowledge. Postmoderns see humans as fundamentally unable to transcend the situatedness inherent in the human condition.

6. In the 1880s a number of European countries met in Berlin to discuss how exactly to divide up the continent of Africa and all its riches.[14] The countries of Africa itself were somehow not invited. Underlying the Berlin Conference were two massively toxic assumptions: the innate inferiority of the inhabitants of Africa (all people of color) and the paternalistic Eurocentrism of the Berlin attendees.[15]

7. Prior to the 1960s most philosophers were committed to two ideas. The first was that truth existed. The second was that (objective) truth could be discovered by human reason properly applied. Beginning in the 1960s, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) and other American philosophers came to reject the existence of objective and discoverable truth in favor of the idea of truth as fundamentally therapeutic. Particular beliefs should not be considered true but as useful tools for helping us cope with the challenges of human existence. Sigmund Freud (1860-1940), Philip Rieff (1922-2006), and others were seen as advocates of this new approach.

8. A worldview is a metanarrative. It is an overarching story about what is real, what is important, and how we should live. Marxism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are all examples of metanarratives. Postmoderns are convinced that all metanarratives are inherently oppressive and thus richly deserving of our rejec-

[14] Diamonds and rubber were two key commodities.

[15] The U. S. also adopted such paternalistic attitudes toward "our little brown brothers" and the inhabitants of the Philippines and other Pacific islands. William Howard Taft, both President and Supreme Court Chief Justice, is the source of the above quote. Teddy Roosevelt, a widely admired person and President, clearly held to similar views.

tion. It's not at all clear what this leaves us with but it's clear that traditional worldviews are toxic and to be jettisoned.

9. Enlightenment thinkers were massively confident in reason and its deliverances.[16] We could achieve epistemic certainty, construct elaborate worldviews, and discover the intricate complexities of the nature of reality. They thus believed in what has been called the omnicompetence of human reason.[17] Postmoderns categorically reject this confidence. They see certainty as an illusion, omnicompetence as ridiculous, and instead see human reason as (at best) significantly situated, very much limited, and in need of being carefully circumscribed.

So there is Postmodernism in a nutshell. What should we think about it and why? Given space limitations, the following observations will have to suffice. We will divide the ten beliefs into two broad categories, the Substantially Correct and the Substantially Incorrect.

10. Of the beliefs mentioned, four are substantially correct and six are either substantially or entirely mistaken. This is more than sufficient to assert that the wholesale acceptance or rejection of Postmodernism is fundamentally misguided.[18] A careful analysis of the ten core beliefs indicates a balanced and nuanced evaluation is needed if justice is to be done to Postmodernism as a whole.

The Substantially Correct

First and foremost, Postmoderns are correct that Descartes was much too confident in human reason. Epistemic certainty is a lofty goal that is broadly unattainable. For Descartes's approach to knowledge to be feasible, there must be a substantial number of foundational beliefs which are certain. It is widely agreed today that there are very few, if any, substantive beliefs of which humans are genuinely certain. As such, Descartes's distinctively modern epistemology is richly deserving of rejection.

A second belief about which Postmoderns are substantially correct is their rejection of the claim that humans are neutral observers. Rather than being neutral, we are massively situated ob-

[16] Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Clarke, and others come to mind here. Pascal is the notable exception.

[17] The label is from McGrath.

[18] There are Christian thinkers to be found in both camps.

servers. Our parents, peers, physical environment, temperament, health, schooling, and birth order all contribute to the lens through which we see the world. All writing is, in some sense, confessional. I "see" the world as a white, older, middle class, male, educated, Evangelical, Protestant, music loving, Kantian, married person from New Jersey. I believe it is naïve to believe otherwise. My lack of neutrality does not make knowing truth impossible nor does it preclude me from fairly reviewing works that disagree with me on substantive issues. It does promote humility and the awareness that some of my influences may have steered me wrong.

Eurocentrism is a moral abomination. How's that for being straightforward? There is no more point in defending Eurocentrism then there is in defending that 2 + 2 = 5, that Hitler was a great guy, or that Jerry Jones is a great guy.[19] All right thinking, biblically informed Christians should reject Eurocentrism with a vengeance. The whole-hearted belief in Eurocentrism crashes and burns in western Europe in 1914. The mass slaughter that was World War I[20] is stark testimony to the brutality of the Germans, French, English, and Russians,[21] and puts to rest the idea that these are morally superior peoples. In addition to the Great War: those wishing to be better informed should read about King Leopold of Belgium,[22] the British slaughtering of the Kenyan Mau Maus,[23] and France's colonial disaster in Viet Nam. All humans are image-bearers and all cultures are peopled by sinful humans prone to reject the Creator God and to look down on their fellow man.[24]

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[19] To quote Foghorn Leghorn, "that's a joke, son!" Written by a guy about to move to Texas.

[20] With total casualties estimated at 41 million people! Initially, many saw the War as a glorious adventure and a morally righteous cause! Not so on both counts.

[21] Among others.

[22] See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner Books Classics, 2020), an absolutely horrific account of what Belgium did in the Congo.

[23] See Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022). Elkins shows convincingly (in massive detail) that British Colonialism embodied two fundamental assumptions: 1) the inferiority of the people in the countries being colonized; and 2) the legacy of violence carried on in the name of civilization and decency.

[24] And woman, too.

One final area which Postmodernism is substantially correct deals with the omnicompetence of reason. Human reason can grasp reality, facilitate scientific and medical progress, and make human life better in a myriad of ways. But it cannot change the human heart and make us acceptable in the eyes of the one Creator God. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Karl Barth (1886-1968), and others testify to the limits of unaided human reason.

The Substantially Incorrect

The Postmodern take on language is not an impressive one. They see language as unstable, opaque, and generally lacking the ability to refer clearly to realities outside of language (God, physical objects, human emotions, and the broader world in which we live). Language, carefully crafted, makes genuine communication possible on a daily basis. We regularly read books, newspapers, and letters with the reasonable expectation of expanding our knowledge of the world. Language makes all this possible.[25]

Human truth claims have a constructive element – the language in which the truth claim is made is created by human beings. The English language is constructed by human beings. The words "cat," "gerbil," and "nerd" are all, in some sense, arbitrary. So with gerbils in mind, we could have chosen a different word, such as *bob-stew*, to refer to the creature we know as a gerbil. But once we decide on a group of words (constituting what we know as the English language), the constructive aspect of truth claims quickly recedes into the background. Consider the following truth claims:

1. My cat is now on the mat
2. Bob is married to Marilyn
3. God exists

With (1) in mind, we look at the mat and discover that (1) is indeed true – Henry, our charismatic kitty, is happily ensconced on the mat. Public records in Texas indicate that (2) is also true. When we consult the records we discover the truth of (2). (3) is either true or false. As Christians we believe there is excellent evidence to affirm the truth of (3). To briefly summarize, though

[25] When reading all the Postmodern complaints about the limits of language, they are, of course, using language to do all their complaining. This seriously undermines what they have to say about language.

human languages are indeed constructed, truth itself is fundamentally a matter of discovery, of the way the world is.

With regards to the human self, Postmodernism is simply mistaken. The Scriptures clearly teach that each human possesses a stable and enduring self. We are image bearers of the eternal Creator God. We have a substantial and immaterial soul.[26] Furthermore, all humans are social, intellectual, emotional, creative, and religious beings. To put it crudely, we are a bundle of qualities attached to an enduring self. The English word "I" refers to this self. For these reasons we need to disagree with Postmodernism on this matter.

It is widely agreed that humans are situated creatures. Many Postmoderns believe that we are trapped in this condition and unable to transcend it.[27] Most historians believe that if they make use of the proper methods they can acquire genuine (objective) knowledge of the past. Most beliefs we have about the distant past never rise to the level of certainty, though we have numerous historical beliefs that range from the moderately probable to the highly probable.[28] Given all this, we should reject the methodological skepticism of many Postmoderns.

If truth (traditionally understood) is not discoverable then the best we can do is to cultivate useful fictions, claims that are false but nevertheless soothe our souls. Human existence is beset by struggle, uncertainty, and anxiety. Suppose Mary is comforted by her belief in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and a belief in the afterlife. She cares not that her beliefs may be false, but only that they bring her comfort. Christians, by contrast, ground their hope and happiness in the objective truth of a genuinely existing Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On any given day the real Jesus is infinitely more precious than the supposed therapeutic effect of any useful fiction.

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[26] Research on near death experiences clearly provides major support for belief in an immaterial soul.

[27] Think about the following: if we are genuinely trapped does the language of complaint transcend the situation the Postmodern is trapped in?! Either way they answer they are in big trouble.

[28] Anyone my age or older knows exactly where they were when they heard of President Kennedy's assassination.

There are a number of Metanarratives in the world. Foucault and other Postmoderns see all Metanarratives as inherently oppressive. The argument runs something like this:

1) All Metanarratives confer power

2) All power leads to tyranny and oppression

∴ We should reject all Metanarratives

What should we think about such an argument? We grant the truth of the first premise, and the conclusion follows logically from the premises. So what should we think about Premise 2? Does all power lead to tyranny and oppression? Not in the least! The power of the Gospel does not oppress; rather it liberates. It sets people free from the bondage (and oppression) of sin (see Romans 6).

The above shows that Postmodernism is a complicated and nuanced view. We need to be good thinkers and separate the wheat from the chaff. Jesus Christ gives hope to the oppressed, and offers the good news of the forgiveness of sins, the power of the Holy Spirit, and genuine hope for life beyond death. May His Name be praised!

Recommended reading on Postmodernism:

Kelly, Stewart E., and James K. Dew Jr. *Understanding Postmodernism: A Christian Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrustions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994.

White, Heath. *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian*. Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2006.

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A Clue to the Clue: *The Abolition of Man* as a Supplement to the Moral Argument of *Mere Christianity*

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This paper was delivered as a plenary address at Defend 2024 at the kind invitation of Dr. Bob Stewart, whose visionary leadership at the Defend conference and at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is greatly appreciated by this author. Further material on Lewis's Moral Argument for Theism from *Mere Christianity* can be found in my book *Answers from Aslan: The Enduring Apologetics of C. S. Lewis* (Tampa: DeWard, 2023).

Introduction

One of C. S. Lewis's most cogent and powerful arguments is that in his scintillating little book *The Abolition of Man*.[1] The brilliance of the book is widely recognized. Lewis was invited to deliver the Riddell Memorial Lectures at Durham University in February of 1943, and the book was the published version of those lectures. The lectures seem to have been so closely reasoned that they puzzled some members of the audience, the initial reception to their publication was muted, and "none of the few reviewers of the first edition seemed to realize its importance," George Sayer reports. Nevertheless the book is now recognized as "the best existing defense of objective values and the natural law."[2] Travers thinks that "Lewis's unflinching commitment to universal objective moral standards in the face of the subjectivist drift in modern culture is his great contribution to ethical thinking in the modern

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (NY: MacMillan, 1947)

[2] George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 201.

world."[3] The book has been called "perhaps the best defense of natural law to be published in the 20th century,"[4] "the most profound of Lewis's cultural critiques,"[5] and "an eloquent example of his ruthless reasoning powers at their most effective."[6]

Due to the nature of the lecture series, *Abolition* is an apology, not for Christianity, but simply for the objectivity of value. That is a hugely important issue in the culture wars that surround us in its own right. But for our purposes as Christian Apologists, the importance of the book is as a supplement to Lewis's Moral Argument for Theism in *Mere Christianity*.[7] It strengthens the case for the objectivity and universality of moral values which are essential elements of that larger argument and extends it to cover other values as well. We will therefore briefly revisit Lewis's version of The Moral Argument in *Mere Christianity* and then see what *Abolition* can add to it.[8]

The Argument in *Mere Christianity*

In the dark days of World War II, Dr. James Welch of the BBC, having been impressed by Lewis's first apologetics book, *The Problem of Pain*, wrote to Lewis asking him to do a series of religious talks on the radio.[9] These "broadcast talks" eventually grew into the book we know as *Mere Christianity*. Starting from square one in trying to reconnect people with the Christian hope, Lewis began

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[3] Michael Travers, "*The Abolition of Man*: C. S. Lewis's Philosophy of History." *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*, ed. Bruce L. Edwards (London: Praeger, 2007), 3:110.

[4] John G. West. Jr., "*The Abolition of Man*." *The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia*, ed. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 67.

[5] Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 174.

[6] Chad Walsh, *The Literary Legacy of C. S. Lewis* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979), 210.

[7] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: MacMillan, 1943), 17-39.

[8] A full treatment of The Moral Argument and its critics can be found my book *Answers from Aslan: The Winsome Apologetics of C. S. Lewis* (Tampa: DeWard, 2023). For more on the significance of *Abolition* for cultural issues, see *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Tampa: DeWard, 2018), 39-51. For general assessment of Lewis as an apologist, see *Deeper Magic: The Theology behind the Writings of C. S. Lewis* (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2016), 216-32.

[9] See Sayer, op. cit., 277-80.

with the common human experience of trying to live with the inner sense that somehow life asks of us a certain "fairness" in our behavior, suggesting that this experience is in fact an important "clue to the meaning of the universe."[10] Lewis thus gave us a classic example of what is traditionally known as "The Moral Argument for Theism."

The argument has three steps. First, it must try to demonstrate that we find ourselves subject to a moral law that is both objective and universal. Second, it must show that secular explanations of this law—that it is purely subjective, that it is a result of conditioning or of culture, that it is a product of evolution—fail adequately to account for its actual features. Third, it must establish that therefore the best explanation for this phenomenon is that there is a moral Lawgiver, that is, God. The argument will be persuasive to the extent that it successfully shows that a real and objective moral law exists and that the alternative explanations of it are indeed unworkable or inadequate. The advantage is that, if it is successful, the moral argument points to the existence of God in such a way as to highlight our moral guilt before His law. Thus it provides a natural segue into the presentation of the Gospel, the good news that this God has provided a way of redemption from that guilt through the gift of His Son.

The Contribution of *The Abolition of Man*

The Abolition of Man provides crucial auxiliary support for two claims essential to the Moral Argument: the objectivity of value and the universality of the basic moral values to which the Argument claims the human race is subject. The bulk of the book deals with the issue of objectivity, and an appendix provides documentary evidence for universality from a plethora of religious and cultural traditions.

Objectivity

Lewis starts with a composition textbook designed for the upper forms of schools—in American terms, senior high-school English.[11] The book was *The Control of Language* by Alec King and

[10] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: MacMillan, 1943): 15.

[11] "The real power to open or close minds rests not with philosophers at conversation in the universities, but rather with programmes of mass education

Martin Ketley, but Lewis charitably disguises it as "the green book" and its authors as Gaius and Titius,[12] probably because he wanted to focus on the point rather than the personalities. Gaius and Titius had referred to a famous passage in which Coleridge had objected to a tourist calling a waterfall "pretty" instead of "sublime." They comment that, while it appeared that Coleridge was making "a remark about the waterfall," in actuality he was not talking about the waterfall at all but only making a "remark about his own feelings."[13] Lewis sees this as a huge problem. The schoolboy who reads it will receive two messages: that "all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker" and that "all such statements are unimportant."[14]

Why is this a problem? In the first place it is dishonest. The schoolboy thinks he is doing his English prep, but he is being fed a particular philosophical position, presented without argument as a simple truth so obvious it needs no support. In the second place, it is a philosophy that Lewis thinks must undermine ethics, theology, politics, indeed Western civilization itself, not to mention the very possibility of human beings retaining their full humanity.[15]

The philosophy hidden in *The Green Book* was Logical Positivism, a radical updating of Hume's skeptical empiricism. In a commendable attempt to free philosophy from meaningless speculation, Positivism proposed the Verification Principle: the meaning of any statement can be given by specifying the set of conditions (assumed to be physical and empirical conditions) that would serve to verify or falsify the statement. If no such conditions can

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and with the assumptions that lie behind widely used school textbooks." Malcolm Guite, qtd. in Michael Ward, *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's* The Abolition of Man (Park Ridge, Il: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 49.

[12] Alec King and Martin Ketley, *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939).

[13] Lewis, *Abolition*, op. cit., 14.

[14] Ibid., 15.

[15] Ibid., 16. Cf. Gilley: "Subjectivism about values is eternally incompatible with democracy and freedom. We and our rulers are of one kind only so long as we are subject unto one law. But if there is no law of nature, the ethos of any society is created by its rulers, educators, and conditioners, and every creator stands above and outside his own creation." Sheridan Gilley, "The Abolition of God: Relativism and the Center of the Faith," *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

be specified, the statement is considered not so much false as meaningless: it looks like a proposition because it has the grammatical form of a proposition, but it actually makes no assertion of fact about the world. It is a "pseudo-statement" which does not even need to be refuted—simply rejected from any consideration of its truth value because it can have none.

Take for example a statement like "Murder is wrong." What set of empirical observations could possibly verify such a claim? Empirically, we could establish that murder is painful to the victim's relatives, or perhaps even destructive to society. But none of those facts can establish that murder is wrong without appeal to a prior claim like "being destructive to society is wrong," which has the same problem as the original claim. So the conclusion of Positivism is that only empirical statements are real statements of truth or falsehood about the world. "Murder is wrong" then is not actually held to be *utterly* meaningless, but it does not have the meaning it appears to have. The person who says it really means "I do not like murder" or "I reject murder" or "I condemn murder." It is not a statement about objective reality but only about the speaker. That is all the Verification Principle allows it to be. So all statements of value are not statements about the waterfall at all but statements about the speaker's feelings. *The Green Book*'s example was an aesthetic value statement rather than a moral one, but all values must be treated the same way if the Verification Principle is taken to be the final word on what can be said.

To all this the proper response is that there is simply no reason why we have to accept it. Why not? Because the Verification Principle as applied by Positivists is vitiated by its unstated assumption of materialism: Only physical conditions are allowed as conditions that satisfy it. And this is a proposition that the Verification Principle itself is incapable of verifying. Lewis's first move therefore is simply to make us aware of this begged question by setting forth an alternative view:

> Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or contempt. . . . It is the doctrine of objective value, the be-

> lief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is.[16]

Why should we accept this alternative, the doctrine of objective value, as true? Lewis observes first that denying it leads to self-contradiction. While they insist on the subjectivity of traditional values, Gaius and Titius "have shown by the very act of writing The Green Book that there must be some other values about which they are not subjective at all."[17] As Kilby notes, "It is an odd thing that the debunker of values who insists that the waterfall is merely whatever one's emotions make of it will write a textbook teaching that doctrine to children." He adds, "To write a textbook debunking the notion of objective values is to contradict the very idea assumed by the act of writing, for such an activity proves that one value was not subjective and trivial, namely [the debunker's] own."[18] The doctrine of subjective value, in other words, is one that many people defend but nobody practices. As Lewis puts it, the skepticism about value of people like Gaius and Titius "is on the surface; it is for use on other people's values; about the values current in their own set, they are not nearly sceptical [sic] enough."[19]

Once we have escaped the shackles of a gratuitously assumed materialism, we have the chance to realize that we are confronted with the reality of a world that contains a core set of values that are not arbitrary but are non-material truths about the way the world really is. They are so basic that they cannot be proved but have to be accepted as axiomatic, so self-evident that "they neither demand nor admit proof."[20] You cannot justify the demand to respect human life or human property on the ground that it is good for society, because if you did not already accept it you would have no way to answer the question, "Why should we do

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[16] Ibid., 27, 29.

[17] Ibid., 39.

[18] Clyde S. Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 101.

[19] *Abolition*, op, cit., 41. Cf. Elshtain: "Those debunking the normative status and truth warrants of claims of value, whether then or now, are tacitly promoting values of their own." Jean Bethke Elshtain, "*The Abolition of Man*: C. S. Lewis's Prescience concerning Things to Come." In *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*, ed. David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity, 2008), 90.

[20] *Abolition*, op. cit., 53.

good to society?" So we cannot avoid the conclusion that some things are inherently good or evil, and that their inherent goodness or evil is a real truth. They are not good because they please us but good for their own sake. "If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved. Similarly, if nothing is obligatory for its own sake, nothing is obligatory at all."[21]

Lewis calls this core of objective value "the Tao," not because he wants to promote Chinese philosophy but because he wants to make the point that objective value is not just a smokescreen for Western ideals.[22] This leads us from the objectivity of true values to their universality. The universality of the Tao flows from its non-arbitrariness. It is not one among many systems of value but "the sole source of all value judgments."[23] Lewis argues,

> The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) "Ideologies" all consist of fragments from the Tao itself arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the Tao and to it alone such validity as they possess.[24]

And he concludes, "The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in."[25]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] "He used an Eastern term rather than a Christian term to stress the idea of the universal recognition of objective values," Harry Lee Poe, *The Making of C. S. Lewis: From Atheists to Apologist (1918-1943)* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 287. The Tao is not to promote Chinese philosophy but to "deemphasize Western categories and remind his readers that moral reality is universal," Michael Ward, *After Humanity*, op. cit., 15.

[23] *Abolition*, op. cit., 56.

[24] Ibid., 56. Cf. the conversation between Oyarsa and Weston in Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* (NY: Scribner, 1996), 125-32, for an extended development of this point.

[25] *Abolition*, op. cit., 57.

Universality

The universality of the most basic values then flows from their axiomatic character. One can no more adopt a new set than set forth a new multiplication table. Ethical debate therefore is limited to questions of application. One can ask what the specific boundaries are between murder and self-defense or other forms of justifiable homicide; one can ask to whom the prohibition of murder applies (members of other tribes? the unborn?). But to question whether human life deserves respect is to leave the conversation altogether. It is to secede from the race of sane human beings—hence the title, *The Abolition of Man*. People whose thinking has been so corrupted by the new subjectivism that they jettison the real truth of objective value as meaningless statements of emotion are in danger of reaching a point of no return. "It is not that they are bad men. They are not men at all. Stepping outside the Tao, they have stepped into the void."[26] The rest of the book deals with the potential effects of this subjectivism on education and politics. It is chillingly prophetic of some of the places to which we have come, but that is outside the scope of this paper. We return to the contributions of the book to the Moral Argument.

Lewis concludes with an appendix in which he illustrates the universality he has claimed for the foundational values of the Tao.[27] Its purpose is not to prove the validity of the Tao by demonstrating its universality inductively (for the Tao, remember, is axiomatic), but rather to manifest that universality to those who might doubt it. It does not set out to demonstrate absolute agreement on every ethical question but rather to show that there is an impressive level of agreement on basic values across religions and cultures which our relativist-leaning academia would not have led us to suspect. As Ward puts it, Lewis's "thesis is not that all moralities coincide on every point, but that they all derive from a single source, the universally accessible Tao."[28] Seen from this perspective, Lewis's groupings of maxims from Christian, Muslim, Egyptian, Hindu, ancient Germanic, and Greco-Roman pagan sources on topics such as general and special beneficence, duties to parents, elders, children and posterity, justice, honesty, mercy,

[26] Ibid., 77.
[27] Ibid., 95-121.
[28] Ward, *After Humanity*, op. cit., 15.

etc. are an impressive testimony to the non-arbitrariness, unity, ubiquity, and universality of the Tao.

Objectivity and Universality Today

Are Lewis's points in *Abolition* still relevant eighty years later? Logical Positivism no longer dominates philosophy departments, and its replacement, Postmodernism in its various manifestations, might seem to be in a very different world from a philosophy that flowed from a desire to put a solid objective foundation under science.[29] But we should not miss the fact that Positivism and Postmodernism are in complete agreement about the subjectivity of value. Positivism held that empirical statements could be truth claims about the world and that everything else was mere subjectivity. Postmodernism has simply revoked Empiricism's claim to exemption from the swelling flood of subjectivity that has been the story of modernity. Therefore, Lewis's defense of objective value is as pertinent as it ever was and is in fact more important than ever.

The relativism and the subjectivism that Lewis was already dealing with have developed more virulent strains than even he could have anticipated eighty years ago. One glaring statement in *Mere Christianity* stands out as a sign of how much things have changed. "The other man very seldom replies, 'To hell with your standard.'"[30] That is not an unlikely response at all anymore! Respect for traditional morality in general is at a low ebb, and the seemingly sudden shift in the definition of marriage calls into question the very universality of the moral law as Lewis defended it. Movements such as identity politics and multiculturalism encourage people to focus on differences rather than on what we have in common. People wonder if there is even any common humanity left in our national consciousness that can be appealed to.

We cannot then make one assumption about our audience that Lewis could still afford to make about his. But does this shift

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[29] Asked about the defects of Logical Positivism, A. J. Ayer replied, "I suppose the most important of the defects was that nearly all of it was false." Qtd. in Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, rev. ed. 1998), 60.

[30] *Mere Christianity*, op. cit., 17.

overturn his point? It does not, for two reasons. First, if we look at the whole history of the human race rather than simply accepting that the last decade or so in the West is as normal as it has come to seem, we realize how abnormal our own little slice of time is. Until very recently the traditional definition of marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman was widely accepted even if not always practiced. There have always been aberrations from the norm, and we are living in one. To attend to the larger sampling of data is to realize that our own moment, far from being normal, is the exception that proves the rule. Here *The Abolition of Man* can help by giving us extra ammunition on this needed point in two ways. First, it gives an explanation of the axiomatic character of the Tao that is absent from *Mere Christianity*, and second, the appendix provides that larger sampling of data that reveals our own age's aberrations. Each of these boosts to the argument are more critically needed now than they were in the year that both books were written.

Second, Lewis himself in *Mere Christianity* had already showed us the way to deal with those who say, "To hell with your standard." People who say that always say it very selectively. The moment they or someone they care about is the victim of a breach of the moral law, their relativism shows itself to be the copout which is all it is capable of being. "Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later."[31] In the same way, adherents of identity politics can only make a case for the unjust way in which they think their favored group has been victimized by appealing to what Lewis called "the Tao," the universal standard of right behavior that all eventually must recognize. Lewis already realized that for some people in the modern world an extra step in the argument would be needed, and he showed us how to take it. Today we will need it more often and may have to spend more time and effort to make it. But Lewis has already shown us the way. Let us follow it!

In sum: the Moral Argument is most cogent when strengthened by the Argument for Objective Value in *Abolition*. Those arguments will serve us best if we see them in the context of Lewis's other major arguments such as the Trilemma, the Argument from Reason, and the Argument from Desire. Some of those ar-

[31] Ibid., 19.

guments will confirm the suggestion that a God very like the God of the Bible must exist, and others will make the bridge from mere theism to Christianity stronger and more able to bear the traffic we hope we can direct across it. And that is what Apologetics is all about.

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Book Reviews

An Invitation to Biblical Poetry. By Elaine James. In *Essentials of Biblical Studies*, edited by Patricia Tull. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 202 Pages. Paperback, $26.99.

Elaine James' *An Invitation to Biblical Poetry* is among the newest additions to the Oxford University Press *Essentials of Biblical Studies* series. *Essentials of Biblical Studies* provides accessible and affordable introductions to various topics in the ever-expanding field of biblical studies. Biblical poetry can be a challenging topic for scholarly inquiry. At the same time, poetic passages are often a refuge for those who pick up the Bible searching for comfort or encouragement. James, professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, invites students and general readers alike to approach biblical poetry with the expectation that reading poetry creates meaningful experiences. One of James' primary goals is to demonstrate that biblical poems "do intellectual work" (5). "Rather, the poems are creating experiences that invite our deep consideration and participation" (5).

An Invitation to Biblical Poetry consists of 5 chapters. In the first chapter, James deals with the quality of *voices*. She has intentionally placed voices as the first chapter of this book to emphasize the importance of this poetic feature which has often been relegated to secondary significance. For James, voice is important because "a distinct quality of biblical poems [is] that they appear to be spoken *by* someone" (16). She goes on to describe various voices encountered in biblical poems and the effects those voices create.

In chapter 2, James turns her attention to the most commonly discussed aspect of biblical poetry, *lines*. However, James is not content to rehearse another explanation of parallelism. Instead, she looks at lines from an aesthetic dimension, asking how the shape of the text might impact its meaning. James argues that biblical poetry is not a metrical tradition. Biblical poetry "is a fairly free rhythm, though more constrained than contemporary free verse" (54). James demonstrates how biblical poetry uses rhythm through repetition, parallelism, and enjambment to create meaning in the text.

In chapter 3, she focuses on *form* as the larger literary patterns that biblical poems fit within. Although James' concern is not to explore social and historical context through form criticism, she maintains the term form. For James, form is a way to speak about "shared literary structures and common features…and the term helpfully retains the important sense that the shape of a text is not separable from its content" (81). James argues that form is important because "[p]art of understanding any poem…is understanding the pattern that it takes and the larger body of work that informs it" (76). James observes several forms including hymns, laments, love poems, parodies, and acrostics.

In chapter 4, she discusses *figures* as "a central tool" of biblical poets. She argues that biblical poems often avoid straightforward language. Biblical poems frequently include brief, local images that "press toward the figural" (108). The figural images used by the poets emerge from a distinct social and cultural context. In some instances, such as examples of symbolism, the reader is tasked with the burden of completing the figure. James explains that a poem may come with a feeling that it means more than it says; this is the work of symbolism. Through this chapter, James explores the biblical poets' use of metaphor, simile, anthropomorphism, and symbolism.

Finally, in chapter 5, she considers how past and future *contexts* might shape biblical poems. After four chapters focused on the internal aspects of poetry, James now makes clear what has been implicit in those early chapters. "No text exists in a vacuum or is generated out of nothing. Every text is written in a language, is part of a larger conversation, and responds to and participates in a larger world" (138). Building on the work of Paul Ricoeur, James considers the three worlds of the text: behind, within, and in front of. James argues that the most generous and thoughtful readings of biblical poetry come alongside relevant knowledge of the ancient world. She discusses the role of allusion and the specific contexts of prophetic and exilic poetry.

James's *An Invitation to Biblical Poetry* provides an approachable introduction to the study of biblical poetry. As a student of F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, James's book provides an accessible companion to his more technical work: *On Biblical Poetry*.[1] Dobbs-Allsopp's *On*

[1] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Biblical Poetry is an essential resource for advanced research of biblical poetry; however, the book's technical content and dense writing rise above the level of an introductory work. Thus, recent developments in the field of biblical poetry are inaccessible for many who do not have the time to work through a difficult tome such as *On Biblical Poetry*. James fills the gap and guides readers toward close reading of the text with the most relevant aspects of biblical poetry at the forefront. One of the strengths of James's work is the abundance of biblical examples and her tendency to push the reader toward the text. She does not present features of biblical poetry merely for academic discussion. James consistently demonstrates how understanding the features of biblical poetry makes us better readers of the text.

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Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age. By Scott D. MacDonald. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021. 163 pages. Softcover, $20.99

Scott D. MacDonald is Associate Professor of Theology at the Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College in Cochrane, Alberta. MacDonald holds degrees from Moody Bible Institute (BA), Stellenbosch University (MTh), and the University of South Africa (DTh). MacDonald's research interests include biblical demonology, Byang Kato, pneumatology, and Neo-Pentecostalism. In *Demonology for the Global Church*, MacDonald identifies a major theological problem: members of God's church around the world "tend to express a view of the demonic that is more in line with our culture than our Bible" (11). For MacDonald, the answer for this problem is to "start and finish with fidelity to the word of God, granting it supremacy over us and our cultural backgrounds" (20).

MacDonald's belief is that the Bible alone can help a person avoid the sensationalism and the antisupernaturalism of competing cultural demonologies (27). Specifically, "through Scripture, God speaks about what seems alien to us. A supernatural subject- the demonic- requires a supernatural explanation" (30). MacDonald is intentional in this study to follow not only the content of

biblical demonology but also the emphases of biblical demonology. Whereas many biblical demonologies begin with the origin and nature of demons, MacDonald, starts with analyzing the behavior of demons, because "demonic beings are introduced by their behavior, especially in their relationship to God's plan of human redemption and the experiences of God's elect" (42). In his chapter on the malevolent activity of demons, he covers ten behaviors: deception, corruption, dominion, false worship and occultism, spiritual warfare, temptation, accusation, inhabitation, affliction, and defeat. MacDonald's next chapter is on the recorded speech of demons. He covers twelve demonic speeches: the arrogant gambler (Is 14:13-14), the serpent (Gn 3:1, 4-5), the accuser (Jb 2:2, 4-5), the whisper (Jb 4:17-21), the deceiver (1 Kgs 22:20-22), the tempter (Mt 4:3, 6, 9; Lk 4:6-7), the defensive spirit (Lk 4:33-34), the unclean spirit (Lk 4:41), the legion (Mt 8:28-29, 31; Mk 5:6-7, 9, 12), the homeless spirit (Lk 11:24-26), the syncretizing spirit (Acts 16:16-17), and the unmastered spirit (Acts 19:13-16).

In his next chapter, MacDonald discusses the nature of demons. Demons are fallen creatures. They are "finite, evil spirits who exist under the sovereignty and supremacy of the Infinite Spirit" (100). In his final chapter on demons, he discusses the corporate influence of demons. He describes four corporate targets of Satan and his demons: families, false religions, the church, and politics (109-120). In his last three chapters of the book, MacDonald focuses on the application of a biblical demonology. He points to four fields related to demonology: biblical reliability, soteriological quality, practical ministry, and multicultural sensitivity. MacDonald urges his readers to familiarize themselves with biblical demonology. Otherwise, "our view of Scripture slips, our picture of salvation blurs, our framework of ministry neglects, and our intertwined weave of multicultural church unwinds" (136).

A strength of *Demonology for the Global Church* is how MacDonald demonstrates both a respect for and a critique of culture. In his discussion on globalization, he distinguishes between "surface-level culture" (behaviors and practices) and "deep-level culture" (thinking and value commitments) (19). Multicultural Christians "can (and should) graciously embrace many forms of learned surface-level culture, creating an elegant tapestry of unity and diversity among God's people" (19). MacDonald writes that Christians "should respect different ways of thinking, for example about parenting methods, but Christ calls his followers to deny themselves,

to repent, and to be renewed in their thinking" (19). He reminds his readers that no culture is "completely or predominantly correct" and that "every culture offers but a finite, incomplete understanding of reality" (22). Because of differences between cultures, MacDonald argues that Scripture is "the meeting place," "the only suitable arbiter in disagreement and the only sure guide in crisis," and "our touchstone for discussion and disagreement even as we contextualize in our various cultural backgrounds" (23).

On the other hand, MacDonald has an unusual interest in the topic of demonic dominion over the nations. His exegesis begins not with the Masoretic text of Dt 32:8-9, but rather with the Septuagint and Qumran manuscripts, which read "according to the number of the sons of God." He argues that God gives the sons of God dominion over various nations, while God specifically rules over Israel. Then, MacDonald turns to Daniel 10, and he interprets the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece as demons who are spiritual rulers and are in conflict with each other. MacDonald then blurs the lines with passages like Job 1:6; 2:1 and 1 Kgs 22:19-22, arguing "it is unwise to insist that the sons of God and the demonic host are two separate groups. Such an argument does not naturally arise from Scripture. Rather, the sons of God who exert dominion over the nations are demons" (53). MacDonald emphasizes verses such as Eph 6:11-12 that describe our struggle against rulers, powers, and world forces of darkness. Finally, MacDonald concludes that "in ages past, God claimed one nation while consigning the rest of the nations to their demonic overlords. Currently, we live in an epoch in which the rule of Christ is expanding among the nations, unveiling the weakness of the spiritual rulers" (54). Though MacDonald can make his interpretation fit apocalyptic texts in Daniel or a textual variant in Deuteronomy, his interpretation does not fit other texts in the Old Testament. How can God bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and at the same time subjugate the nations of the earth to demonic overlords (Gn 12:1)? How can a pagan king like Abimelech of Gerar actually have the fear of the Lord when his nation is subjugated to a demonic overlord (Gn 20)? How in the world could the Queen of Sheba be so interested in Solomon and come to test him with difficult questions if her nation was under a demonic overlord (1 Kgs 10)? It seems rather at times, the Old Testament says the opposite: "The earth is the Lord's, and all

it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). MacDonald's theory is lacking biblical support and coherency.

Even so, this reader highly recommends *Demonology for the Global Church*. MacDonald prioritizes what the Bible says and how the Bible says it when he discusses demonology, instead of depending on cultural presuppositions. The greatest takeaway from this book for the Christian is a more robust view of the salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ provides. MacDonald references the Apostle Paul in Col 1:13-14: Christ "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." MacDonald writes that "the death of Christ won freedom from the devil's purposes for sin, guilt, condemnation, and death. Christ's victory broke the power of Satan, along with his demonic viceroys, and the nations began to receive the gospel of freedom from death and its master" (71). It is hard for Christians today to understand just how sweet our spiritual freedom in Christ is if we do not have a biblical understanding of how horrible life was under our previous slavery to Satan and his demons.

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Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion. By William Wood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 352 pages. Hardcover, $115.00.

William Wood serves as the Chair of the Theology and Religion Faculty Board and as Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology at Oriel College. Within *Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion*, he investigates the disparaging claim from academia's religious studies department. The department dismisses theology as a legitimate form of religious study. Wood attempts to mitigate the department's dismissal by arguing for analytic theology.

Wood, in part 1, defines the parameters of analytic theology. Analytic theology: Constructive, systematic, Christian theology that uses the tools and methods of analytic philosophy. Analytic theology handles the intellectual norms of secular academia because it covers meaning, truthfulness, and logical coherence of Christian doctrines that philosophical theology and philosophy of

religion do not cover. God permits, not denies, analytic theologians to rationally systematize theology even though history, mystery, and spiritual practice may say otherwise. Further, religious studies forge faulty empirical claims against analytic theology.

Continuing with part 2, Wood reveals the philosophical tools analytic theology maintains. Wood defines analytic theology as cooperative with analytic philosophy. Analytic theology shares similar tensions, misunderstandings, and limits of analytic philosophy, but it uses analytic philosophy within the realm of theology and doctrine. Functionally, analytic theology investigates theological claims to *rationally* affirm doctrines, further understand difficult doctrines, and investigate different theological systems.

Wood grounds analytic theology within the same field as theology in part 3. Rationality intersects with theology; philosophy does not negate theology. Instead, philosophy, when coalesced with theology, maintains a theological disposition. Wood challenges three objections against this coalescence: Conceptual idolatry, ontotheology, and perfect being theology. First, the creator/creature distinction remedies conceptual idolatry: impiously treating God as a creature. Second, ontotheology and univocal (one-to-one) language treat God as a creature. However, univocal language does not necessarily equate God's being with creatures. Lastly, perfect being theology does not mistake God as a powerful creature because it affirms the creator/creature distinction. Analytic theology requires a worshipful attitude, which combats the previously stated issues.

In part 4, Wood defends analytic theology from religious scholars' criticism. Analytic theology sufficiently fulfills academic inquiry like other academic studies. It fulfills methodological naturalism (a *method* that presumes natural causes) even though some scholars sneak in ontological naturalism (excludes natural causes) in to keep theology out. Wood moves on to further examine criticism as an ideology religious scholars utilize. He affirms that secular religious study needs analytic theology for it to survive; secular religious study needs analytic theology like Heath Ledger's Joker needs Christopher Nolan's Batman. Conclusively, analytic theology withstands criticism and, according to Wood, belongs in academia.

Wood provides a foundational space for theological and philosophical dialogue. Study about analytic philosophy's usage within

theological study applies to theological writing and assessment. Theological ideas are spread and settle within academia and society, whether for better or worse. Analytic theology *could* rigorously scrutinize theological positions to shape and influence Christian thought. Theological positions would need to share the same rigor to avoid scrutiny. However, analytic theology may assume a kind of preeminence to all other theological study unless kept in check. Analytic theologians must always assume the same worshipful and pious attitude prescribed in part 3.

Even so, *Analytic Theology*'s argument suffers from a broad audience. Wood's audience consists of "analytic theologians and [philosophers], [theologians], and [religious scholars]" (1). His broad audience propels him to cover more bases, making his argument less persuasive for his thesis. Part 1 reveals this issue; Wood assumes analytic theology fits like a puzzle piece for his audience's respective fields. He demonstrates how analytic theology functions for those fields because he assumes its truthfulness. Wood neglects to analyze and argue for analytic theology, an analytic philosopher's goal. Wood's negligence shows his partial inexperience with philosophy.

Wood's personal inexperience with philosophy means he lacks philosophical nuance. Part 3 discusses the merge between metaphysics and theology. Wood argues for and defines ontological sameness as "[two objects sharing] the *same* property," to keep metaphysical reasoning for theology (141–142). However, Wood confuses trope theory (objects that do not have properties) with ontological sameness. His ontological sameness equivocates tropes with properties, claiming two of the "same" tropes "suffice for [matching properties]" (142). This contradicts trope theory because tropes are necessarily distinguished and have no identical (same) tropes. Furthermore, Wood's usage of "same" contradicts his usage of "distinct" (142). Sameness cannot mean *similar*; "same" means identical or equal of two objects. "Two apples," in trope theory, cannot be "ontologically the same [in redness and]… numerically distinct" (142). Wood claims that theologians can talk about God's *being* (ontology) while keeping God transcendent. However, his own philosophical skills lack the parsimonious prowess to achieve this goal.

As previously mentioned, Wood lacks support for his arguments. Much of Wood's arguments are not arguments; rather they are the "implications" of analytic theology in theology and aca-

demia (92). An example of this issue comes from part 3: Wood accepts the noetic effects of sin (the Fall) as a true proposition. However, he does not fully defend against the fall's effects on human rationality in accordance with analytic theology. He claims two things: "the Fall [mars reason, desires, and choices]," and "Rational inquiry… [uses rationality]… to know and love God" (91–92). If the fall has marred humanity in this way, then people cannot accept Wood's position to trust analytic reasoning "to know and love God" (92). Wood attempts to resolve this issue with "humility" (92). However, humility is a *human* function and desire. Wood already claimed that humans are marred, so a marred person cannot resolve a marred function. Theologians could deny Wood's description of analytic reason as untrustworthy and unable to know the truth. "God," the theologian argues, "provides the wisdom and answers we seek to know Him" (i.e. God satisfies where reason fails). All-in-all, Wood needs a more detailed argument to save his position.

Finally for ministers and theologians, the field of analytic theology is niche. Wood opens up the discussion for theologians to question whether or not analytic theology applies to their field. Which, in turn, pushes theologians and ministers to orthodox thinking. Oxford University Press has released twelve books within the *Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* series, so the inquiry of analytic theology is prevalent. However, ministers and theologians must answer whether this "new field" applies to ministry and theology proper.

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Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture. By Christopher Watkin. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022. 605 pages. Hardback, $39.99.

Christopher Watkin serves as associate professor at Mohash University in Australia. Drawing from years of research on Western literature and experience, Watkin offers a massive, diverse analysis of culture from the Bible's perspective in his latest work. *Biblical Critical Theory* is an extensive Christian response to practical questions from late modernity written through the theme of criti-

cal theory. Recent "critical theories" attempt to articulate the structures of the world. Most such theories seek to provide a comprehensive view of life by identifying some controlling markers, such that a person's situation in the world (including markers such as race, gender, or wealth) determines their experience. Most also present this view of life as a critique, proffering a moral mandate for how world structures ought to be changed. Watkin's vision thus offers a Christian articulation of such a theory, not driven by social categories [but answering them] but rather by God's own view of reality. He writes, "It is a book about how the whole Bible sheds light on the whole of life, how we can read and understand our society, our culture, and ourselves through the lens of the Bible's storyline" (2). Each chapter, then, addresses biblical teachings regarding the world in contrast and in answer to cultural readings of pertinent social concepts.

Truly, if God is Creator of an ordered world, then Christians can acknowledge design within lived experience. Whereas many have initiated similar projects in the name of Christian "worldview," Watkin moves past the overarching descriptive story how the Bible answers the "big questions" of life to the biblical response to certain social, cultural, and spiritual experiences within that story. A major concept in Watkin's work is the term "figure" given to represent any idea, experience, structure, behavior, relationship, or object which carry meaning for the person. By balancing figures such as biblical themes, human institutions, and traditional philosophical concepts with the Bible's multifaceted picture of reality, Watkin seeks to forge a responsible Christian path forward. For many cultural figures, Watkin identifies a false dichotomy the world typically presents in description, and for many biblical figures, he identifies a false dichotomy in Christian interpretation of best prescription. His analysis of such dichotomies results in a "diagonalization" drawing on the fullness of the opposed positions. For example, in terms of biblical wisdom (figure), Proverbs presents a view of order and justice in the world while Ecclesiastes presents a view of unpredictability and chaos (perceived dichotomy). These visions are diagonalized by the balance of the book of Job which acknowledges God's control along with the uncertainty of living in the current world (321–324). Watkin's approach repeatedly offers fully-orbed answers to the world's questions on cultural, social, and religious problems.

Another key concept in *Biblical Critical Theory* is Watkin's attention to the *n*-shaped and *u*-shaped dynamics which pervade culture and Scripture, respectively. According to the *n*-shaped dynamic, in both religious and secular settings, a ritual performance is expected to provide a corresponding end from a higher power. In contrast, the Bible repeatedly locates all of creation in a *u*-shaped dynamic with God where he graciously works on the world's behalf to elevate it in superabundance (185–93). Such a contrast can be found in God's covenant blessings, the provision of the Temple, the possibility of epistemology, salvation, and the incarnation. Recognizing the *u*-shaped dynamic of life in God's creation should correct human arrogance and simplistic pragmatic approaches to culture. Watkin's ability to account for all sorts of topics within the concepts of figures, diagonalization, and the directional dynamics presents a gigantic, complex work to be filtered through over time. Readers will be impressed by Watkin's interaction with cultural critics and will benefit from grappling with his substantial answers balancing positive biblical critique of the world as it is.

The breadth of *Biblical Critical Theory* is an obvious strength when contrasted with volumes which only tell the Bible's overarching story or only address specific cultural concerns. This work promises to expose readers to a number of problems, solutions, and thinkers which they have not encountered before despite experience in our postmodern world. Throughout the work, Watkin relies on David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*, Augustine's *Confessions* and *The City of God*, and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, as well as G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Oliver O'Donovan, Tom Holland, and James K. A. Smith. As expected by his academic background in humanities, the author's understanding of and interaction with secular voices spans millennia but especially focuses on the modern and postmodern thought leaders who most shaped the West. His only two implicit delimitations to a broad scope are attention throughout the work does squarely resting on Western history and culture as well as a tendency to cite a uniquely American partisanship when addressing issues of the twenty-first century.

While admirable, the wide scope of explicating a biblical theory of everything also introduces almost unavoidable difficulties for *Biblical Critical Theory*. First, points of organization of the material present distractions in the reading of the full work. For

example, the first chapter of the body deals with God as Trinity, a move typical of Christian dogmatic studies. Although natural from the point of systematic theology (the existence and nature of the God in whom we believe is the launching point for understanding all things), Watkin's decision to begin with God feels unclear until the flow of later chapters establish his outline according to the story of creation. Since God preexisted (and eternally existed as Trinity no less), his place at the head of the contents is sensible enough. The naming of this and subsequent chapters (Trinity, Creation, Humanity, etc.), though, may set readers up to expect a systematic outline of topics rather than the biblical storyline which open up coherently after about one hundred pages.

Second, the breadth of this work defies the specialization of content on the various topics addressed. Both at the level of content and pertinent literature on the topics addressed, Watkin often omitted conversations which would have furthered his own positions. For example, in the chapter on "Trinity," Watkin dealt with the personal and absolute, arts and sciences, community and individual. However, conspicuously absent was the ongoing [albeit intra-evangelical] debate over whether the trinitarian relations informs gender relations, surely a cultural issue worthy of attention.[2] In other chapters, particular authors seem to present more compelling considerations than those used including the absence of T. F. Torrance on the incarnation and space and time or René Girard on the scapegoat mechanism's reinterpretation of violent atonement.[3] Watkin himself acknowledged the existence of gaps in his tome that could have been filled with further research and writing. The challenge of presenting an encompassing portrait of cultural and social concepts through a biblical lens results in a work which will leave a ton of "What about?" questions from specialists. Academic philosophers, theologians, and historians will probably all have their own list of omissions of pertinent interactions between Bible and culture. Despite the aim of the book, Watkin could never realistically address every cultural figure nor respond to each from every academic discipline's perspective.

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[2] For a survey and critique of such arguments, see Matthew Barrett, "Is the Son Eternally Subordinate to the Father," in *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 213–59.

[3] See Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005); René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

A final weakness critically falls on the concepts of diagonalization and figures as well as their representation throughout the book. From the introduction where both concepts are identified forward, diagonalization is graphically represented with a forward-slash shaped banner spanning two concepts. Unlike the *u*- and *n*-shaped dynamics which work masterfully in visual design as well as verbal narrative, it is unclear what makes "diagonalization" diagonal. Since Watkin's use of the concept merely spans two ideas in perceived dichotomy, perhaps the simple metaphor of "bridging" would have communicated his intent without the added confusing of the graphic in the text.[4] Along with diagonalization, the concept of figures becomes convoluted throughout the work. Since "figures" can be found in all sorts of sources and phenomena, the reader can be confused by the label. In essence, since "figures" have such diverse substances, there is no clear meaning to the category. Confusion is added by the unfortunate format of the book labeling graphics "figures" in a different sense, including a list of figures in the front matter. One solution to bring clarity could have been to provide an index of biblical/cultural figures in the back matter as well as denoting the figures' names in bold throughout the body text.

Altogether, *Critical Biblical Theory* presents a compelling case that God does have a controlling vision of the structures of the world and has provided a path for Christian engagement in that world.[5] Christopher Watkin provides a magisterial outline of a myriad of ideas, problems, and applications in the contemporary world, and his biblical framework for engaging those concepts are helpful starting points for academic and ecclesial leaders to consider. Although the book is long, non-academic ministers are still best served reading it in order because of the development of common ideas throughout. Because the book contains such a variety of issues, though, reading individual chapters (with a grasp of Watkin's purpose and method) can help introduce the reader to

[4] Some of the goal of a unique phenomenon such as diagonalizing may be attributed to the complex nature of multi-dimensional problems. However, the binary of a perceived "dichotomy" and the two-dimensional graphics in the text do not convey such an impression.

[5] My review benefits from the engagement of several students in NOBTS's Student Theological Fellowship which read and met to discuss *Critical Biblical Theory* for their summer book club in 2023.

relevant questions and potential answers. Readers must carefully weigh Watkin's diagonalizing biblical solutions to dichotomies found in cultural and social voices, but his foundational work identifying the biblical vision of the world sets a new standard for books offering a comprehensive constructive worldview.

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Todd, Obbie Tyler. *Let Men be Free: Baptist Politics in the Early United States (1776–1835).* Monographs in Baptist History 25. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022. 367 pp. Kindle, $6.99.

Obbie Tyler Todd (PhD, NOBTS) is a Baptist pastor and Adjunct Professor of Theology at Luther Rice College and Seminary who specializes in American religious history. His latest book, *Let Men be Free,* is an exploration of Baptists in the early American republic. Todd introduces religious liberty as fundamental to Baptist doctrine and politics. While Baptists held varying conceptions of religious liberty, they were most united among themselves and with others at the point of disestablishment. Baptist theology was incompatible with religious establishment in principle. This, combined with persecution, spurred colonial Baptists to pulpiteering and political action for disestablishment. Even so, most Baptists thought of America as a Christian nation and were uncertain that the same civic opportunities they sought should be afforded to those outside the Protestant Christian faith.

In chapter 2 Todd describes the "patriotism-under-protest" that characterized Baptist support for the Revolution (73). Baptist conceptions of liberty made them ready patriots, but their calls for disestablishment during the period immediately preceding the war struck their establishmentarian countrymen as divisive, even loyalist agitation (78, 80). Nevertheless, Baptist patriotism was more than theoretical, and by war's end it had become an indisputable credit to Baptists in their new nation (100).

Diverse political thought and dissension emerged among Baptists with the rise of political parties. Many gravitated toward the Republicanism of Madison and Jefferson because they believed that less centralized power would protect freedom of conscience and because clear lines of separation between church and state would protect true churches from the impositions of government.

Yet historians have sometimes overlooked the fact that the nation's Baptist leadership were "predominantly and distinctly Federalist" (142). Belief in American exceptionalism, suspicion of Enlightenment infidelity, and fear of tyrannical demagoguery were all factors that inclined them toward Federalism.

Baptists in the early republic tended to be more unified and urgent in pursuit of religious liberty than civil liberty. While many Baptists worked for abolition and decried Jackson's Indian removal policy, others supported removal and found justification for slavery in the Bible. In chapter 5 Todd sketches the bases for these positions and identifies the leading figures advocating them. Not only did Baptists become increasingly divided over civil liberty, but they also divided over foreign policy. The "anti-mission controversy" reveals that competing visions of America and politics had the power to shape Baptist theology (228–229).

In the final chapters of his book, Todd shows that the quest for religious liberty shaped Baptist institutions and politics as Baptists grew in prominence and power. By the Jacksonian era Baptists had moved closer to the center of American life and were gaining political power at both state and federal levels, even as divisions deepened among them (297, 300). While many Baptists were skeptical of both ecumenism and formal educational institutions, the founding of societies, conventions, and schools would shape the future of Baptist life for generations to come (281).

In *Let Men be free* Todd aims to fill a lacuna in Baptist history with the "first comprehensive treatment of Baptist politics in the new American nation" (13). He successfully charts a course through the early American landscape that reveals characteristics and ideas that tie disparate Baptist threads together into a coherent picture with religious liberty at the center. Without becoming tedious, he exposes diverse sources within Baptist life from colonial to Antebellum America. These show Baptist pastors, leaders, and organizations continually advocating for religious liberty. One gets the sense of the centrality and priority of this issue among early American Baptists, and that while its priority pulled Baptists together, differing perspectives on its implications and the means to achieving it pulled them apart.

Todd also aims to "show more of the breadth of the American Baptist political tradition than has typically been explored during this epoch of history" (18). Toward this end, each chapter is

marked by the inclusion of differing views and groups of early American Baptists. One of the most enjoyable and informative aspects of Todd's presentation is his inclusion of extended quotations from key figures on opposite sides of an issue. This technique gives the reader a sense for the range of Baptist thought, as well as for its theological underpinnings, hermeneutical methods, and the debates that animated political and social action. Even so, at some points in the book the perspective of certain groups seems underrepresented. For example, in Todd's chapter on race, an insightful discussion of proslavery and abolitionist positions among white Baptist figures and groups proceeds without reference to black Baptist sources. The non-specialist reader may wonder if no such sources are available and more generally why some sources appear more prominently than others.

Todd's treatment of Baptist nationalism is relevant to contemporary American religion, wherein many appear unable to distinguish their American and Christian identities. Todd argues that many early American Baptists contributed to a nascent religious nationalism by conflating their vision for the nation with the work of Christian missions (222). He cites Triennial Convention President Richard Furman's work to organize volunteer advocacy groups for immigration policies and Savannah Missionary Society President Adiel Sherwood's efforts to organize temperance societies and to promote education through workforce training programs, Sunday schools, and Shurtleff College (222–225).

Todd's argument would be strengthened by defining religious nationalism more clearly and clarifying the way his examples support his argument. It is unclear how Todd reasons to religious nationalism from the formation of extra-ecclesial institutions and societies. Why, for example, if a Baptist association takes a position on education or immigration policy should this be evidence of religious nationalism? If Baptists hope to see American society transformed by the Gospel or if they work toward a vision for "an educated, morally reformed, *free* America," why should any of this be viewed as Baptist nationalism (236, emphasis original). A reader might conclude that Todd sees religious nationalism wherever Baptists involve themselves in politics or seek to influence social norms. If, rather, Todd is suggesting that early American Baptists contributed to religious nationalism by conflating America with God's people or the work of the church with the work of the state, some clearer examples would strengthen his case.

The reader who is aware of the well-worn caricature of Baptists as anti-intellectual will appreciate Todd's nuanced discussion of education in early American Baptist theology and praxis. Todd shows that even those Baptists who were suspicious of formal education were skeptical not of education per se but of elitism and anything that smacked of religious establishment (281). Furthermore, they were loath to conflate force of intellect or educational attainment with spiritual power.

In conclusion, *Let Men be Free* is an engaging and valuable contribution to the study of Baptist and American history, rich with relevant insights for the present. Todd's scholarship is evident in his extensive bibliography and nearly nine-hundred citations. Todd's method serves his stated purposes, and he successfully establishes the way Baptist politics, centered on religious liberty, shaped Baptist doctrine and practice, all while Baptists were shaping America (13, 17).

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Magda, Ksenija. *Blessing the Curse?: A Biblical Approach for Restoring Relationships in the Church*. Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2020.

As a Croatian biblical theologian and former president of Baptist World Alliance Women, Ksenija Magda brings a global perspective to the topic of gender hierarchy. Magda's primary thesis is that, instead of living in the curse of hierarchy from Genesis 3, the church needs to pursue the freedom and equality of Christ who overcame that curse with his death and resurrection. While she weaves in the issues of ecological and economic hierarchies, her primary focus is dismantling the hierarchy between men and women for the sake of partnership in advancing the gospel.

After explaining her path to this writing project and some reservations about her work, Magda begins by discussing the curse of Genesis 3 and its specific impacts on men, women, and the environment in her first chapter. Here, as Magda expounds on a multitude of negative effects of hierarchy and capitalism, she is careful to emphasize that the problem is not patriarchy but *any* hierarchy, since hierarchy perpetuates Adam and Eve's sin of seeking to "be-

come gods in God's stead" (23). In her second chapter, Magda outlines how church structures have blessed the curse of hierarchy from Genesis 3 rather than condemning hierarchies as "structures of sin" (39). Here, Magda first addresses the global crises of sustainability, migration, gender inequality, and legislation. She argues that as one-third of the earth's population, global Christians should be able to change these gloomy trajectories; instead, the church often perpetuates these problems. She refutes the most common argumentation for God-ordained hierarchies and confronts ways in which these hierarchies have caused abuse in family units, churches, the economy, and the environment.

In her third chapter, Magda explains that Paul understood Christ's death as the solution to the curse. Here, she revisits Genesis 1–2 and offers a more thorough explanation of why the command for humans to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26) should be interpreted as "to work and take care of" (Gen. 2:15) rather than as a blessing of hierarchy. She argues that Romans, and particularly Romans 1, should be read as Paul's interpretation of the curse in Genesis 3. Magda argues that the degeneration of Romans 1 led to "god-wars" between humans vying for the "god-position," though in my view she does not adequately explain this line of reasoning exegetically (81). Next, she argues that Paul sees Jesus as the solution to the curse of hierarchy by himself becoming a curse (Gal. 3:13), and thus there are no longer any hierarchies between Jew or Greek, slave or free, men or women (Gal. 3:28). Therefore, Magda concludes that "because women carry the Spirit of God equally, they cannot be placed in a subordinate position to men" (95). In response, Magda proposes an ecclesiology where Christ is recognized as the head of the church while all its members "have an equal standing regardless of their function or visibility" (136).

In her fourth chapter, Magda offers specific exhortations to men and then to women. When addressing men (an act which is not allowed in her own culture), Magda tackles a litany of topics: meekness, Eve, Deborah, Jesus' inclusion of women, the roles of women in the early church as depicted in Paul's letters, the household codes, and 1 Timothy 2:12. After acknowledging that these topics are equally important for women, she then exhorts women to avoid three common responses to the sinful hierarchies of both society and the church: seeking status through beauty, idolizing motherhood, and becoming "dragon women" who put down "or-

dinary" women in order to climb the hierarchical ladder (202–203). Magda then wraps up her book with a few examples of how Christians can challenge the sinful hierarchical structures undergirding slavery and human trafficking, and why the global church still needs vibrant women's ministries.

From the very first pages, Magda's work is likely to clash with the expectations of a Southern Baptist American reader. Rather than offering a verse-by-verse analysis of passages, Magda intertwines her biblical exegesis with a plethora of examples of the negative impacts of hierarchies in today's society. While I assume that Magda's goal was to keep the negative effects of hierarchy at the forefront, her choice to intersperse this multitude of examples (spanning from human relationships to economics and environmental sustainability) within her overall argument may have undermined her primary objective: to clearly articulate how the curse of gender hierarchy has been solved through Christ. Perhaps this opinion is due to my own Western desire to address one issue at a time; if so, other Southern Baptist readers will also need to be aware that Magda's interconnected approach may not align with our expectations. However, the examples she asserts must not be dismissed as superfluous—these are real scenarios existing in the world today. By surveying the impacts of hierarchy on a global scale, Magda's work has the potential to wake Americans up to the reality that "those of us who are living in 'freedom' are just living on the upper levels of a hierarchical ladder, which is being upheld by hosts of exploited slaves elsewhere" (12).

Additionally, an American reader may be tempted to label Magda's statements regarding the negative impact of capitalism as political and Marxist rather than theological. However, it's important to realize that her statements reflect a current theological discussion regarding the effects of hierarchy in both the economy and the environment.[6] As a Westerner, I believe Magda's arguments could have been strengthened by focusing solely on gender

[6] For an example of the interconnectedness of theology, capitalism, and the environment, see Hesron Sihombing, "Capitalism and the Ecological Crisis: The Spirituality of Voluntary Sacrifice," *International Journal of Public Theology* 15, no. 3 (2021): 329–48. See also Stephen D. Morrison, *All Riches Come From Injustice: The Anti-Mammon Witness of the Early Church & Its Anti-Capitalist Relevance*. (Columbus, OH: Beloved Publishing, 2023).

hierarchy in the family and the church, consolidating her abundance of real-world examples into one section of each chapter, and saving her discussion of the economic and ecological impacts of gender hierarchy for a separate final chapter. I recognize, however, that other readers could consider such compartmentalization disingenuous and would view Magda's interconnection of these issues and examples as a strength.

Complementarians will also likely take offense at a few of her sweeping comments regarding complementarian theology, its underlying motivations, and its effects. One should keep in mind, however, that complementarian theology ranges on a spectrum of severity, and Magda's examples illustrate that at least certain strains of complementarianism can indeed lead to abuse. Overall, Magda's work should challenge Southern Baptists to consider the global impact of hierarchy and rethink whether our churches are operating out of a curse rather than out of Christ's redemption.

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Church Music for the Care of Souls. By Phillip Magness. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023. 273 pages. Hardcover, $19.99.

Phillip Magness is a church musician and short-term international missionary through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He regularly teaches about sacred music in West and Central Africa and has dedicated himself to providing worship resources for believers there in their own language. *Church Music for the Care of Souls* is part of a series called *The Lexham Ministry Guides*, edited by Harold L. Senkbeil. Other texts in this series cover the topics of evangelism, pastoral ministry, spiritual warfare, Christian stewardship, and funerals. The book is small - about the size of an iPad mini. Organized into twenty-one short chapters, Magness includes general ideas on a variety of topics. He concludes with a "postlude" for readers who are interested in reforming their worship practice but are unsure where to begin.

Based on his experiences teaching in higher education and service to the local church, Magness aims to point readers to biblical principles for worship to help them build and maintain healthy habits that support "authentic gospel ministry through music" (4).

The intended audience for this text is not only church musicians but all who have a part in planning corporate worship gatherings.

Beginning with personal stories of memorable congregational singing experiences, Magness explains that church music is most effective when worship planners, regardless of stylistic differences, focus on what he interchangeably refers to as the "Song of Yahweh" and the "Lord's song." While he does not give an exact definition, Magness alludes to instances where God's people break out in song as well as those sung by specific biblical characters such as Moses, Miriam, the incarcerated Paul and Silas, and others. Holy God gives a "holy song" to his people so that they can sing back to him in worship.

Magness then builds on the idea of holy singing. He highlights how the book of Psalms, a hymnal in itself, equips worshipers to sing praise for salvation, lament in times of deep pain, confession of sin, vows of trust, and gratefulness for God's love. Singing "the Lord's song" has functioned as a tool for God's people to worship him since the beginning and serves to teach the next generation the story of his love. He further describes how the ancient Greeks considered music as important as mathematics and science, but in modern thought today, music is seen as a matter of preference and taste. Because of the mathematical relationships in music coupled with the way God wired the human brain, Magness suggests that music supports scriptural teaching to focus one's mind things that are true, honorable, pure, just, and lovely (Phil 4:8). Magness describes the scriptural teaching to "sing with understanding" (1 Cor 14:15) as essential in music ministry. While he does not state this explicitly, he implies that singing with understanding includes formal knowledge of the inner workings of music (17).

Magness says that, since the Holy Spirit sanctifies believers through his word, "we are sanctified when we sing, which makes us desire to sing and play well" (31). While singing is an aspect of spiritual formation, there is no biblical evidence that the act of singing in general sanctifies a person nor that sanctification necessarily leads to good musicianship. Further, Magness does not wish to denigrate those churches whose music is sung a cappella, but he states that the entire legacy of church music set the foundation for classical music and "substantially shaped all forms of modern music, including the melodic and harmonic contexts of today's popular music genres-yes, even those that are opposed to the gospel!

This really should not surprise us, as the devil does not create but only perverts" (31). By this statement, Magness implies that music is moral in and of itself. On the contrary, music is amoral. The lyrics give meaning to the notes, so it seems unfair to claim that popular music is perverted because it is secular. In a later chapter, he further states that "some musical genres carry profane associations that may make them unsuitable vehicles" for worship music. While he also says in the same vein that "music itself is neutral," all music can be sanctified by God's word unless it has been "soiled by profane association" (32). One can only wonder which genres he deems as unworthy of sanctification.

Magness is not a fan of multiple services in varying styles in order to please the musical tastes of the congregation because that demonstrates to outsiders that preferences of people are more important than Christ who brings unity. While the opinion may have merit, this assumption is unfair because not all churches with multiple worship styles are ignoring the Christ who unifies. Pastors and worship planners know their congregational demographics, and there is no "one size fits all" approach that works in every scenario. Magness explains, "Rather than offering one service as a kind of museum for Christian nostalgia and another as an effort to catch up to the world or compete with some popular ministry, each congregation should take hold of the living heritage the Lord has set before it through his word and in his people." (38) The dichotomy that Magness has suggested seems a bit unfair to each side, insinuating that they are not upholding the "living heritage" of the Lord appropriately.

The idea that God is the giver of song and initiates the desire in believers to use the song to worship him permeates the book. Magness is careful to remind worship planners in several places that singing a "new song" is a biblical directive. When music becomes too familiar due to overuse, worshipers are less likely to engage with its meaning. Blending new songs into a congregation's corpus of familiar songs can help alleviate fatigue that comes from singing the same songs over and over (55). This advice will help worship planners keep a fresh assortment of songs from which to select for congregational singing.

In addition to avoiding repetition too frequently, Magness also cautions worship leaders against leading songs that are their own favorites. He suggests that all who sing should be honored as brothers and sisters because God is honored more when a con-

gregation sings what they need to hear rather than what people might prefer to hear (71-72). He maintains that God gives worshipers freedom in how they sing to him but "doing whatever pleases our ears is not what he has in mind for us" (97). Having a biblical basis for this statement would strengthen his point.

There are several strengths and weaknesses in *Church Music for the Care of Souls*. First, Magness rightly reminds the reader that the most important instrument used in worship is the congregational voice, which he calls "the King of Instruments" (132). He reiterates throughout the book the importance of singing as commanded in scripture. He notes multiple times that singing in worship is both prescriptive and descriptive. A solid definition of worship, however, would have been helpful for framing the outflow of the rest of the text. The author intends to help reshape the way that worship planners think about congregational singing. Some readers, however, who are inclined to more contemporary worship leadership practice might find the book to be biased in favor of a more traditional format.

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Augustine and Tradition: Influences, Contexts, Legacy. Edited by Hunter, David G. and Jonathan P. Yates. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021, 501 pp. Hardback $80.00.

Augustine and Tradition: Influences, Contexts, Legacy is a festschrift written in honor of J. Patout Burns, a renowned scholar of early Christianity. The main aim of the editors was to "add to current scholarship on Augustine himself, we were determined that it would be useful to examine Augustine's relationship to traditions that precede him and to some of his most important Christian contemporaries" (xii). The central question this work attempts to answer is "To what extent did Augustine's thought, teaching, or exegesis converge with or diverge from the traditions of his day? How did the cultural traditions of late antiquity shape him and how did he shape them?" (xii). The editors, David G. Hunter and Jonathan P. Yates, divide this work into four primary categories: (I) Augustine and the North African Tradition, (II) Augustine and the Philosophical and Literary Tradition, (III) Augustine and the

Greek Patristic Tradition, and (IV) Augustine and His Latin Contemporaries/Successors.

The first chapter, "Augustine's Rhetorical Reading of Genesis in Confessions 11-12," by Michael Cameron was one of the most insightful chapters in this book. Cameron tries to answer two main questions: How does Augustine come to understand texts to frame and advance his story (2), and how does he use these texts to teach and persuade toward his desired end (rhetoric)? (4). Cameron suggests that *Confessiones* is a spiritual exercise aimed at teaching the reader how to read Scripture like himself (12). Cameron discusses Augustine's understanding and use of Cicero to argue that Augustine develops what he calls hermeneutical rhetoric in a way that invites the reader to ask questions and then find answers in the surrounding text (16).

In chapter 2, Andrew McGowan offers a detailed examination of Augustine's place in the North African liturgical tradition in hopes of providing a better understanding of the "shape and scope of reading practices in the liturgy of Hippo" (29). Against the assumptions of previous scholarship on this topic, McGowan argues that Augustine's liturgy would have not come from a standard lectionary like in the synagogal tradition. McGowan concludes that Augustine's liturgies are complex, and neither arbitrary nor formless, but that Gospel and psalmody are the consistent markers shaping liturgy in Hippo (52).

In chapter 3, Geoffrey Dunn offers a subtle account of Augustine's use of Tertullian and Cyprian to develop his "theology of the West" in general (54) with special attention given to *De haeresibus* regarding "remarriage and theological anthropology" (55). The central concern for Augustine was Tertullian's belief that "the soul is a body, but also that God himself is a body" (55). However, Dunn argues that Tertullian was not deemed a heretic because of his views on the soul but his opposition to remarriage (70). Dunn concludes that the topic of Tertullian's reception among later North African Christians certainly needs more scholarly attention and "the problems Augustine had with Cyprian would resonate with those he had with Tertullian" (70).

In chapter 4, William Tabbernee explores Augustine's knowledge and use of the martyrological tradition in his North African context. Tabbernee argues that Augustine's knowledge of the martyrological tradition was so vast that even without knowledge of a particular martyr he would still be able to preach

about them in his sermons (72). Augustine used these martyrological sermons as opportunities to consolidate ecclesiastical authority over those deemed schismatics and heretics (73). In chapter 5, Alden Bass shows how Augustine's engagement with the works Optatus Milevis during his early years as a priest had a profound impact on him to the extent that "he was unwilling (or unable) to hear his opponents on their own terms" (101). In both essays, the authors show that Augustine was certainly an inheritor of the North African tradition.

In chapter 6, John Peter Kenney presents a detailed account of Augustine's scriptural exegesis and his reliance on classical philosophy. At first, Augustine viewed Platonism as "the gold that the Israelites took as spoils from the Egyptians" to later see it as a system that was helpful but lacking (128). Kenney argues that eventually, Augustine concluded that the Platonists had failed to recognize the power of the Divine Word speaking into the soul and transforming it (143). Furthermore, Augustine found that the apostle Paul's theology was superior to Plato's because they were looking at the transcendent, but could never grasp it (144).

In chapter 7, Thomas Clemmons discusses Porphyry's importance for and among fourth and fifth-century Christian writers. Augustine says, "Porphyry was the most learned of the philosophers, although the most fierce enemy of the Christians" (153). Porphyry represents the pagan intellectual piety of his day and was the first to introduce "theosophy" into the Greek intellectual tradition (154). Clemmons succeeds in giving much-needed scholarly attention to Porphyry as a major interlocutor throughout Augustine's ministry.

In chapter 8, Augustine and the End of Classical Ethics, James R. Wetzel considers Augustine and Cicero in dialogue on grief that reflects on the limits of classical ethics and traces the paths that Augustine took to overcome them. In chapter 9, Dennis Trout accounts for the development of Augustine's appreciation for the Latin literary tradition, with special attention given to his enduring appreciation for Virgil. Cicero, Sallust, Terrance, and the authors of the Latin school curriculum are also discussed (205).

In chapter 10, Joseph W Trigg provides the reader with an insightful investigation into Augustine's critical reception of the work of Origen of Alexandria. A superficial reading of *Confessiones* might lead one to think Augustine connected the dots between

Christianity and Platonism by himself, but Trigg shows that he may have relied more heavily on Origen in several places than previously thought (254). Trigg concludes, "If we ask what he received from a firsthand reading of Origen's work. . . Origen's influence is not particularly impressive," but "if we ask how Origen shaped Augustine's thought, with or without his being aware of it, Origen's influence was arguably immense" (258).

In chapter 11, Mark DelCogliano builds upon the previous scholarship of Joseph T. Lienhard by setting Augustine's engagement with the Cappadocians in their literary context and taking a diachronic approach that not only looks at what passages of the Cappadocians cited by Augustine, but also "how, why, and when he deployed those passages in his writings" (262). DelCogliano concludes that Augustine held them in high regard but was not influenced by them in "any formative or even significant way," and in the instances he did interact with their work, he did so strictly for polemical reasons (284).

In chapter 12, Stephen A Cooper provides a helpful survey of scholarship on Augustine and Marius Victorinus, mentioned in *Confessiones* 8.2.3-5, whom Augustine credits translating the "books of the Platonists" that were such a large influence on Augustine (289). Cooper traces the parallels between the theology and philosophy of Augustine and Victorinus. Cooper concludes that the strongest textual evidence for Victorinus' influence upon Augustine is the traces of Victorinus' Trinitarian treatises and hymns in Augustine's *De Trinitae* (316).

In chapter 13, John C. Cavandi shows the significant connection between Augustine and Ambrose and charts a new course describing the "Ambrosian lens" by which one discerns the essential connection between Augustine's doctrine of creation and redemption in *Confessiones*. For example, Cavandi argues that "Ambrose anticipates Augustine's magnificent use of the creation story in *Confessiones*, book 13, as a type or allegory of redemption" (335).

In chapter 14, Theodore De Bruyn doesn't use this chapter to "unravel Ambrosiaster's influence on Augustine any further," but instead De Bruyn aims to show how different the prevailing concerns of Augustine and Ambrosiaster were when each man approached the epistle to the Romans (353). De Bruyn argues that Ambrosiaster read the letter as a narrative of humankind corporately, while Augustine read the letter as a narrative of the individual. De Bruyn concludes that Ambrosiaster was Augustine's foil,

and Augustine used his training as a philosopher and a rhetorician to reorient Ambrosiaster's corporate view in Romans towards a more personal narrative (379).

Finally, in chapter 15, Brian Matz discusses the reception and influence that Augustine had on the Ninth-century predestination debate. Special attention is given to Augustine's phrase, "predestined to punishment" and then shows how this one area of Augustine's thought came to dominate the conversation from then, until now.

This book makes a major contribution to the present Augustinian scholarship through its wide and careful engagement with some of Augustine's most significant interlocutors and many of the essays provide good starting places for further research. Furthermore, the essays compiled in this book leave the reader with a profound sense of understanding and appreciation of Augustine, his life, and his legacy. Hunter and Yates did a remarkable job in compiling these essays that imitated the careful and insightful scholarship of J. Patout Burns. Any student of Augustine or early church history would do well by reading this book.

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Pauline Theology as a Way of Life: A Vision of Human Flourishing in Christ. By Joshua W. Jipp. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2023. 288 Pages. Hardcover, $37.99.

What is a 'way of life'? Ever since Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, this has been a popular concept through which to view various streams of thought. While he doesn't raise this question explicitly in his newest book, Joshua W. Jipp of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School highlights four important elements of a way of life: 1) any way of life must have a goal or end, 2) a means, or concept of what makes humans capable of achieving this end, 3) a path, or a set of practices that guide humans toward this end, and 4) a underlying structure, an implicit or explicit community of understanding that allow the goal, means, and path to make sense of the world in which humans live. In this book, Jipp approaches Pauline theology explicitly as a way of life and argues that Paul's "theological claims . . . are ultimately in service of his understand-

ing of what it means for humans to flourish, to live well, and to find true happiness" (10).

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 introduces his topic and conversation partners. In chapter 1, he introduces his topic and defends his methodology. Chapter 2 summarizes four significant streams of classical Greek thought: Socrates, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. Chapter 3 summarizes the work of several prominent positive psychologists. In this part, Jipp shows that classical Greek thought and Positive Psychology have sufficient commonalities to be suitable conversation partners with one another and with Paul's theology.

The four chapters of part 2 offer Jipp's reading of Paul's theology as a way of life. In chapter 4, Jipp identifies the goal of Paul's theology as eternal union with Christ. Chapter 5 identifies the means of achieving this goal as the transformation of the moral agency of the individual through the saving work of Christ. Chapter 6 explores the implicit and explicit community of the body of Christ that provides an underlying structure for this way of life. Finally, chapter 7 describes the specific practices that guide humans toward the goal of eternal union with Christ.

This book is a welcome addition to the ever-growing body of Pauline scholarship. Jipp effectively blends the theoretical and the practical to provide readers with a sense of how deep exploration of Pauline theology leads the explorer to a particular way of being-in-the-world (to borrow Heidegger's term). Further, Christian interaction with Positive Psychology is limited and Jipp does an excellent job summarizing the core concepts, goals, and methods of this school of thought.

There are two points of critique that are worth raising. First, Jipp suggests that he sees Pauline theology, classical Greek Philosophy, and Positive Psychology as competing ways of life, which in turn suggests that they are mutually exclusive. He claims that "Paul and ancient philosophies are best approached as offering rival versions of what constitutes a good and true way of life" (24n45). Certainly, throughout the text he draws on Paul's thought to offer correctives to his various interlocutors, but he also illustrates important points of commonality between them. This suggests to me that Paul's thought is not best understood as standing in simple competition with that of Stoic or Aristotelian philosophy or with Positive Psychology, but as offering a corrective that ful-

fills these ancient and contemporary schools of thought, much as Christ fulfilled the Jewish law.

Second, Jipp's discussion of the church seems idealized. He claims that "Persons-in-Christ together manifest Christ's very presence in the world as they act under his lordship and for his purposes. The community does this in their common life together as they worship God, build up one another through the use of their gifts, and devote themselves to love and service" (154). However, this does not describe the way many people experience the church. Many local churches are not deeply loving and fulfilling communities, and for some people the church is a place of pain and suffering rather than a place where they are built up or able to experience and engage in a fulfilling life of love and service. This critique is mild as Jipp does not shy away from difficult passages in Paul's text that address the suffering of individuals in the ancient church. Further, throughout the book he argues that suffering is an important part of human growth in Paul's theology. However, it would be helpful to address more specifically some of the contemporary challenges to the idea of the church community as a community of love and service.

Jipp's discussion of the church community also highlights the importance of social identities within the church. He argues that becoming part of the body of Christ "involves not an erasure of one's social identities but rather a mutual understanding that for persons-in-Christ one's value and worth are based on one's relation to Christ" (152). This is an important point that is significant in both contemporary Christian ethics and missiology, but it needs more precise application. For instance, what does this look like for Asian-Americans, Latino/a individuals, mentally or physically impaired individuals, or those who identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum of identities, etc.? Does it look the same in each case? How do we cultivate this mutual understanding within actual church communities? Social identity is a category that could be extremely broad and while it is outside the scope of Jipp's discussion, his book invites research into what it looks like to include these social identities within or subsume them under the broader category of the individual's relation to Christ without erasing them.

Pauline Theology as a Way of Life is a book that will interest Pauline scholars, Christian ethicists, biblical theologians, and Christian counselors seeking to integrate elements of positive psychology within the context of a broader biblical framework. Further, it is a book that should interest pastors and laypeople seeking to build a solid foundation for a Christian worldview and lifestyle. Anyone whose goal is to develop a clear and consistent biblical lifestyle will find this book a helpful resource.

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Preaching: A Simple Approach to a Sacred Task by Daniel Overdorf. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022. 240 pages. Paperback, $20.99.

Daniel Overdorf is the Director of Preaching Programs and Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Johnson University in Knoxville, Tennessee. He has written several books on preaching, one of which is *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance.* After years of instructing students of preaching who seem confused by more complicated methods, Overdorf realized he needed "a simpler approach to train beginning preaching students—not simple as in naïve or shallow, but as in uncomplicated and understandable" (14). *Preaching* is the result. Overdorf's method begins by addressing one's convictions about preaching and then describes his seven steps from text to sermon: research, focus, shape, develop, bookend, polish, and embody (14).

The first chapter discusses the convictions of preaching. By discussing the convictions about God, Scripture, and preaching. This chapter reminds the reader of Stott's classic *Between Two Worlds.* Overdorf discusses his convictions about preaching in order to provide a definition of preaching: "Preaching is the proclamation of God's story, grounded in his Word, empowered by his Spirit, and embodied by his servant for the redemption and edification of his people" (26). Chapter 2 addresses the research process of sermon preparation, which he considers to be the sport-like fundamental of preaching. Preachers may be tempted to approach the text like a research paper, but the preacher must begin the research phase with the listeners in mind (39).

In chapter 3, Overdorf highlights the importance of unity in the sermon. Quoting Haddon Robinson, "A sermon is more like a

bullet than buckshot" (68). The goal of unity in the sermon is clarity in the pew. Some preachers may be tempted to try to squeeze every textual truth into their thesis statement; Overdorf suggests that preachers should view the thesis statement as an umbrella under which all of the sermon points develop (75). Overdorf then turns to address the form of the sermon in chapter four. Much ink has been spilled over proper sermon form. Without being dogmatic, Overdorf presents deductive and inductive models of sermon forms with examples and encourages preachers to model their sermon after how the texts presents information. He ultimately acknowledges that as preachers mature and develop, they will learn how they best prepare and preach.

Chapters 5 and 6 address the components of a sermon. Overdorf walks the reader through the familiar yet fundamental process of explanation, illustration, and application. He includes a helpful section on transitions between sermon points or movements (123). Transition statements are often overlooked, and this oversight damages the logical and natural flow of the delivery. Overdorf's advice here should be well-received. In chapter 6, Overdorf provides counsel on sermon introductions and conclusions. Here, he offers what appears to be a version of Chapell's fallen condition focus that he calls the corresponding need (136). This corresponding need should be placed before the body of the sermon because it provides listeners with a reason to listen to what follows.

The last two chapters address polishing and embodying the sermon. He highlights the truth that the sermon is an event and an experience for the listener; therefore, the way preachers use descriptive language, engage the senses, and use pictorial language. Ultimately, preachers must "write for the ear" and not the eye (165). In the last chapter, Overdorf encourages the reader to embody the sermon and craft the sermon to communicate orally rather than textually. Overdorf's advice on minimizing notes is helpful for those wishing to lessen their reliance on a manuscript (198).

On first impression, I thought this book would simply be one more introductory book on preacher to add to a litany of others. However, the book's practical nature truly sets it apart from the others. The book is replete with examples of sermon outlines, suggestions, and practical helps. One of the most helpful bonus articles teaches the reader the art of storytelling (128). Telling a

story has a basic movement and several components. Overdorf helps the reader weave these components together for a compelling story.

Overdorf provides several pages of homiletical exercises throughout the work. For example, Overdorf provides a bonus article addressing preaching and prayer. He provides a weekly schedule for sermon preparation and prayer that a preacher could easily follow or adapt. One could see how these worksheets would be beneficial to students of preaching. The book would be a review of the fundamentals for those who are well-versed in the task of preaching. Overdorf's *Preaching* would be a helpful introductory text for first year preaching students or for training elders, or pastors-in-training in local churches to preach and teach.

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When Church Conflict Happens: A Proven Process for Resolving Unhealthy Disagreements and Embracing Healthy Ones. By Michael Hare. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019. 243 pages. Paperback, $15.99.

Michael Hare served as a senior pastor in Church Turnaround Ministries for over two decades, spent fifteen years as a church conflict consultant, and has a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution. He serves as senior staff chaplain and ombudsman at Compassion International and is a graduate instructor at the Abilene Christian University. In *When Church Conflict Happens*, Hare provides a practical, healthy, and biblically based approach and framework towards resolving conflicts in the church. He considers how conflicts are not always harmful in all forms but could provide transformational opportunities for the growth of churches and their leaders. He argues that rather than being ignored, avoided, deferred, or despised, navigating through conflicts confidently can transform churches, deepen relationships, encourage discipleship, and transform leaders.

There are three sections in the book, and beginning in section 1, Hare examines the problem of conflict. He explains the three facets of church conflicts and why the three common approaches to handling conflicts fall short: the negative view given to conflicts without seeing the opportunities that each conflict presents. This

section also focuses on the challenges in attempting church conflict resolution and the errors of church leadership in following traditional methods of resolving issues. In section 2, he attempted to create a functional model for analyzing and resolving conflicts in the bid to demystify church conflict from being a negative tool, given the need to understand conflict level dynamics, which could be intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, or structural. In section 3, Hare presented a seven-chapter workbook pointing people to resources and an avenue to putting knowledge to work in solving conflicts in the church. The author added tools, surveys, and exercises to help leaders implement the model presented in the book's second section. The author elucidated the vital role of forgiveness in conflict resolution, unlike other texts and authors whose key emphasis is only on negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

Michael Hare demystified conflict by submitting that it is a normal part of the everyday interactions of humankind. He, however, emphasized the roles of church leaders in identifying the advantages and opportunities in every conflict, with an attempt to analyze common mistakes church leaders make in their approach to explore common mistakes leaders make in their approach to conflicts. Having validated the reality of conflicts occurring in every human relationship, he described how church leaders can help nurture healthy conflicts and foster creativity and togetherness in every team. Hare focuses on how leaders can experience a paradigm shift, transforming painful crises into genuine breakthroughs and changing how individuals view conflict (49). In addressing the strategies leaders use in resolving conflicts, Hare posits that not all conflicts are the same, and church leaders must seek to understand the situation surrounding each dispute. He argued that in seeking peace, leaders must move from the innate nature of the "fight or flight" brain stem response to issues that seek to react to all situations to the Holy Spirit-guided supernatural responses and thoughtfulness that is sufficient to direct responses from the visible disagreements (presenting issues) to discern what is beneath the surface (44).

Hare's expertise as a conflict resolution consultant came into play through his use of practical life illustrations, case studies, and a step-by-step guide to resolving conflicts that are relatable and real to human life and situations included in every chapter of the

book. These true-to-life experiences make the book an easy read. These help the reader consider different life issues leading to conflicts, observe the root causes keenly, and develop a plan to resolve the conflicts and serve the body of Christ more effectively (94). In his work, Hare attempted to build a connection between theories and practices in conflict resolution; he used thought-provoking situations and scriptural references to address how leaders handle conflicts. He identified and encouraged using biblical and redemptive approaches to deal with conflicts and build healthy dialogue. Positively, the book is filled with information and resources from authors and professionals in conflict resolution; it focuses primarily on accurately analyzing and resolving conflicts and the vital role that forgiveness plays in mending relationships (112). It seeks to help readers understand how knowing their spiritual gifts can help successfully mediate a conflict. The third section provides a model workbook wherein every principle taught in the first two sections is experientially simulated for the readers' benefit, and a significant number of mediation resources, interview questions, conflict assessment tools, and surveys.

However, the author shared illustrations from life experiences drawn from mid-sized to large churches with multi-pastoral staff, boards, trustees, church or educational facilities, and multiple worship services. Such congregations can afford and access help from mediators and professionals in the event of conflicts. This leaves the reader with the question of what happens to congregations of smaller sizes. The book did not consider or illustrate the reality of conflicts in small-sized or growing congregations; this insignificant omission could point a novice reader to an assumption that smaller congregations are immune to the conflicts that larger congregations face. Hare used mediation course terminologies throughout the book without attempting to explain their meanings until the third section of the book (204). Explaining such terms early on in the preceding chapters would make the book an easy read for people whose academic and cultural background differs from the author's.

When Church Conflict Happens is an interactive resource for believers, church leaders, and everyone saddled with the responsibility of interacting with individuals from different walks of life. This well-researched book has substantial scriptural references and profound reflections on resolving conflicts. I recommend it to all believers who seek peace with all men and church leaders who desire

knowledge and expertise in leading and training others to be peacemakers.

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