# INTEGRITY
# *A Journal of Christian Thought*

PUBLISHED BY THE COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY
OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FREE WILL BAPTISTS



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The Commission for Theological Integrity consists of the following members: F. Leroy Forlines (chairman), Daryl W. Ellis, Paul V. Harrison, Jeff Manning, and J. Matthew Pinson.

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# Preface

On October 25-26, 1996, the Commission for Theological Integrity of the National Association of Free Will Baptists sponsored its first Theological Symposium at Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, Tennessee. We were greatly encouraged by the attendance, the interest, and the quality of the papers that were read. We made a decision to continue these meetings annually. On alternate years we have met at Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. Our fourth Theological Symposium convened at Hillsdale on November 4-5, 1999.

The papers that have been presented and the interest that has been shown have convinced us that we have many among us who are well equipped to wrestle with difficult subjects and deal with important issues. Yet few people will do in-depth research and struggle with difficult ideas and issues if they do not have an opportunity to present their findings to others. Until the present time, the annual Theological Symposium has been the only format in our denomination for a person to present researched papers and have them critiqued by others.

As we have reflected upon the interest manifested by those who have attended our annual Theological Symposium and the quality of the papers presented, the members of the Commission for Theological Integrity have become convinced that the time has arrived for us to publish a theological journal. This will provide another format for sharing the benefits of those who pay the price of doing in-depth research and thinking. The journal will help us connect to a much wider audience than we have been able to reach in the past. We want to furnish pertinent material for pastors, those in leadership positions, and those among the laity who would like to be informed and stay in touch with what is happening in the field of biblical and theological life and thought.

The publication of this journal is a joint venture of the Commission for Theological Integrity, Randall House Publications, Free Will Baptist Bible College, and Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College. The commission is greatly indebted to these institutions for their cooperation and support. Without their help the publication of this journal would not be possible.

Free Will Baptists have a rich heritage. We are greatly indebted to those who have made it possible for us to reach the present time with a

sound, biblically based theology. God has used some of His choicest servants to help us stay on the right course while many in the theological world have been led astray. The present time is producing new and difficult challenges. We must equip ourselves for these challenges.

When the church in the Western world entered the twentieth century, secular modernism and theological liberalism strongly challenged it. The twentieth century was a time of both losses and gains for conservative Christianity. Modernism, with its denial of divine revelation and its rejection of a place for miracles in worldview thinking, influenced many in the direction of naturalism. As modernism influenced the theological world, many moved toward theological liberalism. As a result of the influence of modernism, theological liberalism denied special divine revelation and the possibility of miracles. There was no place for the Bible to be viewed as an objective, authoritative, divine revelation. There was no place for the miraculous virgin birth of Christ, no place for the deity of Christ, no place for Jesus' miracles, and no place for the miraculous bodily resurrection of Christ.

Many theological institutions became seriously corrupted by liberalism. In the 1920s it became evident that theological liberalism had devastated numerous theological seminaries. Ministerial students found it increasingly difficult to find conservative seminaries to attend. In order to meet this challenge, God raised up leaders who founded many Bible colleges, Christian liberal arts colleges, and theological seminaries that were committed to the fundamentals of the faith.

The results of the devastating influence of theological liberalism could be seen by a visit to a library. I can remember the experience that I had as a student at Free Will Baptist Bible College from 1948 to 1952. I noticed that most of the scholarly, conservative theological works had been written in the last century. That has changed, however. For example, more good academic works defending biblical inerrancy and the biblical view of creation have been produced since 1970 than had been produced in the history of the world before 1970. Many good, sound theological schools now exist that a ministerial student can attend for his ministerial training.

It seemed that just as the Christian theological world was about ready to be able to deal effectively with secular modernism and theological liberalism, the battle strategy of the enemy changed. As we look back now, we know that this change began to be seen on the grassroots level about 1960. A paradigm shift was taking place in the secular world. Modernism was being replaced by postmodernism. By 1990 postmodernism had become the major secular force that shapes our culture.

Modernism is not absent from our culture, but it is no longer reigning as king in secular thought and life.

In dealing with postmodernism, we have to learn to present Christian truth to those who do not believe that truth exists. We convincingly have to uphold the law of non-contradiction to those who do not believe in it. We must be convincing about sin, guilt, judgment, hell, and the necessity and provision of atonement through Christ if people are to be saved. We must persuade even those who believe that there is no moral truth that judges people to be guilty and condemned. We must persuasively show these same people that this atonement is applied on the condition of faith in Jesus Christ alone and that this is the only way this atonement can and will be applied. We must also uphold the ideals of beauty and excellence to those who think that beauty exists only in the eye of the beholder. We must not capitulate to the idea that one thing is as good as another in the area of ideals. We must convincingly present the fact that Christianity is a rationally consistent worldview and that it is the only rationally consistent worldview. We must do this even with those who reject the possibility of a rational worldview. We must stand for the truth with conviction and compassion and in a respectful manner.

The era from 1960 to 1990 was a transition in the secular culture from modernism to postmodernism. It was a time of confusion. It took us a while to come to grips with the fact that a paradigm shift had taken place. As we enter the twenty-first century, it is clear that we have a different set of problems than was the case when we entered the twentieth century.

Were it not for the fact that Jesus Christ has told us, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), we might be in despair. But we are on the winning team. When we stand for God's truth, we have God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the fact that we are speaking to those who are in the image of God on our side. For those who will hear the bad news that human beings are under the wrath of God for their sins (Romans 1:18; 3:23; 6:23; Revelation 21:8), we have the good news that Jesus Christ has made atonement for their sins (Romans 3:25-26) and that salvation is offered freely to everyone on the condition of faith (John 3:16, 18, 36; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9). We have the message of God's truth to minister to people's emptiness, their lostness, their hurts, and their pain.

We are living in times when Free Will Baptist distinctives should be taught and emphasized. The last half of the twentieth century has been a time during which Calvinism has strengthened its hand in the conservative theological world. I believe that the time has come for Classical Arminianism to make itself known and its influence felt in the theological

world. We must let people know that "free-will theism" (with its God who is less than omniscient) is a departure from Classical Arminianism and Scripture. We must present well-researched and well-thought-out works that present the Classical Arminian view of conditional election, unlimited atonement, resistible grace, and conditional security. We must also renew our commitment to our doctrine of the church and encourage scholarship that affirms it and helps us better understand it.

It is our hope and our prayer that God has called *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* into existence for such a time as this. We encourage you to read, evaluate, and think critically about the articles. Let us know what your observations are. Pray for us.

F. Leroy Forlines, Chairman
Commission for Theological Integrity
December 1999

# Introduction

What you hold in your hand is the first attempt of the Commission for Theological Integrity to provide the Free Will Baptist denomination and the wider Christian community with a theological journal. Our hope is that this journal will offer our pastors and lay leaders serious Christian thought that is relevant to their lives and ministries.

This is a journal of Christian thought. Our aim is to give ministers and other church leaders thoughtful articles on a variety of topics from a Christian perspective. Not all of our articles will be strictly theological. Yet, they will attempt to analyze a number of issues from the vantage point of the Christian worldview.

This is also a Free Will Baptist journal. We want our articles to help Free Will Baptists understand those beliefs that are central to our common faith, practice, and mission, especially those doctrinal distinctives that provide self-definition for us.

We have designed *Integrity* for a general audience. Our articles will be written at a level that is accessible to the general reader who is interested in theological study. Thus, our target audience consists of pastors and lay leaders. Yet, our goal is also to provide scholarly research and writing that address concerns common to the academy and the church. We find ourselves, then, somewhere between a popular magazine and a traditional academic journal, seeing this as the place where we can have our greatest impact.

Given our target readership, we intend for this journal to be educational. We aim to teach our readers about the great thoughts of the Bible and the Christian tradition and how we as Free Will Baptists fit into and appropriate that tradition. We want to teach our readers principles on how to apply the Christian worldview today. So, while some of our articles will be more specialized, many of them will be general introductions to various topics in Christian thought.

Finally, we envision a journal that will be useful for ministry. In teaching our readers, we desire to make them better teachers and preachers of the Word of God. We want to give them articles that will model Christian worldview thinking and help them work through contemporary issues from a biblical perspective. We also hope to show how theology is a complement to Christian spirituality, not a hindrance to it.

Please pray for *Integrity* and the members of the Commission for Theological Integrity. Our prayer is that we will give glory to God as we seek to study and apply His Word in our time.

J. Matthew Pinson

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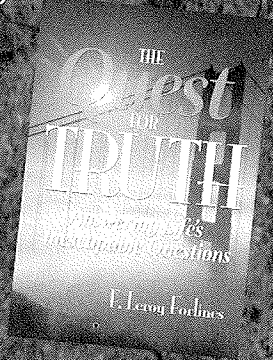


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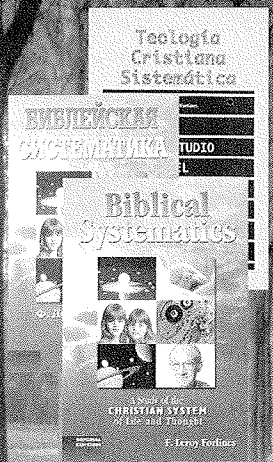


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*Randy Sawyer*

# Dry Bones, Scattered Saints, and Spiritual Renewal: A Sermon

## *Ezekiel 37:1-14*

While I was a senior in college, I began working part-time for a church in northeast Mississippi. One Saturday evening, to my surprise, the pastor called to ask if he could come over. I consented, and he arrived at about 11:00. As he entered the room, it was obvious that he was carrying a heavy burden. I invited him into the kitchen. He sat down, staring at the table. After a short period of silence, tears began to gather in his eyes, and with a broken voice he said, "Our church *needs* revival." With that statement he began to share his deepest concerns: "The altars are barren, the people are unresponsive, and if I can't be effective here, I would rather God move me." He asked if I would have a season of prayer with him. We went to a small room in the back of the house, and there we met God. As I think back on that cherished experience, I realize what a profound impression that evening had on my life. For the first time, I felt the need for revival among God's people. The burden of my pastor's heart became the burden of my own heart.

All of us at times sense the need for spiritual renewal or restoration. Sometimes we feel as if we are on the mountaintop, as if we could touch the throne of God or hear the flutter of angels' wings. Then at other times we feel so dead and unresponsive that it is as if we have never known God at all. Have you experienced the frustration of such moments? Have you sensed the need for spiritual restoration in your own heart or in your church? Have you wondered, "How can I experience renewal? How can my church have revival?" This passage gives us important insight into these questions.

For most Bible readers Ezekiel is a closed book. Filled with mysterious visions, it is extremely difficult to grasp. However, in its structure, the

book of Ezekiel has a basic simplicity. After the opening vision, in which Ezekiel saw the majesty of God and received his call to be a prophet, a long series of messages follows in which Ezekiel prophesied God's intention to punish the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their sin. Then, at the halfway mark, the reader's attention is diverted to the nations that surround Israel, and God's judgment on them is pronounced in a series of oracles. By this time the reader is prepared for the news of Jerusalem's destruction in chapter 32: "the city has fallen." The ominous clouds of despair hover over the nation, and its inhabitants are led away from the land of promise to pagan Babylon. The curtain falls on the drama that was Jerusalem. Its walls are destroyed, its temple ravished, its religion desecrated, and its people carted away. Like the bones of a defeated army scattered across the landscape of some distant battlefield, the people of God are scattered—dead, dry, lifeless, and without hope.

Why did God allow this catastrophe? While they were yet standing on the borders of the promised land and preparing to take possession of it, God had warned His people through Moses that, if they persistently transgressed His commandments, He would not only chastise them but also drive them out of the land and disperse them among all nations. Gradually they turned from the true God, violated His commandments, rejected His chastening, persecuted His prophets, and brought down upon their heads the full measure of divine wrath.

Although the curtain had fallen on Jerusalem, it would rise again. Man's unfaithfulness cannot diminish the faithfulness of God. In spite of this terrible judgment, God would not permit them to be utterly destroyed. He promised to preserve a remnant, restore that remnant to the land of promise, and through them bring forth the Savior of the world.

In the last section of his prophecy, Ezekiel's message becomes a message of hope. Chapter 37 is a part of this final section, the section of promise. In the verses of our text, Ezekiel experienced the vision of the valley of dry bones. Through that vision, he saw an innumerable host of bones—scattered, disconnected, dry, and bleached. As he prophesied over them according to God's command, he watched the bones come together, and upon the skeletons tendon, muscle, and flesh appeared. Then, as he prophesied a second time, breath entered these corpses, and they came to life. The vision simply represents the fact that, though the people of God were scattered and lifeless, they would experience spiritual restoration. That promise was as certain as the character and power of God.

Today many churches are in a similar condition. The church sign reads "Happy Rest Free Will Baptist Church." Sunday after Sunday, the pastor looks out across a congregation that has no life. The pews are occupied with bones, and those bones are dry, bleached, and scattered. Once the church pulsated with life. Once, as a mighty army, she advanced from "victory unto victory." Once she dared challenge the very stronghold of Satan. Once she dwelt on the mountaintop with Christ and beheld His glory.

But now she sadly laments, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Can these bones live? Is revival possible? Through Ezekiel, God issued the promise of spiritual restoration for His people, and that wonderful promise still stands today. Regardless of the seeming hopelessness of their present condition, God's people can experience spiritual restoration.

What must God's people do to experience spiritual renewal? This passage gives us three ingredients necessary for spiritual restoration. First, spiritual restoration is initiated by

*The courage of the man of God.*

In the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah for the first time. He captured Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim subservient, and carried away to Babylon many of the most promising young men. Three years later Johoiakim revolted against Nebuchadnezzar, and, after a lengthy siege, Jerusalem fell a second time. On this occasion the Babylonian monarch carried away into captivity Jehoiakim, the members of his court, and a great number of priests and craftsmen. Ezekiel was in that group and became one of the three exiled prophets. The courage of the other two, Jeremiah and Daniel, are well documented. Ezekiel was no exception.

As chapter 37 opens, Ezekiel is brought by the Spirit of God, in a vision, and set down in the middle of a valley full of bones. According to v. 9, these bones represented the dead of a vast army that had been slain by the sword. They had been dead for a long time, and the bones had been bleaching white for a considerable period. The valley was completely lifeless. In order to emphasize the hopelessness of the situation from the human perspective, the Lord asked Ezekiel whether these bones could live. In v. 3 he responded, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Humanly speaking, the answer was "no." Yet Ezekiel had enough courage to believe God. Ezekiel knew it would require a power beyond

man's ability to bring this about, but he believed it was possible according to the power of God. He had the courage to *believe God.*

Every revival or period of spiritual renewal enjoyed by the church has been initiated by an individual or a group who had the courage to believe God. The revival of 1857 has long been called "The Prayer Meeting Revival." Burdened by the terrible need of New York City, Jeremiah Lanphier gave up a successful business in order to be a street missionary. With social collapse staring the city in the face, Lanphier walked the streets, passing out ads for a noonday prayer meeting. The meeting was to be held at the Dutch Reformed Church on the corner of Fulton Street in downtown New York. For nearly twenty minutes, he waited alone, his faith tried. But then at 12:30, six men came in. The next week there were twenty. By the first week in October, they had decided to meet daily instead of weekly. Within six weeks over ten thousand businessmen were meeting every day in similar meetings, confessing sin and praying for revival. America began to live again. In just two years, over a million converts were added to churches of all denominations. Spiritual restoration came as a result of one man who had the courage to believe God for revival.

Today we have lost faith in God's ability to bring revival. We behave as the young servant in 2 Kings 6. The army of Syria had surrounded Elisha. When the servant beheld that sight, he cried, "Help, master, what are we going to do?" He failed to see, with Elisha, the horses and chariots of the Lord. Our attitude is the same. We huddle in our small groups each Sunday filled with fright and cry out, "Alas." God did not intend for this to be the position of the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church."

Through eyes of faith, we can see the horses and chariots of the Lord—instead of dangers, a deliverer; instead of problems, possibilities. Our Friend is infinitely greater than our foe.

When I was in elementary school, I was somewhat small in stature and frame. As a result—and this almost always seems to be the case—I had my own personal "bully." This fellow student (and I think this is a generous caricature of him, because he never studied) made my life one of constant torment. At the same time, I enjoyed the friendship of one of the biggest guys—and I do mean "biggest"—in our class. He was not only taller and stronger than the other boys in the class; he also was "revered" by everyone. One day my friend (Gary) said to me, "How long are you going to put up with that guy (speaking of the "bully")? I hesitated because I knew that I wasn't prepared to fight him, or anyone else for that matter. As he pressed me for an answer, Gary offered his help. "I'll be there for you, whenever and wherever." By that, I knew that Gary

wouldn't allow me to be slaughtered. So, with newfound confidence, I began looking for an appropriate moment to challenge "the bully." Finally the opportunity presented itself. Of course, I looked around to make sure that Gary was there, just in case. With my friend by my side, I took the plunge, faced my tormentor, and won the day. I felt supremely confident because my friend was greater than my enemy.

Ezekiel also had the courage to obey God. Notice v. 4. As he looked upon that valley filled with dried bones, God commanded him to prophesy to the bones. Imagine his surprise at such instructions. Though prophesying over dry bones would appear to the worldling as the height of foolishness, Ezekiel obeyed without cavil or doubt. His obedience was not prompted by the possibilities of success or growth potential or the opportunity to be noticed but by his courage to believe and obey in spite of the utter hopelessness of the situation. The courageous obedience of the men and women of God often initiates spiritual restoration. Maybe you feel like Ezekiel. You sit in your study on Sunday morning staring at your notes, and you hear, "Son of man, preach to these bones." You wonder why you should go through this futile exercise again. There is no possibility of success. The growth potential is limited. Do you have the courage to obey God?

Because Paul was obedient to a heavenly vision, Macedonia experienced a great spiritual blessing. Peter was likewise obedient to a heavenly vision, and the anxious inquirers at Cornelius's home received the Spirit of God. Countless other saints have influenced their generations for God by faithful obedience.

One of the great characters of the church was Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma. When he set his face toward Burma, great churches wanted him. And some, when he turned aside these offers for the foreign field, called his decision "a wild nightmare of a disordered brain." He toiled for six long years without a convert. He spent many painful days and nights in loathsome prisons. But before his death, thousands were gloriously saved. He left to the world the imperishable record of obedience.

Souls have been won, churches planted, and revival fires ignited by the courageous obedience of faithful men and women of God. If we are going to see a spiritual renewal today, we must follow in the footsteps of those courageous souls who have gone before us. Spiritual restoration is initiated by the courage of the man of God.

The second ingredient for spiritual restoration is

*The preaching of the Word of God.*

According to v. 4, as Ezekiel surveyed the valley of bones, God instructed him: "Prophesy to these bones." Commentator Charles Feinberg remarks that the "prophesying" constituted speaking on God's behalf. He added, "The agency for effecting the purpose of God was the powerful Word of God." Ezekiel was commanded to preach God's Word.

We observe that Ezekiel had a fine church in which to preach: "the middle of a valley." He had a needy audience before him: a valley full of bones, "very many and very dry." He had a divine message to deliver: "the Word of the Lord." He had marvelous results to witness: "the bones came together, bone to his bone."

Everything God has ever done has been accomplished by the power of His Word. According to Genesis 1, He called into existence by His spoken Word that which was not. John 1 tells us that by His incarnate Word He enacted redemption's plan. And, Paul, in Romans 1:16, declared that God's written Word is "the power of God unto salvation."

We *can* have a revival through that same powerful Word. We have fine churches in which to preach. We have needy souls before us. We have a divine message to proclaim. And by the power of that message, we can witness marvelous results.

Notice further that, for Ezekiel, the results came gradually. Verse 7 indicates that first there was a "noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together." Then in v. 8, the bones were covered with "tendons, and flesh appeared on them, and skin covered them." The progress was gradual but amazing. In the work of spiritual renewal, progress is often gradual. The preaching of God's Word does not always reveal its results immediately. The work begins in the inner man, with a rattling of the bones, as it were. We must avoid the temptation to manufacture a rattling of the bones by superficial means. No amount of political posturing or psychological conditioning can produce a rattling of the bones—only the Word of God can.

The commission to "preach to the bones" is the greatest opportunity and blessing a man can be granted. Romans 10:15 reads: "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!'" This is a quotation of Isaiah 52:7. In the original setting, God's people are in Babylon. The scene is cast in terms of a military struggle. A great battle has just been fought. The people and town officials are gathered, anxiously awaiting a report on the battle's outcome. Suddenly,

they spy a runner on the distant horizon. As he nears their hearing, he gladly proclaims, "The battle has been won! We are free!" The people burst into a song of triumph, rejoicing in God's deliverance. When the messenger arrives, they receive him with celebration, saying, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." There is enormous liberating power in the proclamation of the Word. So, gradually the bones come together, gradually flesh appears, and gradually the work is accomplished. But, oh, the marvelous results of the preaching of God's Word!

Some years back I was invited to preach at a revival in Alabama. By Thursday evening I was totally frustrated. There had been so little response during the week that I just could not wait to get out of there. However, on Thursday evening, prior to the service, a member of the church asked if he could speak to me privately. He told me that God's Word had been convicting him since the very first service and that he had to do something about it. During the invitation that evening, he came forward to confess his sin. Others followed, and a marvelous revival broke out. Though I could not see it immediately, the preaching of God's Word was doing a great work. As we are faithful to proclaim His Word, we can expect to witness great results. Spiritual restoration is grounded in the preaching of the Word of God.

The third ingredient for spiritual restoration is

*The power of the Spirit of God.*

According to Ezekiel's vision, though the skeletons had been reassembled and covered with flesh, "there was no breath in them." At this point Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the wind (vv. 9-10).

The Hebrew word for wind is *ruah.* This same word is translated three different ways in this passage. In vv. 1 and 14, it is translated *Spirit;* in vv. 5, 6, 8-10, as breath; and in v. 9, as wind or winds. At its root, *ruah* denotes the sense of "air in motion." This can extend from gentle breezes to a stormy wind, from a simple breath to raging passion. It covers not only man's vital breath but also the Spirit of God who imparts that breath.

The truth is that the ultimate energizing of these bones was a result of the work of the Spirit of God. It is a work of providence. In any age the breath of the Spirit of God consummates spiritual restoration. Revival may be grounded in the preaching of God's Word, but preaching alone is not enough. Paul expressed this in 2 Corinthians 3:3: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written

not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." The Spirit is the agent of the Godhead who consummates all divine labor.

Note once again that Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the wind. John B. Taylor said in his commentary on Ezekiel, "The second action was tantamount to praying, as Ezekiel besought the Spirit of God to effect the miracle of re-creation." If he is right, Ezekiel was first commanded to preach, then to pray. Throughout the history of the church, spiritual renewal has been made effective by the work of the Spirit, and the Spirit has done His work in answer to the prayers of God's people. Can you imagine?

Bakht Singh, the famed evangelist and church planter in India, once told of a man who, during a service, kept staring at an electric light in the room. Afterward the man requested Bakht Singh to lend him the electric bulb. A few days later, the man returned, downcast, because the bulb was useless. Bahkt Singh went to the man's room to investigate why an almost new bulb would not work. The answer was not hard to find. The man had taken the bulb and tied it with a piece of string to the ceiling of the room. Without an electric current, his bulb had no contact with the power supply. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's power supply, and prayer puts the believer in contact with that power supply.

A. W. Tozer once observed that the privilege of living in God's presence is open to every believer. Yet our self-centeredness provides a constant barrier to His presence. The only thing capable of breaking the back of our stubborn resistance is abiding before the throne. Remaining before His majesty burns away the sin, surgically removes the "living flesh," and opens the channel through which His supernatural power can be poured out.

Recently God has begun a fresh movement of power in our church. However, this "new work" is not the result of personality, procedures, programs, or even preaching, as important as the proper use of each of these is to a growing church. But this time of spiritual renewal is the direct result of sixty men who have committed to pray for heaven's help. Now, Sunday after Sunday, these men gather before and during the service to plead for divine assistance. Only eternity will reveal the good that is being accomplished through the "Pastor's Prayer Partners" for an individual and a church. The gateway to supernatural power is abiding long before the throne of our God. *Spiritual restoration is consummated by the energizing power of the Spirit.*

So is it possible for God's people, collectively and individually, to experience a spiritual restoration? The answer is a resounding "yes."

Revival is as possible as the promises of God are sure. The ingredients are the same today as they were in Ezekiel's day. Through the courageous faith and obedience of God's people, the uncompromising preaching of God's Word, and the empowering of God's Spirit, we can experience spiritual restoration.

The principles of this passage are progressive. Courageous faith and obedience grounded in the preaching of God's Word initiate renewal, and then the breath of the Spirit energizes that Word. However, behind it all is a burden, a longing for renewal. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." God will gladly pour out His blessings upon those who desire them.

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*Martin E. Sheldon*

# "Son of Man": A Depiction of Jesus' Humanity or a Title for a Glorious Messiah?

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus makes very specific claims in the New Testament about His identity and mission. Many of these are in the form of titles or self-designations. The title Jesus most often applies to Himself is "Son of Man." An understanding of the origin and sense of this particular title is of utmost importance because it reveals what Jesus Himself intended to convey to His hearers about His person and eschatological mission as the Messiah.

The recent upsurge in the quest for the historical Jesus demonstrates that people are forever attempting to discover Jesus' true identity. This is in spite of Jesus' very own claims as well as the New Testament writers' witness to His identity. This quest continues because of an inherent denial of the supernatural in much critical scholarship. Some theologians question whether Jesus actually made many of the statements the New Testament writers attribute to Him. However, the burden of proof falls upon those who discount the supernatural attributes of Jesus.

Evangelicals are on firm ground in believing that Jesus' Son of Man statements are authentic for the following reasons: first, the careful perpetuation of the oral tradition in Hebrew culture; second, the trustworthiness of the witnesses (that is, the Gospel writers); third, the manuscript evidence; fourth, the fact that New Testament Christians did not commonly use Son of Man as a title for Jesus, which indicates the authenticity of Jesus' statements.[1] Had the writers of the Gospels later added the

1. See especially I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981); F. F. Bruce, "The Background to the Son of Man Sayings," in H. H. Rowdon, ed., *Christ the Lord* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982); F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1972); Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

Son of Man sayings, it seems that the title would have also commonly occurred in the Epistles. This fact alone strongly affirms that Jesus Himself used Son of Man as a self-designation.

A thorough investigation of the Son of Man sayings of Jesus in the New Testament reveals that Jesus used the phrase as a self-designation to convey His identity and mission in three phases. First, Jesus used the title in relation to His earthly life and ministry in order to denote His divine authority. Second, He referred to Himself as the Son of Man in relation to His suffering, death, and resurrection in order to depict Himself as the eschatological Savior. Third, Jesus ascribed this title to Himself in relation to His eschatological mission in order to present Himself as one who appears as a glorious Messiah.

## THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF THE SON OF MAN

Jesus employs the Son of Man title in relation to His earthly life to identify Himself with both God and humanity. For instance, Jesus applies the term to Himself as a messianic title to denote His transcendence and solidarity with humanity in Matthew 16:13-17, where He combines the designations Son of Man, Messiah, and Son of the living God.

Many of Jesus' Son of Man statements are found in texts that depict some aspect of His earthly life and ministry. Several characteristics come to the surface when these texts are explored. One such characteristic is that the Son of Man demanded immediate and exclusive loyalty. On one occasion three men approached Jesus who indicated a desire to follow Him but had other pressing needs they felt they should address first. Jesus responded to the first inquirer by declaring that "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).[2] He indicates by this statement that His life on earth would be one of sacrifice and destitution. His followers should expect the same. The one who would follow Jesus must be totally committed to Him. Jesus responded to a second inquirer: "Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22). Following the Son of Man meant a life of total commitment and self-sacrifice.

Luke discusses a third person who expresses a desire to follow Jesus but wishes first to "go back and say good-by" to his family (Luke 9:61). Jesus' response, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62), clearly indicates that

2. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

following the Son of Man required immediate and exclusive loyalty. Further, Jesus equates following the Son of Man and serving in God's kingdom (Luke 9:58, 62). Luke makes this especially clear in his gospel. Jesus responded to the one who wished first to go and bury his father: "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). And again: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The idea that the Son of Man was the agent of God's kingdom is firmly rooted in these texts.

The authority to forgive sins also characterizes the Son of Man. A case in point is the occasion when four men presented a paralytic before Jesus, who after perceiving their faith forgave the paralytic's sins and simultaneously healed him of his paralysis (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). The scribes and Pharisees perceived this to be blasphemy because only God has the authority to forgive sins ("Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" Mark 2:6-7). Jesus answered this unspoken charge that He had committed blasphemy by stating that the "Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). Thus, Jesus is claiming to be more than an earthly Messiah. By exercising the divine prerogative of forgiving sins, He is laying claim to deity.[3]

The Pharisees' supposition that only God could forgive sins is correct, being squarely based on the Old Testament Scriptures. Adam's fall resulted from his disobedience to God's directive. Adam sinned against the Sovereign God, and thus God Himself pronounced judgment against mankind (Genesis 3). When mankind became extremely immoral, God sent a universal flood as an act of divine judgment (Genesis 6). Therefore, because sin was against God, it was He only who could judge sin. Further, not only was it God's prerogative to judge sin, it was also the divine prerogative to forgive sin. The Old Testament declares: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1-2). The prophet Isaiah reiterates the word of the Lord: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25).

Psalm 103:3 also presents an intriguing parallel. In that passage, the psalmist praises Yahweh because of all of His benefits toward His people.

3. See Darrell J. Doughty, "The Authority of the Son of Man (Mk 2:1-3:6)," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentlische Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Alteren Kirche* 74 (1983): 161-81.

The psalmist exclaims: "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:1-3).

Jesus as the Son of Man accomplished both of these divine activities: He both healed and forgave the paralytic's sins. By so doing He claimed equality with God. Indeed, He did not respond to the Pharisees by denying that only God could forgive sins but actually affirmed His own divinity by claiming to possess the authority to do so Himself. The logical conclusion is that, if only God can forgive sins and the Son of Man exercised this authority on earth, then the Son of Man is God.

A third characteristic of Jesus' use of the Son of Man title is the demonstration of His divine nature and actions. Matthew 11:7-19 and Luke 7:24-35 exemplify this characteristic. In this context John the Baptist sent his disciples to question whether Jesus was the Coming One or if he should look for another. Jesus recounted the miraculous deeds He had accomplished during His earthly ministry. He then commended John for performing the task for which he had been predestined (He was the messenger, Matthew 11:10, cf. Malachi 3:1; and the coming Elijah, Matthew 11:14, cf. Malachi 4:5). These two were very different in their earthly activities, yet the people found fault in them both (Matthew 11:18-19). Jesus presents His earthly activity in juxtaposition to His divine activity. By so doing He expresses His divine nature, while at the same time being very human.

A fourth characteristic of the Son of Man on earth is His superiority over religious institutions and laws. One particular example is Jesus' declaration of His Lordship over the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). Jesus' disciples picked some grain to eat on a Sabbath. The Pharisees accused them of committing an unlawful deed—that is, of breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2). Jesus responded to this accusation with a fivefold answer. First, He referred to a historical precedent for breaking the Sabbath laws (Matthew 12:3-4; e.g., David in 1 Samuel 21:6). Second, he reminded them that the Law itself provided for the innocence of the priests who "desecrate the day" (Matthew 12:5; cf. Numbers 28:9-10). Third, He declared that He was greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6). Fourth, He pointed out the Scriptural precedent of mercy over sacrifice (Matthew 12:7; cf. Hosea 6:6). And fifth, He pronounced His lordship over the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

The Sabbath and the temple had taken an exalted position in the religious life of the Jews. Pharisaic Judaism had added many laws to the Torah in order to ensure the keeping of the Sabbath. Their focus was

removed from God and placed on the temple and the Sabbath. In light of these facts, Jesus' statements are especially astounding. The Son of Man was superior to and Lord over the Sabbath and the temple. He was to be the true object of worship.

Jesus' messianic affirmation provides a fifth characteristic of the Son of Man title, as seen in Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; and Luke 9:18-21. On this occasion Jesus inquired of His disciples as to the opinion of the populace regarding His identity. They replied that people thought He might be one of the great prophets of the past. Then Jesus directed the question to them: "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'" (Matthew 16:15). This question elicited Peter's great confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter because of his confession and declared that it was His Father in heaven who had revealed this to Peter. Jesus strongly affirmed this messianic confession by stating that His Father had revealed it ("this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven," Matthew 16:17). By affirming this confession, Jesus equates the designations Son of Man, the Messiah, and the Son of God. Each of these titles refers to the Messiah. Thus, Jesus, by employing the Son of Man title, depicts Himself as God's Son, the Messiah.

A sixth characteristic of the Son of Man is Jesus' expression of Himself as the eschatological Savior. Jesus states in Luke 19:10 that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." The people were like wandering sheep that had no shepherd (Ezekiel 34:1-6). The shepherd/sheep imagery is common in both the Old Testament and the Gospels. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is depicted as a shepherd who promises to search for His sheep and care for them (Ezekiel 34:11) and as one who "will search for the lost and bring back the strays" (Ezekiel 34:16). The prophet Isaiah proclaims: "the Sovereign LORD . . . tends his flock like a shepherd" (Isaiah 40:10-11).

The Gospels depict Jesus as a shepherd. For instance, Jesus claims to be "the good shepherd" who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Further, He is the good shepherd who knows His sheep (John 10:14). Jesus, as the Son of Man, came to seek the lost, wandering, and helpless and to provide salvation, deliverance, and security.

These texts reveal that Jesus, even in relation to His earthly life and ministry, presents Himself as the Son of Man in order to express that He is the glorious Messiah—God's Son. He does so by demonstrating His divine authority (forgiving sins) and actions (healing); by demanding exclusive loyalty; by declaring His superiority over the Law; by equating the designations of Son of Man, Messiah, and God's Son; and by presenting Himself as the eschatological Savior.

## THE SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF MAN

Another distinct group of Son of Man sayings relates to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus speaks of these events on several occasions in the Gospels.[4] For instance, Jesus explains: "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (Matthew 20:18-19). Jesus' application of the Son of Man title to Himself in these sayings conveys the idea of sacrifice and suffering. These sayings depict a humiliated, suffering servant. That the Messiah would suffer and die was incomprehensible to Jesus' disciples (e.g., Matthew 16:22). A prevalent concept at the time was that the Messiah would inherit the throne of David and deliver His people from their oppressors.[5] Jesus was indeed the Son of David as Matthew and Luke show in the genealogical records. However, He was more than an earthly king; He was the Sovereign Lord and at the same time the Suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 53). He blends the concepts of the Davidic king and the Suffering Servant in many of His statements about Himself.[6]

Jesus' words in Matthew 20:28 are instructive (cf. Mk. 10:45): "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The very purpose for Jesus' coming was to offer up His own life as an atoning sacrifice.[7] Jesus also spoke of being handed over to be crucified (Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2). The phrase "the Son of Man will be delivered up" (*ho huios tou anthropou paradidotai*) conveys a passive sense reminiscent of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53:7, where this Servant is depicted as a lamb being led to the slaughter. Even so, He constantly directed attention to His resurrection on the third day. By so doing He emphasizes the supernatural aspect of His nature and mission.

4. See George R. Beasley-Murray, "Resurrection and Parousia of the Son of Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (November 1991): 296-309; Bruce A. Stevens, "Why Must the Son of Man Suffer? The Divine Warrior in the Gospel of Mark," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 31 (1987): 101-10.

5. See Isaac Landman, ed., *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia in Ten Volumes*, vol. 7 (New York: KTAV, 1969), s.v. "Messianic Era," by Arthur J. Lelyveld.

6. See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelaphia: Westminster, 1964), 334.

7. See C. K. Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1-18. Barrett suggests that a background other than Isaiah 53 is behind Mark 10:45 because the Son of Man is antithetical to the Suffering Servant.

## THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MISSION OF THE SON OF MAN

Jesus employs the Son of Man title in reference to His person and mission as the eschatological king, savior, and judge. The basis for the Son of Man designation in these sections is to be found in Daniel 7:13 and in an apocalyptic tradition that is also based upon Daniel.[8] Jesus' eschatological Son of Man statements are found in Matthew 13:36-43; 16:24-28; 19:23-30; 24:26-51; 25:31-46; 26:57-67; Mark 8:34-9:1; 10:23-31; 13:1-37; 14:61-65; Luke 18:24-30; 21:5-36; 22:66-71. He refers to Himself as the Son of Man in order to present Himself as the divine Messiah who is the eschatological agent of God's eternal kingdom. He accomplished this by "drawing, in part, from Daniel 7 and an apocalyptic Son of Man tradition. As the Son of Man, Jesus is the ultimate Davidic King, the Messiah who rules in absolute peace and righteousness."[9]

## THE SON OF MAN SAYINGS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Apostle John included thirteen of Jesus' Son of Man sayings in his Gospel account. These occurrences are distinct from and complementary to the Synoptic sayings. Jesus' claims about Himself indicate that He was fully aware of His divine nature and mission from the Father. As the Son of Man Jesus fully reveals God, and the Apostle John makes this absolutely clear by his selections of Jesus' Son of Man sayings.[10]

The titles Jesus ascribed to Himself in the fourth Gospel clearly show that He had a full understanding of His person and unique mission. He was cognizant of His preexistence with God and of His mission from God to accomplish the means of reconciliation between God and humanity. He also claimed by His self-designations His equality with God the Father by declaring, "I and the Father are one" (*ego kai ho pater hen esmen*, John 10:30).[11]

Jesus' self-conferred titles were laden with theological significance. He makes it clear that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (John 5:39, 46; 6:45; 7:38; 13:28; 15:25). A close examination of the titles that Jesus ascribed to Himself demonstrates this. Jesus most probably bases His Son

8. See Martin E. Sheldon, "The Eschatological Son of Man in Jewish and Christian Literature," *Evangelical Journal* 17 (Fall 1999): 60-75, where I present this case.

9. Ibid., 75.

10. See Francis J. Moloney, "The Johannine Son of Man," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 6 (June-October 1976): 177-89.

11. The Greek adjective *hen* is neuter, indicating "one thing" or "one essence" and not "one person."

of Man title on Daniel 7:13, as well as drawing from an apocalyptic tradition in order to add certain dimensions to the Son of Man concept. Dan Davis suggests that this title indicates four main components: (1) rejection by men; (2) suffering, death, and resurrection; (3) descension from heaven and authority from God; and (4) deliverance as Savior.[12] Leon Morris suggests a threefold meaning: (1) as a periphrasis for "I"; (2) as the heavenly Son of Man, who will come in glory; and (3) as the Son of Man who suffers to bring men salvation.[13] J. Louis Martyn suggests that Jesus, by drawing from Daniel and 1 Enoch, depicts Himself as a heavenly eschatological figure of judgment.[14]

The first Son of Man saying in John is found in John 1:51 where Jesus directly alludes to Jacob's vision in Genesis 28:10ff. He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51). Jesus intended to evoke the entire episode of Genesis 28, not merely the vision of the angels on the ladder. Jacob's vision consisted of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, and above it the Lord (Yahweh) stood and reaffirmed the covenant promises that He had established with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob's reaction evidences the reality of the Lord's presence. Jacob was afraid and declared the experience to be awesome. He also set up a memorial and called the place Bethel (the house of God).

Therefore, it appears that Jesus alluded to Jacob's vision, first, to present Himself as the heavenly Son of Man who came to reveal God and to open communication between God and man. Second, Jesus affirmed the reality of Yahweh's presence with humanity. Third, Jesus reaffirmed Yahweh's covenant promises. Just as Jacob (Israel) experienced the Lord's presence and the reaffirmation of the Abrahamic covenant, so also would Nathaniel ("a true Israelite," John 1:47) and others experience the glory of the Son of Man and His reaffirmation of the covenant promises.[15] Jesus employed the Son of Man title in this instance in order to proclaim Himself as the vital connection between heaven and earth, God and humanity.

12. Dan Davis, "The Semantic Content of 'Son of Man,'" *Notes on Translation* 4 (1990): 13-14.

13. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* in the *New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981): 172-73.

14. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979): 138; Barnabas Lindars, ed., *The Gospel of John* in the *New Century Bible* (Greenville, S.C.: Attic, 1972): 120.

15. Lindars, 119-22; Morris, 169-71.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus reveals another significant factor the Son of Man title conveys. Jesus states in John 3:13 that "no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." During this conversation Jesus spoke of entering the kingdom of God and of being born from above. Nicodemus could not comprehend Jesus' teaching; so Jesus mildly rebuked him and launched into a short discussion about heavenly knowledge. His statements here imply that only He, the Son of Man, has this heavenly wisdom (John 3:1-15). The significance of Jesus' self-conferred title as the Son of Man begins to unfold in this dialogue.

First, Jesus asserts that "no one has ever gone into heaven." Inherent in this statement is a polemic against the notion that one can somehow ascend into the heavens and acquire a special, heavenly knowledge. Perhaps He is directing against the Jewish *merkabah* mysticism in particular,[16] or it may have been a more inclusive polemic.[17] There certainly must be a reference to the Jewish tradition that the apocalyptic seers gained their knowledge by ascending into the heavens via visions and dreams.

Second, Jesus asserts His heavenly origin by declaring that He has descended from heaven. This refers to the incarnation when the very Son of God became human.[18] There is an apparent time discrepancy (i.e., ascension coming before descension). Why would Jesus put the ascension before His incarnation? Jesus, by this statement, affirmed the reality of His incarnation and anticipated His future glory.[19] The significance of Jesus' ascription of the Son of Man title to Himself in this case is that (1) He emphasized His heavenly origin, (2) He claimed to be the only one who had seen God, and (3) He had therefore acquired heavenly wisdom.[20]

A third element of the Johannine Son of Man is contained in John 3:14-15, where Jesus refers to the episode in Numbers 21:1-9. The Israelites had complained against God and Moses. As a result God sent serpents among them, and many of them died. The Lord commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up so that anyone who had been bitten might look on it and live. Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up

16. Ibid., 156. *Merkabah* mysticism refers to "the tradition of heavenly ascent based on the chariot-vision of the ascension of Elijah."

17. Ibid., 156; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 145.

18. Ibid., 132-33.

19. Lindars, 156.

20. Brown, 132-33.

the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Jesus stands in a typological relation to Moses in His being "lifted up." Just as Moses was Israel's redeemer, so too was Jesus the Redeemer and Savior.[21] The typology ends there because Jesus goes on to state the necessity for His being lifted up. Jesus declared Himself to be Savior and at the same time as providing the means of salvation.

Jesus' statement here is one of several in John (cf. 8:28; 12:32) that anticipated the fulfillment of His work of salvation.[22] His emphasis on the necessity of being "lifted up" shows that He viewed His death as fulfilling God's purpose for the sacrifice for sins and referred to the manner of death He would experience (cf. 12:32-33).[23] Therefore, in this instance, by designating Himself as the Son of Man, Jesus implies that He was both the Savior and the sacrifice for sins. The Son of Man title suggests that Jesus was the Servant of Yahweh who would give His own life as a sin offering (cf. Isaiah 53). Jesus reiterates this phenomenon by stating: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28).

This statement is in the context of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees concerning His identity. He referred to being sent from the Father, whom He addressed as "My Father." By so doing He implied a special relation to the Father and a unique mission from Him. Here, as in 3:14, the term *hupsosete* contains both a metaphorical sense of exaltation and a literal sense of hanging on a cross. "I am" (*ego eimi*) is used in an absolute sense and is equivalent to the divine name.[24] Jesus is asserting that when He, the Son of Man, is lifted up (dies on the cross and is exalted), then they will recognize Him as God.

One other important nuance of Jesus' statements here is that, as the Son of Man, He was taught and commissioned by God the Father. Son of Man was thus a title that was equivalent to Messiah in the sense that He

21. It is interesting to note here that Jesus followed His statement concerning the necessity of the Son of Man's being lifted up with the result clause in v. 15 and by so doing universalized His role as Savior, whereas Moses was Israel's redeemer only.

22. See W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 75.

23. Ibid.

24. See especially v. 24 where Jesus said, ". . . if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." By this statement Jesus aligned Himself with Yahweh of the Old Testament Scriptures because only Yahweh, the living God, had the ability to deliver from sin. For an excellent discussion of the Johannine usage of *ego eimi*, see Brown, 533-38.

was commissioned and sent by the Father—anointed as it were for a unique task. Though Jesus does not normally refer to Himself as Messiah (only in John 4:24-25), He nevertheless depicts Himself as fulfilling that role as the Son of Man. Jesus accentuates that God the Father has sent Him and is with Him when He declares, "the one who sent me is with me" (*ho pempsas me met' emou estin*, John 8:29). Thus, the Son of Man had acted on the Father's initiative and in His authority.[25]

Jesus also claims to have received authority from the Father to execute judgment:

> I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:24-27).

This statement occurs in the context of Jesus' assertion of equality with the Father (John 5:17-21). Apocalyptic language emerges in v. 25 with reference to a future resurrection. Jesus claims to have received authority from the Father to execute judgment. It is God who executed judgment in the Old Testament. Abraham called Him "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25). He was called "the LORD, the Judge" in an oath statement (Judges 11:27). The psalmist anticipated the Lord's coming to execute judgment upon the entire earth (Psalm 96:13). Thus, the Son of Man is equal with God the Father because He had received the authority from the Father to execute judgment. Following the statement that the Father gave Him authority to execute judgment, Jesus says that this is "because he is the Son of Man" (*kai exousian edoken auto krisin poiein, hoti huios anthropou estin*, John 5:27).

Also, Jesus states, "The Father no longer judges anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son" (*oude gar ho pater krinei oudena, alla ten krisin pasan dedoken to huio*, John 5:22). Some interpreters view the definite article before "son" in v. 27 as stressing the human nature of Jesus. Because He is both God and man, He is qualified to execute divine and final judgment.[26] However, the most probable explanation is that Jesus

25. See C. Merser, "*Apostellein* and *Pempein* in John," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 619-24.

26. Cook, 60.

was alluding directly to Daniel 7:13ff. The grammatical construction is almost identical with the Septuagint of Daniel,[27] in which case "Son of Man" indicates one whom God had given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. He was an agent of divine judgment who was Himself divine. There are interesting parallels in the apocryphal book 4 Ezra, where the Messiah executes judgment just prior to His setting up the Messianic kingdom (4 Ezra 12:31-34; 13:25-39).[28]

Jesus' Bread of Life discourse follows the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (John 6:25-59). During this discourse Jesus employs the Son of Man title three times in order to emphasize His existence with God the Father and His provision of eternal life (vv. 27, 53, 62). He implores: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God has placed his seal of approval" (6:27). These comments reveal that Jesus as the Son of Man first provides an eternally satisfying food, and second, God has approved Him.

Jesus the Son of Man declares, "I am the bread of life" and gives a fourfold description of Himself as such. First, He was the bread who came down from heaven (6:50), signifying His existence in heaven. Second, He was the bread who provides eternal life (6:50). Third, He was the living bread who was eternal (6:51). Fourth, He was the bread who would be given for the life of the world (6:51). Jesus again alluded to His preexistence when he exclaimed "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" (6:62)

The conclusion to Jesus' discourse is that God the Father had set His seal of approval on Him, the preexistent Son of Man, to provide eternal life to those who partake of the life of Jesus. The Son of Man provided eternal life through giving His own life for the world. The significance of the Son of Man title in John 6 is equivalent to the Suffering Son of Man in the Synoptic Gospels.

Jesus as the Son of Man received faith and worship from those whom He had helped in some way. Jesus healed a man who had been born blind (John 9:1-7). This healing elicited an unfavorable response from the Pharisees, especially since the event occurred on the Sabbath. The man did not know who Jesus was, other than that He was called Jesus (9:11) and that He was a prophet (9:17), and so He must be from God since He opened his blinded eyes (9:30-33). When Jesus learned that this man had been thrown out of the synagogue, He found the man and asked: "Do

27. Lindars, 225-26.
28. Sheldon, 65-69.

you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35). The man did not know who the Son of Man was, but when Jesus disclosed that He was speaking of Himself, he believed and worshiped Jesus (9:38). It seems that in this instance Jesus presupposed a concept related to the Son of Man. It is most interesting here that Jesus did not ask if the man believed in the Messiah instead of the Son of Man. Jesus must have assumed that the man had a prior knowledge of a Son of Man tradition that was then current. Perhaps Jesus presupposed an awareness of His own teaching about Himself as the Son of Man. At any rate, the Son of Man was worthy of faith and worship.

Elsewhere, Jesus speaks of His glorification as Son of Man. He indicates that, in His glorification, God is at the same time glorified. Jesus replies, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). And again Jesus says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him" (John 13:31). The "hour" in this Gospel is extremely significant, because it indicates the death-resurrection-ascension event that Jesus would experience. John uses the term *hora* seven times to point to this event and to show Jesus' own determination to accomplish His divinely ordained task (e.g., "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" [12:27]). Jesus' first reference to His hour was in chapter two at the wedding in Cana. He states, "My time has not yet come" (2:4). His final reference to His hour was "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (17:1). Jesus, in His last Son of Man saying in this Gospel, states: "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him" (13:31).

The Johannine Son of Man is thus a preexistent heavenly personage who acquired wisdom from God and divine authority to execute judgment. He was also appointed by God to accomplish the task of suffering and dying on the cross to provide salvation for the world. Jesus reached beyond Old Testament "messianism" into the concurrent apocalyptic traditions to convey His Divine Messiahship to His hearers. The content of the Son of Man sayings went beyond the Old Testament messianic ideal.

## SUMMARY

Jesus uses the Son of Man designation when speaking of some aspect of His earthly life and ministry in order to highlight His deity. First, He demands exclusive loyalty from His followers (Matthew 8:20-22; Luke 9:58-62). Second, He equates following the Son of Man (referring to Himself) with serving in God's Kingdom (Luke 9:58, 62). Third, Jesus, as

the Son of Man, exercises the divine prerogative of forgiving sins and healing diseases (e.g., Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). Fourth, He declares superiority over the Law (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). Fifth, He equates the designations Son of Man, Messiah (Greek: Christ), and Son of God with reference to His own identity (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). Sixth, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man in order to disclose His eschatological mission as the Savior of a sinful world (Luke 19:10; cf. Matthew 9:13; John 3:17).

Further, Jesus employs the Son of Man title while speaking of His imminent suffering, death, and resurrection. He does so in order, first, to delineate His coming into the world for the purpose of offering up His own life as an atoning sacrifice; and second, to place emphasis on the supernatural aspect of His nature and mission. This is especially true when He speaks of His resurrection from the dead (Matthew 20:17-19; 26:1-5; Mark 10:45; 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2).

Jesus also uses the Son of Man designation when referring to a yet future coming (e.g., Matthew 25:31-46; 26:57-67). His declaration in Matthew 26:64 is especially pertinent. The high priest demanded: "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). "'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (v. 64).

The Apostle John includes thirteen of Jesus' Son of Man statements. These indicate that Jesus was fully aware of His divine nature and mission from the Father. The Son of Man title expresses Jesus' preexistence with the Father in heaven (e.g., 3:13; 6:62). He, therefore, reveals God (1:51) because He descended from heaven (3:13) when the Father commissioned Him (8:29). His authority to execute judgment is established "because he is the Son of Man" (5:27). The Son of Man designation also expresses Jesus' accomplishment of salvation (8:28; 12:32-33) through His death and resurrection. Finally, Son of Man is a title that indicates Jesus' glorification (12:23).

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Relating to the Person of Jesus Christ*

- Jesus chose Son of Man as a title because of its association with a glorious Messiah found in Jewish apocalyptic (Daniel 7; Similitudes of Enoch; 4 Ezra).
- Jesus claimed to be the divine/glorious Messiah.
- Jesus claimed that He was with God.

- Jesus claimed that God sent Him into the world.
- Jesus claimed equality with God in His work, in forgiving sins, in healing diseases, and in executing judgment.
- God validated each claim that Jesus made about Himself when God raised Him from the dead.[29]

*Relating to Personal Faith*

- We are faced with only two options concerning Jesus. He was either a liar, or He was and is the Sovereign Lord.
- God's validation of Jesus by raising Him from the dead proves beyond doubt that Jesus is everything He claimed to be.
- Therefore, our faith in Jesus Christ rests on solid ground.
- As the Son of Man, Jesus demands our exclusive loyalty.
- As the Son of Man, Jesus deserves our devotion and worship.
- As the Son of Man, Jesus reigns over God's eternal kingdom, of which we are a part through faith in Him.

## CONCLUSION

These contexts reveal that Jesus discloses His deity and claims to be the glorious Messiah by applying the Son of Man title to Himself. Within Judaism "Son of Man" became a figure of a glorious person whom God would send at the end of the age, as the agent of His eternal kingdom. By using this particular title, Jesus claims to be that Person, the Divine Messiah, who had come from God to become the eschatological Savior, Messiah, King, and Judge.

29. See Gary Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Lanham. Md.: University Press of America, 1984).

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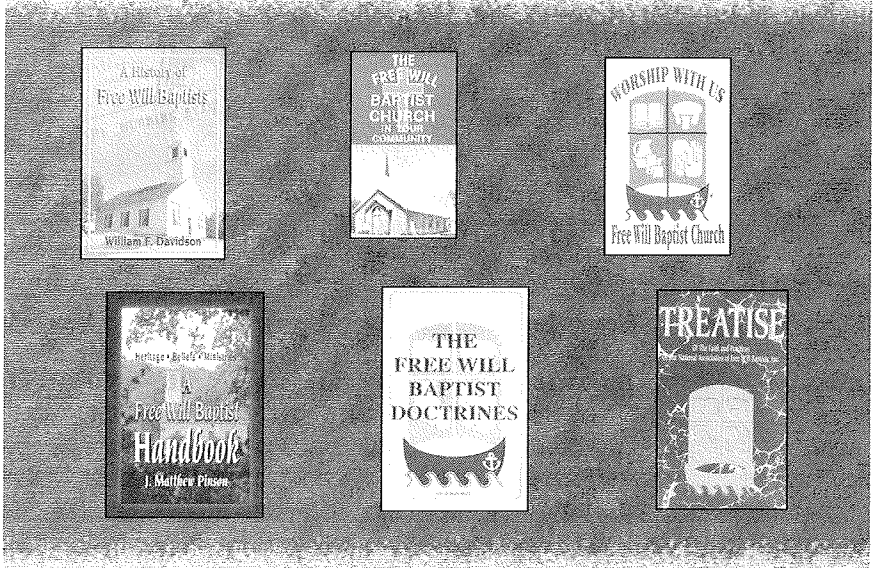


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*Thomas Marberry*

# The Wideness of God's Mercy: An Inquiry into the Extent of Salvation

In recent years the relationship between christology and soteriology has risen to the forefront of theological debate and discussion. The current debate examines soteriology from a distinctively christological perspective. In particular it confronts the uniqueness of Christ in salvation. This debate asks whether Christ is the only way of salvation or if there are other avenues through which a person may enter into fellowship with God.

This debate also addresses an important related issue. It asks if one must make a conscious commitment of his or her life to Christ in order to receive salvation or if the work of Christ provides salvation even for those who have never heard the gospel message. In other words, it asks if the mercy of God, which is available through Christ, can be effective for those who have never heard or personally received the Christian message.

The multitude of books and articles written on this subject in the last ten years testifies to the importance of this discussion in both theoretical and practical realms. This debate has profound consequences for the contemporary church in the areas of missions and evangelism. It also affects significantly how the church formulates its teachings in the areas of christology and soteriology. It is a debate that is simply too important to ignore.

The works of William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos,[1] Millard J. Erickson,[2] Ronald H. Nash,[3] Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips,[4]

1. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, "Are the 'Heathen' Really Lost?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, ed. William V. Crockett and James Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 257-64.

2. Millard J. Erickson, "The State of the Question," in *Through No Fault of Their Own?* 23-33.

3. Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

4. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

and John Sanders[5] provide useful summaries of the current discussion. A number of significant books and articles that examine specific aspects of the debate are listed in the footnotes to this article.

The uniqueness of Christ in salvation is a broad and complex subject, and this essay cannot adequately examine every facet of it. Although several of the issues raised in this debate were confronted by the church during the early centuries and again in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, this study will be limited to the current theological discussion. This study will seek to accomplish the following objectives: First, it will set the debate in its context and present a brief overview of the three most popular positions. Second, it will outline the views of leading defenders of each position and show how scholars of other schools of thought have responded to these views. Third, it will examine how certain key New Testament passages affect this debate.

Ronald H. Nash has been one of the most prolific and widely read authors on this subject in recent years. He notes that three primary positions are being defended today. The first is pluralism. Defenders of this approach argue that Jesus is only one way of salvation among many. They hold that many ways of salvation exist in different religious traditions.[6] John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, and a number of others have defended this view.

The second approach is commonly called exclusivism or restrictivism. According to Nash, this is the traditional view of the Christian church. It holds that Christianity alone teaches absolute religious truth and that one must make an explicit confession of faith in Christ in order to be saved.[7] E. C. Dewick notes that this is the traditional viewpoint of the Christian church: "The main tradition of Christendom has always claimed that the Christian religion is not only superior to all others, but is final and absolute truth for all time."[8] In recent years this view has been defended by Alister E. McGrath, R. Douglas Geivett, W. Gary Phillips, and Ronald Nash.

Inclusivism, the third of Nash's categories, is the most recent and most novel of the three positions. It is also the most difficult to define. Its basic teaching is that the church has throughout its history construed the

5. John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); John Sanders, ed., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

6. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 9.

7. Ibid.

8. E. C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 14.

grace of God too narrowly. Inclusivism emphasizes that it is not the will of God for any to perish. It teaches that, through Christ, salvation is available to all and may be obtained even by many who have not made any explicit confession of faith in Christ. According to Nash, this view is held by a growing number of college and seminary professors, denominational leaders, and pastors.[9] Its main defenders today include Clark H. Pinnock and John Sanders.

## THE PLURALISM OF JOHN HICK

Pluralism has become increasingly popular in the twentieth century in both religious and non-religious circles. Wilfred Cantwell Smith was a well-known early defender of this position. The leading exponent of pluralism in the Christian world today is John Hick, who is well-known for such important works as *God Has Many Names* and *God and the Universe of Faiths*.[10] Paul F. Knitter in his work *No Other Name?* presents a more popular presentation of the pluralistic approach.[11]

The views of Hick are complex and not easily summarized. The following brief quotation describes his view of God. He writes

> . . . that there is but one God, who is maker and lord of all; that in his infinite fullness and richness of being he exceeds all our human attempts to grasp him in thought; and that the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping the one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental icons of him.[12]

In his view, the various religious faiths found in the modern world result from historic, economic, social, and religious forces.[13] He suggests that an individual's religious preference is largely determined by his or her place of birth and that people should be very cautious in making moral judgments about the validity of different religions.[14] He asks, "Should we not perhaps reject the assumption of one and only one true

9. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 9.

10. John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

11. Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

12. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 66.

13. Ibid., 51-54.

14. Ibid., 56.

religion in favor of the alternative possibility of a genuine religious pluralism?"[15]

He argues that God is revealed in the Bible as "gracious and holy love" and that Christ is revealed as "divine love incarnate." Such a God would, in his view, never create a situation in which so many people would be denied salvation because they happened to live before the coming of Christ or outside the range of His historical influence.[16] Hick presents his view of salvation in these words:

> I have been suggesting that Christianity is a way of salvation which, beginning some two thousand years ago, has become the principal way of salvation in three continents. The other great world faiths are likewise ways of salvation providing the principal path to the divine reality for other large segments of humanity. I have also suggested that the idea that Jesus proclaimed himself as God incarnate, and as the sole point of saving contact between God and man, is without adequate historical foundation and represents a doctrine developed by the church.[17]

In summary, it is his view that the desire to worship and serve the divine is widespread in human beings, but the particular religious faith that an individual follows is largely determined by birth, environment, and culture. Christianity is certainly a valid expression of religious truth, but it is not unique. It is one path among many.

A somewhat similar approach is presented in the writings of the German theologian Hans Küng. His book *Christianity and the World Religions* compares Christianity with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. His goal is to encourage better understanding through the sharing of ideas and opinions between representatives of these great religions. The following quotation from his discussion of Islam illustrates his pluralistic approach:

> What is needed today is *not missionary activity in the colonialistic style* (Christians converting Muslims, and now vice versa), *but this testimony of their own faith* (Muslims witnessing to Christians, and vice versa), with the goal of a mutual exchange

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 31.
17. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 145.

> of information, a mutual challenge, and so, ultimately, a mutual transformation.[18]

Like Hick, Küng argues that each of the major religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) contains religious truth, but none of them represents a definitive approach to truth. Hick, Küng, and others who defend a pluralistic approach recognize little that is unique in the Christian faith.[19] For this reason their writings often imply that those who insist that Christ is the only way of salvation are arrogant.

## THE EXCLUSIVIST RESPONSE

During the past ten years, several evangelical thinkers have responded to these pluralistic views in different ways. Nash, for example, emphasizes several significant weaknesses in Hick's approach. He argues that Hick is too much influenced by the liberal Protestant approach to the New Testament with its misguided historical skepticism and emphasis on form and redaction criticism.[20] He also attacks Hick's unbiblical approach to the nature of Christ.[21] Lesslie Newbigin responds to the charge of arrogance:

> To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged. The charge of arrogance which is leveled against those who speak of Jesus as the unique Lord and Savior must be thrown back at those who assume that "modern historical consciousness" has disposed of that faith.[22]

Timothy D. Westergren, in his response to the pluralistic approach of Knitter, comes quickly to the essential difficulty that traditional Protestants have with pluralism. It is pluralism's handling of Scripture. If the New Testament documents give us an accurate picture of the claims of Christ, there can scarcely be many roads to salvation. Jesus claimed to

18. Hans Küng et al., *Christianity and the World Religions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986), 130 (italics in original).

19. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 145.

20. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 76-80.

21. Ibid., 84-91.

22. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 166.

be the divine Son of God and the only way of salvation. Westergren expresses this key difference:

> We choose to believe—and have increasingly positive scholarship to ground our belief—that the apostles wrote accurately and authoritatively about Jesus. We grant the humanness of the authors and their cultures, but claim divine inspiration of the message and divine superintendence over their works. Knitter has made his choice about Scripture; we must make ours.[23]

If the words of Scripture are accepted as true, many aspects of pluralistic teaching, including Hick's assertion that Jesus never claimed to be God incarnate, must be rejected.

The Frankfort Declaration, adopted by a number of German church leaders in 1970, gives a clear and specific refutation of the pluralist position. This declaration states:

> The offer of salvation in Christ is directed without exception to all men who are not yet bound to him in conscious faith. The adherents to the nonchristian religions and world views can receive this salvation only through participation in faith. They must let themselves be freed from their former ties and false hopes in order to be admitted by belief and baptism into the body of Christ. Israel, too, will find salvation in turning to Jesus Christ.
>
> We *therefore reject* the false teaching that the nonchristian religions and world views are also ways of salvation similar to belief in Christ.[24]

## THE INCLUSIVISM OF CLARK PINNOCK

Clark H. Pinnock presents what is probably the most widely accepted form of the inclusivist approach today. His view is that the blood of Christ is sufficient to provide salvation for everyone. In his view God reveals His saving grace through religions other than Christianity. For

23. Timothy D. Westergren, "Do All Roads Lead to Heaven? An Examination of Unitive Pluralism," in *Through No Fault of Their Own?* 173-74.

24. Cited in Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way?* trans. Margaret Clarkson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 118 (italics in original).

this reason, it is possible for an individual who follows another religion to be saved without ever making a specific profession of faith in Christ.

The following rather lengthy quotation is Pinnock's own summary of his position.

> We have now refuted the restrictivist view that says that only those who actually profess Jesus in this life can be saved, be in a right relation with God, and be safe from eschatological wrath. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that many varieties of unevangelized persons will attain salvation. This will happen according to the faith principle. In the case of morally responsible persons confronted with the gospel of Christ in this life, they would surely turn to him in explicit faith. If they did not do so, it would prove that they had not been favorably disposed to God prior to that time, since Jesus is the culmination of divine revelation. Pre-Christian faith is valid up until that moment when Christ is preached, but not afterwards. When Christ is known, the obligation comes into force to believe on him. The unevangelized are expected to receive the Good News when it reaches them. God's offer becomes an objective obligation at that time, and refusal to accept that offer would be fatal. No hope can be offered to those declining God's offer to them in Christ.[25]

Pinnock defines "exclusivism" as the position that sees "Christ as the Savior of the world and other religions largely as zones of darkness." He defines "restrictivism" as a view "which restricts hope to people who have put their faith in Jesus Christ in this earthly life." In his view, the term "inclusivism" refers to "the view upholding Christ as the Savior of humanity but also affirming God's saving presence in the wider world of other religions." He defines "pluralism" to mean "the position that denies the finality of Jesus Christ and maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to God."[26]

*A Wideness in God's Mercy*

Pinnock presents his most complete statement of his inclusivist position in his 1992 book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. In this important work, he argues that evangelical Christianity has been overly influenced by an Augustinian view of election

25. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 168.

26. Ibid., 14-15.

and predestination. This has led to the adoption of a view that limits salvation more narrowly than it is limited in the Bible. He challenges evangelical scholars to reexamine the teachings of Scripture and adopt a position that does not restrict salvation to such a small number of people.

In the introduction to this work, Pinnock gives his analysis of the current status of the debate over religious pluralism. He reflects his disappointment with the pluralism of John Hick and the relativism it inevitably produces. He reserves his harshest criticisms, however, for his fellow evangelicals who advocate some form of restrictivism. He states that "a majority of evangelicals today are hardline restrictivists in my estimation. The only possibility for encountering God and receiving salvation in this view is to exercise explicit faith in Jesus Christ in this earthly life."[27]

He argues that evangelicals have been slow to enter into the debate about religious pluralism largely because they are afraid to challenge established positions. He urges evangelicals to consider the biblical and theological basis for a more optimistic view of salvation. He writes, "I oppose the fewness doctrine which accepts that only a small number will be saved. . . ."[28] He also urges another look at christology. He proposes to maintain a "high Christology" while at the same time insisting "that our belief in Jesus Christ as the one mediator between God and humanity does not by any means entail a negative attitude toward the rest of the world. . . ."[29]

The first chapter presents the biblical and theological basis of his argument. "The foundation of my theology of religions," he writes, "is a belief in the unbounded generosity of God revealed in Jesus Christ."[30] He cites several examples from both the Old and New Testaments of God's desire and determination to work among people of different nations. He again challenges the traditional Augustinian-Calvinistic paradigm of election. In his view, "the Old Testament makes it clear that the election of Israel is a corporate election (not an election of individuals) and a call to service (not to privilege)."[31] He writes: "It was a disaster in the history of theology when Augustine reinterpreted the biblical doctrine of election along the lines of special redemptive privilege rather than unique vocation on behalf of the world."[32]

27. Ibid., 12.
28. Ibid., 13.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 18.
31. Ibid., 24.
32. Ibid., 25.

Pinnock views the New Testament materials in a similar fashion. He argues that Jesus Himself presented a wider view of salvation than modern Christians generally recognize. He notes that "Christians are often too pessimistic about the scope of God's salvation in Christ."[33]

In the final section of this chapter, Pinnock again urges evangelicals to reconsider the "fewness doctrine." Yet, at the same time, he warns evangelicals not to fall into the traps of relativism, universalism, or Unitarianism. "In the light of scriptural warnings, it would seem that although the possibility of salvation exists for everyone, it is impossible to affirm the actuality of salvation for all."[34]

In the second chapter of *Wideness*, Pinnock presents his view of Christ as the Savior of the world. The essence of this chapter is that "Jesus brought salvation for the whole world."[35] The author defends what he calls a "high Christology."[36] Although he does not define this term, the chapter implies that he views Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God and the only way salvation can be obtained. Pinnock notes that "in the public ministry, Jesus places himself in a strategic position as far as the relationship between God and humanity is concerned. He saw himself as central to what God was doing, as one can see in a hundred texts."[37]

Pinnock asserts that this high christology does not demand the narrow view of salvation that is characteristic of most evangelical Christianity. He notes that "there is no salvation except through Christ but it is not necessary for everybody to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him. The patriarch Job, for example, was saved by Christ (ontologically) without actually knowing the name of Jesus (epistemologically)."[38]

The third chapter of *Wideness* examines the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The author rejects the traditional position that Christianity is the only true religion and all others are false. He likewise rejects the pluralistic position that all religions are "more or less true and valid."[39] Instead he advocates a middle position "which couples the church's confession of Jesus Christ with genuine openness to the truth and goodness found in other religions."[40]

33. Ibid., 35.
34. Ibid., 43.
35. Ibid., 49.
36. Ibid., 51.
37. Ibid., 57.
38. Ibid., 75.
39. Ibid., 83
40. Ibid.

Pinnock agrees that many religions are vile and false. He cites as examples the religions practiced by the Canaanites, Moabites, Hittites, Philistines, and Phoenicians of the ancient world. He notes that even the Israelite religion was "far from flawless."[41]

Ancient religions were not, however, totally devoid of value. They could occasionally produce what he calls "pagan saints."[42] He includes in this category Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Daniel, Melchizedek, Lot, Abimelech, Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the Queen of Sheba, Cornelius, and others. These individuals were, in his opinion, "believing men and women who enjoyed a right relationship with God and lived saintly lives, under the terms of the wider covenant God made with Noah."[43]

In this chapter Pinnock presents what may be one of the keys to the understanding of his position. It is his view that people can relate to God in three different ways. They can relate through the cosmic covenant established with Noah, through the old covenant made with Abraham, and through the new covenant ratified by Jesus. He points out that the new covenant certainly includes "a more complete saving knowledge of God" than does the old, but he argues that salvation is available through all three.[44] For Pinnock, "Faith is what pleases God. The fact that different kinds of believers are accepted by God proves the issue that God is not the content of theology but the reality of faith."[45] He argues that "evangelicals need to become more positive in relation to other religions than historically we have been. There are positive features in other religions due to God's presence and revelation."[46] At the same time, he notes that all religions (including Christianity) have certain negative features:

> It must not be forgotten that sin and Satan operate in the realm of religion too, that religions are adept at producing evil fruit both intellectually and morally, and that truth and error, good and bad, are both at work there. A mixture of positive and negative features is in them all, including Christianity as it has developed historically and become socially embodied. The Bible does not permit us to say that all religions are equal in saving power or are lawful cults until the Gospel arrives.[47]

41. Ibid., 88.
42. Ibid., 92.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 105.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 106.
47. Ibid., 109.

The fifth and final chapter of this work directly confronts the problem of the spiritual destiny of the unevangelized. Pinnock asserts that "the eternal destiny of a very large number of people throughout history who have not had access to the Gospel, and who enter eternity not knowing Jesus Christ, is a pressing problem for theology. It pits access against urgency."[48]

In Pinnock's view the Bible does not address this issue as specifically as many would expect. One reason for this lack of emphasis is that the biblical writers deal with "larger issues of justice and restitution, focusing much less on the judgment of solitary individuals."[49] He recognizes that the Bible does reflect an interest in individual salvation but that this topic receives much less emphasis in the Bible than modern evangelicals generally recognize.[50]

Pinnock also argues that traditional theology generally underestimates the extent of God's generosity and mercy: "We have to confront the niggardly traditions of certain varieties of conservative theology that present God as miserly, and that exclude large numbers of people without a second thought. This dark pessimism is contrary to Scripture and right reason."[51] He contends that many people will ultimately be saved and that this can happen only by including large numbers of unevangelized people.[52] How, then, can this happen?

In Pinnock's view salvation is available to all, even to those who have never heard of Christ. He argues that "God's universal salvific will implies the equally universal accessibility of salvation for all people."[53] This salvation is available through faith, even to those who have never heard the gospel message. He explains his approach:

> In my judgment, the faith principle is the basis of universal accessibility. According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology. Since God has not left anyone without witness, people are judged on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded to that light.[54]

48. Ibid., 150.
49. Ibid., 151.
50. Ibid., 152.
51. Ibid., 154.
52. Ibid., 155.
53. Ibid., 157.
54. Ibid., 157-58.

He continues:

> People cannot respond to light that did not reach them. They can only respond to revelation that did. Scripture and reason both imply that no one can be held responsible for truth of which they [*sic*] were inculpably ignorant; they are judged on the basis of the truth they know.[55]

He quotes with approval the statement of Vatican II that reads:

> They also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God, and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.[56]

In support of his position, Pinnock cites Hebrews 11:6 and gives examples of individuals such as Abraham, Abel, Enoch, Job, Jethro, the Queen of Sheba, and others who were saved by faith without any specific knowledge of Christ. He devotes considerable attention to the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. He concludes that all of these were saved by their faith "even though they knew neither Israelite nor Christian revelation."[57]

Near the end of this work Pinnock confronts the issue of the final judgment. He writes concerning God: "We know he will not cast away those who have had no opportunity to know how good he is. God's enemies will suffer condemnation, but innocent bystanders will not." He continues a few sentences later: "Those who suffer everlasting destruction will not be the unevangelized but those who neither obey the Gospel nor any other form of revelation they have been given. In the last judgment, God's enemies and not the inculpably ignorant are rejected."[58] It is clearly his view that to be lost a person must consciously reject the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Unbounded Love*

Pinnock presents a similar approach in a book entitled *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (1994), coauthored with Robert C. Brow.[59] Near the end of chapter eight, these authors address

55. Ibid., 158.
56. Ibid., 159.
57. Ibid., 162.
58. Ibid., 175.
59. Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

two avenues of salvation. The first suggests that "the unevangelized can be saved exactly as Job was in the Old Testament. He believed in God on the basis of what had been shown to him and was saved by faith just as any Christian is."[60] The other possibility suggests that salvation may occur after death. They write: "Just as babies dying in infancy are saved after death, so the unevangelized can be saved in the hereafter. There are texts in the New Testament that hint at such an outcome (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6), and it was commonly believed among the early church fathers."[61] Although they do not specifically commit themselves, these authors do not deny that either method of salvation is still available today.

*Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*

Pinnock also addresses this issue in his contribution to a work originally published in 1995 under the title *More Than One Way?* It was reissued in 1996 under the title *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World.* This valuable work is a collection of essays and responses by authors who defend different positions on this important issue. John Hick represents pluralism; Clark H. Pinnock presents inclusivism; Alister E. McGrath presents one approach to particularism; R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips present another form of particularism.

Chapter two contains Pinnock's defense of inclusivism and the responses of Hick, McGrath, Geivett, and Phillips. In this essay Pinnock suggests that inclusivism is becoming more and more acceptable both to evangelical lay people and to evangelical scholars. It is a system of thought that engenders hope. It also eliminates the view that God plays favorites or restricts His grace so that large groups of people are denied the opportunity to be saved.[62]

He emphasizes that his approach is grounded in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It confesses faith in God as the Creator who is boundlessly generous. It also confesses "faith in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, full of grace and truth."[63] It confesses faith in the Holy Spirit that "embodies the prevenient grace of God and puts into effect the universal drawing action of Jesus Christ."[64]

In this essay Pinnock discusses Melchizedek and Cornelius just as he did in *A Wideness in God's Mercy.* Concerning Cornelius he writes: "God

60. Ibid., 94.

61. Ibid.

62. Clark H. Pinnock, "Response to R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,* 101.

63. Ibid., 103.

64. Ibid., 104.

used this godly Gentile to teach the apostle Peter that there is no partiality in God's dealings with humanity."[65] For Pinnock, Cornelius represents "the wider hope of the book of Acts and the New Testament generally that affirms that God never leaves himself without witness among all peoples."[66]

He also presents a similar analysis of the kind of faith that is essential for salvation:

> Faith cannot be identified with the adherence to Christianity or any other religion. God saves through faith, through a heart response not confined to a religious framework. God can relate to the human soul inside or outside these structures. It is not under our control where the Spirit breathes. There is no time or space where he is not free to move or where a person cannot call on God for mercy.[67]

*Flame of Love*

Pinnock's most recent contribution to this discussion is his book *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (1996).[68] Chapter six, which he entitles "Spirit and Universality," is especially relevant. He summarizes the chapter by saying that "God desires all to be saved and is found graciously present with every person in every place by the Spirit."[69]

In this chapter he suggests that two errors should be avoided. The first is that all will be saved; the second is that only a few will be saved.[70] He emphasizes prevenient grace and concludes that "even those who have not heard of Christ may establish a relationship with God through prevenient grace."[71] He argues that the possibility of salvation exists for all and that all are free to accept or reject God's grace.[72]

65. Ibid., 109.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 117.
68. Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
69. Ibid., 7.
70. Ibid., 190.
71. Ibid., 199.
72. Ibid., 212.

## RESPONSE TO PINNOCK'S APPROACH

There are several aspects of Pinnock's thought with which many evangelicals (especially Arminians) would agree. He is correct to note that the doctrine of election should be reexamined. The views of Augustine should not simply be accepted as true. It is doubtful, however, that most evangelical theologians today would affirm that election applies only to service and has nothing at all to do with salvation.[73]

Pinnock is certainly correct when he notes that non-Christian religions contain many positive and valuable teachings that Christians should understand and appreciate. He demonstrates a sense of balance and perspective when he writes, "We ought not to judge people of other faiths harshly, refusing to see anything noble. Neither should we naively pronounce their religions vehicles of salvation."[74]

It is one thing to recognize the value of teachings found in non-Christian religions. It is quite another, however, to recognize these non-Christian religions as vehicles through which the message of salvation can be conveyed. Just because a non-Christian religion can produce exemplary persons does not mean that that religion is truly redemptive. As Geivett and Phillips correctly note,

> true saintliness is revealed in Scripture to be a consequence of reconciliation with God on the terms he has stipulated. Reconciliation between God and human beings is mediated by Jesus Christ, and righteousness accrues only to those who are "in Christ" by virtue of their response to "the word of reconciliation."[75]

They also note that, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, believers should urge men and women to be reconciled to God through Christ.[76]

Arminian evangelicals would heartily agree with Pinnock's comments about the eternal destiny of nominal Christians, those who have heard the gospel message repeatedly and have outwardly accepted it but have never really been transformed by it. He writes: "It may even be that

73. For two helpful but divergent discussions of the doctrine of election, see Robert T. Shank, *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott, 1970) and James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

74. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 110.

75. R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "Response to Clark H. Pinnock," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 138.

76. Ibid.

there is a greater danger for nominal Christians to be condemned rather than those who have not heard of Jesus. Jesus said, 'to whom much is given, much will be required' and 'the first shall be last.'"[77]

Without doubt Pinnock is correct when he affirms that "the triune God is free to work out the application of his love and salvation for mankind in the ways he chooses."[78] Yet, one's view of the extent of God's saving grace cannot be developed apart from the information revealed about salvation in the New Testament. The unanimous testimony of the biblical writers is that the coming of Christ decisively altered previously existing concepts of salvation.

The preachers and teachers of the early church went forth with a message that challenged both Jews and Gentiles to "repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, KJV). It is doubtful that the Christians of the first century would have endured great suffering and tribulation to spread the name of Jesus had they believed that men and women could be saved without hearing that message.

Pinnock's affirmation that salvation is still available through the covenants that God made with Noah and Abraham must be examined in light of the teachings of the New Testament. If salvation is still available through these two Old Testament covenants, can it really be said that the ministry of Christ is the decisive element in man's relationship with God? Does this not challenge the New Testament contention that Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of salvation that God made to His people in Old Testament times?

Pinnock is certainly correct to note that "faith is what pleases God."[79] Yet, faith in the biblical sense must always have an object. Otto Michel points out that the family of Greek words from which our modern term "faith" comes describes "that personal relationship with a person or thing which is established by trust and trustworthiness. . . ."[80] The New Testament documents emphasize faith in the risen Christ. Given this emphasis upon faith in the risen Christ, Pinnock's statement that "the issue for God is not the content of the theology but the reality of faith"[81] is indeed a precarious one. The New Testament concept of faith is not devoid of theological content.

77. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 175.

78. Ibid., 79.

79. Ibid., 105.

80. Otto Michel, "Faith, Persuade, Belief, Unbelief," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 587.

81. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 105.

It is certainly true that Old Testament characters like Abraham were saved by their faith in God without any specific knowledge of Christ. In both Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 Paul quotes the famous phrase from Genesis, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (KJV). It should be noted, however, that such men in Old Testament times were followers of the true God and not adherents of various pagan cults.

For Pinnock, Christ is essential for salvation, but the knowledge of Him is not. One can be saved without having any knowledge whatever of Christ and His work. This contrasts sharply with the approach of the early preachers and teachers whose work is recorded for us in Acts and the epistles. When Peter spoke to an audience of diaspora Jews on the Day of Pentecost, he said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36, KJV). Apparently Peter thought it was important for them to know something about Christ and His work.

Pinnock devotes considerable attention to Cornelius. He considers him to be an outstanding example of a "pagan saint." If Cornelius was already right with God, why did the Holy Spirit send Peter to witness to him? If he was such a "pagan saint," why was it necessary for Peter to tell Cornelius the story of who Christ was and what He had done? Apparently Peter thought that Cornelius needed to be saved and that it was important for him to know some basic information about Christ.

At times Pinnock seems to imply that salvation may exist in degrees. The following paragraph illustrates this aspect of his thought:

> It would be better not to speak of anonymous Christians, though. The believing Jew of the Old Testament was not a Christian, and the believing pagan was not a Jew. The language of anonymous Christianity tends to obscure the differences that Jesus makes when he is known through faith in the Gospel. The full-strength salvation he brings is neither found nor available anywhere else. Job and Enoch, even Abraham and Moses, belong to that great cloud of witnesses that spur us on. But that does not make them Christians, anonymous or otherwise (Heb. 12:1). Responding positively to pre-messianic revelation can make them right with God, but it cannot make them messianic believers. They must still wait for the Messiah to come.[82]

82. Ibid.

When Pinnock speaks of "full-strength salvation" being available only to believers in the Christian era, he implies the existence of degrees of salvation. Such an approach certainly takes him outside the mainstream of traditional Protestant theology.

Although the view of Pinnock is certainly to be commended for recognizing the wideness of God's mercy, it is to be faulted because it extends that mercy beyond what the Scriptures teach and what experience will allow. Conscious rejection of Jesus Christ is not the only reason people are lost. Nash explains,

> Inclusivists . . . err by suggesting that the only reason people are lost is because they have rejected Christ. But rejecting Jesus is not the only reason that men and women are lost. There are no innocent human beings. Our problems do not result from the fact that we do not know God. They flow from our failure to assent to the light that we have.[83]

Carl F. H. Henry makes this same point. He writes:

> The perversion of truth, justice, and love is what makes humans heathen. God's fairness is demonstrated because he condemns sinners not in the absence of light but because of their rebellious response. His mercy is demonstrated because he provides fallen humans with a privileged call to redemption not extended to fallen angels. He continues to extend that call worldwide even while some rebel humans spurn it as unloving and unjust and prefer to die in their sins. All are judged by what they do with the light they have, and none is without light.[84]

## EXCLUSIVISM

Exclusivism or restrictivism is the view that in order to be saved one must make a personal confession of faith in Christ. As was noted in the introductory section of this essay, this has been the traditional position of the Christian church throughout its history. This approach has many critics, but it also has many able defenders. One of the most outspoken defenders of the traditional position in the current debate is Ronald Nash. He summarizes this position: "Evangelicals believe that Jesus is the only

83. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 136.
84. Carl. F. H. Henry, "Is it Fair?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own?* 255.

Savior. There is no other savior and no other religion, we believe, that can bring human beings to the saving grace of God."[85] In his study Nash devotes considerable attention to key biblical passages such as John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:9-10, John 3:17-18, and Hebrews 9:27-28. He explains: "I am a restrictivist both because I am convinced it is the view taught in Scripture and because the competing views contain serious flaws, both biblical and theological."[86]

In his study Nash examines carefully the arguments for inclusivism and pluralism and points out what he considers to be the incorrect views of these positions. For example, he criticizes inclusivism's use of general revelation. One of inclusivism's key assumptions is that salvation is available to all men. In order for that to be true, general revelation alone must be sufficient for salvation because all men have not received special revelation. Nash examines Paul's use of the concept of general revelation in the first three chapters of Romans. He concludes that for Paul, general revelation can only establish guilt; it cannot bring salvation. Nash writes: "Paul's teaching that no human being succeeds in living up to the light of general revelation implies that general revelation cannot save; special revelation is required for that."[87]

Nash also criticizes inclusivism's understanding of faith. Inclusivists argue that faith is necessary for salvation, but it is not necessary that Jesus be the object of that faith. Some more generalized faith in God is sufficient. Nash responds: "While we might not all agree on the precise amount of knowledge that is required for saving faith to exist, the information that Scripture provides far exceeds the scanty requirements of the inclusivists."[88] Texts such as John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and Romans 10:9-10 indicate that some knowledge of Christ and His work is necessary for salvation.

Nash also attacks inclusivism's interpretation of Scripture, particularly its use of the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. Inclusivists cite vv. 34 and 35 of this text to indicate that knowledge of Christ is not necessary for salvation. Fearing a supreme being and living a good life are all that is necessary. Nash challenges this approach, responding that "Peter's words in Acts 10:35 complement the oft-cited New Testament emphasis on the centrality of Christ in the salvation process."[89]

85. Nash, "Restrictivism," in *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* by Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 107.
86. Ibid., 110.
87. Ibid., 111.
88. Ibid., 114.
89. Ibid., 122.

Geivett and Phillips present a form of exclusivism that is quite similar to Nash's. They summarize their view in these words: "We hold that individual salvation depends on explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ."[90] They also examine the issue of general revelation, but they approach the issue in a way that differs from Nash's analysis. They recognize the validity of general revelation, but they stress its incompleteness. General revelation brings men and women to the point that they desire a closer relationship with their creator. This desire to know God "also includes a desire to understand the cause of alienation from him and the conditions for reconciliation."[91] This desire leads mankind to expect and anticipate a particular revelation from God. This revelation is what God has given in the Scriptures. These authors then proceed to examine several of the same Scripture passages which Nash notes (Acts 4:12; John 3:16, 18; Romans 10:9-15; and so forth), and they come to similar conclusions. They conclude: "It is difficult to escape the impression that the biblical writers themselves were particularists. The burden of proof weighs heavily on the shoulders of the inclusivist."[92]

Alister E. McGrath presents an approach to particularism that diverges from the approaches presented by Nash and Geivett and Phillips. Nash, Geivett, and Phillips have contrasted their positions with the inclusivist position of Pinnock and Sanders. McGrath contrasts his position with the pluralism of John Hick.

The first part of McGrath's essay is very interesting and informative. He notes, quite correctly, that this entire debate is going on in an atmosphere that is charged with emotion. He writes: "To defend Christianity is seen as belittling non-Christian religions, which is unacceptable in a multicultural society."[93] In this politically and emotionally charged atmosphere, pluralism is an attractive alternative. It teaches that salvation is available through many different religious faiths. This teaching is quite compatible with and acceptable to modern man. Yet, this kind of approach hinders free and open discussion of various approaches to salvation.

McGrath suggests that open discussion between representatives of various religious faiths is positive. He asserts that "a discussion about the place of Christianity among the world religions must be conducted on the

90. R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 214.

91. Ibid., 224.

92. Ibid., 238-39.

93. Alister E. McGrath, "A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 151.

basis of mutual respect, both on the part of Christians for those who are not Christians, and on the part of those who are not Christians for those who are."[94] In a world that wants to see only the similarities between religious faiths, McGrath argues that "it is proper that the religions of the world should be recognized as disagreeing with each other in matters of their beliefs."[95]

According to McGrath, the early church understood salvation to be grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[96] He notes that different religious traditions have different understandings of salvation. He notes that it is perfectly appropriate for a Christian to share his understanding of salvation with others.[97] In the Christian faith, salvation is universal in the sense that it is "not bounded by any geographical, cultural, or social divide."[98] All may come to the wedding banquet if they dress appropriately (Matthew 22:1-12). As McGrath explains, "It is God's wish that all people will be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth."[99] He summarizes: "We are assured that those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved."[100]

McGrath then presents an aspect of his thought that is not generally found in the writings of a particularist. He suggests that we cannot conclude that only those who respond to the gospel message will be saved.[101] He writes, "We must be prepared to be surprised at those whom we will meet in the kingdom of God."[102] He also argues that "God is not inhibited from bringing people to faith in him, even if that act of hope and trust may lack the fully orbed character of an informed Christian faith."[103]

McGrath asserts that God may choose to reveal Himself to people in different ways. For example, he states that "many Muslims become Christians through dreams and visions in which they are addressed by the risen Christ."[104] Preaching the gospel is certainly important, but it is not the only way in which God may reveal Himself to people.

This last aspect of McGrath's thought has proven to be controversial. In their response, Geivett and Phillips point out that God is concerned for

94. Ibid., 156.
95. Ibid., 162.
96. Ibid., 163.
97. Ibid., 176.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid., 177.
101. Ibid., 178.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid., 179.
104. Ibid.

all the unsaved, including those who reject the message of salvation. "But," they write, "this concern does not lead him to revise the conditions he has established for salvation."[105]

Particularist writers insist that it is God's desire that all be saved but that this does not mean they automatically will be. God has established certain conditions for salvation. The most important of these conditions is personal faith in Jesus Christ. They recognize that there is room for legitimate differences of opinion regarding how much knowledge one must have of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Several of these writers have given helpful analyses of key Scripture passages that contribute to this discussion.

Further attention needs to be devoted to the Christian understanding of salvation. McGrath has correctly noted that the Christian concept of salvation is unique. The question of the extent of salvation can only be answered in light of a careful examination of the Christian conception of salvation.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE NATURE OF SALVATION

One crucial and often overlooked aspect of the contemporary debate is the relationship between the wideness of God's mercy and certain New Testament teachings on the nature of salvation. Each of these three approaches (pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism) presents not only a different understanding of the wideness of God's mercy. Each also presents a particular understanding of the salvation experience. Each view must be examined in light of the biblical materials on the nature of salvation, and an effort should be made to determine which of these three perspectives is most likely to produce a Christian conversion.

Conversion is not easy to define because the New Testament writers use a variety of different terms and concepts to describe it. The limitations of space do not permit an examination of all of these terms and concepts, but some attention will be given to two key terms: repentance and faith.

In his discussion of Luke 24:36-53, Darrell Bock discusses the Old Testament origin of the Christian concept of repentance. He writes: "Repentance as rooted in the Old Testament is an important concept, since the Hebrew concept of repentance involves a 'turning.' That is, to repent is to change direction from allegiance to idols to serving the living and true God. This change in perspective embraces Jesus and produces

105. Ibid., 197.

the forgiveness he offers."[106] In this quotation, Bock emphasizes that repentance is more than just changing from one system of thought to another. It includes a change in the course of one's life. It involves turning from sin to God. When viewed from a New Testament perspective, repentance means turning from sin to Christ. Newbigin writes: "To repent is to do the U-turn of mind which enables you to believe what is hidden from sight, the reality of the presence of the reign of God in the crucified Jesus."[107]

Faith is closely related to repentance. If repentance can be conceptualized as a turning from sin to God and to Christ, then faith can be conceptualized as the response of trust in Christ and His work without which no turning is possible. Professor Otto Michel has done a most extensive analysis of the concept of faith.[108] He examines the various Hebrew terms and how they are used. He also examines the Greek terms and how they are used in classical Greek, the Septuagint, Jewish intertestamental writings, and the New Testament.

He notes that this family of Greek words describes "that personal relationship with a person or thing which is established by trust and trustworthiness. . . ."[109] Concerning the specific use of the word "faith" in the letters of Paul, Michel writes: "More important is the pointed use of *pistis* [faith] in the context of Pauline theology to denote the reception of the Christian proclamation and the saving faith which was called forth by the gospel."[110]

Michel calls attention to the important fact that Christian faith, contrary to the popular view, is not some type of "leap in the dark." It is much more than the pious hope that there is some type of god out there somewhere who may somehow reward goodness and overlook sins. Rather it is a relationship of trust that is based on God's revelation of Himself. To be more specific, faith is our response to what God has done for us in Christ. It is the acceptance of Christ and His work that makes it possible for us to enter into the family of the faithful. It is our unconditional trust and reliance upon the work of Christ for salvation.

Several passages of Scripture provide useful summaries of the Christian understanding of salvation. One insightful passage is 1 Thessalonians 1:9 where Paul, describing the conversion of the Thessalonian

106. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* in *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 621.

107. Newbigin, 117.

108. Michel, 587-606.

109. Ibid., 587.

110. Ibid., 599.

believers, noted how they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (NIV). Peter Beyerhaus, the famous German missiologist, after considering this key passage, wrote: "In the biblical concept of conversion, the primary concern is with that *new being* which is given by God."[111] The turning from idols to God could only be accomplished by new beings who had experienced the transforming power of Christ in their lives.

The authors of *The Willowbank Report—Gospel and Culture*, prepared for the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in 1978, captured something of the essence of Christian conversion for our world:

> We are clear that the fundamental meaning of conversion is a change in allegiance. Other gods and lords—idolatries every one—previously ruled over us. But now Jesus Christ is Lord. The governing principle of the converted life is that it is lived under the lordship of Christ or (for it comes to the same thing) in the Kingdom of God. His authority over us is total. So this new and liberating allegiance leads inevitably to a reappraisal of every aspect of our lives and in particular of our world-view, our behaviour, and our relationships.[112]

Helmut Thielicke, the outstanding European theologian and ethicist, also describes salvation as a change in allegiance:

> There is thus a change in lordship in which we are not, of course, mere objects of conflict who the stronger snatches from the weak, but which decisively involves our own Yes and in which we have a part in the struggle. There is no liberation from the dominion of darkness without commitment to the new lordship. The freedom for which we are freed is not the opposite of commitment. It is entry into a new commitment. It is not freedom *from* something. It is also freedom *for* allegiance to the victor.[113]

If, as these authors argue, a change in allegiance is the fundamental meaning of Christian conversion, some attempt must be made to determine whether pluralism, inclusivism, or exclusivism can best produce

111. Beyerhaus, 66.

112. *The Willowbank Report—Gospel and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978), 19.

113. Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 405 (italics in original).

this change in allegiance. It is difficult to see how pluralism can produce a Christian conversion in any traditional sense of that term. If there are many roads to salvation, as this view affirms, it is difficult to see how this system of thought could bring one under the lordship of Jesus Christ. As noted above, Otto Michel reminds us that Christian faith necessitates a unique relationship with Christ built on trust. Pluralism can produce no such unique relationship.

Inclusivism teaches that salvation is available to all through Christ, even to those who have never heard the gospel. According to this position, God has obligated Himself to make salvation available to all human beings. The Scriptures leave little doubt that God loves all human beings and desires to see them saved. Second Peter 3:9, for example, states that "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (NIV).

An inclusivist approach, as attractive as it may seem in the light of the mercy of God and the often expressed desire of God that all be saved, has one fatal flaw. Pinnock's faith principle calls for no change in allegiance. It calls for no specific trust in Christ and His work. It offers no new being in Christ. It is, in essence, conversion without content.

Exclusivism teaches that, in order to receive salvation, one must make a personal confession of and commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior. This conversion experience may take a variety of forms. The essence of this conversion experience is, in the words of *The Willowbank Report*: "But now Jesus Christ is Lord."

In his discussion of the Transfiguration experience in Luke 9:28-36, Darrell Bock describes well the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in accomplishing the work of salvation. He writes:

> Our culture desires to assemble a religious hall of honor from as many religious traditions as possible, all in honor of our commitment to religious toleration. But Jesus does not ask for a booth alongside the others. The heavenly voice notes that he transcends all cultures and is called to minister to all humanity as God's chosen servant. He is the ultimate multicultural figure, calling everyone to himself in the ultimate equal opportunity call. The world does not need the clash of competing religious figures and examples. It needs a Savior for all humanity.[114]

114. Bock, 273.

Such passages as Romans 10:9-10, Acts 4:12, John 14:6, John 1:12, and John 3:16-18 affirm a definite connection between Christ and salvation, and the further Christ is removed from salvation, the less Christian it becomes. In its true Christian sense, salvation cannot be experienced without repentance and faith in Christ. It may be difficult for the modern pluralistic world to accept such a message, but that has been the message of the Christian church from its earliest days.

*J. Matthew Pinson*

# Toward a Theology of the Ordinances with Special Reference to Feet Washing

## INTRODUCTION

The *Treatise of the Faith and Practices of Free Will Baptists* describes feet washing as a "sacred ordinance"[1] that is "of universal obligation, and is to be ministered to all true believers."[2] Free Will Baptists unequivocally affirm that feet washing is a Christian ordinance. Yet, despite this affirmation, Free Will Baptists in the twentieth century have written and preached very little on the doctrine. An informal poll I recently made of Free Will Baptists in their 20s and 30s revealed that most of them had never heard a single sermon on the ordinance of feet washing. Those who had had typically grown up in smaller or rural churches. Even those who had attended one of our colleges could not recall having heard a chapel sermon on the subject.

The reasons for this phenomenon are difficult to ascertain. My suspicion is that it is due to a de-emphasis on ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) among Free Will Baptists. Evangelicals in the twentieth century have given short shrift to ecclesiology. This problem might result from the fact that they have been desperately trying to defend the core of the Christian faith against religious liberalism, secularism, and postmodernism. Thus, they have put what they considered less crucial doctrines on the back burner. I believe this can be said about Free Will Baptists in the twentieth century as well. Primarily, we have (rightly) concerned ourselves with expounding and vindicating the core beliefs of orthodox

1. *A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists* (Antioch, Tenn.: Executive Office, National Association of Free Will Baptists, 1996), chap. XVIII.

2. Ibid., "Articles of Faith," art. 13.

Christianity. Secondarily, we have concerned ourselves with articulating and defending the major distinctive that most often seems to set us apart from others in the evangelical community (both Calvinist and Wesleyan): our doctrine of perseverance.

Too often, though, we have not seen the doctrine of the church as serious enough to merit much attention. We have not sensed a great need to expend energy on the doctrine of baptism, because of the many works on this topic from authors in other Baptist denominations. In the period surrounding the schism with the North Carolina State Convention in the early 1960s, a great deal was said about the self-government of the local church. Little, though, has been done since (here again, we may feel we have the Southern Baptists on our side).

On those doctrines that have historically set us apart from other Baptists, however, we have for the most part remained silent.[3] These doctrines include open communion (and its corollary of not requiring rebaptism for those who have undergone immersion in another Christian denomination) and feet washing as an ordinance. The dearth of serious scholarship on feet washing is at least partially responsible for the ambivalent attitude of a growing percentage of our ministers and laity toward it.

Another contribution to the decline of feet washing among Free Will Baptists is analogous to the decline of church discipline among Free Will Baptists: People don't like it. The reason the practice of feet washing has diminished among us in this century is not because we have submitted it to rigorous biblical, theological, and historical scrutiny and have found it wanting. It is merely that we don't like the idea of it. This reminds me of a conversation I once had with a Free Will Baptist who indicated his disapproval for feet washing. I asked him why he was against it, and he said, "Because it's humiliating." Jeanne Audrey Powers, in an attempt to convince United Methodists to "restore feet washing to the church as one of its central rituals," asks the question, "Why does one discern hints of resistance to the practice?" She then proceeds to ask, "Is it a hesitation to be linked with churches of less social status? . . . Is it that such a ritual,

3. Exceptions to this have been J. C. Griffin's *The Upper Room Ought* (Ayden: N.C.: Free Will Baptist Press, n.d.); E. E. Morris's brief defense of feet washing in his *Handbook of Free Will Baptist Doctrine* (published by the author, n.d.); J. D. O'Donnell's short treatments in *Faith for Today* (Nashville: Randall House, 1968) and *Free Will Baptist Doctrines* (Nashville: Randall House, 1974); Robert Picirilli's succinct treatments in *Church Government and Ordinances* (Nashville: Randall House, 1973) and *The Gospel of John* in the *Randall House Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Randall House, 1989); and occasional one- and two-page articles in *Contact* or *The Free Will Baptist*.

which often produces strong feelings and reactions, smacks of emotion in worship?"[4] These sorts of considerations have contributed to the decline of feet washing among Free Will Baptists in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Having said all of this, I believe that one way to contribute to the restoration of the ordinance of feet washing to its proper place of importance in our midst begins with an investigation of how we think about ordinances, how our interaction with other traditions has shaped our thinking about ordinances, and ways we should proceed to think about ordinances. When we break out of dogmatic molds in our conceptualizing about ordinances, when we free ourselves of the Reformed dogmatic consensus of the evangelical community, when we expose the materialistic selfishness of twentieth-century Christianity for what it is—in short, when we get "back to the Bible"—then we will understand new ways Christ has shown us to reenact His life and work in the ritual structures of our congregations. This kind of thinking will, in turn, open us up to our historic tradition of the washing of the saints' feet. This paper is an attempt to contribute to such a bold project. My hope is that my generation can build upon the theological foundations of previous generations and launch out into radical (Latin *radix*=root, foundation) ways of living out the gospel in the communal life of our churches.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### *Sacraments and Sacramentalism*

To understand how to think about ordinances, it is necessary to look briefly at the treatment of sacraments and ordinances in the history of Christian thought. The medieval Roman Catholic and early Reformation (Protestant) views of the sacraments are important to understand. A knowledge of these views not only helps one see the historical and theological contexts out of which Baptist understandings of ordinances arose. It also (and more importantly) helps one understand why Reformation views of the sacraments predisposed the Reformers to define sacraments the way they did.

The Christian Fathers did not define, enumerate, or classify sacraments or ordinances. Indeed, the question of ordinances and sacraments did not arise until much later in the history of Christianity. Tertullian

4. *Ritual in a New Day: An Invitation* [a study of the Alternate Rituals Project of the Section on Worship of the Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church] (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 25, 27.

(c. 160-c. 220) was the first Christian thinker to employ the Latin term *sacramentum*, but he used it to discuss countless sacred ceremonies.[5] "The same loose usage is found in the writings of Augustine, Hilary, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, and others."[6] Augustine (354-430), though he did not strictly define "sacrament," was the first theologian to use the term in a way similar to its present use. He described a sacrament as a "visible sign of an invisible grace."[7]

The concept of sacrament did not take shape until the end of the seventh century. Yet Augustine had set into motion the central medieval Catholic notion of the sacraments: that they convey divine grace. An example of this doctrine is found in Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1160), who fixed the number of the sacraments at seven.[8] Lombard taught that "God instituted the remedies of sacraments against the wounds of original and actual sin. . . . Sacraments were instituted, therefore, for the sake, not only of signifying [symbolizing] but also of sanctifying."[9] Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defined a sacrament as "a sign of a sacred thing, since it is a means of sanctifying men."[10] Gabriel Biel (c. 1415-1495) insisted that, though people may obtain *gratia gratis data* (grace freely given) without the sacraments, they must partake of the sacraments to receive the *gratia*

5. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Black, 1977), 193; David R. Plaster, *Ordinances: What Are They?* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1985), 16.

6. Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937), 242.

7. Plaster, 16.

8. Baptism, confirmation, the Lord's supper, penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage. It is interesting to note that, in Roman Catholicism, feet washing was viewed as a "sacramental," though not a full-fledged sacrament. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "The action of Christ after the Last Supper (John, xiii, 1-15) must also have invested [the washing of feet] with a deep religious significance, and in fact down to the time of St. Bernard we find ecclesiastical writers, at least occasionally, applying to this ceremony the term *Sacramentum* in its wider sense, by which they no doubt meant that it possessed the virtue of what we now call a sacramental. Christ's command to wash one another's feet must have been understood from the beginning in a literal sense, for St. Paul (I Tim., v, 10) implies that a widow to be honored and consecrated in the Church should be one 'having testimony for her good works, if she have received to harbour, if she have washed the saints' feet'. This tradition, we may believe, has never been interrupted. . . ." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Washing of Hands and Feet," by Herbert Thurston.

9. Peter Lombard, *The Four Books of Sentences* (book 4, distinction 1, chapters 1 and 4) in Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), 338-39.

10. Cited in Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-book of the History of Doctrines*, vol. 2, trans. Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1905), 125.

*gratum faciens* (the grace that makes one a friend of God)—that is, saving grace.[11]

The view that the sacraments transmit divine grace contributed to the theological context of the Protestant Reformation. The Magisterial Reformers (and their followers, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans) reacted strongly against five of the seven sacraments. Of these five the most dangerous was penance, since it reinforced the medieval notion that God rewarded good works (merit) with saving grace. Yet, while the major Protestant Reformers rejected five of the seven sacraments, they still held to a basic sacramentalism. They believed that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper convey divine grace. Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and the English Reformers (Anglicans) believed that the sacraments had a special, saving effect on the partaker. This is borne out in Luther's and Calvin's disagreement with Zwingli and the Anabaptists, who held that the sacraments were merely symbolic and nothing more.

Luther made his views clear in such statements as the following from his *Short Catechism* (1529):

> What is the Sacrament of the Altar? *Answer.* It is the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the Bread and Wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink. . . .
> What avails us to eat and drink thus? *Answer.* This is shown us by the words which stand there, *"Given for you and shed for you for the remission of sins."* That is to say, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are bestowed on us by these words.[12]

Luther held onto the views of Duns Scotus and other medieval thinkers that the sacraments were *efficacia signa* (efficacious signs) of divine grace.[13]

Calvin and his followers were less sacramentalistic than Luther. Yet they still insisted that special grace is present when a faithful partaker receives the sacraments (or an infant of at least one faithful parent receives baptism). In his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus*

11. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 135-40.

12. Martin Luther, "The Short Catechism, 1529," in Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 293-94.

13. Seeberg, 282. It must be stressed here that Luther was vehemently opposed to transubstantiation—the view that the substance of the bread and wine literally *becomes* the body and blood of Christ—and the Lord's supper as a sacrifice. Yet it is clear that Luther still believed that special grace was bestowed on the believing partaker of the supper.

*Christ*, Calvin stated that, in the supper, "the Lord displays to us all the treasures of his spiritual grace, inasmuch as he associates us in all the blessings and riches of our Lord Jesus. . . . It is indeed true that this same grace is offered us by the gospel, yet as in the Supper we have more ample certainty, and fuller enjoyment of it, with good cause do we recognise this fruit as coming from it."[14] The framers of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, followers of Calvin, stated that "a sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers."[15]

The *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Reformation Church of England are even more direct about the nature of sacraments as conveyers of grace: "Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him."[16] With the exception of the Anabaptists and Baptists, most early Protestants (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglican) believed that the sacraments, in some way or another, conveyed divine grace.[17] Thus, they preferred the accepted term "sacrament" to the term "ordinance," which was increasingly used by the Anabaptists and their kin.

*Ordinances*

The Anabaptists wished to cut away the encumbrances of Roman Catholic tradition and follow the pattern of the New Testament churches. In this desire they differed in important ways from the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans. Their "biblicism" or "restorationism" manifested itself in such doctrines as believer's baptism, the church as a gathered community of believers rather than a state church (institutional separation of church and state), and complete freedom of conscience. This biblicism also affected the Anabaptists' conception of ordinances.[18]

14. John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, in John Dillenberger, ed., *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings* (n.p.: Scholars Press, 1975), 512.

15. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 92, in *The Book of Confessions* (New York: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1983).

16. From "Articles of Religion," article 25, in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1892), 652.

17. Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) is an exception to this general rule. His followers either became Anabaptists or eventually merged with the Calvinists. See W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 180-93.

18. Though some early Anabaptist writers used the word "sacrament," "ordinance" eventually became the norm, being more in line with the theology of the Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists wholly rejected sacramentalism. The ordinances, far from conveying divine grace, were symbols or pictures that memorialize Christ and His gospel. This mindset appears in *The Dordrecht Confession,* the most influential of the early Anabaptist/Mennonite confessions of faith. In this confession the Lord's supper is said to be "in *commemoration* of the death and sufferings of the Lord . . . to *remind* us of the benefit of the said death and sufferings of Christ." Feet washing is described as "a sign to *remind* us of the true washing—the washing and purification of the soul in the blood of Christ."[19] The Anabaptists rejected sacramentalism and simply affirmed that ordinances are sacred rites ordained by God. Thus, they freed themselves from any preconceived notion of sacraments—whether Catholic or Protestant, whether seven or two.

The number of ordinances varies from one Anabaptist author to another. For example, Dirk Phillips, a prominent sixteenth-century Anabaptist, listed "the foot washing of the saints" as one of seven Christian ordinances.[20] Some Anabaptists emphasized certain rituals more than others, but they did not define and enumerate sacraments the way the church in the Middle Ages had. In their quest to imitate the simplicity of the primitive church, they merely wanted to reenact those rituals that were enacted in the New Testament. This holds true for American Mennonites today. For example, a widely used Mennonite confession published by a major Mennonite publisher affirms six ordinances: baptism, the Lord's supper, feet washing, women's head covering, the kiss of charity, and anointing with oil.[21]

Our Free Will Baptist forebears, the General Baptists, arose in England in the early seventeenth century. Their doctrine of the church was influenced by the Mennonites. They shared the Anabaptist aversion to sacramentalism and tended toward a biblicist view of ordinances. While in those early days disagreements arose on just which rites were ordinances, the General Baptists maintained a much more open-ended definition of ordinances than did their Particular Baptist brethren, who originated a generation later.

19. *The Dordrecht Confession,* in William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson, 1959), 73-74 (italics added).

20. Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 294.

21. *Mennonites: Who They Are, What They Believe* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Christian Light Publications, n.d.). This is the statement of faith printed in the catalog of Christian Light Publications. For a similar list, see Daniel Kauffman, ed. *Doctrines of the Bible* (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald, 1928), 381. Brethren and Grace Brethren are another example; they practice four ordinances: baptism, the Lord's supper, feet washing, and the love feast (*agape* meal).

The Particular Baptists, who arose out of the Calvinist Independents (Congregationalists) in England, modeled their *Second London Confession of Faith* after the Calvinistic *Westminster Confession of Faith.* In their view many Particular Baptists straddled the fence between an Anabaptist (symbolic, memorial) view of the ordinances and a more Calvinistic view. This is evidenced by chapter 30, "Of the Lord's Supper," in the *Second London Confession.* This chapter affirms the presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's supper: "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally, and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified & all the benefits of his death."[22] This article repeats the *Westminster Confession of Faith* verbatim, except that it uses the word "ordinance" instead of "sacrament." The Calvinist Baptists owed more to the teaching of Calvin and the early Reformed tradition on the nature of the ordinances than the General Baptists did.

*Some Conclusions and Implications*

What conclusions should we draw from this historical sketch? *First,* we must recognize the silence of the early Christian Fathers on this subject. Not until Tertullian was the term *sacramentum* employed. Then it was used to describe all manner of Christian ceremonies and rituals that were taught by Christ and the Apostles. Thus, the Christian Fathers spoke in a general way about various and sundry rituals to be practiced in the churches (though, no doubt, some may have emphasized or practiced certain rituals more or less than others). They did not delineate a set number of sacraments.[23] It is also clear that the concept of sacrament as a means of divine grace did not gain currency until Augustine, and then only in seed form. Not until the seventh century did this conception crystallize. *Second,* we must understand that the essential medieval Catholic conception of sacraments was that they convey divine grace.

*Third,* the Reformers, in their reaction to Catholic dogma, did not reject sacramentalism. They only modified it. This predisposed Luther

22. *The Second London Confession,* in Lumpkin, 293. See also Samuel Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1989), 360-74.

23. Anglican scholar Stephen W. Sykes, discussing the number of the sacraments, offers the following insight: "Modern theology has come to think that the reasons that led Roman Catholics and Protestants to be so certain and vehement in their rival enumerations are far from cogent. On the other hand, the church developed in the course of its history a very large number of rituals. . . ." Stephen W. Sykes, "The Sacraments," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks,* Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 274. Cf. John Macquarrie, "Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist," in *Signs of Faith, Hope, and Love: The Christian Sacraments Today:* (San Fransisco: Collins Liturgical, 1988), 58.

and Calvin to reject feet washing as a sacrament. Their view of sacraments was *synthetic*. They were synthesizing the medieval sacramental tradition rather than dispensing with it and thus were unable to free themselves from the basic sacramental theology of the medieval church. The difference between Roman Catholic sacraments and Protestant sacraments was one of degree, not of kind. In other words, the debate was not over whether the sacraments convey grace, but what degree of grace, and whether faith is necessary for the reception of sacramental grace. Yet there was no disagreement that, in the sacraments, God sovereignly conveys His grace.

This synthetic view of sacraments caused the Reformers to work within the accepted number of sacraments, seven, and decide which ones to keep and which ones to throw out, rather than scrapping the whole medieval sacramental system and starting from scratch. Thus, the Reformers limited the sacraments to two: baptism and the Lord's supper. They were unable to get past centuries of theological accretion. Consequently, they were unable to conceive of sacraments outside of the Catholic seven. Furthermore, it was difficult for them to conceive of God conveying grace through any of the other five Catholic sacraments (marriage, extreme unction, ordination, confirmation, and penance).

It is probable, then, that the Reformers' synthetic view of the sacraments predisposed them not to view feet washing (or anything else) as a sacrament. It would not have made sense to them that something like feet washing could be a means of grace. This notion grew out of the idea that God *sovereignly* conveys His grace through the sacraments. It is easy to understand how God could be seen as sovereignly "acting upon" the passive recipient in baptism or the Lord's supper. It is not so easy to see how God could do the same in the washing of the saints' feet. Thus, the Reformers discounted feet washing of necessity because it failed to measure up to the their definition of sacraments. Additionally, Luther preached against feet washing, using a widely held early Protestant view: Christians should avoid feet washing because of the pomp, circumstance, and pride evident when the pope washed the feet of twelve of his cardinals every Maundy Thursday (the day before Good Friday).[24] First, since

24. It is ironic that present-day Lutherans, in both the ELCA and the Missouri Synod, encourage the practice of feet washing on Maundy Thursday. See, e.g., Jay C. Rochelle, "Improve Your Serve: Foot Washing Jars Us out of Complacency," *The Lutheran Magazine* (April 1996), 10-12. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* contains instructions for feet washing. (Washing feet on Maundy Thursday became popular in the seventh century. The word "maundy" is tied directly to the feet washing command in John 13. Its Latin root is *mandatum*, which means "commandment.")

the pope did it, it must be bad. Second, Luther argued, it is a show of pride and not of humility. To summarize, the Reformers were predisposed to reject feet washing as a sacrament because it failed to meet their criteria of a sacrament: that it is a ritual in which God acts upon faithful recipients, sovereignly conveying His grace upon them.

The reason Anabaptists were predisposed to include feet washing and other rites as Christian ordinances was precisely the opposite. They discarded medieval sacramentalism altogether and started from scratch. Their biblicism forced them to go back to the New Testament for instructions and patterns for the practices of the church. This, in turn, opened them up to a radically different way of conceptualizing about sacraments or ordinances. They began to see ordinances as rites that God *ordained,* nothing more, nothing less. These same attitudes opened the seventeenth-century Baptists to an understanding of the ordinances that was not straitjacketed by medieval notions.

Additionally, the Anabaptists and General Baptists rejected the idea that the sacraments convey divine grace. It was much more natural for them to view a rite such as feet washing as an ordinance, since they rejected the criterion that sacraments are a means of grace. The Particular Baptists, however, limited the ordinances to baptism and the Lord's Supper, perhaps because their view of ordinances was an amalgamation of the sacrament-theology of the Calvinists and the ordinance-theology of the Anabaptists.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT ORDINANCES

With these conclusions in mind, we can discuss how to think about ordinances. The first thing we must admit is that neither "ordinance" nor "sacrament" is used in the New Testament or the Christian Fathers in connection with any particular rituals to be practiced by the church. Therefore, we must conclude that *any delimiting definition of ordinances is wholly arbitrary, since it is not to be found in Holy Scripture.*

This reminds me of the first time I asked Leroy Forlines the question, "What is the definition of 'ordinance'?" He responded, "It depends on whom you're talking to. Basically, most people decide on which practices are ordinances and then make a definition that fits."[25] This was, of course, not the answer I had hoped for, but he got to the heart of the matter. The concept of ordinance, as it is conceived today, is simply not a biblical construct. This truth clears the decks. After years of thinking about Forlines's

25. What Forlines was describing is called "begging the question."

response, it finally occurred to me that any attempt to *limit* the number of ordinances by criteria other than being *ordained* by God in the New Testament is not a biblical endeavor.

I recently had a discussion with a Free Will Baptist pastor who asked me, "Why do we have three ordinances instead of two? Why have we added this third ordinance (feet washing)?" Other Baptists often ask us this question. I answered him by saying, "That is not a biblical question." What I meant is that the question "why three ordinances instead of two" is not a question that the New Testament leads us to ask. We ask this question because we unconsciously feel the need to use Reformed criteria to justify our definition of ordinances. Yet the question "why three instead of two" is a question that arises out of an interaction with Reformed theology, not out of an interaction with the New Testament. The question Holy Scripture compels us to ask regarding the ordinances is not "why do we have three ordinances instead of two?" but "why do we have three ordinances instead of six, eight, or eleven?" The reason so many of us ask the question "why three instead of two" is because, theologically, we live in the shadow of the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition. And it doesn't help when most evangelical theology books written today are written by authors out of this tradition. The question "why do we have three ordinances instead of two" betrays an arbitrary (if unconscious) reliance on Reformed categories.

The second question, however, "why do we have three ordinances instead of six, eight, or eleven" (you name the number), reveals a more biblical way of inquiring about ordinances that rejects the Lutheran/Reformed/Anglican sacramentalist view of ordinances. It should be noted that no place in our *Treatise* or in any other of our historic confessions of faith is the term "ordinance" defined. Furthermore, the number of the ordinances is not explicitly limited. Our *Treatise* states that baptism, the Lord's supper, and feet washing are all three ordinances, but it does not deny that other ordinances (practices ordained by God) ought to be observed regularly in the life of the church. The *1812 Former Articles*, a confession of Free Will Baptists in the South until well into the twentieth century, affirms:

> We believe, as touching gospel ordinances, in believers' baptism, laying on of hands, receiving the sacrament[26] in bread and wine, washing the saints' feet, anointing the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, fasting, prayer, singing praise to God, and

26. The term "sacrament" here is used not in a technical but in a popular sense.

> the public ministry of the Word, *with every institution of the Lord we shall find in the New Testament* (Mark 15:15-16; Acts 8:17; 19:6; Luke 22:19-20; John 13:5-17; James 5:14).[27]

Our *Treatise* says, in effect, "We believe that baptism, the Lord's supper, and feet washing are Christian ordinances," and the term "ordinance" goes undefined.[28] But it obviously does not say the church should *not* practice, for instance, anointing with oil, laying on of hands, or fasting. I am not saying this to make anyone nervous. I am merely trying to show that most of our conversations about ordinances are unduly reliant on Reformed notions of the sacraments (which clearly limit them to only two) and not on a natural reading of Holy Scripture.

Having asked the question, "why do we have three ordinances instead of six, eight, or eleven," one must go to Scripture *inductively* to ascertain what an ordinance is. One must avoid going to the Bible deductively, with a preconceived notion of ordinances based on medieval or modern criteria. Our encounter with the inspired Word should shake us from our arbitrary conceptions of ordinances based on Reformed categories.

*Questions with Which We Must Come to Scripture: Feet Washing As a Case Study*

We are, then, to go to the New Testament inductively to find out what an ordinance is rather than relying on historical definitions of sacrament and ordinance that are not rooted in Holy Scripture. At this juncture I would like to discuss some of these questions as well as some of the problems that arise when asking the Bible questions about ordinances. It is fitting to conduct a case study on feet washing. I will use feet washing as an example of a ritual whose status as an ordinance or non-ordinance we seek to establish by an appeal to the Bible.

*Standard Baptist Definitions of Ordinances.* First, however, let us look at some examples of synthetic definitions of "ordinance" that Baptists have proposed. Below are definitions of ordinances from four of the most respected Northern and Southern Baptist theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

27. This confession is reprinted in J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook: Heritage, Beliefs, and Ministries* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998), 142-47 (italics added).

28. Incidentally, the term "ordinance" goes undefined in the Southern Baptist *Faith and Message;* neither does that confession state anything like "There are two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper." It simply fails to mention any ordinances other than these two.

> *A. H. Strong:* "those outward rites which Christ has appointed to be administered in his church as visible signs of the saving truth of the gospel. They are signs, in that they vividly express this truth and confirm it in the believer."[29]
>
> *W. T. Conner:* "pictorial representations of the fundamental facts of the gospel and of our salvation through the gospel . . . instituted by Christ, for a very obvious reason. That reason is that they are adapted to set forth the facts of the gospel and our experience of salvation through grace."[30]
>
> *Henry G. Weston:* "an outward institution, appointed by Christ, by positive precept, to be observed by all his people to the end of the age, commemorating an essential fact and declaring an essential gospel truth."[31]
>
> *Alvah Hovey:* "emblematic of central facts in the Christian religion; and together [the ordinances] teach in a very impressive manner the vital doctrines of the gospel."[32]

From these four definitions, we can construct a standard Baptist view of the basic elements of an ordinance: (1) it must be an outward ritual; (2) it must be ordained by Christ to be (3) literally perpetuated by His people; (4) it must be pictorially symbolic. As to *what* a ritual must pictorially symbolize to be an ordinance, these authors do not agree. Weston indicates that an ordinance must symbolize an "essential gospel truth"; Strong, "the saving truth of the gospel"; Hovey, "the vital doctrines of the gospel." Conner's definition is a bit more open-ended. He argues that an ordinance is symbolic of "the facts of the gospel and our experience of salvation through grace." W. A. Criswell decides to best them all, offering a definition that is a stereotype of the method Forlines spoke of: choosing which rituals you want to be ordinances and then defining accordingly. Criswell says that for a ritual to be an ordinance, it must be "a picture of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ."[33] Thus, by saying that an ordinance must symbolize Christ's atonement and only Christ's atonement,

29. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), 930.

30. W. T. Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937), 273.

31. E. H. Johnson and Henry G. Weston, *An Outline of Systematic Theology and of Ecclesiology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1895), 329.

32. Alvah Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1877), 312.

33. W. A. Criswell, *The Doctrine of the Church* (Nashville: Convention, 1980), 82.

one constructs an edifice around the doctrine of "the two ordinances" that is seemingly impregnable. Yet such an edifice rests on a sandy foundation because the definition is wholly arbitrary.

*Problems with the Above Definitions.* What are we to make of these standard Baptist definitions of "ordinance"? Before answering that question, I will offer a composite definition that seeks to do justice to all the above definitions, including Criswell's:

> An ordinance is an outward ritual that Christ ordained for perpetuation by His New Covenant People, pictorially to symbolize for and confirm in them the redemptive significance of His life and death.

If this is an accurate composite (and I think it is), should we not accept this as a valid definition of "ordinance"? Feet washing fits all these criteria. Yet this is an invalid definition of ordinances because it is entirely arbitrary. One searches in vain for any scriptural warrant for these definitions. Who told these men that this was the definition of an ordinance? Where, for example, did Criswell read in Holy Scripture that "an ordinance must symbolize the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ"? For that matter, how did we find out that something could be an ordinance only if it were ordained by *Christ*? Are the Father and Holy Spirit any less God than Christ? If, for instance, the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle James, ordained the anointing of the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, is this any less an ordinance because the Holy Spirit ordained it rather than Christ?

How should we respond to such a definition? Elements of these Baptist definitions of ordinances are correct and viable. Yet we must admit that their most important elements are arbitrary and lack scriptural warrant. Having said that, I must add that we can use these definitions to show that *feet washing must be considered an ordinance even by the most exacting of these arbitrary standards.*

*Scriptural Criteria for Ordinances.* We have established the need to avoid creating arbitrary definitions for ordinances to suit our own ends. Now let us return to the subject of the appropriate questions to ask regarding ordinances and see how feet washing measures up. The first question must obviously be, did God explicitly ordain the practice? Of course, if Christ ordained a given practice, we can answer the question in the affirmative. No biblical scholar of any tradition would deny that Christ ordained feet washing in John 13.

On the next question the objection to feet washing as an ordinance arises: Did God intend the practice to be *literal*? The main objection to feet washing is that Christ did not intend it to be practiced *literally*, but only figuratively, in daily acts of humility. This idea arises from the fact that "non-feetwashers"[34] cannot seem to get away from the idea that feet washing in John 13 symbolizes only humility. Only recently have biblical scholars begun to recognize the broad theological symbolism in John 13. They have begun to realize that Christ was not only commanding humility. He was also symbolizing the redemptive significance of His life and death and the radical transformation of the one who experiences union with Him. Thus, people who have argued against feet washing as an ordinance have relied on the assumption that Jesus was commanding daily acts of humility. (I must note here that we have failed in this regard. If in the future we take seriously our task to educate our own people and others in the theological significance of feet washing, we will have gone a lot farther in convincing them of our position.)

The reason non-feetwashers do not observe feet washing as an ordinance is not because they do not think it should be *perpetuated* in the church. They would quickly say that feet washing should be *symbolically* perpetuated in the church in daily acts of humility. The reason they do not observe feet washing is because they do not believe Jesus commanded its *literal* practice in the church. So the issue is not whether feet washing should be perpetuated. The issue is whether it is a command for literal reenactment or merely humble acts.

Non-feet-washing Baptists would be harder pressed to argue against feet washing's literal practice if they understood that it symbolizes more than just humility. If humility were the only thing feet washing pictures, it would be easier to think Jesus was only commanding humility. However, that position becomes more difficult to maintain when one understands that feet washing symbolizes the incarnation and sanctification. If other Baptists could get beyond seeing feet washing in John 13 as merely symbolizing humility and could be taught to see the sanctificational imagery and the incarnational imagery of feet washing, how could they insist that Jesus did not command its literal practice? It is one thing to say:

(1) "In John 13, Jesus is just telling us to be humble."

34. I will use the phrase "non-feetwashers" out of convenience to refer to those who do not believe that feet washing is a Christian ordinance.

It is another thing altogether to say:

> (2) "In John 13, Jesus is just telling us to symbolize the incarnation in our everyday lives."

Statement (2) would be ludicrous, since Jesus just happened to give us a ritual with which to symbolize the incarnation. This second statement would be like saying:

> (3) "When Jesus says to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Himself, He is really just saying to celebrate his death in our everyday lives."

What is the formal difference between statements (2) and (3)? (What is the formal difference between "this do"—the Lord's supper—and "ye ought to do"—feet washing?) There is none. If non-feetwashers could be taught to acknowledge the sanctificational and incarnational imagery in feet washing, they would no more be able to say it is a non-literal command than to say that the Lord's supper is a non-literal command. The Quaker tradition argues that the Lord's supper is merely a command to die daily and be crucified with Christ. Quakers argue that Christ did not require its literal perpetuation. If one believes that Christ commanded literal practice of the Lord's supper because of its symbolism of His death, he is logically compelled to believe that Christ commanded the literal practice of feet washing because of its symbolism of His incarnation and of sanctification. If one acknowledges that Christ in the upper room commanded two rituals, and they both symbolize central truths about His life and death, something external must enter into one's reasoning process to show that one ritual must be practiced literally and the other must not. The question of whether Christ intended the feet washing to be practiced *literally* (a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper)[35] cannot be divorced from the *significance* of feet washing.[36] A treatment of

35. For the best recent treatments of feet washing which contend for its status as ordained by Christ to be literally perpetuated by His people, see Allen Edgington, "Footwashing As an Ordinance," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (Fall 1985): 425-34; Robert E. Picirilli, *Church Ordinances and Government* (Nashville: Randall House, 1973); David R. Plaster, *Ordinances: What Are They?* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1985); John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

36. For an understanding of the significance of feet washing, see especially Picirilli, *Church Ordinances and Government* and Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community.*

the symbolic significance of feet washing is also beyond the scope of this paper, but, briefly, it consists of the following: (1) the humiliation of Christ in His incarnation; (2) our imitation of Christ in humility (Phil. 2); (3) brotherly love and a change in relationships; and (4) daily cleansing from sin/sanctification. As long as people see humility as the only teaching in feet washing, they will continue to think of it as a figurative command to be humble. We must capitalize on recent scholarship that emphasizes the theological significance of feet washing and its ritual aspects (features that have been part and parcel of our own tradition for centuries).[37]

Asking the questions (1) is it ordained by God? (2) is it to be practiced literally? and (3) is it to be perpetuated by God's people? have dealt with some but not all of the components of the composite Baptist definition given above. We have insisted that we must not be constrained to say that, to be considered an ordinance, a practice must have been ordained by Christ only and not by one of the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. This is completely arbitrary.

Now we are left with the following questions: "What about the ritual status of an ordinance?" and "What about the symbolism of an ordinance?" Again, we must understand that these are arbitrary questions that Scripture does not compel us to ask, though feet washing answers both these questions satisfactorily.

First, some things ordained by God may or may not be ritual in nature. Practices like fasting, prayer, worship, and the public ministry of the word are not ritual in nature. Things like baptism, laying on of hands, the Lord's supper, feet washing, and anointing the sick with oil are rituals. Any definition of "ordinance" that stipulates that non-ritual ordinances are not Christian ordinances is derived from some other source than Holy Scripture.

Second, the Baptist definitions above insisted that, to be an ordinance, a practice must be a symbol of the redemptive significance of the life and death of Christ for us. We must again admit that some things ordained by God in Scripture do not so readily conform to this demand. Anointing the sick with oil, for instance, is not explicitly and directly symbolic of the redemptive significance of Christ's life and death for us, though it is symbolic of related gospel truths.

37. For a review of this scholarship, see Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community.*

*Implications of These Conclusions*

So the definition of an ordinance we are left with is as follows:

> A Christian ordinance is a practice that God ordained for literal perpetuation by the New Covenant People of God.

An inductive examination of the Bible reveals that one can subdivide New Covenant ordinances into two categories: ritual ordinances and non-ritual ordinances. Ritual ordinances include such practices as baptism, laying on of hands, the Lord's supper, feet washing, and anointing with oil. Non-ritual ordinances include such practices as corporate worship, the public ministry of the Word, prayer, singing, almsgiving, and so forth. It becomes immediately clear that ritual ordinances are far fewer than non-ritual ordinances.

An inductive investigation of the New Testament also indicates that one can subdivide ritual ordinances into three groups: (1) initiatory, (2) regular, and (3) occasional. We would do better to use these criteria to frame our discussions of ordinances rather than the derived Reformed categories under which we so often labor. Here is what I propose: Baptism is obviously the initiatory ritual ordinance of the Christian church.[38] All denominational traditions acknowledge this. Then we have several occasional ritual ordinances. Most of us would say that (at least) fasting and anointing the sick with oil fit this category. In the middle category are regular ritual ordinances. Every Protestant would admit that the Lord's supper is a regular ritual ordinance of the church, but some would wish to place feet washing in the category of occasional ritual ordinances.

The Free Will Baptist belief that feet washing is a regular ritual ordinance on par with the Lord's supper is able to do two things: First, it is not constrained by the arbitrary "two ordinance" notion described above. In other words, we can hold to feet washing as a regular ritual ordinance on par with the Lord's supper without having to construct a definition of ordinance to suit our fancy. (And we *must* do so if we are to remain faithful to Scripture.) Second, this conception of feet washing also meets the criteria laid down by the "two ordinance" conception (that is, even if one accepts the arbitrary Baptist view of ordinances, he must still admit that feet washing conforms to his own definition).

38. Free Will Baptists in the nineteenth century and earlier, of course, included laying on of hands after baptism as an initiatory ritual ordinance of the church.

The following explanation is an attempt to do both these things. Baptism, as all agree, is the initiatory ritual ordinance of the church. In this initiatory ritual ordinance, the believer memorializes (1) Christ's death and resurrection and (2) his own participation in Christ's death and resurrection, through faith, in death to sin and resurrection to newness of life. Leroy Forlines has masterfully shown us that death to sin in Romans 6 (buried with Christ in baptism, planted together in the likeness of his death, and so forth) refers to atonement and justification—the objective work of Christ in our lives; whereas being raised to newness of life in the same passage refers to sanctification—the subjective work of Christ in our lives that necessarily follows from the objective work. Thus baptism, the intiatory ritual ordinance, symbolizes both the objective and subjective aspects of the redemptive significance of Christ's life and death for us.[39]

Protestant theologians agree that the Lord's supper is a regular ritual ordinance that, among other things, reminds us of what our baptism was all about. This presents us with a great problem, however. The initiatory ritual ordinance, baptism, symbolizes the objective and subjective aspects of our union with Christ, Christ's death and resurrection, our death to sin and resurrection to newness of life, our justification and sanctification. It is inconceivable that the only *regular* ritual ordinance of the church for us to commemorate what Christ has done for us presents a bifurcated picture of our redemption. Yet, if the Lord's supper is the only regular ritual ordinance of the church, that is the result. The Lord's supper represents the objective aspects of the work of Christ for us, His death, our death to sin, our justification. To observe only the Lord's supper in the life of the church gives the church an imbalanced picture of our Christ's work for and in us and our life in Him.

*The traditional Free Will Baptist understanding of feet washing in connection with the Lord's supper corrects this dichotomized presentation of our redemption in Christ and its meaning.* It is no accident. Baptism pictorially symbolizes

- Christ's death *and* resurrection
- death to sin *and* resurrection to newness of life
- justification *and* sanctification
- the objective *and* subjective aspects of our union with Christ

39. F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans* in the *Randall House Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Randall House, 1987).

In short, baptism symbolizes the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and their redemptive significance for us. Yet the Lord's supper—by itself—represents *only* Christ's death, our death to sin, justification, the objective aspect of our union with Christ. The Lord's supper in itself does not symbolize the gospel in its entirety.

To symbolize *meaningfully and completely* the redemptive significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and thus not exclude its radical, life-changing efficacy in our subjective experience, the church must observe two regular ritual ordinances. The Lord's supper, by itself, will not do it. Thus I propose that it is no coincidence that Christ commanded the washing of the saints' feet in connection with His holy supper, because only by having the supper and the feet washing *together* can we pictorially symbolize our wondrous redemption in the corporate life of the church.

Thus, as I have said before, Free Will Baptists believe in a "two-pronged communion."[40] In the first prong of communion, the Lord's supper, we celebrate what God in Christ has done:

- Christ's death
- our death in Him
- justification
- the objective
- the vertical (our relationship upward, to God)

In the second prong, feet washing, we celebrate the effects in our everyday lives of what God in Christ has done for us:

- Christ's resurrection
- our resurrection to newness of life
- sanctification
- the subjective
- the horizontal (our relationship outward, to others)

The Lord's supper and feet washing are thus complementary. Like love and marriage, "you can't have one without the other." Or, at least, having one without the other is incoherent and presents a bifurcated picture of our redemption in Christ.

Christ underscored the objective and subjective, vertical and horizontal aspects of the gospel in Matthew 22:37-40. He said there that the

40. Pinson, 89.

first and great commandment was "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Yet he did not stop there. He referred to a second commandment that was integrally linked to the first: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He then underscored His point by declaring: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." As I said in another place, this is the "two-pronged gospel: a right relationship with God which radically changes our attitudes toward ourselves and others. If the second commandment is not kept, . . . then the first is also broken."[41]

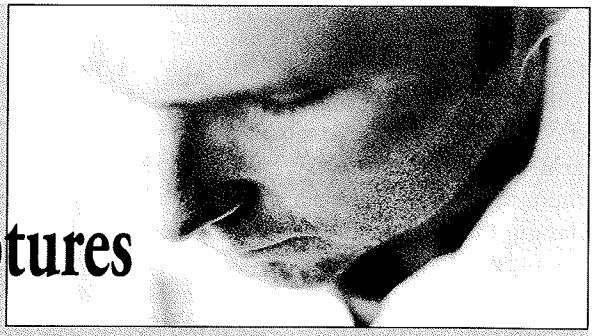
Just as Christ has left the church with an intiatory ritual ordinance that symbolizes His full-orbed gospel, so has He left us with two regular ritual ordinances that, together, symbolize that gospel. By observing feet washing, we realize in the church's corporate life and worship that salvation is not just objective reconciliation with God through the death of Christ. We ritually demonstrate that this reconciliation brings us into a new kind of life subjectively—resurrection life that issues forth in sanctification and breaks out into a radically new way of being reconciled to others through Christ. Only by observing both the Lord's supper and feet washing can we meaningfully—and scripturally—symbolize the gospel in the rites of the church.

Feet washing is not something we should be embarrassed about. I believe that the regular, ritual practice of feet washing as an ordinance is something that Free Will Baptists have to offer the body of Christ in the twenty-first century that can assist in a reformation of Christ's church at home and around the world. Yet, before we can do this, we must reject materialistic selfishness and individualism, and we must get out from under the shadow of a Reformed orthodoxy that we question at so many other points.[42] We must reach deep within our tradition as Free Will Baptists and mine the gems of the past. This is the only way we can hope to forge a viable and vibrant Free Will Baptist witness for Christ and His truth in the twenty-first century.

41. Ibid.

42. I want to stress here that I do not wish to give the impression that we disagree with Reformed orthodoxy on the core doctrines of the Christian faith. I consider Free Will Baptists Reformed not only in the cardinal doctrines of the faith but also with regard to the doctrines of Scripture, sin, depravity, the nature of atonement, justification, sanctification, and the scriptural regulation of worship.

# Consider The Scriptures



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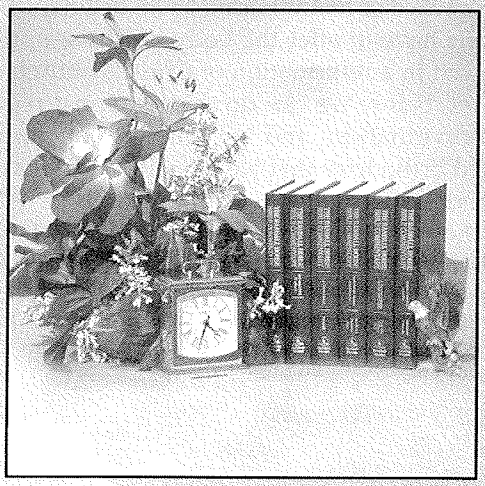

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*Paul V. Harrison*

# Christ, the Sacraments, and Man in the Thought of John Chrysostom

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In the year 347, a military family in Antioch of Syria celebrated the birth of a baby boy. This boy named John was destined to become one of the foremost spokesmen for Christianity in the fourth century. Though John's father died shortly after the boy's birth, he was scrupulously reared by his mother Anthusa. She carefully trained the lad, instilling Christian principles in him from his earliest years.

The boy proved to be precocious and soon came to study under the famed instructor of rhetoric, Libanius. Quite successful as a speaker and writer, John turned his attention to the church, eventually spending about six years as a monk, secluded from the temptations of the world and shut up with the Holy Scriptures.

Following these years of severe privation, the young man became a minister (first a deacon and then a presbyter) in the church in Antioch, and immediately his oratorical skills became evident to everyone. With John's fame spread far and wide, when Constantinople needed a new religious leader, they looked to him as a replacement. He became the head of the Eastern Church in 398, preaching daily and calling for monk-like asceticism from his people. His austere lifestyle and pointed preaching led to trouble with the royal family who resided in Constantinople. He was eventually sent into exile and died in 407. Because of his eloquence, later generations dubbed him Chrysostom, golden mouth.[1]

## THEOLOGY

Attention is commonly focused on John's preaching rather than his theology. Preuschen's comment in the *Protestant Encyclopedia* is the norm:

1. J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), *passim.*

"The history of dogma has scarcely any reason for devoting a chapter to Chrysostom."[2] Baur agreed: "Chrysostom . . . possessed no great significance as a theologian."[3] The late J. N. D. Kelly, the great preacher's most recent biographer, suggested the reason John did not fall in with the speculative or more abstract theologians: "He was by nature much more a practical than a dogmatic theologian. All his life he had been convinced that to rack one's brains about the being of God, which in the last resort transcends human comprehension, was one of the most presumptuous sins of heretics."[4] John's own words, in commenting on John 1:1, make clear his thinking: "And I know indeed that what now has been said cannot by many be comprehended, and therefore it is that in many places we avoid agitating questions of human reasonings, because the rest of the people cannot follow such arguments, and if they could, still they have nothing firm or sure in them."[5]

Therefore, one who reads Augustine and then takes up Chrysostom cannot but see the difference in bent. While this is true, however, one should not conclude that John did not build his preaching ministry upon foundational theology. He ministered in a day when theological dispute was not just the domain of the clergy but was the common property of the laity alike. For that matter, what can anyone preach but theology?

To ascertain John's theology, however, takes special effort, for while his literary output was prodigious, he never penned anything like a broad theology. His various stances must, by and large, be pieced together from his various homilies. The remainder of this paper will seek to do just that, with attention to his understanding of the divinity of Christ, his approach to the sacraments (baptism and communion), and his view of man's will.

## THE PERSON OF CHRIST

When John took up the mantle of presbyter in Antioch in 386, the Council of Nicea with its focus upon the deity of Christ was only sixty-one years past. This first ecumenical council had attempted to deal with the teachings of Arius of Alexandria, who had asserted that "there was a

2. Quoted in Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time,* trans. M. Gonzaga, 2 vols. (London: Sands & Co., 1959), 1:366.

3. Baur, 1:355.

4. Kelly, 195-96.

5. Chrysostom, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* first series (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 14:17. (This set hereafter cited as NPNF1.)

time when the Son was not"; that is, there was a time when He did not exist.

In the technical language of the day, the council had adopted a statement which argued that the Son of God was eternal, uncreated, and of the same essence (*homoousios*) with the Father. Arius and his followers (and they were many and sometimes prominent) maintained that Jesus was of *like* essence (*homoiousios*) with the Father but was not of the *same* essence. These two schools of thought continued to struggle with each other, and in 381 Meletius, bishop of Antioch, presided over the Council of Constantinople which, among other things, ratified Nicea's findings.

John, therefore, ministered in a setting in which the absolute divinity of Christ was greatly debated. Since the days of Nicea, things had become even more complicated. There were several offshoots from each of the different positions, and the original *homoousios* adherents had changed their terminology a bit, seeking to avoid the charge of confusing the persons in the Godhead. Thus, those who believed that the Father and Son were of the same essence sometimes used the term "like" in order to sidestep this charge.[6] We see these very lines of contention drawn in the instruction John offered to his catechumens:

> But if the Arians wish to trip you up, you should know for sure that you must block up your ears to what they say. Answer them with confidence, and show them that the Son is like in substance (*homoios . . . ousia*) to the Father. For it is the Son Himself who said: "As the Father raises up the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He will," and in all things He shows that He has equal power (*isen . . . dynamin*) with the Father. And if, on the other side, Sabellius desires to destroy sound doctrines by glossing over the distinction of Persons (*hypostaseis*), my beloved, wall up your ears against him too, and teach him that the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one (*mia*), but that there are three Persons (*treis hai hypostaseis*). For neither could the Father be called Son, nor the Son Father, nor could the Holy Spirit be called anything other than that. Each remains in His own Person, but each possesses equal power (*ten isin dynamin*). You must also keep this truth firmly fixed in your minds, that the Holy Spirit is the same dignity (*hautes axias*) as the Father and the Son.[7]

6. Kelly, 11-12.

7. Thomas M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom*, Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity, no. 15, ed. Johannes Quasten (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 16-17.

One group that John was especially called to deal with was the Anomoeans. These were radical Arians who denied not only that Jesus was *homoousios* but also that He was *homoiousios*. They were therefore dubbed Anomoeans (*a*, "not" + *homoios*, "like").

John encountered these men both at Antioch and at Constantinople. In commenting upon John 1:1, probably at Antioch, he asserted: "For neither Father nor Son are limited in any way. Since, if 'there is no end of His greatness' (Ps. cxlv.3), and if 'of His wisdom there is no number' (Ps. cxlvii.5), it is clear that there cannot be any beginning in time to His Essence." Later in the same homily, he combated the argument that a son must chronologically follow his father:

> Tell me, then, does the radiance of the sun proceed from the substance itself of the sun, or from some other source? Any one not deprived of his very senses needs must confess, that it proceeds from the substance itself. Yet, although the radiance proceeds from the sun itself, we cannot say that it is later in point of time than the substance of that body, since the sun has never appeared without its rays.[8]

Again countering the charge that the Word had a beginning, having been made by the Father, John emphasized the language used in John 1:

> What then hindered him [John the Baptist] from saying, that "In the beginning God made the Word"? at least Moses speaking of the earth says, not that "in the beginning was the earth," but that "He made it," and then it was. What now hindered John from saying in like manner, that "In the beginning God made the Word"? For if Moses feared lest any one should assert that the earth was uncreated, much more ought John to have feared this respecting the Son, if He was indeed created.[9]

John's orthodoxy on this subject is again explicit in his exposition of Philippians 2:5-8. He named and spoke specifically against Arius, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcion, Valentinus, and others. The thrust of his argument is that "he [the Son] is no way inferior to the Father."[10] As he argued in his *Demonstration against the Pagans That Christ Is God from the Sayings concerning Him in Many Places in the Prophets*, "do you see how, in

8. NPNF1, 14:17.
9. NPNF1, 14:12.
10. NPNF1, 13:207.

a few words, the prophet made it altogether clear that Christ, still remaining God, became man?. . . "[11]

## SACRAMENTS

Regarding baptism, John's thought and teaching fit that of his day. While "most of Chrysostom's teaching about baptism presupposes adult converts receiving this sacrament,"[12] he apparently did accept infant baptism, which was growing in popularity.[13] Augustine, defending John against a charge of Pelagianism, quoted him as saying that "we baptize infants to impart holiness and goodness, as well as to establish a relationship with God."[14] I have been unable to find this passage in John's writings. Regardless of its authenticity, overwhelmingly his focus was upon believer's baptism.

Immersion was Chrysostom's approach. Commenting on the statement of Jesus that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" in John 3:5, he stated:

> For when we immerse our heads in the water, the old man is buried as in a tomb below, and wholly sunk forever; then as we raise them again, the new man rises in its stead. As it is easy for us to dip and to lift our heads again, so it is easy for God to bury the old man, and to show forth the new. And this is done thrice, that you may learn that the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost fulfilleth all this.[15]

11. *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 73, *Saint John Chrysostom: Apologist*, trans. Margaret A. Schatkin and Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 192. The prophet Chrysostom refers to is actually Baruch, though he states that it is Jeremiah.

12. R. A. Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God: The Pastoral Theology of John Chrysostom*, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, vol. 101 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 105.

13. W. R. W. Stephens, in *Saint John Chrysostom, His Life and Times: A Sketch of the Church and the Empire in the Fourth Century*, 3d. ed. (London: John Murray, 1883), 409, stated: "I have failed to find any passages in which Chrysostom urgently inculcates infant baptism."

14. Quoted in Stephens, 396.

15. NPNF1, 14:89. This description fits well with Philip Schaff's general comment: "Immersion continued to be the usual form of baptism, especially in the East; and the threefold immersion in the name of the Trinity." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity*, vol. 3 of *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (n.p.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:486.

Did John view baptism as essential to salvation? His comments on this same passage can leave no doubt as to the answer. Discussing the differences between the catechumens and the fully initiated (that is, the baptized), he warned: "For if it should come to pass, (which God forbid!) that through the sudden arrival of death we depart hence uninitiated, though we have ten thousand virtues, our portion will be no other than hell, and the venomous worm, and fire unquenchable, and bonds indissoluble."[16]

Exploring a broader meaning behind the healing at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, he explained: "A Baptism was about to be given, possessing much power, and the greatest of gifts, a Baptism purging all sins, and making men alive instead of dead. These things then are foreshown as in a picture by the pool . . ."[17] While John is known for often being carried away and stating more than he really meant, there can be little doubt but that he saw baptism as regenerative, as an "instrument of remission of sin."[18] First Corinthians 6:9-10 ("but you were washed . . .") was one of the texts John called into service to prove the cleansing efficacy of "the laver of regeneration," as he called it.[19]

Thus, John understood baptism to wash away sin. In this setting especially, post-baptismal sins were most serious. Springing from this understanding, therefore, was the natural tendency to postpone the rite to as late in life as possible, which often meant the deathbed. In such cases it was dubbed "clinical" (*kline*, bed) baptism. Though it appears that John's own baptism had been delayed by his mother due to such thinking, he railed against such delays.

John opposed these deathbed baptisms, which he apparently sometimes was called upon to perform. He gave his reasons in his *Instructions to Catechumens*. First, such baptisms were performed upon individuals "differing nothing from a corpse" and thus totally oblivious to the moment. In such cases the soul, technically present, "is as a useless log, or a stone." Second, these last-hour baptisms made the preacher's coming a cause for despair:

> Then in the midst of its tumult and confusion, the Priest enters, more formidable than the fever itself, and more distressing than death to the relatives of the sick man. For the entrance of the Presbyter is thought to be a greater reason for despair than the

16. NPNF1, 14:89.
17. NPNF1, 14:126.
18. Stephens, 410.
19. NPNF1, 9:160-61.

> voice of the physician despairing of his life, and that which suggests eternal life seems to be a symbol of death.[20]

Finally, counting on such baptisms (one wonders if they were immersions) was dangerous, for, when the minister comes, "the soul has often taken its flight."[21]

Regarding the holy supper, John's language is most interesting. He often urged his auditors to reflect upon the awesome significance involved in the ceremonies: "I would give up my life rather than impart of the Lord's blood to the unworthy."[22] Here, John's stress upon the importance of the service is in full view. In another place, again emphasizing the solemnity of the supper, he stated: "For this cause even the awful mysteries, so full of that great salvation, which are celebrated at every communion, are called a sacrifice of thanksgiving, because they are the commemoration of many benefits, and they signify the very sum of God's care for us, and by all means they work upon us to be thankful."[23]

The question arises concerning John's use of "sacrifice" for the supper. In the above passage, the translator has loosely rendered *eucharistia* as "sacrifice of thanksgiving." Given the later significance of the concept of sacrifice when used in connection with the communion service, this is a most poor and misleading translation. However, while in this passage the idea of sacrifice is not present, elsewhere it is clearly seen. Later in this same homily, John referred to "when that sacrifice is set forth," and here the translation is accurate.

Perhaps John is nowhere more descriptive of the communion service, however, than in his *On the Priesthood*. In emphasizing the serious nature of the role of pastor/priest, he turns attention to what he loves to call the "awful mysteries":

> For when thou seest the Lord sacrificed, and laid upon the altar, and the priest standing and praying over the victim, and all the worshippers empurpled with that precious blood, canst thou then think that thou art still amongst men, and standing upon the earth? Art thou not, on the contrary, straightway translated to Heaven, and casting out every carnal thought from the soul, dost thou not with disembodied spirit and pure reason contemplate the things which are in Heaven? Oh! what a marvel!

20. NPNF1, 9:160.
21. Ibid.
22. NPNF1, 10:496.
23. NPNF1, 10:174.

> what love of God to man! He who sitteth on high with the Father is at that hour held in the hands of all, and gives Himself to those who are willing to embrace and grasp Him. And this all do through the eyes of faith![24]

We should not, however, conclude that what became the Roman Catholic teaching of the supper being a "bloodless" (*anaimaton*) sacrifice was involved in John's language. Speaking of this usage by the Fathers, especially Augustine and John, John Calvin observed: "Indeed, they use the word 'sacrifice'; but at the same time they explain that they mean nothing else than the remembrance of that one true sacrifice which Christ, our sole Priest . . . made upon the cross."[25]

We need not rely upon Calvin's words, for John himself explains his usage of sacrificial language in his sermon on Hebrews 9:24-26: "He [Christ] is our High Priest, who offered the sacrifice that cleanses us. That we offer now also, which was then offered, which cannot be exhausted. This is done in remembrance of what was then done. For (saith He) 'do this in remembrance of Me.' (Luke xxii.19.) It is not another sacrifice, as the High Priest, but we offer always the same, or rather we perform a remembrance of a Sacrifice."[26] This last clause (*mallon de anamnesin ergazometha thusias*), especially the use of *anamnesin* (remembrance), points away from any real sacrificial understanding on Chrysostom's part.

Of course, the preacher's eucharistic language also raises the question of whether he saw some "change" in the elements of the service. Again, we are beset with difficulties in reaching a conclusion on this issue, for the eloquent preacher was notorious for flowery language which, if pressed to its literal meaning, would be ridiculous. Yet, his words must not be simply sloughed off as uninstructive.

So what did John say on this issue? As noted above, the Christian's first communion service immediately followed his baptism. The initiated believer would rise from the water and recite the Lord's Prayer. Then, the great preacher said, ". . . straightway thou takest into thee the Lord Himself, thou art mingled with His body, thou art intermixed with that Body that lieth above, whither the devil cannot approach."[27]

24. NPNF1, 9:46-47.

25. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1438

26. NPNF1, 14:449.

27. NPNF1, 13:287.

Another revealing passage on this subject is found in John's eighty-second homily on Matthew, which focuses on the institution of the Lord's supper. Commenting on Jesus' words "This is my blood," he explains:

> But this He said, indicating thereby, that His passion and His cross are a mystery, by this too again comforting His disciples. And like as Moses saith, "This shall be to you for an everlasting memorial," so He too, "in remembrance of me," until I come. Therefore also He saith, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover," that is, to deliver you the new rites, and to give a passover, by which I am to make you spiritual.
>
> And He Himself drank of it. For lest on hearing this, they should say, When then? do we drink blood, and eat flesh? and then be perplexed (for when He began to discourse concerning these things, even at the very sayings many were offended), therefore lest they should be troubled then likewise, He first did this Himself, leading them to the calm participation of the mysteries. Therefore He Himself drank His own blood."[28]

It appears here that when John referred to the disciples' potential question of "do we drink blood, and eat flesh?" he assumed a negative answer was to be given. "No," he seemed to present as Jesus' answer, "this is not really flesh and blood, for, see, I will drink it." Yet, at the same time that he implied this understanding, he also spoke of Jesus' drinking "His own blood." This seems to be a rhetorical flourish, not to be taken literally.

One final passage should be cited. In one of his sermons, John declares:

> It is now time to draw near the awe-inspiring table. . . . Christ is present, and He who arranged that first table, even He arranges this present one. For it is not man who makes the things which are set before us become the body and blood of Christ, but it is Christ Himself, who was crucified for us. . . . This expression ["this is my body"] changes the character (*metarruthmizei*) of the elements, and as that sentence, "increase and multiply," once spoken, extends through all time, enabling the procreative power of our nature, even so that expression, "this is my body," once uttered, does at every table in the churches from that time to the present day, and even till Christ's coming, make the sacrifice perfect.[29]

28. NPNF1, 10:492.
29. Quoted in Stephens, 413.

One might think that such language forces the conclusion that Chrysostom understood a literal change to take place in the elements, but there are compelling reasons not to press the preacher's words too hard. First, we must remember that he was highly trained and skilled in rhetoric. Where today special emphasis is placed upon writers, in his day, the rhetor, the public speaker, was the great man. These orators were termed "sophists," for not only did they trade in verbiage but they were considered men of wisdom. These sophists were especially known for making "extensive use of hyperbole, of arresting metaphors and striking comparisons."[30] Regardless of how Chrysostom's language is finally interpreted, one cannot help but see the impress of Libanius's instruction upon the preacher's words. Therefore, his tendency to overstate for rhetorical effect must temper our conclusions.

Adding yet a further reason to exercise care in interpreting such language, Schaff argued that, since eucharistic controversies were the focus of later centuries and therefore not in the bishop's thinking, "it would be unjust to press his devotional and rhetorical language into the service of transubstantiation, or consubstantiation, or the Roman view of the mass."[31] As issues gain the spotlight and become well-defined, the language employed in earlier days without misunderstanding must often be modified to reflect the new context. In connection with this, we must remember that, if Jesus Himself used strong metaphors to convey His meaning, the continued use of such language by others can hardly be an occasion for criticism.

In summary, then, John gave strong emphasis to the communion service. He used metaphorical language reminiscent of Jesus' words, language that especially reflected his rhetorical training. While we cannot speak with certainty, it seems likely that he did not see a literal change in the elements, though his language is not consistent. Certainly it is obvious that the language John used helped to lead toward that later conclusion. With more confidence one can say that where Chrysostom employed sacrificial language, he was merely harking back to the fact that the communion service indeed was a remembrance of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

30. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 96.

31. NPNF1, 9:21.

## MAN'S FALLEN CONDITION

Chrysostom labored not among books but among men. His world was one of exerting his powers to lead men to holy living. Therefore, he brought theology to bear upon the need to strive for holiness. One question in man's quest for righteousness relates to his present condition. John understood man to suffer from a fallen condition, and that condition he saw as tied to Adam's transgression in the garden. Preaching on Genesis 3 and the Fall, Chrysostom concluded his sermon by comparing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the tree of the cross: "The former tree brought death, death entering the scene after the Fall, remember, whereas the latter endowed us with immortality; one drove us from paradise, the other led up to heaven."[32]

The classic passage in John's works that deals with original sin is his sermon on Romans 5:12ff. In his opening paragraph, he asked: "But what means, 'for that all have sinned'? This; he having once fallen, even they that had not eaten of the tree did from him, all of them, become mortal."[33] Later in the homily he referred to Adam's disobedience "which marred all things." And again he made this point when he compared Adam and Christ:

> Now this is why Adam is a type of Christ. How a type? it will be said. Why in that, as the former became to those who were sprung from him, although they had not eaten of the tree, the cause of that death which by his eating was introduced; thus also did Christ become to those sprung from Him, even though they had not wrought righteousness.[34]

Chrysostom again linked mankind's curse of death and Adam when explaining Ephesians 2. He taught that death "had its origin in the transgression of the first-created man, and thenceforward in its issue it passed into a nature."[35]

A further question should be asked: Did John understand Adam's sin to pass on to humanity not only death but also guilt? It appears that he did not. He touched upon this in his sermon on Romans 5. Before moving from his discussion of Adam's impact upon humanity, he summarized Paul's teaching on the subject: "he [Paul] had shown that the world

32. *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 74, *Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 221.
33. NPNF1, 11:401.
34. NPNF1, 11:402.
35. NPNF1, 13:65.

was condemned from Adam, but from Christ was saved and freed from condemnation."[36] While he made reference to "condemnation," he elsewhere suggested that he saw only death and a tendency to sin passed on and not guilt. For example, in discussing Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners," he commented:

> But how would it follow that from his disobedience another would become a sinner? For at this rate a man of this sort will not even deserve punishment, if, that is, it was not from his own self that he became a sinner. What then does the word "sinners" mean here? To me it seems to mean liable to punishment and condemned to death.[37]

Stephens was then correct when he argued that "Chrysostom would thus readily allow the expressions 'hereditary tendency to sin,' 'hereditary liability to the punishment of death,' but he shrinks from the expression 'hereditary sin.'"[38]

Though Chrysostom accepted this teaching that death passed to all men because of Adam's sin, he still struggled with the whole idea that mankind, or any individual for that matter, should suffer for the wrongdoing of another. He struggled with it, but he believed it: "For that one man should be punished on account of another does not seem to be much in accordance with reason. But for one to be saved on account of another is at once more suitable and more reasonable. If then the former took place, much more may the latter."[39]

These excerpts from Chrysostom's works mesh somewhat with what a fifth-century Pelagian named Julian of Eclanum said about him. Julian quoted Chrysostom as saying: "We baptize children, though they are not stained with sin, in order that holiness, righteousness, sonship, inheritance, and brotherhood may be imparted to them through Christ."[40] Though one might think that the practice of infant baptism would be unnecessary if no sin is understood to stain the child, the two ideas at this time had not yet been fully tied to each other.[41]

36. NPNF1, 11:404.
37. NPNF1, 11:403.
38. Stephens, 394.
39. NPNF1, 11:402.
40. Schaff, 3:481. Schaff noted: "The passage is not found in the writings of Chrysostom. Augustine, however, does not dispute the citation, but tries to explain it away (*contra Julian*, i. c. 6, section 21)."
41. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 290-92.

If Chrysostom accepted humanity's tendency to sin, he also accepted that man could overcome that tendency: "For our will is bound by no limits of nature, but hath freedom of choice for its privilege."[42] This power to overcome, to him, is what established man's responsibility, for now if we fail, "we are ourselves to blame for our own destruction."[43]

One should not conclude that Chrysostom deemed man in and of himself to be able of overcome temptation. He realized that divine assistance was essential to overcoming man's innate leaning toward sin:

> Even if we be infinitely wise, even it we are mightier and stronger than all men, yet in the absence of His grace we shall not be able to withstand even the most ordinary temptation. . . . For even if one were a Paul, or a Peter, or a James, or a John, yet if he should be deprived of the divine help he would easily be put to shame, overthrown, and laid prostrate.[44]

Again, when dealing with 1 Corinthians 10:13 ("No temptation has seized you . . ."), he stated: "For the ability [to overcome] lies in God's gracious influence; a power which we draw down by our own will. . . . For, saith he, not even those moderate temptations, as I was remarking, may we bear by our own power."[45] Such teaching as this, both respecting the ability to overcome temptation and to be saved, prompted Schaff to state flatly: "He is a decided synergist."[46]

Chrysostom carried his belief in the freedom of the will to its logical end: that man, though converted, can still fall and finally be lost. He explained:

> And if thou art desirous to become good, there is, none to hinder us; or rather there is one to hinder us, the devil, yet hath he no power, so long as thou choosest what is best, and so attractest God to thine aid. But if thou art not thyself willing, but startest aside, how shall He protect thee? Since not of necessity or compulsion, but of thine own will, He wills thee to be saved. For if thou thyself, having a servant full of hatred and aversion for thee, and continually going off, and fleeing away from thee, wouldest not choose to keep him, and this though needing his services; much less will God, who doeth all things

42. NPNF1, 10:198.
43. NPNF1, 10:155.
44. NPNF1, 9:212-13.
45. NPNF1, 12:138-39.
46. Schaff, 3:937.

> not for His own profit, but for thy salvation, choose to retain thee by compulsion.[47]

As Stephens put it, in Chrysostom's thinking Paul might have relapsed and Judas might have been saved.[48]

## CONCLUSION

John Chrysostom stands with the giants of the early Fathers. His approach to biblical exposition was clearheaded, and the combination of that approach to Scripture with his rhetorical abilities made for an outstanding preacher of the Word.

Yet, while he approached Scripture matter-of-factly, he was a child of his age and reflected that in much of his theology. Chrysostom did not build the structure that became Roman Catholicism, but he did provide much of the mortar that was later used for that purpose. He stands as a brilliant example of what one man, simply by preaching, can do for God. He also stands as a reminder that the theology of the day must always be critically analyzed, for the improper use of words carries with it the potential for great abuse.

47. NPNF1, 10:154-55.
48. Stephens, 399.

*Joel E. Hampton*

# The Equal Ultimacy Question in Calvin's View of Reprobation: Is Predestination Really "Double"?

What is John Calvin doing in a publication like this? That is a perfectly legitimate question to ask while reading a theological journal for Free Will Baptists. There is only one good answer to such a question: John Calvin is in a publication like this because we need him here. Simply put, we cannot fully understand our own system of belief until we come to understand the systems of our theological adversaries. John Calvin and the heirs of his theology, Calvinists, are worthy adversaries. Our differences with Calvinists are real and substantial. However, at times those differences are misunderstood, distorted, and exaggerated. One area in which we differ from Calvinists most strongly is predestination. Reprobation is a subdivision of the doctrine of predestination. As we come to a deeper and better understanding of Calvin's view of reprobation, we will become more certain of our own beliefs on this subject.

The question of the equal ultimacy of reprobation is largely an intramural debate within Calvinism. Most Arminians do not concern themselves with the niceties of double predestination. Yet, we should concern ourselves with Calvin's understanding of reprobation because of the profound implications it has for his theology and our response to it. The question of the equal ultimacy of reprobation is actually a simple one: Is predestination truly "double" in Calvin's mind? Is God as sovereign and as absolute in damning the reprobate as He is in saving the elect? We shall turn to Calvin for his answer.

In saying that Calvin will answer for himself on this issue, we are saying that we will see what Calvin has to say in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The *Institutes* represents Calvin's lifetime of reflection on theology. It is his mature thought. It is the definitive answer to any questions about what Calvin believed on a given subject. So before we begin to engage with a Calvinist on the subject of reprobation, let us see

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what Calvin believed, the arguments of contemporary Calvinists notwithstanding.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin presents the doctrine of reprobation in comparison with the doctrine of election. Because Calvin linked the two, we must take care to consider one in the light of the other. There are at least four basic comparisons between reprobation and election in the thought of Calvin. First, reprobation is an object of God's predestination as surely as is election. Second, reprobation is particular and absolute, just as election is. Third, reprobation finds its ultimate or highest cause in the will of God, as does election. Fourth, and herein lies the rub, reprobation has as its proximate cause (in Calvin's words) man's sin, for which we find no parallel concept in Calvin's doctrine of election.[1]

## REPROBATION, LIKE ELECTION, IS PART AND PARCEL OF PREDESTINATION

As we begin to unravel Calvin's doctrine of reprobation from all of the misconceptions that surround it, we will be best served by exploring Calvin's teaching on the subject in the order already presented. First, Calvin saw God as having a definite plan for every human being. That plan was established in eternity past, before the creation of the universe. God's plan for human beings is called predestination; that is to say, God determined for each person a destiny *before* they were created. Calvin's doctrine of reprobation is firmly rooted in God's eternal plan of predestination, as the following passages demonstrate:

> A baffling question this seems to many. For they think nothing more inconsistent than that out of the common multitude of men *some should be predestined* to salvation, others *to destruction*.
>
> We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: *that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others*.[2]

1. By proximate cause, Calvin meant the immediate or nearest cause, as opposed to the ultimate or highest cause. A good way to illustrate would be to consider a forest fire. We say that a cigarette started the fire, and we are correct because the burning embers of that cigarette ignited the underbrush, which in turn set the entire forest ablaze. Ultimately, though, it is not the cigarette but the careless smoker who is to blame.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles and ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III:XXI:1 (italics added).

Technically speaking, these passages concern election and not reprobation and thus mention it cursorily. Calvin is much more explicit in his inclusion of reprobation in God's eternal plan when he later defines predestination as follows:

> We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, *eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created* to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death.[3]

From what we have already seen, it is clear that Calvin sees reprobation as part of God's eternal plan of predestination. Therefore, no theology that understands reprobation as God's merely passing by the "non-elect" can claim to be authentically Calvinistic. Reprobation is not an accident. Nor is it a by-product of election. Rather, it is an integral part of God's eternal decree. Such a conclusion is well attested in the secondary literature as well. Consider, for example, the following statement by John Murray: "In the esteem of Calvin, is the passing over or rejection of the non-elect as eternal and as sovereign, in that sense as ultimate, as the choosing of the elect to eternal salvation? It appears to me that the frequency and the clarity with which Calvin deals with this question leave no doubt that the answer must be affirmative."[4]

Fred Klooster, another outstanding Calvinist theologian, writes that reprobation, "like election, concerns the eternal decree or sovereign counsel of God."[5] In his treatise on the subject, Calvin himself provides further proof that he saw reprobation as sharing eternality with election. In his reply to Pighius, Calvin asserts that it is by the "secret counsel of God whereby He chooses some to salvation and destines others for eternal destruction."[6] We now see that, for Calvin, predestination is the fountain or source of all that is with regard to man's destiny. Whether one is elect or reprobate makes no difference; he is destined to that end by God's eternal plan.

3. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:XXI:5 (italics added).

4. John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 58-59.

5. Fred Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1961), 37.

6. John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke and Co., 1961), 53.

## REPROBATION IS PARTICULAR AND ABSOLUTE

Some Calvinists would agree with Calvin up to this point but then break ranks with him when he makes reprobation personal. They have no problem seeing reprobation as stemming from predestination, but they prefer to view it as impersonal or corporate. God, for them, predestines certain types of people—in this case, wicked people—to certain ends. Calvin will have none of this.

For him reprobation is every bit as particular and absolute as election. The key passage on this point is again Calvin's definition of predestination in book three, chapter twenty-one, and section five. There he states unambiguously that God, from eternity, decreed "what he willed to become of *each* man." He goes on to say that as "*any man* has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."[7]

Other passages in the *Institutes* also illuminate Calvin's thought on the particularity of reprobation. He sees Jacob and Esau in Romans nine as individuals and not as types. He says of that passage, "for as Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated."[8]

That Calvin saw reprobation as particular and not merely corporate has been recognized by later Reformed theology. Klooster observes: "*At this point we must again note, that reprobation,* like the decree of election *concerns specific individuals.* The decree of reprobation does not simply refer to a general intention of God, nor is it limited in its reference to a class of people."[9]

We have now covered the first two points of our outline. First, predestination comprehends reprobation as surely as it does election. Second, reprobation concerns individuals and not just classes or types of people. In other words, God has determined from eternity past to elect some individuals and to reprobate other individuals.

## THE ULTIMATE CAUSE OF REPROBATION IS GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

This brings us to our third point, which is that reprobation finds its ultimate cause in God's will, as election does. This point is where most modern "Calvinists" abandon ship. They have no problem accepting

7. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:XXI:5 (italics added).
8. Ibid., III:XXII:11.
9. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 39 (italics added).

Calvin's assertion that God has, from eternity past, condemned certain individuals. They do have a problem when one gives God's will as the ultimate reason for that condemnation. It will be best to lay out Calvin's beliefs before offering a critique of his views.

In numerous places Calvin asserts that God's will is the ultimate cause of reprobation. Let us consider but a few. In discussing Romans nine, Calvin flatly denies that God gave Esau what he deserved in reprobating him.[10] Again, in connection with Romans nine, Calvin says, "it is utterly inconsistent to transfer the preparation for destruction to anything but God's secret plan."[11] In another context Calvin concurs with Augustine, saying, "The Lord has created those whom he unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because he has so willed it."[12]

Perhaps one of Calvin's strongest statements concerning the fact that reprobation finds its highest cause in God's will is the following: "Since the disposition of all things is in God's hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, *he so ordains by his plan and* will that among men some are born destined for certain death from the womb, who glorify his name by their own destruction."[13]

There is still further evidence that Calvin saw God's will as the ultimate cause of reprobation. This evidence comes from some of Calvin's other works. For example, in Calvin's book on predestination, he states rather emphatically that "if we are not ashamed of the gospel, we must confess what is there plainly declared. God, by His eternal goodwill, which has no cause outside itself, destined those whom He pleased to salvation, rejecting the rest."[14] Calvin says much the same thing in his commentary on Romans. In dealing with Romans 9:30, Calvin states, "They do what is absurd and invert all order, who strive to assign and set up causes above the secret predestination of God, which he has previously taught us is to be counted as the first cause."[15]

It is reasonably clear that Calvin saw reprobation as issuing from God's will and not based on man's sin, in the final analysis. As with everything else, Calvin is forced by his theology to view reprobation as

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:XXII:11.
11. Ibid., III:XXII:1.
12. Ibid., III:XXIII:5.
13. Ibid., III:XXIII:6 (italics added).
14. Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 58.
15. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 376.

anchored in God's decretive will.[16] Of course, as we have already seen, Calvin thought of his view of reprobation as being eminently biblical.

Having seen what Calvin has to say on the subject of reprobation's ultimate cause, it will prove helpful to examine the secondary literature. John Murray says that Calvin sees "the highest cause" in reprobation in "the secret predestination of God." He goes on to say that the "reason for discrimination is the bare and simple good pleasure of God."[17] Murray says much the same thing in another work but is more explicit. His thoughts are worth repeating at some length here:

> And it is the note of secret predestination that is uppermost in Calvin's thought at these points, because this is the only explanation why the reprobate are left to reap the curse which their evil deeds deserve and for which they have no answer before God. This is why we are compelled to take account of the ultimacy, even in the matter of the judicial or penal aspect of reprobation, of the sovereignty of God's will, a sovereignty which is not one whit less sovereignly differentiating at the point of reprobation than it is at the point of election to life.[18]

At this point a brief review of what has been set forth so far is in order. We have seen that, for Calvin, reprobation is in several respects parallel to election. First, we saw that reprobation is eternal and comprehended within God's eternal predestination, along with election. Second, we saw that reprobation concerns individuals and is therefore particular, just as election is. Third, we saw that reprobation finds its ultimate cause in God's sovereign will, as does election. That brings us to our fourth and most difficult point.

### THE PROXIMATE CAUSE OF REPROBATION IS MAN'S SIN

The fourth point in our outline is that reprobation finds its proximate cause in man's sin. There is no parallel point in election for Calvin.

16. By *decretive will* we mean what God has decreed as opposed to what He has merely allowed.

17. John Murray, "Calvin, Dort, and Westminster on Predestination: A Comparative Study," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 156. The discrimination of which Murray speaks is, of course, the discrimination between elect and reprobate.

18. Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, 63-64.

Election is based solely on God's good pleasure. Nothing good in man could be seen as the ground for God's electing, because there is no good in man. Reprobation, on the other hand, is different. While it finds its ultimate cause in God's sovereign will, it finds its proximate cause in man's sin. Therefore, the reprobate will not be able to claim injustice on God's part as the reason for his damnation. He is justly condemned for his sin.

There are two brief passages in the *Institutes* that provide most of the proof for this point. Both are in Book III, chapter XXIII, and section 3. In the first, Calvin says:

> As all of us are vitiated by sin, we can only be odious to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty but by the fairest reckoning of justice. But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are by condition of nature subject to the judgment of death, of what injustice toward themselves may they complain?
>
> Let them not accuse God of injustice if they are destined by his eternal judgment to death, to which they feel—whether they will or not—that they are led by their own nature of itself. How perverse is their disposition to protest is apparent from the fact that they deliberately suppress the cause of condemnation which they are compelled to recognize in themselves, in order to free themselves by blaming God.[19]

While Calvin speaks of reprobation as being caused by God's will most often, he does occasionally make mention of man's sin as the proximate cause as we have seen. He states his view on this element of reprobation most clearly outside the *Institutes*. In his commentary on Romans, Calvin addresses this issue while dealing with Romans 9:11. He says there: "It is indeed true, *that the proximate cause of reprobation is the curse we all inherit from Adam;* yet, that we may learn to acquiesce in the bare and simple good pleasure of God, Paul withdraws us from this view, until he has established this doctrine,—that *God has a sufficiently just reason for electing and for reprobating in his own will.*"[20]

Calvin's idea that reprobation has man's sin as its proximate cause is not lost on Reformed theologians of our own day. Some have made too much of this particular feature of Calvin's doctrine. Perhaps a small sampling of Reformed writing on this topic would illustrate this point.

19. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:XXIII:3.

20. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 350 (italics added).

Murray sees the same distinction between election and reprobation that Calvin does on this point: "But there is a factor in reprobation that does not enter into the salvation which is the fruit of election. This factor is that reprobation cannot be conceived of apart from the everlasting condemnation which it involves and condemnation always presupposes guilt and ill-desert."[21]

R. C. Sproul, a popular Reformed author, has probably done as much as anyone to popularize and defend Calvinist theology in recent years. Yet when he comes to the doctrine of reprobation, he balks at Calvin's view. He writes:

> If God, when He is decreeing reprobation, does so in consideration of the reprobate's being already fallen, then He does not coerce him to sin. To be reprobate is to be left in sin, not pushed or forced to sin. *If the decree of reprobation were made without a view to the fall, then the objection to double predestination would be valid and God would be properly charged with being the author of sin.*[22]

Part of the problem in the whole question of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation is the terminology that is used. When Calvin spoke of God's good pleasure as the ultimate cause of reprobation and man's sin as the proximate cause of reprobation, he was talking about two different aspects of the same doctrine. God's good pleasure in choosing whom He would pass by or condemn is a reflection of His sovereign right as Creator. God's condemnation of sinners to everlasting punishment is a reflection of His sovereign right as judge.[23]

Unfortunately, Calvin does not spell this out in the *Institutes*. What he is trying to communicate, though, is that man's sin is the ground of his just condemnation, but that his reprobation or being passed over in election is based on God's good pleasure without consideration of his sin. As Murray insists, these two elements must be held in distinction.[24]

21. Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, 61.

22. R. C. Sproul, "'Double' Predestination," in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), 71 (italics added). In response to Sproul, we Arminians say, "That is exactly the point!" But then we have been saying that since at least the time of Wesley.

23. As one of my professors at Covenant Seminary suggested to me, reprobation is ultimately caused by God's decree, but from our human vantage point, damnation is a self-inflicted wound.

24. Murray, "Calvin, Dort, and Westminster on Predestination: A Comparative Study," 156.

Now as to the question of whether reprobation has equal ultimacy with election in Calvin's thought, the following assertions will be made. First, it seems that Calvin means to present reprobation as the equal of election both by its place in the order of the *Institutes* and by the way that he presents it. If he had wished to present reprobation as somehow different from or unequal to election, he could have easily placed it in his discussion of the Fall in Book II. However, he does not do that. Rather, he places it right alongside his discussion of election in Book III.[25]

Furthermore, Calvin seems to go to some lengths to draw parallels between reprobation and election. The sense of parallelism is heightened when he comes to his discussion of man's sin in reprobation. There he seems to be conscious of the fact that he has drawn a close analogy between reprobation and election and feels compelled to make a few qualifications.

Second, Calvin's view of reprobation appears in the *Institutes* to be largely the flip side of the coin of election. This is true primarily because of his view of divine sovereignty and the nature of humanity. Calvin states rather emphatically that there is a cause and effect relationship between God's decree and our experience. He says, "I shall not hesitate then, simply to confess with Augustine that 'the will of God is the necessity of things.'"[26] Calvin's point is this: If God decrees it, it will come to pass. Those whom God elects to salvation will surely be saved. Conversely, those whom God reprobates will surely be damned. If that is not strict parallelism, it is difficult to imagine what is.

Third, reprobation in Calvin's thought must have equal ultimacy with election because of Calvin's view of foreknowledge. Contrary to Sproul, who contends that God made His decree of reprobation on the basis of His seeing man as fallen, Calvin predicates God's foreknowledge on His decree. He states that "since *he* [God] *foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place*, they vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge, when it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding."[27]

It is easy to see why Sproul and other Calvinists want to soften Calvin's doctrine by making God seem perfectly fair and equitable, but the fact remains that for Calvin, God knows only what He has decreed.

25. Calvin placed a great deal of emphasis on the format of the *Institutes*. He revised his *magnum opus* a number of times over a period of decades. This paper draws on the definitive, and final, 1559 edition.

26. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:XXIII:8.

27. Ibid., III:XXIII:6 (italics added).

Therefore, He foreknew man as fallen because He decreed the Fall. Sproul's contention sounds a lot like the common Arminian construct that has God foreordaining to eternal life those whom He foresees as having faith in Christ. Calvin goes to great pains to show that reprobation is not based on foreknown evil works any more than election is based on foreknown good works.[28]

Fourth, when trying to determine what Calvin believed about reprobation, we must look at the preponderance of evidence. The vast majority of Calvin's writing on reprobation concerns God's right to do with His creatures what He wishes. There are comparatively few places where Calvin addresses the issue of man's sin in reprobation, and that is always from the standpoint of man's being without excuse before God.

Reprobation is not an easy subject. Calvin is not always easy to read. However, I think that his views on the subject are reasonably straightforward. For Calvin, reprobation is God's decree *not* to elect certain individuals to salvation. God's good pleasure alone is the highest cause. If man's sin could be made to be the cause of reprobation, then God's decree is no longer absolute and God is no longer sovereign.

Perhaps the best way to state the case is as follows: Reprobation and election are of equal ultimacy in the thought of John Calvin as both proceed from the secret counsel of God before the foundation of the world. While they share equal ultimacy, there is one important qualification to be made. The elect obtain salvation solely by God's grace and enjoy eternal life though they never deserved it. The reprobate are passed by solely on the basis of God's good pleasure, but they suffer eternal damnation because their sins deserve it.

What then is the lesson for Free Will Baptists in all of this? I hope we have come to understand Calvin and Calvinists a little better and to know why we believe what we believe. Calvin's system forced him to take the position that he took on reprobation—a position that he admitted was not an entirely pleasant one to hold. When one understands Calvin's view, it is not difficult to imagine why few modern Calvinists follow him faithfully on this point. However, Calvinists are very fond of reminding Arminians of all of the things that we "must" believe in order to be consistent. Perhaps we should return the favor and remind our Calvinistic brethren that double predestination is both the logically consistent position to hold within their system and the only position that is faithful to the doctrine of their namesake.

28. Ibid., III:XXI:11.

Most readers undoubtedly cringed at several points in this article. As Free Will Baptists, we just do not believe that the Bible teaches what Calvin insists that it does. Our instincts are right. We must take care to back up our gut feeling with evidence from Scripture. Calvin does us a great service in highlighting for us what we do not believe and why. That is why we needed him in this journal.

*David Fite*

# Can We Prove Our Faith? Reflections on Reason and Christian Belief in a Postmodern Age

## INTRODUCTION

In exploring the question whether we can prove our faith, we first need to define what we mean by proof. Proving means establishing something as fact by evidence. For the sake of clarity, however, we need a definition that will suit the context more specifically and more meaningfully. One could say that proving is arguing a position to a person so that he cannot help but believe in the truthfulness of the position, whether or not he submits to the demands or implications of that position. When people speak of proving their faith, this is often what they mean.

To say a person can prove his faith in the way defined above seems problematic if not just false. Experience speaks against it. One could claim that people who say they are not convinced of the truth of our faith are lying, but that hardly seems helpful. Paul speaks of people having a "depraved mind" (Romans 1:28, NASB) and "suppressing the truth" (Romans 1:18, NASB). Both Scripture and experience seem to argue that people are not lying when they say they do not believe Christians' truth claims. They believe, at least in conscious thought, that Christians are wrong.

So does that mean a person cannot prove his faith? Saying that one cannot prove his faith seems to give too much weight to the skeptics. Perhaps it would be more practical simply to put the question like this: What is the value of arguing for one's faith? Is apologetics—the defense of the faith—worthwhile? Or was the person correct who said that, to the person who believes, no proof is necessary, and to the person who does not believe, no proof is possible?

Must Christians choose between proving everything and proving nothing? Must one choose between seeing rational arguments for faith as

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all-powerful and seeing them as totally effete? Are they supremely valuable or completely worthless? It may be that the answer lies somewhere in the middle. Can a person not acknowledge limitations to the rational arguments for Christian faith usually put forward and at the same time place a significant level of value on them? Does one not see this kind of balance in the Bible? This article will argue that such a balance does in fact appear in the Bible. First, however, let us consider the three approaches into which most efforts of establishing truth fit.

## STARTING WITH MAN

### *Empiricism*

Empiricism is the attempt to find truth by means of sense data. Our senses give us data that we build up into a structure of knowledge. We work from particular observations to general laws. Many people have embraced empiricism because they believe it is scientific. For them, "scientific" means basing beliefs on fact rather than on superstition, tradition, or speculation. Some have gone so far as to say that things that are not observable and testable have no meaning. One should not believe or even waste time discussing what is not empirical. If it is non-sense, then it is nonsense, they argue. David Hume exemplifies this approach:

> If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[1]

A whole school of thought grew up around this basic approach in the early twentieth century. The Vienna Circle said that if a statement is not logically necessary—like two plus two equals four—or verifiable by sense data, then that statement is non-sense. It is not up for discussion. It falls outside the realm of meaningful discourse. A.J. Ayer, for example, argues that

> the term "god" is a metaphysical term. And if "god" is a metaphysical term, then it cannot even be probable that a god exists. For to say that "God exists" is to make a metaphysical

1. David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 165.

> utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance.[2]

Such a development points out the weakness of relying too heavily on an empirical approach to proving faith. It is too small to contain all of reality. Many things fall outside the parameters of such a method, like love, honor, class, God, and so on. The attraction of empiricism, of course, is that many people respect the scientific method, which they perceive to be the most rigorous application of this approach. Some Christians believe that, if we can prove our faith with something so well regarded, maybe we could get somewhere with unbelievers. However, as was just said, science can reach no further than the created order. It cannot deal with the existence of the Creator who is separate from His creation and is not subject to its laws.

Another problem that can arise in trying to use empirical means to prove one's faith is that raised by Antony Flew in his parable of the gardener.[3] He says that people who want to use physical data to support a position (like believing in God) must allow physical data that seems to contradict that position (like evil and suffering). There are different ways of dealing with the problem of evil,[4] but believers should understand the difficulties inherent in an empirical approach to proving their faith.

One can assess the system of naturalism[5] on which empiricism is based and the system of biblical supernaturalism to argue that one agrees more with reality than the other does. Do the fossils show gradual evolution of life from simple to complex or sudden encasement of organisms that all existed at the same time by a worldwide flood that buried animals roughly where they lived at the time (and in this time)? Many creationists argue the possibility of the latter. However, even if a flood were

2. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 2d ed. (London: Gollancz, 1946), 115.

3. Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM, 1955), cited in William P. Alston and Richard B. Brandt, eds., *The Problems of Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), 97-99. In this parable, two explorers come upon a garden in the jungle. One believes a gardener exists. The other does not. They both hide to see if a gardener will appear, but none is ever seen. The believer then asserts that the gardener is invisible. So the two explorers set up an electric fence. Yet they never hear the gardener shriek. The unbeliever asks, "Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"

4. See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 34ff. Plantinga argues that God could not create free people and insure they would always do good.

5. Naturalism is a view of the world that says that only time, chance, and matter exist.

proved, its cause would not be. Some accept an ancient flood but credit it to a random asteroid. This raises another weakness of empiricism: biases are part of the process. How do we get from facts to conclusions? We bridge the gulf by interpretations. Interpretations, however, can be very subjective.

So one can discuss which system among various ones seems to make the best sense of the world, but one can always find plenty of room for bias and error. This does not mean that science is not reliable but that it is not sufficient. If one assumes away all supernatural events up front, one eliminates a whole category of possible interpretations for a given phenomenon. Thus, if reality includes natural and supernatural events, then science is too small when it comes to constructing an accurate and complete worldview.

Another problem with empiricism is that final proof is elusive in such an approach. New information could always modify or overthrow old positions; so empiricists hold their positions tentatively. Most people who want to "prove" their faith are not looking to hold their convictions tentatively. Yet this is the nature of empirical proof.

*Rationalism*

Rationalism is the attempt to find truth by using laws that do not derive from sense experience or from one's point of view. Most people believe that if $2x=4$, then $x=2$. They base this belief not on experience or preference but on a law that transcends them, a law that seems difficult to deny. There seem to be certain laws or truths apparent to all that do not depend for their validity on experience or personal viewpoint. They are just there. The law of non-contradiction is an example of one of these laws. Something cannot be A and non-A at the same time. This is fundamental to all reasoning and communication. Yet it comes to people from some source other than sense data or point of view.

Some people try to prove their faith by building arguments (to prove God's existence, for example) on such a non-derived foundation. If, however, two people build their truth-structures on different foundations, those structures will be quite different. Postmodernists say that this is the problem with how Western thought has operated since the Enlightenment. People choose foundations that will support the kind of structure they want to build—a structure that gives them power over other people. Thus, an approach that aimed at avoiding the unreliability of sense perception and the relativism of individual viewpoint ends up succumbing to the latter.

There is a certain amount of truth to what postmodernists say on this point. The Bible says that human thought is not free and objective but

skewed by sin. Scripture contains examples of people who refuse to believe what does not suit them. So a Christian at least has to say that the rationalist approach has limits to its effectiveness, limits placed upon it by sin.

Thomas Aquinas wrote some famous discussions on five ways of proving God's existence. These theistic proofs are good as far as logical arguments go. For people with honest questions, it would be difficult to find better basic theistic proofs than those of Aquinas. But a hardened heart makes for a closed mind, and many people will not believe regardless of what the proof is. Further, even if we waded through all of the problems with Aquinas's proofs and established once for all the inevitability of God's existence, what kind of God would we have proven? Could we prove that God is one? Could we prove that God is good? If so, in what way is God good?

How does one prove that God superintended the processes involved in the writing of Scripture so that they resulted in the text He wanted? Does proving God's existence prove a Christian approach to the Bible? Were the gospel writers writing back into the life of Jesus theological formulations that grew up decades after His death in the communities in which those writers lived and worshipped, or were they accurately relating the actual words of the historical Jesus? These questions reveal that proving one's faith and proving the existence of God are not the same thing. What many people want to prove by Aquinas's arguments are positions that cannot possibly be established in that way. Most people want to prove far more than what Aquinas's proofs could prove at their best.

Another limit to a rationalist approach to finding truth is that human beings are finite. An infinite God created the universe. This creation included human beings. It should be apparent that human beings are not capable of knowing everything that God knows. There is only one God, and no human being (except Jesus Christ) is or will ever be God.

So arguments can establish only so much. Yet, the fact that an argument does not absolutely prove a claim does not mean the argument does not increase the likelihood of the claim being true. Richard Swinburne makes a distinction between arguments in which the premises make the conclusion certain and those in which the premises make the conclusion more likely.[6] He then divides the latter into arguments in which the premises make the conclusion probable and those in which the premises make

6. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5-19.

the conclusion more likely than it was before the argument was made. This approach corrects a defeatist attitude that says an argument either makes it impossible for one to disbelieve or it has no value at all. A biblical approach to whether we can prove our faith says that proofs and arguments have limits but also have helpful applications (see below on "Presuppositions and Evidence in Scripture"). One should not think that a lack of indisputable evidence for a belief necessarily means one is not justified in holding that belief. Brian Davies observes that "children may not be able to produce evidence for the belief that such and such people are their parents. But they need not be believing unreasonably in believing that certain people actually are their parents."[7]

*Subjectivism*

Some people argue that there really is no such thing as truth. All that exists is each person's view of the world. This approach will be addressed below under "Persuading Postmodernists."[8]

## STARTING WITH GOD

*Revelation*

If instead of beginning with man (empiricism, rationalism, or subjectivism), we begin with God as He reveals Himself in His Word, and then assess all data from that perspective, we can make a case for things fitting together well. This does not mean that no problems exist. But where there are problems, things one does not understand very well or at all, this in itself fits, since God reveals Himself to people as one whose understanding far exceeds their own.

If one starts with faith and then turns to objections raised against the reliability of the Scriptures, for instance, one can make a good case for the Bible's reliability. Objections raised against the Bible on the grounds of the scientific method are by their very nature susceptible to obsolescence. As more information becomes available, these objections may drop off one by one or in clusters, as has often been the case in the twentieth century. Empirical data is always being supplemented by new information. Hypotheses are constantly destroyed and new ones proposed.

7. Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.

8. John Frame divides approaches to knowledge into three categories: empiricism, rationalism, and subjectivism. See his *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987).

The twentieth century has seen the burgeoning of countless critical theories of biblical composition and theology. It has also seen a spate of critical attacks launched by one liberal against another liberal's position so that hostile biblical critics have in a significant sense canceled out each other's positions. So if one's faith were based on empiricism, it would always be uncertain and unstable. However, basing one's faith on God's revelation is secure. Yet what is revelation based on? How does one establish the truth of revelation? (How does one establish the truth of empiricism?)

Every system has a starting point. One cannot keep going further and further back in stages of justification. Even coherentism[9] does not really do this. It posits more a circle of data strung together than a line moving backwards which is by nature infinite. Everyone has a starting point. The starting point urged here is revelation. Revelation is the only starting point that can yield a total worldview that will hold together. This is because God created the whole system of which people have a worldview. He is the only one with an adequate view of it all. Only He can see it as it must be seen in order to set out a coherent explanation.

But how do we know that He created it in the first place so that we can have confidence that the Bible expresses the truth about reality? God's existence and creation of the universe chronologically and logically precede one's asking that question. A person cannot truly establish this fact. This is not because the fact is irrational, indefensible, or untrue but because the very nature of the case is that one cannot establish it. Establishing this fact before believing it would require that we step away from it to get a sufficient look at it to rule one way or the other. But where would one step? If one is not God who already exists beyond the universe, how can one get outside the universe to examine it? He cannot. Human beings are part of the object under investigation. We are part of the study. One can learn much about the particulars of his surroundings with the tools available, but stepping outside the universe to see the big picture is just not possible. That picture must be supplied by someone outside the universe, and God is the only candidate.

So faith is based on revelation, not on science or reason. But that does not make faith contrary to science or reason. In fact, revelation becomes

9. Coherentism is a theory of how people know things. It says that we do not start with an undisputed foundation and build our knowledge on that. Rather, we know that A is true because it fits nicely in the circle of everything else we already believe. If we select something else in that circle and ask, "Yes, but how do I know that this belief is true?" the answer is the same. You never get to a starting point.

in the mind a kind of hypothesis against which all reality is assessed. The biblical Christian worldview has the fewest problems of any other worldview (and "problems" are a part of the worldview itself, because people are finite and the one who provided the revelation on which the Christian worldview is based is infinite). Beginning with revelation, one can view Aquinas's arguments as very helpful, not in "proving" God's existence but in confirming His existence, which one already accepts.

It is important that Christians not allow modernist attacks on their faith to drive them into the postmodern camp for protection, like David, who sought protection from Saul in the land of the Philistines. The correct approach for David would have been continuing to rely on the Lord rather than seeking solace in God's enemies. Similarly, for Christians in the twenty-first century, the answer to modernism is not postmodernism. When someone attacks the truth claims of Scripture, the answer is not to say that science and history are untrustworthy. The answer is to invest the time and energy needed to uncover the biases or flaws that crept in between the facts and the conclusions. We should not be too quick to say that our faith cannot be proved in hopes that it will not be disproved. Such a statement in this context implies that faith and reason are opposed to each other, and this is a position that introduces discrepancy into God's two modes of revelation, natural and biblical. However, it is valid to say that we cannot prove our faith by starting with man and working up. Does this mean that there is no value in "proofs" or evidence?

*Presuppositions and Evidence in Scripture*

The Bible does not build a case for the existence of God. It assumes His existence; God just speaks. Some say that the Bible does give an argument for God's existence in Psalm 19:1 (KJV) when it says, "The heavens declare the glory of God. . . ." This passage, however, does not build a case for God's existence. The verses simply assume His existence and assert that He is reflected in His creation. This passage does not develop arguments as to why people must conclude that God exists because of their observation of nature; it simply asserts that He is reflected in nature. But the Bible does contain evidence for the truth of Yahwism over Baalism in the Old Testament and for the truth of "the Way" over Rabbinic Judaism in the New Testament. The confrontation on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18, KJV) in which Elijah said, "If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him," involved very dramatic evidence of who was truly God. The signs and wonders in the New Testament were given not as a national health plan but as evidence that what Jesus (and then the Apostles) said was true.

At Carmel the pyrotechnic proof persuaded some but not all. Jezebel responded not in faith and repentance but in attempted murder of Elijah. In the New Testament one finds the same situation. The miracles persuaded some, so that the disciples saw Him calm the sea (Matthew 14:33, KJV) and said, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." When one of the soldiers who crucified Jesus experienced the darkness and earthquake, he also confessed that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 27:54). Yet, for the most part, the evidence did not persuade the Pharisees. They responded to the obvious display of supernatural power not in faith but in murder. Does providing evidence eliminate the need for faith? The Bible says no by the stories God relates through it. Evidence and testimony can be accepted or rejected, believed or mistrusted. How could the Pharisees not believe that Jesus was the Christ after all the signs He performed? They explained away the evidence. They said, for example, that He cast out demons by the power of the prince of demons (Matthew 12:24). Refusing to believe the evidence that is provided constitutes the only sin in Scripture that cannot be forgiven. A person who simply refuses to accept the evidence available can never be saved, because salvation occurs on the condition of faith. Explaining away the evidence is an option available to all people everywhere. So in Scripture one finds both presuppositions and evidence. Yet even in the evidence, one sees both usefulness and limitations. Limitations derive not from the relativity of truth or unreliability of perception or reason but from the depravity of man and from human free will.

Though Jesus used evidence, He Himself also pointed out its limitations. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man asks that Lazarus be allowed to return to the world of the living to warn the rich man's relatives about hell. Abraham tells him that there is no need for that since they have the Scriptures. Oh, but if someone comes back from the dead, they will definitely believe. Not so, says Abraham. If they will not listen to the Scriptures, then they would not listen even if someone came back from the dead. Jesus says that revelation is superior to evidence. Aquinas makes a similar point when he says that even those things that human reason could grasp about God are still presented to people by supernatural revelation because there is greater certainty in revelation than in reason.[10] The rich man acted as though the problem with people's beliefs was a simple lack of information. If they knew about

10. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, v. 2 of *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1955), 68.

this place, they would repent. But they did know about the resurrection and judgment. They had learned these things from the Old Testament Scriptures. The reason they had not repented yet was not lack of information but lack of willingness. This is what Jesus wants people to see.

This is also what Jesus faced with the Pharisees. They asked Him for a sign to verify His identity. He said in strong terms that He would give them no sign. He also said that people who asked for a sign were wicked and adulterous. John the Baptist, however, expressed doubts about Jesus' identity, and Jesus answered those doubts with signs and with praise, calling John the greatest man who had ever lived. Why did Jesus treat John and the Pharisees differently? Because they were different. (Here are two parties who both believe in God but argue vehemently about who the Messiah is. Thus, even if one could prove God's existence to people, he would not necessarily persuade them of biblical teaching. Proving God's existence and proving one's faith are not the same thing.) The Pharisees had already made up their minds about Jesus. They were unwilling to believe that He was the Messiah. In fact, they had already decided to kill Him. On the other hand, John was very willing to believe in Jesus' messianic status. He had lived a rather ascetic life, preaching the Messiah's coming, and he identified Jesus as that Christ. So he was willing to believe but had doubts. The doubts of the Pharisees were simply excuses not to believe, not to submit to Jesus as the Christ.

What good would a sign do? They had just witnessed a sign when they asked for a sign. In Matthew 12:9-14 Jesus healed a man. The Pharisees' reaction, however, was not belief but a plot to kill Him. Jesus exorcised a demon later in the same chapter, but the Pharisees explained it away. In that episode Jesus tells the crowd about the unpardonable sin. This sin is unpardonable not because it is so bad but because by the very nature of the case one can never be forgiven if one keeps on explaining away the work of the Spirit. Then, in verse 38 of the same chapter, the Pharisees ask for a sign. After two miracles and a stern rebuke, they still have the gall to ask for a sign. Surely their lack of objectivity was apparent to everyone but them.

So Jesus says that unbelief is not simply a matter of ignorance or a lack of sufficient evidence. It is instead a symptom of a hard heart, which does not want to acknowledge its rightful master. He also says that there are various degrees of hard-heartedness. He pronounced a woe upon the cities in Galilee that had seen most of His miracles. He said that if the miracles He had performed in Bethsaida had been performed in Sodom, they would have repented. (This shows that evidence can play a role in faith/repentance.) Some people are absolutely, immovably opposed to

God—they will not yield, no matter what. Others resist, but not to the point of being unreachable.

The world is not populated merely with people on the extremes—those who are eager to believe and those who would not believe no matter what. Most people fall on a line between these two extremes. Their unbelief consists partially of a lack of understanding and partially of a depraved tendency to resist the Moral Authority. So the effectiveness of signs, evidences, and arguments will depend on the level of resistance in a particular person. That level of resistance depends on factors that are too complex and too powerful for anyone to manipulate. Only the Spirit of God can address these variables with confidence. Seldom do people understand them, and rarely can people predict how they will react to external influences. No wonder Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44, KJV).

Mark touches on the biblical relationship between proofs and revelation in Mark 16:20, where he says that after Jesus ascended His disciples went everywhere preaching and that God confirmed His Word by the signs that accompanied its preaching. Revelation was primary, but it was confirmed by signs (proofs).

Another kind of evidence in Scripture is religious experience. Some say that such evidence is inadmissible, that there are too many problems with this kind of proof for it to be of any value. However, the Bible reflects an awareness of problems with religious experience without rejecting its value. Paul says that Satan sometimes makes himself an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), but he also says in Romans 8:16 that God's Spirit bears witness with the spirit of believers that we are His children. Religious experience can be subjective and even deceiving, especially since "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities . . . against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12, KJV). Such problems should lead a person to square his subjective experience with the objective Word of God, not to distrust his experience and confer on it no value.

*Revelation, Reason, and Faith*

Revelation comes in two forms: nature and Scripture. Nature (the creation outside and inside the human being) gives people basic information about God. Romans 1:20 says that nature reveals God's "eternal power and Godhead" (KJV). Nature informs people of God's existence. Something inside a human being reacts when someone mentions the idea of God or the Creator. One knows something about Him by looking out

at the world (its size, beauty, and complexity), and by looking in (at his reason, moral nature, and so on). Theologians call this general revelation. They refer to Scripture as special revelation. In contrast to the general and subjective revelation found in nature, Scripture contains specific, objective truth about God, man, and the world.

Reason is the ability God gave people to understand His revelation. As a created being, we have reason that is finite. God's reason and being are infinite. Finite human reason cannot understand God fully. Yet since He created people as rational beings and He Himself is rational, people can understand Him in part.

Faith is believing what one cannot prove. Or, in the words of Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (NASB). "The assurance of things hoped for" means confidence about what has not yet occurred. People often charge into a dark room, flipping the light switch on and heading to their destination in one fluid motion. They don't stand outside the room and reach in to flip the switch so they can wait to see if the light is going to come on. They cannot prove that it will come on. The bulb might be burned out. Once the light comes on, they no longer have faith but sight—an empirical datum—the light is on. Before the light actually comes on, a person has confidence that it will come on, though he has absolutely no proof. That's faith.

"The conviction of things not seen" points out another side to faith. Faith often has for its object something that is not possible to see. People have faith about some things of which they will one day have sight, like whether God will keep His Word. This is like the light switch. Other things that require faith, however, will never become sight. Most people believe in the basic reliability of their senses and reason. Yet this is faith, since a person cannot empirically verify his reason or his perceptions. There is, however, every reason to have confidence in one's senses and reason. Some things simply are not subject to proof as such.

How do reason and revelation relate to each other? Aquinas says that some truths about God can be grasped by human reason and others cannot. Obviously one needs supernatural revelation to inform him about the latter. But why, asks Aquinas, did God give supernatural revelation about things concerning Himself that people could figure out by human reason? He answers his own question by giving three reasons.[11] First, if this truth were available only by rational investigation, few people would ever attain it. This is due in some cases to a lack of "physical disposition";

11. Ibid., 66-67.

that is, some people are not bright enough to work it out for themselves. In other cases people have to work for a living and do not have time for such scholarly pursuits. Still others are too lazy to reach this truth. So whichever explanation fits a particular case, the fact is that few people would attain the truth that human reason can grasp about God if they had to rely solely on that reason. Another reason God did not leave it up to people's gray matter is that it would take too much time. By the time a person figured out the things that could be figured out, he would have very little time to do anything with such knowledge. The last reason Aquinas gives for God's providing supernatural revelation about even those truths concerning Him that could be grasped by the human intellect is that

> [t]he investigation of the human reason for the most part has falsity present within it, and this is due partly to the weakness of our intellect in judgment, and partly to the admixture of images. The result is that many, remaining ignorant of the power of demonstration, would hold in doubt those things that have been most truly demonstrated. This would be particularly the case since they see that, among those who are reputed to be wise men, each one teaches his own brand of doctrine. Furthermore, with the many truths that are demonstrated, there sometimes is mingled something that is false, which is not demonstrated but rather asserted on the basis of some probable or sophistical argument, which yet has the credit of being a demonstration. That is why it was necessary that the unshakable certitude and pure truth concerning divine things should be presented to men by way of faith.[12]

Revelation has priority over reason. Certainty comes not from reason but from revelation. In trying to understand precisely what Aquinas is saying here, it is helpful to keep in mind a crucial distinction. There is a difference between something's being objectively true and someone's believing that something is true. Aquinas says that, due to the unreliability of the human intellect, people are able to "hold in doubt those things that have been most truly demonstrated." Certain things about God are objectively true and should be regarded as such ("most truly demonstrated"). This does not mean, however, that a given person has to believe those things ("hold in doubt those things that . . . "). This point is very important in a discussion of whether we can prove our faith.

12. Ibid., 68.

PERSUADING POSTMODERNISTS

*Assumptions*

For persuading unbelievers who tend to base their views on logical arguments or scientific knowledge, see the above discussion on "Starting with Man." Increasingly, unbelievers take an approach to truth that falls under the very broad category of postmodernism. The basic assumptions of postmodernism are: (1) Human beings can never be objective. (2) Human perception cannot be reasonably reliable. (3) There is no truth to discover even if people were objective and capable of reliable perceptions (thus postmodernism is described as anti-foundational, because there is no indisputable truth-foundation on which to build one's particular belief system). (4) (perhaps properly a part of 3) The law of non-contradiction (see "Rationalism") is not valid. If these things cannot be established, then the postmodern approach cannot get started. If a person cannot demonstrate that he cannot know something, then a loose end remains. If he admits that he cannot know that he cannot know, then he is left with the possibility that he can know.

It is important to be honest and credible in defending the faith. Believers need to acknowledge the valid observations that postmodernists make, no matter how badly they think postmodernists have taken these observations to extremes.

*Objectivity.* The postmodern reaction against exaggerated claims by modernists[15] for the power of human reason is certainly welcome in the Christian camp. However, the limits believers see in human reason lead them to seek special revelation to tell them things they could learn in no other way about data beyond the reach of their senses. Unlike postmodernism, the Christian view of the limits of reason does not lead us to give up all hope of learning truth. Christians should also appreciate questions postmodernists have raised about human objectivity. When paleontologists of the evolutionary school find a tiny bone fragment and identify a seemingly unidentifiable specimen with the very thing they set out to find in the first place, people rightly call their objectivity into question. Yet, unlike postmodernists, Christians do not throw the baby out with the bath water. They do not conclude that, because some people are shown to be non-objective some of the time, no one is capable of being objective at

15. Modernists are people who view human reason and experience as autonomous and capable of solving all life's problems.

any time. Depravity leads people to compromise truth for selfish gain. This is consistent with, even predicted by, scriptural principles.

The arrogance that surrounds many modernists (especially in the past) is something to which postmodernists are right to object. Arrogance, however, does not always pervert truth. An arrogant surgeon can still find his way to the left ventricle. A pompous professor of math will still get it right most of the time. Truth held in a cocky mind does not change into untruth. The fact that some people made too great a claim for finding the truth or using the truth does not mean that there is no truth. If I boast that my car can do 150 miles per hour and in a race it proves to be capable of only 120 or 98 or 10, my car does not cease to be a car. And truth does not cease to be truth just because someone exaggerated its utility or perspicuity.

*Perception.* Postmodernists tend to reject human perceptions based on the idea that they are nothing but each person's unique interpretation of the object, not reliable information about the object itself. One could cite the picture below.

Some people will see a duck; others will see a rabbit. Upon careful examination most people can see both. Examples like these are helpful in two ways. First, they point out the role the human mind has in organizing data received from the senses and making sense of it. Different minds can organize data in different ways. This raises a caution against modernist claims of an almost airtight objectivity. The second thing it shows is the narrow range of alternative interpretations. It could be a duck, a rabbit and maybe a few other things if one wished to stretch it. It could not, however, be a squadron of B-52 bombers or 473 triangles standing on 1,287 octagons. The number of possible interpretations is relatively small. So even though two minds could derive somewhat different impressions from the same sense data, the range of interpretation is not as great as some postmodernists would lead us to believe. This raises a caution against postmodernists who want things to be "absolutely relative."

When impressions contradict each other, one can fall back on other criteria to discover which part of the interpretive range is most likely to contain the truth.

*Non-contradiction.* Some claim that defending the law of non-contradiction by using it is circular reasoning. One cannot argue against a position that denies contradiction by pointing out that it is contradictory, goes the argument. Yet, as Geisler points out, this is invalid. Using the law of non-contradiction to defend itself is simply saying that to deny that principle is contradictory. "For the law of non-contradiction is not used as the basis of the indirect proof of its validity; it is simply used in the process of defending its validity."[16] Geisler illustrates with the sentence, "I cannot speak a word in English." This sentence is "self-destructive" because it does what it claims it cannot do. It uses English to say that it cannot use English. It disproves itself. This is similar to the indirect proof for the law of non-contradiction. "We cannot deny the law of non-contradiction without using it in the very sentence that denies it. For the sentence that denies non-contradiction is offered as a non-contradictory sentence. If it is not, then it makes no sense." There is nothing flawed about using English to say that I can use English. Even so, there is nothing flawed about using the law of non-contradiction to defend it. The flaw comes when someone uses the law of non-contradiction to deny the law of non-contradiction.[17]

*Unpalatable Conclusions*

Paul attacked false teaching by showing where it would lead when he said in 1 Corinthians 15:16-17, "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (KJV). Paul showed the unpalatable conclusions bound up in their assumptions and used those conclusions to make his audience more receptive to the truth: the dead are raised. On that note, Christians can still make people more receptive to the truth (as expressed in faith) by showing its superiority to the alternatives (false worldviews).

*The Jungle.* Because of the postmodern belief in the social construction of reality, the lack of any absolute standard of reality to which one can attune his belief systems, postmodernism boils down to the law of the jungle. The strong rule the weak. Power is inescapably the highest good.

16. Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 79.

17. Ibid.

It is the nature of the case. Michel Foucault claims that "we are subjected to the reproduction of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."[18] So power not only determines who gets to speak but also what constitutes truth.

Postmodernism promises freedom from mistreatment for all people. Yet their approach is likely to make mistreatment far more common and severe as the masses care even less about true education and reason, leaving power over society in the hands of an increasingly small elite bent on pushing its own agenda. The freedom postmodernism brings is the freedom of the convict who escapes from prison only to live as an animal, cowering in the shadows and sleeping under bridges as visions of marshals torment him.

*The Closet.* Many people whose thinking has been molded by postmodern ideas argue that their approach opens new vistas. Celebrating the diversity of the human family in a postmodern sense actually creates the opposite effect. If one's concern is to abolish negative judgments against any culture or choice, then he also abolishes a few other things—everything that transcends space and time. Ferdinand de Saussure, whose ideas were taken over and in some cases modified by Jacques Derrida (one of the most important postmodern thinkers), argued, "In the language itself, there are only differences."[19] This involved his idea that words have no meaning in themselves, that meaning derives only from the difference between one word and another. Words and the concepts to which they refer ("signifiers" and "signifieds" in Saussure's terms) do not derive meaning from an absolute but from their interaction with each other. There is nothing that is not entangled in this system of differences. There is no standard from which these words and concepts depart in varying degrees. Rather, people can speak of things because of their ability to compare or contrast them with other things. This system of differences is all there is. Ideals do not fit in this kind of view. Love, honor, beauty, and so on have no reality in this system. Saussure may have tried to avoid the logical conclusion of his ideas, but others have seen through this.

There is nothing bigger than the individual in a postmodern cosmos. The individual cannot be a part of something bigger than himself because

18. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 132.

19. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 116.

there is nothing bigger than himself. Someone could respond that his culture is bigger. Yet this does not ease the claustrophobia. Indeed, it leads to another unsightly by-product of postmodernism: the loss of self.

*The Hole.* If a person is merely one of millions of expressions of his culture, then meaning gushes from life as blood from a severed artery. It seems pointless to say that one is part of something bigger than himself when he means that he is only a manifestation of his culture. In this case there is something bigger than himself, but he is nothing. If everything one believes is determined by his culture, then this is what he is left with. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann say that one can avoid "the misleading notion of 'collective identities' without having recourse to the uniqueness *sub specie aeternitatis*, of individual existence."[20] In fact, instead of wanting the uniqueness of the individual, some postmodern thinkers see their goal as eliminating the self.[21]

*The Greasy Spot.* A passage above mentioned that Saussure did not take his "difference" insight to its logical conclusion of precluding ideals. Another side to this involves the impossibility of truth. Derrida takes Saussure's idea all the way to disallowing the whole notion of absolute truth.[22]

However, the approach of denying the existence of truth is impossible to sustain. If one grants that there are isolated cases of truth, then he returns to reason and rational criteria for determining which among competing views is the closest to reality. However, if he does not grant the existence of truth in at least some areas, life becomes ridiculous and the postmodern approach cannot be articulated, because nothing can be articulated. The framework necessary for statements is missing. All a person has are subjects and no predicates.

The idea that truth is relative breaks down in any one of a number of ways in practical experience. If I and a postmodern friend were standing on the roof of a thirty-story building and I said that I believed jumping from the roof would result in my hitting the street, I would expect my friend to back me up on that assertion. But if his postmodern approach to truth were valid, there would be no good reason for him to concur. He

20. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967), 174.

21. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 104ff.

22. Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1984), 17-18.

could say that in his paradigm he would float and drift softly along the breezes like an autumn leaf and not touch down until he reached Hadrian's Wall. If truth really were relative, if truth could be different from one person to the next, how could I say that my notion of reality was more valid than his? Only in testing our hypotheses could his ideas be brought down to earth.

It seems unlikely that one could find any postmodernists that would consider creating (and testing) their own reality concerning the laws of gravity while standing on the roof of a tall building. However, if they are prepared to yield the point in such a particular, how can they hold onto their general approach? How can one say that truth is (sometimes) absolute in the physical realm but completely relative in the realm of values, ideas, and religion? If a person admits that some truths are absolute, how can he be sure that others are not? If truths available for empirical testing are shown to be absolute, how much more likely is it that truths in that realm accessible only by divine revelation are also absolute?

## CONCLUSION

Christians create barriers to the gospel when they tell unbelievers (in words or in attitudes) that they do not expect them to convert unless they prove their faith to them. By addressing the whole personality and by beginning with revelation, Christians can often use arguments to make people more receptive to the Spirit's call when He beckons them to return to their Creator.

*Daryl W. Ellis*

# How Big Is Your Church?

Relationships are not easy. When a person associates with someone else, he opens the door to potential difficulty. The level of complication increases in proportion to the number of persons involved. Perhaps because of frustrations or even fears, some opt to reduce that tension in life by a policy of disengagement. This course of action may provide a sense of relief. Others cope with the challenge of relationships by engaging others indiscriminately, becoming, at least emotionally, promiscuous. The unprincipled proliferation of relationships numbs the person to the risks involved. Shallowness opens the doors to detrimental entanglements.

The world of religion works similarly. However, religious relationships heighten the risk and potential harm to a person. One can either blindly engage in relationships or resort to isolation to the point of lost opportunity. How does one learn to discriminate without unnecessarily playing it safe to the point of detriment to the kingdom of God?

The purpose of this article is to understand the biblical scope of the church with its logical implications and to recollect how the issue of religious unity has played out in our denomination. After considering these topics, it will offer some proposals to seize the biblical ideal.

A question Christians must ask is "How big is the church?" The answer will shape our attitudes. The Lord Jesus Christ introduced the term *ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18, convincing Peter that "I [the Lord Jesus] will build my church."[1] At least from a New Testament perspective, the church was yet to begin. Then, in Revelation 22:16, we see that the word "churches" suggests more than one particular church. From Matthew's pronouncement to the concluding words of John in Revelation, there is an interplay between one and many churches. In Acts, both uses are prevalent: "the Lord added to the *church* daily" (Acts 2:47, KJV); "the *church* at Jerusalem" (8:1); "in the *church* at Antioch" (13:1).

1. All Scripture quotations in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

The word *church* can refer to one group, multiple fellowships, and yet even one more perspective found in Ephesians 5:23: "Christ is the head of the church." Apparently there is more than just a group of visible churches; there is a more comprehensive meaning, described by Berkhof: "The whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour" (Colossians 1:18, 24; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-25).[2]

Scripture refers to an individual church, a group of churches in one locale, and then a larger group: everyone who has professed faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Calvin expresses this concept well: "The church universal is a multitude gathered from all nations; it is divided and dispersed in separate places, but agrees on the one truth of divine doctrine, and is bound by the bond of the same religion."[3]

John records the interaction between Jesus and His followers as Jesus was closing His earthly ministry. He modeled servanthood, predicted imminent events, and introduced a new command, which is really an affirmation of the appeal from Deuteronomy 6:5 teaching the love of God and of others. F. F. Bruce captures the newness of the command: ". . . but by his teaching and still more by his example Jesus imparted a new depth of meaning to it."[4] The behavior of the disciples would be a witness, an attractive, winsome influence because of their connection with a loving God.

He continued to comfort His disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit and then closed His teaching session with them in a time of prayer. Jesus prayed for Himself and the disciples and then expanded the circle to include "those who would believe in me through their message." Of particular concern in this article are His words in John 17:21-23: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21). "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (v. 23). Here the unity spoken of is "a unity, which has its root within the soul but is manifested in outward action."[5] It seems here that the vision is for all those who follow Jesus.

2. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 557.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vols. 20-21 of *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1023.

4. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 294.

5. Ibid., 335.

Before one rushes to corral all the churches together in outward unity, the context must govern the application. In John 17:21, "all the requests are subsequential, the second depends on the first, and the third depends on both."[6] Following the earlier illustration of the vine and the branches in John 15, the branches may not be in proximity, but they are united in one, Jesus Christ. Obviously, it is Christ who serves as the cohesive element in any practice of unity.

Scripture details groups of people in various locations as "the church of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ prayed that unity would exist among His followers. Donald Guthrie sees a development throughout the New Testament:

> The extended idea of a universal church which lined these local groups into one entity or body took time to develop. . . . It was a logical extension of the local community idea, for if individual members were knit together locally, the same principle would link communities which were formed on the same basis.[7]

In Paul's classic passage on the church in Ephesians 4:11-16, he teaches that each local group, if properly equipped, will manifest maturity with unity, knowledge, and stability. Paul shares his vision that they, working together according to their giftedness, will complement one another and experience unity, without lapsing into neglect concerning the deceitfulness of men.

The Scriptures complete the picture of the church with a reality check, calling her to diligence in confronting evil and false doctrine. Here is a sampling of such passages: Romans 16:17 warns against those who would cause divisions with contrary teachings. Galatians 1:8-9 alerts us to a false gospel with their own doctrines. First Timothy 6:3, 5 highlights the importance of the teachings of Jesus. Titus 3:10 admonishes us to confront divisive persons and possibly avoid them. Second Peter 3:17 reminds believers to be on guard for doctrinal error. Second Corinthians 6:14-18 clearly prohibits formal connections with unbelievers by teaching separation. Second Peter 2:1-3 guarantees there will be false teachers with their doctrines.

6. Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1994), 275.

7. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 788.

That God is concerned that believers be sensitive to error as they live for Him is quite evident. He affords false teaching no slack among God's people. Thus, one of the responsibilities of leadership is alertness to doctrinal error, as Paul expresses in his farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31.

## HOW HAS THE STRUGGLE CONCERNING UNITY PLAYED OUT IN MODERN HISTORY?

As one ponders the place of the local church in the context of the body of Christ, he must engage the tension between acting as a sole individual in the monastic mold and the unity that Jesus prayed His followers could experience. How has this been practiced in the past? Here are some examples.

The American Bible Society, founded in 1816, created a desire for denominations to work together. This cooperation could exist without any threat to their distinctives. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1851 and the Student Volunteer Movement in 1886 brought Christians together for causes that reached beyond the local church. In spite of the successes in evangelism, some felt that these organizations were ignoring social issues. However, the more telling motive may have been an infatuation with liberal theology and the collateral damage from Darwinian influence that undermined the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was not the lack of social impact; it was the allure of a social gospel to supplant the good news of a personal gospel.

The word "ecumenical" means relating to "the inhabited world." It carries the idea of universality. The ecumenical movement as we know it resulted from the missionary effort during the nineteenth century.[8] The fruits of cooperation among evangelicals prompted denominations to imagine the impact of organic unions, even large church confederations.

Ecumenism became so popular in the mid-twentieth century that an article appeared even in a popular women's magazine declaring, "Today every major Protestant denomination in this country, with the exception of the Southern Baptists and various 'fundamentalists sects' is engaged at the very highest levels in ecumenical discussions with fellow Protestants or Catholics or both."[9] The author goes on to answer the question, Why unity? " . . . the ecumenical movement is simply a practical application

8. Ralph Hampton, "Reassessing the Ecumenical Movement," *Contact* (December 1979), 13.

9. Victor H. Berstein, "What Church Unity Demands of Catholics and Protestants," *Redbook* (March 1966), 65.

of the principle, 'united we stand, divided we fall.' The Christians have decided that only in unity can they hope to survive the world onslaught of secularism."[10]

Different organizations formed to accommodate this thrust. The Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and the National Council of Churches (NCC, formerly known as the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America) were realizations of this dream. The NCC became the voice of the Protestant church as far as the national press was concerned. Social change was more attractive than a message against sin and the call to repentance. The NCC pronounced most of the religious assessments until the middle 1970s when the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) had supplanted them as the voice of Protestantism to the national press.

Opposition to the ecumenical efforts of the NCC came from the fundamentalist movement. Whereas the ecumenical groups sounded a note of coming together regardless of the cost, the fundamentalists trumpeted a call to separation. Born out of the theological controversies of the early twentieth century, the fundamentalists addressed the challenge of modernism in the church.

By the turn of the century, liberalism had made inroads into the seminaries that fed into the local churches. It was not uncommon for a minister to reject creation and the infallibility of the Bible. Something had to be done, and the conservatives rose to the occasion. In 1909 a set of twelve paperback books was published called *The Fundamentals*. This period birthed the great apologetic works of J. Gresham Machen. Schools were founded for training ministers. Nearly forty Bible schools were founded between 1930 and 1940.[11]

God used the fundamentalist movement to preserve the integrity of the Bible. Surprising to some, the fundamentalists were not so militant in the beginning. Ernest Sandeen remarked about *The Fundamentals*: "They showed remarkable restraint in promoting the more controversial aspects of their views."[12] Unfortunately, fundamentalism failed to stem the tide of modernism, and the leading seminaries and colleges succumbed to leaders of liberal persuasion. The experience of seeing the church compromised by false doctrine would heavily influence the fundamentalist

10. Ibid., 114.

11. Earle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 481.

12. Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 119.

mindset. Keeping their eyes open and maintaining a vigil for doctrinal purity, fundamentalist passions were ignited in those early days. The "trademarks" of fundamentalism are biblical holiness and ecclesiastical purity.[13] In the zeal to maintain a pure church, militancy became a more prominent feature. In fact, a passion for purity prompted the cry: "The only true fundamentalist is a fighting fundamentalist!"[14] One cannot fault the virtue of preserving biblical purity. However, such zeal grew out of balance as a result of frustration and the new standard of "second-degree separation." This kind of separation insisted that a Christian separate from other Christian groups who failed to separate from questionable groups. In fact, this inaction would forfeit their right even to be called fundamentalist. "Fundamentalism" now included more than adherence to the fundamental doctrines of Scripture explained in the 1909 publications. The dogma of second-degree separation became a fundamental! Thus, the stage was set for another movement among Christians.

In the 1940s a fresh movement emerged from the fundamentalist movement called neoevangelicalism. Some wanted to shed the militant image of the fundamentalists. Although they had similar doctrinal beliefs, their attitudes were different. Others desired respectability in the church world. This regaining of respectability had a price in the mind of some, such as historian David O. Beale: "it meant carrying on a dialogue and joining with them in ecumenical campaigns."[15] The passionate interest in leaving the fundamentalist camp dulled some sensitivity toward error among those looking for something less confrontational. Their zeal to correct the image of Christians in the eyes of the public sometimes clouded their judgment.

For many, the new evangelical movement provided an opportunity to escape the harshness of the militant fundamentalist movement. Instead of separation, the cry was infiltration. To the fundamentalists, the movement away from militancy, from the clarion call of separation, had to be a religious compromise. To the neoevangelical leaders, separation from false doctrine was never compromised, but the antagonistic spirit of "separatism" was avoided. Paul P. Petticord, a past president of NAE, in his address to the NAE Convention made it very clear: "Evangelicals do not believe that any person denying the atonement of the Lord Jesus or the final authority of the Word of God can have any place in the Body of

13. David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism since 1850* (Greenville, S.C.: Unusual Publications), 10.

14. Ibid., 357.

15. Ibid., 8.

Christ."[16] Citing some of the criticism of Billy Graham, he countered, "To accept 'cooperation of' is different from becoming 'a part of an organization.'"[17]

So the tension between the fundamentalists and the neoevangelicals was more a matter of religious behavior than erosion of fundamental doctrines. No doubt, some non-fundamentalists with suspicious theology found a safe haven among these new evangelicals. The National Association of Evangelicals fought liberalism in another way, but it was just too close for comfort for the fundamentalists. Both groups had godly men who pursued their approach with a passion—both believing that their way was the biblical way.

The ecclesiastical world fell along a continuum from multi-level separatism to wholesale ecumenism. The terms "separatist" and "ecumenist" are not evil in themselves, because a serious Bible student desires to be separate from all evil while desiring a model of biblical unity within the local church as well as the church world at large.

It appears that both positions, as some portray them, are beyond the teachings of the Bible. Each position has a flagship passage from which it proceeds. For the separatist the passage of choice is 2 Corinthians 6:14-19, and for the ecumenist it is John 17:21-24. Separatists tend to be most concerned with their slant on ecclesiastical purity. It seems some are possessed with reducing the "acceptable" body of Christ to the narrowest of tests. Ecumenists could well be driven more by popular thinking and socially acceptable practices. Robert E. Picirilli was correct when he said: "That ecumenical ideals are popular is not surprising. The very spirit of our times nurtures such thinking. Everything must be tolerated in love, say those who speak for our age."[18]

## HOW HAVE FREE WILL BAPTISTS FACED THE ISSUE?

Participating in the ecumenical movement is not an issue among Free Will Baptists. Much of the credit for this stance goes to our leaders such as Picirilli, Leroy Forlines, and Ralph Hampton. Hampton's statement typifies their alertness: "Union without doctrinal basis is not biblical. The

16. Paul P. Petticord, "True Ecumenicity," address to the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, 11.

17. Ibid., 8.

18. Robert E. Picirilli, "The Charismatics, the New Ecumenicals" in *Contending for the Faith* (Nashville: The Commission on Theological Liberalism, National Association of Free Will Baptists, 1984), 4.

lack of union does not preclude genuine unity nor does unity require union."[19]

Fortunately, reckless ecumenism is not our problem today. The real problem is difficult to define. There is an awkwardness between those who sense the need to fight for maintaining their form of ecclesiastical purity and those who feel that the critical spirit toward other conservative Christians is unnecessary and hurtful to the body. This disagreement intensifies when some are convinced that sin is being tolerated, while still others decry a legalistic mindset. The frustration for the evangelical is that it seems that the fundamentalist cannot accept anyone different from himself. Any movement to accommodate someone less restrictive is opening the barn door to the wolf.

David Wells summarizes our tensions well with his assessment of the broader Christian community:

> Fundamentalism was a walled city; evangelicalism is a city. Fundamentalism always had an air of embattlement about it, of being an island in a sea of unremitting hostility. Evangelicalism has reacted against this sense of psychological isolation. It has lowered the barricades. It is open to the world. The great sin in Fundamentalism is to compromise; the great sin in evangelicalism is to be narrow.[20]

In general, the Free Will Baptist fundamentalist's solution is constant vigilance expressed by separation or at least greater scrutiny throughout the professing evangelical church. Many Free Will Baptist evangelicals believe we fall short of the biblical call to unity. They regret that our denomination's separatist tendencies in the twentieth century have short-changed our denomination from the blessing of Christ's church, robbing us of many valuable things.

The most prolific example would be the participation in and then withdrawal from the National Association of Evangelicals. The NAE was born in 1942, seven years after the National Association of Free Will Baptists formed. In 1946 Free Will Baptists joined the NAE as an associate member.[21] Free Will Baptists were very active in the NAE, even voting to give 3% of their unified program funds to the organization.[22] Several

19. Hampton, 19.

20 David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 301.

21. *Minutes of the National Association of Free Will Baptists* (Nashville: The Executive Office of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, 1946), 12.

22. Ibid.

Free Will Baptist men became influential servants in the organization, but currents were flowing against the cooperative approach with other denominations.

Free Will Baptists were identified with the fundamentalist movement in the early twentieth century. Davidson surmises: "That relationship not only tended to discourage ecumenism, but also encouraged an increasing isolationism that led to the dissolving of relationships with a number of evangelical cooperative organizations."[23] The slide to isolationism or the rise to purity—take your pick—began in 1967 when the National Association of Free Will Baptists voted to sever all relations with the American Bible Society due to "apparent tendencies toward ecumenicalism."[24]

The fires of separatism were lighted, and, over the next few years, the struggle between fundamentalists and evangelicals within the Free Will Baptist denomination raged. It culminated in Forth Worth, Texas, in 1972, with the Association voting 257-225 to dissociate from the NAE.[25] Ten years later, the Association voted to "re-affirm our position as a fundamentalist denomination."[26] As indicated by the vote in Forth Worth in 1982, the National Association of Free Will Baptists is a divided denomination on this issue, and it will affect the way the denomination approaches situations in the future. Depending on one's point of view, Free Will Baptists have either lost a great deal of quality interaction with the larger body of Christ, or we have been saved from an entanglement that would lead down a road of ineffectiveness and displeasure to God.

## WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

This article suggests a more flexible approach that will allow more freedom for cooperative efforts in a less than typical manner. The Scriptures must be consulted when making a decision on alliances or working with other church groups. Romans 16:17 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 make it clear that the church must be vigilant in her alertness for false doctrine. As Forlines reasons, "Can anyone doubt these passages teach us that we must take a forthright stand for the fundamentals of the faith and that we cannot cooperate with, fellowship with, or approve of those who

23. William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in America, 1727-1984* (Nashville: Randall House, 1985), 420.

24. *Minutes of the National Association of Free Will Baptists* (1967), 14.

25. *Minutes of the National Association of Free Will Baptists* (1972), 24.

26. *Minutes of the National Association of Free Will Baptists* (1982), 135.

deny the fundamentals?"[27] We can become so preoccupied with an issue that we eventually develop an un-Christlike posture. Imagine that! Good intentions gone awry.

Formal ecclesiastical union with other groups is problematic. The ecumenical movement that started earlier this century is not for Christians. The ecumenical movement as portrayed by the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches is not an option for a Bible-believing Christian. Participation in the National Association of Evangelicals is a moot point because the effectiveness of the organization is less potent than in earlier years. Typical of many Christian organizations, the forty-year cycle has run its course, and the National Association of Evangelicals is having difficulty retooling for a new time and a new day in Christian circles. We are living in a different world, and the need for formal membership may be less critical. The best choice may be a renewed emphasis on informal cooperation among Christians, local church to local church, and a resistance to fighting the battles of a half-century past.

The so-called middle ground of "evangelical ecumenism" is suspect because of the disarray one finds within the evangelical movement. When Roger Olson argues that a division between traditionalists and reformists threatens to end our (the evangelical) consensus, Timothy George sends forth a vivid retort: "Theologians are not freelance scholars of religion, but trustees for the deposit of faith that they, like pastors, are charged with passing on intact to the rising generations."[28]

Spiritual self-interest groups will forever shake the tenuous connection among Christians. Presbyterians argue over supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Pentecostal groups joust over the necessity of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) with the baptism of the Spirit. Baptists debate Lordship salvation. Charismatics ponder the reality of a Toronto blessing. Even Free Will Baptists grow tense over Promise Keepers. Robert Webber lists fourteen subgroups in evangelicalism in discussing the challenges within the movement.[29] All that is to say that debate and interaction will be commonplace.

For those who spend some time looking into some of the tensions within evangelicalism, there is a temptation just to give up and go home. (That feeling has overwhelmed some after certain National Association meetings.) Giving up and cloistering into private God-missions causes

27. Leroy Forlines, "Theological Separation," in *Contending for the Faith*, 3.
28. Timothy George, "A Theology to Die for," *Christianity Today* (February 9, 1998), 49.
29. Robert Webber, *Common Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 32.

one to miss out on what God wishes to do among His people in our world. So how do we fulfill God's vision for the church as the bride is prepared to meet the bridegroom? How do we prove faithful to the admonitions of Scripture as we interact with others?

God seems to raise up within orthodoxy thinkers who challenge the status quo. Although some may bristle at the thought-provoking challenges, the works of Carl Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947); Robert Webber, *Common Roots* (1978); and David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (1993) affirm the confidence one may assume when the Bible is raised high as the standard for belief.

Some Christians have a tendency to be indiscriminate in their labeling of every caldron stirrer within Christendom. For instance, when we hear about the need to revitalize the church, a temptation arises to corral everyone into the same pen. Compare Robert Webber with Clark Pinnock. Both call for renewal but their approach is dissimilar. Whereas Webber calls us back beyond the Reformation to the early church Fathers, Pinnock relishes the idea of innovation in theology.[30] In his call to renewal, Webber asserts, "If evangelicals are to offer leadership to the church, we must stand in continuity with biblical and historic Christianity, a stance which will provide healing and reconciliation, both inwardly to the church herself and outwardly to the world."[31]

As we peer into the next century, we glance back and reckon ourselves as the historical people of God. Webber's analysis is provocative: "Thus it calls into question the ahistorical and exclusivistic attitudes characteristic of some evangelicals."[32] We have a grand history as Free Will Baptists, one of freedom to serve God as one's biblically taught conscience guides and a history of cooperation with other churches. The period of 1972-1998 is but a small chapter and should not be characterized as the norm for our ecclesiastical outlook.

David Smith reminds us that "Christians have an obligation, in view of Christ's prayer for the unity of the church, to accept that all who love Christ in sincerity and truth are members of His body and so are brothers and sisters. They, therefore, must do what they can to cooperate with one another and love them."[33] Augustus H. Strong echoes the thought:

> No church can properly ignore, or disregard, the existence or work of other churches around it. Every other church is

30. Clark Pinnock, "A Pilgrim on the Way," *Christianity Today* (February 9, 1998), 43.
31. Webber, 34.
32. Ibid., 43.
33. David L. Smith, *All God's People* (Glendale, Ill.: Victor, 1986), 405.

> presumptively possessed of the Spirit, in equal measure with itself. There must therefore be sympathy and mutual furtherance of each other's welfare among churches, as among individual Christians.[34]

There is a call to something more than just serving God in a self-appointed arena. Yet as the church extends herself, cautions must be employed, because Satan plots to corrupt the church. The alarm Wells rings is timely:

> Unless the evangelical Church can recover the knowledge of what it means to live before a holy God, unless in its worship it can relearn humility, wonder, love, and praise, unless it can find again a moral purpose in the world that resonates with the holiness of God and that is accordingly deep and unyielding—unless the evangelical Church can do all these things, theology will have no place in its life.[35]

Without sound theology the church will be poorly equipped for witness in our time. Although we may tend to minimize it, culture does affect our attitudes and approach as churchmen. That does not for an instant imply a change in doctrinal belief but a new challenge as it relates to relationships with other believers.

We are called not only to be holy and separated from evil; we are also challenged to be a people of discernment. We must heed the Apostle Paul's prayer as recorded in Colossians 1:9ff.: "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." After the rebuke for immaturity, the writer of Hebrews teaches, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). These verses indicate that there is a place for spiritual discernment. In fact, it becomes a necessity if the church is to realize the desires of God.

And now as we enter the third Christian millennium, the situation is different from what it was before. Although liberalism is still a force in some circles, the decline in the liberal mainline churches makes it much less of a player. New Age ideas and postmodernism are having a greater impact.

34. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1906), 926.
35. Wells, 301.

Theological battles, though important, must make room for doing God's business in our communities. Where are the answers to life's challenges? The lostness of people is the primary concern from the church's perspective. But, racism, poverty, AIDS, educational crises, addictions, and the decline of the family must arrest the attention of the church, too, as an application of the gospel.

Here are some things church leaders can do to engage the enemy and rescue the lost as the church awaits the coming of the Lord.

*Cherish our heritage without giving it an inordinate amount of importance.*

The despair of society has overwhelmed attention to religious details. "The major division in American religion now revolves around an axis of liberalism and conservatism rather than the denominational landmarks of the past."[36] It is insignificant to plan as if our denomination will be the attraction. That only happens with those already connected to a denomination. That is not to minimize the importance of denominations. Shelley dispels the notion that denominations are a detriment to the church's witness to unity by highlighting the fact that denominations were created to maintain unity.[37] However, denominationalism could become an unhealthy distraction and out of balance in a church's mission. Bible believers must lift the sacred text beyond the call to separatism and embrace Webber's expression of the church:

> Paul's reference to the church as "the body of Christ" is not a mere metaphor containing social and psychological value, but a statement about the humanity of that relationship which exists between Christ and the redeemed. From an incarnational perspective, the church is not a human organization, but a divine creation which, in a mystical, yet real way, co-inheres with the Son who is made present in and through her.[38]

*Maintain the vigilance over doctrinal issues.*

Forlines's statement rings true many years after he wrote it:

> The major task of Free Will Baptists as it relates to theological separation and the Scripture is that we continue to maintain

36. Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 178.

37. Bruce Shelley, "Denominations—Divided We Stand," *Christianity Today* (September 7, 1998), 90.

38. Webber, 247.

> our doctrinal purity. To preserve this doctrinal purity our approach must be determined by the situation we face. The situation that we face is considerably different from that faced by those who, some years back, felt compelled to leave certain denominations.[39]

Whatever practice one has in religious affiliation, the pursuit of truth must never yield to the pressures of conforming to one's preference. Fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and conservatism—all must kneel at the altar of truth. Doctrinal error, inappropriate entanglements, lifestyle concessions, along with sins of slander and fostering discord, must be recognized for what they are: sin!

*Appreciate, if possible, the contributions of those fellow believers who differ with you on the issue of separation.*

Forlines offers a biblical balance: "We must have unity on fundamental doctrines and basic principles, but we must have room for difference on some points of detail. The only way to have absolute unity is to have one person do the thinking for the rest of us."[40]

The evangelical is not about to capitulate to the fundamentalist and lose the precious opportunity to grow and experience the ecstasy of true biblical unity. The fundamentalist cannot allow himself even to consider retreating from a second-degree separation construct. The fundamentalist may have difficulty fellowshipping with a Free Will Baptist evangelical! However, by the grace of God, the two groups have the opportunity to grow.

The evangelical needs a reminder to be careful with his tolerance level. The fundamentalist mindset fosters ideas of disgust. For the fundamentalist, there will always be a target, even if one has to be invented. Sadly, some allow themselves to overestimate their place in the kingdom—a prophet complex—and those who do not believe "like me" are part of the conspiracy. The fundamentalist needs a reminder that rigidity can sap the spirit. The evangelical and fundamentalist need a reminder to hate sin and that all sin is sin. The fundamentalist needs a reminder to be more understanding and less judgmental before he has the facts. The evangelical needs a reminder that theology is in disarray, even in conservative circles, and caution is needed.

39. Forlines, 4.
40. Ibid., 7.

The pride trap may snare both factions. Some fundamentalists boast of their holy separateness, while some evangelicals crow about their inclusive attitude. Both need attitudinal adjustments. The blessing of the tension might be the corrective influence of those different from ourselves. One may need to be reminded to be holy and watch the ease with which one floats with the current religious trends. One may feel the awareness that holiness needs a dose of love and that suspicious minds may not be so spiritual. In spite of some deeply held differences, we could at least open our minds to learn from one another.

*Wrestle with different scenarios.*

Is there a difference between your joining a group that may be questionable and being joined by some questionable people? Are there some uneasy relationships that may be acceptable but call for caution? Is there a difference between a church activity like worship and evangelism and community efforts against gambling, racism, alcohol, and pornography? Is there guilt by association with denominational names, although they have a spectrum of belief within them like Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Methodists?

What doctrinal beliefs would prohibit fellowship? Eschatology? Security of the believer? Sanctification? Gifts of the Spirit? Inerrancy? What church practices would prevent fellowship? Worship styles? Bible translations? Music? The role of women? Dress? Amusements? Is there a difference between a pastor's participating in something and a church member's doing so?

*Determine your own uncompromising principles and stick with them until released by the Holy Spirit.*

It may sound more credible to assert that "I follow the teachings of the Bible to determine my practices." In reality, it often becomes a matter of preference. Clinton Arnold, alluding to 1 Corinthians, suggests that leadership styles, charismatic gifts, and the role of women are not worthy of dividing over.[41] Perhaps you believe that these are worth dividing over! Others may choose to separate from someone using what they consider a questionable translation of the Bible. What are the guidelines you will follow?

41. Clinton Arnold, "Where Do We Draw the Line?" *Discipleship Journal* 101 (1997): 50-52.

*Explore creative ways to invite biblical unity without offending your conscience.*

Regardless of one's views, it is a sad day when a Free Will Baptist believes that no one else in the church of the living Christ is worthy of our fellowship. It is more than sad. It is an abominable perspective and a confusing witness to a lost and dying world. Some may play it so safe that they regress to sub-biblical behavior.

All of us, regardless of mindset, can adjust to foster more biblical unity in our world.

- Pray for other churches in public.
- Develop your relationship with a pastor from another denomination.
- Start or join a pastor's prayer group.
- Build a partnership with another church using an obviously acceptable concern.
- Reach out to a Black or Hispanic congregation, even if they do enjoy worship more than you do.
- Seek some high profile events to model the body working together.
- Teach and model spiritual discernment on issue to issue.

May the words of Martin Luther ring in our ears and impress our hearts: "Let us act with humility, cast ourselves at one another's feet, join hands with each other, and help one another. For here we battle not against the pope or emperor, but against the devil, and do you imagine that he is asleep?"[42]

42. Cited in Wells, 283.

*Darrell Holley*

# The Principles of the Christian Critical Tradition

When I was young, I learned a little song that went like this:

> Tell me why the stars do shine,
> Tell me why the ivy twines,
> Tell me why the sky's so blue,
> And I will tell you just why I love you.
>
> Because God made the stars to shine,
> Because God made the ivy twine,
> Because God made the sky so blue,
> Because God made you, that's why I love you.

That, I believe, is the basis for the Judaeo-Christian view of the arts. At the center is the belief in a single, personal Creator. It is the working out of that very basic belief that has formed the foundation of what might be called the Christian critical tradition. For two thousand years now, Christians have been trying to understand the arts from a uniquely Christian perspective and to express themselves in art that is in keeping with that perspective. An exploration of that artistic tradition reveals certain ideas which have been the motivating principles behind both that criticism and that creativity.

The Russian Bolshevik Leon Trotsky, no lover of Christianity, once pointed out that "all the varieties of idealistic formalization, either openly or secretly, lead to a God, as the Cause of all causes. . . . a single personal Creator is already an element of order."[1] Trotsky, of course, disdained religion, particularly Christianity, but his statement represents a keen insight into the theistic, and particularly Christian, view of literature. Though he

1. Leon Trotsky, "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism," in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), 827.

hated it, Trotsky clearly saw that the Christian belief in the personal Creator results in a unique literary criticism.

Because personal belief systems are intricately tied with art, Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Fine Art*, said:

> Fine art is not real art till it is . . . free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy and has become simply a mode of revealing the consciousness and bringing to utterance the divine nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key—with many nations there is no other—to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion. . . . [The] mind . . . generates out of itself the works of fine art as the first middle term of reconciliation between pure thought and what is external, sensuous, and transitory, between nature with its finite actuality and the infinite freedom of the reason that comprehends.[2]

By looking at the art a person creates, one can look into the person, into his mind, and find the ideas that dwell there. Marcel Proust said, "Through art we can know another's view of the universe."[3]

If Hegel is true that the Idea will manifest itself in the work of art, then the critic is quite justified in trying to get at that Idea, in trying to understand just what the artist is saying. Criticism, in the Christian tradition, has attempted to do just that. It has attempted to discover that "view of the universe" which the art expresses and to judge that view by Christian beliefs. The Christian critic looks upon the work of art as a complex statement of the artist's beliefs and thoughts. Again, Hegel said:

> The universal need for expression in art lies . . . in man's rational impulse to exalt the inner and outer world into a spiritual consciousness for himself, as an object in which he recognizes his own self. He satisfies the need of this spiritual freedom when he makes all that exists explicit for himself *within*, and in a corresponding way realises this his explicit self *without*, evoking, thereby, in this reduplication of himself, what is in him into

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Philosophy of Fine Art," in *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 29-30.

3. Cited in H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 11.

> vision and into knowledge for his own mind and for that of others. This is the free rationality of man, in which, as all action and knowledge, so also art has its ground and necessary origin.[4]

With this view of the "meaning" of art, it has been quite possible for Christians to view the arts incorrectly. Christians have "from time to time puritanically denounced the Arts as irreligious and mischievous, or tried to exploit the Arts as a means to the teaching of religion and morals."[5] There have been famous apologies and defenses of the arts, such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, which defended the arts from the charge of impiety or immorality. Often these "defenses" attempted to show that art could be "used" for moral purposes. These defenses of the arts themselves, however, viewed the arts incorrectly. Hegel says:

> In this aspect of the matter, the fine arts being granted to be a *luxury*, it has been thought necessary in various ways to take up their defence with reference to their relation towards *practical* necessities, and more especially towards morality and piety, and, as it is impossible to demonstrate their harmlessness, at least to make it credible that the mental luxury in question afforded a larger sum of advantages than of disadvantages.[6]

The viewing of art as a luxury was often combated by viewing art as a tool, a means of getting to some desired end. But this also demeans art. It turns it into something not independent at all, but something "servile."[7] It leads to a fierce didacticism, to the attaching of an Aesopian "the moral of this story is" to the end of every work.[8]

These mistaken views are not the Christian view of the arts, though they have often been mistaken for it. The Christian view of the arts is rooted, as Trotsky implied, in the Christian belief of the personal Creator. Art has value "because a work of art is a work of creativity, and creativity has value because God is the Creator"—this is the Christian view.[9] Francis Schaeffer said:

4. Hegel, 59.
5. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 69-70.
6. Hegel, 25.
7. Ibid., 29.
8. Ibid., 81.
9. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 34.

> An art work has value as a creation because man is made in the image of God, and therefore man not only can love and think and feel emotion, but also has the capacity to create. Being in the image of the Creator, we are called upon to have creativity. In fact, it is part of the image of God to be creative, or to have creativity. We never find an animal, non-man, making a work of art. On the other hand, we never find men anywhere in the world or in any culture in the world who do not produce art. Creativity is a part of the distinction between man and non-man.[10]

This is a much more balanced view of art and much more in keeping with the principles of the Christian critical tradition. The Christian critic sees the work of art not as a whimsical luxury nor even as a tract, but as a thing of meaning of itself. Now, this should not be confused with the idea of "art for art's sake." In the Christian view, the work does not have to maintain its value alone; it is an outgrowth of man's basic creativeness, an aspect of his God-given humanity, and therefore has value. A work of art has value as a work of creativity.[11]

Because art is a result of man's creativity, it is, as Hegel said, "of a spiritual nature." Man's mind "imbues all the products of its activity with thought."[12] The Christian critic therefore examines a work of art and hopes to ascertain the "thought" behind the work. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, speaks of "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."[13] The Christian critic, when he has interpreted a work (ascertained the "thought" behind it), then evaluates that work in light of Christian principles, principles ultimately revealed in the Scriptures.

In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul writes: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."[14] In this passage Paul presents six basic principles that, throughout the history of Christian criticism, have served as criteria by which to evaluate art. Rookmaaker, the twentieth-century art critic, has called this passage "the mental attitude involved in being

10. Ibid., 34.
11. Ibid., 36.
12. Hegel, 35-36.
13. 2 Corinthians 10:5. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the King James Version of the Bible.
14. Philippians 4:8.

essentially human, expressing the true humanity which Christ came to restore."[15] John Calvin called it "general exhortations which relate to the whole of life."[16]

These principles express that works of art are the product of human thought and rationality and can therefore be examined in the light of that thought. Paul's Idealism which he expresses in this passage is at the very heart of the Christian concept of the arts.

Paul here understands all products of human artistry as products of the artist's beliefs and ideas. The work of art (or "external element," as Hegel would call it) does indeed partake of the nature of the artist.

> We assume something further behind [the external element], something inward, a significance, by which the external semblance has a soul breathed into it. It is this, its soul, that the external appearance indicates. [The work of art is not] exhausted in these mere particular lines, curves, surfaces, borrowing, reliefs in the stone, in these colours, tones, sounds, of words, [*sic*] or whatever other medium is employed; but it should reveal life, feeling, soul, import, and mind, which is just what we mean by the significance of a work of art.[17]

Paul calls for the examination of art and not just the *examination* of art but the *evaluation* of it. C. S. Lewis says that the Christian will "take literature a little less seriously than the cultured Pagan" due to the transitoriness of life.[18] If this life is all that there is, if there is no immortality, then indeed the pagan is quite right to take this life very seriously, for it is all that there is. Man's salvation must then be found in this life alone. If this life must be everything to man (and it must, if there is no other), then he should indeed take it most seriously. Ultimately, he will find, however, that this life—which must be everything to him—will begin to seem valueless and insipid, for, in a strange paradox, if this life must be everything, it will begin to seem like nothing—for it must certainly fail to be everything. But to the Christian, this life is not everything. There is a life beyond the realm of space and time. This life therefore does not have to be everything; it can be merely the something that it is. The Christian can then enjoy the delights of this world as they are, not asking too much of them,

15. Rookmaaker, 236.

16. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 121.

17. Hegel, 44.

18. Cited in Rookmaaker, 236.

not requiring that they be one's salvation, for "salvation cometh of the Lord."

This view of life is at the heart of what Paul talks about. For the Christian, art is not everything, but it can be the something that it is. Art can be enjoyed merely as the product of man's creativity, not as a means of salvation.

Some may criticize the construction of a "Christian criticism" as being a narrowing view of art. Some may contend that the application of these six principles will be stultifying on the arts, will result in the arts' being "frozen." Rookmaaker answers that objection:

> The norms of art are in fact basically not different from the norms for the whole of life. Art belongs to human life, is part of it, and obeys the same rules. The fact that the artist must keep in mind the specific structures of art is the same as anyone else in other human activities must do: the government has to work within the structures of the state, the motorist within the structures of the way the car works and of the rules of the road. But whether you are an artist, a politician or a motorist you must apply not only the specialized structures of your own field of operations but also the structure of the whole of life, the fact that, being human, man is designed to work in a particular way, and that only by being wholly true to humanity will each activity really fulfill its purpose.[19]

The Christian view of the arts, far from "freezing" the arts, sets them free to fulfill their purpose.

Paul's criteria for evaluating works of art are six: truth, seriousness, righteousness, purity, beauty, and technical excellence.

Dorothy Sayers, the mystery novelist and friend of C. S. Lewis's, said:

> In this matter, as in so many others, Christianity displays its usual propensity for making everything as awkward as possible. It outrages the tidy-minded by occupying a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it made modern science and the modern views of history possible by insisting that the pattern of events was not (as the Greek philosophers thought) static or cyclic, but a progression in time from a beginning to an end. On the other, it tiresomely maintains that at every point in the developing temporal process, the conditional truths are referable to an extra-temporal standard of absolute truth, before

19. Ibid.

> which all souls enjoy complete equality, no aristocratic privilege being attached to the accident of later birth.[20]

This is the first principle: the work of art must be true. In light of the modern theories of criticism, this is an amazing statement. The Greek word translated "true" might also be understood as "real, actual."[21] One lexicon defines it as "truth, but not merely truth as spoken; truth of idea, reality."[22] In other words, the work must be true to "what is," that is, what is real. The Christian critic demands that works of art be true.

How can a work of art be true? Surely this does not mean that there must be an exact copy of reality; such an interpretation would result in no art at all, for "art is never a copy of reality. . . . Art always gives an interpretation of reality."[23] What then does truth in art mean?

> Truth in art does not mean doing accurate copies. But that the artist's insight is rich and full, that he really has a good view of reality, that he does justice to the different elements of the aspect of reality he is representing. Truth has to do with the fullness of reality, its scope and meaning. It is artistic truth! Hamlet may never have lived—but Shakespeare's Hamlet is true insofar as Shakespeare has been able to make the figure he created true to reality, to human character and potential. . . . So too fairy tales can be true, if they show human action and behavior in keeping with human character—within the framework of fairy tale reality.[24]

The principle of truth in art certainly does not prohibit fiction or fantasy. Even when dealing with an unreal situation, such as fantasy or science fiction, the author is still obliged to present moral truth. As Dorothy Sayers said, this is the standard to which Christianity brings everything. In an essay on the English critic Charles Williams, she says that he ran "counter to the modern trend in criticism." She says that he, like all early critics, judged works of literature "as if they were contemporaries, bringing their opinions to the bar of absolute, rather than of relative, truth."

20. Dorothy Sayers, *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 72.

21. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: American Book Company, 1963), 72.

22. Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 12.

23. Rookmaaker, 236.

24. Ibid., 237-38.

"He was thus never content with knowing under what pressure of social conditions a poet came to say what he did: he felt that this did not exhaust the subject or explain the poem away. He always went on to ask: 'Did the poet speak truth? and if so, what ought we to do about it?'"[25] If she is right about Williams, then he measures up as an excellent Christian critic, at least on this point. He did exactly what Paul recommends; he examined works in regard to their truthfulness.

It is of just this aspect of good literature that the great Russian novelist Alexandr Solzhenitsyn spoke in his Nobel Lecture:

> We will be told: What can literature do against the pitiless onslaught of naked violence? Let us not forget that violence does not and cannot flourish by itself; it is inevitably intertwined with *lying*. Between them there is the closest, most profound and natural bond: nothing screens violence except lies, and the only way lies can hold out is by violence. Whoever has once announced violence as his *method* must inexorably choose lying as his *principle*. At birth, violence behaves openly and even proudly. But as soon as it becomes stronger and firmly established, it senses the thinning of the air around it and cannot go on without befogging itself in lies, coating itself with lying's sugary oratory. It does not always or necessarily go straight for the gullet; usually it demands of its victims only allegiance to the lie, only complicity in the lie.
>
> The simple act of an ordinary courageous man is not to take part, not to support lies! Let *that* come into the world and even reign over it, but not through me. Writers and artists can do more: they can *vanquish lies*! In the struggle against lies, art has always won and always will. Conspicuously, incontestably for everyone. Lies can stand up against much in the world, but not against art. . . . In Russian, proverbs about *truth* are favorites. They persistently express the considerable, bitter, grim experience of the people, often astonishingly: *One word of truth outweighs the world*. On such a seemingly fantastic violation of the laws of the conservation of mass and energy are based both my own activities and my appeal to the writers of the whole world.[26]

It is precisely on this principle, the principle of truthfulness, that much of the debate over the literature of the Eastern civilizations has

25. Sayers, *Poetry*, 71-72.

26. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Lecture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 33-34.

hinged. In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote his famous "Minute on Indian Education." The debate in Parliament centered on what form the government-subsidized education in India would take. Would the students study Arabic and Sanscrit works or would they study the curriculum of the average English school? It was in behalf of the principle of truthfulness that Lord Macaulay spoke in behalf of the so-called "Anglicist" position: "What we spend on the Arabic and Sanscrit colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth; it is bounty-money paid to raise up champions of error. It goes to form a nest . . . of bigots."[27] After describing his conversations with scholars distinguished in Arabic and Sanscrit, he says, "I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."[28] At first glance, it appears that Macaulay was one of those bigots whom he denounced as "champions of error." What caused him to speak this way? He gives a reason:

> The first instance to which I refer, is the great revival of letters among the Western nations at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time almost everything that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee of Public Instruction has hitherto acted; had they neglected the language of Cicero and Tacitus; had they confined their attention to the old dialects of our own island; had they printed nothing and taught nothing at the universities but Chronicles in Anglo-Saxon, and Romances in Norman-French, would England have been what she now is? What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our own tongue is to the people of India.[29]

Macaulay champions the liberal arts, which do not lie, which lead men into truth.

Some no doubt will raise the question as to whether the arts do indeed express propositional truth. Now, certainly, a poem will express truth differently from a sermon or scientific treatise; a drama will state truth indirectly. ("The thought of Shakespeare [is not] to be found in the utterance of any particular character," wrote Allan Bloom. "That thought

27. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education," in *Speeches by Lord Macaulay with His Minute on Indian Education* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935, rpt. 1979), 355-56.

28. Ibid., 349.

29. Ibid., 351.

is in none of the parts but is somehow in the whole, and the process of arriving at it is more subtle than that involved in reading a treatise."[30]) But speak the truth they must. "That a work of art is in the form of fantasy or epic or painting does not mean that there is not propositional content. Just as one can have propositional statements in prose, there can be propositional statements in poetry, in painting, in virtually any art form."[31]

Schaeffer tells the story of a liberal theologian at Princeton who commented that "he did not mind saying the creeds, providing that he could sing them." Schaeffer comments on this:

> What he meant was that so long as he could make them a work of art he didn't feel that he had to worry about the content. But this is both poor theology and poor aesthetics. A lyric can be as emphatically (and accurately) historic [*sic*] as a straight piece of prose. *Paradise Lost,* for example, contains many statements which while artistically expressed are almost straight theology. Just because something takes the form of a work of art does not mean that it cannot be factual.[32]

Paul certainly did not believe in the lack of propositional truth in art. In his instructions to the early Christians about their worship, he instructs them to sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" and to sing in the spirit—but to sing "with the understanding also."[33] Obviously he viewed art as being able to express truth.

This principle of truthfulness in art would appear to break down when confronted by an abstract work, that is, a work with no actual "subject." Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins in d Minor,* for instance—how can it be said to express truth? Even abstract works "say something." Can anyone doubt that the ghostly, elongated figures of Giacometti speak of the alienation and loneliness so felt in modern culture? Can anyone doubt that the "music" of John Cage reflects his belief in the lack of rationality in life, his belief that human existence is basically irrational and absurd? The question, Is it true? must be applied not just to the "content" but to the form of the work. The form a work of art takes may be evaluated just as the content may be.

30. Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), xviii.
31. Schaeffer, 48.
32. Ibid.
33. Ephesians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 14:15.

The first principle of Christian criticism is the principle of truthfulness. The Christian critic looks for truth. The Christian critic agrees with Hegel that "art has the vocation of revealing the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape."[34]

The second principle by which the work of art is to be evaluated is the principle of seriousness. *Seriousness* does not seem to be the very best word to describe this principle, but it does as well as *noble* and *honest*, two of the ways the word has been translated in this passage. The Greek word so translated is defined as "venerable, honorable," "revered, august," and "grave, worthy of respect" in various lexicons. Perhaps *serious* will do as well as these.

A "noble" style of art is one which takes the content and the form seriously, which treats them with respect. People often speak of a "serious work" or "serious literature" or "serious music." This does not imply that the work must be humorless, that it cannot be a comedy. It certainly may, but, however it treats the content and the form, it must take them seriously. T. S. Eliot uses the term *maturity* to refer to the author, his manners, and his language. This "maturity" is certainly part of the principle termed here "seriousness."

It is at this point that the question of content versus form must be raised. Throughout the history of criticism this issue has divided critics. Where does the Christian critic stand? Is he interested in content? Yes, of course he is. Is he interested in form? The principle of truthfulness shows that he must be. Where does the Christian critic come down?—somewhere in the middle, or better yet, on both sides; the principle of seriousness requires this. Hegel said:

> It is [art's] true task to bring to consciousness the highest interests of the mind. Hence it follows at once with respect to the *content* that fine art cannot rove in the wildness of unfettered fancy, for these spiritual interests determine definite bases for its content, however manifold and inexhaustible its forms and shapes may be. The same holds true for the forms themselves. They, again, are not at the mercy of mere chance. Not every plastic shape is capable of being the expression and representation of those spiritual interests, of absorbing and of reproducing them; every definite content determines a form suitable to it.[35]

34. Hegel, 87.
35. Ibid., 37.

"Every definite content determines a form suitable to it." This is nothing more than Paul's principle of seriousness: a work must unite the content with a form suitable to it. Good "content" alone is not sufficient, for the "form" is also part of the content. "We should realize that if something untrue or immoral is stated in great art it can be far more destructive and devastating than if it is expressed in poor art or prosaic statement."[36] Moral excellence presented in a technically un-excellent manner says that that morality is slight, unimportant, negligible, perhaps even untrue; moral excellence presented in a technically un-excellent fashion is satire; the style pokes fun at the words and changes the meaning. Technical excellence is very important, but it is not alone sufficient; a wrong presented beautifully becomes all the more wrong and wicked.

As a postscript to the discussion of this principle, it might be good to deal with a criticism that Francis Schaeffer makes in his work *Art and the Bible*. He says, "We must distinguish carefully between style and message. Let me say firmly that there is no such thing as a godly style or an ungodly style. The more one tries to make such a distinction, the more confusing it becomes."[37] Schaeffer and others have criticized some Christians for rejecting works of art which attempted to put sound content with an alien (what they often considered "non-Christian") style. Now certainly there have been Christians who were uncultured people too ignorant to look very deeply into a work for its correct "message" or too obstinately conservative to accept any new art form or style, whatever its qualities. But sometimes this has not been the case. This principle of seriousness (often, like all these principles, held in simple form by people who have a background in Christianity but not in the arts) is an explanation of why the average Christian (or even the average non-Christian who has accepted Christian values and culture) hates some "modern art" or "modern literature" or "modern music." The problem is that those "modern" styles are not appropriate, do not suit well the Christian philosophical message. Those forms when united with that "message" change it.

In an example from our popular culture, this explains why the young person reared in one set of standards may greatly enjoy modern music (and, if he professes Christianity, even use it to express his religious faith) and another person (perhaps older or from a more conservative home) who was reared in a decidedly Christian culture find it puzzling and alien and ugly. The latter (though he may not realize it) is not familiar

36. Schaeffer, 44.
37. Ibid., 51.

with the "modern" worldview, only with the "older world-view still flavored with the salt of Christian values—open, knowing of a God, of justice and absolutes."[38] He realizes that this modern music (to him it is alien music) is not at all in keeping with the traditional Christian worldview. This may not be a rational realization that is the result of actual education on his part, either in music or theology; it may be simply a vague feeling of alienation or puzzlement.

Before going on to the next principle, it might be appropriate at this point to clarify something that may be unclear. The terms "Christian philosophic message," "Christian content," "Christian theme" should not be understood to be limited to distinctly "religious" or "biblical" themes. Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* is as "Christian" as Augustine's *Confessions*, though it is not "religious." Rembrandt's *The Slaughtered Ox* is certainly more Christian, in the sense of this essay, than Picasso's *Last Supper*.

> No, what is Christian in art does not lie in the theme, but in the spirit of it, in its wisdom and the understanding of reality it reflects. Just as being a Christian does not mean going round singing hallelujah all day, but showing the renewal of one's life by Christ through true creativity, so a Christian painting is not one in which all the figures have haloes or (if we put our ears to the canvas) can be heard singing hallelujahs. Christian art is nothing special. It is sound, healthy, good art. It is art that is in line with the God-given structures of art, one which has a loving and free view on reality, one which is good and true. In a way there is no specifically Christian art. One can distinguish only good and bad art, art which is sound and good from art which is false or weird in its insight into reality. This is so whether it is painting or drama or music. Christians, however full of faith they may be, can still make bad art. They may be sinful and weak, or they might not have much talent. On the other hand a non-Christian can make a thing of beauty, a joy for ever—provided he remains within the scope of the norms for art, provided that he works out of the fullness of his humanity, and does not glory in the depraved or in iniquity or glorify the devil.[39]

The third principle of Christian criticism is the principle of righteousness. The word means "equal, even, proportional," or "fair, impartial," or

38. Rookmaaker, 214.
39. Ibid., 243.

"righteous, balanced, doing what is right or dutiful." In particular usage in Christian homiletics it is used to mean "just in the eyes of God, righteous."[40] Some might accuse Paul of stretching the point to apply this word to art criticism. One must remember that this word only acquired its modern meaning of "holy" or "morally good" from its usage in religious contexts. Prior to its use by Christian theologians, it was used non-religiously. If the word has too much of a religious connotation, it could very easily be understood as "right-ness" without doing any damage to the thought. This principle is that of rightness.

Just as the principle of truthfulness applied to both content and form, so does the principle of righteousness. As far as there is a "subject" or theme to a work, the subject must be treated "rightly." This does not mean that all the characters of a novel, for instance, must be righteous people or that the morally "right" must be rewarded materially. But the right must be seen to be the right. The character who murders in a novel must be seen as wrong, not right, even if he goes unpunished. Righteousness must be seen as such, and unrighteousness must be seen as such.

What if there is no subject, as in Bach's violin concerto? Is the principle inoperative? Quite to the contrary; righteousness simply means doing right—that is, giving a thing the attention which, by its own nature, it requires. (The word *right* is commonly used in this way when it is said that a man "did right by his family.") This implies proportion, balance, even-handedness. "To be righteous," said Rookmaaker, "means to be right to the situation, to give each element its due: to create a right balance, a harmonious whole. . . . So 'righteousness' can be expressed in details of colour, composition . . . even in a modulation of music."[41] A work of art must be balanced, well proportioned. Augustine speaks of "ordinate loves": things must be given the love, the attention, the thought they require, no more and no less. Either excess or lack leads to imbalance and to a type of "unrightness" or unrighteousness. Rightness is considered very much a part of good writing; all students of composition are taught "to search for the right 'finishing touch,' the right tone, the right word in the right place."[42]

Uneducated or uncultured Christians are often severely criticized for being narrowly parochial in their view of art. They are often very quick

40. Liddell and Scott, 325; James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Royal Publishers, 1979), 23; Souter, 66.

41. Rookmaaker, 239.

42. Ibid., 243.

(at least this has sometimes been the case) to discover any scene in a novel, any line in a play, any picture in a book which they understand to be "obscene" or "vulgar," by which they mean "impure in regards to sexual morals" or "unchaste." Sometimes they have indeed been guilty of prudishness, seeing as unchaste or immoral what is, in reality, very natural and holy and ordained by God. But often they are merely following a very old Christian traditional principle that demands purity in the arts. Paul instructs his readers to examine things in regard to their purity or chastity.

To see what the Jewish and early Christian authors of the Bible considered chaste and unchaste one might look at several Scriptural examples: David's sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 or the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19. There are other instances of various sexual misdeeds. There is the attempted homosexual rape of Lot's guests by the men of the city of Sodom. There is the incest committed by Lot and his two daughters. There is the story of the fornication of Shechem and Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. In the New Testament, there is the teaching of Paul concerning the conjugal duties of husbands and wives.

Paul and other early Christians certainly understood that these passages showed that sexuality is certainly a real part of human life. In this sense, as in all others, the Scriptures themselves are true; they are true to life. Human sexuality is often a needful topic for discussion for various reasons. These passages deal with sex straightforwardly and honestly but without needless graphic description. Incidents are described and commented upon without "corrupting" the reader. The reader is narrated to, instructed, but never titillated. The Christian critic does not demand that a work be silent in regards to sex; such a work might be very unreal, untrue to life. He does demand, however, that sexuality be dealt with properly.

Our Lord taught us that it is wrong for a man "to lust after" a woman. Paul warns women to dress "in modest apparel."[43] People are both to avoid lust themselves and to avoid enticing others to lust. The writer must often deal with the subject of sex, but he dare not do it in such a way that a reader is led to think "lustfully." If the Bible itself, viewed as a work of literature, is any example, then this is best done by avoiding graphic portrayal. The work can be "sexual" (dealing with sex), but it must not be "sexy" (sexually suggestive).

43. Matthew 5:28; 1 Timothy 2:9.

> It is for the sake of humanity that we stand against every pressure that would drag the woman [or for that matter, the man] down to the level of an object of lust. For that same reason we are against all kinds of manipulation, in advertising, in the mass communication media. . . . Humanity, involving manhood and womanhood, is something of too great a worth to be deprived of its value and meaning.[44]

Paul insists that a work must not only exhibit truthfulness, seriousness, righteousness, and purity; it must exhibit loveliness or beauty. The word *lovely* means "worthy to be loved." Why is something worthy to be loved? A man may say he loves his friend. It may be because he does good things for him. He is "lovely" in his actions. It is in this sense that David sang, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives."[45] They had done things that had endeared them to the hearts of their countrymen. But actions do not alone constitute "loveliness," for Christians are commanded to love their enemies. Obviously one's enemy does not do things that please one. How can one's enemy be "lovely"—that is, worthy of being loved? For the Christian, the fact that every human being is made in the image of God constitutes a reason for loving him. There are innately in every person certain qualities that are lovely, worthy of being loved: the ability to reason, the ability to make free choices, the ability to create, and so forth.

We often say of a colorful sunset, "It is lovely." What does the sunset *do*? It does only one thing: it pleases us, pleases our taste for color or balance or any of a great number of qualities. It is worthy of being loved. This is not to say that all men will love it. Some men are so crass or so insensitive or so uneducated that the words "It is lovely" about a sunset do not make sense to them. They have no appreciation of it. But their insensitivity or mere ignorance does not change the inherent value of the "lovely" sunset. It is worthy to be loved, whether any one ever actually loves it or not.

It is on this point that the person with the "modern" non-Christian worldview will have extreme difficulty. He will say that there is no such thing as inherent beauty. We call a sunset beautiful, he will say, because we have been educated in a tradition that perceives sunsets to be beautiful, not because they are inherently so to all people at all times. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, he will say. To this objection, Christian critics must respond, or else we can have nothing to say to modern men. But we

44. Rookmaaker, 248.
45. 2 Samuel 1:23.

can respond. Of course there are those who do not see the sunset as being beautiful, and the moderns are right, this view is a result of a different education. And it is here that Christian critics are so bold as to proclaim the cultural superiority of Christian culture. These principles of Christian criticism are not *a* way of looking at the arts, just one of many; they are *the* way of looking at the arts. Any other way is less completely human. We believe these principles to be found in God's written revelation and in nature created by God. The Christian critic looks at a work to find beauty. A work must be beautiful, having those properties that should please us as readers or viewers or listeners. This is not to say that every part of the work will be beautiful.

In his last principle of Christian criticism, Paul states that which, generally, all literary critics look for: technical excellence. Paul says that a work must be "admirable" or, as the King James Version says, "of good report." The work must be spoken well of by those who are in a position to know. The art critic must find in the painting those examples of the artist's skill in the techniques of painting. The literary critic must find in the work that skill in the use of language which marks it as being technically excellent. This technical excellence in the use of words will vary of course from language to language; it is the stuff of which composition classes are made.

The Christian critical tradition is a long and glorious one, including the great critics of the last two thousand years. It is a wide and grand stream of literature and other art forms which have met these criteria. For these are not criteria that result in only a selected few works meeting the approval of self-appointed censors. These are standards by which the great works of art of Western civilization have been weighed—and not found wanting. These are the standards by which the necessary works for a liberal-arts education have been chosen. There are no "great books of the Western world" that do not meet this standard; no book that fails to meet this standard is a great book. These criteria do winnow literature and the arts; they do separate the good from the bad. The lying, the frivolous, the immoral, the ugly, the impure, the poorly done—these have something to fear from these principles of Christian criticism; but the truthful, the serious, the rightly done, the pure, the beautiful, the excellent—these will be commended and extolled. The principles of Christian criticism are the source of Western art and are the means by which the arts can be evaluated.

* * *

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."—James 1:17

* * *

> At midnight I went topside to have a last look at the aurora, but found only a spotty glow on the horizon extended from north to northeast. I had been playing the victrola while I waited for the midnight hour. I was . . . playing one of the records of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The night was calm and clear. I left the door to my shack open and also my trapdoor. I stood there in the darkness to look around at some of my favorite constellations, which were as bright as I had ever seen them.
>
> Presently I began to have the illusion that what I was seeing was also what I was hearing, so perfectly did the music seem to blend with what was happening in the sky. As the notes swelled, the dull aurora on the horizon pulsed and quickened and draped itself into arches and fanning beams which reached across the sky until at my zenith the display attained its crescendo. The music and the night became one; and I told myself that all beauty was akin and sprang from the same substance. I recalled a gallant, unselfish act that was of the same essence as the music and the aurora.[46]

46. Richard Byrd, *Alone* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1938), 138-39.

# Book Reviews

*From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible.* By Albert H. Baylis. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. 288 pp. $24.99 hardcover.

Baylis begins this intriguing overview of the Old Testament by inviting the reader to imagine what was going through Moses' mind as he prepared to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and into Canaan. He briefly describes the kind of cultural climate that threatened the Hebrews and sets Moses' composition of Genesis against that backdrop. He discusses how God used Moses to give the Hebrews the right view of Himself and thereby helped preserve this people from the influences around them.

In the second chapter, Baylis deals with the Bible's treatment of man as central in God's creation. He discusses various ways the text ascribes great value to man in sharp contrast to the demeaning view of man found in contemporary Canaanite cultures. He also deals here with the first human sin and its consequences. He discusses Genesis two and three in terms of human relationships. He considers sin's effects, especially on relationships and the longer-term consequences for the history of the world and the nature of human societies. He then describes a huge change of pace, a transition starting in Genesis 12. He talks about God's covenant with Abram and what the latter learns in the gap between the covenant's issuance and its fulfillment. He also tackles the relationship between this covenant and the rest of Scripture, especially the Scriptures that deal with Jesus.

Baylis pictures the Exodus as a creation, with Egypt as the womb and the nation of Israel as the child. He has a section summarizing crucial themes in Exodus. Then he traces them through the rest of the Old Testament and on into the New Testament. He also touches on literary devices, but he does so without slowing down the more casual reader.

He deals with the function of the Law for the Israelites and for us. Baylis gives a summary of its contents with a discussion of why certain clusters of laws were given and a comparison of God's Law through Moses with the law codes of other peoples in Moses' day. He reaches ahead and deals with law-keeping and the New Testament, discussing the Law in the teaching of Jesus and Paul.

He sums up the book of Deuteronomy as "love and land." The people were to love God, and, if they did, God would insure that they stay in the land. Loving a unique God involved special requirements as revealed in this Law.

Baylis contrasts the optimistic, bright picture presented in Joshua with the dark, gloomy image of Judges. He discusses the ceremonies the people observed upon entering the land. He points out the review of Moses' instruction in Joshua, then turns to consider the erosion of character and commitment that characterized the people in the book of Judges. The writer of Judges tells us why the people were not able to make any more progress at taking the land. The reason was disobedience. Baylis also includes a chronology of the Judges that is very helpful in sorting out all the names mentioned and plugging them into their time and situation. He talks about the continuation of the theme of "rest" in Hebrews. He also offers helpful comments on the subject of Old Testament warfare and the Christian.

The author describes the days of Samuel as a time of vulnerability and insecurity, which helps one understand why the people insisted so strongly on having a king, the acquisition of which will be the subject of Samuel. He deals with the themes of the nature of kingship, the Davidic Covenant, and the uniqueness of Yahweh. He carries forward the theme of kingship by referring to Psalm 2 and Psalm 72 on a path toward Christ's being God's king.

Baylis talks about Kings as constantly repeating the diagnosis that God's people were rebelling from Him and in doing so risked His wrath. The author tells us of God's assessment of Israel's and Judah's kings. He discusses four sins that show up over and over in these assessments and then gives a summary of the ratings. He cites an interesting study that shows how Elijah was disproving Baalism almost point-for-point in the Carmel showdown.

The author introduces the Psalms and their theology. He defines wisdom in the Bible and says that the "fear of Yahweh" is the connection between wisdom and Law in the Old Testament. He distinguishes between the wisdom books of the Old Testament and goes on to discuss the fulfillment of wisdom in the New Testament, particularly in the Christ. He quickly situates the prophets in their historical contexts and then gives an overview of each prophet's message. He ends this section (as he has the others) by showing the connection to Jesus and the New Testament.

Baylis deals with the period of the exile and post-exilic writings in much the same way, paving the road for the New Testament. In the last chapter, he gathers all the major themes of the Old Testament and shows how they were fulfilled (in part or in whole) in the New Testament, leaving the reader prepared to read the smaller half of the Bible (as Baylis calls it) much more meaningfully.

This book offers a great deal, both to beginners and to more experienced readers of the Old Testament. For the beginner Baylis writes in a very easy-to-read style. No one will walk away from this book scratching his head. He deals with profound truths but in a very accessible way. On the other hand, the more advanced reader is not left out. At the end of each chapter, Baylis includes notes for a more detailed treatment of theological points. He also includes charts and maps in the text itself that help everyone make better sense of what they are reading.

The book engages the reader in a personal way and draws him into the meat of the text before he even knows it. The cohesion of Baylis's book communicates very well the cohesion of the Bible. When he speaks of Abraham, he speaks of a covenant that will thread its way right into Romans and the salvation of the New Testament believer. When he deals with the inability of the people to conquer the land completely because of sin, he quickly and naturally ties it to the warning of Hebrews not to go on in unbelief and disobedience but to find the rest of faith. Baylis has written a book that is easy to read and hard to improve on. If you want a good overview of the Old Testament that also puts the New Testament into focus, you cannot go wrong with this book.

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*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Willem A. VanGemeren, ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997. 5 vols. 5812 pages. $199.99 hardcover (CD-ROM version also available).

In his classic work *On The Study of Words* (1851), Richard Chenevix Trench observes that "lessons of infinite worth" await the diligent student of language. "I am sure," he offers, "at least, that for many a young man his first discovery of the fact that words are living powers, has been like the dropping of scales from his eyes."

Every Christian expositor who gives the biblical text its rightful place of authority in the church's ministry knows what Trench means. Because we believe the Bible is *verbally* inspired, we study its words set in their proper context in order to preach and teach sound doctrine. To this end, Zondervan's recent publication of the five-volume *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (NIDOTTE) offers a wealth of information.

The publisher designed NIDOTTE as a complement to Colin Brown's well known *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (1975), with additional features. Eight years in the making, NIDOTTE is the product of over two hundred evangelical scholars. Its 5,000+ pages divide into three parts: a 218-page guide, followed by the lexical articles themselves, concluding with a 977-page topical dictionary.

The guide begins by explaining how to use the entire work. Then come several articles orienting the reader to proper methodology in the lexical study of the Old Testament. Among the highlights here are the studies of Old Testament history by Merrill and Long; "Literary Approaches and Interpretation" by Tremper Longman III; and Kevin Vanhoozer's "Hermeneutics, Text, and Biblical Theology." Richard Schulz's article on integrating Old Testament theology and

exegesis offers helpful insights for the expository preacher. The same is true for John Walton's "Principles for Productive Word Study."

The second and largest part of NIDOTTE is the dictionary itself. Entries are listed alphabetically (using the Hebrew alphabet) and numbered according to the *Exhaustive Concordance of the NIV* (Goodrick and Kohlenberger). This numbering system makes the work usable for those with little or no exposure to Hebrew. Included with each entry are related terms within that semantic field. For example, in the listing for *'hb*, "love," are included cross references to *dbq*, "cling to"; *hsd*, "loyalty"; and *rhm*, "compassion." The articles examine cognate words and etymology; Old Testament usage; usage in other documents, such as post-biblical Hebrew, Septuagint, and so forth; synonyms; and conclude with a bibliography.

The third section, a topical dictionary, also offers valuable resource material for the expositor. Subjects include biographies, book theologies, and discussions of significant topics (conquest, exile, offerings, law, justice, prophecy, and so forth). The editors have chosen leading authorities to write in their fields of expertise: for example, Alan Millard on Assyria; D. J. Wiseman on Babylon; C. J. H. Wright on ethics; and Edwin Yamauchi on Cyrus. David Clark's article on the theology of the Apocrypha offers as much help in understanding these books as anything I have ever read. R. I. Vasholz explains in his work on the canon that the books of the Old Testament did not undergo a process of progressive development and acceptance but were authoritative when they were written.

A few concerns about NIDOTTE deserve note, however. With regard to the lexical entries, some of the comments disappoint. The article on *rwh*, for example, contains little analysis of the meaning "spirit" and gets caught up in disputed meanings of some minor phrases (such as "sweet smelling aroma"). Hamilton's discussion of *rhm* range too far afield from the meaning "compassion" into an etymological analysis and a supposed "maternal metaphor" for God. Olivier skirts the moral sense of *tmm*, "perfect." Wakely gives eight pages to *nsh'*, "to lend," though the word only occurs eighteen times in the Old Testament. The discussion drifts into a treatise on economics in Israel. Naude's entry on *hrm* omits key passages such as Deuteronomy 7 which are vital to understanding the concept of the "ban." Other significant words receiving less than adequate treatment are *shwl*, "grave"; *npsh*, "soul"; and *shlm*, "peace." Especially disappointing are Fretheim's articles on the key names of God, *elohim* and *el*.

Although the topical dictionary is extremely helpful, some features are puzzling. For example, Moberly's twenty-page (!) discussion of "lament" turns into a socio-religious analysis of "mourning as a religious metaphor in the Old Testament," even touching on "lament in the modern sense." One also wonders at the relative length of some entries compared to others. "Desert" has nine pages while "Idolatry: Theology" has only two and a half, "Prayer" only six, and the "Fall of Humankind" one and a half pages. Further, some omissions seem glaring; no articles on sin, revelation, or salvation/redemption/atonement appear in the topical dictionary (though, in fairness, these are discussed under their Hebrew roots in the lexical section). Yet "Reptiles" gets two pages! I found myself hoping that McConville would elaborate further on the conservative "alternative"

approach to the "mainstream" critical view of Deuteronomic theology in his article. His cursory statement, "It has been widely held since then that the prophetic books generally have undergone deuteronomistic expansion and editing" (4:529) begs for explanation in view of NIDOTTE's evangelical orientation.

Despite these concerns, NIDOTTE promises to find its niche in the much-needed and often-neglected field of Old Testament lexical reference works. Any preacher or teacher committed to exegesis of the Old Testament text will soon treasure it as a valued resource, proving once more that Trench's assertion of 150 years ago remains valid.

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*Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom.* By Leon Morris. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996. 191 pp. $16.99 hardcover.

Leon Morris has served both in Australia and in the United States. He was formerly principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia, and retired in 1979. In America he served as visiting professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is widely regarded as a leading evangelical New Testament scholar. Morris served as Revision Editor of the Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series, to which he contributed volumes on Luke, 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation. He is also author of *The Gospel according to John* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series. Another outstanding book by this author is *The Cross of Jesus.*

The author makes clear that he has two audiences in view as he writes. The commentary is addressed primarily to the "general reader" and secondarily to the "specialist." However, Morris has included rather extensive footnotes for more serious students and scholars. He says: "In the footnotes I have tried to take notice of some of the more scholarly writings I have encountered."

In the introduction Morris gives attention to the date, authorship, destination, literary genre, nature of Paul's opponents, and contribution of Galatians to Christian thought. The commentary itself follows a passage-by-passage approach, with each verse considered. The author gives his own translation, which stands at the head of each section. The main presentation deals with the English text. Issues relating to Greek words and grammar are covered in the footnotes.

Morris does not attempt to dodge or to sidestep any problem that one may have in regards to the destination of this letter—or its contents. The author successfully defends the fact that the churches to whom Paul was writing were Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. One strong reason for this position is that there is no record of Paul's having preached in Northern Galatia.

Some will take exception to Morris's view that Paul's second visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10) is identified with the famine visit (Acts 11:30) and not the Jerusalem Council visit (Acts 15:1-29). (Our own Thomas Marberry in *The Randall House Bible Commentary* holds to the view that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 describe the same visit of Paul to Jerusalem.)

The author emphasizes that Galatians is first of all a book of apostolic rebuke toward those who would entice believers away from the truth of the gospel. To those who would look kindly toward "another gospel," perilous consequences await. Paul writes with passion and persuasion to those who are on the verge of spiritual bewitchment.

Morris points out that the enemy of the true gospel is set on undermining and destroying the faith of the believers in Galatia. Much is made of Paul's reasoning and rhetoric as he seeks to warn his readers of the very serious results that await those who forsake "Paul's gospel."

The author carefully emphasizes the contrasting images Paul uses to show the superiority of the gospel of Christ: freedom in Christ versus bondage to the law; justification by faith alone in opposition to the works of the law; perfection by the ministry of the Holy Spirit and not by fleshly endeavors; God's adopted children as contrasted with "slaves of elemental spirits"; and Jerusalem from above greater than Jerusalem below. The chief difference in each set of opposites is the cross of Christ—which is, according to Morris, "Paul's charter of Christian freedom."

The essence of this author's understanding of the book of Galatians may be found in the following quotation: "Paul does not object to Jewish Christians keeping the law as a part of the way they served God. Indeed, on occasion he himself could comply with its provisions (Acts 21:20-26). But insisting on the law as binding on Gentile converts was quite another thing."

This is an interesting and a very stimulating work on Galatians. It is recommended to Bible students, teachers, and preachers, as well as to those who have more scholarly concerns.

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*Angels and the New Spirituality*. By Duane A. Garrett. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995. 272 pp. $12.99 paperback.

*Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness*. By Stephen F. Noll. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 255 pp. $19.99 paperback.

The renewed interest in angels in American culture has given rise to several new books on the subject of angelology. New Age theologies especially place strong emphasis on angels, going so far as attempting to give them names and assigning

to them various responsibilities in nature and the world of mankind. New-Agers are claiming knowledge beyond the scope of revealed truth in the Bible, and thus they lead astray their followers with a false emphasis on a pseudo-spirituality that does nothing to bring man closer to God.

Duane Garrett, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Canadian Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Stephen F. Noll, professor of Biblical Studies and Academic Dean at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, have written two excellent books on the subject of angelology that seek to answer many of the legitimate questions that surround the subject. Both of these men have sought to give a very thorough and biblically based picture of the history, function, and ministry of angels today.

The subject of angels is a rather cloudy one because there is not much information as to the time and place of their creation. Nor is there an accounting of exactly how many angels there are. The Bible is silent on the subject of their original creation and gives names to only two or three, such as Michael and Gabriel, two of the archangels. The Old Testament has much more to say about angels than the New Testament. These accounts include appearances of angelic beings to Abraham, Jacob, and other chief characters. The apocryphal books (the books considered non-canonical by most Protestants) say more about angels and their names than the canonical books of the Bible. In the Apocrypha we see the activity of angels, along with their several names, more involved with human affairs on a regular basis, especially in the books of Enoch. However, these books are unreliable since they are not divinely inspired.

Garrett sounds a warning about the unusual interest in angels and their ministry today. He says that "the current interest in angels is not just about angels. It is a manifestation of an entirely new spirituality. . . . More than that, it is an approach to religion and the quest for personal worth that is leaving Christianity bewildered and leaving them behind" (p. 6).

These are not the sorts of books normally found on the shelves of Christian bookstores. Do not look for glowing accounts of angelic encounters filling the pages of these works. Instead, both of these books seek to answer biblically the questions that plague the minds of honest inquirers. These are academic works, addressed to the serious scholar who is seeking to become well informed about the subject.

Some of the questions addressed in both these volumes are: (1) The idea of "guardian angels," about which most angelic literature is written. Both writers come to the conclusion that, although angelic beings serve a protective ministry for believers, the idea of a personal guardian angel is not supported by Scripture. (2) The relationship of the angels to the work of God, especially in the matter of creation and the control of the natural world. Both writers see angels active as God's representatives in the beginning of creation and in the operation of the natural world. (3) The existence of evil in the world defined in the person of Satan (a former archangel) and his demons (fallen angels). Noll especially questions whether the account of Satan's fall as related in the book of Isaiah, accepted by most conservative scholars, is an accurate depiction of the beginning of Satan's

place in the world. (4) The order of angels (their hierarchy) is presented by both writers, differing a little in the number of levels of their existence and their authority. (5) The presence of angelic beings in the world today, both good angels and demonic angels, is seen as revolving around the constant battle for the control of creation and the minds of men. (6) Both of these books present an excellent history of angelology in both the pagan world and the Christian world. They see the pagan gods as the presence of demonic angels.

Noll, a less conservative writer, seems to have a dualistic view of the spiritual world, seeing the evil spiritual entities (demonic angels) as a balance against the omnipotence of God. Garrett reminds the reader that demonic angels have no power of their own except that allowed by God. He rejects the idea of a dualistic (powers of equal force) presence in the spiritual world.

Noll approaches the subject of angelology by examining every reference to angels in the Bible, beginning in the Old Testament and continuing into the New Testament. His is a biblical-theological method. Garrett approaches his study by subject matter. His work could be called a systematic study of angels. While Garrett's book is the more conversational and easy to read, which would probably appeal to most pastors, Noll's is more detailed and difficult to read because of the academic language he uses. His work would most likely appeal to academicians rather than pastors.

For those wishing to make a further study of angelology, both works include an extensive bibliography of available works on the subject. Both books are well documented in the body of the text so that the serious student can refer to other works as he studies. Both of these books present a well thought out and clearly presented treatise on the subject of angelology.

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*Vital Christology Issues: Examining Contemporary and Classic Concerns*, Roy B. Zuck, ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997. 192 pp. $12.99 paperback.

This book is part of the Vital Issues Series, edited by Zuck and consisting of selected (mostly brief) articles from the pages of the Dallas Theological Seminary quarterly journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, from the 1930s to the present. Some of the others in the series deal with vital theological, contemporary, Christian living, New Testament, Old Testament, and ministry issues.

Reviewers often observe about such a collection that some articles are better than others. That is almost inevitably the case, and this book is certainly no exception. There are seventeen essays (chapters) by eleven different writers, many of them well-known Dallas faculty. Each treats some aspect of biblical revelation about Christ: His preexistence, claims to Deity, key events in His early experience,

ministry then and now, death and resurrection (and Paul's theology of the same), ascension, and so forth.

The quandary for the reviewer of such a variety is whether to tell a little about each or to be selective; I have chosen the latter course but want to give our readers a general idea of the whole. This I think I can do best by referring to the six articles by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., on Christ's baptism, temptation, transfiguration, triumphal entry, agony in Gethsemane, and death. Like many of the other articles, these are largely devotional in nature, surveying the biblical picture and drawing out the theological implications of the incidents. In Johnson's favor I note many observations well expressed and useful to a preacher preparing a sermon on one or another of these topics. He has a way of putting things (and of quoting others) that makes one think, "I wish I'd said that!"

There is little that is controversial, at least within Bible-believing scholarship. Robert P. Lightner's "The Savior's Sufferings in Life" is an exception. He deals with the question whether the active obedience of Christ, like His atoning death, was also substitutionary for believers. He believes that it was not; while he does not say specifically, I assume he also believes that Jesus' active obedience (all of which he unnecessarily brings under the rubric of "sufferings") is *not* imputed to the believer.

We generally associate a pronounced dispensationalism with Dallas Seminary. The various essays certainly uphold that association, although many of them only indirectly. Two by John Walvoord are clearest in this. "The Ministry of Christ in His Life on Earth" (obviously misnamed) makes a less than convincing case that each of Jesus' teachings must be interpreted in light of whether He was speaking in relationship to: (1) the sphere of Jewish law, (2) the sphere of the kingdom, or (3) the sphere of the church. "The Present Universal Lordship of Christ" has as its primary purpose to show that the biblical descriptions of Christ's present position of Lordship at the Father's right hand do not fit the Davidic, millennial, earthly kingdom promised to the Messiah. The questionable linchpin of dispensational interpretation—namely, that every passage must be carefully categorized into one or another neat dispensational box—is very evident here.

Among the few really stimulating articles is "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful." Author Dan B. Garlington deals with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as indicating that He was tested and proved faithful in obedience and that He is the unique Son of God and Savior. Garlington offers especially helpful observations drawing attention to parallels between the temptation of Christ and the temptations of Adam and of Israel, likewise represented as sons of God.

Equally excellent, and practical, is "The Resurrection and Ascension of Christ" by Edward Robinson, which takes the reader through the multiple accounts of Christ's resurrection, post-resurrection appearances, and ascension, detail by detail. Robinson focuses on apparent contradictions and provides a full harmonization—one that is convincing and reasonable. His is the best attempt at reconstruction of the whole picture that I have seen. The only part that is not

satisfying is the explanation of Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my father"; but that does not negatively affect the harmonization.

Neither of the writers who deal with the temptation of Christ gives much more than passing treatment to the question whether Jesus could have sinned. Both affirm that He could not, but their arguments are simplistic and insufficient.

Technically, one could wish that the time of original publication of each essay had been indicated. Also, in these days of advanced computer technology, there is in my opinion no longer any excuse for putting the notes anywhere except at the bottom of the pages where they fit; I refuse to read endnotes that are grouped together by chapters in the back of the book. And there are lots of notes with additional observations.

In general, I can but mildly recommend the book. Its most helpful use will be to the average pastor for sermon preparation.

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*The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence.* By John Sanders. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 356 pp. $21.99 paperback.

John Sanders is associate professor of philosophy and religion at Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana. He is also the author of *No Other Name* and the editor of *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* as well as a contributor to *The Openness of God.*

Sanders begins this work with a skewed view of God that makes everything else suspect. His God is a reactionary God who sits in heaven awaiting the decisions of free man in order to decide what His next move will be. He sees the "give and take" relationship as essential to human freedom and a meaningful relationship between God and man. Concerning the Fall of Adam and Eve, he writes: "In Genesis 3 the totally unexpected happened" (p. 46). Two pages later he writes, "Now God has to adjust his project in response to this horrible turn of events" (p. 48). Concerning Abraham's offering of Isaac, Sanders is sure that God did not know what Abraham's response would be when He commanded him to offer his son. This very clearly contradicts the omniscience of God and passages like Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:18-20, which say that the elect were chosen prior to creation and Jesus was already determined as the sacrifice for man's sins prior to creation—both of which would dictate God's foreknowledge of the Fall.

He has also shifted from the historic position of the conservative church on God's foremost attribute being His holiness. He, along with Clark Pinnock, has adopted the longstanding position of theological liberalism that God's love is His foremost attribute. His doctrine of salvation is but the logical result of this shift. He believes that general revelation is redemptive—a position the church has

historically rejected. This doctrine clearly contradicts the exclusivism of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 and adopts an inclusivism that makes it possible for the pagan who has never heard the name of Jesus to go to heaven. He also believes that certain individuals get a second chance to be saved after death, depending on how they respond to general revelation.

*The God Who Risks* is but another step by the evangelical left away from the historic fundamentals of the faith. Sanders is part of a growing reaction to Calvinism's mechanized, robotized world, in which God's sovereignty is so exhaustive and particular that He foreknows all future events because He foreordained them even down to the most minute detail. This extreme view of sovereignty ultimately makes God the author of sin and turns man into hardly more than a puppet on a string being manipulated by God. Sanders, along with scholars like Clark Pinnock, represents an overreaction to an obvious problem. However, when the church reacts to a problem, she often overreacts. That is exactly what Sanders has done.

The book is worth reading for those with some theological background, especially those who are interested in the Arminianism/Calvinism debate. Sanders does offer some very good rebuttals for certain points of Calvinism, especially in chapter seven, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty." Once again, he goes too far in his attempt to create a workable model of sovereignty and free will. He apparently cannot reconcile the fact that free acts of free beings can be foreknown yet still be free. In his model, in order for God and man to relate to each other on a meaningful level other than a programmer/robot level, God has to await man's actions and then determine His response. His concept of human freedom goes beyond the biblical concept of limited human freedom, although he does recognize that God set the boundaries of human freedom. It appears that Sanders sets those boundaries far wider than the picture presented in the Bible.

The author has clearly researched the material. His quotations result in fifty-six pages of endnotes and seventeen pages of bibliography.

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*Postmodernizing the Faith.* By Millard J. Erickson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 164 pp. $14.99 paperback.

*Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?* By James W. Sire. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994. 239 pp. $11.99 paperback.

Probably the most critical area facing contemporary Christian apologists in the twenty-first century is the catch-all category known as postmodernism. In order to be always ready to provide a credible defense of the hope that lies within us, we must be aware of the mood and terrain from which postmodern thinkers are

speaking. Knowing a few of the basics of postmodernism provides an important starting point. Postmodernists subscribe to the notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth which is the same for all people, in all places, at all times. Instead, "truth" is relative to the individual or to the group making various assertions. In general, postmoderns are convinced that truth claims are made for the purpose of exercising power over others. This may take place between individuals, but the greater and more insidious use of the "will to power" occurs between competing political agendas, in race relations, in gender and class struggles, and so forth. It is for this reason, postmodernists argue, that establishments must be unmasked for the oppression that they seek to maintain. The following two books can help the contemporary defender of the faith to understand better some of the ways that people think who have been influenced by this postmodern mood.

Baptist theologian Millard Erickson has provided a valuable tool for considering differing responses evangelicals are giving to the phenomenon of postmodernism. Since the term "evangelical" cuts such a wide swath, it is probably not surprising that the reactions to postmodernism go from being very negative to being very positive in many ways. In fact, this is how Erickson structures his book. After an introduction which explains characteristics of premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism, Erickson devotes chapters 2-4 to thinkers responding negatively to postmodernism and chapters 5-7 to thinkers responding favorably. With each chapter one is confronted with an explanation of a particular theologian's thought as it relates to postmodernism. Those giving negative responses (David Wells, Thomas Oden, and Francis Schaeffer) do not respond in lockstep manner. Likewise, those giving positive responses (Stanley Grenz, Middleton and Walsh, and B. Keith Putt) give varying degrees of affirmation.

The great value of this book is to be found in Erickson's concise yet insightful explanation of each of these positions. Professor Erickson goes to great lengths in attempting to be even-handed with his treatment of each position, giving numerous strengths and weaknesses for each. In his final analysis, he says that he believes the approach holding the greatest promise in dealing with postmodernism is that advocated by Francis Schaeffer. He does believe that in the future the evangelical community may need to use some different methods (more narrative approach) in presenting the objectively true gospel of Christ. This may not be the first book to read in approaching postmodernism, but it is an invaluable resource for the serious beginner.

James Sire, senior editor at InterVarsity Press, has done an excellent job of introducing Christian apologetics for a postmodern age in a way that is engaging and readable while being substantive. He has gathered many of the illustrations he uses in the book from surveys and question and answer sessions he has conducted on over 150 American campuses where he has lectured on the subject of the book's title.

Given the status of Truth and Reality in our postmodern world, the question posed in the book's title is a particularly pertinent one to be asking. The Christian need not think that this question puts him at an immediate disadvantage. After all, we are supposed to believe in truth. And postmodernists are supposed to hold

tolerance as their highest ideal. So they should be happy for us to hold what we hold. The bigger question, however, is: Why should a postmodernist believe anything at all? Sire is clear. "We believe. That's what we do to live. Believing is like breathing: we do it but we only know we are doing it when something draws our attention to it" (p. 16). Sire does not explicitly address postmodernism continually through the book, though he does so at key junctures. Nonetheless, the very question that is the driving force of the entire book sets this treatment of apologetics squarely in the center of the postmodern debate. This is a fine book and highly recommended reading for anyone wanting to learn how to do Christian apologetics in a postmodern setting.

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*Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*. By Charles Van Engen. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996. 306 pp. $21.95 paperback.

As a book about the theology of mission, *Mission on the Way* creates a tempo of expectancy for evangelical Christians in ministry *on the way* to meet the returning Lord Jesus. The book's purpose is to propose a theology of faith, love, and hope for the church in mission. The bulk of the work examines issues that a theology of mission entails.

The author has twelve years of missionary experience in southern Mexico with the Presbyterian Church. He is currently the Arthur F. Glasser Professor of Biblical Theology of Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Van Engen's beginning question—is there a stand-alone theology of mission?—is a valid and pertinent one. Mission has always been a "borrowing study" in biblical theology as well as practice. However, if the evangelical stand is correct, that evangelistic outreach of the church is the foremost reason for being and the activating task for the Christian church, then why distinguish mission as a church activity and not as *the* church's life-breathing essence? Why are mission and church not mutually enveloping and embracing terms, impossible to separate? A key concept to which Van Engen builds up is that the church universal "is by its very nature missionary, sent to all people precisely because the head of the church is he 'who fills all in all'" (Ephesians 1:23, NASB).

The book's primary contribution and the basis of my recommendation is that it is a "check out" book. Its definitions, review of issues, footnotes, and bibliography make it a very valuable resource book to enable one to "check out" current missiological thought. The book serves as a base from which to investigate the issues missiology faces in this modern era, and it places them in a historical flow.

A weakness of the book is its type and cohesion. Missiology books are typically heavy-laden with technical verbiage. This one is no different. Of the various mission-theology issues Van Engen treats (the Bible, in Context, the Church,

Evangelical and Conciliar Mission Theologies, Religious Pluralism, Modernity and Postmodernity, and Ministry Formation), he presents individual issues with breadth and clear explanation. However, their application to his principal thesis goes unexplained. It would seem preferable to state the foundation at the beginning and relate the disparate issues to that foundation.

Missiology books do offer things not available in most other ministry books. In the great Getzian tradition, there are pictures that begin by showing a simple concept and end with something rivaling a DNA chart. The verbiage challenge is ever present. Nevertheless, it can be interesting to wonder what the author means by phrases such as "cosmologically contextualized Christ" and "a new epistemological paradigm of contextualization" and "the postmodern 'ecumenical missionary paradigm'" (translations: *Immanuel* and *Realizing anew God's work in the Old and New Testaments* and *What will world-watchers see tomorrow?*).

The book is a very valuable resource and orientation book for pastors. Additionally, it offers good and well-defined insight pertinent to Van Engen's basic thrust: the mission-church at life and task.

To focus my enthusiasm, the main question of Van Engen is used. Missiological thought does not come from the same corner of the world as Free Will Baptists. Nevertheless, as a Presbyterian has to work his way through issues, similar issues face all believers. Free Will Baptists emphasize neither vertical organization nor hierarchy; thus, most of what is said about denominations—and we are a denomination—is not our starting point. Allow me to restate Van Engen's thesis, and then I will illustrate my enthusiasm. Van Engen explores a church that applies itself as a body to the mission task. That is the most valid question for Free Will Baptists today.

To illustrate my enthusiasm, I will follow the sequence of chapter 2, "The Importance of Narrative Theology." It starts with "God's Trinitarian Mission," God's use of human instruments in redemption. (The Free Will Baptist position is membership and a servant-leadership patterned after Christ, dependent on the Holy Spirit, and glorifying to the Father.) He continues with "God's Wholistic Mission" and touts a biblical pattern for the whole person. (Free will predicates personal involvement.) Van Engen concludes, "[Old Testament] narrative can emphasize that the totality of the human person is impacted by God's mission and then in turn participates in the narrative of God's mission." (The Free Will Baptist posture is that free salvation incorporates the believer into the benefits of salvation as well as the task of mission.)

"God's Universal Mission" reveals Free Will Baptists postured upon free grace for all men, everywhere. "God's Corporate Mission" searches for a faith community. (Free Will Baptists firmly identify *community* as the local autonomous church.) He finishes with "God's Contextual Mission" and describes the church-at-mission-task that his thesis identifies.

Consideration of the primacy of Van Engen's thesis is worthwhile to Free Will Baptists. The task awaiting us is to define ourselves in the world community

as a missionary church with a denominational posture and doctrine biblically reflecting God's primary task of mission.

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*The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth Century Anabaptism.* By William R. Estep. 3d. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. 306 pp. $19.99 paperback.

*The Anabaptist Story* is a classic, and its author is a prince among Anabaptist historians. In his "Preface to the Third Edition," Estep defends his decision to revise and expand his earlier work rather than to write an entirely new text. He actually had little choice. Though he now had access to numerous new Anabaptist resources, they would have had little meaning for the reader apart from the original story. He has so skillfully woven the new materials into the old that the story seems entirely fresh and well worth the effort required for the re-reading of the "Story."

The author's approach is simple and direct. He moves quickly from the movement's birth in Zwingli's Zurich to its character, its leaders, and finally its growth and expansion beyond the boundaries of its native Switzerland. While it is evident that Estep holds Anabaptism in high regard, he is as objective as hisctorians are capable of being, allowing the story to reveal both the good and the bad, the positive and the negative in these "radical reformers" of the Protestant Reformation.

The story is told first from the perspective of the varied and diverse groups that made up Anabaptism and then from the perspective of the movement's more important leaders. Estep admits that Anabaptist theology is somewhat more difficult to characterize than that of the other major reform movements—Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican—simply because the Anabaptists could not boast of a Martin Luther or an Ulrich Zwingli or a John Calvin. Persecuted—often to the death—imprisoned, and publicly denounced by both Protestants and Catholics, Anabaptist leaders seldom had the freedom or the time to make a significant mark on the thinking of their people beyond their own small area of influence.

Even so, the Anabaptists left an incredible legacy. America today is indebted to this small band of reformers for its concepts of religious liberty and separation of church and state. None of the other reformers had any sense of toleration, and they were quick to join the Catholics in the persecution of the Anabaptists. All the other reform movements were in one way or another related to the state. They knew nothing of a voluntary, gathered church, free from state control. The church in America, as well, owes great debt to this wing of the Reformation. Ideas such as Christ as Head of the church, voluntary church, and believer's baptism must be traced directly to the Anabaptist movement.

Finally, Estep draws three important conclusions that accurately define Anabaptism for the reader. First, the Anabaptists had no desire to reform the medieval Roman Catholic Church. In their eyes, the church was both corrupt and incorrigible. Everything about the medieval church—its infant baptism, its relationship with the state, its blatant immorality, its persecution of Christians—made it an unlikely candidate for reformation. Their intent, rather, was restoration—restoration of primitive New Testament Christianity. It was this adamant rejection of the church that led George Hunston Williams to dub the movement the "Radical Reformation."

Second, Estep rightly acknowledges that the study of this phase of the Reformation was almost totally neglected from the sixteenth century until the middle of the twentieth. Both contemporary and later historians, failing to recognize that most of the more gentle, conservative, biblical Anabaptists had been removed from the Reformation stage by persecution in the early moments of the movement's history, assumed that all Anabaptists were extremists. And eventually, as a result of persecution, it was true. Except for Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips, and a few other conservative leaders, Anabaptism was left in the hands of a band of radicals who had determined that the kingdom was soon coming and that God had commissioned them to prepare the world for the Second Advent, even by use of the sword if that became necessary. The extremists had left such a cruel legacy that history and historians had refused for centuries to include Anabaptism in their study of the Reformation.

The third conclusion was simply that today's Baptists were not Anabaptists. Until the middle of this century, most historians had assumed that the Baptists were historically linked with Anabaptism of the sixteenth century, that Pilgrim Marpeck, Conrad Grebel, and Menno Simons were the ancient ancestors of the Baptists of the twentieth century. However, Estep, along with other more recent historians, has clearly shown that the modern Baptist movement must be traced back to Puritan England rather than to Anabaptist Switzerland or Holland. A spiritual link indeed exists, but it is virtually impossible to draw stronger ties than that between these two New Testament churches.

John Smyth did, in 1609/10, along with the majority of his congregation, petition for membership in the Waterlander Mennonite church in Holland, declaring that body to be the "true church" of Christ. It must be assumed, however, that he had come to Anabaptist convictions on the primary dogmas of general atonement and believer's baptism prior to his arrival in Holland and that those convictions had been derived from his own study of Scripture rather than from Anabaptist influence. His appeal to the Waterlanders for membership was based on his fear that his self-baptism was invalid and that this left the authenticity of his own Baptist church in question. But other leaders in Smyth's church—Thomas Helwys, John Murton, Thomas Seamer, and William Pigott—dismissed Smyth's concern as irrelevant, arguing that the New Testament was an adequate foundation for the church and that historical credibility offered by the Anabaptists was not necessary. The Helwys group excommunicated Smyth and his followers and wrote to the Waterlanders asking that they not receive the ejected

Baptists. A formal merger between the Dutch Anabaptists and the English Baptists never materialized. Smyth died, and Helwys led the remnant back to England where they established the first formal Baptist church on English soil in 1612. Even so, Estep acknowledges that some Mennonite influence must be assumed at least in the areas of separation of church and state, religious freedom, and the nature of the church. Soon after his return to England, Helwys published the *Booke of the Mistery of Iniquity* in which he boldly proclaimed Anabaptist views on religious liberty—the first time such a message had been heard by English ears. This first church in England was General Baptist in its orientation and must be considered as a part of the larger heritage for the Free Will Baptist denomination. It is at this point that Estep's book takes on significant meaning for those who are interested in their Free Will Baptist heritage.

Who should read *The Anabaptist Story?* There is something of a paradox in Estep's writing. The text is simple and easy to read, and for that reason laymen should benefit from the reading of this exciting story. But, at the same time, the author often assumes that the reader has a rather broad basic knowledge of Reformation history and leaves him to "fill in the blanks" in order for the story to come together. Finally, while the footnotes could possibly fill in those blanks for the reader, they often are in German and add little except for the advanced scholar. Certainly, every educator and every pastor who is interested in his Baptist and Reformation heritage should read this most important study of Anabaptist history.

If this text appeals to the reader, then Estep's excellent text on the relationship between the Renaissance and the Reformation also is required reading: William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. 320 pp. $22.99 paperback).

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*Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult: How to Interest People Who Aren't Interested.* By Nick Pollard. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997. 192 pp. $10.99 paperback.

When was the last time you read a book on evangelism? If the last book had a title like "Soul Winning—Easy as ABC," then it is time to read *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult: How to Interest People Who Aren't Interested.*

Most Christians carry a sense of failure in the area of evangelism. We feel the pressure to witness and have moments when we are ready to run across the street and share the gospel with an unsaved neighbor. The problem is that we never get out the front door. We would like to find an easy way to do evangelism.

For those looking for an easy way to share the gospel, this book will not make it easier. Nick Pollard, who spends most of his time at universities working with campus missions, states that reading his book will not make evangelism easy, but it can make it slightly less difficult. His statement is backed with years of experience as an evangelist. He speaks and debates, but he emphasizes that real evangelism takes place one-on-one. One-on-one evangelism is difficult, and in today's culture, being armed with the Romans Road will not get you very far.

Pollard defines evangelism as positive deconstruction. It is the process of taking apart what a person believes to analyze it. He stresses the positive, because this deconstruction is done in a positive way—in order to replace false belief with something better. Its purpose is for the unbeliever to question his belief system and to find out more about Jesus. When that happens, the first step toward Jesus has been taken.

There are many belief systems in our society. Pollard helps in giving us the basic worldviews of people we encounter each day. Everything is questioned, and people believe Jesus may be right for you but not for them. For many would-be evangelists, those sorts of opinions would constitute enough of a barrier to move on to the next sinner. Pollard urges us to continue conversations and build relationships, at the same time leading unbelievers to question what they believe.

Reading *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult,* I was aware of my shortcomings in evangelism. There are questions I did not want asked and statements made that easily got me sidetracked. I knew the Evangelism Explosion outline that kept me focused in the direction to go. The problem is that people have serious questions, and they are not ready to go any further in a conversation until they get a serious answer. Pollard deals with the questions and helps us with answers. Unbelievers must answer their own questions, and as an evangelist we help them find the answers. Isn't that what Jesus did with the woman at the well?

If you are around people who are not interested in knowing Christ (and who is not around them?), this book will help you sharpen your skills in doing what Jesus commissioned all of us to do.

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*Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World.* By Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997. 260 pp. $14.99 paperback.

Millard Erickson and James Heflin both have rich heritages as seminary professors. Their friendship and mutual interests drew them together to coauthor this work. As the subtitle implies, this book is about doctrinal preaching "in our day."

The authors make the point that doctrinal preaching is essential to the life of the church, but since our culture has so radically changed, preaching is difficult

in our world, especially doctrinal preaching. So should preachers give up on doctrinal preaching altogether and find some other avenue of communication? The authors' contention is that it is not only possible to preach doctrine in our day but that it is actually the best way to preach.

The book contains fourteen chapters and is divided into four separate parts. Part One deals with "Understanding the Issues." Chapter One opens with a fictitious classroom scene in a seminary. Two professors are arguing for their particular field of interest and against each other's discipline of study. One professor contends for the need of preaching and illustrates the irrelevance of doctrine in our present society. The other professor stands his ground in defense of doctrine and bewails the ineffectiveness of today's preaching, concluding that it is not "sufficiently visual." In a novel kind of a way, this classroom scene sets the stage for the remainder of the book.

As the book moves on, a benchmark is established as the authors carefully and meticulously set forth the "value and benefit of doctrine." After supporting these benefits with an exhaustive list of scriptural references, personal illustrations, and sermonic ideas, the authors forge ahead into the "difficulty of doctrine today." Preachers should be able to identify with the difficulties in preaching doctrine. Among the obstacles that are faced, the authors categorize four main ones: cultural, religious, Christian, and clergy factors. Each area presents a modern-day hurdle for the preacher of doctrine.

The role of preaching as a component and integral part of the "worship service" is analyzed. In light of today's movement away from preaching in so many circles, Erickson and Heflin draw the line in the sand in favor of preaching. They see it as not just a "part" of the church service, but as a priority in the church service. Of course, they are talking about properly constructed sermons based on the Word of God. A preacher's task may be more difficult today in communicating and preaching biblical truths, but he must not abandon this age-old form just because of our changing world.

Part Two then takes the reader through the elements of gathering content for the doctrinal sermon. Two approaches are considered: one, preaching doctrine from the didactic passages; and two, gleaning doctrine from the narratives. The authors declare and demonstrate how it is possible to preach doctrine from both sources. Erickson, the author of this chapter, sees narratives as "a matter of revelation as divine acts, whereas the didactic is a case of revelation as divine speech." Both are rich sources to mine in gathering materials for preaching. In making application of the truths set forth in this section, the book calls for the need of a particular kind of contextualization which makes a passage of Scripture relevant to the hearer. The authors then offer several tests for this.

The knowledge of Parts One and Two are expounded in Part Three. The authors review expositional, topical, narrative, and dramatic preaching in this section about delivering doctrine in sermonic form. The authors give good definitions for these various methods of preaching. They have obviously exhausted the list of homiletical sources to give other definitions and to arrive at a logical, scriptural, and systematic way to use each form and still "preach doctrine."

The final part of the book, appropriately entitled "Getting It Done," gives help for the preacher as he seeks to plan and strategize a program of doctrinal preaching. The authors discuss the when, how, what, and why of doctrinal preaching in churches. They give ideas for various church calendars and seasonal events. These men obviously want to see that the task of doctrinal preaching "gets done."

This book is pastor-, church-, and preacher-friendly. The opening part of the book on "Understanding the Issues" alone makes it a "worth-having" book—well worth its price. It not only touches on doctrinal preaching but also looks at any and all preaching in a scriptural and historical manner. The authors give a resounding "yes" for the importance of preaching in our day.

Part Two gets a little weighty and academic at times, but it is nonetheless beneficial in understanding preaching from both the didactic and narrative passages in the Bible. I was particularly concerned with one thing in the book. Even though both men seem to be conservative theologically, it alarms me for them to advise that we should be open to changes in contemporary culture, including the field of geology and the age of the earth. They accept the radioactive dating method and reject the dating process through Bible genealogies. Thereby, they accept the age of the earth at "about 6 billion years." I disagree with their conclusions.

All in all, throughout the book, I agree with their findings that preaching—yes, doctrinal preaching—must be done. However, we live in a world that largely resists it. This book is a manual on how to overcome that problem.

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*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God.* By Dallas Willard. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998. 428 pp. $22.00 hardcover.

Does life in Christ mean more than preparation for future existence in heaven? Can Christians experience victorious living that rises high above mere management of sin? What should be taught to apprentices of Jesus, and how could they be trained in such a way that they would routinely do the things He said were right? Theologian and scholar Dallas Willard, a University of Southern California philosophy professor, carefully and thoroughly addresses these questions in his recent bestseller, *The Divine Conspiracy.*

Willard hopes that this third and final book in his trilogy on the spiritual life provides an understanding of the gospel that can help Christians actually do what Christ did and said to do. He expresses his longing for the day when the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20 will be "routinely implemented as the objective . . . of the Christian churches, one-by-one and collectively."

Drawing from this commission, Willard focuses on Christ's command to teach new disciples to observe everything He said to do.

Jesus taught His followers to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Willard identifies God's kingdom as "the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done." Jesus did not instruct His disciples to pray for the existence of the kingdom, but rather that God's rightful rule would be effective on earth.

As students of the Word know, Jesus gave this prayer lesson during His sermon recorded in Matthew 5-7, which is the featured text in Willard's discourse on kingdom living. For God's will to be done on earth, kingdom citizens (that is, disciples of Christ) must not only allow God to rule in their hearts in preparation for the afterlife, but they must also live obedient lives *now*. They are actually bearers of God's rule on earth, and as they internalize the words of Christ, they can live in His likeness in His kingdom now.

The problem, as Willard sees it, is the failure of Christians to integrate faith (what they profess to believe) with behavior (how they live). He says the message being proclaimed from many of the pulpits and classrooms of churches today is essentially "sin-management," while transformation of life and character is rarely taught or modeled.

Unless teachers, pastors, and lay people confront this problem of the disconnection of life from faith, the real power of the gospel of the kingdom will continue to be seriously hindered. So what does Willard propose? He does not come out with any new programs or campaigns, but rather he calls us to reject the lukewarm faith so prevalent today and to replace it with Christlikeness. Likewise, he rejects the popular concepts of "consumer Christianity" and proposes instead a curriculum for Christlike living—not as something simply to be taught to others, but as a practical lifestyle for all believers.

Willard's proposed curriculum for Christlikeness includes the following four disciplines: solitude, silence, worship, and study. All of these, pursued with prayer and purpose, will help the disciple accomplish two primary objectives: enthralling the mind with God and breaking the power of the evil in our own bodies.

Some of Willard's viewpoints might confuse his readers, and some of his ideas are rather controversial. Basically, however, reading and heeding the message in this book would be a worthwhile activity for anyone serious about knowing God and experiencing His kingdom among us now.

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*Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience.* By Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 212 pp. $15.99 paperback.

Macaulay and Barrs believe that to be human is to be in the image of God. In light of this definition, *Being Human* deals with the nature of spiritual experience. The authors believe that teaching on the Christian life should include a strong emphasis on human responsibility and an encouragement to enjoy life. They maintain that being human means being the people that God originally intended us to be—serving Him and enjoying Him, serving and enjoying each other, ruling and enjoying His good world.

The book is perceptive, practical, and personal. It addresses the Christian life from a biblical perspective. The material is practical and easy to read and understand. Each chapter concludes with a personal challenge. Reading the ten chapters of this work will be a rewarding educational experience.

In Chapter One, "In the Likeness of God," the authors contend that misunderstanding and misinterpreting Scripture passages dealing with the Christian life have produced some distorted views of the Christian life. They conclude that Christ is to be the center of our lives. Christ is the source of all our spiritual life and must be the model for the Christian life. The authors argue that restoration of the image of God in human beings is the goal of the Christian life.

Chapter Two, "The Biblical Framework and Two Alternatives," emphasizes that humanness, being in the image of God, is like the key that unlocks all the doors in the house of the Christian life. This chapter deals with three views of reality: the materialistic, the biblical, and the platonic. The *materialistic view* denies the reality of God's existence and therefore allows no possibility of the supernatural working in this world. The *biblical view* begins with God himself. The authors contend that man was made like God and was intended to worship, love, and enjoy Him. God did not make us to relate to Him with only one part of our lives—the spiritual part. He made us to relate to Him and express His likeness in all of life—body, mind, emotions, will. The *platonic view* asserts that reality is made up of two parts: the material realm and the spiritual realm. The material realm is the realm of the physical world. The spiritual realm is the realm of ideas—that is, the forms which stand behind the appearances of the material world. The platonic view radically de-emphasizes the material realm and exalts the "spiritual." Macaulay and Barrs conclude that the biblical view of reality contradicts the materialistic and platonic views. They believe that God desires that men and women be fulfilled in every aspect of their humanness—spiritual and material—as they grow day by day into the likeness of Him, enjoying fellowship with the living God. They suggest that the framework of the Christian life include how the body, the world, gifts, prayer, and spirituality fit into the process of the restoration of the image of God.

Chapter Three, "The Centrality of Christ," discusses two false paths to Christian maturity: asceticism and higher spirituality. The authors contend that God's grace is sufficient for Christian growth. By God's grace, Christians have been reconciled to God, rescued from darkness, have a renewed mind and new

life in Christ. Christians do not have to do anything to achieve this new status, for it has been given to us in Christ. Nor can we add anything to the work Christ has done on our behalf. Christ is all in all.

The authors emphasize in Chapter Four, "Active Obedience," that the Bible opposes the idea that Christian growth comes from something beyond Christ's work. One aspect of Christian growth is that of active obedience to the Lord. Christian growth demands allegiance and obedience to the Word of God.

Chapter Five is entitled "The Holy Spirit and the Self: Sovereignty and Responsibility." This chapter emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The authors believe that the sovereignty of the Spirit and the principle of humanness are affirmed side by side in the New Testament. They conclude that the knowledge that the Spirit will work in me to change me and strengthen me establishes the necessity of my working out my own salvation. Rather than discouraging me, making me feel that I can only wait helplessly for the Spirit to work, the knowledge that the Spirit is the sovereign Lord over my life is a source of comfort and encouragement. Even in giving us His infallible Word, the Spirit did not override the significance of those who wrote the various books. Nor does He do so now as He works in us who believe and who press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Chapter Six deals with "Affirming the Self and Denying the Self." Macaulay and Barrs believe that sanctification must not be viewed as a negative experience for the believer but essentially as a positive one. For this reason they describe the biblical view of spiritual experience as an affirmation of life—that is, as a recovery of the human experience lost at the Fall.

The mind is crucial to the Christian life, as the authors argue in Chapter Seven, "The Mind." One of the prominent features of the modern scientific culture is skepticism—a tendency to doubt religious statements. Reason has been challenged by those who make no claim to religious faith. Faced with this challenge, many Christians have retreated from a defense both of the reasonableness of Christianity and of the importance of the mind. Paul claims that Christianity is reasonable, rational—in other words, that it makes sense of the whole of human experience. The authors conclude that we must acknowledge the importance of the mind, because reason is an essential aspect of our humanness, because it is an essential element of our growth as Christians and because it is an essential weapon in the battle we face today.

In Chapter Eight, "Guidance," the authors' belief in the importance of emphasizing humanness in the Christian's life can be seen in the area of guidance: the way Christians discover what they should do—particularly what God wants them to do. The authors contend that God made us with the ability to decide, and He expects us to use that ability in a godly way and for godly ends.

Chapter Nine, "The Family," outlines a biblical concept of the family and its relationships. The authors stress that the creation of the family is one of the most demanding and fulfilling of human possibilities. It is the unit God created originally to be His image. To whatever degree a family recovers the experience intended at creation, to that extent they can enter into the glory of God's own

internal experience within the "family" of the Trinity. What a majestic foundation for marriage. What an encouragement to persevere through the difficulties, knowing that riches of experience such as these lie so close at hand.

Macaulay and Barrs contend in Chapter Ten, "The Believer's Judgment," that human responsibility establishes the principle of humanness more securely than anything else. God made us in His image, and He has called us to love Him and keep His commandments. Such love and obedience is not insignificant to Him, however small it may seem in our own eyes. All is meaningful, and all is to be weighed. Since God has adopted us in Christ as His beloved children, let us yield up every moment of our days to His service as those who will have to give an account of ourselves to Him.

This excellent book presents a pointed and powerful understanding of the Christian life. It is broad, balanced, and biblical in the concepts that are addressed, analyzed, and articulated.

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