



Διδασκαλία

DIDASKALIA

THE JOURNAL OF PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



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THE JOURNAL OF PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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DIDASKALIA — 1. act., the act of *teaching, instruction*; Romans 12:7. Of Timothy, 1 Tim 4:13, 16. 2. pass., of that which is taught, *teaching*; Eph. 4:14. Freq. of the teachings of eccl. Christianity: 2 Tim. 4:3 — From Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching
(Διδασκαλία)...”

— 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

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Didaskalia is Providence's peer-reviewed academic journal, published annually by ProvPress, a division of Providence Theological Seminary. Guided by the principle of interdisciplinary theological reflection for the church, Didaskalia features articles and book reviews of significance for an ecclesial and academic audience.

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Didaskalia is open to all submissions of original research, articles, and academic book reviews. Articles should run approximately 8000 words in length, be written according to style guidelines set forth in Turabian / Chicago Manual of Style, and use footnotes rather than endnotes. Book reviews should be approximately 1000-1200 words in length and should include both summary of and critical engagement with the book being reviewed.

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Theological Reflection for the Church

Patrick S. Franklin, Editor

This is to be my final editorial for *Didaskalia*, since my role as Editor is coming to an end at the completion of this academic year. It has been a privilege to oversee this journal, and to serve its readers as well as the faculty, staff, alumni, and stakeholders of Providence University College and Theological Seminary. I thank all for welcoming and empowering me to do so.

The journal has undergone important changes since the beginning of my tenure, for which I take only partial credit (and for which I give much credit to our Managing Editor, Russell Doerksen, our Associate Editor, Shannon Doerksen, and to Kayla Hiebert, who designed the new look of the journal and performs all the typesetting and creative layout work). Perhaps most importantly, we adopted a new mission for the journal: “Guided by the principle of interdisciplinary theological reflection for the church, *Didaskalia* features articles and book reviews of significance for an ecclesial and academic audience.”

Several notable implications follow from this mission statement. First, *Didaskalia* seeks to include interdisciplinary scholarship. While the majority of the submissions we receive typically fall under biblical and theological studies, we welcome and seek contributions from all scholarly disciplines.

Second, *Didaskalia* is nevertheless a theological journal—not theological in the narrow sense of the term (i.e., systematic theology, historical theology, or biblical studies exclusively) but in the broader sense of Christian theological reflection on all things (since, according to passages such as John 1:3 and Col. 1:16-17, all things were created through Christ and in him all things hold together and find their ultimate coherence). Thus, we encourage authors toward serious Christian reflection (both appreciative engagement and constructive criticism) upon their own scholarly disciplines and particular areas of

expertise. Of recent volumes, our issue on Christ-centred education (vol. 27; 2016-2017) perhaps best exemplifies this kind of vision.

Third, Didaskalia strives to engage both church and academy. This is a delicate tension to uphold. We seek articles that are profound and insightful without being too abstract or technical. At the same time, we seek articles that are edifying and reverent without being merely sentimental and uncritical. We want content that stirs the heart, stretches the mind, uplifts (and sometimes provokes) the soul, and exhorts hands and feet toward action in the world that serves God's kingdom and lives out concretely and holistically the call to love God and neighbour.

Fourth, as an academic journal, Didaskalia sometimes has to be selective. Not every article submitted meets our criteria for publication. As Editor, I perform initial screening to determine which articles have the potential to be published (assessing academic, theological, ecclesial, and practical fittingness with our vision). I then send out those articles showing potential to be published for double-blind peer review (this means both author and reviewer remain anonymous to each other). Peer reviewers are experts in fields most relevant to the articles in question; they provide feedback both to me as Editor (whether or not to publish, and if so what revisions are required before publication) and to the author (as to how to improve the piece). So, peer review strengthens the overall quality of the journal as a whole as well as each and every individual article within it. After peer review, accepted articles are revised by their authors and then re-submitted for copy-review. Our copy editors (Russell and Shannon Doerksen) then go over each article with a fine-toothed comb, as it were, to correct grammar and spelling, to raise clarifying questions, and to fix errors regarding style, formatting, citations, and the like. After revision, articles undergo layout and typesetting, and then come back to the Editor for final close reading and editing.

Given this process and these criteria, authors really are to be congratulated for their work and persistence!

This issue includes articles from seven authors, as well as book reviews from four reviewers. It opens with two articles from graduates of Providence Theological Seminary. Ryan Turnbull (winner of the seminary's 2017 BTS student paper competition) contributes an

article on Hauerwas and the church entitled “The Gift of the Church: A More Excellent Form of Life.” Marcelo Wall then follows with a piece on Emil Brunner’s critical engagement with and constructive reorientation of the natural theology tradition, stressing Brunner’s passion for the church and the credibility of its mission in the world.

Next up are two articles by Providence professors, the first by incoming Associate Professor of Theology Robert J. Dean on the missional character of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s preaching, and the second by outgoing Associate Professor Theology and Ethics (yours truly, Patrick S. Franklin) that seeks constructively to cast missional ecclesiology in a Trinitarian framework, as participating in the ecstatic Love of the triune God. Together these essays offer clarity, correction, and theological depth to contemporary missional ecclesiology.

Following this is an article by Dustin Burlet that brings the Genesis flood account (Gen. 6-9) into conversation with the theological tradition concerning God’s impassibility. Burlet pursues two interrelated questions: how might a clear understanding of divine impassibility shed light on the Genesis flood, and how might a clear understanding of the latter inform our understanding of former?

In the next article, Martin W. Mittelstadt tells the tragic story of David Wells, a conscientious objector from Winnipeg who was tried for military absenteeism and subsequently died under suspicious and enigmatic circumstances on February 18, 1918. Mittelstadt draws out connections and implications for Pentecostals, conscientious objectors, and martyrs.

Finally, Jayelle Friesen (an MA Theology student at Providence) offers a review essay of Kevin Vanhoozer’s important book, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Brazos, 2016). Her review essay is a fitting contribution, given the recent 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation celebrated this past year (October 31, 1517/2017). Vanhoozer responds to the critics of Protestantism through detailed textual engagement with key primary sources, while acknowledging that contemporary Protestantism often fails to uphold the theological vision and practices of the Reformers.

The present issue concludes with book reviews by Christopher Holmes, Lissa Wray Beal, Brent Rempel, and Dustin Burlet.

In closing, I wish to thank our readers for their interest in Didaskalia, as well as all who have been involved in its production during my tenure. It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve you.

The Gift of the Church: A More Excellent Form of Life

Ryan Turnbull*

“Yet I side with the Psalmist, who insists that those who would abide in the Lord’s tent must ‘speak the truth from their heart.’ ‘Because it is true’ is the necessary condition for such speech.”¹

Stanley Hauerwas believes that truth matters. But before Hauerwas can ask the age-old question, “What is truth?” he first must inquire into the type of people that are capable of truth. For the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, truth is not knowable apart from the particular community’s life-form that constitutes the language game by which truth claims can be evaluated. Stanley Hauerwas, who has adopted Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy, understands that this insight about truth provides the means by which he can keep theological claims theological. In other words, it is only in the church that Christians come to know what it means for Jesus to be the Truth. Thus Hauerwas writes,

The ‘it’ in ‘because it is true’ is a person. Truth for us is not a principle or system, not a structure of correct insights, not a doctrine. The expression of the truth may use any of these means to say what is true, but as Barth rightly insists, ‘Jesus Christ in the promise of the Spirit as His revelation in the sphere of our time and history is the truth.’²

* Ryan Turnbull is a graduate of Providence Theological Seminary (M.A., Theological Studies). Ryan’s original paper, now revised for publication, placed first in the Biblical and Theological Studies Department’s 2017 student paper competition.

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology* (New York, NY: Church, 2013), 122.

² Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 125-26.

The claim that truth is a person is a claim that is made by the Christian tradition and only intelligible to those embedded within the practices of that tradition. Hauerwas explicitly rejects the notion that truth is some sort of theory of relation,³ insisting that the person of Jesus is the truth:

Because [Jesus] is the truth, we can speak the truth. That speaking the truth takes the form of witness means we are confronted with this truth in a manner that does not allow us to distance ourselves from him. Any attempt to sunder truth from this, the true witness, to make truth an idea about the relation between God and man, cannot be the truth. If the truth is thought to be but a symbol, no matter how exalted, it is but a falsehood. The true witness is this man of Gethsemane and Golgotha.⁴

It is in the life-form constituted by the practices of prayer, preaching, baptism, and Eucharist that Christians form the primitive agreements that constitute the rules of use that give meaning to the proposition that Jesus is the Truth. That is one way to describe it, but it does not say everything that must be said, for while this form of life is necessary to teach Christians the language to say what they believe, Christians also believe Jesus is really present in these practices. The practices of the church are simultaneously where Christ is present and where Christians gain the resources necessary to see that Christ

³ On descriptivist accounts of language, truth is understood to be the relation of the correspondence of words to their objects of reference in the 'real' world. This understanding of truth, while helpful in certain language-games is unintelligible when it is exposed, as Wittgenstein has shown, that language is not something distinct from the world but is instead constitutive of and coterminous with the world. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 107-115 and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 1-3.

⁴ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 126.

is present.⁵ Hauerwas calls this transformation *theosis*, which is his way of showing that Wittgenstein's philosophical account is useful in describing the divine reality that it is only through the in-grafting work of the Holy Spirit that we are transformed to see Jesus rightly.⁶ To see Jesus rightly is to recognize that Jesus is Lord, and that he is so because he is true God and true man; it took the church a long time to learn to be able to say this, but it was necessary in order to realize the significance of all that Jesus' Lordship entails. Hauerwas' use of Wittgenstein and MacIntyre is therefore not a retreat into theory, but a reflection of a deep pneuma-participatory ontology of language that is animated by his christological particularism.⁷

Hauerwas often claims that the first task of the church is to be the church, which is ultimately a political claim that defines both the internal goods of the church and the standards of excellence and rules

⁵ Hauerwas' ecclesial focus has been criticized for being insufficiently theological, with the suggestion that a more explicitly pneumatological approach would strengthen his position. See, for example, Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 179. In his most recent work, it appears that Hauerwas has attempted to do precisely that by adopting the language of '*theosis*' from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This focus on *theosis* provides the necessary participatory framework to make Hauerwas' insistence on the formative nature of practices to be a theological claim and not merely a sociological theory. For more on Hauerwas' new pneumatological emphasis, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, Kindle ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 32-52; "Begotten, Not Made: The Grammar of the Incarnation," *ABC Religion and Ethics* (January 4, 2017), online: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/01/04/4600040.htm> (accessed: January 5, 2017).

⁶ Hauerwas writes, "Because Jesus is very God and very man, at the Eucharist we are consumed by what we consume. God became human, assumed our nature, so that we might share in God's very life. The Eastern Church has a name for this transformation. It is called *theosis* and it means we only are able to be fully human to the extent we are divinized" (*Without Apology*, 9).

⁷ Hauerwas is thus using these philosophical tools to show how his theology follows the Barthian imperative to let ontology precede epistemology. It is interesting to see Hauerwas develop his pneumatology along Eastern conceptual lines, as it reveals some of the deep continuities between his own Methodism and the Eastern tradition, which is itself an area that should be explored further. Hauerwas' recent work on pneumatology should be watched closely in forthcoming work, as it has been long called for from his friendly critics. See most recently Robert J. Dean, *For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 235-36.

for achieving those goods. For Hauerwas, “Christianity is mostly a matter of politics – politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called the church.”⁸ The notion of the church as polis is the bedrock of Hauerwas’ theological politics.⁹ In this essay I first examine the contributions of Alasdair MacIntyre to Hauerwas’ conception of traditions and practices before turning to some of the particular liturgical practices of the church that form Christians to see and live in the particular truth of the gospel.

After MacIntyre

Overview

Truthfulness is a key virtue for Hauerwas. From the beginning of his career, Hauerwas has sought to recover the virtues as a way of describing Christian belief and practice, and to do so he has relied heavily on the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre, building on the heritage of Wittgenstein, has provided Hauerwas with the thick philosophical descriptions necessary to understand what a tradition is and what role it plays in ordering the meaning conditions for the formation of the virtues that constitute Christian ethics. With the publishing of *After Virtue*,¹⁰ MacIntyre began to develop an alternative to the philosophical moral options of modernity by resurrecting an Aristotelian conception of the virtues. *After Virtue* is seen as the turning point in his philosophy which all of his later work has

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 30.

⁹ The best analysis of Hauerwas’ theological politics has come from Arne Rasmussen. See especially *The Church as Polis*, 191-230. He compares and contrasts Hauerwas’ theological politics with Moltmann’s political theology in order to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of their positions. In my analysis, I focus more on the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre on Hauerwas’ conception of practices and tradition. I undertake an analysis of some of the specific practices that Hauerwas has increasingly written on since the publishing of Rasmussen’s book.

¹⁰ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

sought to clarify, nuance, and extend in the Thomist direction.¹¹ It is to MacIntyre's description of a moral tradition in *After Virtue* that we now turn.

MacIntyre lays out a three-staged account of the concept of virtue. According to this account, each later stage presupposes the earlier stages but not *vice versa*.¹² The first stage of MacIntyre's account is his definition of what he considers to be a 'practice.' MacIntyre has a technical definition for practice that is more expansive than most ordinary usages of the word:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.¹³

MacIntyre clarifies that on this definition neither throwing a football with skill nor planting turnips count as practices (as more colloquial conceptions of practices might suggest), but that the game of football and farming do.¹⁴ Thus a practice for MacIntyre is a broad term that covers an entire inter-connected set of actions.

To further unpack this definition, MacIntyre makes the distinction between internal and external goods by using the analogy of teaching a young child to play chess.¹⁵ This hypothetical child is exceptionally intelligent but has no desire to learn to play chess, so

¹¹ For his more explicitly Thomist development of the ideas of *After Virtue*, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

¹² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

¹³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

¹⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188.

MacIntyre bribes the child with a small bag of candy. This bribe is an external good. It is an external good because the candy is not a good that is internal to the practice of playing chess, as it neither achieves the goods constitutive of the game nor does it systematically extend those goods. The internal goods of chess are such things as analytical skill, strategic imagination, competitive intensity, and so on. To gain the external good (i.e., the candy), the child may be motivated to cheat to win. However, if the child at some point desires to play the game for the pleasure of the goods internal to the game itself, and derives some sort of satisfaction in doing so, then cheating to win would no longer be reasonable, as it would destroy those goods, the attainment of which the child is playing for.

This brings us to an observation about the nature of internal versus external goods that MacIntyre makes. External goods are always objects of personal property, be they wealth, fame, power, and so forth.¹⁶ Internal goods, however, are goods for the entire community that participates in the practice to which these goods belong. When new techniques in sport or art are advanced, everyone in the practice benefits, thus we can observe that in many sports the overall level of play today is much higher than in previous generations precisely because of the contributions of those generations.¹⁷

Further, MacIntyre notes that there are two types of internal goods. The first are goods internally related to the excellence of the practice itself, such as mastery of the art of painting.¹⁸ The second

¹⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190–91. For example, in a recent interview with Peter Mansbridge, Wayne Gretzky confessed that he would not be good enough to play in today's league. The internal standards of excellence in the sport of hockey have surpassed even the abilities of 'the Great One' yet it is precisely because of the contributions he made to strategy and various components of the skills that make up the game of hockey that the game has been able to advance to the point that it is today. Simultaneously, Gretzky worries that the external goods of money and fame are distorting the practice of hockey, making access for low-income players more difficult and curbing some of the creativity that was brought to the game by players who previously did not solely focus on hockey. See Wayne Gretzky interview with Peter Mansbridge, *CBC The National* (October 11, 2016), online: <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/nhl/wayne-gretzky-interview-national-1.3800604> (accessed February 4, 2017).

¹⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 189.

type of internal good is related to the first good, for as the painter pursues the good of excellence in painting generally, the painter will experience the good of a certain kind of life. The life of a painter qua painter is the second kind of internal good to the practice of painting, as it is primarily as a painter that one achieves the necessary competence in judging the first type of internal goods.¹⁹

It is at this point that MacIntyre defines what a virtue is: “A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”²⁰ Let me extend the painter example even further. To experience the second type of internal good, the good of being a painter, one must be in possession of virtue, for it could very well be the case that one attempts to live as a painter but does so solely as a means to attain external goods, or in some other way that tends to distort or otherwise ignore the first class of internal goods that are, in part, constitutive of the practice of painting. According to MacIntyre, there are at least three virtues that are required in any practice in order to achieve the goods internal to that practice; these virtues are justice, honesty, and courage.²¹

Virtues are carried along and sustained by various institutions. MacIntyre distinguishes practices from institutions by pointing out that while chess, physics, and medicine are practices, chess clubs, laboratories, universities, and hospitals are institutions. It is because of the inextricability of practices from the institutions that bear them that the virtues are necessary in providing the essential function of allowing practices to resist the corrupting influence of institutions.²² Institutions can easily fall prey to the temptation of external goods that are associated with practices and attempt to distort and destroy

¹⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

²⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

²¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191. MacIntyre seems to suggest that these are three necessary virtues that must be in place for the relations necessary to achieve the internal goods of practices. It is interesting to note that, insofar as Hauerwas will adopt MacIntyre’s work, truthfulness remains one of the cardinal virtues for explicitly Christian practice.

²² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.

the integrity of the practice in order to achieve greater levels of the external good.²³ It is clear that practices can be distinguished, but never wholly separated, from the institutions that sustain them and provide the standards of excellence and rules that determine what the internal goods of that practice are and how they might be achieved, for "...it is always within some particular community with its own specific institutional forms that we learn or fail to learn to exercise the virtues."²⁴ Furthermore, practices require institutions because practices have a history, and that history is remembered within the institutions that bear them.²⁵

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice. Practices of course, as I have just noticed, have a history: games, sciences and arts all have histories. Thus the standards are not themselves immune from criticism, but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far... *De gustibus est disputandum.*²⁶

Thus far, MacIntyre has been providing an account of the virtues

²³ This is precisely Gretzky's big complaint against modern hockey. Because of the extraordinary level of money and prestige (i.e., external goods) associated with professional hockey, there is an incentive on the part of the NHL to distort and destroy the internal goods of hockey that have made that practice the great national past time of Canada.

²⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194–95.

²⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193–94.

²⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190. The Latin quote is a refutation of the traditional maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum* or "in matters of taste there can be no disputes." MacIntyre's description of the rules and norms which govern practices points towards the conclusion that matters of taste may in fact be disputed, precisely on the grounds of the standards of excellence that are intrinsic to the practices to which standards of taste refer.

in terms of practices. To complement this account, MacIntyre also insists that to achieve further clarity as to the nature of the virtues, there must be some telos which provides a narrative unity to a whole human life.²⁷ For MacIntyre, this narrative unity to a life is necessary both to avoid moral arbitrariness and to specify the context of particular virtues.²⁸

Narrative is a category that has received a great deal of consideration in recent scholarship.²⁹ For MacIntyre, narratives are necessary in order to distinguish between intelligible and unintelligible actions. According to MacIntyre, “the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action as such.”³⁰ Unintelligible actions are but failed candidates for the status of intelligible action and so should not be conceptually lumped together as a single class of action. Intelligibility is of crucial importance here, because it points to the necessity of narrative; we know what type of action is occurring because of the narrative context of that action. Therefore, mere phenomenological descriptions of action *qua* action are inadequate. As it turns out, two persons could be engaged, phenomenologically, in the same activity, but because of the organizing principle of intelligibility, turn out to be performing radically different actions as defined by their respective narratives.

To demonstrate this, MacIntyre provides the example of a man doing some sort of activity in front of his house.³¹ The observer must ask the question, “What is he doing?” This question is a question regarding the intelligibility of the actions that the agent is performing. To answer the question, it is necessary to provide some sort of narrative context that can make intelligible the series of otherwise isolated actions the man seems to be performing. Thus the man may be digging, doing yard-work, exercising, or pleasing his wife. He may in fact be doing a combination of these things, but what is crucial to

²⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 202–3.

²⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193.

²⁹ For an excellent overview of the relevant discussion on narrative, see Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

³⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209.

³¹ What follows is a summary of the argument as presented in Alasdair MacIntyre, “Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, and Tradition,” in *Why Narrative*, 89–110, 91f.

note is that without some sort of narrative context, it is not possible to correctly judge the activity of that man. Indeed, it may be the case that his neighbour is performing similar actions from a third-person perspective, but the narrative context may be such that he is, in fact, preparing for a party or pleasing his children. Thus, the particular types of action being performed by both men are not necessarily identical types of action, even if they may appear so externally. What is most determinative for the intelligibility of the action is its narrative context, which, though it is best known to the agent, may also be observable by any who are privy to the particularities of the context.

While the narrative unity of a human life provides an intelligible unity to actions, it is not enough to say that narratives are only knowable to individuals – otherwise it would be very difficult to communicate, never mind form the kinds of communities necessary to engage in many practices. The exercise of virtue is therefore never sought individualistically.³² MacIntyre acknowledges the strangeness of such a claim to those who have been formed in the tradition of modern individualism. “From the standpoint of individualism I am what I myself choose to be.”³³ According to this ideology, it is we individuals who get to supply the narratives to determine the types of actions we are taking. This is what allows so many Canadians to deny their part in the genocide of Indigenous peoples, failing to recognize that the larger narrative their entire lives are embedded in requires each individual to engage with and take responsibility for the legacy of failed treaties and residential schools that blight our collective history. As a farmer on Treaty Two lands, I have a shared responsibility of care for the land and the people that are indigenous to the land that must be taken into account as I perform the other actions that constitute the practice of agriculture in western Manitoba.

Upon recognizing the communal narratives that we share, we recognize that we are part of various traditions. We inherit particular histories and modes of reasoning that are partially determinative

³² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

³³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

³⁴ Perhaps this is what is meant by the psalmist’s confession, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105, KJV). The narrative of the Word is the particular tradition that shows us the way forward.

for how we proceed in the world.³⁴ MacIntyre further notes that all “reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention.”³⁵ Traditions are not static, nor do they imply an inability to know the world as defenders of modern rationality are wont to imply.³⁶ A living tradition is best described as a “socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition.”³⁷ I find it amazing, given this definition of tradition that Hauerwas has basically wholly adopted from MacIntyre, that he continues to be accused of reading Christianity as a monolithic tradition.³⁸ A tradition does not imply uniform agreement about the goods internal to its practices; it sets the rules for the debate about precisely what goods are internal to its practices. Disagreement is encouraged, frequent, and necessary if the tradition is to continue as a living tradition.

Nicholas Healy has argued that Hauerwas’ adoption of MacIntyre’s account of traditions is theologically thin. Healy suggests that there is an important difference between the Christian tradition and all other traditions. For Healy, it is axiomatic that “we need to make ongoing efforts to convert if we are to be a good Christian.”³⁹ His point is that we do not simply inhabit the Christian tradition like we may inhabit liberalism or socialism – “we have to *think* about being a Christian.”⁴⁰ I am not so sure that the same kind of determining that is required to figure out what Christianity is and how it may be lived out is not, in fact, present in other traditions. But ultimately, for Healy, the more serious charge is that following Jesus is “*always* beyond the ‘human powers’ of MacIntyre’s definition.”⁴¹ This is an important observation, as it points to the relative lack of pneuma-

³⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

³⁶ See, for example, R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 261-79.

³⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

³⁸ This is why I find Healy’s demand for an empirical example of the church Hauerwas describes to be wrong-headed. Hauerwas’ demand that the church be distinctive is not as much an empirical issue as it is just part of the definition of church as a ‘tradition.’ See Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 80-94.

³⁹ Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

⁴⁰ Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

⁴¹ Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

tology that has been explicitly stated in Hauerwas' work. As I have already argued however, Hauerwas has been operating with an assumed pneumatology that he has made most explicit in a number of recent publications, most notably, the book he co-authored with Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*.⁴² In this discussion of the Holy Spirit that is framed largely in the Methodist language of 'sanctification' (what he elsewhere refers to as *theosis*), Hauerwas shows it is indeed possible to maintain a basically MacIntyrean account of traditions by positing a synergistic relationship between the gift that is the Holy Spirit, and the very human effort on display in the practices of the Church.⁴³

One final point that should be clarified regarding MacIntyre is the issue of inter-tradition dialogue, if only for the reason that it is where both he and Hauerwas have received criticism for being sectarian. If all rationality is tradition-located then how do disputes between traditions get resolved? MacIntyre takes up this challenge in his follow-up volume, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* In a chapter entitled "Overcoming a Conflict of Traditions," MacIntyre puts forth Thomas Aquinas as the example par-excellence of how one might go about overcoming such a dispute.⁴⁴ According to MacIntyre, Aquinas had the great fortune of being formed in both Aristotelian metaphysics and Augustinian theology. As such, he learned two 'first languages' which allowed him to perform a synthesis of the traditions that faithfully extended the rationality of both traditions, providing a way forward through crises that both traditions had previously been unable to overcome. What was essential, however, was a certain imagination on the part of Aquinas to learn both traditions on their own terms before any synthesis or translation of concepts was able to occur. The contemporaries of Aquinas failed where Aquinas succeeded precisely because they did not do the necessary work of fully entering into the opposing tradition, but instead forced a pre-

⁴² Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*.

⁴³ Hauerwas and Willimon point to the posture required by the prayer "Come Holy Spirit" as being the key to understanding how the life of worship in the church is made possible and meaningful only by the Spirit's indwelling presence as divine Gift (see *Ibid.*, loc. 54).

⁴⁴ For a much fuller account of the crises in the two traditions that Aquinas was able to overcome, see MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 164–82.

mature translation of concepts that proved to be antithetical to established norms within their own original traditions.⁴⁵ It is this refusal to translate concepts prematurely that has earned both Hauerwas and MacIntyre the reputation of sectarianism. Ultimately, it would seem they are only doing what is minimally required to respect the particularity and integrity of moral traditions and are perhaps saved from charges of sectarian habits of thought.⁴⁶

The Gift of the Church

MacIntyre's philosophy has proven especially helpful to Hauerwas in helping him conceptually clarify his ecclesiology. The church is the institution that bears the practices of the tradition named Christianity and provides the narrative context that makes various moral actions intelligible for Christians. In what follows, I examine several of those practices in light of the borrowed MacIntyrian framework to tease out the particularist bent that Hauerwas demonstrates.

For Hauerwas, the tradition that Christians must be part of to know what is true is called 'church.' The church is "where Jesus is," which is to say, "where the Eucharist is."⁴⁷ The celebration of the Eucharist gathers and thus makes visible the people of God. It reconciles and thus brings unity in Christ rather than the generic 'common humanity' of the contemporary liberal social order. The Eucharist makes us listen and respond to the story of scripture, which reinforces the shared tradition. It remembers God's action in Israel (Exodus 16; 2 Kings 4), and by invoking the presence of the Spirit, makes Christ present. Finally, it sends us out into the world to witness and serve and thus shapes the life of the Christian at work by providing a sense of time.⁴⁸ For Christians, the tradition, or life-form, we inhabit is a Eucharistic one, because we give thanks that through this tradi-

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 170.

⁴⁶ For a succinct summary of Hauerwas' various attempts to avoid the charge of sectarianism, see Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 133–34.

⁴⁷ Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 23.

⁴⁸ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 23.

tion called church, God has given us everything we need to follow him.⁴⁹ The Eucharist is the ‘gifts of God for the people of God’ and thus reminds us that everything that is, exists not by necessity but as gift.⁵⁰ This Eucharistic story is precisely the story necessary if the lives of those who call themselves Christian are to possess the narrative unity that MacIntyre insists is necessary if the life Christians live is in fact, intelligible.

Worship: The Language of the Church

The significance of worship for Christian theology and ethics has increased dramatically for Hauerwas over his career. The turn of the century marked a general liturgical shift in the focus of Hauerwas’ publishing efforts, though he had begun to develop many of these ideas in the preceding decades.⁵¹ To say that worship has ‘significance’ for Christian theology and ethics, as I put it above, is precisely the sort of abstraction that Hauerwas’ work has rejected.⁵² Instead, for Hauerwas, worship is ethics.⁵³ At Duke, Hauerwas took to teaching Christian ethics through the liturgical practices of the church, which has helped him better articulate that there is no ‘*litur-*

⁴⁹ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 13.

⁵⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 40. The Eucharist forms the church as a community of witness that is engaged in the careful task of describing all that is as God’s good work.

⁵¹ See, for example, several of the essays in Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1995); and the beginnings of an emphasis on preaching in the sermonic exhibits of *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

⁵² Hauerwas routinely rejects the fragmenting of various parts of the Christian life into isolatable categories of activity. He does so regarding worship and ethics in Stanley M. Hauerwas, “Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the ‘And,’” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God*, ed. E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 95–106.

⁵³ After teaching Christian ethics through the liturgical life of the church for many years at Duke, Hauerwas teamed up with Sam Wells to edit the ‘big book’ on ethics as worship that he has gotten his friends to write for him. See Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*.

gy and ethics,' rather, the liturgical practices of the church constitute the ethics of the church.⁵⁴

There are four assumptions that Hauerwas identifies as having separated worship from ethics in modern ethical discourse. First, "Ethics is about the real, worship is about the unreal."⁵⁵ This assumption stands in the Kantian tradition that divides what is knowable into the realm of the phenomena and the unknowable into the realm of the noumena. This divide effectively makes worship, which is, allegedly, a merely 'spiritual' exercise, about things that are not knowable and therefore irrelevant for how the 'real' world operates. In protest to this assumption, Hauerwas ambitiously asserts that "life is in fact a rehearsal for worship – that, within an eschatological perspective, it is worship for which humanity and the creation were made, and it is worship that will make up the greater part of eternity, within which what is called 'life' and 'the real' will appear to be a tiny blip."⁵⁶ The second assumption is that "worship is about beauty, ethics is about the good."⁵⁷ Worship is conceived primarily as an aesthetic activity that is reducible to mere subjectivity, while ethics represents that which is objective. Hauerwas rejects the objectivity/subjectivity divide as part of his larger contention that there are no disinterested observers, for everyone stands in a particular tradition (à la MacIntyre).⁵⁸ In a related manner, the third assumption is that "worship is about the internal, ethics is about the external."⁵⁹ Of course, this way of dividing the two reflects the presumptions of a liberal politics that construes the political as a matter of distributing scarce resources, guaranteeing personal liberties and rights, and the exaltation of

⁵⁴ For a description of this course, see Stanley Hauerwas, "The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship," in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 153-68.

⁵⁵ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 4.

⁵⁶ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

⁵⁷ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

⁵⁸ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

⁵⁹ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6.

‘tolerance’ as the highest virtue.⁶⁰ Finally, the fourth presumption Hauerwas seeks to confront is that “worship is about words, ethics is about action.”⁶¹ While it may be the case that some Christians have described their worship as being fundamentally about the propriety of the words used in their songs and the content of their sermons, Hauerwas points to the fact that worship is a combination of words and actions. It is not for nothing that the words of Christian worship are characterized by phrases of action: “‘Baptise them...,’ ‘Do this...,’ ‘Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,’ ‘When two or three are gathered.’”⁶²

Liturgy is not a sufficient condition to create virtuous formation in the lives of Christians, but it is at least a necessary one.⁶³ “Liturgy is quite literally where we learn to suffer God’s beauty and so suffering discover we are made in God’s image. Through worship we discover the truth about ourselves, making possible lives of goodness otherwise impossible.”⁶⁴ We discover the truth about ourselves in worship, because we are engaged in the types of practices that require of us certain virtues intrinsic to the internal goods of those practices. Perhaps the two most significant virtues for Hauerwas are truthfulness and peacefulness; he has surely written more on these two virtues than any other.⁶⁵ I began this chapter by drawing attention to Hauerwas’ sermon, “Because it is True.” In what follows, I return to the virtue of truthfulness and the practices of praying and preaching that are required for it. For it is only by becoming people who can speak the truth that Christians can put forth an alternative to the lie that to be ‘morally serious,’ one must sometimes be prepared to kill.

⁶⁰ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6. While it may be possible to take issue with the details of Hauerwas’ summing up of the liberal political order in this instance, this characterization should be read against the more sustained criticism of liberalism that Hauerwas has made over the course of his entire career.

⁶¹ Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6.

⁶² Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 7.

⁶³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 160.

⁶⁴ Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 164.

⁶⁵ Patience is another important virtue for Hauerwas, but I understand it to be an outworking of a commitment to peacefulness. For a discussion of the kind of moral patience that peace requires see, Paul Doerksen, “The Politics of Moral Patience,” *Political Theology* 15, no. 5 (September 2014): 454–67.

Praying

For Hauerwas, prayer is a practice that creates truthful people. Prayer is a practice of truthful speech because it demands that we submit our prayers to the prayers of the church. For Christians who have been formed in the extemporaneous prayers of the revivalist and pietist traditions of Protestantism, the idea that we must submit our prayers to the discipline of the church may sound like the opposite of honest speech.⁶⁶ This is because, too often, Christians have accepted the liberal assumption that truthful speech is a product of achieving freedom from such discipline in order to express our ‘authentic self.’ If MacIntyre’s arguments concerning the narrative embeddedness and unity of human lives are at all correct, and Hauerwas seemingly accepts that they are, then this conception of the ‘authentic self’ or ‘sovereign self’ (as Hauerwas calls it) is fundamentally flawed. We can only give truthful descriptions of ourselves when we acknowledge the narrative unity of our existence; in the same way, prayer, as a practice that is embedded in the institution of the church, must be disciplined by the standards and narratives that are constitutive of it as a practice. Therefore, the most truthful prayers are the prayers that have been subjected to the disciplining force of the psalms of Israel and the liturgical prayers of the church.

Hauerwas recalls that his father had always been the designated prayer leader at various family gatherings through the years and that his father had been quite good at it. The trouble arose, however, when the Hauerwas family decided that Stanley must have inherited

⁶⁶ To be fair, pietist traditions have produced great people of prayer, but this is often a result of a very rigorous community of practice that encourages them to regularly attend prayer meetings or prayer floors. There is real power in these prayers, but even in these traditions, submission to the prayers of Scripture can be incredibly beneficial in disciplining language and rooting out possible idolatrous prayers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer characterizes this well when he writes, “In the language of the Father in heaven God’s children learn to speak with God. Repeating God’s own words, we begin to pray to God. We ought to speak to God, and God wishes to hear us, not in the false and confused language of our heart but in the clear and pure language that God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ.... God’s speech in Jesus Christ meets us in the Holy Scriptures.” *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, vol. 5 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 156.

his father's gift.⁶⁷ As Hauerwas tells it, "I was no good at it. I just could not get the hang of praying...I could not pray off the cuff...I could not, so to speak, 'pray on my own.'"⁶⁸ Even after he had completed his formal theological education, he found that he had a hard time praying anything but the formal prayers of the church. Perhaps this could be written off as a personality quirk, and no doubt, personality plays a part in it, but I suspect it also has to do with Hauerwas' deeply held conviction that he must be honest with God. Too often, prayers that are 'off the cuff' are sloppy, inelegant, and worst of all, dishonest. These prayers can too often reflect the appetites and distractions of the moment that presume a cosmic vending machine as their object of address and thus fail to recognize God as the God who saved Israel from Egypt and later raised Jesus.

As Hauerwas puts it,

The language of prayer is exacting, an exactness that fosters over time – elegance. The prayers of the church, unlike our prayers, have been honed to say no more and no less than what must be said to confess sin, to praise God, to respond with thanksgiving to the gift of Eucharist. Liturgy is the source of the word-care necessary for our lives to be beautiful and good – beautiful and good because by constant repetition we have learned the habits necessary to speak truthfully. To learn to speak truthfully is a skill never finished if we are to resist the lies of the languages that speak us. To be free, therefore, from the lies of the world requires that we be pulled into a community that submits our speaking to the discipline of prayer.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 11–12.

⁶⁸ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 12.

⁶⁹ Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 163.

Eventually, Stanley Hauerwas learned to pray.⁷⁰ He learned that he did not need to become especially pious or holy in order to pray, but that it was enough to be truthful and to speak plainly to God. To read the prayers Hauerwas has written, however, is to read the prayers of a man who has been disciplined by the exacting language of the church in order to know how he, in all of his plain-spoken particularity, can speak to the particular God who is known to Christians as Father, Son, and Spirit. Prayer is the language of particularity, for as Hauerwas learned, “a vague god vaguely prayed to serves no one well.”⁷¹

Hauerwas was once asked to pray to a ‘vague god’ at one of the ceremonies of civil religion that have come to dominate political life in America. His prayer, in part, was as follows:

God, you alone know how we are to pray to you on occasions like this. We do not fear you, since we prefer to fear one another. Accordingly, our prayers are not to you but to some ‘ultimate vagueness.’ You have, of course, tried to scare the hell out of some of us through the creation of your people Israel and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But we are subtle, crafty and stiff-necked people who prefer to be damned into vagueness.⁷²

Hauerwas subverts the expectations of the vagueness of American civil religion by rehearsing the story of God’s ever more particular redemptive work in creation, Israel, and Jesus in order to critique and reject the vagueness of praying to a God of our own creation. To pray is to dare to speak to God, and in this prayer, Hauerwas demonstrates that if one is to do so successfully, then one must be disciplined by

⁷⁰ Hauerwas credits (or perhaps blames?) the question of his wife, Paula Gilbert, whether he ever prayed before class. He realized that he had no good excuse as to why he did not, and so began preparing a prayer to read before class every day. I find that on this point, Hauerwas and I share something in common, for I too find it difficult to pray, and it is often only the questioning voice of my wife Rachel that makes me remember the importance of prayer. Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 12.

⁷¹ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 17.

⁷² Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 47–48.

the stories of the church to pray to the God who is God and not just some ‘ultimate vagueness.’ The honest prayer is therefore the prayer that has been shaped by the particular vocabulary of the church, not the vague assertions of a poorly defined liberal conception of ‘authenticity.’ The honest prayer is the disciplined prayer plainly prayed.⁷³

Many of the prayers of Hauerwas are not just the truthful product of such discipline, but are in themselves a disciplined practice in truthfulness. In a prayer entitled “Lies We Wrap in Love,” Hauerwas invokes the transforming power of God to make us truthful as we faithfully rehearse the characteristic ways biblical poets and prophets have talked to God:

Dear God, we often ask you to invade our lives, to plumb the secrets of our hearts unknown even to ourselves. But in fact we do not desire that. What we really want to scream, if only to ourselves, is ‘Do not reveal to us who we are!’ We think we are better people if you leave us to our illusions. Yes, we know another word for a life of illusion is hell. But we are surrounded by many caught up in such a hell – people too deficient of soul even to be capable of lying, but only of self-deceit. Dear God, we ask your mercy on all those so caught, particularly if we are among them. The loneliness of such a life is terrifying. Remind us, compel us to be truthful, painful as that is. For without the truth, without you, we die. Save us from the pleasantness which too often is but a name for ambition. Save us from the temptation to say to another what we think she wants to hear rather than what we both need to hear.

⁷³ Kelly Johnson has observed that at times, Hauerwas’ prayers verge on the overly idiosyncratic, calling more attention to himself than God. This may be true, though I would prefer not to comment on Hauerwas’ motive. I take up some of Johnson’s more serious charges below. Kelly S. Johnson, “Worshipping in Spirit and Truth,” in *Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas’s 70th Birthday*, Charles R. Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles M. Collier, eds., 300-314 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 314.

The regimen of living your truth is hard, but help us remember that any love but truthful love is cursed. The lie wrapped in love is just another word for violence. For God's sake, for the world's sake, give us the courage and the love to speak truthfully, so that we might be at peace with one another and with you. Amen.⁷⁴

Ultimately, Hauerwas sees prayer as true theology. If theology is, as Hauerwas has repeatedly asserted, a disciplining in grammar in order to 'speak Christian' well, then prayer is one of the practices that must put all theology to the test. "Any theology, therefore, that is finally not about helping us to pray cannot be Christian. In an odd way, then, this book represents the most important testing of my theological work."⁷⁵ Theology must lead to prayer, and insofar as Hauerwas' theology has been able to do that, it is a positive witness to its usefulness for Christian life and practice.

Kelly Johnson has challenged Hauerwas' understanding of prayer as an exercise in truthfulness. Johnson suggests that Hauerwas has allowed his interest in liturgy as a way of forming truthfulness to over-determine his account of the significance of liturgy for the Christian life.⁷⁶ Later in the same essay, however, Johnson notes that Hauerwas often uses the curious phrase, 'God's prayers' as a way to refer to Jesus, the church, and particular people.⁷⁷ This formulation points to the deep Trinitarian theology that undergirds Hauerwas' understanding of the liturgy. Again, relying on the doctrine of *theosis*, Hauerwas suggests that the Holy Spirit, as a particularizing agent, rests on the body of Jesus and so, the spiritual mysteries of the liturgy are always tied up in the particular and concrete elements that involve bodies, water, bread, and wine.⁷⁸ While Hauerwas is interested in the way prayers can discipline Christian speech in truthfulness,

⁷⁴ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 39–40.

⁷⁵ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 15.

⁷⁶ Johnson, "Worshiping in Spirit and Truth," 303.

⁷⁷ Johnson, "Worshiping in Spirit and Truth," 308. For example, Hauerwas uses this phrase frequently in *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 23, 26, 29.

⁷⁸ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, loc. 223.

the fact that it often fails to do so is not ultimately a problem.⁷⁹ The efficacy of the liturgy is not the issue, it is the Spirit that is efficacious, but it is precisely because of the particularizing nature of the Spirit that our language *can* be made truthful through the discipline of prayer.

Preaching

If prayer is the practice that tests theology for its truthfulness, preaching is the practice that disciplines our prayers by the narrative witness of Scripture. Hauerwas has now published several collections of his sermons, his hope being that people take his sermons as seriously as his more ‘academic’ work.⁸⁰ He himself understands that the work he does in his sermons is as, or more, important than the many scholarly contributions he has made in his long career.⁸¹

What makes the practice of preaching significant in Hauerwas’ work is how it exposes his approach to the Bible.⁸² For Hauerwas “... the sermon is not just an exposition of the text. Rather it is a re-narration of the text which assumes that no account of any text is truthful that is not about God’s care of God’s creation through Israel and the

⁷⁹ Contrary to the suggestion that the ‘real problem’ with Hauerwas’ understanding of the liturgy is that it often does not work. See Johnson, “*Worshipping in Spirit and Truth*,” 311.

⁸⁰ The following are books, in order of publishing, containing collections of his sermons, though the odd sermon will show up in works beyond these: Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture; Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers, and Sundries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (Brazos, 2005); *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Brazos, 2009); *Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011); *Without Apology*.

⁸¹ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xi-xiii. Indeed, Hauerwas sees his sermons as being among his most important theological work, a point he made in criticizing Nicholas Healy’s charge that Hauerwas’ project is insufficiently theological. See Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 274.

⁸² Richard Hays argues that while Hauerwas does not perform careful exegesis, he frustratingly manages to come up with conclusions about the text that seem to capture the spirit of the Scriptures. Hays does not want to go so far in rejecting critical methods as Hauerwas has, but he is left at a loss as to how Hauerwas is able to interpret the text so well without them. See *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996), 259-61.

church. A sermon is scriptural when it inscribes a community into an ongoing Christian narrative.”⁸³ So in preaching, the community receives the narrative that makes all their other actions intelligible.

For Hauerwas, preaching is not a matter of getting to the ‘meaning’ of the text. For Hauerwas, “the ‘meaning’ is the use to which I put these texts for the upbuilding of the church.”⁸⁴ In an analysis of Hauerwas’ account of preaching, Robert Dean has suggested that this claim by Hauerwas “fails to live up to his best theological convictions...stressing that the meaning of the texts is found in the uses to which ‘I’ put the texts remains far too anthropologically and preacherly-centered.”⁸⁵ Dean’s point is well taken, but perhaps this is a place where Hauerwasian therapeutic hyperbole may apply.⁸⁶ Far from being a claim reflective of hyper-subjective or pragmatic readings, if we read the sentence closely, it seems that the focus is not actually on the individual preacher, but on the relationship between preacher, text, and congregation. The way that Hauerwas ties meaning to the up-building of the church is suggestive for the way the preacher must be operating in the Spirit in order to accomplish that edification. Dean recognizes that how Hauerwas has chosen to word this sentence does not sit comfortably with the rest of how Hauerwas talks about preaching, as the rest of his essay admirably demonstrates. It is precisely this dissonance in the exaggerated claim that Hauerwas is making that should alert us to the way this sentence is not a claim about preacherly-centeredness but is a claim about how the text is meaningful in the context of preaching.

Hauerwas’ rhetorical flourishes are often dismissed or met with frustration by his commentators. Unfortunately, this misses the genius of a great deal of Hauerwas’ theological method. Readers of Hauerwas need to work to understand how these flourishes

⁸³ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 42.

⁸⁴ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

⁸⁵ Robert J. Dean, “Unapologetically (A)Political: Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching,” *Didaskalia* 25 (Fall 2015): 152.

⁸⁶ By ‘therapeutic’ I am referring to Hauerwas’ oft unacknowledged methodological dependence on Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy. See, Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), for an engagement of the relationship between Hauerwas and Wittgenstein.

are not mere overstatements but are the means by which Hauerwas is disrupting the conversation. Given that preaching is a practice embedded in a MacIntyrian understanding of practice, it would be odd to understand this as a retreat into an individualistic account of preaching. Once the connection is drawn between Hauerwas' MacIntyrian conception of practices and the practice of preaching, it becomes clear that Hauerwas is drawing our attention to the way the practice of preaching for a congregation helps draw 'a' meaning from the superabundance of meaning in the text. Thus, while Hauerwas begins with a sentence that looks strikingly modern and pragmatic, it leads away from modernist epistemological concerns and introduces a pre-modern conception of meaning. The polemic that is *Unleashing the Scripture* is thus best read as an application of post-modern philosophy to a modern problem in order to arrive at a pre-modern solution.

It seems, given the context, that Hauerwas is not advocating a radical anti-realism concerning meaning, rather, he is pointing towards the more pre-modern notion of the super-abundance of meaning in Scripture. From this super-abundance, a particular meaning is then brought forth by the preacher for that particular preaching occasion. Hauerwas is thus best understood here as denying the *singularity* of meaning in a text, not meaning as such.⁸⁷ Hauerwas suspects that most attempts to get at the (singular) 'meaning' of the text are in fact attempts to dismiss the text.⁸⁸ As a result, Hauerwas tries to never explain the text, for to do so would be to subject the text to criteria of meaning external to scripture.⁸⁹ Hauerwas believes that both fundamentalists and biblical critics have fallen prey to the

⁸⁷ I am here indebted to Dean's discussion of Augustine's nuanced affirmation and relativization of meaning in the same article, see Dean, "Unapologetically (A) Political: Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching," 155–56. Nevertheless, I resist the notion that Hauerwas is not at his best here, as I want to allow the therapeutic, disruptive force of such a statement to stand, especially given the kind of disruptive polemic that *Unleashing the Scripture* represents.

⁸⁸ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxii.

⁸⁹ In an essay entitled, "Explaining Why Willimon Never Explains," Hauerwas suggests that his friend Will Willimon is such a great preacher precisely because he never tries to explain away the text in a way that makes it unnecessary for the congregation to receive the political demands the text makes on our lives. See Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 224–33.

same modern epistemology that assumes some sort of descriptivist account of meaning.⁹⁰ This Enlightenment notion presumes that all truth can be known by any rational individual (the fictive agent of the Enlightenment story) without first requiring the transformation of the individual into and through the community of belief. This assumption continues to underwrite the liberal politics of the Enlightenment tradition and does not allow the politics of the church to be the determinative tradition in forming the standards and rules that allow the practice of preaching to reach the internal good of encountering the living Christ in our midst.

The liberal politics that underwrite the hermeneutical assumptions Hauerwas seeks to resist are the politics of choice. The fundamental story in the liberal tradition is that there are no stories except the stories that individuals choose for themselves. This has led to a fragmentation of the Bible in the hands of both fundamentalists and text-critics. For the fundamentalists, pervasive interpretive pluralism is a massive problem that threatens to undo the assertion of certainty that is characteristic of their biblicism.⁹¹ Liberal text-critics, on the other hand, have faced a similar fragmentation through endless debates over composition, historiography, and the overall unity of the text. With the loss of allegorical and typological approaches to biblical interpretation, it has become increasingly easy to fail to hear the entire Word of God.⁹² Hauerwas is able to use the text to edify the church because he has been transformed and is guided by the traditions of the church – his choices are not wholly arbitrary.⁹³

⁹⁰ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 35.

⁹¹ For an excellent account of the problems facing the biblicist approach of fundamentalist and evangelical interpreters of the Bible, see Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011).

⁹² Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36. It should be noted that the rhetoric of *Unleashing the Scripture* is among Hauerwas' most hyperbolic. There has been a promising renewal in the area of theological interpretation of scripture in the last couple decades. For an excellent introduction into this recovery of ancient methods in the postmodern context, see Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

⁹³ Origen argues that a certain amount of spiritual maturity (a type of Christian phronesis perhaps?) is required for the right reading of scripture. For a good exposition of Origen's hermeneutical 'method' see Nadia Delicata, "Padeia tou Kyriou: From Origen to Medieval Exegesis," *Didaskalia*, vol. 27 (Fall 2016): 31-64.

Hauerwas notes that within the Christian tradition, the church discovers the connections of the text through the use of allegorical reading, which reflects the conviction that the Bible represents a unified narrative.⁹⁴ This work of ‘discovering connections’ affirms the best of the traditional Christian affirmation that God speaks, and recognizes the chastening of post-modernity that has served to abolish any notion that there could be a ‘once for all’ interpretation of a text.⁹⁵ Allegorical readings open up new horizons of meaning, and in surprising ways, many of the so-called ‘close readings’ of contemporary critical scholarship can also be used to open up new senses of meaning.⁹⁶ The observation of certain syntactical relations in discourse analysis, for example, does not actually get you any closer to some sort of objective ‘meaning’ that the text possesses as a property of itself. Instead, the careful observation of these kinds of relations draw the imagination of the interpreter to notice a certain emphasis of the text that in turn opens up a level of meaning that can be used for the benefit of the church.⁹⁷ “Such readings are not simply attempts to get the text ‘right’ but rather invitations, suggestions, and recommendations to help us get ourselves right – that is, they are meant to tell us what to do as Christians.”⁹⁸

Scripture, therefore, is only intelligible as the book of the Church.⁹⁹ In *Without Apology* (a fitting title for pretty much any book by Hauerwas), Hauerwas takes this claim further by not only arguing

⁹⁴ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36; 40.

⁹⁵ This is by no means the only attempt that has been made to accomplish these two tasks, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998). I appreciate Vanhoozer’s challenge to make explicit the theologies that are implicit in our hermeneutics (457). Hauerwas’ reliance on the philosophical structures of MacIntyre and Wittgenstein (and numerous others) is more *ad hoc* pillaging of Babylon in service of Christ than a new theoretical construct.

⁹⁶ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

⁹⁷ Hauerwas’ contribution in *Unleashing the Scripture* comes as a prophetic provocation at the beginning of the resurgence of theological hermeneutics. For a more recent and highly nuanced treatment of figural reading see Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

⁹⁸ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

⁹⁹ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

that the Bible is intelligible only as a book for the church, but that it is intelligible only within the church. He challenges the modern assumption that the work of the preacher is to ‘translate’ the message of the Bible into generally intelligible terms that the congregation can understand. Hauerwas questions Tillich’s remark that he “was obliged to seek a language which expresses in other terms the human experience to which the Biblical and ecclesiastical terminology point,”¹⁰⁰ wondering where the assumption that ‘human experience’ is an intelligible concept comes from. In MacIntyrian terms, why is the liberal concept of human experience a relevant or even necessary criterion to satisfy within the Christian tradition? Hauerwas worries that by hastily translating the message of the gospel, too much is lost and we lose the benefit of the formation that the peculiarly Christian practices provide in making us into the type of people who can identify that “within the church, *truth* means Christ, the image of the invisible God.”¹⁰¹ Ultimately, “to speak the truth does not require translation but rather a confidence that what we say when we say God was in Christ makes a difference for how our lives and the world is rightly understood. Preaching is the gift God has given the church so that our lives can be located within God’s life by having our existence storied by the Gospel.”¹⁰²

For Hauerwas, then, the task of the preacher is both to refuse to over-explain the text, and to refuse to translate into the vague idiom of ‘general experience’ the message of the gospel. In so doing, the preacher thus trains Christians in the “odd grammar of Christian speech and [in] how that grammar helps us see the sheer contingency of our existence.”¹⁰³ Hauerwas’ account of the practice of preaching is sacramental because he believes that in the activity of preaching, the Holy Spirit is at work to make our words efficacious.

It would never occur to me that I should try to ‘dumb down’ a sermon. God has given us what is necessary for the Gospel to be understood by any congregation.

¹⁰⁰ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xiv.

¹⁰¹ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

¹⁰² Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

¹⁰³ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xviii.

The name of that gift is the Holy Spirit who enlivens the words we use. I am convinced nothing is more important for the recovery of preaching as a central act of the church than that those who preach trust that God is going to show up when the Word is rightly proclaimed. Too often those who preach fear those to whom they preach when in fact we ought to fear God. If God is rightly expected to show up, if God is rightly feared, then those who preach and those who hear will understand no explanation is required.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

In the practices of the church, Hauerwas' theological particularism reveals itself as a confidence in the work of the Spirit to reveal Jesus as the truth to those who have been rightly formed by the practices of the church. The Spirit's work does not become subordinated to this formation in the church, for the church is established by Christ and, understood through *theosis*, functions as the very life-form of God. This formation requires effort, but it is a gift of grace that assumes the divinizing work of the Holy Spirit to make our practices efficacious. Christians gain the virtue of truthfulness by being transformed by contact with the one who is the Truth. As Christians consume the Eucharist they are consumed by it and are given all the resources needed to do the careful and exacting work of learning to pray honestly and plainly according to the formative narrative of Scripture.

¹⁰⁴ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxv.

The Legacy of Emil Brunner's Approach to Natural Theology

Marcelo Wall *

Introduction

In the Christian natural theology tradition, God's word and creation have been the two languages nurturing human knowledge about the divine. Natural theology distinguishes between supernatural revelation (Scripture) and the revelation in creation, which lacks supernatural insights. Modern neo-paganism, which appeared in the nineteenth century, elevated nature to be a sacred and almost divine entity. Karl Barth reacted very strongly against this (as well as modernity's tendency to elevate autonomous human reason) and many Protestants firmly embraced Barth's reaction.¹ Barth's theology tended to privatize divine epistemology, acknowledging the only source of theology to be God's own revelation in Jesus Christ through Scripture.² In Barth's view, this isolation from the church and the rest of the academic world would be the necessary cost for a 'true' theology. Barth judged natural theology as corrupted and beyond redemption. Emil Brunner was of a different opinion and, famously, debated Barth on this issue.³

This paper proposes to interpret Brunner as a model for the evangelical church in the faith-science dialogue, enabling the church to avoid both rationalism and fideism. On the one hand, without his kind of approach, the evangelical church would be left to react against William Paley's inconsistent natural theology, making God

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¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 19–20.

² McGrath, *Darwinism*, 20.

³ Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 159.

into a reasonable object. On the other hand, the evangelical church could be tempted to avoid rational and rigorous scientific inquiry altogether. In contrast, Brunner found hope in the partial redemption of human reason. This hope led Brunner to recognize a relationship between theology and science, thus upholding a public epistemology rather than privatizing it as Barth had.

Brunner's approach is commendable and important for the contemporary church in two respects: First, it guards against isolation between the church and the academic world. Second, Brunner's approach provides the means for a dialogue between the church and the academy. The importance of this dialogue lies in that every translation of the Bible required many years of education in languages and linguistics, historical background, and other 'non-biblical' subjects; modern science is no exception and raises significant hermeneutical considerations.

Emil Brunner and the New Approach to Natural Theology

Emil Brunner, whom Reinhold Niebuhr names as a seminal theologian, has set a hallmark upon the theology of the twentieth century.⁴ He was born at Winterthur, Switzerland, two days before Christmas of 1889. After studying and receiving his Doctor of Theology from the University of Zurich, he became associated with a small circle of theologians led by Karl Barth.⁵ Brunner's theology was not significantly influenced by Karl Barth directly, though he agreed with many of Barth's ideas. For the most part, he had formed his own theology by the time he had graduated. He was, however (like Barth himself), strongly influenced by Søren Kierkegaard's

⁴ Paul G. Schrottenboer, "Emil Brunner," in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, edited by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 99–100.

⁵ James Edward Humphrey, *Emil Brunner* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 15, 18.

philosophy of the God-Human relation of encounter.⁶

After the extremes of modernism (reason/science alone) and fundamentalism (Bible alone), Barth became the major voice in Europe, especially among Protestants; he argued that God cannot be a human-defined construct.⁷ Barth stated that the *Deus Optimus Maximus* is far more than “the pathetic asseveration of a thesis which is the product of a creaturely mind.”⁸ This was a strong reaction against modern epistemology, which elevated the supremacy of the autonomous reasoning of rational individuals. This epistemology was of course welcomed and celebrated among the natural sciences, though it became a threat for the church when religion and God became objects of this kind of empirical epistemology.⁹

Emil Brunner must be understood in the context of “dialectic theology.” Relying on Emmanuel Kant’s concept of God, a transcendent reality not knowable by human reason but only through faith, Brunner and Barth approached theology “dialectically.”¹⁰ Barth argued that God is to be understood only through the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹¹ This seems to be the strongest discordance he had with Calvin’s theological approach. “Barth suggests a connection between what he takes to be Calvin’s position and something he calls ‘fatal speculation,’ because it entails a God whose being we can ‘define’ ... apart from the incarnation.”¹² Interestingly, this disagreement is clearly visible again in the doctrine of God’s revelation in nature,

⁶ Humphrey, *Emil Brunner*, 20; Curtis L. Thompson, “Emil Brunner: Polemically Promoting Kierkegaard’s Christian Philosophy of Encounter,” in *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Theology: German Protestant Theology*, edited by Jon Bartley Stewart, vol. 1 (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 65.

⁷ Lee C. Barrett, “Karl Barth: The Dialectic of Attraction and Repulsion,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, edited by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 6.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation III/1*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1958), 368.

⁹ McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 144–45.

¹⁰ McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 157–59.

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation II/2*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1958), 7.

¹² Paul Helm, “John Calvin and the Hiddenness of God,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, edited by Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 71.

which will be discussed later.

Protestant theology, with this great disruption between Friedrich Schleiermacher's Romantic *feeling* of God and Barth's unknowable God except through Christ, was tempted to privatize all knowledge of God. Brunner agrees entirely with the starting point of a hidden or ineffable God, unknowable without any self-manifestation. He affirms: "God is the unknown God, until He makes Himself known."¹³ At the same time, Brunner contradicts Barth's exclusive knowledge of God, and calls it foolish that there would be no knowledge at all of God outside of special revelation.¹⁴ Brunner explains that experience and Scripture offered him a different view. Barth claimed that knowledge of God is found in the Christian experience through the encounter with God's (event-like) personal self-disclosure. Brunner affirmed this, but he refused the exclusive totality of this avenue to God-knowledge. In doing so, Brunner left the door open for a renewal of natural theology and with it a possible relationship between faith and science.

The Other Task of Theology

Brunner states that the main goal of theology is "a service which is rendered for the sake of the doctrine of the Church."¹⁵ Correct doctrine is crucial to the church's call to teach and preach the truth.¹⁶ Barth understood the task of theology very similarly. "For it is not by this rejection [of theology's service to the church] that truth is known, the Gospel is expounded, God is praised and the Church is built."¹⁷ Even if Barth believes that associating theology with apologetics disturbs "real theology" (as he calls it), Brunner sees an equal-

¹³ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics 1*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 121.

¹⁴ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:21.

¹⁵ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:4.

¹⁶ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:98.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, "No! Answer to Emil Brunner," in *Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply No! By Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London, UK: Centenary, 1946), 76.

ly important purpose for theology's apologetic endeavour.¹⁸ However, Brunner does not espouse the way of defending Christian faith that had become common in modernity (i.e., in the wake of Paley), but rather an attack on false positions, such as unbelief, superstition, or misleading ideologies. Brunner calls this attacking apologetic *eristic* and refers back to the apologists of the early church, with their *eristic* biblical message, in order to argue for the justification of this "other" task of theology.¹⁹ This approach leads the church to engage in conversation and debate with those outside the church, and not only those on the inside. Such engagement might also turn the church's focus away from rigid doctrine, as Brunner calls it, to unity inside the church against attacks from outside. About this *eristic* task, Brunner signifies the example of Kierkegaard, calling him "one of the most powerful champions of the Christian Faith... incomparably the greatest Apologist or eristic thinker of the Christian faith within the sphere of Protestantism."²⁰

The *eristic* task requires also the use of different knowledge than that of the (classical) theological task to teach the church (e.g., philosophical or scientific enquiry). The *eristic* task has deep roots within the Christian tradition, not least amongst the early church apologists and patristics. The correction of misinterpretations of God is not unlike the patristic efforts to define the doctrine of the Trinity, through debate and dialogue with skeptical objections and alternate but insufficient theological accounts (Brunner also cites the earlier Arian controversy).²¹ In the early church, the *eristic* task required theology to attack misinterpretations originating from outside the

¹⁸ Barth, "No!: Answer to Emil Brunner," 76–77; Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:98–99.

¹⁹ It is not clear what Brunner means by the term *eristic*. He probably does not refer to the Aristotelian *eristic*, the goal of which was to win every debate by any means. Arthur Schopenhauer's *eristic* is more compatible with Brunner's use of the term, for whom it means proving the rightness of the advanced thesis. See Jerzy Stelmach and Bartosz Brozek, *Methods of Legal Reasoning* (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2006), 120.

²⁰ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:100.

²¹ Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, trans. Olive Wyon (London, UK: Lutterworth, 1934), 276.

²² David Andrew Gilland, *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), 142.

church in order to gain credibility with pagan thinkers.²² What Brunner especially championed is the necessity of a publicly recognized theology (on some level, at least). He even claims that the public, provocative and debatable approaches are in fact the original form of theology, according to the history of Christianity.²³ We might say that apologetics in this sense flows from the missional character of Christian theology.

The *imago Dei* as the Point of Contact Between Man and God

The place of polemics is a necessity that Brunner sees in the task of theology itself. This view is raised from an earlier understanding of the *imago Dei* and its corruption and redemption through Christ. Brunner elaborates his concept of the *imago Dei* first from the Old Testament and then as well from the New Testament.²⁴ He goes on to explain that the aim for a Christian to become like Christ (e.g., 1 John 3:2) is a strong justification to claim at least an ongoing redemption of the *imago Dei* after the fall.²⁵ In other words, that humans are called to assimilate with Christ, implies an ability to do so. Hence, the *imago Dei* is beginning to be redeemed. However, how the *imago* is being redeemed depends on the way in which it was corrupted. Grounded in 1 Corinthians, Brunner claims that humanity, whether Christian or not, is the image and the glory of God.²⁶ He states that the *imago Dei* is “the imperishable structure of man’s being which cannot be affected by the conflict between the Original Creation and Sin.”²⁷ This is close to the understanding that humans are different from animals because they have God’s image in them. It occurs naturally in *every* human being; even if it has been corrupted, it is still there.

Brunner agrees with two conclusions that he draws from historic scholasticism concerning the doctrine of the *imago Dei*: a) a rational

²³ Brunner in Gilland, *Law and Gospel*, 142.

²⁴ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London, UK: Lutterworth, 1939), 499–501.

²⁵ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 501.

²⁶ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 500.

²⁷ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 513.

natural theology is possible; and b) a rejection of the view that the Fall led to the total destruction of good in humanity along with the removal of free will to do good.²⁸ The renewal of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* can be seen as one of Brunner's contributions to the evangelical church. It recognizes the existence of good works and true insights even amongst those who have not experienced the new birth in Christ. In other words, it allows theology and the sciences to develop, at least in some important respects, a common anthropology. Brunner's claim is nuanced, neither fully confident in nor sceptical of scientific and humanistic attempts to understand human beings: "[t]he present *humanitas* is not ... original human nature, ... it is that which man has retained of his original relation with God."²⁹ This relationship becomes, in his understanding, the *Anknüpfungspunkt* (Ger. point of contact), which enables an encounter with God in contrast to other beings such as animals who do not have this point of contact for personal encounter.³⁰

Daring a Strong Protestant Tradition

After the First World War, Barth had contributed to a revival of the Protestant faith and to a critique of theological liberalism, which increased his reputation as a theological authority.³¹ On the other hand, Rudolf Bultmann became a favourite theologian of secular historians, due to his form criticism of the New Testament in *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition*.³² Brunner had the courage to stand up to both of them, exposing weaknesses in their theologies.³³

²⁸ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 507.

²⁹ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 514.

³⁰ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 514.

³¹ Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 41–42.

³² Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

³³ An example is given in Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 41–49.

(In addition, he also had to argue against Martin Luther's dismissal of natural theology).³⁴ He establishes himself not by disregarding all of their works, but by attempting to avoid their one-sided emphasis on God's transcendence. Brunner explains:

I do not wish to blame Karl Barth for neglecting and discrediting ... God uses the genius of one-sidedness—which is perhaps a pleonasm—as much as the spirits of moderation. He made use of Luther's one-sidedness, monstrous though it was at some points, as much as the comprehensive and balanced thought of Calvin.³⁵

Even though the Reformed tradition has many strengths,³⁶ certain strains had become unbalanced in its treatment of knowledge. Brunner commends Barth's encouragements to “fight with all the passion, strength and circumspection.”³⁷ But he differs on what should be fought against and for. Barth is focused on internal church struggles, whereas Brunner's concern is attacks from the outside the church.

The Barth-Brunner Debate

If Brunner desired to be heard, he needed to face the conflict. However, his struggle was not against Barth or Luther, rather it concerned dangers which he worried could confront the church. With

³⁴ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, vol. 1; Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics*, vol. 2, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1950); Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation: Dogmatics*, vol. 3, trans. David Cairns and T. H. L. Parker (Eugene, OR: Lutterworth, 1960); Brunner, *Man in Revolt*; Brunner, *The Mediator*; Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*; Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1946).

³⁵ Emil Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” in *Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply No!* By Dr. Karl Barth, translated by Peter Fraenkel (London, UK: Centenary, 1946), 59.

³⁶ This can be seen in the six references that Barth makes, countering Brunner, to three central Reformation truths: *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*. Barth, “No!: Answer to Emil Brunner,” 80, 84, 85, 87, 90.

³⁷ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 59.

this in mind, Brunner made a public critique of Barth's rejection of the *theologia naturalis* (Lat. natural theology). In 1934 he published an article entitled "Nature and Grace." In this article, Brunner praises Barth for his major contribution to Protestant theology, after which he exposes six false conclusions that Barth has made, and presents six counter-theses. After this rich confrontation, he goes on to present a short historical overview of Roman Catholic Thomism, Lutheran Protestantism, and Calvinistic Neo-Protestantism. He concludes with a claim for the necessity of the *theologia naturalis* for the mission and pedagogy of the church in society.

First, countering Barth's conclusion that man's rationality contains no traces of the lost image of God, Brunner answers that the formal *imago Dei* is still the human's vital purpose and significance in creation. This distinguishes humans from the rest of creation, including their unique responsibility.³⁸ Since God still communicates with human beings, and they are still able to understand his communication, there remains for humans a responsibility to respond to God's call. According to Brunner, this formal *imago Dei* is not affected by sin, rather it is the material *imago Dei*,³⁹ the human's relational aspect, that is corrupted by sin.⁴⁰ It is not nature (in the sense of abilities) but the attitude of the heart that is affected.

Second, Brunner declares that Barth's conclusion on revelation is false, when the latter asserts that there is no revelation other than God's explicit, personal (event-like) address in Christ. Brunner counters by arguing that Scripture and Christian tradition have always seen the artist in his work (i.e., God in creation, for example Psalm 19 and Romans 1). *Theologia naturalis* is not contradicting at any point the special revelation of Jesus Christ and Scripture, but rather affirming it. Recalling Luther's *cognito legalis* (Lat. aware-

³⁸ Brunner uses the term *Verantwortung* as it has in its root the word *Antwort*, which can be translated as response. *Antwort* contains the terms "*Wort*" (word) and the preposition "against/to" (*ant*). Hence, the human *Verantwortung* is a responsibility of a response to God's word. Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 53.

³⁹ Even if Brunner uses the term material, it appears that he is not recalling platonic dualism. He might have been accepted more in public by using a different term to describe this part of the *imago Dei*.

⁴⁰ Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 20, 23–24.

ness of the legal), Brunner affirms that human awareness of morality is actually required for the possibility of repentance. Here is where Brunner introduces his great contribution to *theologia naturalis*. He states that general revelation is not redemptive but is nevertheless an awareness and knowledge of at least the existence of a Creator. However, because of sin this general knowledge is misread.⁴¹

A third conclusion of Barth that Brunner contradicts is that if Christ is to redeem everything, sin must have corrupted everything. Brunner strikes back with what experience and Scripture show, namely that even though sin had entered and corrupted the world, it did not corrupt creation completely. Therefore, a *preserving grace/general grace* is preserving creation. Nevertheless, redemption can only come through Christ.⁴²

Fourth, Barth had concluded that any ordinances (such as state⁴³ and marriage) can lead only to an unchristian knowledge of God. Brunner denied this, arguing instead that these ordinances, given from creation on, are affirmed in Scripture to be given by the Creator to all—and not to Christians only. These ordinances are part of God’s preserving grace and within it a *limited* universal revelation of God.⁴⁴ In other words, the existence of power structures within the world communicates the existence of a supreme power, even though this might not be perceived in such a way.

Fifth, Barth had argued that since Christ is the only subject of saving activity, there can be no *Anknüpfungspunkt*, as this would imply human participation in what is properly and exclusively God’s saving action. Brunner retorts that if man is the only creation that can receive revelation from God, there needs to be something different in him, which he then says to be the formal *imago Dei*. This is the necessary *Anknüpfungspunkt*, not given as merit for salvation to humans,

⁴¹ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 20, 24–27.

⁴² Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 20, 27–29.

⁴³ It is important to remember the repulsive actions of the German state at the time (1934).

⁴⁴ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 21, 29–31. This is Brunner’s weakest conclusion, in my view, and unintentionally connotes the “universal truth” of modernity. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation*, 3:21.

but to affirm the responsibility to God's message. Human beings' receptivity to God's word becomes their responsibility. Knowledge of morality and sin is necessary to understand grace.⁴⁵

Finally, the sixth deduction of Barth is that it is a heresy to say that the new creation is a perfection of the old; they are completely separate. Brunner argues that, in every instance, the old creation is not destroyed, but is redeemed. The old creation is still present, though it is so through the new creation, which is Christ in the Christian. This is the centre for the imperative of faith to the human, who cannot believe without the work of God in him.⁴⁶ Barth's greatest concern was that if the relationship between theology and science is allowed, then it would probably provide theological integrity for a pro-Nazi view. With it, theology could be influenced and ultimately overtaken by psychology and anthropology.⁴⁷ Each theologian, seeing a different danger, argued for a different approach to theological epistemology. Barth wanted to privatize theological epistemology against a pro-Nazi view, while Brunner wanted to equip the church to address the misconceptions of outsiders, because he feared the church's isolation due to its being discredited scientifically. Brunner was driven by the missional enterprise and Barth by the safeguarding of 'true' or 'pure' theology.

The Necessity of a Relationship Between Theology and Science

The struggle for the future task of theology in the Christian church was the main issue. Brunner ended his article by disregarding any attempt to make of the *theologia naturalis* "a self-sufficient rational system of natural knowledge of God."⁴⁸ This would entail three things: science would provide the proof for theological claims, special revelation and human sinful corruption would be ignored, and God would become simply the object of human reason. Hence, Brunner reminds us of another task of theology which has a higher significance within *theologia naturalis*, thus planting a seed in a new

⁴⁵ Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 21, 31–33.

⁴⁶ Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 21, 33–34.

⁴⁷ McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 160–61.

⁴⁸ Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 58.

generation of theologians. This seed is his plea for a ‘thick’ theology, which can embrace science as a noteworthy and respectable source of knowledge, while allowing special revelation to have the bigger voice in the dialogue between science and theology. This, he argued, was for the sake of the proclamation of the word of God. Brunner explained:

[A] true understanding of *theologia naturalis* is of decisive importance ... for the manner of proclamation... It is the task of our theological generation to find the way back to a true *theologia naturalis*... It is high time to wake up for the opportunity that we have missed.⁴⁹

God’s word has always come to people in specific contexts, though not corrupted thereby. As human analogy is “the basis of every theology,”⁵⁰ Brunner makes a case for the *analogia entis* (Lat. analogy of being), that God’s being is partially reflected in creation. Barth condemned the *analogia entis* and affirmed that it was something different than the *analogia fides* (Lat. analogy of faith), or *regula fidei* (Lat. rule of faith) which is the sum of Christian teachings represented in Scripture. However, there is no other *imago Dei* except the one seen in Christ, who became a human being. Condemning the *analogia entis* would be condemning every received human understanding of God. Brunner even charges that Barth’s own theology was based on *human analogies*.⁵¹ Describing the *analogia entis* as the source of theological ontology would be reductionist, but condemning *analogia entis* would lead to the rejection of the essential human ability to perceive God’s revelation at all, almost to take away the human responsibility to follow God’s will.⁵² Brunner summarizes that even if the *analogia fides*, idealized by Barth, seems to be a better starting

⁴⁹ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 59–60.

⁵⁰ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 54–55.

⁵¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God I.1*, trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1936), 11.

⁵² Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

point for a ‘purer’ theology, it does not replace the *analogia entis* but presupposes it.⁵³ Therefore, the human *entis*, and with it its sciences, needs to be considered in order to be honest in speaking about God. This clarifies the necessity for a *theologia naturalis*, and with it the requirement of a relationship between science and theology.

Brunner’s Passion for the Church in Context

Brunner had a strong passion for the church. This passion motivated his quest for a true *theologia naturalis*. In his arguments against Barth’s rejection of any *theologia naturalis*, Brunner explains that, “[i]n the long run the Church can bear the rejection of *theologia naturalis* as little as its misuse.”⁵⁴ Brunner was in no way seeking a dependence on a rational system applied to theology in order to comprehend God. His major concern was the church in its context; he wanted the church to have an impact in society and this was only achievable with a public truth, rather than an isolated and privatized knowledge about God and human beings available only to the church. The necessity of recognizing a certain right of society outside of the Christian faith is vital for the missional message and the *eristic* task of theology. Brunner’s pastoral, engaging, and balanced theology has had a great impact on the evangelical world in the British Isles and further to North America and even in Japan.⁵⁵

Brunner’s pastoral passion provided a fertile ground for “missionary theology,” as Brunner called it, which is the purpose of the *eristic* task of theology.⁵⁶ This missionary theology is grounded in Scripture in order to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”⁵⁷ The missionary task necessarily makes use of human knowledge beyond Christian special revelation in order to present the message of salvation. The church remains unfruitful and static in its imperative *kerygma* (Gr. proclamation) until it is intro-

⁵³ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 1:24.

⁵⁴ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 59.

⁵⁵ Cynthia Bennett Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology: The Theological Methodology of Emil Brunner* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 6.

⁵⁶ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:101.

⁵⁷ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:101.

duced into the already known truth of its surrounding context and world. Brunner saw a great danger in avoiding orthopraxis and only focusing on orthodoxy, even to the point of Protestant theology's destruction.⁵⁸ In this case Brunner sees the *theologia naturalis* as missionary theology and as orthopraxis. McGrath agrees with Brunner that the quest for the right relation between theology, grounded in Scripture, and science, grounded in a rational epistemology, is still the ongoing theological task.⁵⁹ He even appears to agree, if not in an articulated sense, with Brunner in the apologetic task of *theologia naturalis*.

Not only is the apologetic an important purpose of *theologia naturalis*, but also the pedagogical goal. Brunner does not contradict Barth's understanding about the primary purpose of the theological task, but insists that part of the purpose of theology is the right instruction of the church for its engagement of the world. This is clearly seen by the phrasing Brunner uses when he writes about the *other* task of theology (i.e., to teach the church). The pedagogical task requires the acknowledgement of a natural knowledge, at least about the world. "Experience teaches that wherever *theologia naturalis* is despised, there also the pedagogic factor is despised – which necessarily has disastrous consequences in the Church."⁶⁰ In other words, where natural theology, philosophy, reason, and science are rejected from knowledge, the teaching of the church will be compromised.

Brunner's Legacy

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson refer to Brunner as "a true giant overshadowed by the colossi," Barth and Bultmann.⁶¹ Moreover, "Brunner's more open and apologetic style ... will one day merit a return to prominence."⁶² In fact, Paul Tillich already saw Brunner's legacy, when he wrote: "Brunner constructs a theological epistemolo-

⁵⁸ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:103.

⁵⁹ McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine*, 20.

⁶⁰ Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 57–58.

⁶¹ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 77–78.

⁶² Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*, 6.

gy, which in my opinion is both biblical and existentialist, and which matches the matter, with which theology deals.”⁶³ The first legacy that Brunner left us then is, as Tillich suggests, a new epistemology: He regained the intellectual room for a rational interaction between theology and science. By daring to challenge his great theological predecessors, who saw any relationship between theology and science as impossible, Brunner contributed the essential term “encounter.”⁶⁴ This encounter has overthrown the subject-object structure of modern epistemology, modifying necessarily both subject and object to relational entities, so that they cannot be isolated, but both are modified through the encounter itself. For the evangelical church this became important in two ways. First, scientists and philosophers can truly and fully be part of the church and contribute meaningfully, and with full integrity to their disciplines, to genuine dialogue in faith and science conversations. Second, acknowledging the naturally possible encounter with God gives the responsibility back to the people, and frees the church from an ‘over-predestinated’ theology.

A second legacy Brunner has left is the quest for a theological anthropology. He affirms that the importance of anthropology lies in the fact that it is: “(a) ... a subject of common concern in discussion with the unbelieving world; [and] (b) ... the basis of social ethics.”⁶⁵ Achieving a theological anthropology might even lead to a social agreement of morals and ethics. The understanding of ethics depends upon the relation between science and theology that one envisions. Brunner explains: “The theologian’s attitude towards *theologia naturalis* decides the character of his ethics.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, this is no guarantee of a social agreement between theology and science. The importance of this anthropology for the theological quest lies in that knowing God/Creator informs our knowledge about the created human. The better our own understanding of ourselves, the better our

⁶³ Paul Tillich, *Begegnungen: Paul Tillich über sich selbst und andere*, edited by Renate Albrecht, translated by Herbert Drube, Maria Rhine, and Gertie Siemens, 2nd ed., *Gesammelte Werke XII* (Frankfurt am Main, DE: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1980), 346.

⁶⁴ Paul Tillich, *Begegnungen*, 346.

⁶⁵ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 2:46.

⁶⁶ Brunner, “Nature and Grace,” 51.

understanding of our corrupted *imago Dei*. Here again is the belief of the continuity of the old and new creation.⁶⁷ A strong emphasis on theological anthropology is given in the term *Vernunft* (Ger. reason) as the *Anknüpfungspunkt*. *Vernunft* has in its root the word *vernehmen*, which could be translated as *to receive insight*. In sum, reason as the ability to receive insight is the point of encounter between God and humans and entails human responsibility for a response to God's word.

This emphasis on theological anthropology is important for the contemporary church. Every human being has a vested interest in his or her own humanity. If society hears the church's voice about the Christian understanding of humanity, it is able to shape its ethics. It is also a message for scientists and theologians not to neglect each other's arguments. Whereas Barth offered two contradicting parties, Brunner offered dialogue with the Bible as the 'louder' voice. If the church wants to bear effective and winsome witness in the academy, it cannot begin by dismissing established models and paradigms; rather, it must first seek to understand these and to find common ground when possible. Within such a context of relationship and the building of trust and credibility, dialogue can ensue and the Christian *kerygma* can be introduced.

A third legacy of Brunner also follows his emphasis on theological anthropology. This legacy is seen in the hope that Brunner's theology offered to human beings, especially in a reaction to the Great Depression.⁶⁸ Influenced by Martin Buber's I-Thou personalism, Brunner took the analogy of the relation between humans as an analogy for the relationship between God and the individual.⁶⁹ The analogy that God is never present as a third party or an impersonal object in any encounter in Scripture provided the ground for Brunner's conclusion: God is necessarily a personal God, and in every revelation there is not only a representation of God, rather He Himself is in every revelation.⁷⁰ This conclusion leaves Brunner with

⁶⁷ Humphrey, *Emil Brunner*, 66.

⁶⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 66.

⁶⁹ Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*, 180 n106.

a personal God, who desires to reveal himself in many ways, but ultimately and only rightly doing so in Jesus Christ. Christian conversion is thus seen as a personal encounter with the Creator himself and not only the intellectual approval of a creed or confession. Brunner writes, “This, then, is conversion: that we seek first the Kingdom of God; that God’s desire, namely, service to our neighbour, becomes our chief concern.”⁷¹

For the church today, Brunner’s personal God is of immense significance in the missional task of the church. This personal God, who desires a relationship with his creatures and their redemption, is the answer to a culture that is disappointed even with itself. Brunner’s explanation of the right attitude of the heart as a sign of conversion helps to counter the exclusivity in the orthodoxy. As Scripture makes clear, not only the right information but also following the right person is what brings salvation. The personal encounter with the Creator is necessary in order to discern a correct *theologia naturalis*, even if the worldview is not necessarily Christian. The necessary motivation of any *theologia naturalis* has to be a “service to our neighbour.”⁷² Cultural engagement is a major concern in Brunner’s theology. It cannot be done without having the neighbour in sight. One cannot be a good theologian while being a bad Christian. The Christian imperative requires a *theologia naturalis*, a relation between theology and science, a relation between the Christian and their neighbour.⁷³

Conclusion

Brunner was able to balance and bring together strengths and reject weaknesses of other theologies, “even at the potential cost of prestige.”⁷⁴ Having dared to challenge the renowned theologians of his day makes Brunner a protector of a balanced attitude when reflecting on God. In conclusion, Brunner contributes five major insights regarding the relation between theology and science, which

⁷⁰ Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 24–25.

⁷¹ Brunner, *Our Faith*, trans. John W. Rilling (London: SCM, 1949), 85.

⁷² Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:84.

⁷³ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1:84–85.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*, 6.

can protect the church from privatizing the knowledge of God.

First, he clarified and countered philosophical issues related to the rejection of the *theologia naturalis*; he also corrected those embracing it as a systematic starting point of theology. There is at least some knowledge about the Creator in creation. The second major contribution can be found in Brunner's formal *imago Dei* as the *Anknüpfungspunkt*, which opens a major aspect of theological anthropology, an often presupposed or somehow evaded aspect in theology in his context. There is an awareness in human beings that is not found in the rest of creation, which is a sign that humans are called to something higher than the rest of creation. These two contributions lead to the necessity of a *theologia naturalis*, which Christian theology puts in the service of its *eristic* task. Third, Brunner made it clear that theology is the product of human reasoning and thus needs to be connected with a robust theological anthropology. Such leads to greater understanding about God and human beings. Fourth, Brunner sought to rescue and reconfigure the *analogia entis*. The recalling of the Christian imperative to love God and neighbour requires a connection between Christian and non-Christian knowledge, which is found in the *theologia naturalis*. His seminal work, even if overshadowed in the German context, had a major impact in the English context, where most of the discussions are now happening.⁷⁵ This is clear evidence of Brunner's broad and balanced impact on the relationship of theology and science.

Fifth, Brunner's 'thick' theology is probably his most important gift to the North American church as it navigates the current culture wars. The Christian's way to handle tough situations is through dialogue and engagement with their neighbours. The balance between rejection and adoration of science and reason is of huge importance as it enables us to dialogue even about the nature and functioning of human beings, which might become a common bridge for social ethics. To reject sources of knowledge other than the Bible is to compromise the pedagogical mission of the church. That Christians necessarily reflect on God from a human perspective needs to be ac-

⁷⁵ Peter McEnhill and George Newlands, *Fifty Key Christian Thinkers* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004), 84; Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*, 6.

knowledge, but it is also the only context from which we can reflect on God. Both are held together in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, who became incarnate and dwelt among us, died, rose again, ascended and now sends forth the Spirit to remind us of all that he said and lead us into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13).

Brunner's approach of a 'thick' theology protected the church from the pitfalls of either rejecting completely everything outside the Bible or to becoming purely 'reasonable,' letting science dictate the terms upon which God ought to be defined. His argument for the partial redemption of human reason and upholding epistemology as public saved the church from a total isolation from the academy and an ensuing disruption of the relationship between theology and science.

A Matter of Mission: Bonhoeffer, the Bible, and Ecclesial Formation

Robert J. Dean*

Introduction

In October of 1931, mere months after returning to Germany, having spent the greater part of a year as an international exchange student in New York, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a dismayed letter to a former classmate from the University of Berlin. In the letter Bonhoeffer reflected upon the dire straits of Christianity in the West and observed that “the great dying out of Christianity seems to be here.”¹ Cultural Protestantism had been slowly choking the life out of the Evangelical Church in Germany. Bonhoeffer, who at that time was in the midst of a short and unsuccessful ministry as a chaplain at Berlin Technical University, had experienced the effects of its death-grip first hand: the future engineers of Germany simply had no interest in attending his theological discussion groups or morning devotions.² Perhaps it was from the desk within his empty chaplain’s office that Bonhoeffer penned the letter to his friend that included the desperate words of lamentation: “Invisibility is ruining us.”³ In Bonhoeffer’s judgment, things were no better in America. While the church in the United States seemed to show signs of great zeal and activity, the ex-

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¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931-1932* (hereafter DBWE 11), trans. Anne Schmidt-Lange et al., ed. Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 55.

² Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 144.

³ DBWE 11, 55.

ternal picture belied the truth of the situation. Empty pragmatism and vain entrepreneurship had replaced the Gospel as the driving impetus of American church life, leading Bonhoeffer to remark, “The huge project of American mission is hollow on the inside. The mother church itself is dying.”⁴ At this point, Bonhoeffer still held hope that help might come from the East from the Christian Ashrams of India, and perhaps even from Gandhi himself.⁵ He even spoke of a premonition that “something very big must be about to happen, but we are told just to wait.”⁶

Within fifteen months the waiting was over, as two major events transpired that forever changed the course of Bonhoeffer’s life. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor of Germany. While Germany, under the dark clouds of Nazi rule, would provide the context for the duration of Bonhoeffer’s life and ministry, it was Bonhoeffer’s turn to the Bible a short time before Hitler’s rise to power that would provide its content and direction. This transformative encounter with Scripture liberated the young theologian from his ambitious professional aspirations and set him free to become a servant of the church. He came to recognize that “everything now depended on a renewal of the church and of the pastoral station.”⁷ As a result, when the invitation came to head up one of the newly formed seminaries of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer willingly gave up his pastorate in London to return to Germany in the spring of 1935.

Bonhoeffer responded to the challenge of forming leaders for the church in Nazi Germany by entering into a period of intense *ressourcement* during which he leveraged the wisdom of the monastic tradition, mined the riches of the Lutheran Confessions, and, above

⁴ *DBWE* 11, 54–55.

⁵ *DBWE* 11, 55. While Bonhoeffer was undoubtedly interested in Gandhi, Christiane Tietz has shown that Bonhoeffer was also aware of and profoundly interested in Indian forms of Christianity. “Bonhoeffer’s Strong Christology in the Context of Religious Pluralism,” *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 185–88.

⁶ *DBWE* 11, 55.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937* (hereafter *DBWE* 14), trans. Douglas W. Stott, ed. H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 134.

all, was enraptured by the life-giving testimony of Scripture. John Webster has observed that during this period, Bonhoeffer's writing "shifts to become a good deal less formal and conceptual," and he "becomes, in effect, a practical, biblical theologian."⁸ These biblical writings appear to be governed by the twin convictions "that Holy Scripture is the *viva vox Dei*, and that this living voice demands an attitude of ready submission and active compliance."⁹ In this way, Bonhoeffer the biblical theologian could be seen to be practicing a missional hermeneutic as he turns to Scripture in anticipation of encountering the living Word, who, through the Spirit, creates faith in his people and sets them on the path of discipleship.¹⁰ A missional hermeneutic presumes that the Scriptures have been given to the church for the sake of its continuing formation as a community of witness and mission in the world.¹¹ The intersection and overlap of ecclesiology and ethics in Bonhoeffer's writings from this period could be considered evidence of his employment of a missional hermeneutic. Michael Gorman observes, "a missional hermeneutic will bind those two fields so closely together that retaining theological labels ('ecclesiology'; 'ethics') will no longer be sustainable."¹²

It may seem somewhat counterintuitive to associate Bonhoeffer with a missional hermeneutic in light of the relatively rare appearance of the word 'mission' in his writings. However, the very scarcity of the word in Bonhoeffer's corpus illuminates the strategic importance of its appearance in his introduction to his theological reflections on the Finkenwalde experiment in theological education and Christian community in *Life Together*. There he writes, "We are not dealing with a concern of some private circles but with a mission entrusted

⁸ John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 99.

⁹ Webster, *Word and Church*, 101.

¹⁰ Darrell Guder, "Missional Hermeneutics: The Missional Authority of Scripture—Interpreting Scripture as Missional Formation," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 15 (2007): 119. For an introduction to contemporary discussion surrounding missional hermeneutics, see George R. Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping a Conversation," *Missiology* 39, no. 3 (July 2011): 309–21.

¹¹ Guder, "Missional Hermeneutics," 113–14.

¹² Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 58.

to the church.”¹³ Exploration of Bonhoeffer’s biblical expositions from this period will help to make plain the often overlooked inherent missional impulse that propels his thought.¹⁴ In what follows, we will explore Bonhoeffer’s treatment of three key passages of Scripture—Acts 2, Psalm 119, and John 20:19-31—from the period during which he directed the preachers’ seminary at Finkenwalde and oversaw the collective pastorates at Köslin and Sigurdshof. In these expositions, Bonhoeffer embodies what could be regarded a missional hermeneutic as he engages Scripture with the expectation that the Spirit speaking through the Word will inscribe God’s people into the continuing drama of redemption through eliciting “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5 NRSV). These biblical expositions, which seek to ground the life of the church in its pilgrimage between the ages in the life of the triune God, offer an important corrective to some contemporary presentations of missional ecclesiology which end up instrumentalizing the life of the Christian community.¹⁵ In contrast to the broadly held perception that Bonhoeffer’s thought suffers from a pneumatological deficiency,¹⁶ these expositions are amongst the

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (hereafter *DBWE 5*), trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 25.

¹⁴ This missional impulse has been observed by Richard Bliese, “Bonhoeffer and the Great Commission: Does Bonhoeffer Have a Theology of Mission?” *Reflections on Bonhoeffer: Essays in Honor of F. Burton Nelson*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg (Chicago: Covenant, 1999), 253–66; Patrick Franklin, “Bonhoeffer’s Missional Ecclesiology,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 9 (2008–2007): 96–128; and Robert J. Dean, *For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 148–52.

¹⁵ For recent criticisms of the missional church conversation along these lines, see David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 197–200; and Patrick S. Franklin, *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 277–79. Franklin also points to Bonhoeffer as providing resources for a trinitarian revision of missional ecclesiology (279–81).

¹⁶ For examples of this pneumatological perception, see Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 94; L. Gregory Jones, “The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community and the Politics of Worldly Discipleship,” in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1994), 164–66; Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 187, n.29.

most pneumatologically robust passages in the Bonhoeffer corpus. In all three, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the Spirit's role in inscribing the church through its encounter with the Word into the unfolding drama of salvation, which is the *missio Dei*. As a result, these biblical expositions present a significant resource for the Western church seeking to navigate its way through the ruins of Christendom.

Acts 2: A New Creation of Word and Spirit

Bonhoeffer's exposition of Acts 2 was a recurring part of the curriculum at Finkenwalde.¹⁷ His first treatment of the passage occurred near the beginning of a New Testament course entitled, "The Visible Church in the New Testament."¹⁸ Just prior to his exposition, Bonhoeffer introduced what would be the guiding question of the course: "Does the church of God's word have a place in the world, and if so, what is the nature of that space?"¹⁹ This was no mere intellectual exercise, but a question that had been forced upon the church by the rise of National Socialism, the emergence of the German Christians, and the ensuing struggle for control of the Reich Church.²⁰ Bonhoeffer avers that there are two problematic ways of answering the question that appear to tempt the theologian at this point. The first is an "idealistic-docetic ecclesiology" and the second is described as a "materialistic-secular or magical-sacramental ecclesiology."²¹ Whereas Bonhoeffer associates the former with an erroneous reading of Barth, and the latter, somewhat humorously, with a correct interpretation of Dibelius, there are also resonances at this point with observations he makes in other lectures from this period about misplaced attempts to construe faith and correspondingly render God visible within the Lutheran tradition and Roman

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer lectured on Acts 2 during the second (1935-1936), fourth (1936-1937), and fifth sessions (1937). See *DBWE* 14, 1027-36.

¹⁸ See also the chapter bearing the same name in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (hereafter *DBWE* 4), trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 225-52.

¹⁹ *DBWE* 14, 435.

²⁰ For this reason Bonhoeffer insists that the question impressed itself much more immediately upon pastors than the theological faculties (*DBWE* 14, 436).

²¹ *DBWE* 14, 435-36.

Catholicism. According to Bonhoeffer, there is a strand of the Lutheran tradition, for which he uses the term “orthodoxy,” that presents an exclusively linear or temporal understanding of faith attempting to capture the living God within a timeless set of theological propositions or a verbally inspired Bible.²² On the other hand, Bonhoeffer argues that Roman Catholicism fosters an exclusively spatial understanding of faith, which equates the presence of God with the institutional church and all of its trappings.²³ Neither model was adequate for confronting the challenge placed before the church in the form of the Leviathan, which was the Nazi state. On the one hand, the “idealistic-docetic ecclesiology” of Lutheran orthodoxy did not require any space in the world; on the other, the “materialistic-secular or magical-sacramental ecclesiology” of Rome paved the way for the signing of the concordat between Hitler and the Vatican. The challenge confronting Bonhoeffer at the beginning of this lecture was, therefore, to navigate the ecclesiological channel and chart a course which allowed him to speak of the reality of the church as a people in the world, without running aground on the rocks of spiritualization, on the one hand, or undialectical materialism, on the other.²⁴

With this challenge in mind, it is instructive to observe that Bonhoeffer begins his quest to understand the nature of the space of the church in the world with a discussion of the founding of the church on the day of Pentecost. “It is the historic [geschichtlich] reality of the Holy Spirit,” Bonhoeffer asserts, “which forbids all Docetism.”²⁵ The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is an historic event that is locatable within the ongoing history of God’s dealings with his people Israel. At two different points in the lecture, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the inextricable connection between the Old Testament ‘church’ of the promise and the New Testament church

²² *DBWE* 14, 390, 455, 458.

²³ *DBWE* 14, 390, 455, 458.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer appears to anticipate the work of Philip Lee at this point, who warns, “Calvin’s principal foe might well have been, as he apprehended it, Roman idolatry (the false materializing of the spiritual). The arch foe today, however, is Protestant gnosticism (the false spiritualizing of the material).” Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 270–71.

²⁵ *DBWE* 14, 438

that lives in the joy of fulfillment of the promise.²⁶ Less than a year earlier, the Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller had emphasized the profound discontinuity and even contradiction between Christianity and Judaism, stating, “There is no bond between them, rather the sharpest opposition.”²⁷ Yet here was Bonhoeffer, in no uncertain terms, telling his young seminarians that any church seeking “to dissolve this unity would no longer be the church of the Holy Spirit, since the Spirit binds the church to Israel and to the Old Testament.”²⁸ Not only was this a striking statement of solidarity with the Jews in the face of the recently enacted Nuremberg Laws, Bonhoeffer also recognized that apart from the witness of the Old Testament it would be almost impossible to sustain the corporate witness of the church as a concrete people in the world. As a case in point, the German Christians found the concept of the Holy Spirit, deracinated from its Old Testament context, to be quite congenial to their own political agenda.²⁹ Against this proclivity towards pneumatological abstraction, Bonhoeffer affirms the *filioque* as a way of emphasizing the inseparability of the Spirit from the Jew, Jesus, and hence the church from the people of Israel.³⁰ By locating the events of Pentecost within the history of Israel and its Messiah, Bonhoeffer begins to dispel the notion that the coming of the Spirit could ever be construed as an inward or private event. The founding of the church-community is a public happening through which the Spirit establishes the it as a city on a hill before the eyes of a watching world.³¹ Drawing upon the work of Eugene Rogers and Reinhard Hütter, it could be said, in congruence with Bonhoeffer, that the Spirit delights to rest on matter, and that it is the Pentecostal publicity of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the church as

²⁶ DBWE 14, 438, 440.

²⁷ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 21.

²⁸ DBWE 14, 440.

²⁹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 50–51.

³⁰ DBWE 14, 440.

³¹ DBWE 14, 439.

“the public” of the crucified and risen Jesus.³² As a result, Bonhoeffer can offer the warning, “Wherever the church withdraws into invisibility, it is in fact scorning the reality of the Spirit.”³³

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Bonhoeffer observes, results not in ethereal moments of spiritual ecstasy, but in clear and comprehensible communicative events through which the Holy Spirit bears concrete witness to Jesus Christ.³⁴ Peter’s speech stands as a preeminent example of the witness to Christ evoked by the Spirit. Upon hearing Peter’s proclamation of grace in the form of his attestation of the resurrection of Christ, the crowd is immediately led to ask, “What should we do?” The proclamation of “the full and free grace of God” always sets people in motion, summoning them “to action, to repentance, and to new life.”³⁵ Any proclamation of grace that simply leaves people as they are and fails to elicit the question “What should we do?” is, in Bonhoeffer’s opinion, simply a peddling of religious opiates.³⁶ The proclamation of grace loosens not only the internal fetters that bind the fallen human heart, but also summons people out of “concrete, historic [geschichtlich] institutions in this world” into the visibly distinct order of the church-community.³⁷

Since Pentecost marks the pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit, it is not merely an historic event, it is also pre-eminently an

³² Rogers explores the Spirit’s befriending of matter in *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 55–60. Hütter develops the notion of the church as a public constituted by the publicity of the Holy Spirit in *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 37–42. While Bonhoeffer’s exposition of the Pentecost narrative places him in alignment with this aspect of Hütter’s thought, Michael Mawson has rightly displayed the dissonance between Bonhoeffer’s pneumatology and Hütter’s expanded account of the “enhyposstatic” subsistence of the church’s core practices in the Holy Spirit. See Mawson, “The Spirit and the Community: Pneumatology and Ecclesiology in Jenson, Hütter and Bonhoeffer,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 4 (2013): 453–68.

³³ *DBWE* 14, 439.

³⁴ *DBWE* 14, 439–40.

³⁵ *DBWE* 14, 441.

³⁶ *DBWE* 14, 440.

³⁷ *DBWE* 14, 441, 720.

eschatological event. Bonhoeffer describes the church founded at Pentecost as “the end and consummation of God’s revelation in the history of God’s people.”³⁸ Pentecost must be understood as the eschatological irruption of the new creation. Bonhoeffer explains, “The coming of the Spirit is a new creation precisely because the Spirit leads the church-community into community with Christ. . . . A bit of world is created anew according to the image of God (Col 3:9).”³⁹ There is great continuity at this point with Bonhoeffer’s earlier articulation of the church as “Christ existing as church-community”⁴⁰ and his corresponding emphasis upon Christ as the *Kollektivperson* of the new humanity.⁴¹ As “the new human being,” the church is the eschatological space where fallen men and women, suffering from the radical self-incurvature of sin, are turned-inside-out by the love of God in Christ so that they may love and serve God and one another in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴² The events of the day of Pentecost mark the creation of the eschatological people of God and not simply the birth of a new religious community, not even one that prioritizes the ‘religious’ above all else.⁴³ A religious community is intent on

³⁸ *DBWE* 14, 438. At this point, Bonhoeffer is echoing the oft-made assertion of his doctoral dissertations that the church is a reality of revelation. See *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of Sociology of the Church* (hereafter *DBWE* 1), trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 127, 134, 141, 153; and *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 110–16.

³⁹ *DBWE* 14, 441–42.

⁴⁰ *DBWE* 1, 121, 140, 192, 214, 260.

⁴¹ Clifford Green has demonstrated how these concepts are inseparably linked in *Sanctorum Communio*. See, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 52–62.

⁴² For Bonhoeffer’s mature representation of this line of thought, see *DBWE* 4, 217–19. See also, Clifford Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119–23.

⁴³ Bonhoeffer’s insistence upon distinguishing the new creation of Pentecost from religious matters anticipates his criticism of thinking in two spheres in *Ethics* and his famous reflections upon “religionless Christianity” and the “worldliness of faith” in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. See *Ethics* (hereafter *DBWE* 6), trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 47–75; and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. Isabel Best et al., ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 361–550.

dividing up life between the sacred and the profane. In parcelling life out in this way, the religious community tears apart the word and deed of God, leading to the “pietistic, total dissolution of the concept of the church.”⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer believed that this is what had occurred under the influence of “orthodoxy” in the Lutheran Church of his day, paving the way for the capitulation of Christians in Germany to the commands and claims of the Nazi regime. However, the church, properly understood, is not a *religious* institution, but a new creation of the Holy Spirit. Bonhoeffer observes:

Because the church is concerned with God, the Holy Spirit, and the word, it is concerned not specifically with religion but rather with obedience to the word, with the actions of the Father, that is, with actually implementing this new creation from the Spirit. It is not the religious question or some religious concern in the larger sense that constitutes the church—expressed from the human perspective—but obedience to the word of this gracious new creation. But this also means: it is not the religious formula, dogma, that constitutes the church but the practical doing of what has been commanded.⁴⁵

Far from denigrating doctrine, Bonhoeffer’s concern is to see doctrine restored to its proper place in the life of the church, subservient to “the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”⁴⁶ It is because Christianity is emphatically not a ‘religious’ matter that there must be doctrine.⁴⁷ The religious impulse wells up from within the individual’s subjectivity, but Christ comes to us *extra nos*. Therefore, Christ must

⁴⁴ *DBWE* 14, 443.

⁴⁵ *DBWE* 14, 442.

⁴⁶ “The Theological Declaration of Barmen,” in Peter Matheson, *The Church and the Third Reich: A Documentary Account of Christian Resistance and Complicity during the Nazi Era* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 46.

⁴⁷ In another lecture delivered during this period, Bonhoeffer observes, “Christianity is doctrine related to a certain form of existence (speech and life!)” (*DBWE* 14, 540).

be proclaimed and taught.⁴⁸ In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Bonhoeffer would devote particular energy to exploring the significance of the *didache* (the apostles' teaching). Bonhoeffer insists that the constancy of the early church in attending to the *didache* is attributable to the fact that "this witness—precisely as *didache*—is the work of God, of the Holy Spirit itself. In this *didache*, the Holy Spirit itself is speaking."⁴⁹ In good Reformation fashion, Word and Spirit are inseparable for Bonhoeffer.⁵⁰ The Spirit is the quickening power of the Word and the Word is the content of the Spirit's witness. An implication of this theological commitment is that any gathering around the proclamation of the apostolic testimony is pregnant with Pentecostal possibilities. The sermon can become the occasion of concrete encounter between the congregation and the person of the risen Christ. This is not attributable to any faculties or capacities ascribable to the preacher, but rather is solely the result of the Holy Spirit's unwavering commitment to speak through Scripture.⁵¹

The second distinguishing characteristic of the *didache* from all other forms of transmission of information is that "this *didache* creates *κοινωνία*."⁵² The *κοινωνία* of the church-community is founded upon neither "ethical norms" nor "emotional elements," but is solely attributable to the Holy Spirit speaking through the *didache*. The "being-there-for-one-another" which characterizes the *κοινωνία* of the church-community is the public manifestation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ As a result, Bonhoeffer could refer with some sympathy to Schwenkfeld's criticism of Luther that, following John 13:34, the mutual

⁴⁸ *DBWE* 14, 539–40.

⁴⁹ *DBWE* 14, 444.

⁵⁰ For an explicit articulation of this commitment from this period, see *DBWE* 14, 457.

⁵¹ In a public lecture from the same period, Bonhoeffer warned an audience of preachers against the dangers of seeking to produce "relevant" sermons, by reminding them that "the *concretissimum* of the sermon is not the *application I provide* but the Holy Spirit speaking through the text of the Bible" (*DBWE* 14, 422).

⁵² *DBWE* 14, 445.

⁵³ *DBWE* 14, 445. This anticipates the distinction drawn by Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* between truly "spiritual" community and merely "psychic" community (*DBWE* 5, 27–47).

⁵⁴ *DBWE* 14, 465–66.

love shared between Christians should be considered to be a *nota ecclesiae*.⁵⁵ Anticipating the note of Eucharistic joy that marks the conclusion of *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer observes that the community that is called into being through the proclamation of the Word finds its consummation in communion, in the body and blood of Jesus at the Table of the Lord.⁵⁶

Just as the Lord's Supper points to the now and not-yet character of the Kingdom, so also the presence of signs and wonders in the early Christian community.⁵⁷ Signs and wonders demonstrate that the promised Holy Spirit is present. Their presence additionally indicates that the consummation has not yet arrived, otherwise, they would no longer be signs and wonders, but the normal course of affairs. Signs and wonders are to be expected within the community that is the new creation of the Holy Spirit: "They keep the fear of God alive; thus do they effectively support and surround the preaching of the gospel."⁵⁸ It is only when the church becomes a "religious community" that signs and wonders cease.

Acts 2 ends with the evangelist's assertion that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47 NRSV). As the preceding exposition has hopefully made clear, for Bonhoeffer there can be no separating the "being saved" from the being "added to their number." It is only because the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is truly present to his people through the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacrament in the midst of the fellowship, constituting the church as *his very own* body, that one may truly say with Bonhoeffer that "the church-community is a missionary community by its *very nature*."⁵⁹

Bonhoeffer's exposition of Acts 2 allows him to him to establish the identity of the church as an eschatological people in the world. By sounding the note of new creation and also emphasizing the church's inseparable bond with Israel, Bonhoeffer is able to counter the spiritualizing tendencies of Lutheran "orthodoxy" and stress

⁵⁵ *DBWE* 14, 720.

⁵⁶ *DBWE* 14, 445; *DBWE* 5, 118.

⁵⁷ *DBWE* 14, 445, 719.

⁵⁸ *DBWE* 14, 719.

⁵⁹ This formulation is found in the notes of Otto Dudzus (*DBWE* 14, 721, n. 19).

the existence of the church-community as a concrete people which cannot be circumscribed within the bounds of the merely religious. Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the Spirit creating faith through the Word stands as a buffer against an undialectical construal of the church's space in the world, as he feared was the case in Roman Catholicism. In this lecture, we see the intersection of pneumatology and Christology within the purview of the *missio Dei*, as the Holy Spirit renews faith on the face of the earth through sweeping men and women up into Messianic time and inscribing them into the continuing drama of the faithfulness of Jesus for the sake of the world. We will next turn to Bonhoeffer's exposition of Psalm 119 for further clues as to the nature of faith and the church's concrete pilgrimage between the ages.

Psalm 119: A People on the Way

Discerning the proper relation of Law and Gospel was a pressing and vexatious question that particularly occupied Bonhoeffer and his seminarians.⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer's engagement with his favourite psalm provided a means of enriching the understanding of discipleship that he had previously developed through his engagement with the Synoptic Gospels and the writings of Paul through locating discipleship within the Old Testament context of the pilgrimage of God's people under the instruction of Torah.⁶¹ He considered his exposition of Psalm 119 to be "the climax of his theological life."⁶² Bonhoeffer's meditations on Psalm 119 stand in continuity with *Discipleship's* frontal assault upon German cultural Protestantism, whose peddling of cheap grace had effectively rendered the church innocuous and invisible.⁶³ The Lutheran church of Bonhoeffer's day had inherited a legacy emerging from the Reformation in which the polemical

⁶⁰ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 565–66.

⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground, 1937-1940* (hereafter DBWE 15), trans. Victoria J. Barnett et al., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 238.

⁶² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 667.

⁶³ DBWE 4, 43–56.

understanding of faith and works had made the necessity of discipleship unintelligible. The absolutizing of this antagonism between Law and Gospel in modern theology has, according to Lutheran theologian David Yeago, directly contributed to the increasingly gnostic and antinomian character of the contemporary Protestant church.⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer already seemed to have had his finger on this problem in the 1930s. He instinctively reached for Psalm 119 as an inoculation against this “fundamental misconstrual of the coherence of the Christian faith,”⁶⁵ which had infected Christendom in Germany. There could hardly be a more appropriate choice than the psalm which celebrates the Torah, the charter which comprehensively ordered the life of Israel to the worship of YHWH and simultaneously distinguished Israel from the neighbouring people groups of the Ancient Near East.⁶⁶ Far from being something to be despised or liberated from, Psalm 119 consistently holds up the Law as a gift in which the people of God rightfully delight (e.g., vv. 103, 105, 111). Along with the Psalmist, Bonhoeffer affirms that the commandments have been given to us in order that we may “keep them diligently.”⁶⁷

However, it would be a great disservice to Bonhoeffer were we to think that his solution to the plague of antinomianism was simply a good dose of legalism. A merely external observance of the commandments is insufficient, since the commandments are not an end in themselves, but rather testify to the living, commanding Lord.⁶⁸ If we are to seek the Lord with our whole hearts, our sin-riddled and internally-divided selves must be put to death and a new beginning made. In his commentary on the opening verse of the psalm, Bonhoeffer stresses that this is exactly what has happened. Those who have learned to pray with the psalmist are those who recognize that they are already *in via*. They know that a new and definitive beginning has already been made for them through the death and resurrec-

⁶⁴ David S. Yeago, “Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal,” *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 1 (1993): 37–49.

⁶⁵ Yeago, “Gnosticism,” 38.

⁶⁶ Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 74–88.

⁶⁷ *DBWE* 15, 505.

⁶⁸ *DBWE* 15, 503.

tion of Christ and their incorporation into the paschal reality through the waters of baptism. Taken as a whole, Bonhoeffer's reflections on Psalm 119 quite clearly insinuate that the pilgrimage of God's people is properly understood not as an *imitatio Christi*, but rather as *participatio Christi*.

The call of God sets God's people upon a path. In fact, Bonhoeffer observes, "The entire gospel message of salvation can be called simply 'the way' (Acts 19:9; 22:4; 24:14) or the 'way of God' (Acts 18:25, 26). In this way it becomes clear that the gospel and faith are not a timeless idea but an action of God and of the human being in history."⁶⁹ As an action of God and of the human being in history, the path or way of God's people will necessarily become visible before the eyes of the watching world.⁷⁰ The summons of God has set God's people in perpetual motion. This moving forward must not be mistaken for the frantic activity and anxious striving of the fallen pious ego. Rather, it is only through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that we are freed to join the psalmist in properly saying, "I want to keep the commandments."⁷¹ Anticipating a spurious objection from the antinomian pseudo-Lutheranism of his day, Bonhoeffer returns *ad fontes* to cite the Formula of Concord: "As soon as the Holy Spirit has begun his work of rebirth and renewal in us through the Word and holy sacraments, it is certain that on the basis of his power we can and should be cooperating with him, though still in great weakness."⁷²

Bonhoeffer had previously made explicit for his seminarians how "walking in the Spirit" in the writings of the apostle Paul and discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels both functioned to describe the single reality of life in Christ.⁷³ Now, through his engagement with Psalm 119, Bonhoeffer supplements these understandings with a

⁶⁹ DBWE 15, 504.

⁷⁰ DBWE 15, 504.

⁷¹ DBWE 15, 509.

⁷² DBWE 15, 510, quoting 'Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II,' 65, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles P. Arand et al., ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 556.

⁷³ DBWE 14, 620–22.

Torah-inspired vision of life in Christ as inhabiting the path circumscribed by the commandments. One who moves forward from the beginning that God has already made for them in Christ, liberated from the incurvature of sin through the rebirth of the Spirit, no longer finds oneself “*under* the law,” but rather “*within* the law of God.”⁷⁴ God’s law, Bonhoeffer reminds us, is properly located within the order of God’s redemptive activity. God gives the Torah to those whom God has liberated from slavery in Egypt.⁷⁵

Situating the law within God’s own redemptive activity leads to the recognition that the way God sets his people upon is the way that God has tread. Bonhoeffer declares, “The way of God is God’s way to human beings, and only in this way is it the way of human beings to God. Its name is Jesus Christ (John 14:6).”⁷⁶ Since the righteousness of the Christian is found in the one who has perfectly fulfilled the Law, Christians live by the remembrance of Jesus.⁷⁷ Therefore, in addition to the communal practices of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, the individual disciple will devote herself to prayerful meditation upon the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, Christians are confronted not only with the God who has acted in the past for their redemption, but with the voice of the living Lord who desires to address them in the present. In a similar manner to his discussion of the *didache*, Bonhoeffer insists that Scripture is not disposable: “God’s word is not the sum of a few general sentences that could be in my mind at any time; rather it is God’s daily new word addressed to me, expounded in its never-ending wealth of interpretation.”⁷⁸ In an insightful essay, which argues for the often overlooked significance of Bonhoeffer’s engagement with Psalm 119 upon the development of his *Ethics*, Brian Brock suggests that “What Bonhoeffer is emphasising, almost alone in contemporary discussions of the role of the Bible in Christian ethics, is that the Bible can never be replaced in concrete moral deliberation by summaries of its moral content which we turn to in time of moral decision.”⁷⁹ The

⁷⁴ *DBWE* 15, 498.

⁷⁵ *DBWE* 15, 499.

⁷⁶ *DBWE* 15, 505.

⁷⁷ *DBWE* 15, 518.

⁷⁸ *DBWE* 15, 517.

church must return again and again to Scripture in the expectation that it will hear there the guiding voice of its living Lord.

As Brock has observed, Bonhoeffer's retrieval of the biblical conception of the commandments marking out a path, "sharply delineates the biblical idea of command from modern understandings of divine commanding as occasional interventions in the normal course of affairs, or as a synonym for the pronouncements of the conscience or analytical self-observation."⁸⁰ There is a continuity and a trajectory to the Christian life. Within the sphere of the commandments there is space for affirming genuine human agency in a way that avoids the pitfalls of Pelagianism. It is God's grace that activates and sustains the genuine human agency of those on the way: "God's grace stood at the beginning; it makes our beginning so that we may be freed from our own beginnings. Grace put us on the way, and it is grace that we call upon, step-by-step."⁸¹

In his letter to the Council of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union proposing the establishment of a House of Brethren at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer suggested that the neglect of Christian life under the commandments had adversely affected the ministry of the church and resulted in a sense of dis-ease about the pastoral calling among the young seminarians. Bonhoeffer hypothesized that:

The vague sense that something is not quite right in the life of the ministry can be articulated more clearly only through the shared practical attempt to practice obedience toward the commandments. The fact that the credibility of our own proclamation has suffered through our own lives and through a lack of clarity concerning what Christian life really is obligates pastors to reflect anew and attempt a new practical application.⁸²

⁷⁹ Brian Brock, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible in Christian Ethics: Psalm 119, the Mandates, and Ethics as a 'Way,'" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (2005): 20.

⁸⁰ Brock, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible," 11.

⁸¹ *DBWE* 15, 511.

⁸² *DBWE* 14, 96.

Here we clearly see that Bonhoeffer understood the attempt to re-imagine Christian community and revitalize Christian life within the sphere of the commandments as being directly related to the missional mandate of the church and its proclamation. However, there is the danger that if we leave off here we could misconstrue the relationship of life under the commandments and the missional mandate of the church in purely instrumental terms. For this reason, it is important to attend to the recurrence within the psalm, and within Bonhoeffer's exposition of the psalm, of words such as "happy," "blessed," and "joy." Life under the commandments is not simply an instrumental aid to the proclamation of the Gospel, it is also the life for which we were created. Hence, it is also the goal or telos of the Gospel. The call that sets us upon the way is the call to enter into the joy of the Kingdom and to live under the life-giving reign of God. Put simply, "Discipleship is joy."⁸³

Bonhoeffer's engagement with Psalm 119 reinforces his commitment to understanding the Gospel not as an idea or principle, but as an evangelical summons to life in the presence of the risen Christ. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit creates faith. Biblical faith, Guder explains, must be understood as "neither a thing nor a status nor a possession. But it is a new way of walking. It is a living hope. It is the capacity to join a pilgrimage going in a new direction."⁸⁴ Just as the celebration of Torah in Psalm 119 testifies to the missional reality that "the first task of Israel is to be Israel,"⁸⁵ those who have found themselves set on pilgrimage by the call to discipleship celebrate the gift of communion with Christ and are entrusted with the task of travelling along the way circumscribed by the commandments of God. Daily they return to Scripture, attentively listening for the voice of the one whose very Word is the manna which sustains them on their continuing pilgrimage in the midst of the peoples of the world.

⁸³ *DBWE* 4, 40.

⁸⁴ Darrell Guder, "Missional Hermeneutics: The Missional Vocation of the Congregation—and How Scripture Shapes That Calling," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 15 (2007): 138.

⁸⁵ John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 57.

John 20:19–31: Propelled by the Breath of the Risen Christ

The final text under consideration is Bonhoeffer's sermon meditations on John 20:19-31, which were published as part of a collection of preaching aids in 1940.⁸⁶ John 20:19-31 is perhaps the missional text *par excellence*.⁸⁷ As such, it presents Bonhoeffer with an explicitly trinitarian grammar that is sometimes lacking in his writings.⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer begins his reflections on John 20:19-31 by noting that not even the fear that led the disciples to hide behind locked doors could stand in the way of the Resurrected One. Fittingly, the first words spoken to the fearful disciples by the one who eschewed the way of violence and willingly took up the cross are, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19 NRSV). This greeting indicates that the reign of sin and death has been broken and community with the Lord has been restored.⁸⁹ However, Bonhoeffer goes on to assert, "There is no community with Jesus that is not at the same time *a call to service*."⁹⁰ The disciples are a sent people whose commissioning by the risen Prince of Peace for participation in his peacemaking mission "parallels the sending of Jesus through the Father."⁹¹ In a sacramental echo of the creation of the first human being, Jesus fills the disciples with his resurrection breath. This breath is the Holy Spirit whose reception equips the disciples to participate in Christ's work, which is nothing less than "forgiving and retaining sins in divine authority."⁹² Following the text of the Gospel itself, it is important for Bonhoeffer that disciples are willing to both forgive *and* retain sins. He warns, "Wanting to forgive sins but not wanting to retain sins turns divine

⁸⁶ *DBWE* 15, 542, n.1.

⁸⁷ The celebrated missiologist Lesslie Newbigin preached his final sermon on this text at Beeson Divinity School on June 24, 1997. Lesslie Newbigin, "So Send I You" (Worcester: Gateway Films / Vision Video, 1999), DVD.

⁸⁸ Rowan Williams has recently commented on the lack of an explicitly trinitarian grammar in Bonhoeffer's writings. "Centres and Margins: Bonhoeffer's Christ," Hulsean Lectures, University of Cambridge, 16 February 2016, <https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2182567> (accessed 14 May 2016).

⁸⁹ *DBWE* 15, 543–44.

⁹⁰ *DBWE* 15, 544.

⁹¹ *DBWE* 15, 544.

⁹² *DBWE* 15, 544.

forgiveness into a human work, a dalliance with sin.”⁹³

The question of church discipline was a burning question for Bonhoeffer, his seminarians, and the most resolute pastors of the Confessing Church at this time.⁹⁴ Throughout this period Bonhoeffer insisted, in good Lutheran fashion, that for the sake of sinners the church must dare to exercise the power of the keys (Mt 16:19).⁹⁵ The Christian community must recover the important place of church discipline, “for the sake of what is holy, but also for the sake of the sinners, and for the sake of the church-community itself.”⁹⁶ This does not mean, however, that through church discipline the church aspires to create some type of pure or ideal community. While the practice of church discipline protects sinners from their own hypocrisy, the church can never definitively “protect itself from hypocrites.”⁹⁷

Bonhoeffer is clear that church discipline is properly conceived of as an aspect of the ministry of the Word.⁹⁸ The Word of God goes forth seeking to gather and bear sinners. Where the Word is joyfully received in faith there is great consolation for the sinner. However, where the forgiving Word is met with the obstinacy of unbelief, there, for the sake of both the church-community and the unrepentant sinner, sins must be retained. The retention of sin and the corresponding excommunication of the brother or sister is not the congregation sitting in judgment over the sinner, but rather the confirmation that the recalcitrant sinner has already separated him or herself from the life of the community under the Word.⁹⁹ The church does no favours by denying this reality; the key that binds is exercised for the sake of the key that looses. Therefore, Bonhoeffer can affirm in the context

⁹³ *DBWE* 15, 545.

⁹⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 568–69.

⁹⁵ Martin Luther, “The Keys (1530),” in *Church and Ministry II*, vol. 40 *Luther’s Works*, trans. Earl Beyer and Conrad Bergendoff, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 321–77.

⁹⁶ *DBWE* 4, 270.

⁹⁷ *DBWE* 14, 831.

⁹⁸ The theme of church discipline permeates many of Bonhoeffer’s writings from this period. Especially significant is the “Lecture and Discussion on the Power of the Keys and Church Discipline,” in *DBWE* 14, 825–42. Also relevant are his discussions of church discipline in *DBWE* 4, 269–75 and *DBWE* 5, 103–6.

⁹⁹ *DBWE* 14, 834.

of his reflections on John 20:21-23 that

the proclamation of judgment serves the proclamation of grace; the retention of sin serves the future repentance, conversion, and forgiveness. The disciple shall forgive and retain sins with great certainty and joyfulness by Christ's authority, for this is the work of his Lord that has been entrusted to him. He may not shy away from it.¹⁰⁰

It is the exercising of the keys that preserves the concrete reality of the Gospel in the midst of the congregation. Where the keys are not exercised, "the forgiveness of sin has become a general doctrinal statement and is no longer God's living, saving intervention."¹⁰¹

Bonhoeffer continues his sermon meditations by noting that both the forgiveness and retention of sin "will be carried out in the public proclamation of the word and in personal confession."¹⁰² Proclamation and personal confession occupy an important place in Bonhoeffer's theology and practice of pastoral ministry.¹⁰³ This is reflected in his meditative remarks as he goes on to say, "The breath of the Resurrected One blows through both of them. Divinely authorized preaching and confession exist because Christ lives and has given us the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁴ Standing between proclamation and personal confession is what Bonhoeffer refers to as *Seelsorge*—"pastoral care" or "the cure of souls."¹⁰⁵ Pastoral care is an extension of the preaching office.¹⁰⁶ The need for pastoral care arises as a result of the stubbornness or hardening of heart that prevents a parishioner from hearing the proclamation of the Gospel. In the ministry of pastoral care, the pastor comes alongside of the parishioner and through

¹⁰⁰ *DBWE* 15, 545.

¹⁰¹ *DBWE* 14, 826.

¹⁰² *DBWE* 15, 545.

¹⁰³ For a recent exploration of the subtle shifts in Bonhoeffer's theology of personal confession in his later writings, see Nicola J. Wilkes, "Life and Health: Bonhoeffer's Normative and Divergent Accounts of Private Confession of Sin," *Modern Theology* 71, no.1 (2014): 58–68.

¹⁰⁴ *DBWE* 15, 545.

¹⁰⁵ See Bonhoeffer's lecture on "Pastoral Care," in *DBWE* 14, 559–94.

¹⁰⁶ *DBWE* 14, 561.

careful listening seeks to discern the concrete commandment that must be spoken to this particular individual.¹⁰⁷ The ministry of pastoral care is “*the beginning of church discipline.*”¹⁰⁸ Where the pastor is negligent in exercising this ministry, it can hardly be expected that members of the congregation will take up their responsibility of fraternal admonition and mutual correction.¹⁰⁹ The goal of pastoral care is personal confession.¹¹⁰ The personal confession of sin to another Christian becomes the occasion of my concrete encounter with the Word of God that kills and makes alive. In hearing my confession, bearing my sin, and pronouncing my absolution, the brother or sister becomes as Christ to me. In community with the Crucified and Risen One, believers are given the privilege of bearing sinners through the forgiveness of sins.¹¹¹ Through the personal confession of concrete sins the strained and fractured bonds of community are restored, the selfish man of sin is put to death, the power of sin is broken, and the timid believer receives the gift of assurance.¹¹² “Wherever the Word of the Crucified is a living reality,” Bonhoeffer asserts, “there will be confession to one another.”

Bonhoeffer moves on in his sermon meditation to discuss the figure of ‘doubting’ Thomas. We are not told whether, when encountered by the risen Lord, Thomas reached out to touch his wounds. In fact, Bonhoeffer tells us, it doesn’t matter. Rather what counts is that the address of the risen Lord has elicited faith in his doubting disciple.¹¹⁴ Jesus’s address of Thomas, Bonhoeffer explains, “does not glorify doubt, seeing, or touching, but glorifies faith alone. Faith can find assurance in or rest on not that which we see but the word of God alone.”¹¹⁵ It is for this reason that word and sacrament have been given to the church-community, so that disciples “may become

¹⁰⁷ *DBWE* 14, 574.

¹⁰⁸ *DBWE* 14, 832.

¹⁰⁹ *DBWE* 14, 832.

¹¹⁰ *DBWE* 14, 592.

¹¹¹ *DBWE* 5, 102.

¹¹² *DBWE* 5, 110–13.

¹¹³ *DBWE* 5, 116.

¹¹⁴ *DBWE* 15, 545.

¹¹⁵ *DBWE* 15, 546.

blessed by believing, not seeing.”¹¹⁶

Bonhoeffer’s meditation on John 20:19-31 further fortifies our understanding of his missional ecclesiology by allowing us to see how the church becomes the site of the unfolding drama of the Word’s continuing encounter with the world. Through the breathing out of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are made participants in the Son’s reconciling mission as they are empowered to proclaim God’s judgement and pronounce the words of divine forgiveness. The risen Christ encounters men and women, drawing them into his very life, as the church faithfully enacts the practices and ministry with which it has been entrusted.

Conclusion

Bonhoeffer concludes his sermon meditations on John 20:19-31 with the following three-point summary: “that the resurrection of Jesus is our new life, that from now on we live in service to Jesus, and that both only become real for us in faith.”¹¹⁷ This summary statement serves as a convenient organizing structure for the conclusion of the paper. First, to say “the resurrection of Jesus is our new life” is to say with Bonhoeffer that Jesus is the new human being into whom we have been incorporated by the Holy Spirit. He is God’s way to us and, by the grace of God, the way by which we now travel. He is the one who has borne our sins and restored us to community with God and one another. Drawing together these emphases from Bonhoeffer’s three biblical expositions allows us to say that our salvation is found in being made participants in the divine life of the triune God through our union with the Son through the Holy Spirit. To speak in the theological terms that have dominated contemporary ecclesiological discussions, for Bonhoeffer, the church, as a trinitarian reality, truly is the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Second, from now on we live in service to Jesus. As those who share in the life of the Son, the church naturally participates in his

¹¹⁶ *DBWE* 15, 547.

¹¹⁷ *DBWE* 15, 547.

mission. Michael Gorman speaks with a Bonhoefferian accent when he asserts, “To be in Christ is to be in mission; to participate in the gospel is to participate in the advance of the gospel.”¹¹⁸ Just as there is, for Bonhoeffer, no separating the person and work of Christ, in a similar way there can be no separating the identity and mission of the church. The church is a missional community because it is the presence of the one who has been sent to reconcile and gather up all things in the Spirit and present them as a holy and blameless offering to the Father. In this way, Bonhoeffer will later assert in his *Ethics*, “*The church is the place where Jesus Christ’s taking form is proclaimed and where it happens.*”¹¹⁹ Participating in God’s mission then is participating through the Spirit in the reality of Christ. There is an inherently dramatic character to this participation as, through the Spirit, the church becomes the site of the Word’s encounter with the world. This locating of the church within the economy of the Trinitarian mission results in the overcoming of the false dichotomies which seek to speak of the church exclusively as a means or an end, or which seek to play off the upbuilding of the Christian community against its evangelism or outreach. Bonhoeffer recognized, as Gorman has expressed, that “*all Christian praxis is inherently mission- al.*”¹²⁰

This brings us to the third and final summary statement: “both only become real for us in faith.” This is another way of saying that the church is a *creatura verbum Dei*.¹²¹ The church is not a human project to be realized through the application of clever marketing techniques, the rigorous policing of morals, the subtle manipulation of emotional states, or any other anthropologically-driven means or mechanism. Rather, as Bonhoeffer states in *Life Together*, “Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”¹²² This

¹¹⁸ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 62.

¹¹⁹ *DBWE* 6, 102.

¹²⁰ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 40.

¹²¹ Christoph Schwöbel, “The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers,” in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, ed. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 110–55

¹²² *DBWE* 5, 38.

participation occurs as the Father addresses his people through his living Word carried on the breath of the life-giving Spirit, creating the obedience that comes through faith. Philip Ziegler, therefore, is right to draw attention to the fact that “although the themes of discipleship and church community are often taken to be Bonhoeffer’s primary concerns, it is no small thing to keep in view that their importance is in fact derivative, following from a more basic concern with the hearing of the one Word of God, the present address of the living Lord Jesus Christ in the church.”¹²³ A truly missional church is, therefore, first and foremost a listening church. No amount of frantic or frenetic activity can make up for a deficit in hearing the Word. However, where the Word is genuinely heard, it necessarily activates human beings in freedom. Far from diminishing human agency, Bonhoeffer’s emphasis upon Word and Spirit creates the necessary conditions for a robust, theologically-grounded understanding of human responsibility.¹²⁴ Through the obedience of faith, created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, the Word claims space in the world through the discrete practices of the liturgical assembly, amidst the fellowship’s faithful bearing of one another in love, and in the concrete decisions of the disciples in daily life. John Howard Yoder strikes a chord that resonates with Bonhoeffer, when he observes that “when we listen to the Bible on its own terms, we discover that the message of the kingdom of God is less like a religion than it is like a people.”¹²⁵ The gospel is “a history that makes history. That is, it is history that becomes every Christian’s history as the Spirit draws followers to Christ and molds them into his Body.”¹²⁶ However, as a *creatura verbum Dei*, the public reality of the church displayed in the life of God’s people as the Spirit draws them into conformity with

¹²³ Philip G. Ziegler, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Theologian of the Word of God,” in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 34.

¹²⁴ Responsibility (*Verantwortung*) has been described as “the core theme” of Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*. Larry L. Rasmussen, “The Ethics of Responsible Action,” in *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 218.

¹²⁵ Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 356.

¹²⁶ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 83.

the Son is “possessed by a special kind of visibility.”¹²⁷ Although the spiritual reality of the church as the creation of the Holy Spirit is discernable only to the eyes of faith, the presence of the new humanity in the midst of the nations is the “sign, instrument, and foretaste” of the world’s salvation.¹²⁸ Ecclesial formation, which for Bonhoeffer is simply another way of speaking of the journey undertaken by the community of disciples in response to and continual reliance upon the voice of their living Lord speaking through Scripture, is clearly a matter of mission.

¹²⁷ John Webster, “The Church and the Perfection of God,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 76.

¹²⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 124.

The God Who Sends is The God Who Loves: *Mission as Participating in the Ecstatic Love of the Triune God*

Patrick S. Franklin*

I. Introduction

The God who sends is the God who loves. If we are called to participate in the mission of God then we are called also, and more fundamentally, to participate in the Love of God. David Bosch writes, “Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is a mission because God loves people.”¹ Similarly, Gordon Fee writes, “The *love of God* is the foundation of Paul’s view of salvation (Rom 5:1-11; 8:31-39; Eph 1:3-14). The *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* is what gave concrete expression to that love.”² And again, in more detail,

Thus for Paul, human redemption is the combined activity of Father, Son, and Spirit, in that (1) it is predicated on the love of God, whose love sets it in motion; (2) it is effected histor-

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¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 402. Quoted in Jason S. Sexton, “A Confessing Trinitarian Theology for Today’s Mission,” in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 182.

² Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 592.

ically through the death and resurrection of Christ the Son; and (3) it is actualized in the life of believers through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in any number of ways in Paul, of which Rom 5:5, 8 offers a typical example. The love of God that found expression historically in Christ's dying for us (v. 8) is what the Holy Spirit has poured out in our hearts (v. 5).³

Bosch and Fee clearly ground the *missio Dei* (the mission of God) in the *caritas Dei* (the love of God), which in my view is the proper order. This proper ordering, however, has not always been carefully followed in contemporary discussions about the mission of God. In recent years, many have attempted to recover an emphasis on missiology by articulating its significance for theology and ecclesiology. For example, the missional literature describes God as a missional or sending God. Just as the Father sent the Son and the Spirit into the world to accomplish the *missio Dei*, so now God sends the church into the world as "God's instrument for God's mission."⁴ While this renewed emphasis on mission is welcome and helpful, it sometimes has the tendency to promote a pragmatic and functional approach to church. The term 'missional' has become something of a buzz word in recent years, though its meaning in popular usage is frequently vague and its history not well understood.⁵ For example, 'missional' is often confused with emerging/emergent church, evangelistic or seeker-sensitive approaches to church, the church growth movement, a form of consumer ecclesiology, the practice of formulating organizational mission statements, an unbalanced focus on social justice (doing good works in the world is emphasized over gathering to worship), or simply a general, more strenuous emphasis

³ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 589.

⁴ Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent," in Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 8.

⁵ See Todd J. Billings, "What Makes a Church Missional? Freedom From Cultural Captivity Does Not Mean Freedom From Tradition," *Christianity Today* 52, no. 3 (Mar. 2008), 56-59; and Alan Hirsch, "Defining Missional: The Word Is Everywhere, But Where Did It Come From And What Does It Really Mean?," *Leadership* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 20-22.

on missions or outreach programs. Ironically, missional ecclesiology arose, in part, as a critique of such church models and trends. However, sometimes its own advocates have contributed to these misunderstandings.

Three brief examples illustrate this tendency. First, Michael Frost argues that *cause creates community*: “We build community incidentally, when our imaginations and energies are captured by a higher, even nobler cause . . . Christian community results from the greater cause of Christian mission.”⁶ Frost’s intention here is a good one, namely to call the church out of an insular and sentimental Christian subculture mentality. However, his proposal that *cause creates community* potentially reduces the church to a project, a means to a functional end. More seriously it grounds the mission of the church in something other than its intrinsic relational and participatory ontology and *telos*.

Second, Darrell Guder promotes “the preeminence of witness as the fundamental definition of the church,” regarding witness as “an all-encompassing definition of Christian existence” and hence subordinating all other functions of the church to witness (including proclamation, community, and service/ministry).⁷ Elsewhere, reacting to what he perceives to be Evangelicalism’s overemphasis on personal conversion (over-against corporate election for mission), Guder says that “The biblical record places no emphasis on the special significance of conversion stories.”⁸ In fact, “One does not

⁶ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 108. See also Guder, *Missional Church*, 4-6, 8, 19, 227; and Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church’s Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 44.

⁷ Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 109, 233, 49.

⁸ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 129. Given the context of Guder’s statements, it should be noted that his intention is to overcome a false mission-benefit dichotomy, which he sees in traditional soteriology and ecclesiology. According to Guder, traditional Christian thought (i.e., since Constantine) has focused almost exclusively upon the individual believer’s salvation benefits. In contrast to this, Guder wishes to give voice to the missional elements of salvation by defining Christian existence according to the concept of witness. However, rather than transcending the mission-benefit dichotomy, I fear that he succeeds only in shifting the emphasis *from* the benefits of salvation *to* missionary service. Perhaps he actually intensifies the dichotomy by downplaying

find a concern for ‘the establishment of their personal well-being in their relationship with God’ in the stories of the call of Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the disciples or Paul. The issue in these encounters is not ‘the saving of their souls’ or ‘their experience of grace and salvation.’”⁹ While Guder’s critique of individualistic soteriology has some merit, his correction here is an over-correction.

Third, several missional writers argue that while traditional theologies of church and mission proceed from Christology to ecclesiology to mission, missional theology must proceed from Christology to missiology to ecclesiology.¹⁰ As Alan Hirsch articulates it, “Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology.”¹¹ Ben Wheatley explains, “Missiology needs to precede ecclesi-

benefits in favour of mission, as, for example, when he contends that the vocation of Christians to serve includes “their personal blessing, experience, and endowment as something secondary and accessory,” which “remains bound to the primary and essential element of their status,” i.e., Christ’s commission. Similarly, in equating Christian existence with the missional function or task, he gives precedence to doing over being: “Christian existence is ‘existence in the execution of this [missional] task.’” See Guder, *Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 130.

⁹ Guder, *Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 129. Guder tends to erect false dichotomies when making his claims. For example: “We must conclude that the church as an ‘institute of salvation’ (Heilsanstalt) has had a greatly **diminished sense of mission** to the world. It has been far more *preoccupied with its inner life*, thereby failing to grasp the essential linkage between its internal life and its **external calling**. Rather than understanding **worship as God’s divine preparation for sending**, it has tended to *make worship an end in itself*. Rather than understanding **preaching as the exposition of God’s Word to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11ff), it has become the *impartment of clerical wisdom to help the saints* prepare for heaven while coping with this ‘vale of tears’. In fact, where the *concern for individual salvation* grew and the **focus upon missional calling** decreased in the early medieval church, **preaching** lost its importance and the *sacraments as holy, reified rites* became central.” (Guder, *Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 135; italics and bold mine to indicate the two sides of the false dichotomy)

¹⁰ My own view is that ecclesiology flows from a dialogical and holistic (even systematic) interaction between theological anthropology, soteriology, and missiology, each of which is grounded ultimately in a relational and participatory trinitarian theological framework. This is the approach that I pursue in my book, *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016).

¹¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 142. See also the discussion of this topic in relation to bounded and centered sets in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of*

ology because if ecclesiology precedes missiology, mission becomes just a subset of the church.”¹² Or, as Graham Cray puts it, “Start with the Church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the Church will be found.”¹³ Such missional thinkers prefer to think about the church as a manifestation or outcome of God’s mission. This is a partially helpful move; a good biblical and theological case can be made that missiology is not simply a derivative of ecclesiology or a program of the church but is grounded more deeply in God’s own mission to save the world through Israel’s messiah.¹⁴ However, this move does not go far enough to ground the *missio Dei* itself ontologically in the nature of the triune God as ecstatic Love. Hence, it potentially falls into reducing the church to a means to a functional end.¹⁵

To avoid these problems, it is important to envision missional ecclesiology as flowing out of a participatory and relational trinitarian theology, in which God’s redemptive mission is grounded more fundamentally in God’s nature as love. God’s mission to redeem the world flows from God’s prior love for human beings and creation. God’s love for human beings and creation is rooted, in turn, in the other-centered, ecstatic, perichoretic love that constitutes God’s triune being and reflects the fullness and overflowing quality of

Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 255; cf. Frost, *Exiles*, 155.

¹² Cited by David Fitch (quoting Ben Wheatley), “Missiology Precedes Ecclesiology: The Epistemological Problem,” blog post (January 8, 2009); online: <http://www.missioalliance.org/missiology-precedes-ecclesiology-the-epistemological-problem/>

¹³ Graham Cray, ed., *The Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (Brookvale: Willow, 2005), 116. Quoted in Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 143.

¹⁴ See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

¹⁵ To be fair, in talking about ‘ecclesiology,’ Hirsch seems to mean not the ontology of the church but its functional expression and structures: “By my reading of the scriptures, ecclesiology is the most fluid of the doctrines. The church is a dynamic cultural expression of the people of God in any given place. Worship style, social dynamics, liturgical expressions must result from the process of contextualizing the gospel in any given culture. *Church must follow mission.*” (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 143.) Similarly, Frost writes, “Too many churches begin by trying to artificially develop an ecclesiology, determining first where to meet, what songs to sing, what to preach, how to have small groups and leadership structures” (Frost, *Exiles*, 155).

the divine life. In what follows I will outline and commend such a theology. The aim is not to reject or displace missional theology, but to ground it more deeply in a participatory and relational trinitarian theological framework.

II. A Participatory and Relational Trinitarian Theological Framework

1. *The Augustinian Mutual Love Tradition*

The New Testament declares that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). In attesting to this, Augustine believes that Scripture speaks of love not merely as an aspect of God's character or a description of how God normally acts (though both of these statements are true); more fundamentally, love defines God's *essential* nature. Now if love is God's essential nature then it must be true that love has always characterized God, even before the creation of human beings or other (heavenly) creatures. If love is essential to God's nature, then love is constitutive of the divine life itself and God is eternally a loving Being. As an essentially loving Being, God exists not as an isolated individual deity but in the eternal communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the One God exists as three subsisting persons; and, as three divine persons-in-relation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit subsist eternally as the One God.

The insight that God is love led Augustine to formulate his mutual love model of the Trinity. According to Augustine's mutual love model, the Father eternally generates the Son (without beginning or end) and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and subsists as their mutual love.¹⁶ Augustine begins his discussion with

¹⁶ Identifying the Spirit as the bond of Love shared between the Father and the Son is not unique to Augustine or even to the Western tradition. For example, we find this connection in Athenagoras of Athens, Athanasius (who says that the Spirit constitutes the union between Father and Son), Basil (the Spirit is the communion of the Father and Son, the bond of their union), Gregory of Nazianzus (the Spirit is the intermediate between Father and Son), and Epiphanius (the Spirit is in the midst of the Father and Son as the Bond of the Trinity). See Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 167. Augustine himself presents this teaching as having been passed down to him from his theological predecessors. On this point, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88.

a reflection on the nature of love as depicted in 1 John 4:16: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” He discovers that love implies a Trinity of relationships and can serve as something of an analogy for the Triune God: “There you are with three, the lover, what is being loved, and love. And what is love but a kind of life coupling or trying to couple together two things, namely lover and what is being loved?”¹⁷ This analogy does not espouse tritheism, as if there are three gods loving each other, but rather illustrates that God is love and as such exists in complexity and differentiation. In contrast, human beings image God in this manner only in a partial sense, for, as Augustine says, “it is not the case that anyone who loves himself is love except when *love loves itself*.”¹⁸ For the human individual, love is not its own (hypostasizing) subject, but only gains transcendence in the encounter with another human person. However, Augustine implies that there is a kind of inter-subjectivity within God, because in God (and in God alone) “love loves itself.”¹⁹ Love takes on such an all-encompassing reality as to be a transcendent Subject.²⁰ For Augustine and the Augustin-

¹⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity* VIII/5.14 (255). We must be somewhat careful with the word ‘analogy,’ especially if we are tempted to think that Augustine is trying to *explain* the mystery of the triune life. His ‘analogy’ does not simply proceed from something created to something divine, but employs a theological pattern (discerned from Scripture) already and necessarily operating in the created order itself (perhaps we might say that Augustine employs analogy in a kind of sacramental, rather than merely illustrative/symbolic, deductive, or inductive, way). As Lewis Ayres writes, “Moving from the created analogue towards the Trinity is done well, then, when it is recognized as, and performed as, a move towards that which defeats the exercised mind. The advance towards understanding is one that is only appropriately founded in humility before the divine mystery.” And, “The description of a triad in the act of love . . . is based on the assumption that love is necessarily triune *because* love is God. The description is part analogy, part invitation to use the language of faith to explore that which one *thinks* one understands.” Thus, “Augustine’s account is not an analogy between a structure of loving in the created order and the loving that constitutes the Trinitarian life, but a description of the manner in which we love in and because of the Spirit’s presence. It is a description of a structure of loving in the created order, founded in the divine love that will also illustrate the nature of the Trinitarian love *per se*.” See Ayres, *Augustine*, 141, 283, 284.

¹⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity* IV/1.2 (272). Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity* IV/1.2 (272).

²⁰ Not to be confused with what we find in the creaturely realm, i.e., the human person as an autonomous individual. Rather, the Spirit’s ‘subjectivity’ has to do with agency, as the Spirit works inseparably together with Father and Son. Lewis Ayres is

ian mutual love tradition, the Holy Spirit is Love personified.²¹ For Christians, Love in its deepest sense is not simply an emotion or a sentiment; rather, Love is the divine Spirit who indwells us, awakens love within us, and draws us into loving communion with God and others.

To depict simultaneously the essential unity of God and the interrelatedness of Father, Son, and Spirit, the Greek fathers of the early church employed the concept of *perichoresis*. This term was first used by Gregory of Naziansus to express the way in which the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ co-inherited without the integrity of either being diminished. In subsequent trinitarian theol-

helpful here: “The Spirit is the communion of Father and Son which . . . is a mutual act of adherence and love; the Spirit is the love and fount of love between Father and Son who eternally gives himself; the Spirit, as also ‘God from God,’ shares in the simple mode of divine existence in which he is what he might be thought to possess. Thus, . . . Augustine presents the Spirit as the agent identical to the act of communion between Father and Son” (Ayles, *Augustine*, 258).

²¹ Augustine’s process of thinking this through is complex, involving several important mutually dependent affirmations, and thus difficult to capture in a brief summary. First, given the classical tradition’s emphasis on divine simplicity, implying that God IS as God acts, for God *to be* is the same *as to be wise, to be loving, to be just*, and so forth (whereas for creatures being is not necessarily identical with the predicates attached to it). As Ayles explains it, “Lacking any accidents [in the Aristotelians sense], God must be any qualities we predicate of God” (Ayles, *Augustine*, 216). Second, as a consequence, God’s act of love must be identical with God’s being Love. Thus, the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, IS Love (since, for God to be is to be loving, to be Love). Third, the love that comes to us from God is God’s very self, God from God, Love from Love, and thus one of the divine persons, either the Son or the Spirit (because both are sent, while the Father is not sent). Fourth, Augustine identifies this divine person as being the Spirit, because the Spirit is the one that God sends to indwell us as Gift (John 15:26; Rom. 8:9) and as God’s own Love (e.g., Rom. 5:5: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”). Fifth, to say that the Spirit is Love is not to imply that the Spirit is impersonal or passive; rather, the Spirit is the active presence and activity of God, who loves us and draws us to participate in that love and thus into communion with God and others (e.g., Gal. 4:6: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”). Finally, it is helpful to note that this movement of God’s Love follows from the doctrines of the unity of inseparable divine operations and the pattern of divine appropriation in Scripture, such that the manifestation of God’s being and acting as Love in the created order follows the eternal, internal processions within God: thus, God’s Love comes to us *from* the Father *through* the Son and in the Spirit. For a detailed and nuanced discussion of Augustine’s theological exposition of the Spirit as Love, see Ayles, *Augustine*, chapter 10.

ogy, *perichoresis* came to depict the mutual indwelling, co-inhering, or inter-penetrating of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²² As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains it, *perichoresis* illustrates that the three persons “mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, ‘are’ what they are by relation to one another.”²³ According to T. F. Torrance, this move had deep and far reaching implications not only for the Christian understanding of God but also for the Christian understanding of the human person, with ripple effects influencing the development of conceptions of personhood. This new understanding of personhood distinguished Christian thinking from classical Greek ontology in which being (*ousia*) had been conceived as something static and unchanging, as for example in Aristotle’s distinction between substances and accidents and his restriction of relation to the latter category. Conversely, by admitting the category of relation into the concept of being the Cappadocians reconceived being itself (*ousia*) in dynamic and relational terms. In the new Christian understanding, “With God, Being and Communion are one and the same” and being could now be conceived as being-in-relation.²⁴

The New Testament speaks of Christians experiencing the *koinōnia* of the Holy Spirit, a word which is often translated ‘fellowship’ but also includes the idea of partnership or participation.²⁵ To experience the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is not just to commune with the Spirit; it is actually to participate in the Spirit and thereby to experience communion with God and each other. The same Spirit who proceeds as the mutual love between the Father and the Son, thus completing or perfecting the ecstatic and perichoretic relational unity of the Trinity, also unites Christian brothers and sisters together by drawing them to share in the divine Love, and thereby to partic-

²² On the historical development of *perichoresis*, see James. D. Gifford, Jr., *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer’s Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015; Kindle edition), chapter 3.

²³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1993).

²⁴ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 104.

²⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 290. For this theme in Paul, see Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 30-31.

ipate in God's own trinitarian life. In the economy of salvation the Spirit's mission corresponds with the latter's manner of procession (as Love and Gift) in the immanent Godhead;²⁶ so, the Spirit as the bond of love, brings believers into union with Christ (and thus the Father) and with one another.

By participating in the Spirit, Christians share together in the trinitarian love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Stan Grenz puts it, "Through the Spirit, we participate in the love that lies at the heart of the triune God himself."²⁷ Or as James Torrance exclaims, "By sharing in Jesus' life of communion with the Father in the Spirit, we are given to participate in the Son's eternal communion with the Father and hence in the trinitarian life of God."²⁸ Through their sharing and participating together in the love of the Trinity, Christian brothers and sisters have unity in the Spirit and the church community begins to reflect the communion of the triune God.²⁹ This is why the church cannot simply be a means to an end, simply an instrument deployed functionally to achieve God's mission. With Bonhoeffer (and against some missional writers), we must affirm that the church is both means and end; it exists simultaneously for the sake of its

²⁶ As John Webster states, it is important to remember that, "as with all God's external works, the economic mission of the Spirit refers back to the Spirit's antecedent deity and personhood, in which the mission has its ground. Missions follow processions; the character of the work is determined by the nature of the one who works." John Webster, "Illumination," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 329. For Augustine's affirmation of and dependence on this notion, see Ayres, *Augustine*, 181, 183.

²⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 484.

²⁸ James B. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation," in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (London: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House, 1989), 7. Quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 325.

²⁹ Reflecting on Acts 4:32 ("They had one soul and one heart toward the Lord"), Augustine writes: "[if] many souls through love are one soul, and many hearts are one heart, what does the very fountain of love do in the Father and the Son? . . . If, therefore, 'the love of God [which] has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' [Rom. 5:5] makes many souls one soul and many hearts one heart, how much more does [the Spirit] make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one light, one *principium*?" (Tractate 39.5; quoted in Ayres, *Augustine*, 257).

own community and for the sake of the world.³⁰ It exists for its own sake (as an end) because God's missional intention is to establish a new creation, a community of love and new life, in which people live in restored communion with God and one another.³¹ Yet, the church also exists for the world instrumentally (as a means), as the "church for others" because its Lord Jesus Christ, the "man for others," is conforming it to his image, which includes being-free-for-others and for the world.³² The church exists to experience and share the reconciliation and intimate communion that the gospel makes possible; everything it is and does bears witness to this.

In a sense, the church community images the Trinity and God's own trinitarian life informs human relationships in the church. Being bound together in the Spirit, we have become united in a way that is analogous (not identical) to the unity of Father and Son. As Jesus prayed to the Father, "My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are *in* me and I am *in* you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me" (John 17:21; emphasis added).³³ It is important for us to notice the "in" references in John as pointing to the mutual indwelling of the trinitarian persons. The Holy Spirit, who will be "in" Jesus' disciples, will place them "in Christ," who is "in" the Father.³⁴ Reflecting on this passage, Andreas Köstenberger and Scott Swain write,

The model for this unity is found in the Father and the Son, specifically, their mutual indwelling or perichoresis (17:21, 23, 26). Just as the unity of the Father and the Son is mani-

³⁰ See my discussion of this in my article "Bonhoeffer's Missional Ecclesiology," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 9 (2007-2008), 118-25.

³¹ Köstenberger and Swain write, "Communion in the Son's eternal life of love, glory and giving with the Father in the Spirit constitutes the ultimate blessing of the gospel." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 178.

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, vol. 8 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 501, 503.

³³ For a detailed exposition of the theme of participation in Paul, see Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 21-49.

³⁴ On the 'in' language in Paul, see Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 29.

fest in their mutual indwelling (14:10-11), so Jesus asks that the unity of the apostolic community will be manifest as they come to experience the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (cf. 14:17, 23). The effect of this new perichoretic communion will be that the world will ‘know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me’ (17:23).³⁵

The church does not reflect the image of the Trinity simply because it is a community that tries to imitate the triune relationships.³⁶ It reflects the image of the Trinity because it is comprised of individual human beings (exocentric persons-in-relation) whom the Spirit of God indwells and thereby frees to love and serve God and others genuinely.³⁷ Just as God created individual human beings in the divine image to be other-centred and to find their fulfilment in relationship with God and other human beings, so now God redeems and transforms human beings to cultivate relational fulfilment with God and others in the church community (though complete fulfilment awaits eschatological consummation).

One implication of the foregoing discussion of Christian life as participating together in the life of the Trinity is that Christian soteriology must be conceived relationally rather than merely indi-

³⁵ Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 176. Ladd writes, “The idiom of abiding is usually called mysticism, but it is difficult to define. There is a mutual abiding of the believer in Christ (16:56; 14:20, 21; 15:5; 17:21) and Christ in the believer (6:56; 14:20, 23; 15:5; 17:23, 26). This is analogous to the Son abiding in the Father (10:38; 14:10, 11, 20, 21; 17:21) and the Father abiding in the Son (10:38; 14:10, 11, 21; 17:21, 23). Once it is said that believers are in both the Father and the Son (17:21); and once it is said that both Father and Son will come to make their abode in believers (14:23).” George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 313-14. Quoted in Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation*, Kindle loc. 1342.

³⁶ What I am proposing is not ‘social’ trinitarianism *per se* (at least as usually understood), but a relational ontology of human personhood informed by trinitarian theology, which proceeds not simply from Trinity to human community but from Trinity through theological anthropology and soteriology to ecclesial community.

³⁷ I am drawing here on Wolfhart Pannenberg’s notion of exocentricity discussed in his *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

vidualistically.³⁸ Being in the church is thus intrinsically related to the believer's salvation; it is not just a secondary application—not because the church is an institutional dispenser of salvation but because it is the community in which reconciliation is embodied and transformation takes place. It is the place in which redeemed human persons practice and live out concretely their restored relationships with God and others. The church is the phenomenological manifestation of what God has achieved ontologically. As Bonhoeffer argues, Christian communion is not a human ideal that we strive to achieve; it is a divine reality established by Christ in which we participate by the Spirit.³⁹

2. *Basil and Other Patristic Writers on Participation*

In a recent book on ecclesiology, Robert Sherman writes, “It is the Holy Spirit who acts as the effective agent of the Father in communicating Christ’s benefits to us, *and* it is the Holy Spirit who acts as the effective agent in us to enable and strengthen our grateful human response.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Lesslie Newbigin once wrote, “The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. His work is to enable us to participate in Christ’s Sonship, to be one with him in his obedience to the Father. And only he can enable us to participate in, and thereby be the occasions of, his witness.”⁴¹ New Testament scholar Gordon Fee explains,

The participation in the *Holy Spirit* continually actualizes

³⁸ Robert Sherman writes, “The Triune God does not save by plucking individuals up to heaven or by us establishing a particular social agenda or political regime following Jesus’s example. Rather, salvation is the fruit of God’s embedding persons in a community called and sanctified (which is to say, set apart) by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to God’s own fulfillment of creation’s ultimate goal in the work of Jesus Christ.” Robert Sherman, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 41.

³⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, vol. 5 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burness, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 35-38.

⁴⁰ Sherman, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit*, 57.

⁴¹ Leslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 50. Quoted in Sexton, “A Confessing Trinitarian Theology,” 183.

that love and grace in the life of the believer and the believing community. The *κοινωνία* (*fellowship/participation in*) of the Holy Spirit is how the living God not only brings people into an intimate and abiding relationship with himself, as the God of all grace, but also causes them to participate in all the benefits of that grace and salvation—that is, by indwelling them in the present with his own presence and guaranteeing their final eschatological glory.⁴²

These statements represent well the patristic doctrine of participation.⁴³ In this final section, I will draw on patristic sources, especially Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*, to elucidate what it means to participate in the missional activity of the triune God.⁴⁴

In *De Spiritu Sancto*, Basil reflects theologically on two doxological statements that were being used in the church: (1) the doxology to God the Father with the Son *together with* the Holy Spirit; and (2) the doxology to God the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit. Basil seeks to defend the first statement against his interlocutors, who took issue with the term “with” but not with terms “through” and “in” used in the second statement.⁴⁵ Basil finds problematic both their rejection of the first statement and their reasons for affirming the second. They reject the first statement due to their tritheistic and subordinationist leanings (since “with” implies unity and equality of the Spirit with the Father and Son, which they rejected) and therefore they affirm the second statement but in a way that rejects the orthodox position. As Basil explains,

⁴² Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 592.

⁴³ E.g., “[T]he Son himself partakes of no one and that which is partaken from the Father is the Son. We partaking of the Son himself are said to partake of God. This is what Peter said: ‘That you might become partners of a divine nature’ [2 Pet. 1:4].” Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, Book 1.16; Quoted from *The Trinitarian Controversy*, trans., ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 79.

⁴⁴ As a guide to my reading of the primary text from Basil (*De Spiritu Sancto*; NPNF2-08: *Basil: Letters and Selected Works*) I have learned much from Dennis Ngien, *Gifted Response: The Triune God as the Causative Agent of our Responsive Worship* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 1-34.

⁴⁵ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* II.4 (NPNF2-08, p. 4).

By the term ‘of whom’ they wish to designate the Creator; by the term ‘through whom,’ the subordinate agent or instrument; by the term ‘in whom,’ or ‘in which,’ they mean to shew the time of place. The object of all this is that the Creator of the universe [the Son] may be regarded as of no higher dignity than an instrument, and that the Holy Spirit may appear to be adding to existing things nothing more than the contribution derived from place or time.⁴⁶

Basil sets out to defend the legitimacy of both statements and to clarify their true meaning in light of Scripture and the orthodox tradition. Against his opponents’ interpretation of the second statement, Basil shows that the prepositions ‘of,’ ‘through,’ and ‘in’ are each applied to all three persons of the Trinity in the Bible: ‘through’ and ‘in’ are applied to the Father, ‘of’ and ‘in’ are applied to the Son, and ‘of’ and ‘through’ are applied to the Spirit.⁴⁷ While the meanings associated with these prepositions in the second statement are in one important sense distinct, they emphatically do not refer to ontological separation of or subordination within the Trinity. This is because this statement refers not to the immanent divine essence but to the economic activity of God *ad extra* in drawing that which is not God to participate in God’s creative, redemptive, and perfecting activity.⁴⁸ Basil explains,

I say that the Church recognizes both uses, and deprecates neither as subversive of the other. For whenever we are contemplating the majesty of the nature of the Only Begotten, and the excellence of His dignity, we bear witness that the glory is *with* the Father; while on the other hand, whenever we bethink us of His bestowal on us of good gifts, and of our access to, and admission into, the household of God, we

⁴⁶ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* I.3 (NPNF2-08, p. 3).

⁴⁷ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* III.5; I.IV.6; I.V.7-12 (NPNF2-08, p. 4-8).

⁴⁸ The theological formula *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt* (“the external works of the Trinity are undivided”) expresses a theme that is common to the patristic writers and has its roots in the writings of Athanasius (Sherman, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit*, 41 fn. 4).

confess that this grace is effected for us through Him and by Him.⁴⁹

For Basil, both statements are valid; indeed, both are necessary to safeguard the unity of the economic trinity and the differentiation of the divine persons. As Dennis Ngien explains, the second statement (which includes ‘through’ and ‘in’) “admits of the way the Triune God deals with us in the economy of salvation,” while the first statement (‘with’) “admits of the immanent unity and close communion of the members of the Trinity.”⁵⁰ The second statement makes possible theological expressions of appropriation (e.g., the three articles of the Creed following Father, Son, and Spirit) while the first statement reminds us both of the oneness and equality of the Godhead and of the unity of the divine operations or activity *ad extra* (i.e., each of God’s acts is one act with a threefold pattern, where external missions follow internal processions). Thus, when used doxologically, Basil argues that “the one phrase ‘with whom’ is the proper one to be used in the ascription of glory, while the other, ‘through whom,’ is specially [sic] appropriate in giving thanks.”⁵¹ Basil’s analysis of the economic significance of the prepositions ‘of,’ ‘through,’ and ‘in’ fits the pattern we find in New Testament texts such as Titus 3:54b-6, “He [God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal *by* the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously *through* Jesus Christ our Savior,” and Ephesians 2:18, “*Through* [Christ], we both alike have access *to* the Father *in* the one Spirit” (emphasis added; notice that both of these statements concern God’s economic activity *ad extra*, either toward us or in drawing us to participate in the double movement of divine grace). Basil’s analysis is also consistent with common patristic formulations.⁵² Consider the following:

⁴⁹ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* VII.16 (NPNF2-08, p. 10).

⁵⁰ Ngien, *Gifted Response*, 2.

⁵¹ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* VII.16 (NPNF2-08, p. 10).

⁵² As Lewis Ayres reports, “pro-Nicene accounts of inseparable operation frequently move beyond asserting merely that each of the divine three is involved in every act, by emphasizing the Father works through the Son and in the Spirit. Such assertions both emphasize the fact of Trinitarian order, and they begin to specify how we may conceive of the three as being unified” (Ayres, *Augustine*, 70).

Irenaeus: One God, the Father, who is over all and through all and in us all. For over all is the Father; and through all is the Son, for by means of Him all things were made by the Father; and in us all is the Spirit, who cries Abba Father, and fashions man into the likeness of God.⁵³

Irenaeus: And for this reason the baptism of our regeneration proceeds through these three points: God the Father bestowing on us regeneration through His Son by the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁴

Gregory of Nyssa: But in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

Ambrose: And of the Father, too, you may rightly say “of Him,” for of Him was the operative Wisdom [the Son], Which of His own and the Father’s will gave being to all things which were not. “Through Him [the Son],” because all things were made through His Wisdom. “In Him [the Spirit],” because He is the Fount of substantial Life, in Whom we live and move and have our being.⁵⁶

Augustine: Not that the Father should be understood to have made one part of the whole creation and the Son another and the Holy Spirit yet another, but that each and every nature has been made simultaneously by the Father through the

⁵³ Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 5, trans., ed. Armistage Robinson (New York: MacMillan: 1920), 74.

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, *Demonstration*, 75.

⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter to Ablabius: On Not Three Gods* (NPNF2-05, p. 334).

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit* II.IX.92 (NPNF2-10, p. 126).

Son, in the Gift of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷

Having clarified the meaning of the second statement, including its proper relation to the first statement, we can now explore its implications for a theology of participation. For example, reflecting on the significance of Basil's thought for Christian worship, Dennis Ngien writes, "The saving import of the Spirit's deity lies in this: the Spirit places us in Christ so that our worship, as a participation in the Son's communion with the Father, is found pleasing. The believer, 'the place of the Spirit,' is enabled to offer doxology to God." In light of this, "The Church's worship is truly ours insofar as it participates in the Spirit's unitive movement through the only begotten to the Father."⁵⁸ As Basil asserts, "it is impossible to worship the Son, save by the Holy Ghost; impossible to call upon the Father, save by the Spirit of adoption."⁵⁹ Similarly, Nazianzus says, "[I]t is the Spirit in whom we worship and through whom we pray . . . Worshipping, then, and praying in the Spirit seem to me to be simply the Spirit presenting prayer and worship to himself."⁶⁰

Thus, as James Torrance argues, a thoroughly trinitarian theology of worship recognizes a "double movement of grace": first, "a God-humanward movement, from (*ek*) the Father, through (*dia*) the Son, in (*en*) the Spirit," and second, "a human Godward movement to the Father, through the Son in the Spirit."⁶¹ It is important to note that both of these movements occur within God; in the second movement we are not entirely passive but neither are we entirely active and we certainly do not initiate the human-Godward movement. Rather, by the Spirit we are placed "in" the Son so that we can participate in his efficacious offering. As Ngien points out, all of this depends upon God's triune soteriological activity achieved in time in

⁵⁷ Augustine, *De Vera Religione* 7.13 (*Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina 32.196; quoted in Ayres, *Augustine*, 62).

⁵⁸ Ngien, *Gifted Response*, 2.

⁵⁹ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* XI.27 (NPNF2-08, p. 18).

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations* 5.31.12, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 125-26

⁶¹ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 32.

the economy of salvation: “The divine descent presupposes the sending of the Son; the human ascent presupposes the homecoming of the Son to glory, but with our humanity eternally attached. The Spirit is the power of efficacy of both movements in us.”⁶² Thus, worship is the gift of participating by the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.⁶³ In fact, all of Christian being and doing must be understood theologically as participating in the triune God. For example, patristic writers speak in participatory terms about human knowledge of God, holiness, and spirituality. Consider the following representative quotations:

Basil: Thus the way of the knowledge of God lies from One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father, and conversely the natural Goodness and the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit.⁶⁴

Origen: As now by participation in the Son of God one is adopted as a son, and by participating in that wisdom which is in God is rendered wise, so also by participation in the Holy Spirit is a man rendered holy and spiritual. For it is one and the same thing to have a share in the Holy Spirit, which is (the Spirit) of the Father and the Son, since the nature of the Trinity is one and incorporeal.⁶⁵

Basil: Shining upon those that are cleansed from every spot, [the Spirit] makes them spiritual by fellowship with Himself. Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritu-

⁶² Ngien, *Gifted Response*, 31.

⁶³ This is a slightly modified version of James Torrance’s definition of worship (Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*, 30).

⁶⁴ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* XVIII.47 (NPNF2-08, p. 29).

⁶⁵ Origen, *On First Principles* IV.32 (ANF04, p. 379).

al, and send forth their grace to others.⁶⁶

With respect to participating in God's mission, I suggest that mission is the gift of participating by the Spirit in the Son's missionary activity of establishing the Kingdom of God the Father. Our mission is, first and foremost, God's mission; it is the *missio Dei*. Our mission is a participation in God's mission, made possible through our union with Christ in the Spirit. We minister and do mission in Christ by the Spirit; Christ is the true Minister and Missionary. All that we proclaim to the world and demonstrate with our lives as a living hermeneutic of the gospel comes *from* God the Father *through* the priestly and salvific mediation of Christ the Son *in* and *by* the new-creation power, illuminating guidance, and personal, fruit-bestowing presence of the Holy Spirit. Correspondingly, all that we offer and accomplish as we participate in God's mission (that is, all that *genuinely* participates in God's missional activity) we do *in* and *by* the Spirit through the sole priesthood of Christ (in which we participate as his kingdom of priests, purchased by his blood; Rev. 5:9-10) to the glory and honour of the Father, in obedience to "the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ" (Eph. 1:9).

III. Summary and Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the mission of God is properly grounded in the ecstatic, loving being and act of the Trinity. The argument can be summarized in four steps. First, God's mission to the world is rooted in God's love for the world. This idea is supported in scripture and in tradition, though it is not always explicit in the contemporary missional literature. Second, God's love for the world is itself rooted in God's own essential nature as Love. Third, through God's mission, we are lovingly drawn into union with Christ and one another by the Spirit, who is the very Love and Gift of God. Finally, by virtue of our union with Christ, we participate in God's mission. This involves a threefold economic pattern of human participation in

⁶⁶ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* IX.23 (NPNF2-08, p. 15).

divine activity, a double movement of grace that takes place in Christ by the Spirit. The God-humanward movement proceeds from the Father through the Son in/by the Spirit, while the human-Godward movement takes place in/by the Spirit through the Son to the Father.

While I do not have the space to develop the many practical implications this theological framework has for the church, some of these include: (a) the importance of spiritual discernment (and spiritual direction) for pastoral ministry, church leadership, and missional engagement; (b) the importance of the church's immersion in the biblical narrative, indwelling the text so as to embody its patterns and see the world through it (as Gorman suggests, the church must 'become' the gospel; *Gorman, Becoming the Gospel*); (c) due attention to discipleship as being/becoming and doing (thus a grace-based, holistic character ethics), since true missional witness calls the church to be and become that which it proclaims and does "in Christ" (e.g., Matt. 5:13-16); (d) a renewal of worship and liturgy shaped by the trinitarian *patterns* outlined in this article (not just dropping the word 'Trinity' here and there, or simply referring to Father, Son, and Spirit; thus the *structure* of our songs, prayers, and sermons must be trinitarian, not just the verbal content), informed by the whole of scripture, and articulated contextually and missionally; (e) a renewed theology of vocation, conceived missionally within a participatory trinitarian framework, so that the *whole people* of God can bear witness of the *whole gospel* to the *whole world*; and (f) a deeper understanding and outworking of a sacramental approach to theology, ecclesiology, and mission, within which the church is seen to be the sacramental presence of God in the world (this, in turn, has implications for how we understand and practice preaching, worship, the sacraments, Christian ministry and service within the church, solidarity with the suffering and marginalized, social action and community engagement, and so forth; in short, we are participating concretely in something God is mysteriously and graciously initiating, sustaining, and completing; e.g., Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; 3:12; 4:8-9).

Impassible Yet Impassioned: The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility in Conversation with the Noachian Deluge of Genesis

Dustin G. Burlet*

Introduction

Scripture is clear that the Noachian Deluge was directly related to the sin of humanity and that human beings had the effect of corrupting the (good) earth that God had created, thereby leading him to destroy it, along with all flesh (Gen 6:5, 11–13, 17).¹ The extreme, catastrophic nature of the flood and the severity surrounding the Deluge event as a whole, raise a number of theological questions, many of which concern the nature and character of God.² Such queries include the quandary of how the goodness, kindness, and mercy of the Creator can effectively intersect with and correlate/complement his justice, wrath, and judgment. Other questions pertain to God’s ‘thoughts’ concerning the flood itself. Would God have been angry, sad, or even indifferent at the devastation that he unleashed upon humanity? Kenneth A. Matthews asserts that Gen 6:6 “provides a

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¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters, Theological Explorations for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5, 37, 42; John Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 307–08. I will return to this point later on in this paper.

² For more information on the moral, homiletic, eschatological, and ecological nature of the literary traditions related to Noah, the ark, and the flood in early Christian literature, see Mark Wilson, “Noah, The Ark, and the Flood in Early Christian Literature,” *Scriptura* 113 (2014): 1–12.

window into the heart of the troubled Creator.”³ Walter Brueggemann states that Gen 6:6 “shows us the deep pathos of God. God is not angered but grieved. He is not enraged but saddened. God does not stand over against but with his creation.”⁴

This paper will seek to adjudicate these assertions through exploring the time-honored but hotly debated doctrine of the impassibility of God alongside a study of Gen 6:6–7 within its immediate and canonical context.⁵ The paper itself will be divided into two sections and will seek to answer two questions. One, how may a clear understanding of divine impassibility shed light on the Genesis flood? Two, how may a clear understanding of the Genesis flood shed light on our understanding of divine impassibility?

Since my goal is a better understanding of the doctrine of divine impassibility and since much of the confusion and debate that surrounds divine impassibility hinges upon *a priori* assumptions and the definition of impassibility,⁶ I will attempt to delineate clearly what impassibility means, historically and contemporarily, prior to discussing the Genesis text. The following discussion of this matter, which will comprise section one of this paper, will review the classic definition of impassibility, how it has been challenged and altered in some contemporary works, such as that of Jürgen Moltmann, and how the definition and understanding of the doctrine of divine impassibility is complicated by its relationship to various other attributes of

³ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B. & H., 1996), 339.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 77. Cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 144–45 and Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 119.

⁵ Some of the wording/phrasing of this sentence has been derived from John B. Song, “An Exploration of Novatian’s Hermeneutic on Divine Impassibility and God’s Emotions in Light of Modern Concerns,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012): 3.

⁶ Some of the wording/phrasing of this sentence has been derived from Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 3, 5. See too Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 93. Richard E. Creel provides no less than eight different ways of defining the term impassibility. Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 9–10.

God. The so-called ‘Hellenization hypothesis’ will also be addressed at length. Although the relationship between God the Father’s impassibility and Christ’s passion demands careful trinitarian reflection, this paper shall only engage that debate secondarily.⁷

The Impassibility of God — General Orientation

As noted above, divine impassibility is the source of much theological confusion, consternation, and debate.⁸ This is, perhaps, in large part due to unclear definitions. Traditionally, the doctrine of divine impassibility has meant that God is not and cannot be changed or affected by anything that is external to himself or outside of his being.⁹ This does not mean that God is lacking affection or that God does not have emotions such as love, joy, jealousy, or grief, among others,¹⁰

⁷ Ronald S. Baines, et al., eds. *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical, Classical, & Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015) and Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2012) well address this matter. Concerning open theism, particularly as it pertains to Gen 6:6, see Walter A. Maier III, “Does God ‘Repent’ or Change His Mind?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 68 (2004): 127–43.

⁸ Walton, *Genesis*, 308. Indeed, “the doctrine of divine impassibility is one of the most challenging of all of the attributes of God to understand, assess, and develop.” Lister, *God is Impassible*, 17.

⁹ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 130. Do note though that certain individuals maintain that in certain respects God’s passibility or impassibility is “within the power of his own choosing, so that, whereas he is impassible in all respects in that he could prevent himself from being changed by any outside force, he could choose to make himself passible in certain respects” such as making himself “emotionally vulnerable to the sins and sufferings of his creatures.” Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 12.

¹⁰ Notable examples include: (1) anger (Deut 9:22; Ps 7:11; Rom 1:18), (2) compassion (Judg 2:18; Deut 32:36; Ps 135:14), (3) grief (Gen 6:6; Ps 78:40), (4) hate (Ps 5:5; 11:5; Prov 6:16), (5) jealousy (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Josh 24:19), (6) joy (Isa 62:5; Jer 32:41; Zeph 3:17), (7) laughter (Psa 2:4; 37:13; Prov 1:26), and (8) love (Jer 31:3; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). See Joseph R. Nally, “God’s Impassibility and Feelings,” 1; cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 165–66.

for he clearly does; indeed, they even define his character.¹¹ Rather, as J. I. Packer puts it, what divine impassibility means is:

Not impassivity, unconcern, and impersonal detachment in the face of the creation. Not inability or unwillingness to empathize with human pain and grief. It means simply that God’s experiences do not come upon him as ours come upon us. His are foreknown, willed, and chosen by himself, and are not involuntary surprises forced on him from outside, apart from his own decision, in the way that ours regularly are.¹²

Divine impassibility has traditionally been considered as comprising four different aspects, namely nature, will, knowledge, and feelings; that is, though each of these elements comprise what is meant by divine impassibility, the question is not whether God is passible or impassible but a choice among sixteen permutations. As Richard E. Creel states, “consider the possibilities, using ‘i’ to stand for impassible, ‘p’ to stand for passible, ‘N’ to stand for ‘in nature,’ ‘W’ to stand for ‘in will,’ ‘K’ to stand for ‘in knowledge’ and ‘F’ to stand for ‘in feeling.’”¹³

¹¹ While God does condescend himself in order to accommodate himself to the reader’s understanding, it is inappropriate to say that the language of God and emotions is “only a metaphor.” The question we must ask is, “what does the metaphor point to?” Tremper Longman III, *Genesis, The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 115; cf. Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 193–94 and 285, and Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 130. See too Anne K. Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch*, Siphut 12: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

¹² J. I. Packer, “What Do You Mean When You Say God?,” *Christianity Today* 30 (1986): 31.

¹³ Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 11–12. See too Amuluche Gregory Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God: On the Classical, Modern-Western and Third World Struggles to Harmonise the Incompatible Attributes of the Trinitarian God*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 95 (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH, 1995): 366–69ff.

TABLE ONE¹⁴

N	W	K	F
i	i	i	i
p	i	i	i
i	p	i	i
i	i	p	i
i	i	i	p
p	p	i	i
p	i	p	i
p	i	i	p
i	p	p	i
i	i	p	p
i	p	i	p
p	p	p	i
p	p	i	p
p	i	p	p
i	p	p	p
p	p	p	p

Pointedly, Mark Baddeley argues that divine impassibility is a key component of what makes the gospel such good news.¹⁵ This is because the doctrine of the impassibility of God helps to vindicate the Christian belief that God acts out of love and in grace and mercy because it is within his very being, i.e., his character/nature, to do so.¹⁶ In other words, a key component of the traditional definition of divine impassibility is that God is not persuaded or motivated to be gracious, kind, benevolent, and merciful toward humanity by necessity, compulsion, or force. That is to say, it is because God is eternally, unchangeably, and unshakably *compassionate in his very being* that his ‘compassions’ are aroused whenever he witnesses human

¹⁴ Chart derived in full from Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 12.

¹⁵ Mark Baddeley, “Does God Feel Our Pain?” *The Briefing* 384 (2010): 12.

¹⁶ See Baddeley, “Does God Feel Our Pain?” 12–17.

suffering. He is not, therefore, required to behave in the way some contemporary scholars claim, as will be discussed below.¹⁷

Although divine impassibility was accepted virtually as axiomatic in Christian theology from the early Church Fathers until the latter end of the nineteenth century,¹⁸ rejection of this ancient doctrine has become a theological commonplace. Impassibility is now the so-called “ugly duckling”¹⁹ in theology today, as many modern theologians now champion divine passibility—a God who can suffer with human beings.²⁰ What has precipitated such a “seismic” shift?²¹ Arguably, the largest catalyst for this change has arisen out of the carnage and mayhem of World War I and II and the immense amount of human suffering that people witnessed in those times. Such tragedy forced many people to reflect on the theology of a suffering God and the doctrine of divine impassibility. Perhaps a snippet from Elie Wiesel’s *Night* can help to explain the situation:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. “Where is God? Where is he?” someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, “Where is God now?” And I heard a voice in myself

¹⁷ Impassibility, therefore, establishes that God relates to us in a fully emotional way, grounded in his own nature. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 131. See too J. I. Packer, “Theism for Our Time,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, Festschrift for D. Broughton Knox, ed. Peter T. O’Brien and David G. Peterson, 1–23 (Homebush West: Anzea, 1986), 7–8, 16–17; and D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15th Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 236–37.

¹⁸ Richard Bauckham, “‘Only the Suffering God Can Help’. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology,” *Themelios* 9.3 (1984): 6; Gloria L. Schabb, *The Creative Suffering of the Triune God: An Evolutionary Theory*, Academy Series (New York, NY: Oxford, 2007), 4.

¹⁹ Baddeley, “Does God Feel Our Pain?” 17.

²⁰ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 30; Amos Winarto Oei, “The Impassible God Who ‘Cried,’” *Themelios* 41.2 (2016): 238; Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility, and Corporeality*, Studies in Philosophical Theology (The Hague, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1992), 1.

²¹ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 30.

answer: “Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows.”²²

Moltmann clearly commends to his readers the theology of a suffering God in his commentary of the atrocity noted above:

Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference.²³

Elsewhere, in his painful search for a God “after Auschwitz,”²⁴ Moltmann said:

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man [sic]. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has not tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being. Aristotle’s God cannot love; he can only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of his perfection and

²² Originally published in 1956, *Night* is about Wiesel’s experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944–1945. See Lister, *God is Impossible*, 29. For more information concerning the decline of the doctrine of divine impassibility in relationship to World War I and II, see Sarot, *God*, 1–3 and Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009), 4–10.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Boden (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974), 274. NB: For a summary of the (many and notable) issues that are involved in Moltmann’s use of Wiesel, including factual inconsistencies, see Lister, *God is Impossible*, 30.

²⁴ Oei, “The Impossible God,” 239, quoting Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wende, “The Crucified God Yesterday and Today: 1972–2002,” in *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 71.

beauty, and in this way draw them to him. The “unmoved Mover” is a “loveless Beloved.”²⁵

Regrettably (and, mistakenly, as I will argue), a good number of contemporary theologians, following Moltmann and others like him, take divine impassibility to mean that God has no emotional capacity and no interest in his creation; that is, they equate divine impassibility with divine indifference.²⁶ As noted above, however, there is no need to redefine divine impassibility for such assertions/conclusions are not necessary inferences of the traditional definition of divine impassibility.

Not insignificantly, according to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which will be discussed shortly, the doctrine of the impassibility of God is intrinsically related to other divine attributes, such as God’s immutability, as well as the question of how best to understand, reconcile, and balance the transcendence and immanence of God.²⁷ What then is the distinction between divine immutability and impassibility? The doctrine of divine immutability is the doctrine that God is “characteristically changeless in his character.”²⁸ An immutable being is necessarily impassible, i.e., not subject to change or influence by external factors.²⁹ In this way, divine immutability requires divine impassibility.³⁰ An impassible being, however, is not necessarily immutable—it might change itself. Conversely, a passible being could not be immutable, but a mutable being might be impassible for it may only be subject to changes from within—not

²⁵ Oei, “The Impassible God,” 239, quoting Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 222.

²⁶ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 30; cf. Longman, *Genesis*, 115–16 and D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 167.

²⁷ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 19.

²⁸ Bird maintains that the tautology is deliberate, i.e., Scripture itself is clear in urging our Christian belief in God’s changelessness as a constituent element of his person. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 129. Support for this doctrine may be found in Num 23:19; Pss 55:19, 102:26–28; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17; 1 John 1:5. For more information, see Grudem, *Theology*, 163–64. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 304–08, and Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology II: God Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2003), 74–93.

²⁹ Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 11.

³⁰ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 130; cf. Geisler, *Theology*, 115.

externally. Alongside this (according to the traditional definitions, at least) divine impassibility was considered to be a crucial attribute of divine perfection.³¹ Thus, in answer to the question, “Does God have feelings?” the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (2.1 - Of God, and of the Holy Trinity) states:

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.³²

Adolf Harnack, however, proposed that the early Church Fathers (and, therefore, later confessions of faith) were “injudiciously influenced by Hellenistic philosophy.”³³ In sum, “The Hellenization hypothesis claims that the Fathers, even if unintentionally, allowed the dynamic revelation of God in Scripture to become overwhelmed by and subjugated to the extrabiblical influences of Hellenistic philosophy.”³⁴ Notably, the doctrine of divine impassibility is often put forward as evidence of this deficiency.³⁵

³¹ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 3; Geisler, *Theology*, 113–14.

³² christianityinview.com/downloads/westminstercof.pdf. With respect to “passions,” as was noted above, God’s emotions are rooted in his nature and flow from his incorruptibility. Nally, “Feelings,” 1.

³³ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 5. Another individual states “the doctrine of God . . . have [sic] suffered because of the lack of caution which theologians in every age have shown in their too ready acceptance of the gifts which the Greeks have brought.” T. E. Pollard, “The Impassibility of God,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8 (1955): 353; cf. Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 24, 61 and Lister, *God is Impassible*, 20–21.

³⁴ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 20; cf. Francis F. House, “The Barrier of Impassibility,” *Theology* 83 (1980): 413.

In order to critique to this idea effectively, it is necessary to ascertain the origins of impassibility. To do this, I will trace the Greek concept of *apatheia* and explore concerns in Greek philosophy in attributing emotions to a perfect deity from the pre-Socratic thinkers until the time of Plato, Aristotle, and the Epicureans/Stoics.³⁶

The Impassibility of God — Greek Philosophical Foundations

Apatheia, a concept of negation, connotes “noninfluenceability,” i.e., the state of being beyond influence, that is, of not being subject to any external force(s).³⁷ This idea was further conceived of by Greek thinkers in two distinct forms: (1) intrinsic noninfluenceability, and (2) acquired noninfluenceability, the former being attributed mainly to God/divine beings, the latter predominantly being used by the Stoics to talk about a learned moral ideal that was necessary for “the human attainment of moral perfection.”³⁸

The attribution of intrinsic *apatheia*, or noninfluenceability, leads implicitly to the confirmation of divine immutability, simplicity/indivisibility, incorporeality/invisibility, self-sufficiency, and transcendence, for when a being is “simple, immutable, incorporeal and self-sufficient the ancient Greeks usually attribute intrinsic *apatheia* to it.”³⁹

In this way, *apatheia* stands in contrast to: (a) *paschein*, which,

³⁵ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 21. See too Carson, *How Long O Lord?*, 166–67.

³⁶ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 4, 5, 7. Indeed, “the exact scope of the problem of divine impassibility becomes definitely more understandable when it is perceived in the light of the historical development of the concept of *apatheia*, out of which it arose.” Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 26.

³⁷ See Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 27; cf. Robert S. Franks, “Passibility and Impassibility,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 9:658–60 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 658.

³⁸ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 27. To the Stoics, *apatheia* was the “eradication of unwanted emotions, a life free of emotional disturbances.” Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29. In this way, the Stoics indeed affirmed “desirable” emotions, i.e., emotions that were “ordered by reason,” such as joy, caution, wishing, etc. Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 6.

³⁹ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 27–28. Nnamani also includes information (on the same two pages) on how Latin authors like Cicero and the Church Fathers rendered the Greek’s concept of *apatheia*.

in its most general ancient Greek sense, signifies any sort of influence on a personal being/subject that is caused by an external force; (b) *pathos*, which was mainly used to denote a “negative or positive, short-lived or ongoing inner feeling or condition of the soul, that was initiated by an external force”⁴⁰; and, (c) *pathetikos* and *pathetos*, which were used to “qualify the state of being beyond influence or being able to feel pain and suffering.”⁴¹ In brief, though the idea of *apatheia* existed among pre-Socratic thinkers such as Xenophanes, Empedocles, and Melissos of Samos, and though the attribution of an intrinsic *apatheia* (noninfluenceability) to the ‘highest ranking’ deity seems to be implicit within the work of Plato, it was only in the writings of Aristotle that the concept developed more fully.⁴²

Within his treatises on *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle maintained that “there must be an immortal, unchanging being, ultimately responsible for all wholeness and orderliness in the sensible world.”⁴³ To put it another way, Aristotle reasoned that there is a singular initiator of all existence and motion who, though enabling/empowering motion to occur, remained altogether outside the sphere of motion, being itself unmoved, i.e., an unmoved prime mover. Although one may assert that the universe itself chose to begin the process of replication, “one cannot, however, conclude from this that such a cause is infinite. One can affirm only that there was a cause sufficient to account for the effect.”⁴⁴

Even so, for the universe to cause itself into existence is an impossibility, logically speaking, for the will, cause, force, or entity that began the initiation would have to actually be outside of the universe

⁴⁰ Although the early Church Fathers used *pathos* solely to denote suffering, the rest of antiquity rarely used it in such a restricted sense. Note: it was the Greek’s philosophic custom to attribute *pathos* to the lower gods and *apatheia* to the supreme God. Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 26–28.

⁴¹ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 26–27.

⁴² Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 26–27. Interestingly, Plato was concerned about the possibility of change, i.e., impassibility/immutability, within a perfect being, even if the change was self-initiated, for he maintained that something that was already in a state of perfection can only change for the worse and never for the better. See Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 6.

⁴³ Joe Sachs, “Aristotle: Metaphysics,” *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 1. See book 8 of *Physics* and book 12 of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

⁴⁴ Erickson, *Theology*, 186.

for it would be acting upon the universe. Thus, this initiator, force, will, or entity would, in fact, actually be the unmoved prime mover – not the universe.⁴⁵ Aristotle, therefore, argued for a singular unmoved primary mover that was “wholly self-moved” and “the origin and cause of all actualization.”⁴⁶

Alongside this, Aristotle maintained that if thing A (i.e., an object or being) was moved or ‘forced’ by thing B (i.e., something external to thing A) in a way that was contrary to thing A’s ‘natural constitution’ – that movement was said to be ‘violent.’⁴⁷ In addition to this, any ‘change’ to thing A or thing B was characterized by Aristotle as ‘perishing’ and ‘becoming.’⁴⁸ In this way, we can begin to see implications concerning the doctrine of divine impassibility, for if God can be acted upon or ‘forced’ to emotive or respond to the universe in a particular way, then does not God become the victim of the world?⁴⁹ Is he not then constrained by, rather than independent of, its power/influence?⁵⁰

Within Aristotelian metaphysics, therefore, divine impassibility is identical to divine immutability. By implication, this means: (1) Aristotle’s God cannot and does not show any feeling of love to his

⁴⁵ See James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 15–19 and James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 25–46.

⁴⁶ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 5. Aristotle concludes *Metaphysics*, Book Λ, with a quotation from the *Iliad*: “The rule of many is not good; one ruler let there be;” cf. Harry A. Wolfson, “The Plurality of Immovable Movers in Aristotle and Averroës,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 233–53.

⁴⁷ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 5. The term ‘violent,’ as it is used by Aristotle, is not to be understood in our modern sense of the word. Rather, ‘natural’ motion is whatever an object does *naturally*, without being forced. An object at rest, like a book lying on the table, *naturally* remains at rest and does not move unless a force is acted upon it. Pushing a book along a table or lifting a book are, therefore, ‘violent’ and not ‘natural’ movements. See J. L. Stanbrough, “Aristotle’s View on Motion,” 1.

⁴⁸ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 5.

⁴⁹ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 5.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 131. Indeed, “He is absolute, infinite, exalted, active, impassible, transcendent, but in all this He is the one who loves in freedom, the one who is free in His love, and therefore not His own prisoner. He is all this as the Lord, and in such a way that He embraces the opposites of these concepts even while He is superior to them.” Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 115.

creatures.⁵¹ Rather, in his “static perfection,” God “moves the world only through the love that finite beings feel for Him”⁵²; (2) Humanity cannot be ‘friends with God’ for God does not and cannot love us as we love him.⁵³ That being said, however, Aristotelian *apatheia* does not exclude the possibility of God being ‘happy.’ Indeed, God’s ‘blessedness’ is the highest good but it is founded on the condition that such a divine feeling must be eternal so as not to entail any change.⁵⁴ Thus, ‘God’s bliss’ will always surpass human happiness due to its eternal nature.⁵⁵

Lastly, though the caricature of Stoicism is of an ‘apathetic’ deity, the idea that God is in an “impassive and unperturbed state of bliss” is more Epicurean than Stoic.⁵⁶ For Epicureans, “the blessed and immortal nature knows no trouble itself nor causes trouble to any other, so that it is never constrained by anger or favor. For all such things exist only in the weak.”⁵⁷ Alongside this, as was noted above, though the Stoic emphasis is on human and not divine *apatheia*,⁵⁸ the Stoic’s notion of *apatheia* as an “ethical ideal” seems to originate from a desire to imitate divine *apatheia*.⁵⁹ Consequently, the negation of ‘passions’ in God could be seen as “strengthening the urge among philosophers to suppress or eliminate all passions and emotions in human beings.”⁶⁰

With the above overview in mind, we will now examine the question of the Hellenization hypothesis and the Patristic views on divine impassibility.

⁵¹ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 30.

⁵² Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 30.

⁵³ See Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 29–30.

⁵⁴ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 30.

⁵⁵ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 30.

⁵⁶ Song, “Novatian’s Hermeneutic,” 6.

⁵⁷ See Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 24.

⁵⁸ Notably, Philo never attributed *apatheia* to God. For more information, see Lister, *God is Impassible*, 60.

⁵⁹ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 32, 38

⁶⁰ Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 38

The Impassibility of God — The Church Fathers

Divine impassibility was discussed (and held to be a cardinal belief) by a number of Church Fathers, both early and medieval.⁶¹ If the Hellenization hypothesis is correct, however, it would drastically undermine the value of Patristic reflection on divine impassibility.⁶² However, it is overly simplistic to say that the Church Fathers merely adopted “the Greek view,” for ample diversity existed in Hellenistic philosophy, as demonstrated above. In addition to this, the Fathers regularly deferred to the authority of Scripture and often went against the prevailing philosophical grain.⁶³ We will return to this point later on. Also, none of the philosophical systems ever espoused “a personal, creator, deity that is marked by absolute emotional detachment from his creation.”⁶⁴ As such, the Church Fathers would have had no precedent for adhering to such an erroneous belief, either from Greek philosophy or from Scripture.

The following section will delineate three models of the Patristic theologians, namely the qualified-impassibility model, the extreme-impassibility model, and the extreme-passibility model, with the vast majority of the Church Fathers adhering to the first model. Though space forbids even a sampling of quotations with respect to their beliefs about impassibility, most of the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers, such as the Christian martyr Ignatius (d. ca. 110 A.D.), Theophilus of Antioch (late second century A.D.), church theologian/bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus (ca. 130–200 A.D.), renowned anti-Marcionite (and probable coiner of the term “Trinity”) Tertullian (ca. 160–225 A.D.), Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254 A.D.),

⁶¹ Geisler, *Theology*, 115. See too Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 59.

⁶² Lister, *God is Impassible*, 21.

⁶³ For more information, see Oei, “The Impassible God,” 240; Lister, *God is Impassible*, 60–63 and 104–06; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, *Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93.

⁶⁴ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 61.

⁶⁵ Although Gregory devoted his *Ad Theopompum* to the study of this doctrine, it would take more than fifteen centuries for the next monograph to appear, namely Marshall Randles’ *The Blessed God* (London, C. H. Kelly, 1900). A “peak of interest in the subject” is indicated by the next major work on the subject, J. K. Mozley, *The*

and Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213–270 A.D.), his disciple,⁶⁵ as well as Lactantius (ca. 250–325 A.D), tutor to Constantine’s son⁶⁶ all affirmed the impassibility of God and the passionate involvement of God in creation; a view that is known as the “qualified-impassibility model.”⁶⁷

In contrast, only a few of the earliest Church Fathers, namely Justin Martyr (ca. 100–165 A.D.) and Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 A.D.), seem to propose a more “unmitigated notion of divine impassibility—one that tilted in a hyper-transcendent direction,” which proved “an impediment to accounting for divine involvement with creation.”⁶⁸ This model is known as the “extreme-impassibility model.” The last model, the “extreme passibility model” need not detain us, mostly due to its connection with the patripassian controversy.⁶⁹ Notably, no early Church Fathers subscribed to this view.

Although the purpose of this paper is not to give an exhaustive account of the doctrine of divine impassibility throughout the history of Christendom, a number of other Church Fathers also warrant mention, all of whom subscribed to the “qualified impassibility model.” These Fathers include Athanasius (ca. 296–373 A.D.), one of the key players in the Arian controversy, Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–389 A.D.), known for his contributions to the development of orthodox

Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926). For more details, see Sarot, *God*, 1 and Bauckham, “Only the Suffering God Can Help,” 6.

⁶⁶ For more information on the early Church Fathers, I recommend Bryan M. Lifestin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016). See Lister, *God is Impassible*, 66–81 as well for more information on the specific individuals mentioned.

⁶⁷ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 66; cf. Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, 366–69.

⁶⁸ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 95. NB: Christological heresies such as Docetism, Arianism, and Nestorianism all belong under this heading. For more information, see James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, eds. *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 143.

⁶⁹ Patripassianism is the claim that the Father was identical with the Son and suffered on the cross. According to Tertullian and Hippolytus, alleged patripassianists, such as Noetus, Praxeas, and Callistus, taught that the Father suffered on the cross because of their prior commitment to a modalistic theology. For more information, see Lister, *God is Impassible*, 100; cf. Sarot, *God*, 1 who also discusses theopaschitism.

Trinitarian doctrine, Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395 A.D.), another one of the Cappadocian Fathers, renowned theologian and bishop of Hippo, Augustine (354–430 A.D.) and, Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444 A.D.).⁷⁰

Thus, in the main, the Patristic evidence with respect to divine impassibility, bears out G. L. Prestige’s well-known finding, outlined below:

It is clear that impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that He surveys existence with Epicurean impassivity from the shelter of a metaphysical insulation, but that His will is determined from within instead of being swayed from without . . . if it were possible to admit that the impulse was wrung from Him either by the needs or by the claims of His creation, and that thus whether by pity or by justice His hand was forced, He could no longer be represented as absolute; He would be dependent on the created universe and thus at best only in possession of concurrent power.⁷¹

In sum, although the Fathers were able to make good use of the “conceptual tools” of Greek philosophy (i.e., that they were able to use the techniques of the learning of the day to elaborate on Christian truth)⁷² they were also more than capable of “molding the conceptual content” to fit a Scripturally determined worldview.⁷³

In other words, while the early Church Fathers did use words and concepts taken from philosophy, they did so primarily: (a) to show that biblical revelation was compatible with some of what philosophy taught (evangelism); (b) to defend Christianity against philosophical attacks (apologetics); and (c) to demonstrate that Christi-

⁷⁰ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 90, 66. See too Baines et al., eds., *Confessing the Impassible God*.

⁷¹ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), 7.

⁷² Oei, “The Impassible God,” 241. By this I mean that they were able to leverage ‘touch stone’ beliefs.

⁷³ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 105; cf. Carson, *How Long O Lord?*, 166.

anity actually provided better philosophical answers to the questions at hand (both apologetics and evangelism).⁷⁴ Paul Helm put it well in saying that though Greek philosophy might have provided “the conceptual tool for developing the doctrine of divine impassibility . . . it does not follow that what doctrine results is derived not from Scripture but from philosophy.”⁷⁵ Thus, it may be said that much of the misreading of the early Fathers by modern theologians (including the Hellenization charge) is founded upon the (erroneous) notion that to be impassible is to be devoid of emotion.⁷⁶ The Patristic legacy is not as captive to Greek philosophy as some theologians would seem to suggest.⁷⁷ Next, we will briefly examine a number of post-Patristic figures on divine impassibility.

The Impassibility of God — Medieval-Post-Reformation Eras

The historical overview delineated here can afford to be much briefer than in the previous section because, up until the modern era, most of the formulations of divine impassibility continued in accordance to the tradition that was established during Patristic times.⁷⁸

Both Anselm (ca. 1033–1109 A.D.) and Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274 A.D.), wished to affirm “qualified impassibility” (i.e., a

⁷⁴ Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 108. See too Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 90–91. Admittedly, however, impassibility did become core doctrine, so an accommodation for apologetics was creedal. I am indebted to Dr. Mark J. Boda for this thought and comment and regret that I cannot elaborate on it further in this article.

⁷⁵ Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford, Clarendon: 1988), 135. One may still question, “but is this the God we would encounter with Scripture alone? Or is there no such thing as Scripture alone?” For more information, see Baines, *Confessing the Impassibility of God*, 89–176. I thank Dr. Mark J. Boda for raising this query.

⁷⁶ Oei, “The Impassible God,” 239, 242. Indeed, one may argue that “contemporary theologians have not come to the Bible and the Fathers philosophically neutral, but rather already convinced that an impassible and immutable God [as defined and understood in the contemporary sense] will not do. Thus, their interpretation of . . . the Fathers is driven, at least in part, by an already preconceived understanding of the philosophical issues involved and the philosophical answers that must be given.” See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 84; cf. House, “Impassibility,” 413.

⁷⁷ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 93; Lister, *God is Impassible*, 60–63, 101–06.

⁷⁸ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 107.

sense of “divine passion” alongside their support of divine impassibility).⁷⁹ The same thing could be said with respect to Martin Luther (1483–1546 A.D.), John Calvin (1509–1564 A.D.),⁸⁰ and many of the great Post-Reformation puritans, such as Stephen Charnock (1628–1680 A.D.) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758 A.D.).⁸¹ Suffice it to say, none of the above theologians teach an equivalent of modern passibilism, nor did an “alien philosophical construct” (i.e., Hellenization) hold them captive.⁸² To conclude, in the words of Richard A. Muller:

The Reformed interpretation of the divine affections was in the interest, not of a metaphysical structure, but of a consistent view of the way God relates to the human race. The method by which the interpretation was achieved, moreover, reflects the general hermeneutics of that era: the argument did not consist in the direct application of a philosophical themes of transcendence or immutability to a particular biblical text, but in a recourse to the general principles of the *analogia fidei* and *scriptura sui interpres* by drawing conclusions from the juxtaposition of biblical texts.⁸³

Given that the purpose of this paper is to answer two questions—(1) how may a clear understanding of divine impassibility shed light on the Genesis flood? And (2), how may a clear understanding of the Genesis flood shed light on our understanding of divine impassibility—we are now in a position to study divine impassibility with an increased focus on its biblical/exegetical components in light of the Noachian Deluge of Genesis.

⁷⁹ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 112. See too Oei, “The Impassible God,” 242–43.

⁸⁰ Oei, “The Impassible God,” 243–44.

⁸¹ Lister, *God is Impassible*, 112–21 and Geisler, *Theology*, 118–21.

⁸² Lister, *God is Impassible*, 121–22.

⁸³ Richard A. Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes: Vol 3 of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 588–89.

The Noachian Deluge — General Orientation

In light of the doctrine of divine impassibility, would God have been angry, sad, or even indifferent at the devastation that he unleashed upon humanity? This question can only be answered through a focused study of Gen 6:6–7 within its immediate and canonical context, the details of which will comprise the remainder of this paper. With respect to genre, the account of the Noachian Deluge, as it stands within Genesis 6–9, may be described as “theological history.”⁸⁴

Put simply, stories (i.e., narratives) help us to map reality and they affect/influence our values and our perceptions of morality and ethics.⁸⁵ In this way, the general function of primeval history, Genesis 1–11,⁸⁶ was to shape what we would call in contemporary terms the Hebrew worldview⁸⁷ and to cultivate the principles that underlay their understanding of proper relationships: (1) God to the universe; (2) humanity to God; (3) humanity to God’s creation; (4) humanity to humanity; and (5) humanity to self.⁸⁸

As a whole, the book of Genesis is structured by a series of toledoths, which are usually translated as “these are the descendants of

⁸⁴ With respect to genre, I contend that the account of the Noachian Deluge may be described as “theological history.” See: Longman, *Genesis*, 8; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 61; and Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 95–100.

⁸⁵ In toto, “a narrative displays a worldview, an interpreted world. In addition to relating a series of events, authors take up an attitude towards it . . . narratives are powerful instruments for shaping the way we see, imagine and think about the world.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et. al., 52–64 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2000), 59.

⁸⁶ I use Gen 1–11 and 12–50 as a shorthand for what is really Gen 1:1–11:26 and Gen 11:27–50:26.

⁸⁷ For more information on the meaning and definition of worldview, see Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 17.

⁸⁸ Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman III, *Science, Creation and the Bible: Reconciling Rival Theories of Origins* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 14.

...,” or “this is the history of ...”⁸⁹ Hamilton argues that “the rhetorical features of Genesis 1–11 are so distinctly woven into one tapestry as to constitute an unassailable case for the unity of the section.”⁹⁰

Introduction	Gen 1:1-2:3	In the beginning... (or) When God began to create...
<i>toledoth</i> 1	Gen 2:4-4:36	These are the generations [or: this is the history] of the heavens and the earth...
<i>toledoth</i> 2	Gen 5:1-6:8	This is the book of the generations of Adam
<i>toledoth</i> 3	Gen 6:9-9:28	These are the generations of Noah
<i>toledoth</i> 4	Gen 10:1-11:9	These are the sons of Noah
<i>toledoth</i> 5	Gen 11:10-11:26	These are the generations of Shem
<i>toledoth</i> 6	Gen 11:27-25:11	Now these are the generations of Terah
<i>toledoth</i> 7	Gen 25:12-18	These are the generations of Ishmael
<i>toledoth</i> 8	Gen 25:19-35:29	These are the generations of Isaac
<i>toledoth</i> 9	Gen 36:1-8	These are the generations of Esau
<i>toledoth</i> 10	Gen 36:9-37:1	These are the generations of Esau the father of Edomites
<i>toledoth</i> 11	Gen 37:2-50:26	These are the generations of Jacob

As is evidenced above, Gen 6:6–7 comes at the very end of the second *toledoth*, and functions as the trailer to the flood story,⁹¹ or as some have more poignantly put it, the “Prelude to Disaster.”⁹² The

⁸⁹ Johnny V. Miller and John M. Soden, *In the Beginning . . . We Misunderstood: Interpreting Genesis 1 in Its Original Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 60.

⁹⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 29.

⁹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 136 but see too 143; cf. Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 285 and John Sailhamer, *Genesis, in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland, 21–331 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 117.

⁹² Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, Old Testament Perspectives (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 1994), 67.

significance of the wording of Gen 6:5 becomes clear as we read it in light of God’s assessment of Creation in Genesis 1 and the woman’s assessment of the tree prior to the Fall in Genesis 3:⁹³

- Gen 1:10 God saw (הִרְאָה) that it was good (טוֹב)
 Gen 3:6 The woman saw (הִרְאָה) that the tree was good (טוֹב)
 and she took (לָקְחָה)
 Gen 6:2 The sons of God saw (הִרְאָה) that the daughters of hu-
 manity were good (טוֹב) and they took (לָקְחוּ) wives for
 themselves
 Gen 6:5 The LORD saw (הִרְאָה) the (great) wickedness (רָעָה) of
 humanity

The Gen 6:5 language suggests that the downward spiral of sin, evil, and disorder has reached its climax. With respect to divine impassibility, therefore, it is clearly evident that there is sufficient cause or impetus for the Creator’s wrath or anger to be aroused and for his justice to be meted out. Theologically, this section is also of great import as the narrator interrupts his report of the “divine motives that underlie the decree of destruction” (Gen 6:5a, 7a) in order to high- light the depravity of humanity (Gen 6:5b) and God’s reluctance to punish them (Gen 6:6, 7b).

⁹⁴ This reluctance comes directly to bear on our understanding of divine impassibility as it pertains to God’s ‘ thoughts,’ specifically concerning the flood. But was God angry, sad, or even indifferent at the devastation that he was about to un- leash upon humanity? The account as a whole, which depicts God’s ‘ thoughts,’ can be arranged in a “rough palistrophe” shown below:⁹⁵

⁹³ See Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 112; cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 137.

⁹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis*, 143.

⁹⁵ This schematic is a modified version of Wenham, *Genesis*, 136. Note: the literary structure referred to as a palistrophe is the same sort of structure as that called *chiastic* or a *chiasm*, namely one that repeats the first sequence in reverse order, as A-B-C-D-D-C-B-A. George Eager, “A Palistrophe in the Flood Story,” 1. For more information on chiasms, see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (England: JSOT, 1986) 32.

- A The LORD sees humanity (Gen 6:5)
- B The LORD ‘regrets’/‘is sorry’ (Gen 6:6a)
 - C The LORD was ‘grieved in his heart’ (Gen 6:6b)
 - C’ The LORD says “I shall wipe out” (Gen 6:7a)
- B’ The LORD ‘regrets’/‘is sorry’ (Gen 6:7b)
- A’ The LORD ‘sees’ Noah (6:8)

With respect to the doctrine of divine impassibility, therefore, much hinges upon the exact nuance and meaning of Gen 6:6a and b and Genesis 6:7b. We will explore this more in depth within the next section of this paper.

The Noachian Deluge — The Impassibility of God

Matthews asserts that Gen 6:6 “provides a window into the heart of the troubled Creator.”⁹⁶ Brueggemann states that Gen 6:6 “shows us the deep pathos of God. God is not angered but grieved. He is not enraged but saddened. God does not stand over against but with his creation.”⁹⁷ Let us examine such statements more closely. Gen 6:6 reads:

וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה כִּי־עָשָׂתָּ אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאֶרֶץ וַיִּתְצַב אֱלֹהֵי־לֵבָו

Two main questions concern us within this passage, the meaning of the initial verb נחם and the meaning of the Hebrew word עעב. These two terms will be addressed at length in the sections below.

The Noachian Deluge — Genesis 6:6A

As mentioned, the first matter of debate is the initial verb, נחם,⁹⁸ which is often rendered in Gen 6:6 (and Gen 6:7) in many contemporary English translations as “regret,” (NET, NIV 2011, HCSB, NJPS,

⁹⁶ Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 339.

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 77; cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 144–45 and Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 119.

⁹⁸ Niphal yiqtol 3ms from נחם with waw consecutive. Sequential. Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 120 § 2.

NJB, CEB), but is also translated as “sorry,” (NASBU, ESV, NLT, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, MSG), or “sorrow,” (BBE), “repented,” (KJV), and somewhat surprisingly, even as “grieved,” (NIV 1984).⁹⁹ The LXX rendering is also unique.¹⁰⁰ Notably, out of the forty eight times that the root נחם occurs in the Niphal, thirty-four of those instances occur with God as the subject (either expressed or implied).¹⁰¹

Although an exhaustive study of each of the stems of this verb is beyond the scope of this paper,¹⁰² the root נחם in the Niphal stem seems to carry one of four semantic meanings, depending on the

⁹⁹ See Maier, “Does God ‘Repent,’” 135, for further defense and justification of this translation.

¹⁰⁰ The LXX renders the verb as $\epsilon\nu\theta\upsilon\mu\epsilon\omicron\mu\alpha$, “to reflect (on), consider, think,” rather than the numerous other options available that are more akin to the above English translations. For more information on the LXX’s relatively unique terminology in Gen 6:6, see Hamilton, *Genesis*, 274–75 as well as Maier, “Does God ‘Repent,’” 134–33. Interestingly, *HALOT*, 688–89, states that the LXX uses sixteen different translations in forty-seven instances (Ezek 14:22 omitted in LXX) while Walton states that the Septuagint uses ten different translations for this word. Walton, *Genesis*, 309. See T. A. Muraoka, *Greek~Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (Luven, Belgium. PEETERS, 2010), 275–76.

¹⁰¹ The passages are: Gen 6:6, 7; Exod 32:12, 14; Judg 2:18; 1 Sam 15:11, 29 (2), 35; 2 Sam 24:16; Isa 1:24; 57:6; Jer 4:28; 15:6; 18:8, 10; 20:16; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Ezek 24:14; Joel 2:13, 14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9, 10; 4:2; Zech 8:14; Pss 90:13; 106:45; 110:4; 1 Chr 21:15. See Curtis, “Response to Yahweh,” 499–500. NB: though Curtis states that the niphal of the verb in question occurs forty-eight times in the Old Testament, these specific references have been double checked by myself via Lisowsky’s concordance, Goodrick/Kohlenberger’s *NIVEC* and Swanson/Kohlenberger’s *HECOT* and they do not correspond. The last six [!] references are Exod 13:17; Judg 21:6; 21:15; Jer 8:6, 31:19; Job 42:6. Interestingly, Mike Butterworth states that in all but five [!] occurrences of the verb, the subject is God. Mike Butterworth, “ נחם ,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, 3:81–83 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:82; cf. Maier, “Does God ‘Repent,’” 133.

¹⁰² Not to mention the fact that a failure to differentiate between the stems themselves as separate and altogether different entities, in and of themselves, would be also to commit a gross number of severe exegetical errors. See D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961), Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), and Benjamin B. Baxter, “Hebrew and Greek Word-Study Fallacies,” *MJTM* 12 (2010–2011): 3–32, for more details with respect to this point. I am indebted to Dr. Mark J. Boda for his invaluable comments regarding this matter.

context. These four semantic meanings are as follows:¹⁰³

(1) The first definition that is traditionally given is “to experience emotional pain or weakness,” i.e., “to feel regret” or “to become remorseful,” often concerning a past action (Exod 13:17; Judg 21:6, 15; 1 Sam 15:11, 35; Jer 31:19). Many scholars also include Gen 6:6–7 but since this is our topic of inquiry, we shall reserve judgment until the end of our analysis. In four of these nine texts (five if we include Gen 6:6–7), the word **כִּי**, “because,” introduces the cause of the emotional sorrow (cf. Judg 21:6, 15; 1 Sam 15:11, 35; Job 42:6; Jer 31:19). (2) The second meaning is “to be comforted” or “to comfort oneself,” sometimes by taking vengeance (see Gen 24:67; 38:12; 2 Sam 13:39; Ps 77:3; Isa 1:24; Jer 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 31:16; 32:31). Note, category two represents a polarization of category one. That is, they are almost antithetical to one another (i.e., they are seemingly in conflict with one another). This point will be addressed later on and is important to our final analysis.¹⁰⁴ (3) The third meaning, “to relent from” or “to repudiate” a course of action which is already underway, is also possible (see Judg 2:18; 2 Sam 24:16 = 1 Chr 21:15; Pss 90:13; 106:45; Jer 8:6; 20:16; 42:10). (4) Finally, the fourth meaning, “to renege,”¹⁰⁵ “to retract” (a statement) or “to relent or change one’s

¹⁰³ The following summary is derived from Robert B. Chisholm, “Does God ‘Change His Mind?’” *BSac* 152 (1995): 388–89, who, in turn, credits Dyke Van H. Parunak, “A Semantic Survey of *NHM*,” *Bib* 56 (1975): 512–32 and Dyke Van H. Parunak, *The Repentance of God in the Old Testament*, ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973. Chisholm notes that he has condensed Parunak’s six categories into four. *HALOT*, 688 offers three categories: 1. To regret a) to become remorseful, b) to regret something, c) to repent. 2. To be sorry, come to regret something. 3) To console oneself. *CDCH*, 269, however, follows the same categories listed above. 1. Regret, be sorry, repent, relent. 2. Be moved to pity, have compassion. 3. Comfort oneself, be comforted, be consoled. 4. Gain satisfaction (for oneself), avenge oneself (cf. Maier, “Does God ‘Repent,’” 133ff.)

¹⁰⁴ Though Hamilton, *Genesis*, 275, notes the polarity that exists between several of Parunak’s definitions, see below, he appeals to the polarization of “the verb *bārak* (Piel), which means “to bless” and “to curse.” For more information on Job 2:9, which, most likely, is Hamilton’s intended reference for the dual meaning of the verb *בָּרַךְ*, “to bless,” and the Joban scribes likely use of antiphrasis, see August H. Konkel, *Job*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2006), 41–42.

¹⁰⁵ This specific example comes from Knafl, *Forming God*, 149 who credits Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 4A (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 182.

mind concerning,” “to deviate from” (a stated course of action), is also possible (see Exod 32:12, 14; 1 Sam 15:29; Job 42:6;¹⁰⁶ Ps 110:4; Isa 57:6; Jer 4:28; 15:6; 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; Ezek 24:14; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2; Zech 8:14).

With respect to Gen 6:6, it is reasonable to initially conclude that the meaning of נָחַם would seem to be category one: “to experience emotional pain or weakness,” “to feel regret,” or “to be remorseful,” for the context would seem to speak of God’s grief and emotional pain as a result of his making humankind (a past action).¹⁰⁷ Within our Western world and mindset, we often assume that “changing our mind” or our position about something that is core/fundamental to our lives is an emotional experience. But is this necessarily true? How do we know if there is emotion or not? How would we determine this? On what grounds? Perhaps future work in this area will provide greater clarity with respect to this matter.¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, John Walton questions separating the verb into four categories and maintains that “a broader cohesion exists than previously maintained.”¹⁰⁹ Upon a reexamination of the verb in question, Walton determines that its use in Gen 6:6 has “nothing to do with regrets, grief, or being sorry.”¹¹⁰ In brief, Walton proposes that the Niphal of נָחַם can best be understood via the nomenclature of accounting, that is, “in terms of acting to keep personal, national, or cosmic ‘ledgers’ in balance.”¹¹¹ To clarify, in bookkeeping, “debts equal credits. If the books get out of balance something must be adjusted. Whenever transactions are made, entries must be made accordingly.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ For more information concerning this particular referent (and why it is placed in category #4) see Mark J. Boda, *Severe Mercy, Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphut 1: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 390–92; cf. L. Newell, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?” ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1983 and Tremper Longman III, *Job*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 448–50.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Sam 15:11, 35.

¹⁰⁸ I thank Dr. Mark J. Boda for making me aware of these significant points.

¹⁰⁹ Walton, *Genesis*, 309; cf. Maier, “Does God ‘Repent,’” 133–34.

¹¹⁰ Walton, *Genesis*, 310.

¹¹¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 309–10. Walton notes that Israel would be more inclined to think of balancing scales.

¹¹² Walton, *Genesis*, 309.

Walton states that the LORD is “auditing the accounts” of the world because (יָ) he had made humankind and that the “ledger” has been “put out of balance by the wickedness of humanity.”¹¹³ Thus, by means of the Flood, God is enforcing a system of “checks and balances” as part of the “equilibrium that he is maintaining in the world.”¹¹⁴ As such, Walton renders the passage at hand as: “the LORD audited the accounts because he had made humankind in the earth and his heart tormented him (i.e., he was distressed) over it. So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe humankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth . . . because I have audited the accounts since I have made them.’”¹¹⁵

Despite Walton’s circumlocution, his proposal does eliminate the theological quandary of attempting to explain how God could be sorry or repent.¹¹⁶ The simplicity of Walton’s idea becomes all the more impressive, perhaps, in view of other alternative explanations, such as that of Wenham, who opines, “theological systematization is hardly the concern of the biblical narrators.”¹¹⁷

With respect to divine impassibility, Walton explicitly states that his conclusions do “not suggest that God is without emotions or feeling about what he is doing.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, “his heart tormented him (i.e., he was distressed) over it.”¹¹⁹ In the words of Victor P. Hamil-

¹¹³ Walton, *Genesis*, 310.

¹¹⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 310.

¹¹⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 310.

¹¹⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 311; cf. Chisholm, “Does God ‘Change His Mind’?” 387–99.

¹¹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis*, 144. Compare the various attempts of other commentators to “systematize” the text: Hamilton, *Genesis*, 274–75; Waltke, *Genesis*, 118–19; Matthews, *Genesis*, 342; and Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 47. With respect to Walton’s translation, accuracy of lexical semantics must always trump eliminating theological quandaries. Although this is something that Walton would agree with whole-heartedly and (nigh indisputably) believed that he has maintained in his analysis, I remain persuaded that more study in this area is needed prior to adopting Walton’s translation. For more information on Walton’s methodology and the principles of how he conducts lexicographic studies, see John Walton, “Principles for Productive Word Study,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, 1:161–171 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1:161–71.

¹¹⁸ Walton, *Genesis*, 311.

¹¹⁹ Walton, *Genesis*, 310–11.

ton, “verses like this remind us that the God of the OT is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse. To call him the Impassible Absolute is but part of the truth.”¹²⁰ Terence Fretheim too states:

That divine judgment and divine tears go together has considerable theological import. Without the references to divine tears, God would be much more removed and unmoved. Judgment accompanied by weeping, though still judgment, is different—in motivation and in the understanding of the relationship at stake.¹²¹

The Noachian Deluge — Genesis 6:6B

This brings us to the second point of debate concerning the intersection between the doctrine of divine impassibility and the Noachian Deluge. The verb נִצְרַף ,¹²² which, notably, is in the hithpael and translated as “tormented” and “distressed” by Walton. In English versions it is variously translated as “grieved,” (NASBU, ESV, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, NASB), “grief,” (BBE), or something akin to that, such as “his heart was filled with pain,” (NIV 1984), “he was deeply troubled in his heart,” (NIV 2011), “his heart was saddened,” (NJPS), “it broke his heart,” (NLT, MSG), or, as the CEB put it, “he was heartbroken.”¹²³ With this in mind, it is easy to appreciate Brueggemann’s words:

It is popularly thought that the crisis of the flood is to place the world in jeopardy. But a close reading indicates that it is the heart and person of God which are placed in crisis. The

¹²⁰ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 274.

¹²¹ Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 60.

¹²² Hithpael *yiqtol* 3ms from נִצְרַף with waw consecutive. Sequential. Chisholm, *Exegesis*, 120 § 2. Barry Bandstra *Genesis 1–11, A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 346–47, states that “the hitpael stem is reflexive here. The transitivity structure of the hitpael has the Actor function also as the Beneficiary: *he grieved himself to his heart.*” Emphasis original.

¹²³ Cf. I Chr 28:9; Jer 17:10; Ps 139:23; Rom 8:27. See too Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 78–79.

crisis is not the much water, which now has become only a dramatic setting. Rather, the crisis comes because of the resistant character of the world which evokes hurt and grief in the heart of God . . . while God wills creation to be turned toward him, he does not commandeer it . . . rather, it is done by the anguish and grief of God, who enters into the pain and fracture of the world. The world is brought to the rule of God but only by the pathos and vulnerability of the creator. The story is not about the world assaulted and a God who stands remote. It is about the hurt God endures because of and for the sake of his wayward creation.¹²⁴

In light of the many English translations offered above, as well as Brueggemann's poignant comments, it is interesting to observe that the NET Bible renders Gen 6:6b as "he was highly offended." This rendering is supported also by Gordon Wenham, who translates Gen 6:6b as: "He felt bitterly indignant about it."¹²⁵ In fact, Bruce Waltke goes so far as to state that "the Hebrew here [Gen 6:6b] means 'indignant rage.'"¹²⁶ As in the case of נהם an exhaustive study of each of the stems of the verbal root is beyond the scope of this paper.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 78–79. This is contra W. Lee Humphreys, *Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 68 who says God "destroys and sustains without struggle and apparently without qualm." As shall become apparent, God indeed cares and is by no means impassive about his decision.

¹²⁵ Wenham, *Genesis*, 135.

¹²⁶ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 119.

¹²⁷ Concerning the meaning of the various stems, *HALOT*, 864–65, offers the following categories: Qal. 1. To rebuke, hurt, be deeply saddened. Niphal. 1. To be worried. 2. To grieve. 3. To hurt oneself. Piel. 1. To hurt someone's feelings. Hiphil. 1. To hurt someone's feelings. Hithpael. 1. To be deeply worried. Similarly, CDCH, 338, offers the following: Qal. 1. Grieve, rebuke. 2. Hurt. 3. Be grieved. Niphal. 1. Be grieved. 2. Be hurt. Piel. 1. Grieve, hurt. Hiphil. 1. Grieve. Cause Pain. Hithpael. Be grieved, be filled with pain. See also Terence E. Fretheim, "עצב," in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, 3:482–83 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:482–83 and the NET Bible (from which the summary that is outlined below has been derived from): (1) "to be injured" (Ps 56:5; Eccl 10:9; 1 Chr 4:10); (2) "to experience emotional pain"; "to be depressed emotionally"; "to be worried" (2 Sam 19:2; Isa 54:6; Neh 8: 10-11); (3) "to be embarrassed"; "to be offended" (sometimes to the point of anger

It is significant that there is only one other instance of the verb עָצַב in the hithpael in the entire Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, namely the account of the rape of Dinah in Gen 34:7.¹²⁸ As such, Gen 34:7 is the only truly comparable passage for our understanding of Gen 6:6. The pertinent section of text reads:

וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאָנָשִׁים וַיַּחֲרֻר לָהֶם מְאֹד

The NJPS renders this phrase as “the men were distressed and very angry . . .”¹²⁹ It is, therefore, perhaps quite evident that Jacob’s sons not only empathized with Dinah and expressed a certain solidarity with her hurt/were wounded emotionally, but were also prompted by Shechem’s action to strike out in judgment against the source of their distress.¹³⁰ Why? Because such a disgraceful (נִבְלָה) thing should not be done in Israel!¹³¹

Given this brief analysis of Gen 34:7, both the NET translation (he was highly offended) and Wenham’s rendering (he was bitterly indignant) are justifiable translations of Gen 6:6, both linguistically and contextually. But what are we to make of Waltke’s comment concerning God’s “indignant rage” about the Flood?¹³² I would venture

at another or oneself); “to be insulted” (Gen 34:7; 45:5; 1 Sam 20:3, 34; 1 Kgs 1:6; Isa 63:10; Ps 78:40). This third category develops from the second by metonymy. To be clear, metonymy is the use of one word for another, i.e., the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant; synecdoche is the part for the whole. For more information on both of these stylistic devices, see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 133.

¹²⁸ See Sarna, *Genesis*, 47, 234 for more information.

¹²⁹ Cf. EVV.

¹³⁰ Cf. the NET Bible notes.

¹³¹ This stands as a good example of the author’s use of anachronism. There was no territory named Israel either in the time of the patriarchs or in the time when the Israelites were the desert with Moses, though during the latter period it would not be unusual to say that something is not done among the *people* of Israel. See Walton, *Genesis*, 629 and Sarna, *Genesis*, 234 and 367 for more information.

¹³² Alongside this, it is perhaps not insignificant that though there are only two other references where this word is used with respect to God (Ps 78:40; Isa 63:10), the latter of which pertains to God’s holy spirit/mind, רוּחַ; cf. Ps 51:11, only in Gen 6:6 is the verb עָצַב supplemented by the phrase אֶל-לִבּוֹ, “to his heart/mind.” Wenham, *Genesis*, 145; cf. Matthews, *Genesis*, 343. Do note, however, that though the Hebrew word לֵב, is often rendered as heart in English translations, it rarely refers to the physical human heart. Rather, the “heart” is the center of one’s being, an image for

to say that in light of Gen 34:7, the indignant portion of Waltke's claim seems to be on target. That being said, however, the fact that the narrator of Genesis seemed to have had a strong incentive for and could have stated that God burned with rage in Gen 6:6 (as Dinah's brothers did in Gen 34:7) but intentionally and deliberately chose not to do so causes me to question whether rage is the best rendering for this context. That is to say, the fact that the narrator seemed unambiguously to couch the language of Gen 6:6 in terms that were different than Gen 34:7 indicates to me that God's decision to destroy the world via the Flood was "made in sorrow not in anger."¹³³ Thus, while I agree with the "indignant" part of Waltke's translation, I disagree with his use of the word "rage."

As such, I propose that Gen 6:6 be rendered as follows: "Then the LORD was remorseful because he made human beings on the earth.¹³⁴ Then he was pained to/in his innermost being."¹³⁵

This rendering has the benefit of highlighting a correspondence that exists between Gen 6:6 and the judgment oracles in Gen 3:16-19. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, life would be filled with pain; but sin in the human race also brought pain to God.¹³⁶ Even so, when

person's thought life, reflections, and will. The "story of the heart" reveals a person's commitments/direction in life. Alex Luc, "לֵב," in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, 2:749-54 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:749-54. Sean Harrison, ed., *NLT Study Bible: Study Notes: 'The Heart'*, 1019.

¹³³ See Sarna, *Genesis*, 47 (cf. 234).

¹³⁴ Or, alternatively, "with the earth," taking the preposition as a *beth comitantiae*, i.e., a beth of accompaniment. See Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, § 248, 99. If such is the case, then it would be that the LORD is remorseful not only for making humanity but regrets also making the earth itself, hence why he is going to destroy it along with along with all flesh (Gen 6:5, 11-13, 17). See Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 5, 37, 42. It is, of course, recognized, however, that arguments based on prepositional usage are slippery.

¹³⁵ The preposition is either specification or locative. See Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax: Third Edition. Revised and Expanded by John C. Beckman* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §306/308, 117/118. Note that the translation offered above recognizes that "Scripture reveals God to us via accommodations, including the use of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic terminology." See Maier, "Does God 'Repent,'" 131-32, 43.

¹³⁶ Alongside this, as something perhaps of an aside, the wording of Gen 6:6 is also ironic, literarily and contextually speaking, when compared to Gen 5:29. Lamech anticipated relief (נָחָם) from all of humanity's work (עֲצָצָה) and their painful toil (עֲצָבוֹן), but in Gen 6:6 we read that God was 'sorry' (נָחָם) that he had made (עָשָׂה)

taken as a whole (literarily and theologically) the Noachian Deluge dramatically underscores the fact that there is always hope with God. The implications of this seem to be that God's mercy and grace transcends/trumps his grief.¹³⁷

Conclusion

Given the ubiquity of pain, suffering, and death that is experienced by his creatures, does God suffer? Can humanity hurt God, emotionally? In light of the above analysis, it would seem that the answer is a qualified 'yes.' God really does suffer for the sins of humanity. They are, quite simply, agony to him. In the words of Bertrand Brassnett:

Morality and religion alike demand this. If my sins are nothing to God, there is no particular reason why they should be anything to me, and so far as I am moral it is impossible for me to worship a God to whom my immorality is a thing of no account. God suffers in the sins of men [sic] ; and is content so to suffer.¹³⁸

Yet, even so, the Creator does not grieve as the created. God's suffering is not surprisingly imposed; it does not move him to be something other than he already is or to do something other than what he already intended.¹³⁹ God chooses to be the God who suffers

humankind for it brought him 'great pain' (עֲצָרָה). See Hamilton, *Genesis*, 274, Matthews, *Genesis*, 343, Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 77, and the NET Bible.

¹³⁷ In this way, the purpose of Gen 6:8–9 and Gen 7:1 is to demonstrate that Noah found favor/grace with God. Noah represents the "obedience of faith" and for this he is blessed and does indeed live up to his name. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 118. With respect to whether or not God showed favor to Noah necessarily because of his righteousness, Carol M. Kaminski skillfully explores this query and concludes that though Noah does escape the judgment of his generation, he is not exempt from the negative assessment of humanity as presented in Gen 6:6. Carol M. Kaminski, *Was Noah Good? Finding Favor in the Flood Narrative* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2014). Indeed, "Noah's survival and role was not earned by his righteousness but was a manifestation of God's grace." Longman, *Genesis*, 116–17

¹³⁸ Bertrand Brassnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 11.

¹³⁹ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 131.

“with and for human creatures”¹⁴⁰ no matter the severity of his “cosmic grief.”¹⁴¹ In sum, as J. I. Packer states: “a totally impassive God would be a horror and not the God of Calvary at all . . . If, therefore, we can learn to think of the *chosenness* of God’s grief and pain as the essence of his impassibility, so-called, we will do well.”¹⁴² I wish to close with a song entitled “The Tears of God” written by Heath Christopher Goodman that deeply affected me during the writing of this paper.

Tears of God¹⁴³

All the unborn babes waiting on death row...
 All the starving people, pain and death are all they know...
 All the soldiers dying in all the wars combined...
 You know he sees it all through tear-filled eyes ...

Can you just imagine what Almighty must go through...
 The Purest Eyes of Heaven seeing what the wicked do...
 Beholding all creation that He once delighted in...
 Now grieves the heart of God, people’s lives so full of sin...

Who can dry the eyes of the one who made the skies...
 If Angels strive in vain to shut up Heaven’s rain?
 Who can offer comfort when the Comforter grieves?
 Who can stop the rain, the tears of God, the tears of God...

All the fathers weeping for their daughters on the run...
 All the mothers praying for her prodigal son...
 All the families broken by sin’s dread curse...
 You know He sees it all, you know He hurts...

¹⁴⁰ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 131.

¹⁴¹ Schaab, *Creative Suffering*, 3, 195; cf. Oei, “The Impassible God,” 238–39.

¹⁴² Packer, “What Do You Mean When You Say God?” 31. Emphasis original.

¹⁴³ The song ‘Tears of God’ is written by Heath Christopher Goodman (the version that appears below has been slightly modified) and is available at <http://churchofthelordjesus.com/archives/1368>

With all the power at his command, yet He still knew...
that even the Creator of the world would only save a few...

Who can dry the eyes of the one who made the skies...

If Angels strive in vain to shut up Heaven's rain?

Who can offer comfort when the Comforter grieves?

Who can stop the rain, the tears of God, the tears of God...

“Canada’s First Martyr”: The Suspicious Death of Winnipeg’s WWI Pentecostal Conscientious Objector

Martin W. Mittelstadt*

Canada’s First Martyr.

He lies in his quiet grave, our first martyr. He was a conscientious objector to military service, and was sentenced a few weeks ago to two years in the Penitentiary.

He became insane, and a few days before his death he was removed to Selkirk Asylum, where he passed away.

Poor boy; he was almost alone here—his friends all live in England. He had a sweetheart, and in a letter to her he said he rejoiced to have “the privilege of witnessing for Christ.”

Immediately before his arrest, which he supposed was impending, he sent 400 dollars to his mother in England. His name was David Wells.

It may be in the coming years his name will be honoured, but he has gone—gone from this world where true goodness is forever crucified. “He was taken from prison and from judgment.”

The minister of the church to which he belonged, and who conducted the funeral ceremony, said “he was a man of exceptional physique and highest moral character.”

But his sensitive, refined nature could not endure the horrors of a Canadian prison, and his reason fled.

Everyone seems wishful to evade all responsibility. The doctors at the asylum say he was too far gone for them to be able to help

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him, and that he might have been cured had he been taken there sooner.

But the tortured spirit has fled away to rest, and the world goes on—I will not say unheeding or uncaring—for some both heed and care, but they are, for the most part, those who have no power to stop these terrible evils.

One minister, one of the best and bravest in all Canada, Rev. William Ivens, a Methodist minister of Winnipeg, journeyed to Selkirk to attend the funeral. He has written to the Press, calling himself a conscientious objector, and has repeatedly urged the release from prison of all C.O.'s. He has written to Premier Borden¹ asking for a full inquiry into this death, and for the suspension of the prison officials until all is cleared up, which, of course, it can never be. His letters have all been published in the Press.

Mentally, I contrast him with another “minister of the Gospel of the Man of Sorrows” who in his pulpit, the day before this poor boy was laid to repose, said that “the conscientious objectors did not deserve to be fed by the State three meals a day, but should all be banished to a cannibal island.”

I have called David Wells “Canada’s First Martyr.” Perhaps this is incorrect, for many Roman Catholic missionaries suffered death at the hands of hostile Indians in the early days of this country.

But I suppose we all thought that the days of martyrdom had passed, and I believe that this poor boy has given his life for the grandest cause that it was ever the lot of man to serve.

He might have suffered as much had he gone to the war, where he would have been but one in a crowd of poor slaughtered men, and instead of dying with them he has died for them; hence he is undoubtedly a martyr, and it is true to-day as ever that “The noble army of martyrs praised Thee, O Lord,”

Gertrude Richardson²

¹ The author refers incorrectly to Prime Minister Borden as premier.

² Gertrude Richardson, “Canada’s First Martyr,” *Leicester Pioneer* (LT; April 12, 1918). The English-born Richardson (1875-1946) played an integral role as a Manitoban activist for labour, suffrage, peace, and socialist movements. She wrote regular columns (and subversive poetry) for newspapers from Swan River, Brandon, and Winnipeg, to Leicester, England. See further Barbara Ann Roberts, *A Reconstructed World: A Feminist Biography of Gertrude Richardson* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996).

In 2013 the Canadian Pentecostal Symposium at SPS focused on the plight of Canadian Pentecostal Conscientious Objectors (CO). As Murray Dempster began to rehearse their struggles as “the ironic, the tragic, and the heroic,” I was particularly shaken to hear that such atrocities had occurred in “my” Winnipeg.³ As a “cradle” Pentecostal, I felt betrayed. Why had I not heard these stories? In this essay, I proclaim what I believe deserves to be called the Pentecostal “testimony” of young David Wells and probe deeper into the suspicious circumstances surrounding his death. To do so, I begin with the context for conscientious objection in Canada, Pentecostal allegiance, and immediate scene in Winnipeg. Then, I retell the story of Wells. I conclude with implications for further research and an exhortation for Pentecostals (and all Christians) to remember and somehow embody the life of David Wells, for his story is indeed our story.

Pentecostal COs in Canadian Context

Before I recount the events between the first report of charges against David Wells for desertion on January 21, 1918, and his tragic death on February 18, his story requires context.⁴ When England declared war on Germany in the summer of 1914, Canada automatically entered the war. As the war dragged on, a rising death toll and low volunteerism at home and abroad led Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden to demonstrate his and Canadian allegiance to the UK through adoption of the Military Service Act (MSA). With a goal of 100,000 conscripted reinforcements, the MSA afforded various forms of exemption for those “prohibited from doing so by the tenets and articles of faith.”⁵ At the time, only five Canadian denominations held peace-church status, namely, the Doukhobors, Hutterites,

³ Dempster’s essay is entitled: “The Canada-Britain-USA Triad: Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism in WWI and WWII,” *CJPC* 4 (2013): 1-26.

⁴ See the brief summary in Dempster, “The Canada-Britain-USA Triad” and extended analyses by Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection during the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009) and Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

⁵ See *Military Service Act*, online: https://archive.org/stream/MilitaryServiceAct1917Manual/MilitaryServiceAct1917Manual_djvu.txt. Accessed 1/20/2017.

Mennonites, Society of Friends (Quakers), and Tunkers (Brethren in Christ). Since CO opportunities depended not upon individual conscience, but denominational stance, self-identifying COs of smaller sects had no recourse to collective conscience and failed to meet the CO qualifications. Nevertheless, appeals for CO status came from men among the Christadelphians, International Bible Students Association (ISBA, Jehovah Witnesses), Plymouth Brethren, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Pentecostals. Though early Pentecostals demonstrated strong pacifistic impulses, Canadian and American objectors found themselves in very different circumstances. When men from the Assemblies of God challenged conscription in the United States, the upstart denomination chartered in 1914 registered as a pacifist church, and many of these men received exemption in 1917.⁶ Though the well-travelled border between Canada and United States proved invaluable for the early exchange of pastors and evangelists, this relationship proved inconsequential for Canadian Pentecostals Cos.

I turn now from the larger Canadian context to Winnipeg and the events only days before and after Wells' story hit the press. Throughout 1917, local news generally updated the public about CO approvals and rejections, but the new year produced a rash of headlines concerning allegations of mistreatment and revealed a restless Winnipeg public. In early January, 1918, a *Winnipeg Tribune* (*WT*) reporter narrated a sobering account of an unnamed man who was denied CO status and his subsequent refusal to don a uniform. After the officer appealed for "seven volunteers to put [the] man in uniform," the reporter minced no words: "the storm hit the conscientious objector 'somewhere' and in a few moments he was in khaki."⁷

During the week of January 21 at Minto Street Barracks, three men, Pentecostal Charles Matheson along with ISBA members Robert Clegg and Henry Naish, were twice stripped naked and tortured by cold showers until they would accept duty or collapse. Clegg's claim of brutal treatment and his subsequent hospitalization produced

⁶ See the recent documentary history by Brian K. Pipkin and Jay Beaman, *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice: A Reader*, PPSJ 10 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

⁷ "War Heroes Force Husky Objector Into Uniform," *Winnipeg Tribune* (*WT*); January 12, 1918).

extreme responses. While an officer familiar with the case called it “school boy pranks,” others such as Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Fred Dixon wired the government at Ottawa and demanded an immediate investigation of conditions at Minto Street Barracks with reference to treatment of all COs. Dixon protested that, “The day of torture should be past... finish(ed).”⁸ By the final weekend of January, three similar responses revealed growing concern: 1) a scathing diatribe entitled “Stop It!” with a call for investigation of physical coercion;⁹ 2) the congratulatory and encouraging remarks of Methodist minister, Rev. William Ivens, in support of the protest made by the alleged victims;¹⁰ and 3) the grievous remarks of Dr. Horace Ward, pastor of All Soul’s Church, concerning recent allegations and the general misunderstanding of CO courage.¹¹ With Clegg in the hospital, Sargent Simpson, provost marshal at the barracks, was charged and released on bail.¹² Opposing the case in the court of the King’s Bench, Judge Galt turned the case to military court on February 13, and Simpson’s case was subsequently dismissed.¹³ Like so many others, Clegg, Naish, Claude (presumably Charles) Matheson and a number of their fellow ISBA objectors eventually found themselves overseas and subjected to torturous labour.¹⁴

⁸ See “Conscientious Objectors Said To Have Been Roughly Handled,” *Manitoba Free Press* (MFP; January 24, 1918), and “Treatment of Drafted Men Under Probe,” *WT* (January 24, 1918).

⁹ “Stop It!” *MFP* (January 25, 1918). The writer laments: “The evidence is conclusive that methods of ‘hazing’ and physical coercion have been resorted to in this city... It is idle to pretend that, in cases like this, the hazing is the result of spontaneous indignation by the companions of the recalcitrant; these things happen because someone in authority is desirous that they should happen... There will doubtless be an investigation; with the awarding of due punishment to those to whom the responsibility for these acts is brought home.”

¹⁰ “Ivens Praises Men Who Protest Treatment to Minto Soldiers,” *WT* (January 26, 1918).

¹¹ “Westwood Raps ‘Torture Bath,’” *WT* (January 28, 1918).

¹² “Three Charges against Simpson,” *MFP* (January 28, 1918); and “Sergt. Simpson to be Tried by Court-Martial,” *WT* (January 28, 1918).

¹³ “Judge Galt Refuses to Order MacDonald to Try Sergt. Simpson,” *WT* (February 13, 1918); “Alleged Hazing Case Dismissed,” *MFP* (February 14, 1918); “Simpson is Not Guilty of Hazing,” *MFP* (February 19, 1918).

¹⁴ “Come From ‘Pen’ To Be Soldiers,” *WT* (April 8, 1918); “Conscientious Objectors, Free from Pen, Go to War,” *WT* (April 10, 1918); and Richardson, “Dem-

In the days after Wells' death on February 18, the scene in Winnipeg remained tumultuous. Gertrude Richardson reported ongoing atrocities of Winnipeg COs sent "straight to the front" and afforded no opportunity to say "good-bye" to their loved ones. She was told of "heart-rending scenes... of poor lads [who] were not willing to go" and other COs "taken to the station in ambulance wagons, in handcuffs and irons [to be] shipped over with the draft."¹⁵ The miserable effects of a Manitoba winter coupled with accusations of brutality and sketchy acquittals produced an increasingly despondent and mixed public. The story of David Wells must be heard in this climate.

First Reports of David Wells' Death

Little is known of David Wells. Richardson's above-cited letter provides the best synopsis of his life and death and matches up well with Winnipeg newspaper reports.¹⁶ On Monday, January 21, 1918, the *MFP* related that Wells and five other men answered to the charge of military absenteeism.¹⁷ Over the previous weekend, Wells became the first of seven men to appear before a city magistrate for defaulting on his appointment for enlistment. Two days later, on January 23, 1918, the *WT* disclosed that David Wells and Chas. H. Edwards became the first two men sentenced by the Winnipeg city police court to two years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary for draft evasion.¹⁸ According to the next day's *MFP*, Wells stated, "I plead

ocratic' Militarism," *LP* (June 14, 1918). Shaw also documents numerous horrific punishments given particularly to COs of small and unrecognized "denominations" (*Crisis of Conscience*, 93-97).

¹⁵ Richardson, "The Cruelty of War," *LP* (March 22, 1918); and "The Spring – and the Breaking of Chains," *LP* (May 31, 1918).

¹⁶ Shaw (*Crisis of Conscience*, 91-93) provides the most comprehensive modern reconstruction of Wells' story. Interestingly, Shaw cites only primary material from the *MFP* and seems either unaware or ignores the *WT*. Though duplication between the major newspapers occurs, *WT* definitely fills certain gaps. I found further references to primary source material via Barbara Roberts' *Biography of Richardson*. See also M. James Penton, "Wells, David," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), online: http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wells_david_14E.html (accessed 10/20/2016).

¹⁷ "Rounding Up the Absentees: City and Provincial Police Deal Actively with Draft Law Evaders," *MFP* (January 21, 1918).

¹⁸ "2 Conscientious Objectors Sent to Jail for 2 Years," *WT* (January 23, 1918).

guilty before men, but not before God.” In response, prosecutor Capt. Goddard, assistant provost marshal, referred to Wells and Edwards as “religious fanatics who attempted to hide behind their religion,” and Magistrate Hugh John MacDonald declared, “I’m here to administer human not divine law.”¹⁹

An important element of this story includes the press’s inability to accurately classify Wells religious affiliation. Though an *MFP* reporter identified Wells as a member of the ISBA, the January 24, 1918, *WT* published the bold clarifications of an unnamed young man who presumably defended Wells before Sergeant J. Palmer of the Military Service Council: “I am aggrieved that David Wells should be described as an International Bible Student. He is not. He is a Christian.”²⁰ The same young man not only further exclaimed that, if necessary, he would also “defy the earthly king and continue to serve my Master on high,” but he also proclaimed Wells “a martyr now serving two years in the penitentiary for a just cause.” The unfolding drama reveals, first, that early accounts incorrectly identify Wells as an ISBA member and, second, that the day of his sentencing already foreshadows Richardson’s title for Wells as a martyr.²¹ By Friday of this same week, the *MFP* reported that Wells and Edwards received notice that their two-year sentences would not be granted appeals.²² Wells’ story fell silent for about a month.

On February 26, 1918, the *WT*’s front page led with the following headline: “Conscientious Objector Sent to ‘Pen’ Dies in Asylum.”²³ Both Winnipeg newspapers provide a few details of Wells’

¹⁹ “Two Years’ Sentence for Draft Evaders,” *MFP* (January 24, 1918). Like Wells, Edwards defied the authorities and offered a similar motivation: “I consider this a grand and glorious privilege to witness for the Lord.” This same story also appeared as “Serving the Lord” in *Vancouver Daily World* (January 24, 1918).

²⁰ Differentiation between ISBA and Christian serves not as an indictment of ISBA. This response of this young man would be consistent with Fundamentalist and proto-Evangelical opinions of ISBA. Originally named “Russellites” after their founder Charles Taze Russell, and often self-described as ISBA, the sect endured numerous splits and emerged as “Jehovah’s Witnesses” in 1931.

²¹ “Going to War is Crime, Young Man Informs Officer,” *WT* (January 24, 1918).

²² “No Appeals for Bible Students,” *MFP* (January 25, 1918). Wells continues to be identified as a “Bible Student.”

²³ *WT* (February 26, 1918).

background and his previous physical condition. Wells came from a military family. His father served in the British navy for thirty years, and two brothers were currently in the British army. Wells appeared healthy, weighed 210 pounds, exhibited strong moral character, worked as a drayman for the Canadian Northern Railway, and sent \$400 to his mother in England only a day before the charge of absenteeism.

Following Wells' death on February 18, Wells' body was transferred to undertakers at Moody and Sons in Selkirk for preparation. Rev. H. C. Sweet of the Langside Mission and, according to the report, Wells' former pastor, officiated the funeral, and Wells was buried on February 25 at Selkirk Cemetery.²⁴ According to a summary in the MFP, J. J. McFadden, supervisory physician at Stony Mountain, reported that "everything possible was done for Wells from the moment he was taken to the penitentiary," and even though Wells received fair and comfortable treatment, "he became a raving maniac and would neither eat, drink, talk, or walk."²⁵ McFadden further stated that Wells' "case was a dangerous one and he had to be removed as quickly as possible." McFadden contended that Wells not only confessed willingness to join the army, but that efforts were in process to reopen his case before military authorities (interestingly, the deluge of news to emerge in the following weeks never repeats this claim). Though Wells was not required to work and was kept in a comfortable room, McFadden summarizes Wells' condition: "the disgrace of being in the penitentiary evidently preyed upon his mind to an alarming extent."²⁶

²⁴ In "'Sweet' Memories" (*The Portal of Western Bible College Yearbook*, 1949), the unnamed author confirms the early identification of Henry Charles Sweet with the burgeoning Pentecostals in Winnipeg: "as early as 1916 he became identified with the Pentecostal movement, (Rev. A. H. Argue then leading in this gracious work). The identification preceded any formal organization of the movement, and it was during these early years that Dr. Sweet was privileged to baptize in water, among others... Rev. Watson Argue" (4). Though Sweet never pursued Pentecostal ordination, his participation among and influence upon Pentecostals in Winnipeg is well documented. See Ronald Kydd, "H. C. Sweet: Canadian Churchman," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 20 (1978): 19-30.

²⁵ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic," *MFP* (February 27, 1918).

²⁶ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic."

Both the *MFP* and *WT* recounted the days following Wells' arrival at the Selkirk Asylum. According to A. T. Rice, superintendent of the asylum, Wells' condition was a woeful one. Wells had to be carried into the facility and was deemed "palpably insane." Incapable of basic tasks, "Wells [had] to be fed forcibly, he would not lie on his bed, trying to roll on the floor... When we put the bed on the floor, he still persisted in rolling off the comfortable mattress and springs... We could not keep him up." Like McFadden, Dr. Rice offers a stunning synopsis of Wells' death only seven days after arrival at the facility: "Everything possible was done to help him, but it was a hopeless case from the start and he died on the 18th."²⁷

Not surprisingly, these same reports reveal the bewilderment of friends: "when [Wells] went to the penitentiary he was in perfect condition, both physically and mentally." Mr. Schwab of Argue Brothers, a real estate dealer, was astonished and "had no previous intimation that [Wells'] condition was other than normal."²⁸ Members of Well's Pentecostal congregation told of their rejected attempt to visit Wells at Stony Mountain. Though other unnamed friends were described as "indignant that they were unable to learn of the serious condition of Wells from the authorities,"²⁹ no one suspected foul play. Rev. Sweet said that he was "shocked." The pastor acknowledged that the death certificate indicates that "Wells was wrong mentally for some time,"³⁰ but when asked if Wells' family would press charges against the penitentiary or the hospital for mistreatment of their son, Sweet replied, "His friends think it strange that a young man of such exceptional physique should succumb so soon. However, I do not intimate that he was mistreated, as I do not know enough about the case."³¹ Though the initial announcements from the *WT* and *MFP* said little about the potential for foul play, the details reported in the first few days would eventually receive scrutiny, and the tone would change over the course of one week.

²⁷ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic."

²⁸ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic."

²⁹ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic."

³⁰ "'Objector' Dies Raving Lunatic."

³¹ "Taken from Penitentiary."

Foul Play?

Suddenly on Saturday, March 2, the *WT* reported growing concern that COs “should be placed on an equal footing, whether a member of a brotherhood or not.”³² Members of two adjoining churches, the Pentecostal Mission and Plymouth Brethren, circulated a petition of Well’s imprisonment and subsequent confinement in the Selkirk asylum. Wells was described not as a member of the Pentecostal Mission, located on Furby Street, but a regular attendee of both congregations. Rev. Sweet entered the foray a few days later. His Langside Pentecostal Mission announced that the congregation was not convinced by the explanation of Wells’ death, but sought “to be fully satisfied of the cause of the death before we drop the matter entirely.”³³ A similar report on the same day described a petition, presumably led by Sweet, to seek amendment to the MSA. He reportedly stated:

In my opinion, and in the opinion of the followers of our mission, all conscientious objectors should be treated alike. The clause in the service act is all wrong and not British in its spirit. What we want is to see that the conscientious objector is dealt with in the same way as the Mennonite and the farmer. These people are released from service to help in the campaign for greater production, while a city man is jailed when he refuses to fight. We don’t want the public to get the impression that we want to protect slackers. When we refer to objectors we mean real conscientious objectors. If the military authorities jail conscientious objectors, we want to see that the Mennonites and their like are also jailed. If farmers’ sons are allowed to stay on the land, I don’t see why conscientious objectors should not be allowed to do the same. I am sure the majority of these men, while fighting in

³² “Ask All Objectors to Draft Be Given Equal Legal Rights,” *WT* (March 2, 1918).

³³ “Pentecostal Mission to Ask Probe of Death,” *WT* (March 6, 1918).

any form, would gladly do their bit on the soil.³⁴

Rev. Ivens, an attendee at Wells' funeral and interment, also became involved in the cause. In a letter to the editor, he wrote that Wells' death "made a profound impression on... the reasonable public." He lamented that "a man should not be treated so as to cause death even though he will not fight. The man who will die rather than violate his conscience may be a fanatic," but not a slacker, shirker, hypocrite, or coward.³⁵ After a plea for the government to entertain changes similar to Sweet's request above, he concluded:

We must face the facts fearlessly. Wells is not the last man who will die for his conscience unless the government amend its present legislation. Every man who has a contribution to give to the life of the nation is needed at this hour. Better send a man with a conscience to the farm or the forge than send him into eternity. Now is the time to act.³⁶

Two days later, the *WT* reported that Ivens presented a petition with more than 400 signatures to the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council with a request for amendment to the MSA and the release of COs currently serving at Stony Mountain.³⁷

This same newspaper report related the actions of a third clergyman, Dr. Horace Westwood, a Unitarian. Westwood also presented a letter that resulted in passage of the following resolution by the Trades and Labor Council:

Resolved that the public is greatly shocked at the news of the death of David Wells after being incarcerated a month at the penitentiary as a conscientious objector, and

³⁴ "Objectors Seek to Change Act. Pentecostal Mission Followers to Petition For Amend to Military Service Law," *WT* (March 6, 1918).

³⁵ Rev. J. W. Ivens, "The Conscientious Objector." *WT* (March 6, 1918).

³⁶ Rev. J. W. Ivens, "The Conscientious Objector."

³⁷ "Labor Council Demands Probe of Wells' Death and Treatment at 'Pen,'" *WT* (March 8, 1918).

Whereas, at his entrance to the penitentiary, he was in superb physical condition, and

Whereas there appears to be widespread public opinion that his insanity, and subsequent death were the result of treatment inflicted upon him while in the penitentiary.

Therefore we, the Winnipeg Trades and Labor council request: Firstly, that a searching and immediate inquiry be made into the death of David Wells and the treatment of conscientious objectors generally and that the results of such inquiry be made public. Secondly, that in harmony with present methods of prison reform, a copy of the penitentiary rules and regulations, as applied to all prisoners, be made public.

Whereas it is evident that the Military Service Act is discriminating in its application to conscientious objectors, exempting those belonging to particular and specified sects, but imprisoning other bona fide objectors not belonging to such sects.

We therefore request that the act be so amended as to apply equally to all bona fide conscientious objectors and that conscientious objectors now suffering incarceration under the act be immediately released by being placed in the same category as those belonging to a recognized church.³⁸

The proposal's opening line revealed the initial motivation. Secondary concerns linked to Westwood's comments that COs were entitled to only one visit every three months and none of them from a clergyman. Other comments included those of A. H. Tripp, a friend and fellow teamster of Wells, who described his friend as a "big and healthy man," and James Painters who asserted that the "government

³⁸ "Labor Council Demands Probe."

had forced Wells to his death."³⁹

Unfortunately, Wells' story would gain no specific traction. Except for Richardson's tribute and memorial, the petitions failed to produce results. Questions surrounding the death of David Wells drew to an end.

Implications: Pentecostals, Conscientious Objectors and Martyrs?

I am a biblical scholar. I am not a historian, and certainly not a prosecuting attorney. Having said this, I am confident that the cumulative evidence warrants further study and should give contemporary Pentecostals (and Canadian Christians) pause concerning the story not only of one young man, but others like him during WWI and beyond.

First, I need not rehearse all the reports that raise suspicion about Wells' health, but the question remains: how does a strapping "210 pound" drayman apparently in "perfect" physical and mental condition come to such a stunning end? How is it that clergymen, friends, and co-workers seem unaware of any previous health concerns? In a related vein, what about the evidence concerning Wells' rapid mental deterioration? If Wells brings no pre-condition to prison, is it possible that a crushed spirit leads to his death? Given the proximity to other reports of mistreatment, is it only mere conjecture that Wells suffered similar treatment at Minto Street Barracks, Stony Mountain penitentiary, and/or the Selkirk Asylum? And if Wells sent a generous gift of support to his mother (possibly a widow) only days before the charge of absenteeism, did he suspect difficulty ahead?

Second, I would suggest that Wells received reasonable support from his Pentecostal community. The attempted visits of Mr. Schwab, who is undoubtedly connected to Argue's Mission;⁴⁰ the

³⁹ "Labor Council Demands Probe."

⁴⁰ Zelma Argue (*What Meaneth This? The Story of our Personal Experiences and Evangelistic Campaigns: The Argue Evangelistic Party*; Winnipeg, no date) affirms the presence of Winnipeg businessman, Brother A. E. Schwab, at one of the early meetings in May 1907. Zelma writes "I can still see the glory that lighted up his face till it shone with heaven's own light, as with upraised arm and closed eyes, he walked up and down the length of the double parlor, while from his lips flowed

pastoral response (funeral and interment) and petitions for investigation by Rev. Sweet; and the petitionary protest launched by the Pentecostal Mission on Furby Street demonstrate his association to Pentecostal churches and their concern over his imprisonment and subsequent death. On the other hand, where is the Argue family? Given Sweet's affiliation with Argue, how is it that Wells' story receives news coverage over two months, and the voices of Argue and leaders of the Argue mission are absent?⁴¹

Third, what did Pentecostals in Winnipeg think about pacifism? Was Wells a renegade or representative? Why is there only one other report of a Pentecostal CO (Charles Matheson)? The Furby Mission demonstrates solidarity with Wells through their pursuit of justice, but did they share his pacifistic impulse? Since the Furby Mission shared a building with a Plymouth Brethren congregation, did they share pacifistic views? If so, are these representative of Pentecostals throughout Winnipeg? It is noteworthy that Rev. Sweet of the Langside Mission seeks justice, but unlike Rev. Ivens, a radical pacifist, local reports do not reveal Sweet's position on military service.⁴²

What about the Canadian Pentecostal COs across Canada? Shaw has produced the most comprehensive list of CO claims by Canadians in WWI.⁴³ Of the 325 claims, only six further claimants beyond Wells and Matheson identify as Pentecostals, and all of them

a stream of worship in a language straight from heaven" (11). On the occasion of her ordination in 1920, Zelma reflects on the gifts she received from "my father's brother, Dr. George Argue... and his younger brother, M. Willis Argue President of Argue Bros., a leading business firm of Winnipeg" (26).

⁴¹ Argue and Sweet shared ministries at the Langside Mission. See *Calvary Temple, 50 Years. 1907-1957 and a Golden Jubilee* (Winnipeg, 1957), 5. The Langside Mission advertised in the MFP meetings (February 9, 1918) and a baptismal service (February 16, 1918) with Rev. Sweet presiding.

⁴² To complicate matters, Shaw cites Sweet: "The Pentecostals are not united on this question of objection to military service... Some of them are believers in war and others are not. They are not a unit, and therefore I don't think the matter will be discussed by them as a body." Much to my dismay, Shaw's reference ("Pentecostal Missionites Would Not Take Action," *MFP*; January 26, 1918) is not correct. She also writes that Sweet's comments follow Wells' death, yet Wells does not die until February 18. I searched thoroughly for this statement, but no avail. Undoubtedly, such a report would provide further context, and possible hints concerning Sweet's leanings (Shaw, *Crisis in Conscience*, 93, 219).

⁴³ See Table 1 in Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience*, 167-190.

come from Ontario: Frederick Leader (Caledonia), Elmor Morrison (Moorefield), Clarence Morton (Brantford), John Philips (White Hall), Vernal Running (Lansdowne), and William Steinburg (Seguin Falls). I would ask the same questions from the preceding paragraph concerning their experiences and their communities. Do trends and trajectories emerge? What about data by province, region, community (e.g., 35 claims are made by men with connections to Manitoba)? How do the various publics respond? Given Winnipeg's impulse toward activism, comparisons across Canada would prove valuable.

Fourth, I must confess a cultural sin. I have long been a candid critic regarding recent American policies on torture from Guantánamo Bay to President Donald Trump's desire to reapply torture because it works "absolutely" and the US must "fight fire with fire."⁴⁴ But much to my own shame, a recent trip to the Canadian Human Rights Museum – in Winnipeg nonetheless – crushed my arrogance and demonstrated that the Canadian story of injustice looks rather similar to the larger human story.⁴⁵ The story of David Wells is a Canadian story.

Finally, Wells' story proves yet again the need to do away with stereotypes. Pacifism does not mean passive. CO does not mean fragile. Peace-making calls for Spirit-inspired passion, witness by resistance, and if necessary, martyrdom. The story of David Wells serves as an "ironic, tragic, and heroic" testimony, a story well-suited for our day. If indeed Pentecostals cherish the art of testimony as a primary practice, the story of David Wells deserves a place in Pentecostal lore. Whether Wells' death came as the result of a crushed spirit, the effects of physical torture, or both, his words, "I plead guilty before men, but not before God," do not dismiss the narratives of Jesus and Acts in exchange for a different story, but exhibit the gracious ministry (charismata) of the Spirit under intense pressure.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Matthew Weaver and Spencer Ackerman, "Trump Claims Torture Works, But Warns of its 'Potentially Existential' Costs," *The Guardian* (January 26, 2017), online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/26/donald-trump-torture-absolutely-works-says-us-president-in-first-television-interview> (accessed April 19, 2018).

⁴⁵ Online: <https://www.humanrights.ca/> (accessed April 19, 2018).

⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 186.

I testify with Gertrude Richardson that David Wells deserves the title of martyr; I echo a further tribute offered to a courageous young man.

In Memoriam

David Wells, C.O.

...Rest sweetly, sacred soul, tired out with strife.
Wonder and questioning – sleep now and rest;
No more rude hands shall hurt thee, or molest;
No more rude voices will slander thee or grieve;
No more the sands of war shall (sleuth-like) want
To rend thee with their fangs of murderous red.
Thou hast been faithful to the Master – rest
And in His heaven forget the wrongs of earth.
Thou has been faithful, while the men who bear
His holy name to speak His message here,
Blaspheming, call on souls like thine to yield
To Moloch's worship on the fields of war.
Thou hast been faithful, and an earnest prayer
Rises to God through tears and sorrow pangs,
“God keep us, faithful – faithful to the end.
Like him who lies in sleep after life's pain.”
Thou has been faithful, and they crushed out Life.
(Yielding a perfume like a broken flower).
Shall blossom still, in other lives to be
Till war, and all its evil is no more.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Richardson, “In Memoriam. David Wells, C.O.,” LP (April 12, 1918).

Review Essay: Biblical Authority After Babel

Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity. By Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016. Kindle e-book; \$13.19. ISBN: 9781493405909.

Jayelle Friesen*

The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) is the story of a time in which humanity reached an astonishing level of unity, but a sudden turn of events sent them into chaos and confusion with lasting effects. This story is the inspiration behind the title of Kevin J. Vanhoozer's book, *Biblical Authority After Babel*. He explains that the Protestant Reformation is considered the church's very own Babel experience: with the loss of the "tower" of Roman Catholic uniformity,¹ the result has been nothing but confusion over biblical interpretation, authority, and interpretive communities² – or has it? In this book Vanhoozer sets out to prove that the Reformation was not responsible for interpretive pluralism, but rather a "unitive Protestant interpretive plurality."³

Review

As just stated, the main thesis of the book is that the Reformation was not responsible for the widespread interpretive pluralism that has divided Protestantism and hindered the witness of the church, but rather, if understood correctly, leads to a unifying view of interpretive plurality through the help of the Holy Spirit. Essentially, the two main problems that Vanhoozer addresses here are interpretation and interpretive authority.

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¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), Kindle e-book, location 6268.

² Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 84.

³ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6290.

In order to give an answer to these problems, the author appeals to the five solas of the Reformation: *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), and *solus deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone). Vanhoozer chooses to focus on the solas because they represent what he calls “mere Protestant Christianity,” as they are a summation of the gospel message, and govern Protestant theology to avoid the accusations of interpretive anarchy.⁴

The thesis is supported through a process called “retrieving” the *solas* of the Reformation. The key word here, “retrieving,” means “a mode of ‘handing down,’”⁵ but the author goes further to say that retrieving is more than just repeating history; it is about reforming as well: “retrieval is not replication but a creative looking back for the sake of a faithful moving forward.”⁶ Vanhoozer embarks on a journey to retrieve the key insights of the Reformation; he retrieves both the *solas* to combat interpretive pluralism, and, stemming from the *solas*, the priesthood of all believers in order to answer the problem of authority in interpretive communities.⁷

The introduction gives readers a brief look at some of the main criticisms of the Protestant movement, especially those that say it begat secularism, skepticism, and schism.⁸ The two main problems of interpretation and authority are identified immediately, and at first glance it appears that *sola scriptura* should be the only *sola* that matters because Scripture is the object of interpretation. However, the Protestant approach involves more than just declaring the Bible to be authoritative, and although *sola scriptura* holds a central place in Vanhoozer’s argument, each of the *solas* are interrelated and therefore all deserve careful investigation. Five entire chapters of the book are dedicated to each of the *solas*, and the method of investigation for each *sola* is to ascertain what the Reformers meant by it, analyze other views, and then retrieve the *sola* for the Church today.

The first chapter looks at *sola gratia*, the idea that the cross is sufficient for salvation and that works have no place in making a per-

⁴ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 193-194.

⁵ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 575.

⁶ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 1192-1193.

⁷ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 597.

son righteous.⁹ Scripture itself is a divinely initiated, gracious, and self-communicative act of the triune God. To refute the claim that the Reformation begat secularism, Vanhoozer shows that *sola gratia* places biblical interpreters and interpretation into the economy of the grace of triune communicative activity.¹⁰

Chapter two covers *sola fide*, which reminds us that as fallible interpreters we are reliant on the Holy Spirit to help us understand Scripture.¹¹ Just as salvation comes through faith, so does knowledge of God. It is here that Vanhoozer turns to the community of faith and its traditions, by which we safeguard against interpretive relativism.¹² Authority is placed in the apostolicity of the Church – the extent to which it comes in line with the apostles – and not in individual autonomy.¹³ This understanding of authority, together with the understanding of *sola scriptura* that follows, refutes the charge that the Reformation caused skepticism.¹⁴

In chapter three, Vanhoozer finally clarifies the most problematic *sola*: the intention of the Reformers was not *solo scriptura* (scripture only), meaning that it is the sole source of theology, but *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), meaning that it is the primary authority in theology.¹⁵ Scripture cannot be separated from the economy of grace, the community of faith, or church tradition, which is why it is imperative that this *sola* works together in conjunction with all the others.¹⁶ *Sola scriptura* also confirms the practice that Scripture interprets Scripture, which means that the clearer passages help us interpret those that are less clear, and that Jesus is the beginning key insight into understanding what Scripture is all about.¹⁷

Chapter four deals with *solus Christus*, which affirms that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, but does not separate Jesus from the Church. Vanhoozer reminds us that “mere

⁸ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 313-418.

⁹ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6238-6239.

¹⁰ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 1666-1667.

¹¹ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 2129-2131.

¹² Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 2337-2339.

¹³ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 2602-2605.

¹⁴ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 1667-1669.

¹⁵ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 3174-3175.

¹⁶ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 3163-3166.

¹⁷ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 3484-3486.

Protestant Christianity ought to treasure the church because it treasures the gospel.”¹⁸ Once again, authority is given to the Church by Christ himself because it is the visible representation of his lordship and rule on Earth, which makes us members of a royal priesthood.¹⁹ This *sola* refutes the charge of schism, since we believe that Christ is Lord over every local church and denomination.²⁰

Finally, chapter five brings us to *solī deo gloria*. This last *sola* encourages us to actively work towards the common good and unity of the Church, because, “the one church is a confederacy of local holy nations, united by a single constitution (Scripture), head (Jesus Christ), and ethos (Holy Spirit).”²¹ The true intention of the Reformers was never to sow disunity within the Church, which means that a proper retrieving of this *sola* should naturally guide us towards a unified body.

Vanhoozer’s conclusion, unsurprisingly, is that evangelical Protestantism is the best option for the church on the whole. The marriage of Protestantism and evangelicalism brings together a catholic sensibility and robust ecclesiology, with a fervor for biblical authority and union with Christ.²² It is this transdenominational movement that embodies “mere Protestant Christianity” so well.²³

Critical Engagement

Coming from a strong evangelical Anabaptist background, it is difficult to disagree with Vanhoozer’s thesis. Of course, the Reformation was good for the church, in order to right the many wrongs imposed by the Roman Catholic Church. And of course, despite the many divisions in the evangelical church, we must continue to allow every believer to be an interpreter of Scripture. I freely admit that I came to this book with bias, but this does not mean Vanhoozer has not created a solid argument in favor of the Protestant Reformation.

¹⁸ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 4214-4215.

¹⁹ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 4571-4575.

²⁰ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 1669-1670.

²¹ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6342-6345.

²² Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6084-6086.

²³ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6001-6002.

The strength of Vanhoozer's book lies in the wealth of research and reliable sources. He summons an army of quotes from well-known authors and theologians to back up his claims, which make his argument all the more convincing. At times, it is difficult to isolate his thoughts from other authors' due to his heavy usage of quotes, but the consensus shows that Vanhoozer is not just a rogue theologian trying to make a proverbial silk purse from the sow's ear of Reformation aftermath.

Another strength of the book is that Vanhoozer treats opposing views with respect. The way he introduces the main criticisms of Protestantism into his introductory chapter almost makes the reader agree with the critics before he has even begun to defend the Reformation. Similarly, in each of the five *sola* chapters, he places the opposing views near the beginning of the chapter, so that the reader has time to process all the information before arriving at his conclusion. In this way Vanhoozer follows the well-known advice, "You must be able to say 'I understand' before you can say 'I disagree.'"

There is one major challenge in this book that may frustrate more practical readers. While I find myself in agreement with the premise, it is a shame that the book does not go further into practical application on a topic that is still highly relevant to churches. In his defense, Vanhoozer states that, "This book is not a handbook on hermeneutics. I have not pretended to offer detailed... procedures for resolving interpretive difference. My primary aim has been to refute the charge that the Reformation loosed interpretive anarchy upon the world."²⁴ Clearly practical application is not the intent of the author – it is defending the Reformation, a task which he accomplishes with thoughtful persuasion. Yet the ideas he argues for are not purely speculative; they must be applied to the church in order to have meaning. In fact, his entire argument revolves around an action: "reclaiming," which we have already defined as looking back in order to move forward. This act of "moving forward" inherently implies application even though it is not provided. The challenge for readers going forth, then, is to realize how to reclaim the *solas* in their own church context, a task that requires a lot of time, effort, and creative thinking.

²⁴ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 6316-6320.

There are two, albeit general, suggestions that Vanhoozer touches on briefly in the concluding chapter that can help inspire such practical application: dialogue and peace. Dialogue means communicating with Christians who differ in their interpretation of scripture; “Dialogue does not add new meaning to the text, but, as a result of the different perspectives, each person in the dialogue discovers something in the text that he or she had not previously seen. Without ‘outsiderness’ ... people see less, not more.”²⁵ Peace is the result when theological debate is done correctly, in order to avoid theological discord.²⁶ These two suggestions are a starting point to reclaim the kind of Protestantism that Vanhoozer describes.

One concern with this book and its implications is that even if we were to somehow implement Vanhoozer’s ideas and reclaim the *solas* of the Reformation and the priesthood of all believers in our churches, there is no guarantee that we would not end up in exactly the same place 500 years from now. Despite the original intention behind the Reformation, the Protestant church has still ended up where it is today, complete with its many problems and divisions, because it did not develop in a vacuum. In the last 500 years, the church has had to wade through deep cultural and epistemological shifts, and so while the critics are not wrong when they say there are problems with Protestantism, we cannot blame the problems directly on the Reformers. Perhaps Vanhoozer’s idea of “mere Protestant Christianity” may not even be entirely possible. He can defend the Reformation with ease, but reconciling theories with actuality is difficult to accomplish, and that is our challenge. Yet his entire argument, being wrapped up in “reclaiming” the Reformation, means there must be continued striving towards and embracing this “mere Protestant” vision to the best of our ability.

Despite the challenges and concerns, this book has a solid thesis with supporting research and a fair assessment of the situation. Anyone already on the side of the Protestant Reformation should find it easy to understand and agree with the arguments made in this book. Vanhoozer accomplishes what he set out to do, which is first and foremost to defend the Reformation against its critics.

²⁵ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 5658-5660.

²⁶ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 5702-5707.

Personal Engagement

Upon reading this book, I appreciated Vanhoozer's willingness to bring up objections to Protestantism, and to point out and address problems. My entire church and educational background has been steeped in evangelical Anabaptist theology, and it is easy to become blind to our faults without an outside perspective. I was challenged to think even more critically about that spiritual heritage, and to question whether or not we are really on the 'right' track.

One specific challenge I found in Vanhoozer's book was to take a closer look at unity as a sign of the true church. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit..." (Eph. 4:4-5, NIV), but 500 years after the Reformation there are thousands of Protestant denominations worldwide that are in disagreement with one another. Why are we so divided?²⁷ I almost envy the Roman Catholic Church for their outward solidarity, although they are not without their problems either. The encouragement that Vanhoozer offers is that we cannot simply look at the numbers to decide whether or not the Reformation was worthwhile; "we need to assess whether and to what extent the Reformation encouraged faithfulness to God's Word and godly obedience—conformity to Christ. Christlikeness is ultimately the only fruit that counts."²⁸

Another way this book has impacted me is by bringing a new sense of clarity to the *solas*. Phrases such as "saved through faith," "by grace alone," and "the authority of Scripture," – to name a few – are common refrains in a church such as mine. So common, in fact, that we forget to stop and explain what they truly mean. My personal takeaway from this book is a renewed interest in the *solas* and a fuller understanding of their meaning.

To give a more specific example, I previously mentioned how Vanhoozer identifies the common misconception of *solo scriptura*, not *sola scriptura*. In the past, I have been accused of contradicting my own heritage of Scripture alone by those who misunderstand the meaning; how could I possibly confess Scripture alone while affirm-

²⁷ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 157-163.

²⁸ Vanhoozer. *Biblical Authority*, 164-166.

ing church tradition or spiritual experience and the work of the Holy Spirit? According to Vanhoozer, these people are assuming the common misconception of *solo scriptura*. On top of this, the “Jesus and me” mentality of the evangelical church, in addition to our highly individualistic society, has led many to forget that true Reformational interpretive authority must find itself in the community of faith, not just in the individual. While it is true that there are evangelicals who may fall into this camp, such naïve Biblicism does not accurately represent the Reformation. I appreciate that Vanhoozer reminds us not to separate Scripture from the economy of grace, the community of faith, or church tradition.

In conclusion, *Biblical Authority After Babel* is a book that defends the Reformation and attempts to see interpretation and interpretive authority in the proper light. It is written out of careful consideration and thoughtful research, in order to defend against popular criticisms. As a result, we have a better picture of what the Protestant church can be, and hopefully encouragement to strive towards that “mere Protestant Christianity.”

Book Review: For the Life of the World

For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas. By Robert J. Dean. Eugene: Pickwick, 2016. 239 pp. + appendix, bibliography, index. Paperback; \$35.00. ISBN: 9781498233194.

Robert J. Dean has written a wonderful book, compelling, lucid, and elegant. He takes up the christological and ecclesiological thought of two of the twentieth century's leading thinkers, showing that for both "a catholic ecclesiology is a necessary implicate of an evangelical Christology" (p. 13).

Beginning with Christology, Dean demonstrates the extent to which each eschews speculative and exemplaristic approaches, focusing instead on Jesus' identity and the form of moral-ethical life commensurate with it. Each in his own way draws "renewed attention to the concrete figure of Jesus Christ whose unique identity is rendered in the Scriptures" (p. 65). Though Dean is primarily concerned with exposition, he nonetheless raises a few probing questions in relation to each theologian. For example, in the case of Hauerwas, he asks "to what degree narrative or story is an adequate conceptual tool to speak of the person of Jesus Christ and his relationship to the church?" (p. 49) That said, Dean demonstrates, through scrupulous attention to the sources, "the animating center, shared by both theologians, is nothing other than the person of Jesus Christ in the irreducible uniqueness of his personal presence" (p. 71).

In the second major section of the book, Dean unfolds their respective ecclesiologies, understood as making sense only in light of Christ who wills to take form in the work, or as Bonhoeffer likes to say, "visible space" (p. 88). The enemy for both men, Dean argues, is the belief that the Messiah can be without his people. Life together means, among other things, that Christians are shaped in such a way that they learn to desire rightly. Interestingly, it is here that Dean deftly explains how Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas offer criticisms of the work of their great mentor, Karl Barth. For Hauerwas, Barth is not

sufficiently catholic. Barth's "church" lacks "a certain density in the world" (p. 142). Barth's thought fails "to specify the material conditions necessary for sustaining the church's witness" (p. 126). For Bonhoeffer, Barth's ecclesiology lacks concreteness and explicit relationship to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Dean brings Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas into dialogue. The former would be nervous, he argues, about the latter's emphasis on virtue, detracting as it does from the immediate call to discipleship. The latter would be twitchy about the former's consideration of the church as a kind of mandate.

In the third major section, we are treated to an account of how each understands the church and state relationship. As is well known, Bonhoeffer was no fan of democracy per se. Democracy requires subjects trained in ways of being conducive to human flourishing, something that was not the case. Government's mandate, Dean shows, is from above, indeed from Jesus Christ, the man for others. The church is to be open to the world, recognizing that Christ is at work in it to advance his purposes. For Hauerwas, we see how the state "in its current existing form, in effect [establishes] its immunity from the claims of the gospel" (p. 191). Hauerwas offers trenchant criticisms of a church that joins with the world in valorizing "speed and efficiency" (p. 199). As with the previous chapter, Dean is not immune from offering perceptive criticisms of his interlocutors. He asks, winsomely, whether Hauerwas's theocratic sensibilities are all that profitable? In the case of Bonhoeffer, he wonders whether the language of mandates "obfuscates the eschatological character of the church?" (p. 222). What each theologian gives us is a rich Christian humanism, rooted in a profound appreciation for the joys of ordinary life. We learn from the incarnation "that transcendence is not properly an epistemological category, but is rather a moral category arising from the event of personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 216). Similarly, we learn that the church is called to be for others (Bonhoeffer) and to be itself (Hauerwas)—both of which are profoundly complementary.

In conclusion, I appreciated this book a great deal. A book based on a dissertation, as is Dean's, should do two things. First, it should help you to understanding a complex thinker(s) on his or her own terms. Second, it should encourage engagement that extends and in-

habits their own best insights. Dean's book does both, and with great verve and sensitivity. I look forward to future offerings of his. As I do, I offer one word of caution. Is the aversion to "abstract metaphysical speculation" on the part of Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas warranted? Especially in the case of Hauerwas, who owes much to Thomas' account of salvation as friendship with God, I wonder why there is so little attention paid to God, indeed to the divine unity? To be sure, we hear a lot about Jesus, in the case of both men, and the importance of Trinity, but what about the one God? I would encourage Dean to consider whether the genealogy each assumes about the displacement of Christology and the need for it to assume centre stage in everything is somewhat overblown. Aside from that, the Christian community has been blessed with another younger voice who has clearly internalized some of the most important themes from these two key thinkers, meditation upon which is crucial if the church is to faithfully witness God's Kingdom in these strange and rather disorienting days. May, as Hauerwas says, "God . . . use our faithfulness to make his kingdom a reality in the world" (p. 249).

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Book Review: Jeremiah Invented

Jeremiah Invented: Constructions and Deconstructions of Jeremiah. Edited by Else K. Holt and Carolyn J. Sharp. LHBOTS 595. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015. xxi +145 pages. Cloth. ISBN: 9780567448514.

This collection of ten essays arises out of the *Writing/Reading Jeremiah* section of the 2009–2013 meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. The essays explore the biography of the prophet Jeremiah by multi-dimensional engagements with the literary persona of the prophet. The volume is not an attempt to recover the historic person of Jeremiah, nor that of his so-called biographer. Rather, it explores “dimensions of a rich variety of historical, ideological, and artistic constructions of the prophet Jeremiah” (p. xv).

The volume editors acknowledge that constructions and deconstructions of Jeremiah are formed not simply through an understanding of “ancient historical contexts and semantic possibilities” (p. xix), but by engagement of the reader’s own “convictions, norms, perceptual limitations, and artistic sensibilities” (p. xix). They conclude their introductory comments by posing four new interpretive avenues that (among others) could be pursued more fully to move Jeremian scholarship in fruitful directions (trauma studies, post-colonial readings, biblical studies and ethics, and late-modern and postmodern interpretations of text and culture applied to the role of the Book of Consolation within Jeremiah). Not all of the ten essays follow these avenues, but together they invite the reader into “culturally honest, methodologically sophisticated” interpretations (p. xix).

The first two essays (Joe Henderson, “Duhm and Skinner’s Invention of Jeremiah” and Mary Chilton Callaway, “Seduced by Method: History and Jeremiah 20”) deal in different ways with the historical-critical legacy of Jeremian scholarship. Henderson sketches contexts within which the historical-critical quest for the “authentic” voice of the prophet was conducted that led to the prophet looking much like the Romantic poets and even the liberal Protestant scholars themselves. Henderson concludes that, despite the waning of historical-critical engagement, the foundational assumption

of “Duhm’s biographical invention” remains largely intact (p. 15). Callaway juxtaposes the search for authentic history with the post-modern acknowledgement of multivalent voices within a text such as Jeremiah 20. In the text prophet, enemies, exilic redactors—and contemporary readers—surface multiple histories that interact in any reading of Jeremiah 20. Yet, while no authoritative window into one historical moment may be recoverable, theological truth remains intact, fruitfully keeping us “off balance if we don’t domesticate [the text]” (p. 33).

Barbara Green (“Sunk in the Mud: Literary Correlation and Collaboration between King and Prophet in the Book of Jeremiah”) examines the progress of seven discourses between Jeremiah and Zedekiah in chs. 20-39. The discourses develop a similarity between king and prophet: trapped within Jerusalem and mutually vulnerable. In this context, Jeremiah’s failure to convince the king to surrender draws attention to the re-settlers in Babylon, the only future left to the people of Israel. Green concludes her literary reading thus provides “compelling and consoling” theological and spiritual reflection on the fate of both king and prophet (p. 48).

Amy Kalmanofsky (“Bare Naked: A Gender Analysis of the Naked Body in Jeremiah 13”) explores attitudes towards male and female nakedness in the Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamian art and literature. Applied to ch. 13, the analysis shows Jeremiah’s nakedness is symbolic of strength and power reflective of God’s glory, while Israel’s (female) nakedness is obscene, symbolizing disgust and shame. It is the latter symbolism Jeremiah uses rhetorically in ch. 13, calling Israel to repentance.

Kathleen M. O’Connor (“Figuration in Jeremiah’s Confessions with Questions for Isaiah’s Servant”) explores the prophetic persona in the confessions (chs. 10-20) using the lens of disaster and trauma studies. O’Connor shows this “biographical” material enables the exiles to name and reflect upon their trauma. O’Connor concludes by arguing Deutero-Isaiah “allude[s] to, quote[s], and refigure[s]” (p. 71) Jeremiah in the Suffering Servant. This reutilization shows continued reflection on past trauma by the late-Babylonian community, revealing movement toward a more hopeful assessment of past experience.

Mary E. Mills explores the construction of social meaning in “Death and Lament in Jeremiah and Lamentations.” In Jeremiah a male commentator, and in Lamentations a female perspective, construct a literary place of urban annihilation and the appropriate emotional response to such loss. Her synchronic reading enables these texts to stand as a literary space in which lament is named and can be experienced by every reader, male or female, in multiple reader-contexts.

In a very brief response to O’Connor and Mills, A. R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman (“First-Person Figurations of Servant and Suffering in Isaiah and Jeremiah”), reflect on interpretive developments since the 1980’s, and provide probing questions for the ongoing conversation. The response is not a crucial part of the volume. Its inclusion is, however, a gracious acknowledgement of the formative contribution of Diamond to the guild of Jeremian studies, and of his untimely death in 2011.

Three final essays engage Jeremiah through categories of visual and performance art. Louis Stulman’s “Art and Atrocity, and the Book of Jeremiah,” is a plea for a “hermeneutic of engagement” (p. 103) that considers the literary and historical “networks of meaning of the tradition itself” (p. 103), and is wholly engaged in the present world that is “at risk and in the grip of death” (p. 95). Stulman’s essay reads Jeremiah as art that is also disaster and survival literature, depicting trauma in ways recognizable to our present context and thus providing words and images to speak of present-day horrors.

Johanna Erzberger (“Prophetic Sign Acts as Performances”) utilizes examples of modern performance art alongside Jeremiah’s sign of the yoke (chs. 27-28) to reveal how prophetic sign acts behind the biblical narrative “produce meaning” (p. 104). Erzberger’s structural categories explore how the artist/prophet, audience, and public context are inter-related, requiring the audience to identify with or reject the representation of themselves in the performance.

The final essay (Else K. Holt, “Jeremiah the Lamerter: A Synoptic Reading”) exegetes Rembrandt’s 1630 painting of Jeremiah lament. The essay is an example of how artistic interpretation proceeds, the many possible texts that may have influenced the artist, and how attending to an artist’s interpretive conclusions “opens up

the exegete's mind to ambiguities already present in the biblical text and thus to meanings hidden beneath the textual surface" (p. 117).

The essays in this volume apply a multiplicity of interpretive stances and methods to the text of Jeremiah. They reveal that, while questions of history are not wholly abandoned, they need no longer be primary for a fruitful engagement with this prophetic text. This volume is important reading for Jeremian scholars, and for those wishing to engage in a modern era the tragedy to which Jeremiah witnesses.

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Book Review: God the Trinity

God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits. By Malcolm B. Yarnell, III. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016. 272 pages. Hardcover; \$29.99. ISBN: 9781433680748.

In *God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits* Malcolm Yarnell, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, defends the scriptural foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The author's central claim is that Christians will gain a fuller understanding of the Triune God through literary, canonical, and theological interpretation. The book is noticeably not a systematic or philosophical treatment of the Trinity. Rather, Yarnell frames his discussion around eight biblical passages (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Deut 6:4–7; John 1:18; John 16:14–15; John 17:21–22; Eph 1:9–10; and Rev 5:6). Consequently, the contours of historical trinitarian theology, such as the modes of operation, inseparable operations and mutual indwelling, emerge organically under the guidance of careful exegesis. Yarnell employs an artistic metaphor whereby each text presents a “portrait” of the triune God. Collectively, these portraits serve to elucidate the Trinitarian idiom of the Bible—a concept the author develops throughout the work that refers to the manner of the triune God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture. “God as Trinity,” Yarnell explains, “is the transcendent pattern in the entire Bible” (23–4).

In chapter one, Yarnell addresses the weaknesses of a scientific or purely historical-grammatical interpretive method. Such an approach represses the Trinitarian pattern woven throughout the many literary genres of the Bible. Interpreters must read Scripture holistically and canonically. On this basis, Yarnell turns to the triune revelation in the baptismal declaration of Matthew 28:16–20. Baptism, as an act of worship, evokes the very presence of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, and the Christian partakes of his divine life.

In chapter two, Yarnell discusses Paul's metaphysical soteriology in the triune portrait of 2 Corinthians 13:14. Our communion with God is derivative, for Christians participate “with” the divine life of love. Yarnell writes, “Salvation is gained supremely through acceptance of the invitation to enter into an eternal relation with the Triune

God!” (52) Such participation or deification is real but it does not fracture the Creator-creature distinction.

Chapter three considers the Israelite monotheistic claim in Deuteronomy 6:4-7. The Shema reveals both the relational nature of the God of Israel and the required human response to such divine revelation. Yahweh’s oneness is a call to “exclusive” and “entire” religious devotion, rather than an ontological statement regarding God’s intrinsic being. The Trinitarianism of the New Testament writers develops from this confession and redefines Israelite monotheism by including Jesus, the Lord, in the Shema.

In chapters four through six, Yarnell offers a theological interpretation of three passages from the Gospel of John. In these chapters, Yarnell discusses several important aspects of orthodox Trinitarianism in dialogue with patristic interpreters. Utilizing the conceptual categories of the economic and immanent Trinity, Yarnell argues that the economic relation between Father and Son truly reflects the triune life *ad intra*. He writes, “Through the revelation of Jesus Christ, human beings, who are bound within history, are allowed glimpses into the eternal habitation of God, the place of the One who is manifested as Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit” (111). Ontologically, Jesus possesses the divinity of the Godhead (“the Word was God”); relationally, Jesus proceeds from the Father (“the Word was with God”).

In chapter seven, Yarnell explores the doxological hymn in Ephesians 1:3-14. This passage reveals an orderly account of the economy of salvation. God’s redemptive works are truly inseparable although certain acts are rightly appropriated to particular persons. Finally, chapter eight traces the “consummate Trinity” in Revelation 5:6. John’s portrait of the triune God bridges eternity and history. The immanent relations reveal an order or taxis, which entails subordination and mutuality, as the three persons of the Trinity exist in a relationship of perichoretic indwelling.

The Old Testament played a decisive role in the early stages of Trinitarian development.¹ With the exception of Deuteronomy 6:4–6, however, engagement is limited to passages from the New Testament. The work is not intended to be an exhaustive study of all texts relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, further treatment

of the Old Testament would strengthen the author's contention of the pervasive Trinitarian pattern in the Bible.

The book exhibits several strengths that contribute to contemporary evangelical Trinitarian theology. Yarnell's moderate appropriation of Karl Rahner's axiom rightfully grounds human knowledge of the ontological Trinity in the revelation of the incarnate Word of God as the concrete disclosure of the triune God. He writes, "The economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity truly *but not exhaustively*" (173). The Triune God's economic unveiling—as Father, Son, and Spirit—reveals an "unalterable divine reality" (174). Conversely, the delimiting words "*but not exhaustively*" guard divine transcendence and freedom.

Yarnell contends that deficient hermeneutical approaches result in similarly deficient accounts of Trinitarian theology. At times, contemporary evangelicalism has uncritically assumed a rationalistic biblical hermeneutic. In light of this trend, Yarnell revisions theological method in conversation with patristic and pre-critical exegetical models. This approach is decidedly a *via media* between modernism and postmodernism, between "scientific measurement" and "artistic inspiration" (27). Many contemporary theologians hesitate to speak of a doctrine of the Trinity located in the Bible, preferring rather to understand the doctrine as a faithful development of the early church. Offering an alternative to this trend, Yarnell argues that verbal revelation must remain the *sine qua non* of Trinitarian theology. He writes, "God the Trinity is revealed through word and deed in the Bible, even though not in propositional form" (18). In setting a precedent for a theological appropriation of Scripture, the author aims to provide a biblical foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The extensive use of theological interpretation represents an important contribution of the work.

In sum, Yarnell calls for renewal in evangelical Trinitarian theology and offers a work that benefits this resurgence. God the Trinity will serve general readers, pastors, and theological students interest-

¹ Cf. Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

ed in the historic doctrine of the Trinity, theological interpretation, and biblical hermeneutics.

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Book Review: Old Testament Textual Criticism

Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction, 2nd ed., by Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. 255 pp. Paperback; \$24.99. ISBN 9780801097539.

Brotzman's *Old Testament Textual Criticism* has been a standard beginner textbook for textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament since 1994. However, since the field of textual criticism is constantly changing it is necessary at times to prepare revisions of even the "classics." This review will delineate some of the more extensive changes that Tully introduced in order to prepare a second edition of Brotzman's honoured text.

Prior to doing so, however, it is prudent to assist the reader by providing an orientation to the Tully/Brotzman text as a whole and the nature of textual criticism in general. The book is eight chapters in length, complete with an introduction, conclusion, two appendices, "An English Key to *BHS*" and "What Text(s) Are We Attempting to Reconstruct?", a (modest) glossary, bibliography, and thorough subject/author/scripture indices. The preface by notable scholar Bruce Waltke, found within the first edition, has been removed.

In brief, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* invites the reader to probe the sources, methodology, and goals of Old Testament textual criticism. Though it is perhaps tempting for the fledging student or harried pastor to ignore complex matters such as the transmission/copying process of the Scriptures or the procedures for evaluating different textual readings, learning this material effectively will better equip and prepare the exegete to preach, teach, and understand God's Word more circumspectly.

The eight chapters are each of roughly equal length but only a mere three retain their original chapter names and are so indicated with an asterisk * below. Concerning the remaining five chapters, the first edition chapter names are written in square brackets [] following the second "Tully" edition in the list below.

1. * Writing in the Ancient Near East
2. A Brief Overview of the Transmission of the Old Testament Text
[Transmission of the Old Testament in Hebrew]
3. Hebrew Texts of the Old Testament
[Ancient Versions of the Old Testament]
4. Ancient Translations of the Old Testament
[The Dead Sea Scrolls]
5. Critical Editions of the Old Testament Text
[Introduction to BHS]
6. Scribal Changes in the Old Testament Text
[Scribal Errors]
7. * Principles and Practice of Textual Criticism
8. * Textual Commentary on the Book of Ruth

When comparing and contrasting the two editions, one should notice that although the character and basic outline of Brotzman's text have largely been retained (for example, the bold faced headings throughout each of the main sections have been continued), much has been revised and rewritten and a good amount of content has been added throughout. Perhaps the most prominent (and welcome!) change, aside from the detailed explanation of *BHQ* which Tully does most admirably, is the addition of the "For Further Reading" or "For Further Study" sections at the end of many of the volume's chapters.

These recommendations provide up-to-date, sometimes annotated, bibliographies of various references works, monographs, and articles. The resources listed are all well within the bounds of a practical introduction and will serve the student exceptionally well. The lists of suggestions, however, do contain some notable omissions. For example, in chapter three, "Hebrew Texts of the Old Testament," the recommended reading section on the "The Biblical Texts from Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls)" fails to mention explicitly Flint and Vanderkam's *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2002), Vanderkam's *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (2010), or any of the series of volumes in *Studies in the Dead Scrolls and Related Literature* (e.g. Ulrich, 1999; Fitzmyer, 2000; or Flint, 2001). Also, within chapter four, "Ancient Translations of the Old Testament," the "For

Further Study” list pertaining to the Greek Septuagint (LXX) fails to mention Muraoka’s *Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-way Index* (2010), Dine’s *The Septuagint* (2004), Tov’s *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (1999), or Morrish’s inexpensive *Concordance of the Septuagint* (1970).

The second most noticeable (and also heartily welcomed!) change is the addition of more than twice as many total figures (i.e., charts and illustrative depictions), as compared to the first edition. Although space prohibits a full delineation of each new figure, suffice to say that they alone justify the purchase of the second edition and that Tully is to be commended on his erudition in this regard. Although the only completely new table that has been added to the main text itself is 6.1 “Possible Confusion of Archaic Letters,” table 5.1 “Selected Sigla Found in *BHS* and *BHQ*,” previously entitled “Symbols Used in the *BHS*,” now includes images from both of these major critical editions and 3.1 “Biblical Texts from Qumran” has been significantly brought more up-to-date. Minor other changes that improve readability and accuracy are also evident in some of the other tables as well: see 1.1. “Ancient Writings Systems,” 2.2. “Transmission of the Old Testament Text,” and 3.2 “Important Masoretic Manuscripts” for more pronounced examples. All of the tables/figures are well designed and enhance the reader’s comprehension and understanding of the material at hand.

Another welcome addition to the Tully volume is appendix B: “What Text(s) Are We Attempting to Reconstruct?” Within this appendix, Tully discusses the wide variety of scholarly opinions/debates concerning the goal(s) of textual criticism. Upon delineating the various positions, Tully opines: “In summary, in the majority of cases we can state: *The goal of Old Testament textual criticism is to recover the final, authoritative text*” (226). But, “to account for those few cases in which manuscript evidence reflects different literary versions, we must add an “(s)” as a qualifier: *the goal of Old Testament textual criticism is to recover the final, authoritative text(s)*” (226). Emphases original.

Lastly, one notices the extensive, though not exhaustive, update to the bibliography, the few minor updates to the glossary (which, when compared to Tov’s *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* or the

Fischer/Würhwein volume *The Text of the Old Testament*, could have been substantially bolstered) and a markedly clearer presentation of the textual commentary on the book of Ruth. One (minor?) quibble, however, with this last chapter is the lack of engagement with the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Megilloth*. Would it not have behooved the author to leverage, at least in part, the now-standard reference work for such a volume as this? On another note, one imagines that critical interaction with the rather controversial *Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition* (HBCE, formerly the Oxford Hebrew Bible) could also have been beneficial.

Such criticisms notwithstanding, this thorough revision of Broz-tman will surely prepare beginners for further research in textual criticism and thoroughly equip students to use more scholarly, advanced textual criticism manuals, such as *Tov's Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, with increased skill and fluidity. Its primary readers will be undergraduate and graduate students and, one hopes, pastors/ministers.

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