# The Asbury Journal

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Bible, Theology, and Mission

Every fall term here at Asbury Theological Seminary our doctoral students and faculty participate in an inter-disciplinary Post Graduate Colloquium. Themes of the colloquium change from year to year, but Wesleyan studies, biblical studies, and mission studies all play a large role, since our doctoral programs focus on that triumvirate of scholarly foci.

This year the theme focused on another triumvirate: the Bible, Theology, and Missions. It might be accurate to say that everything we do here at Asbury includes all three: The Bible as the foundation of our faith, theology as our Holy Spirit-directed reading of the scriptures, and mission as the everyday outworking of our commitments to bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. But it is especially true of our graduate programs—missions without the Bible and theology is unguided human activity; the Bible without theology and missions remains misunderstood and unpracticed truth; and theology without biblical roots and missional fruit come across as the foolishness of the Greeks.

Lawson Stone, professor of Old Testament, presented a keynote paper that “explores the role of biblical exegesis in the task of Christian theology and in the contemporary global mission of the church from the perspective of an Old Testament scholar.” In this essay, Stone argues that the expansion of the church in its early centuries was energized by “serious biblical study.” The resulting theologies and mission efforts then reflexively helped shape further biblical study and exegesis in an ongoing, fruitful interaction among the three dimensions of bible, theology, and mission.

Mark Awabdy, a biblical studies doctoral student, argues in his essay that revisiting the interpretation of the Hebrew phrase “resident alien” in Leviticus has the potential to reshape the way we do mission to populations today that we might consider similar to that sociological category. As such, Awabdy’s study is a test case of how biblical studies, in this case a proper, precise understanding of a biblical word, can and should readily influence the doing of theology and the practice of mission. This is not, Awabdy argues, idle scholarship, but immediate and important mission work of the highest order. Indeed, some of the most significant unreached people groups such as Muslims, might be redefined by the argument concerning “non-indigenous residents” in this paper.
Brian Ebel, a systematic theology doctoral student, adds some historical perspective to the mix of our theme. He highlights Wolfhart Pannenberg’s understanding of the “retroactive significance of the resurrection” as a way of understanding how important biblical hermeneutic principles. As Ebel states it, “the manner in which Jesus Christ is established to be the Messiah of Israel, united to God, and the reconciler of humanity to God” was the event of resurrection as retroactively understood by the church. “It is by means of his resurrection from the dead that the incarnation and cross are established.”

Kevin Lines, an intercultural studies doctoral student, draws a distinction between biblical hermeneutics and biblical translation—or rather shows their association one to the other. Through biblical translation, new insights into scriptural passages come to light from the understandings of the very people for whom the translation has been prepared. This, in turn, makes future translations of the Bible, to both the same and different people groups, richer and deeper and more faithful to what God intends for the whole world.

Together this package of essays raises important questions that pertain to biblical studies, theology and mission which are the very stuff of what is happening to the global church in our day and age.

Another of our Asbury students gives comment and critique of a recent essay in the Asbury Journal by Nathan Crawford, with both essays offering important insights on how recent insights from the neurosciences can be brought into conversation with the soteriological insights of Wesleyan theology.

Finally, we have included in this issue an address from the president of Asbury Theological Seminary, Timothy Tennent, that brings into sharper relief the implications of globalization on the global mission of the church, showing that a Wesleyan understanding of holiness is key to energizing the mission movements of today.

—Terry C. Muck
Editor, The Asbury Journal
Abstract

This essay explores the role of biblical exegesis in the task of Christian theology and in the contemporary global mission of the church from the perspective of an Old Testament scholar. It poses the question what a biblical exegesis would look like that was consistently Christian in its assumptions while, at the same time, honest and competent in dealing with the phenomena of the biblical text. Using the exegesis of the early centuries of the church as a case study, the essay develops insights into the role of serious biblical study in empowering the early church’s vibrant expansion through the entire known world, shaping its clarification of the essential tasks and content of Christian theology, by competently integrating both literal and spiritual dimensions of the Bible’s meaning into a coherent process of biblical interpretation.

Key Words: Bible, theology, mission, patristics, exegesis, hermeneutics, literal, spiritual, typology, allegory

Lawson G. Stone is professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary where he has taught for 24 years.
It almost sounds like a joke. “Four rabbis went into a bar.” But it’s actually a very serious rabbinic legend. Four imminent rabbis, according to the legend, entered a garden. The first one, Simeon Ben Azzai, dropped dead. The second rabbi, Simeon Ben Zoma, lost his mind. The third, Elisha ben Abuyah, lost his faith and became the most reviled, infamous apostate in the history of Judaism. Only the fourth, Rabbi Akiva, emerged from the garden alive.¹

Most hearers of that story would say, “Stay out of that garden!” But what was this place of death, insanity, and spiritual peril from which only the greatest of rabbis emerged whole? In rabbinic Hebrew the word for “garden” in this story is pārdes, the famous acronym for the four senses of scripture in classical Jewish exegesis.² The legend hints darkly at the hazards menacing those daring entry into the “garden” of the senses of the Scripture ill prepared. Exegesis is not for sissies.

The story hits home in the world of contemporary scholarship in Bible, theology and mission. The uninitiated new seminarian or young scholar encounters a mélange of disconnected methods, a cacophony of voices, and a welter of ideologies, enforced by the powerful resources of scholarly organizations, publishers and academic administrations. Jewish philosopher, linguist, and culture critic George Steiner has characterized tribalized academic journalism—what we often call “scholarship”—as “covens which celebrate this or that rite of explication.”³ And, we might add, eager for new initiates. The student began simply enough with a love for God and the scriptures and a passion for souls to be brought to Christ. But now she feels an undertow, a pull toward the predilections and preoccupations of the academy. A new acculturation begins. Then she hears the insistent demands of a church all too often in the tank with popular culture, impatient with reflective analysis and resentful of boundaries and impediments in its rush to relevance. Pity the student who, lacking the wisdom, fortitude, and spiritual survival skills of Rabbi Akiva, finds the garden of scriptural sense a very dangerous jungle. There be dragons.

The most fruitful course through this jungle probably does not lie on the path of contemporary movements of revision or reaction. I doubt a new “theological exegesis” or hermeneutical incantation will put the pieces back together. Instead, we should attend to the exact meaning of our clichéd insistence on uniting heart and head. Exactly how do we achieve a genuinely learned and intellectually responsible biblical interpretation in the context of a robust love of God’s truth and a vibrantly missional church life? I hunger for self-consciously Christian counsel on the interpretation of the Bible that still respects the text’s own voices, still listens. I grieve the present sterile impasse between modernity and post-modernity. I suspect that recent popular narratives about the history of hermeneutics too easily schematize
the history of interpretation and self-servingly exaggerate selected
distinctions among the so-called pre-critical, critical and post-critical eras. These concerns have driven me farther and farther back in search of
interpreters who share our post-apostolic position while evincing an urgent
and lively connection with the text as a transformative divine word. I
increasingly find myself among those who sense the best answers come
from the formative era of the Church, beginning with First Clement, a product
of the late first/early second century, and extending possibly as late as the
death of Bede the Venerable (735) or John of Damascus (750). I confess
that as an OT scholar whose research competence lies the the Late Bronze/
Iron I cultural transition in Syria-Palestine, who knows more about Hebrew
verbs, Egyptian chariots and Philistine swords than I do early Christian history
and theology, I enter the jungle of patristic hermeneutics with some disquiet.
What follows is not a definitive statement, but a report on what I have learned
so far—perhaps even a cry for help!

Whenever the theme of the Bible in the early church comes up,
thetical pundists array themselves into several camps. One loudly
declares the “superiority of pre-critical exegesis” while pillorying historical criticism,
which, admittedly, offers a target-rich environment. Others recoil in horror
from specters of wild allegory or, worse, the threat that the OT might
actually end up being read in the light of the Christian revelation. Still others
celebrate patristic exegesis, finding in its apparent claims for multiple
meanings a warrant for the post-modern claim of polyvalence in texts, glibly
asserting close fellowship of Augustine and Chrysostom with Derrida,
Foucault, and Lyotard, to the surprise of them all!

My explorations of this “jungle” of early Christian exegesis has crystalized
in three observations that have provided me with fresh directions in every
facet of my own exegetical labors and which, I trust, will help any aspiring
to be thoroughly Christian and rigorously exegetical as we serve the
advancement of kingdom of Christ in our world.

**The Bible in Mission**

First, the early church’s distinctive engagement with scripture figures
substantially in the explosive expansion of early Christianity. We should
note here that the early Christians evangelized their entire known world.
Cultures existed of which the early Christians knew nothing. But in every
culture they knew, they sought to plant churches. Some thrived, some
flopped. But from Ireland to China, from Russia to Ethiopia, the early
Christian movement spread to every culture they knew, despite persecutions,
despite being a marginal sect, without the help of cultural anthropology,
faith-promise pledging, Facebook or even PowerPoint, though I take some
comfort knowing they did have seminaries, of a sort! The Bible played a
central role in this projection of the Christian faith to the whole known world. So important was scripture in the early centuries of the church that Christians had, virtually, to invent, a vastly expanded form of the “notebook,” that is, the codex rather than the scroll, to get the Bible into a form more usable in its mission. They pioneered and enormously expanded the practical utility of this previously minor medium of information storage and retrieval. Francis Young reminds us that the patristic era, the 2nd-6th century A.D., was perhaps the most literate era in human history prior to the 19th-20th century and that the adoption of the codex constituted a vital cross-cultural initiative. In fact, the story of the expansion of Christianity could be told as the story of the translation of the Bible. This missionally directed technological innovation also re-situated the study of the scriptures from the formal exclusivity of sacred liturgy, where scrolls dominated, to the lectern, the study and the classroom where codices became the form taken by texts to be studied closely and even critically. Moreover, the shift to codices profoundly affected how readers perceived the scriptures. The entire Bible in one book provided both a linear sequence and immediate “random access” to any passage, making intertextuality and a comprehensive canonical awareness palpable features of Christian reading, a quality instantly obvious to anyone reading patristic exegesis. The early church’s engagement with scripture fed, enabled and energized the moral fulfillment of the Great Commission and the adaptations to mission reciprocally shaped how the church experienced the scriptures.

In connection with presenting the gospel to every known culture the early church did something else quite striking. Periodically, historians of doctrine depict pre-Nicean Christianity as a non-philosophical, primarily ethical devoid of metaphysical speculation, friendly to diversity, not preoccupied with awkward ideas like the Trinity or perichoresis or hypostatic union. By contrast, Nicean and Post-Nicean Christianity morphed into a gigantic system contaminated by Hellenistic philosophical ideas and corrupted by Roman power. Sometimes such narratives also assert the facile but invalid contrast between claims of a dynamic, practical and ethical “Hebraic mentality” found in the ministry of Jesus, that mutated under the pressure of the more abstract and sterile speculative logic of a “Greek mentality” that emerged in Paul and came to fruition in the dogmas of Niccan and Post-Nicean Christianity. Wolfhart Pannenberg exposed the weaknesses of this argument decades ago, in an article entitled “The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology,” which appeared in a book entitled, ironically, Basic Questions in Theology! Pannenberg here demonstrated that in fact, the conquest and assimilation went the other direction. Early Christian thought was so vibrant that it commandeered as its own inheritance the intellectual
and cultural legacies of Greece and Rome, transformationally re-inhabiting these cultures and reciprocally infusing them with a new energy. Likewise, Young speaks of early Christianity’s “potentially supersessionary claim in relation to all of ancient culture” in which “with astonishing audacity, a small persecuted community of oddly assorted persons with no natural kinship, no historical identity, claims a universality which challenges the most powerful tradition in ancient society”.

Speaking of the biblical preaching of the bishops of the 4th century, Charles Kannengieser has observed precisely this dynamic in the biblical preaching of the 4th century urban bishops:

By addressing audiences of newly converted men and women, the bishops, many of whom were themselves adult converts, proceeded to retrieve essential values of their own thousand-year-old culture. They would literally convert the past millennium in marking out, in terms precisely of their culture, a consistent definition of Christian beliefs. Christian leaders and interpreters built up a powerful theoretical construct in defense of their faith which implied a radical metamorphosis of Greek thought at the same time as it actualized the message of Jewish scriptures in the context of the Greek-speaking churches.

That Christian thought could seize and transform the language and ideas of the very cultures who thought to exterminate it did not dilute it, but manifested its vitality.

People like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Jerome, and others were right in the middle of these achievements of early Christianity. All were searching and serious interpreters of scripture. Justin was a debater and apologist who shows a surprising closeness to Jewish exegesis, even to forms of the Greek OT more at home in the synagogue than the church.

Irenaeus, living at the edge of civilization in Lyon, France, spoke on behalf of a “great church” theology that would express the common faith through diverse cultural forms but still be recognizable as the same faith the world over while still distinguished from deviant theology, distortions, and heresy.

Origen, in the yeasty ferment of Alexandria confounded Heretics, Jews and Pagans in debate, but was beloved by his greatest adversaries outside the faith—though reviled by many inside! Augustine, that “purpose driven pastor” of late 4th to 5th century North Africa, preached to throngs of seekers and believers alike, shouldering both pastoral and administrative burdens though his first love was, in fact, biblical scholarship. John Chrysostom was the eloquent expositor of North Syria who could also sympathize with his sleepy congregants as the lamps in church were lit or rebuke sharply his audience for skipping church to attend the races! Though
it lacked the resources of cultural or economic coercion, the early church decisively engaged local and regional cultures and gained a hearing. Th

ough not authoritarian through coercion, the church was authoritative by through effective persuasion achieved by a high level of penetrating biblical exposition.

The NT clearly expects the Christian Faith to transform and transcend its Jewish origins; to fulfill and go beyond them, but without repudiating them. Charged with a global mission, the Christian faith had to be able to translate itself, without loss or corruption, into the expressive means of new cultures in order to infect them with the life-giving new self-replicating DNA of divine grace and the world-view transforming energy of Christian ideas. Virus like, the gospel could both merge with and utterly transform its host culture. The early church did not compromise the faith, but knew what the contemporary church, in its nervously self-conscious attempts at contextualization too easily forgets. A missional hermeneutic must translate the gospel to make it accessible, not transform the gospel merely to make it acceptable. The church fruitfully appropriates Greek or Roman, or any other culture’s expressive forms knowing that the Gospel is potentially indigenous to any culture because it ultimately transcends all cultures.

The church’s challenge today remains the same: to articulate with integrity the substance and detail of the faith in terms accessible and persuasive to our neighbors around the world. The church needs to use the tools and ideas that the surrounding culture provides to clarify and communicate the gospel forcibly and even to discern better the truth of its Gospel. The early church’s study of the Bible enabled it to do precisely that. The very motion of cultural self-transcendence enacted in the OT storyline of Israel’s ongoing historical engagement with Yahweh, culminating in the incarnation, passion and ascension of Jesus, and embedded in the structure of the Christian biblical canon, predisposed the Christian movement to adapt to any culture while maintaining its unchanging identity in Christ.

How faithful and effective is today’s church in the face of the global cultural dimensions of our evangelistic and theological calling? Perhaps we can learn afresh from ancient Christianity how to recover an engagement with the Bible that will energize and inform a more meaningful and fruitful witness to contemporary cultures. None of these early leaders were perfect, nor can we simply drop their approaches and solutions down in our time, mimicking patristic techniques without implementing the underlying principles. Still, however distant we might be from these pre-modern exegetes, how they went about the study of scripture had everything to do with the evident excellence and faithfulness with which they fulfilled their vocations. As we seek to replicate and extend their achievements, we dare not ignore their insights into the craft of interpreting the Bible.
The Bible and Theology

A second achievement of emerging Christianity also illuminates its engagement with the Bible. The early church formulated the fundamental doctrines of the faith, in enduring forms that continue to set the standards for Christian theology. The early church wrestled with the great questions provoked by the Bible, but not definitively answered there. How can monotheists call Jesus “God?” How can Jesus be God and man at the same time? Was Jesus two natures in one body? Was he one person with two tendencies? Somebody had to figure it out. Someone like Athanasius. Or take the trinity: is the Holy Spirit “God” or just a divine influence? Is the Holy Spirit a person? How do the Father, Son, and Spirit inter-relate? Are they just three “forms” taken by one God at different times? How can they be eternal if one is begotten and the other proceeds? The Bible provokes these questions, but does not provide a comprehensive answer. Somebody had to figure it out. Somebody like Augustine or, even earlier, the controversial Novatian. Christians in the centuries following tried to improve on the answers arrived at by the earliest efforts of the church but, at their best, tended mainly to rediscover or reinvent patristic insights.

At the heart of this theological achievement raged an ongoing debate about how to interpret the Bible. More importantly, the heart of the heart of this discussion was the church’s reflection on the status of the OT. The church has invested—I am tempted to say, “wasted”—now two or three generations in re-visiting a range of theological controversies, often under new and fetching titles, but essentially recapitulating tired, old debates in forms not even fresh, but duplicative of ancient error and heresy. A church in need of clarifying afresh the doctrines of the faith surely has has something to learn from ancient Christianity about how to read the Bible theologically.

Ironically, the “biblical theology movement” of the mid-20th century, which aspired to address precisely such matters, fell short, perhaps because it did not learn from the ancient church what its true question should have been. Any survivor of a modern course of theology knows about the ponderous debate from Gablter to the present about the purpose of biblical theology and its derivative question regarding a “center” for OT theology. These discussions have become sterile exercises in diminishing returns. Worse, these questions prevent us from feeling the force of more fundamental questions. Listening to the early church has pushed me to ask a much more risky and more explicitly theological question: How does God, by the Spirit, use the Bible to rule the church? Employing an analogy to the human flesh of Jesus, ancient exegeses knew that the Bible, through its very nature as time- and culture-conditioned communication through human literature, mediated by the divine inspiration of its authors a capacity to resound and
relay divine speech, a word by which God discloses his character, purpose and will, transforms humanity and fulfills the prayer of Jesus, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In these time- and culture-contextualized words, the Christian finds the truth, and not just a subjective “for me” truth. We find the Truth of God, believed, in the words of Vincent of Lerins, everywhere, always, and by all.

Meaningful encounters with God in scripture surely happen periodically on any hermeneutical approach. The Holy Spirit reigns over the church and is not prevented by bad hermeneutics from breaking in on the church’s life. The church, however, is not called to exegetical sloth, counting on extraordinary divine intervention to make up the deficit! The challenge for scriptural hermeneutics is to discover for today the transforming hearing of God’s word in the disciplined study of scripture that was the norm for early Christianity. While none can domesticate the Spirit or pre-package the living voice of God, and while “steps” oriented methods that reduce interpretation to a sterile, mechanical process will fail, despite their business and bustle, I still wonder whether the church today is hearing that voice as frequently as our loquacious God would like. The whole enterprise of exegesis ought to culminate frequently, even if not predictably, in that kind of encounter with the Truth. If exegesis does not regularly arrive at that point, why do it? Few would doubt that Irenaeus, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, and later, Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, and Erasmus got serious traction on scripture as the executive means of God’s lordship over the church. As the framers and tradents of Christian language and ideas, their discourse generated the whole subsequent Christian consciousness of the canon and the practice of theological exegesis. Indeed, some thinkers have argued that the patristic exegesis of the 2nd-6th centuries, in its passionate conviction that the patient, scrupulous analysis of “the words” could in fact disclose “The Word,” birthed the distinctive rationality and hermeneutic norms that have underwritten the finest achievements of literate western culture.

At the heart of the classical, patristic exegetical practice rests a single concept, all too easily distorted and parodied, but essential to their work: the “rule of faith.” Anyone educated theologically in the last 100 years has inherited the prejudiced view of the rule of faith as an alien ideology forcibly imposed on a texts ill suited to them. We can almost hear the shudder of horror in Walter Brueggeman’s voice as he breathlessly warns that hearing the OT according to a rule of faith, leads to the “odd outcome of. .an unqualified embrace of the Tridentine inclination to subject the text and its possible interpretation to the control of church categories.” Brueggeman of course begs the question whether the character and purpose of God, his grace, and salvation might be themes at home in the pages of the OT and
NT, and whether contemporary ideologies of relativism and pluralism are not even more alien to these texts! Originating as it did at least as early as Irenaeus in the 2nd century, prior to the great doctrinal controversies of subsequent centuries, the rule of faith can hardly be equated with the creeds and formulations of the councils. The rule of faith in fact even precedes the general recognition of the NT canon. The church in its first post-apostolic century had the OT, primarily in Greek, a body of Christian writings that had not yet crystallized into a fixed canon, and the “rule of faith.” Reading in the formative era of early Christianity, the second century, the time of the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists, discloses two realities that were simply facts of these persons’ existence as Christians. First, they affirm without reservation, hesitation, or qualification that the text of scripture, specifically the OT, stands as the word of God, even though the OT on its plain sense does not use the distinctive vocabulary of post-incarnation Christianity. Second, the early Christian preachers and teachers live in the contemporary reality of the church’s knowledge of God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. This latter experience took the form of the living memory of the apostolic teaching. Early Christian leaders saw these indisputable facts as two simultaneous dimensions of one single revelation of God. On the one hand, the Text, the scriptures: a large, rather wild and unruly body of divine truth, the great mosaic. On the other hand, the Christian reality, the hypothesis of the whole Bible, which could be summarized easily by Irenaeus in his Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching in just a few lines already adumbrating the trinitarian structure of the creeds. Earlier, the prophetic proof-texting of Justin Martyr clung to an order of presentation curiously identical to later creedal formulations. And the formative era writers instinctively and unself-consciously see these two media as manifestations of one and the same divine truth. They do not join them, they experience them as already one piece. This unity of the text of scripture with the content, the reality, of the Christian faith is what these writers name “the rule of faith.” It was not a rule one had to adhere to, but was simply the fact that scripture was divine revelation, and the subject matter of that revelation was the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. There were the words, and there was the Word. One did not “obey” the rule of faith, rather good interpretation simply exposed it.

More than is typically acknowledged, early Christian exegetes did recognize and respect the differences between these two aspects of biblical revelation and struggled to integrate the “pre-incarnational” character of the OT with the revelation of God in Christ. Two voices in the early church epitomize this watershed insight. On the one hand, we have Marcion of Sinope. Marcion had become wealthy in the shipping business and after moving to Rome around 140, had made a large donation to the Roman church. Shortly,
he declared himself the true “apostle of Jesus Christ” started his own church, and created his own canon of scripture. Marcion read the OT closely and grasped its pre-Christian character so clearly that he concluded that it in fact had nothing to do with the Christian faith beyond serving as an inferior prologue to be discarded once the superior religion of Christ and Paul appeared. His biographer, Adolph Von Harnack, agreed, famously asserting:

To reject the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake which the Church rightly repudiated; to retain it in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation could not yet avoid; but to continue to keep it in Protestantism as a canonical document after the nineteenth century is the consequence of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.

Marcion missed the rule of faith by seeing only the literal, or remote character of the OT, sheared off from the larger context of the culmination of its own inner historical movement in Christ. Divorcing the text from the testimony, the words from the Word, he rejected the OT and any part of the NT that depended upon it. The church reacted vigorously, expelling Marcion and asserting in the strongest possible terms the unity of the OT with the redemption God achieved in Christ. The Roman church also returned Marcion’s money!

The rule of faith could also be missed on the other side. A curious illustration is the Epistle of Barnabas. Barnabas also read the OT quite closely. Like Marcion, he saw the OT’s absence of explicit reference to uniquely Christian ideas, and indeed, material in the OT that seemed to conflict with the Christian revelation. But where Marcion turned left, Barnabas turned right. Barnabas denies that the OT possesses any literal sense, but only a hidden, allegorical sense. He asserts that no change occurred in the divine economy between Moses and Jesus, but that only one covenant ever existed, one which the Israelites of Moses’ era rejected. When Moses shattered the tablets, the covenant was lost, hidden, only to be restored, in the same form in which Moses offered it, by Jesus. Barnabas taught that in fact, the Jews had made a catastrophic blunder in their approach to the Torah and, later, in reading their scriptures. When the Hebrews made the golden calf at Mt. Sinai and Moses shattered the two tables of the covenant, the Jews were permanently cut off from the covenant, which now belonged wholly and exclusively to the future Christian church. The Jews, in attempting to interpret and apply the OT literally, such as by following the levitical dietary laws, were deceived by an evil angel and blinded to the Christian meaning hidden beneath the surface of the text. Each forbidden food, for example, represented a moral vice to be avoided, not a food taboo. Thus where Marcion ripped the OT away from the church, asserting its alien, pre-
incarnation character, Barnabas articulates a radical supersessionism that disinherited the synagogue, denying the literal, historical sense of the text. Unlike Marcion, Barnabas was not excommunicated. He suffered perhaps a more ignominious fate. Even though his epistle actually appears bound in the NT of the 4th century Codex Sinaiticus, and even though Hippolytus loosely alludes to this epistle as “scripture,” these potential honors did not change the fact that, on the role of the OT, Barnabas was ignored. One scholar even declares that Barnabas’s interpretation was “the stuff of madness” that found neither condemnation nor disciples.37

A positive and early Latin example comes from the essay by the “anti-pope” Novatian regarding the Jewish dietary laws.38 While he accepted these laws as standards governing the ancient Israelites, he recognized their explicit suspension in the NT, thus setting up the essential problem of the OT for Christian faith. Novatian digs into the canonical context and shows how the most strongly proscribed animals, the “creeping things” in Leviticus 11, are actually identified in Genesis 1 as especially blessed by God and declared “good.” He therefore explains that Moses gave the dietary laws not to protect humans from eating gross things, but rather, to protect these creatures from unrestricted consumption and exploitation by humans. He also pointed to the flood story, after which humans were authorized to eat any animals they wished, showing that these animals are not in fact, injurious to consume (Cf. Gen. 9:1-4). The dietary restriction was thus distinctly tied to the Sinai covenant and the peculiar role Israel played in the history of redemption. Novatian observes that even though the dietary laws do not bind Christians, still they affirm self-control and freedom from impulsion by fleshly appetites while also engendering a respect for the goodness of God’s creation by protecting certain elements of it from human consumption. He then connects this principle with NT statements about diet, such as Paul’s claim not to eat meat or drink wine if the kingdom or a brother’s welfare requires such abstinence. Novatian thus respected the OT context of the dietary laws, their non-regulatory status for Christians, but nevertheless discerned in these obscure levitical rules important continuing values for his persecuted Christian readers, embodying well the theological dynamic of the rule of faith.

The two integrated dimensions of the one rule of faith soon assumed a hermeneutical status. Just as an ellipse inscribes a line always maintaining a fixed distance from to loci, so christian preachers and listeners instinctively insisted on interpretations that oriented themselves around two poles. The OT had a remote, past, pre-christian sense, which was increasingly referred to as the “literal sense” or “letter.” At the same time, the OT bore anticipatory testimony to God’s redemption in Christ, increasingly referred to as the “higher” or “deeper” sense, the “spiritual sense” or most generally, the
anagogic sense. These two facts existed in formative Christian interpretation in fully complementary, simultaneous relation. The OT, existed to form Christian readers in the knowledge of God through Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, and did so precisely as a text rooted, in its literal sense, in the pre-incarnation life of ancient Israel. What was needed was a way of articulating systematically this simultaneous “dual citizenship” of the OT represented by the rule of faith so that Christians could expound the scriptures for the enrichment and instruction of the church, debate Jews and pagans, and demonstrate the coherence of Christianity with its Hebrew heritage.

A major turning point comes with the work of Irenaeus in the late 2nd century. Irenaeus recognized the pre-christian status of the OT, that it does not explicitly name the content of the Christian faith. In his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, he begins with a faith summary in Trinitarian form, but his reading of the OT narrative then proceeds very little christological application. He lets the storyline carry the meaning, separating the OT narrative leading up to Christ from a more traditional set of “proofs from prophecy” drawn from the OT, largely duplicating the work of Justin Martyr. Irenaeus avoided two kinds of Christian moves with the OT. He repudiated any attempt to discard the OT, but more importantly, he also repudiated any attempt to change the OT, to redact it, so that it gave a more Christian-friendly witness. He is the first we know of (so far) to use the term “New Testament” as a title for the 27-book Christian “supplement” to the Hebrew scriptures. Thus Irenaeus becomes the architect of the canonical architecture of “two testaments, one Bible.” His affirmation of the unity of their underlying theological subject matter did not alter his recognition, expressed centuries later by Karl Barth, that, with respect to God’s self-revelation in Christ, the OT is a witness of expectation, while the NT is a witness of recollection. Of course, Irenaeus recognized the force of the NT proclamation to recontextualize the OT witness, but he understood it as a laying bare of a more fundamental quality of the OT, not the brute shifting or changing of the text’s meaning. He did not see the OT as “polyvalent” and so capable of meaning anything, but saw the gospel as disclosing a meaning already present in the text, because it is the truth that summoned the text forth in the first place. Irenaeus accomplished this by shifting the standpoint from which one reads it and by discerning its goal. So Irenaeus expounded one the earliest known versions of *Heilsgeschichte* in which the OT served as a gradual education of humanity to prepare the way for the incarnation.

In Irenaeus we see the fundamental motion of Christian reading, especially of the OT. We read it “in process” as the “Old” Testament, but we also read it aware of an inner trajectory toward the incarnation and NT.
Thus a complementary relationship exists between the text on the one hand and the gospel on the other. The unity does not preclude the difference, the difference did not contradict the unity.

**Biblical Interpretation for Theology and Mission**

The third achievement of the ancient church in its engagement with the scriptures was the unleashing of coherent, convincing programs of biblical study and exposition that were both pastoral and missional. No interpretive approach can succeed if the mass of preachers and teachers in the church cannot step into their pulpits and “preach the word.” But the sheer mass of patristic exegesis from the 3rd-5th centuries staggers bibliographic imagination and testifies to the church hitting its stride. Moving beyond Irenaeus, we discover that the two aspects of the rule of faith, the Text and the Testimony, the media of revelation and its living subject matter, become more clearly defined and distinguished. Whatever differences might separate the exegetical sensibilities of the two famous “schools” of Alexandria and Antioch, one famous for allegory, the other for a stress on history, both of these schools shared this same sense that the text of scripture was at once distinct from, but integrally united with, the reality of Christian truth and experience. Both schools discerned in their exegesis a literal sense, and both sought to discern beyond the literal sense a normative level of reading for contemporary believers, not merely as an inference from the past, but here and now. Both discerned a phenomenon in the biblical narrative by which every work of God participates in the unchanging character of God.

Thus early works of Cod provide the basis for understanding subsequent divine actions, but these later actions likewise illuminate and clarify previous ones. A pervasive mimetic tendency, an emerging, multi-faceted set of internal analogies, flows through the sequence of events narrated through the Old and New Testaments, provided the basis for all attempts at anagogy (“higher” readings) whether the allegorizing of the Alexandrians or the more nuanced theoria sought by the Antiochene exegetes.

The principle difference between the two schools appears to have been that the Alexandrians believed that once the underlying, changeless and eternal truth to which the Bible testifies was known, the actual process of its historical unfolding and the extended, complex narrative structure of the text’s witness could then be dissolved so that all texts could be heard to articulate fully developed Christian truths. The analogical device serving the Alexandrian vision was allegory, in which the precise details of the text, the exact contours of its grammatical, literary sense, generated a derivative theological statement framed in terms of unchanging Christian doctrine, but whose inner logic mirrored the inner logic of the text’s literal sense. The allegory served as a kind of pantograph: a pen moves over the surface
structure, the literal sense of the text, and an attached pen, writing in a different color, on a difference surface, perhaps at a different angle and on a different scale, makes exactly comparable movements. Thus a “good” allegory is “good” precisely because its application mirrors exactly and sympathetically the inner logic and movement of the literal sense, the same logic translated to a different level or plane.44

“Levels” are exactly what we associate with Alexandrian allegory, with the well-known analogy drawn by Origen in his manual of exegesis, called On First Principles, between the human as body, soul, and spirit, and the text as literal, moral, and spiritual.45 At every point, “the letter” pointed to an analogously constructed discourse in which Christian truth was articulated fully. But the important point remains the dependence of the allegory, at its best, whether it be Christ and the church or the Word and the Soul, upon a meticulous reading of the text’s surface, or literal sense. In fact, allegory created in Origen a deep curiosity and even a fierce honesty about the literal sense of the text. Origen felt every ripple or tension in the text and argued that apparent contradictions, points of offense to logic or sensibility functioned intentionally to push the reader to higher levels of explication. Thus Origen could honestly face the various tensions in the narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 without sensing a threat to faith. Regarding these, he wrote:

What intelligent person can believe that there was a first day, then a second and third day, evening, and morning, without the sun, the moon, and the stars; and the first day—even if this is the right term—even without a heaven? Who is foolish enough to believe that, like a human farmer, God planted a garden to the east in Eden and created in it a visible, physical tree of life from which anyone tasting its fruit with bodily teeth would receive life; and that one would have a part in good and evil by eating the fruit picked from the appropriate tree? When God is depicted walking in the garden in the evening and Adam hiding behind the tree, I think no one will doubt that these details point figuratively to some mysteries by means of a historical narrative which seems to have happened but did not happen in a bodily sense.46

Origen’s method delivers him from the need for strained harmonizations as he can accept the literal sense, with all its problems, and even display a certain sensitivity to what we could call issues of genre, particularly passages where he claims he can find no “bodily” or literal meaning. His discussion is not hard to translate into a more contemporary sensitivity to genre. Indeed, some of the best discussions of the literal sense of scripture in patristic exegesis appear in volumes analyzing Origen’s exegesis.47
Not surprisingly, the allegorist learned Hebrew, poured himself into a massive 7000 page project of textual collation, wrote innumerable notes and essays engaging the various textual and historical conundrums of the Bible, wrestling with problems with chronology, investigating the extent of Moses’ contribution to the Psalter, exploring whether the Psalms reflect a chronological ordering, identifying spurious additions or scribal lapses in scripture, researching whether a solar eclipse happened when Jesus was crucified, and much more.48 His debate about the authenticity and canonicity of the Song of Susanna in his correspondence with the North African lay librarian, Julius Africanus, sounds like a debate between two 19th Century German source critics.49 However bizarre it may seem, in its way, this method is quite close to the text, however disquieting the proximity.

While the interpreters of Antioch are often contrasted with the Alexandrians, as early as the late 2nd century they also operated with a dialectical, dual-poled interpretive model, though approached from a different direction context.50 Chrysostom comments about the Jewish origins of the OT “though the books are from them, the books and their meaning belong to us.”51 As a result, their sophistication comes not in the erection of a massive apparatus of figuration, but in probing into the text as an act of communication that generates a derivative sphere of possibility which the Antiochenes happily identify with the church’s confession and witness. This more modest use of analogy receives the term theoria. George Steiner notes that theoria was an ancient notion with connotations both secular and ritual, telling of of “concentrated insight, of an act of contemplation focused patiently on its object” as well as “the deed of witness performed by legates sent, in solemn assembly, to observe the oracles spoken or the rites performed at the sacred Attic games.”52 In this context, the Antiochene theoria denotes a sense of seeing the text fully, in all its dimensions, bearing witness to the divine truth served and conveyed in it. The net effect of the Antiochene sensibility was that of the literal sense, termed historia, as a boundary. The number of messianic prophecies could contract, for example, to no more than those identified in the NT, as in the exegesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia. More importantly, the Antiochene exegetes did not consider the text’s testimony to the unchanging truth of the gospel to eclipse or collapse the inner development of the history of redemption through the OT and NT. As a result, the Antiochenes and those influenced by them at times failed to see the full range of the Bible’s theological witness, a reticence that later, more theologically discriminating generations branded as heretical.

The early church articulated Christian truth in a remarkably widespread and enduring manner in large measure because it grasped both the particular, historical dimension of revelation, found in the text of scripture, and the ongoing reality of the gospel which scripture attests. Seizing upon the inner
analogies existing among the discrete revelatory acts of God narrated in scripture, and employing various modes of analogical extension, ancient Christian readers exploited this complementary relation in vigorous, imaginative theological exposition. Some interpreters, the Alexandrians, stressed the culmination of the story of redemption so strongly as to dissolve the particularity of the pre-christian witness, putting one pole of the relation at risk. Others, the Antiochenes, tended to confine their theological reflection to the boundaries of the biblical narrative and thus risked missing the full range of the biblical theological vision.

Such energy naturally culminated in attempts to synthesize the best insights of both schools. From the end of the Diocletian persecution (311) to the Council of Chalcedon (452), the two sensibilities I have described co-existed in a great exegetical “western synthesis” represented by Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, and the Cappadocians, and here we find early church exegesis in its finest flower alongside intentional reflection on method. Writers like Tyconius, for example, sought to compose rules governing how the process of analogy might work. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* would, however, hold pride of place for articulating the hermeneutic of the western synthesis. The rule of faith became coherent rules of interpretation that authorized 150 years of creative preaching that was then imitated for the next 1000 years!

We only gesture here with broad strokes. The patristic exegesis of this era that persisted in holding the attention of subsequent generations of readers actualizes the “rule of faith” in a supple movement between two moments or poles in interpretation. Here I stress the first of these poles because it often is missing from discussions of patristic hermeneutics. It is the moment of remoteness, of remove, in which the Bible spoke from a time, place, and perspective that was not the reader’s position. Right alongside this, though, was a moment of address, in which scripture was heard speaking a transformative word to the church. This unified, but distinct dialectic between remoteness and address, distance and directness, has become my central interest. The moment of remove is not a de-canonization or secularization of the text, but frankly grasps the “otherness” of the text, just as the moment of address thus is not a sudden “spiritualizing” of a previously non-Christian or irrelevant word. The dimension or movement of remoteness is what came to be called the literal sense: the reader intentionally recognizes the otherness of scripture, its alienness. In a way, this makes concrete the transcendence of God, who is Other, as much as he is Immanuel. In the moment of remove interpreters rub their eyes and say “Is *that* in the Bible?” I’m thinking here of Augustine’s treatment of the binding of Isaac in his homily *De Scripturis* where he fearlessly refuses to deny the text’s historical truthfulness when confronted with its central horror.
At this point, he warns the reader:

Before all else, brothers, in the name of the Lord, this we admonish and enjoin upon you with as much force as we can: when you hear the mystery of the biblical narrative expounded, believe that things occurred just as recounted. Do not remove the foundation in actual events and try to build on air.55

In grappling with the literal sense of the text, the church fathers employed skills commonly taught in the educational institutions in which they were trained.56 These disciplines included translation, textual emendation, detection of interpolations and editorial interference in texts, clarification of the historical, topographical, and other elements of the text. Few in today’s hermeneutical debates would readily predict Augustine would have urged the following:

Some scholars have made separate studies of all the words and names in Hebrew, Syriac, Egyptian, or any other language found in the holy scriptures that are used without any interpretation. They did this in these specialized areas to save the Christian student a lot of bother... In the same way I can see the possibility that if someone suitably qualified were interested in devoting a generous amount of time to the good of his brethren he could compile a monograph classifying and setting out all the places animals, plants, and trees, or the stones and metals, and all the other unfamiliar kinds of object mentioned in scripture. Perhaps indeed some or all of this has already been done; I have come across much information on which I did not realize that good and learned Christians had done research or written books. These things tend to remain unknown, whether because the bulk of scholars neglect them, or because jealous ones conceal them.57

Most of the patristic authors studied the scholia on Homer and a host of other texts upon which they honed their craft as part of the typical paideia of late antiquity. Not least among these emphases was a wholesome respect for authors and the meanings they conveyed in their texts. Augustine, for example, wrote:

The aim of [the Bible’s] readers is simply to find out the thoughts and wishes of those by whom it was written down and, through them, the will of God, which we believe these men followed as they spoke... It often happens that by thoughtlessly asserting something that the author did not mean an interpreter runs up against other things which cannot be reconciled with that original idea. If he agrees that these things are true and certain,
his original interpretation could not possibly be true, and by
cherishing his own idea he comes in some strange way to be
more displeased with scripture than with himself. If he
encourages this evil to spread it will be his downfall.58

Augustine invested enormous energy into the exegesis of the creation story,
producing at least five expositions. Imagining a critic challenging him on
how to adjudicate among the diverse possibilities of interpretation he had
found in Genesis 1, Augustine penned wise words regarding the role of the
author’s original meaning:

And when we read in the divine books such a vast array of
true meanings, which can be extracted from a few words, and
which are backed by sound Catholic faith, we should pick
above all the one which can certainly be shown to have been
held by the author we are reading; while if this is hidden
from us, then surely one which the scriptural context does
not rule out and which is agreeable to sound faith; but if
even the scriptural context cannot be worked out and assessed,
then at least only one which sound faith prescribes. It is one
thing, after all, not to be able to work out what the writer is
most likely to have meant, quite another to stray from the
road sign-posted by godliness. Should each defect be avoided,
the reader’s work has won its complete reward, while if each
cannot be avoided, even though the writer’s intention should
remain in doubt, it will not be without value to have extracted
a sense that accords with sound faith.59

These disciplines were shared with their pagan debating partners and their
educated listeners. The literal sense, to a significant degree, was thus a sense
of scripture available to any empathetic, competent reader. A perusal of
Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana reveals an almost obsessive concern for
the grammatical, text-critical, and literary-rhetorical shape of the text, even
if in the Latin translation.60

Then there was Jerome, who demonstrated the untenability of the LXX
as the basis for Christian exegesis and grounded the study of the OT in the
Hebrew text, ultimately even winning over Augustine and establishing the
principle that while Bible translations can certain be the word of God for
readers, the church dares not tie itself to any derivative text nor allow any
translation, however widely loved, to usurp the original text. The church
forgets this time and again, absolutizing first the LXX, then the Vulgate,
then the King James Bible, and now, perhaps, the NIV. But Jerome secured
his point, and ad fontes became the mantra for any who sought to tap the
living root of the Christian faith.61

A fine sense of the plain meaning of the text even emerges from
Athanasius in his pastoral letter on the Psalms.62 While he stresses that the
Psalms reveal to us Jesus Christ, he then describes how the Psalms reveal the changing states of the human soul, moving through each psalm and very deftly summarizing its content and emotional tone, an almost effortless use of the literal sense of the Psalter to pastoral ends without feeling the necessity of Christological allusions. Not again until Luther’s discovery of the “faithful synagogue” in the Psalms do we see such a keen eye for the literal sense of the Psalter. Then there is Eusebius of Caesarea, for whom no conflict existed between the spiritual application of scripture and the attempt to reconstruct and co-ordinate the history of the entirety of human civilization with the history of God’s people, first as Israel, then as the church. This busy bishop even took the time to compile an exhaustive analysis of the geographical details of the Bible which became a guide to pilgrims who came to the Holy Land to be in the places where God revealed himself to his ancient people. Language, literature, history and even a degree of public access to scripture’s meaning, all of these made up the literal sense as known in the early centuries of the church. It is certainly the case that they knew far less about these things than we do today, and they also did vastly different things with the information they had than we do. Nevertheless, a concern for such matters as language, grammar, literary flow, historical reference, authorial purposes, and open access to the text animated the best of classical patristic exegesis. In the literal sense, in the moment of distancing, the interpreter realizes it is the reader who must adjust to the Bible, not the Bible that must adapt to the reader. This is not about so-called Enlightenment objectivity, claiming to come to the text without presuppositions. Rather, it is a tuning of the ear, a purifying of ourselves to listen to the text, to let it be truly “other.”

The interpreters of the Western Synthesis also exemplify the second dimension of interpretation in the rule of faith, which comes—consequentially, but also simultaneously—as the moment of address, the movement of proximity and approach. Scripture speaks in and to the faith of the church, becoming a criterion of identity, of truthful witness, and concrete obedience. For the these readers, the church’s confessions, the clarification of the boundaries of the canon, the ongoing life of service and sacramental worship, and the transformation of the reader in holiness constituted the aim and goal of scripture’s revelation. The quest to respond faithfully sends the interpreter back to the text, of course, where the whole dialectic continues in a rhythm of straining to listen above the jangle of the reader’s own agendas, questions, and demands, and at the same time, having those very agendas, questions, and demands addressed, spoken to, and transformed in the encounter with God in scripture. Ironically, pre-modern interpreters saw the literal sense as “simple,” but saw the applied sense as complex and multiple. So we hear of anagogical, moral, tropological, etc.
senses beyond or above the literal sense, while modern and even post-modern interpreters tend to see the complexity of meaning in the formation or pre-history of the text, i.e. it’s literal sense. One suspects behind the patristic multiplicity of analogic senses lies not a complex hermeneutic, but simply the varied ways of the Spirit in causing the inspired Word to become exhalation, contemporary address, Rede.

Conclusion

The early church reached its world for Christ. The early church captured the resources and expressive means of formidable world-class cultures and empires in the service of that mission. The early church grasped the heart of Christian theology and articulated it in an enduring form that we still cannot equal. At the heart of these achievements rests the early church’s seriousness about reading the Bible, not just for “practical” ministry or the cultivation of piety, but a full immersion into the complete phenomenon that is the Bible. That carnivorous garden with which I began, that place Karl Barth called the “strange new world within the Bible,” became for these early Christian interpreters not a place of death, insanity, apostasy, and crisis, nor merely a place they could sojourn briefly, but safely. The scriptures became their permanent abode, their homeland. So may it be for us as well.

End Notes

1 Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 14b; Jerusalem Talmud, Hagigah 2:1. The story exists in several forms. Cf. A. W. Strane, A Translation of the Treatise Chagigah from the Babylonian Talmud (Cambridge University Press, 1891). p. 83. The figure of Elisha ben Abuya has stirred the imaginations of doubters and strugglers for centuries, inspiring the novel As A Driven Leaf by Milton Steinberg (Behrman House, New Edition with Forward by Chaim Potok, 1996; Orig. 1939) and Jacob Gordin’s haunting, even if spectacularly failed play Elisha Ben Abuyah (1906).

2 Namely, peshat, remez, derash, and sod.

3 George Steiner, Real Presences (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989) 25.


5 Though this late terminus for the patristic era is widely accepted, all also agree that after ca. 450-550, at least by the death of Gregory the Great, biblical exposition shows a palapable shift, becoming more encyclopedic and summative of previous


9 Note, for example, Steinmetz, a strong advocate of “pre-critical” exegesis, who advocates interpreters finding “multiple meanings” in scripture. But he does so not because the Bible is a unique book with a divine author. Far from it! He categorically states that he agrees with Jowett (!) that the Bible is to be read “like any other book” but then asks, “how does one read other books?” From here he turns to “modern literary criticism” and its claims of polyvalence in texts, thus dispensing with the indispensable presupposition of pre-critical Christian exegesis even why asserting its superiority! Paradoxically, he then falls back into limits of the “field of possible meanings.” (Steinmetz, “Superiority,” 159-163)


16 Most classically seen in: Adolph von Harnack *What is Christianity* Harnack, *(Germ. Das Wesen des Christentums, 1900, ET 1907)* and perpetuated today by many
popular and scholarly writers.

17 T. Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with the Greeks; J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture. Note the decisive, even if excessive, rebuttal of James Barr: The Semantics of Biblical Language. Indeed, the whole linguistic argument collapses upon the realization that “Hebrew” was not distinctively “hebraic” or Israelite, since it was merely the dialect spoken in Late Bronze and Iron Age Canaan even before the Israelites arrived there. The language was part of Israel’s “pagan” legacy and thus would not encode uniquely Israelite sensibilities, just as the almost linguistically identical dialect of the Moabite Stone (ca. 850 B.C.) does not linguistically encode a unique “moabite mentality.”


19 Young, Biblical Exegesis, 49.

20 Kannengieser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 674.


22 Kugel and Greer, Early Biblical Interpretation, 109-120.

23 The Donatist controversy in North Africa likely represents a watershed in the church’s experience with coercion. Augustine resisted the use of imperial power to compel the Donatists to return to the catholic church, but did not object to imperial action to stop acts of violence and vandalism by the donatist majority against the catholic minority. When imperial power shifted to attempt, by modest means for that era, to nudge the Donatists to return to the catholic church, Augustine hesitantly surrendered his objections. Later, medieval church leaders cited Augustine as a precedent for far more grave resort to force, including acts of war (Henry Chadwick, Augustine: A Very Short Introduction [Oxford: Oxford University, 1986] 80-90).

24 For an outstanding study of this issue in contemporary Christian theology: Timothy C. Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).


28 Kugel and Greer, Early Biblical Interpretation, 109-208.

29 The point is made programmatically and repeatedly by George Steiner, esp.
in *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989) and *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale, 2001) and animates his principle work, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 3rd Ed. 1998). The radical dissociation of the word from the world, and of both from any notion of “the Word” constitutes for Steiner the central madness and agony of contemporary thought.

39 Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 92. Brueggeman’s sudden invocation of modernity’s alleged liberation of the Bible from the clutches of the church strikes the present reader as ironic given his immediately preceding discussion centering around the collapse of modernity’s epistemological consensus.


37 The inclusion of this work, along with the “Shepherd of Hermas” in *Codex Sinaiticus* (4th Century) does not necessarily imply any elevated status for these works.


41 Many Christians of the 2nd century knew the OT mainly through “Christianizing Targums” which some Christian apologetes revered more than the traditional OT text. That Jews had begun producing new Greek translations of the OT in reaction to the Christian adoption of the LXX increased Christians’ suspicion of “anti-christian” Greek recensions. (Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 288). On the evidence of such compilations, cf: Rendel Harris, *Testimonies* (2 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1916). Shotwell (Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr, 69-70) argued that Justin actually used a version of the Greek OT that was closer to the Jewish versions of Aquila and Symmachus than it was to the traditional LXX.
Cf. the magisterial and provocative treatment of the theological inter-relations between the OT and NT in: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) 1/2: 145-121, esp. 70-101.


Theophrilus of Antioch’s comments on Genesis ca. 180 AD are among the earliest distinct examples of the Antiochene style of exegesis. (Kannengieser, *Handbook*, 472; Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation*, 31).


Press, 2008) 64.

58 On Christian Teaching, 32.


60 The literature on Augustine defies competent review by any but the specialist, so the reader is directed to the bibliographic essays in Kannengieser (Handbook, 1149-1233) and Saebø (Hebrew Bible—Old Testament, 701-730). A helpful collection of essays may be found in: Pamela Bright, ed. Augustine and the Bible (Notre Dame, 1999; orig. Fr. 1986).


63 Cf. the account in James Samuel Preus, From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1969).

64 Cf. Kannengieser, Handbook, 675-683; Saebø, Hebrew Bible—Old Testament, 534-536. Sadly, Eusebius is often considered a part of the “Origenist” heritage and his interest in the literal sense is missed.


66 Fine summaries of the aspects comprising the literal and spiritual senses may be found in: Kannengieser, Handbook, 167-205, 206-269.
Mark A. Awabdy

Green Eggs and Shawarma: Reinterpreting the Bible, Reforming Mission, with Leviticus’ “non-indigenous resident” (married) as a Test Case

Abstract

This article encourages Christians to revisit and reinterpret the Bible in order to more faithfully align with God’s mission in the world. As a test case, the article reinterprets the socio-religious status of the “non-indigenous resident” (married) in Leviticus and concludes with some possibilities for reforming mission theology and praxis. The first section of the article reviews the conventional interpretation of Leviticus’ married as one granted absolute religious freedom. Against this view, the body of the article contends that the married in Leviticus was bound in covenant to Yahweh, yet free to practice some foreign customs and practices. To argue for this, the article reconsiders the intent of the Holiness Code’s married injunctions; reinterprets three pertinent laws; and identifies an important contextual limiting factor in Lev 18-20. In the conclusion, the author offers three ways this fresh understanding of the married in Leviticus intersects with, and may serve to reform, present cross-cultural witness to the Gospel.

Keywords: Cross-cultural mission, Leviticus, “non-indigenous resident” (married), reinterpretation, reformation, covenant, socio-religious status

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“The Church reformed, and always reforming according to the Word of God” (ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei). What might this Protestant Reformation mantra mean for the Church of Jesus Christ today? Here is one response among many. The Church is called to reread and reapply Scripture in light of God’s historic and present activity in the world, thereby jettisoning unfruitful readings while advancing and recontextualizing fruitful ones. That is to say, the Church, Majority World (Southern) and Minority (Western) constituents together, must subject its traditions to rigorous, prayerful reconsideration in order to expose deficiencies in theology and praxis. Every valid biblical reinterpretation must be done in the context of Christian community (with historic and contemporary interlocutors) and should result in a more faithful alignment with God’s mission expressed in the biblical narrative.

This means that both eminent missional texts and motifs must be reconsidered, and overlooked ones, restored. To illustrate the value of the latter – restoring overlooked expressions of mission in the Bible – I turn our attention to the book of Leviticus. Lawson G. Stone’s forthcoming article exposes one underappreciated aspect of mission in Leviticus, namely, that of stewarding Yahweh’s creation: “The presence of Yahweh in his sanctuary, in his land, among his people confers a sacred obligation for its care.”

There is another missional impulse in Leviticus, oft-bypassed by readers, and it centers on the injunctions to protect and provide for the “non-indigenous resident” (singular: וָאֵל; plural: וֹאֵל), often translated “(resident) alien.” “Israel did not just live in the midst of the nations; the people of the world were also right in her midst.” Arguably the וָאֵל has always been allowed to enter covenant with Yahweh by being incorporated into Israel. Some would contest this understanding since “texts where captives, slaves, and strangers (וָאֵל) [and to a lesser degree, ‘strangers’ (וֹאֵל) and ‘foreigners’ (יָבִיאוּרָה)] are integrated into Israel present us not with mission but with the normal process of assimilation. Mission implies a community’s conviction of responsibility toward the rest of humankind.” However, the biblical portrait of the וָאֵל is unlike the rest of these identities. A strong case can be made for the Old Testament’s centripetal (attracting others), not centrifugal (going to others), mission to the וָאֵל in Exodus (i.e., 12:48-49), Numbers (i.e., 15:13-16), and Deuteronomy (i.e., 16:10-15). That is to say, Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy do not envision, much less exhort, Israelites to travel across national borders to spread Yahwism, but they do integrate non-indigenous residents into Yahweh worship within the cultic community. Can such a case be made for Leviticus, too?

Several indispensible monographs devoted to mission in the OT overlook the וָאֵל altogether, or mention the וָאֵל in a few cursory paragraphs, often without reference to Leviticus. Furthermore, conventional
scholarship has not provided an adequate conception of Leviticus’ וֹ, and therefore biblical reinterpretation is needed before we may begin to construct a “נֵי missiology” from Leviticus. In the scope of this article I offer a reinterpretation of the socio-religious status of the נֵי in Leviticus and then conclude with some possibilities for reforming mission theology and praxis.

Conventional Interpretation of the נֵי in Leviticus

A person belonging to the נֵי class in the OT has been defined as one “who (alone or with his family) leaves village and tribe because of war, famine, epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter and residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed” (e.g. 2 Sam 4:3; Isa 16:4, Ruth 1:1). This definition may be generally true, but the identity of the נֵי class in the OT varies and is contextually informed by each of its literary environments: the so-called Holiness Code (HC; Lev 17-26[27]), Covenant Code (CC; Exod 20-23), Deuteronomic Code (DC, Deut 12-26), and non-legal texts. Rather than interpreting the term etymologically, or constructing an all-inclusive definition (i.e., the above definition), over the last two centuries scholars have attempted to understand the נֵי through syntactical and socio-historical analyses of its various OT corpora.

Even with these advances, the research to date has not adequately explained the socio-religious status of the נֵי in the Holiness Code (HC) of Leviticus 17-26, a corpus that contains, together with the genetically related chapter 16, all of Leviticus’ injunctions concerning the נֵי. The historical referent of the HC’s נֵי is debatable because it is largely contingent on one’s dating schema. Most would concur that “the נֵי stood as a listening member, that is, he was in a relationship with the entire religious community, but each one [ני] in this relationship was marked by strangeness, that is, the נֵי was of modest origin outside Judah” (translation mine). Similarly, the נֵי in HC “designates a religious type of non-Israelite origin, i.e., a foreigner who seeks integration in the religious community of Israel.”

What is controversial is the extent to which the נֵי of the HC was integrated into Israel’s religious community. Source critics in the nineteenth century who dated P (of which HC was believed to be a part) to the postexilic era equated HC’s נֵי with “proselytes” to Judaism in the Second Temple period (cf. Septuagint: πρωσήλυτος). However, if we accept that the HC had a pre-exilic provenance, then “proselyte” is anachronism.

If נֵי were not proselytes in the Second Temple sense, to what extent were they integrated into Israel’s social and cultic congregation? José Ramírez Kidd and Jan Joosten assert, respectively:

These laws attempted to prevent the defilement of the land in a time when concern for sanctity and cultic purity of the
congregation was particularly important, and their observance was a *condicio sine qua non* for the admission of the יָרֵע and his coexistence “in Israel.”

As a resident alien, he is a free agent and nobody’s charge. The law therefore seeks to protect him from oppression and recommends him to the goodwill of the Israelites. His freedom is real: the יָרֵע may retain his foreign culture and religion with its practices, though he would be welcome to participate in the Israelite religion with its practices. In any case, however, he should observe the apodictic prohibitions for fear of defiling the land and the sanctuary, the earthly dwelling of YHWH among his people.

Indeed the HC is concerned that Israelites and יָרֵע maintain the purity of the land. Yahweh’s people are to be holy (i.e., 19:2; cf. 22:32-33 where Yahweh will make them holy). Yahweh’s land is sacred (chs. 18, 20) since he owns the land (25:2, 23), will dwell in it (26:11) and will walk among his people if they keep covenant (26:12). Consequently, the יָרֵע injunctions must be understood pragmatically as a means of preventing community and land defilement.

Yet, against Joosten, how can the יָרֵע retain all facets of “his foreign culture and religion with its practices” without defiling the land? Joosten footnotes Gordon Wenham as support, but Wenham’s language is qualified and actually substantiates my thesis: “That the law finds it necessary to specify that certain rules did apply to sojourners seems to imply that in some matters resident aliens were allowed to preserve their traditional customs” (italics mine). Does the HC grant יָרֵע unmitigated religious liberty, or were they bound to Yahweh, yet free to practice some of their foreign customs and practices? I argue the latter by: reconsidering the intent of the HC’s יָרֵע injunctions; reinterpreting three pertinent laws; and identifying a contextual limiting factor in Lev 18-20.

**The Intent of the יָרֵע Injunctions in the HC**

In the OT the verbal form יָרֵע “to sojourn” often expresses residence outside of Israel (e.g., Gen 12:10; Ruth 1:1, Ps 120:5; Ezra 1:4; Lam 4:15), whereas the nominal cognate יַעַר predominantly indicates a non-indigenous, usually non-Israelite, resident in Israel. In the HC יָרֵע are regularly paired with native Israelites, namely, the: יָרֵע “native” (16:29; 17:15; 18:26; 19:34; 23:42; 24:16; 24:22), יָרֵע “Israelites” (17:13; 20:2); or יַעַר “[from] the house of Israel” (17:8, 10; 22:18). Two verses provide rationale for this egalitarian coupling of the יָרֵע with the native; Lev 19:34 and 24:22, respectively:
The non-indigenous resident [לטב] who resides [הנ] with you shall be as the native [הנ] among you, and you shall love him [לא = הנ] as yourself for you were non-indigenous residents [לטב] in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

There shall be one standard for you all [לטב], whether for the non-indigenous resident [בנ] or the native [ני], for I am Yahweh your God.

Both close with the null-copular clause “I am Yahweh your God” which is one form of the first member of the so-called covenant formula, featured in the HC with both members in 26:12: “And I will be your God, and you will be my people.” Even if the 2mp enclitic pronoun “your God” (אלוהים) refers only to native Israelites in 19:34, the same cannot be said for 24:22 since here the proximate statement “there shall be one standard for you all” expressly refers to native Israelite and נ constituents, and therefore both are implied in Yahweh’s pronouncement: “I am Yahweh your God.” In Leviticus נ were, as far as Yahweh was concerned, integrated members of his covenant people.

Like the CC and the DC, the HC contains נ legislation concerned with protecting the נ (i.e., Lev 19:10, 34; 23:22). The HC is unique in that it also couples the native with the נ to sanction “matters of holiness”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HC נ law</th>
<th>Prescription</th>
<th>Sanction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:8</td>
<td>The bringing of a sacrifice</td>
<td>תֹּֽתְּ לֹו וֹתְּ formula (“he shall be cut off from his people”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 17:10</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>תֹּֽתְּ לֹו וֹתְּ formula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev 17:12</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>תֹּֽתְּ לֹו וֹתְּ formula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev 17:13</td>
<td>The slaughtering of animals</td>
<td>תֹּֽתְּ לֹו וֹתְּ formula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev 17:15</td>
<td>Eating “carcass” (לֹוֹֽלָּ)</td>
<td>נְנָּֽלָּ וֹתְּ formula (“he shall bear his guilt”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:26</td>
<td>Sexual relations</td>
<td>נְנָּֽלָּ וֹתְּ formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 20:2</td>
<td>Molech worship</td>
<td>נְנָּֽלָּ וֹתְּ formula (“he shall surely be put to death”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 24:16</td>
<td>Blasphemy</td>
<td>נְנָּֽלָּ וֹתְּ formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 24:22</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>נְנָּֽלָּ וֹתְּ formula</td>
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If the נ had the potential to be “cut off from bis people” (italics mine; 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26) - “his people” referring most plausibly to the Israeliite people - he must have been meaningfully integrated into the covenant community (contra the נ “foreigner” who is not subject to
these laws). Furthermore, these prescriptions are not merely mechanisms for preserving the land’s holiness, but covenant markers, distinguishing Yahweh’s people socio-religiously from the customs and rituals of other Near Eastern societies. That the יב was included in these prescriptions (notably 17:15; cf. Deut 14:21), and held accountable to these sanctions without impunity, indicates the יב participated with native Israelites in imitating Yahweh’s holiness (19:2). This calling was reserved for only those in covenant relationship to Yahweh.

Three Laws of Particular Interest

Joosten presents three laws as evidence that the יב did not enter into covenant with Yahweh: Lev 17:3; 23:42-43; and 24:15-16. We first reconsider Lev 24:15-16:

You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “If anyone curses his God or [יִבְרְכָה] then he will bear his sin. So the one who blasphemes Yahweh’s name shall surely be put to death; all the assembly, whether the resident non-Israelite or the native, when he blasphemes the name, shall be put to death” (translation mine).

Joosten claims that “the legal casuistics stated in v. 15-16 are carefully nuanced: if someone — presumably a non-Israelite — curses his (own) god(s), he will merely ‘bear his sin,’ but if anybody, resident alien or Israelite, curses the name of YHWH, he will be put to death.” This is a fascinating, but unsupported, reading of “his god” (יִבְרְכָה).

Most significantly, 24:15-16 cannot be divorced from its context. The prescription and sanction of 24:15-16 is Yahweh’s response to the incident in 24:9-12 of the man (a יב cf. 24:11) who “blasphemed the Name and cursed” (24:11). The verbs in 24:11 are synthetically parallel, that is, “and cursed” (כִּישָׁם) provides a related, but distinct nuance to “blasphemed the Name” (שם נשא). The implication is that in both v. 11 and vv. 15-16 the God of Israel, whose name is Yahweh, was the object of verbal abuse (or verbal stoning; thus, death by stoning fulfills lex talionis). Contextually, then, Joosten is not justified in reading יב as the foreign deity of the יב. Rather, Yahweh “uses the pronominal suffix to indicate that it is the person’s personal God.” Accordingly, “he will bear his sin” (יִבְרְכָה) in v. 15 is not a lesser punishment for a separate violation, but is elucidated by the parallel sanction in v. 16 “shall surely be put to death.” In this reading, the יב is not portrayed as retaining foreign (local or national) deities, but is defined, with the Israelite community, in relation to “his God,” namely, Yahweh.
The next text germane to our discussion is Lev 17:3-4, which reads:

Any man from the house of Israel [ברא שלום] who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat inside the camp or who slaughters outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to Yahweh, before Yahweh’s Tabernacle, bloodguilt shall be [imputed] to that man (translation mine).

Since the pattern in chapter 17 (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15) has been to include the ב (of the house of Israel) in the sacrificial prescriptions, the Septuagint converted “of the house of Israel” (ברא שלום) to “of the sons of Israel” in order to add: “or of resident non-Israelites who resides among you.” If the MT is original, does Lev 17:3 omit the ב by accident? This is possible. More likely a distinction is being made, as Joosten correctly observes:

The MT rules that, to the Israelites, all slaughter of domestic animals is forbidden except as a שלום at the tent of meeting (17:3, 4). However, this rule does not apply to the resident alien, which implies that to them profane slaughter is permitted (though it is not encouraged). 35

He interprets this omission of the ב as evidence that the ב was religiously free,35 but there is an alternative. Lev 17:3-4 in no way indicates that נשים were prohibited from presenting their domestic animal sacrifices to Yahweh (note: 17:8-11 and 22:18). Since נשים are not mentioned in 17:3-4, the implication is that they were granted the prerogative to perform profane slaughter of domestic animals. The very נשים protected by Lev 19 from the poverty and disenfranchisement to which they were predisposed, are once again protected, this time by their prerogative to immediate slaughter and consumption of their domestic livestock. As covenant members, נשים were permitted to sacrifice their animals to Yahweh (17:8-11, 22:18; cf. Num 15:13-16); but as those susceptible to food paucity, נשים were not required to complete this time-consuming sacrificial process before eating their meat.

The final law of concern to our study is Lev 23:42-43, which reads:

You shall live in booths for seven days. All the native Israelites [ברא שלום] shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the sons of Israel [ברא שלום] live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God (translation mine).

Joosten’s observation and rationale here are both accurate:

One could say the non-mention of the ב is emphatic: he is not obliged to dwell in booths. .. The dwelling in booths makes sense only for the Israelites, whose forefathers took
part in the Exodus; the resident alien is not required to participate in the celebration of Israel’s past.\textsuperscript{36}

Milgrom notes, “Everywhere else in H, the \( אִדֶּד \) ‘the Israelite’ is equated with the \( לִבְנֵי \) ‘the resident alien’ (16:29; 17:15; 18:26; 19:34; 24:16, 22; Exod 12:19, 48, 49; Num 9:14; 15:13, 29, 30. ) as well as elsewhere (Josh 8:33; Ezek 47:22). Rather than allow for this sole exception, many critics insert the \( לִבְנֵי \).”\textsuperscript{37} Why, then, would the \( לִבְנֵי \) be excluded in Lev 23:42-43 from celebrating the Festival of Booths? Joosten answers perceptively: “The dwelling in booths makes sense only for the Israelites, whose forefathers took part in the Exodus.” Although the \( לִבְנֵי \) was not obliged to dwell in booths, as one in covenant with Yahweh the \( לִבְנֵי \) might choose to dwell in booths, to celebrate Yahweh’s redemption of the native Israelites. Similarly, in Exod 12:48-49 Yahweh insists the \( לִבְנֵי \) “shall be like the native of the land” (\( אָדָם \) \( אַרְעָה \) \( בָּנָי \) \( בָּנָי \)) insofar as the \( לִבְנֵי \) and all his male children were circumcised and privileged to celebrate Passover, another festival that commemorated the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.\textsuperscript{38}

**A Contextual Limiting Factor in Lev 18-20**

The so-called Holiness Code (HC) of Leviticus 17-26 extends holiness to the land and daily life of Yahweh’s people, not least because Yahweh’s presence was not confined to his sanctum (as in Lev 9-10; 16:2). If the Israelites obeyed the terms of the covenant, Yahweh promised them, “I will walk among you” (26:12).\textsuperscript{39} In Lev 18:24-28 the inhabitants of Canaan were said to have defiled themselves and the land, and as a result, the personified land vomited them out. The Israelite community must itself be careful to observe Yahweh’s commandments “lest the land vomit you out when you defile it” (18:28; cf. 26:33, 38, 45). By way of \textit{inclusio} with ch.18, framing chapter 19, Lev 20:23 states, “You shall not follow the customs of the nation which I am about to drive out before you, for they did all these things. Thus, I abhorred them” (translation mine). In contrast to this prohibition, throughout Lev 18-20 are favorable injunctions related to another subclass of non-indigenous persons, namely, \( לִבְנֵי \). A literary case can be made for reading the \( לִבְנֵי \) “non-indigenous resident” dialectally with the \( אֱרָם \) \( אָדָם \) “nation(s).” Consider this brief survey.

In 18:26 the \( לִבְנֵי \) is expressly included with the “native” (\( אֱרָם \)) as those who are to avoid the sexual perversities that characterize the “nations” (\( לִבְנֵי \)) (18:24-25). The aforementioned \textit{inclusio} of 18-20 reflects this structure.\textsuperscript{40}

Lev 18 Sexual relationships and the pollution of the land

Lev 19 \( A \) \( tôrâ \) for the holy community (see 19:2)

Lev 20 Sexual relationships and pollution of the land
Chapter 19 contains four injunctions to protect the vulnerable ה (vv. 10, 33, 34 [2x]), and these injunctions are antithetical to the manner in which Israel was to regard Canaan’s defiled land and inhabitants. In Lev 20:2 both the “Israelites” (ה赀 וארק) and the are prohibited from sacrificing offspring to Molech, and in 20:23 Molech infanticide is in view (along with predominantly sexual sins) when Yahweh commands “you shall not follow the customs of the nation [א’.

Therefore, two subsets of the “foreign” class, נה וארק (non-indigenous residents) and 들 וארק (nations), are diametrically opposed in Lev 18-20. The ה is one who remains in the land, whereas the nations are vomited out. Certain customs of the ה, we may infer, were permitted, but the customs of the nations abhorred. The ה was to be cultically and ethically holy, representing, with native Israelites, Yahweh’s holiness, but the nations were emblematic of ethical profanity.

Conclusions: Reinterpretation for Reformation

You have probably been wondering what the main title of this article, “Green Eggs and Shawarma,” has anything to do with the article itself! For many readers, myself included, Dr. Seuss’ classic story has preconditioned us to expect Green Eggs and Ham. When we read Shawarma instead of Ham, our expectations are unmet, and we mentally search for the meaning of the new phrase. Before understanding new phrase as a whole, some may first need to learn that Shawarma is rotisserie broiled or grilled lamb, goat, chicken, turkey, beef, or a mixture of these. Yet, for many Middle Eastern readers – with some Europeans and North Africans – their cuisine, not Dr. Seuss’ tale, has preconditioned them to expect Red Eggs and Shawarma (not Green Eggs and Ham). They may not know about Sam-I-Am, but they certainly know about Shawarma, and they love hard-boiled eggs soaked in pickled beet juice.41 Here is the analogy. Just as we have been predisposed toward a particular reading of “Green Eggs and Shawarma,” so also conventional biblical interpretations and our own cultural lenses have predisposed us toward certain readings of Scripture. While many historic interpretations of Scripture must be embraced and guarded, some must be reexamined and reinterpreted.

With a number of indispensable, missiology monographs available today, many of which are firmly grounded biblically and theologically (see footnote 3), is there really any need to revisit the Bible to reform our mission theology and praxis? The answer is a resounding yes! We are indebted, for example, to OT exegetes, missiologists and cross-cultural Christians who have revisited the Bible and have cogently shown God’s mission to the world is a thoroughly Old Testament vision (not conceived by Jesus and the early Church). In this article I hope I have raised awareness, at least minimally, that further biblical
reinterpretation is needed. To show this, I provided a test case: a reinterpretation of Leviticus’ "non-indigenous resident" to function as a rubric for reforming our missiology.

Recent scholarship has helpfully defined the "non-indigenous resident among the Israelites (perhaps including Northern Kingdom immigrants to Judah after 722 BC). However, against conventional interpretation, Leviticus does not portray the "non-indigenous resident as religiously neutral, but as one governed by covenant with Yahweh, and by implication as one required to relinquish allegiances to other deities. The "non-indigenous resident was a cultic participant and was accountable to preserve the purity of Yahweh’s land, temple, and people as a holy dwelling for Yahweh’s presence. On the one hand, the "non-indigenous resident bound himself to Yahweh and experienced coextensive membership in Israel’s religious community. On the other hand, the "non-indigenous resident was unbound with respect to his ethnicity: he was not, and would never be, considered indigenous to the region or to the Israelite community. This means the "non-indigenous resident called Yahweh "his God" (יְהֹוָה), and was therefore obliged to uphold the sanctity of his God’s reputation. It also appears to mean the "non-indigenous resident was free to celebrate Israel’s redemptive history, but not required to. It is plausible, if not probable, that the "non-indigenous resident was free to retain his custom of non-sacred slaughter of domestic animals as a means of circumventing hunger. That the "non-indigenous resident had bound himself in covenant relationship to Yahweh is enforced by chs. 18-20 where compassion toward non-indigenous residents (בִּנְיָמִין) is contrasted with abhorrence for the customs of the nations (נָגֵל).

Finally, and most importantly, can this reinterpretation of the "non-indigenous resident in Leviticus aid us in reforming our missiology? With prayer and sensitivity, we may appropriate Leviticus’ "laws because there are contemporary "counterparts and because the God of Israel is the God of the Church of Jesus Christ. Christopher Wright reminds us:

we ourselves, like every generation of Christians, standing as we do between Pentecost and the Parousia, are a part of the story-line. We stand in organic spiritual continuity with the biblical people of God in both Testaments, a continuity which transcends the varying degrees of cultural discontinuity. Our story is part of their story. This was the principle by which New Testament writers could apply the ethics of the Old Testament to their Christian readers, even before the formation of the New Testament canon.42

Consider these three ways our fresh understanding of the "non-indigenous resident in Leviticus intersects with present cross-cultural witness:

1) Cross-cultural believers who, among indigenous believers, witness to the glory of God in Jesus Christ are tantamount to non-indigenous residents, בִּנְיָמִין, who testified to Yahweh as their God.
For many who read this article it should not be hard to imagine yourself as a believer in a host country among indigenous believers. Imagine you are a non-indigenous resident in their land, their country, their Church. You share, with the indigenous Christians, the weighty calling of preserving the holiness of the community as a fitting locale for God to reside in sovereign power. Rather than standing in awe that the indigenous believers worship your God, stand in awe that you worship the God of the indigenous believers! Such was the disposition of the āh in Leviticus.

2) Non-indigenous believers who are not supported financially by their country of origin and who do not have a lucrative occupation are tantamount to non-indigenous residents, בָּנָי, who were predisposed to poverty, real estate disenfranchisement, identity crisis, injustice, and preclusion from certain prerogatives related to worshiping God. Perhaps you leap up to help those who are suffering; I thank God for your response to the “בָּנִים” who resides in your community. Now imagine yourself conversely as a minority, without a reliable income, residing among a majority ethnic population. You are vulnerable to certain social, economic, and religious disadvantages. Your calling is to testify to the sufficiency of God while living in a place that does not feel like home. The calling of your sisters and brothers in Christ is to be the sufficiency of God on your behalf. Humble yourself to receive, to benefit, to be fed, to be protected. In so doing, you will experience how the בָּנָי in Leviticus felt: underprivileged, yet regarded and satisfied. In so doing, you will fulfill one part of your “reason for existence” (raison d’être).

3) New believers who have left, or have been expelled, from their families and first cultures (i.e., MBBs), to reside in an environment more amiable to their faith are tantamount to non-indigenous residents, בָּנָי, who upon covenanting to Yahweh renounced allegiances to other deities, likely also to their families, to live as new members of Yahweh’s people. The בָּנָי in Leviticus, however, was not asked to surrender his ethnic identity. He was permitted, by implication, to retain certain customs (e.g., immediate nonsacred slaughter and consumption of domestic animals) and to observe, or refrain from observing, one part of Israel’s ethnic history (Festival of Booths). Just as Yahweh accommodated his stipulations for the בָּנָי in Leviticus, so Christian communities must accommodate their prescriptions for new, non-indigenous, believers (cf. Acts 15:28-31). Perhaps by revisiting the בָּנָי in Leviticus, and in the rest of the Bible, we may be able to further nuance our biblical rubric for discerning which of a new believer’s
cultural customs are to be abandoned and which are to be celebrated.

Do these three examples reflect a reformation in missiology, as I have suggested should be the goal of biblical reinterpretation? No, if by reformation we mean unprecedented improvement. I am sure practical theologians have derived similar examples from other biblical texts. Yes, if by reformation these three examples, among many others unvoiced, compel us to align or realign ourselves, our families, our communities with the mission of God. Every faithful reinterpretation of Scripture, especially when performed collaboratively between believers from variegated cultures, should engender a reformation, that is, an innovative missional vision invigorated by a resolve to witness cross-culturally to the all-satisfying beauty of Jesus Christ.

End Notes

1 Lawson G. Stone’s article, “Worship as Cherishing Yahweh’s World in Leviticus,” has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal that I will keep anonymous.

2 “Non-indigenous resident” is my preferred translation for the יֵדְעָה. The translation “(resident) alien” (NASB; JPS [1985]; NIV) may conjure images of an extraterrestrial, and the cognate verb “to alienate” and nominal form “alienation” have a negative charge, and for these reasons “(resident) alien” is an unhelpful translation. The translation “foreigner” (TNIV; NET; NLT) is better reserved for a separate Hebrew term (“ederation,” HALOT 2:700); also to call a יֵדְעָה a “foreigner” would be a misnomer in some biblical texts where the יֵדְעָה may be an immigrant from the Northern Kingdom, not ethnically non-Israelite. Others translate יֵדְעָה “stranger” (RSV; KJV; JPS [1917]; ESV), but a separate Hebrew noun is employed for “stranger” (“דָּרָכָה,” HALOT 1:279) and also for the noun “sojourner” (“ederation” “sojourner” HALOT 4:1712). Immigrant is another possible translation, but modern associations with immigration issues must be distinguished (cf. James K. Hoffmeier, The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible [Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books], 2009).


6 The יֵדְעָה class of persons in Leviticus is distinct from the יֵדְעָה “unauthorized” (10:1) or “lay person” (22:10; that is, one unauthorized as a priest) and the יֵדְעָה “foreigner” (22:25), but contra distingute to הָעָעָה “the nation(s)” (chs. 18-20). HC also frequently pairs the יֵדְעָה with its counterpart, יִשְׂרָאֵל “native” Israelite. Lastly, Jan Joosten (People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26 [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 74) observes the term יֵדְעָה “sojourner” in HC is not synonymous with the יֵדְעָה since the former “does not define rights, but objectively describes a social condition.”
On this important distinction, see Christopher J. H. Wright’s argumentation in *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006), 501-05.


11 “ו” HALOT 1:201.

12 James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], 116) has taught HB readers to interpret words synchronically, unless one can demonstrate that a given biblical passage intends for its readers to appreciate the etymological sense of a given word.


14 The typical source-critical division between Lev 16 and 17 is unjustifiable. Erich Zenger (“Das Buch Levitikus als Teiltext der Tora/des Pentateuch. Eine synchronre Lektüre mit rekanonischer Perspektive,” in *Levitikus als Buch* [eds. H.-J. Fabry and H.-W. Jüngling; BBB 119; Berlin/Bodenheim b. Mainz, 1999], 47-83) and Benedikt Jürgens (*Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Leviticus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext* [HBSt 28; Freiburg i.Br., 2001], 180-86) have convincingly argued that these
chapters together are central to Leviticus and portray the restoration of the divine-human relationship by means of purification rites.

15 The noun יְהֹוָה in Leviticus refers to Israel in Yahweh’s land once (plural בְּיָד: 25:23), and to the “non-indigenous resident” 20 times: 16:29; 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26; 19:10, 33, 34(2x); 20:2; 22:18; 23:22; 24:16, 22; 25:23, 35, 47(3x).

16 Scholars have identified the HC’s יְהֹוָה as: Samaritan hierarchs (Vink, “Priestly Code,” Priestly Code, 48); Northern kingdom Israelites who yielded to Judean control after Samaria fell (Cohen, “‘Ger’ Biblique,” 131); Israelite exiles who returned to Palestine (Cazelles, “Mission d’Esdras,” 131); Israelites who stayed in Palestine and joined the exiles who returned (Van Houten, Alien in Israelite Law, 156); and Diaspora Jews traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals (Grelet, “Rédaction Sacerdotale,” 178).

17 “steh der ger als das zugehörige Glied, das er ist, in einer Relation zur Religionsgemeinschaft als ganzer, ohne daß sich in dieser Relation eine herkunftsmäßige Fremdheit des ger von außerhalb Jadas ausdrückte”: Bultmann, Der Fremde, 216.

18 Kidd, alterity and identity, 6-7.
19 Bertholet, Die Stellung der Israel, 152.
20 Kaufmann, Religion of Israel, 206.
21 Kidd, alterity and identity, 68.
22 Joosten, People and Land, 72.
24 Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 244.
26 Ironically, Joosten (People and Land, 101) himself affirms this component of H’s covenant formula.

27 Here I augment the chart from Kidd, alterity and identity, 57.
28 A persuasive argument can be established for viewing the יְהֹוָה in Deuteronomy as a covenant member. Curiously, Deut 14:21 ostensibly exempts the יְהֹוָה from this food law, whereas this parallel law in Lev 17:15 explicitly holds the יְהֹוָה responsible.
29 Joosten, People and Land, 69.
31 Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, Leviticus in Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007), 440.
32 Along with most scholars, Martin Noth (Leviticus: A Commentary [OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965], 180) supports my reading יְהֹוָה as Israel’s God, “At the head of v. 15b is the general sentence that ‘anyone’ (including the foreigner) must bear the consequences of ‘cursing God.’”
33 A phrase which Baruch A. Levine (Leviticus [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 112) says “expresses the close relationship and common descent of Israelites, even in exile.”
34 Joosten, People and Land, 65-6.
35 Joosten (People and Land, 65-6) contends, “The יְהֹוָה is an exceptional situation:
not an Israelite, yet entitled to live as a free man among the people. Taking account of this, the sacral law does not oblige him to behave like an Israelite: he is not required to bring sacrifices to YHWH. Yet he must observe certain prohibitions, such as those prohibiting sacrifices to other gods or the eating of blood. A transgression against those prohibitions would bring guilt on the whole people; it must not be tolerated.” Jacob Milgrom (Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [Anchor Bible, Vol. 3; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 1453) relegates the rationale of 17:3-4 to holiness: “The ⓐ is bound by the Noahide law to drain the blood (Gen 9:4), but since he is required to worship Israel’s God, he need not bring the blood to his altar…it is incumbent on the ⓐ to obey only YHWH’s prohibitive commandments, since their violation generates impurity that pollutes the land and ultimately results in Israel’s exile. The violation of performative commandments, however, is characterized not by action, but by neglect. No pollution is generated by inaction, and the ecology is not upset… Thus in H’s view, the ⓐ does not belong in this law.”

36 Joosten, People and Land, 36.
37 Milgrom (Leviticus 23-27, 2052).
38 This verse reads: “But if a ⓐ resides with you and celebrates Passover to Yahweh, all his males must be circumcised, and then let him approach to celebrate it. He shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it” (translation mine).

39 Christophe Nihan (From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus [FAT 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 108) argues HC’s concern for Israel’s holiness in the sector outside the sacrificial cult (chs. 17-26) culminates Leviticus’ threefold structure by which Israel is gradually initiated into Yahweh’s presence: Lev 1-10 highlights a public theophany before the “tent of meeting” (see chs. 9-10); Lev 11-16 features a theophany inside the inner-sanctum on the (Lev 16:2; cf. Exod 25:22); and Lev 26 pronounces Yahweh will walk in the midst of the Israelites if they keep the terms of the covenant (26:12), language reflective of the primeval divine-human relationship in Genesis 3.

40 Nihan, Priestly Torah, 99
41 Pickled beet eggs are also commonplace to the Amish, Upper Peninsula Michiganders, Pennsylvanian Dutch, among others. People from these regions, however, would be knowledgeable of Dr. Seuss, but probably less familiar with Shawarma.

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Brian M. Ebel

The Pannenbergian Retroactive Significance of Resurrection

Abstract

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg the Scriptures are born out of the historical acts of God in salvation history. It is this focus upon history, most importantly from the the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that sets Pannenberg apart from his contemporaries. Previous attempts to hurdle these historical issues such as theological positivism have given way in the postmodern era to the recognition that there are few uninterpretable facts as modernity claimed. As such, hermeneutics are key to the manner in which the Scriptures are interpreted. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to consider how Wolfhart Pannenberg, an important theologian of the twentieth century, argues the retroactive significance of the resurrection is the manner in which Jesus Christ is established to be the Messiah of Israel, united to God, and the reconciler of humanity to God. It is by means of his resurrection from the dead that the incarnation and cross are established, and moreover establishes a key hermeneutic not only for Christology but consequently for the interpretation of Scripture.

Keywords: Pannenberg, resurrection, Christology, hermeneutics, retroactive significance

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Introduction

The purpose of this fall colloquium concerns the use and interpretation of the bible in theology and missiology. Given this subject concentration, it seemed appropriate as a theologian to consider where one begins in his or her interpretation of the bible, and reflect upon this as it relates to how the Scriptures are then utilized for theology and/or missiology. According to Wolfhart Pannenberg the Scriptures are born out of the mighty acts of God in salvation history, and as people who are part of the Way, those who interpret the bible might begin with those historical acts which climax in Jesus Christ. This approach is typical of the allegorical approach to Scripture as proposed by Origen of the early Church.1 Perhaps, then, the purpose of this paper already has juxtaposed the purpose of the colloquium, by beginning with theology as it bears hermeneutical weight upon the bible. Clearly, both disciplines are interrelated for one cannot have theology without its source of the bible and the source of the bible requires at least some rudimentary level of interpretation. Theological positivism attempted to hurdle this issue via modern foundational methodologies that sought to reduce the bible to bare and uninterpreted facts, but what evolved in postmodernity was the realization that hermeneutics and interpretation plays a role in how one approaches the bible, and that the bible itself requires interpretation.2 Accordingly, this paper shall comprise how one of the dominant theologians of the twentieth century, Wolfhart Pannenberg, argues that the retroactive significance of the resurrection is the manner in which Jesus Christ is established to be the messiah of Israel who is united to God, and the reconciler of humanity and God. In this manner, the entirety of the incarnation, life, ministry, proclamation of the Kingdom or teachings of Jesus, and the cross of Jesus as contained in the bible are interpreted through the resurrection. Thus, this work explores two options, that is (1) the Pannenbergian retroactive significance of the resurrection and (2) how this serves as a key hermeneutic in his Christology which consequently shapes the interpretation of the bible.

Preliminary & Methodological Considerations

In beginning, Wolfhart Pannenberg utilizes a “theology from below” Christological methodology that looks to the historical acts of God as opposed to a “from above” methodology which looks to the logos oriented Christologies in which the divinity of Jesus is assumed on the basis of kerygmatic confessions of faith or on the basis of human soteriological need. The from above position considers the a priori presupposition that Jesus is divine and one with God, and the from below position considers a posteriori the historical acts as the means to confirming the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. Through his from below methodology,
Pannenberg contends these historical acts contained throughout Scripture are bridged through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, in whom the apocalyptic hopes and prophetic predictions of Israel are embodied and realized. Pannenberg also argues the resurrection is a historical event which can be subjected to scrutiny, or historical-critical methodologies much like any other historical event. To this end, Pannenberg looks to the Pauline corpus and the empty tomb tradition in his systematic theology. His “from below” process by which he scrutinizes these events occurs by challenging that the resurrection is validated when it is not a priori disregarded and when it is considered to be historically probable. These presuppositions are critical for the success of his “from below” proposition, as it is by scrutiny of the life, message, and Christ-event that Pannenberg contends Jesus of Nazareth is authenticated to be the Christ of God.

If his “from below” proposal succeeds, the manner in which this occurs is by means of the resurrection and how its retroactive significance establishes Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. Pannenberg contends the resurrection is the event in which God establishes the person Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, which also provides confirmation to his pre-Easter message of the Kingdom — the future inbreaking of God in the present — and his ministry which was the embodiment of this Kingdom. Accordingly, Pannenberg argues the resurrection has retroactive significance not only establishing the person and work of Jesus Christ but also establishing the unity of Jesus Christ with God. Thus, the resurrection is not only the historical confirmatory act of God of Jesus Christ, but also a hermeneutical key that interprets the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. These two elements, the retroactive significance of the resurrection as the establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and its operation as a hermeneutical key to interpret the person and ministry of Jesus Christ which provide key emphases of this work.

The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection — The Authentication of Jesus Christ

The importance of the resurrection in the Pannenbergian Christology concerns how the resurrection as a historical event provides retroactive significance and establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. His proposal is demonstrated through legal terminology and a Greek philosophy of ontology. In terms of legal terminology, Pannenberg contends there are laws and ordinances having “retroactive force,” that is ex post facto force, and similarly, the resurrection of Jesus casts interpretive force ex post facto upon the person and activity of Jesus Christ. Whereas this is easily demonstrable in terms of law, he demonstrates how ontologically the Greek concept of essence demonstrates that from the future, it is possible to see
the essence of something has never changed, although this is only visible from the future. He claims:

The essence of a man, of a situation, or even of the world in general is not yet to be perceived from what is now visible. Only the future will decide it. It is still to be shown what will become of man and of the world’s situation in the future.7

The important thrust of his retroactive significance concerns the manner in which the resurrection establishes the person and preceding work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the retroactive significance of the resurrection demonstrates how the logical outcome of his proposal from below manifests itself. This from below method posits the retroactive significance of the resurrection as a lens by which the cross, the ministry, the incarnation, the very unity of Jesus Christ with God, and the implications for salvation history and humanity are revealed and interpreted both ontologically and epistemologically.8 By means of a historical event from below – the resurrection – the divinity of Jesus is established and not assumed as in the case of Anselm, Schleiermacher, Barth, and other theologians who utilize theological methodologies from above via a logos or incarnation oriented Christology.9 The manner in which the resurrection is retroactively authenticative is important not only as a hermeneutical key for the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, but more importantly to the unity of Jesus with God and revelation of the eschatological destiny of humanity as they relate to God through Jesus Christ.

So, the retroactive significance of the resurrection serves in a confirmatory manner to establish the person and the work of Jesus Christ, which does not indicate that Jesus has become someone else, or someone he was previously not, but rather someone improperly recognized prior to his resurrection.10 This is a critical juncture at which the great weight of his proposal is found in marked contrast to other Christologies claiming the resurrection is a myth of sorts, the rise for Christian faith, or even Christologies claiming somehow Jesus became someone else in the resurrection.11 The point of his retroactive significance of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is precisely to show that Jesus is the Christ, the promised messiah, who fits into the overarching narrative of salvation history God is at the very least co-authoring and at the very most guiding to the juncture of universal historical fulfillment in the eschaton, and which is competing among other truth claims within the scope of the history of world religions.12 If Jesus is one with God, then the claims he makes about God and for God have authority. And if Jesus has unity with God, then the act of crucifixion which seemed to be a failure of another false messiah is rather the very victory of God through his resurrection, and the revelation of the reconciliation of humanity and the world to God.
His proposal becomes evident when contrasted with other Christologies, especially Christologies whose methodologies are committed to beginning with the incarnation or other “from above” positions. The difference here concerns how his from below methodology seeks to confirm Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ whereas other Christologies have sought to confirm that Christ is Jesus of Nazareth. That is, whereas other Christologies have looked to logos Christology and the incarnation for the divinity of Jesus, whereas Anselm and others sought to convey that the God-Man was necessary because of the human soteriological need thus positing the divinity of Jesus in the incarnation, Pannenberg turns to the resurrection as the establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, for it is the Christ-event which is the central historical event from which Pannenberg constructs his Christology. This is the reason why Pannenberg has taken care to lay the framework for the resurrection as a historical event. In this way, the resurrection as a historical event is able to retroactively cast light upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the claims made by Jesus, the miracles and teachings of Jesus, and even the nearness of the Kingdom in him, authenticating him as the Messiah and Christ of God despite the seemingly glaring contradiction that the cross of Friday provided. So the resurrection confirms cross and incarnation, not vice versa as in, for example, Anselm, Schleiermacher, and Barth. Thus, it cannot be stressed enough that Pannenberg provides in the retroactive significance of the resurrection an important point of coherence between methodology and his Christology, as both are mutually complimentary, and it is in the retroactive significance of the resurrection which Pannenberg shows the authentication of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, while also providing a key hermeneutic for interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the resurrection retroactively confirms ontology and epistemology.

Surprisingly, while his proposal for retroactive significance is of critical importance in his Christology, he relegates a relatively minor amount of space within the corpus of Jesus – God & Man to delineate the importance of this, as the proposal is treated, in some manner of speaking, as an almost foregone conclusion. The retroactive significance of the resurrection is inherently part of a methodology that is imbued with the historicity of the resurrection as the confirmation of the Christ-event. While he does not provide much space to this, he does take care to answer some of the potential criticisms concerning his method. The response Pannenberg provides maintains many points of continuity with the early tradition of the Church and with the witness of Scripture in which Paul argues for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Pannenberg sees his own methodology as little more than a convention of the early church and the two stage Christology of Romans 1.3 between Son of David and Son of God. He contends the
Easter event was understood by early Christians within the scope of relations between God and the world in the context of the apocalyptic hope and promise of Judaism, and in this way, he sees the Easter event pointing back upon the life, ministry, and incarnation of Jesus in a confirmatory manner that God is revealed in Jesus, that Jesus is indeed the Son and Christ of God that is one with God, and Jesus has thus revealed the eschatological destiny of humanity in the prolepsis of the Christ-event. Thus, Pannenberg brings his Christology to a penultimate climax as his proposal for revelation as history that came at the forefront of his contributions to the theological community, as well as his “from below” methodology that integrates with his revelation as history proposal propel his retroactive significance of the resurrection. That penultimate climax is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a historical event in his theology in which God offers the revelation of the eschatological destiny of humanity and a glimpse of the final self-disclosure of God, and it is this event which casts retroactive significance and interpretive light upon the person of Jesus Christ and the ministry of Jesus Christ, showing him to be one with God and the promised Messiah of Israel.

The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection – A Key Hermeneutic of Jesus Christ

Now that the retroactive significance of the resurrection has been explored, how does this provide a hermeneutical key to interpreting the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God? Pannenberg relates that the proclamation of the Kingdom which seemingly failed on Friday had been confirmed on Sunday in the resurrection, although the expectation of the general resurrection of the dead as had been apocalyptically expected had only been proleptically revealed. Jesus began a new era, with continuities of the original expectation, although the expression of this new era was discontinuous with many tenets involving the restoration of land, religious life, and socio-political structures. Thus the manner in which the resurrection of Jesus finds meaning for Christology concerns how the crucified one of Friday has been held in tension with the resurrected Lord of Sunday, and how Sunday looks back upon Friday as well as the totality of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth establishing him to be the Christ of God and one with God. In this regard, Tupper recapitulates six Pannenbergian themes with respect to the resurrection of Jesus which are helpful to show the meaning of the resurrection and its continuities and discontinuities with the original apocalyptic expectation:

(1) If Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun. (2) If Jesus has been raised, this for a Jew can only mean that God himself has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus. (3) Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus
moved so close to the Son of Man that the insight became obvious: the Son of Man is none other than the man Jesus who will come again. (4) If Jesus, having been raised from the dead, is ascended to God and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus. (5) The transition to the Gentile mission is motivated by the eschatological resurrection of Jesus as resurrection of the crucified One. (6) What the early Christian tradition transmitted as the words of the risen Jesus is to be understood in terms of its content as the explication of the significance inherent in the resurrection itself.

Essentially, these six themes Pannenberg offers show the continuity between the retroactive authentication which the resurrection provides, and its ensuing consequent: a key hermeneutic of the event and person of Jesus Christ. He does this by locating the meaning of the event within the context of its own history from salvation history, apocalyptic hope, and prophetic tradition to its embodiment and expression being fulfilled eschatologically in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. This is to say that in light of the activity and indirect self-revelation of God in history, in light of the prophetic promises and apocalyptic predictions, and in light of the meaning of resurrection as developed from within the context of post-exilic Judaism and among other religions, the resurrection of Jesus comes to expression. This is why Pannenberg designates the resurrection as a “metaphor,” which is understandable insofar as it relates to the context of post-exilic Judaism, but as he claims occurs in a very different manner in Jesus Christ. While this could at first glance be problematic because of potential to deny the resurrection of historicity, Pannenberg by utilizing the term metaphor, is able to express a real historical event, point to the contextual examples and partial meaning of this event, while at the same time offering nuance that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an event unlike any other event for which humanity is able to presently understand and create meaning. His understanding of direct and indirect revelation drives this. For Pannenberg revelation is indirect, open to interpretation, subject to history, time, and historical-critical investigation, indicating that the revelation is not a direct full disclosure between God and humanity – it is open to being shaped in terms of an unfolding of event and meaning. Only in the eschaton will the final and full disclosure from God be made to humanity, and the fullness of truth shall then be fully revealed. Thus, the resurrection is proleptically revealed, and is still yet to come for humanity in its fullest sense; it is in this manner, an indirect revelation of what is yet to be made fully known. How one utilizes this hermeneutical key from the perspective of the metaphor nuance comes to expression in the experience of the risen Christ
for the Church against the backdrop of the expected general resurrection as was previously expected. In this way, the person of Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord, and the Christ-event finds meaning for past, present, and future. Moreover, it merges salvation history and universal history, positing God to be the author of history who has through a new and unique event through Jesus Christ made a decisive movement in the reconciliation of God and humanity.26

The treatment Pannenbergs gives to the retroactive significance of the resurrection stems from how he sees the Early Church having understood the resurrection of Jesus as the “decisive point in the history of his relation to God,” which furthers the case for retroactive significance of the resurrection forming a key hermeneutic.27 In this regard, the key hermeneutic functions by casting interpretive light from the resurrection retroactively upon the claims and claim to unity with God which Jesus made. So, while there are titles given to Jesus such as Son of God, while Jesus claimed unity with God, and the presence of God was present to those who believed his message, the titles and events seemingly create “tensions between the physical basis of the divine sonship through Jesus’ divine procreation and the idea of the installation as the Son of God through the resurrection.”28 For Pannenberg, the question concerns whether or not these titles and events are exclusionary:

In the sense that Jesus became the Son of God only at his baptism, through the particular event of transfiguration, or through his resurrection, or that he already was the Son of God from the beginning, from his birth or even a preexistent being before his earthly birth? Or can a material relationship among all these conceptions be shown?29

While some have said the message and its revelation of the rule of God in human life was enough to make the authoritative claim that the future of the salvation of God was operative in Jesus, Pannenberg claims that the message alone is not enough as it does not bring the entirety of the future of God into the present of humanity.30 Rather, he argues the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was for the early Christian community “the decisive point in the history of his relation to God.”31 This is a key claim Pannenberg levels in his systematic theology as it forms the basis for which the resurrection becomes the hermeneutic in which Jesus is confirmed to be one with God and the agent of reconciliation between God and humanity. In so doing, Pannenberg argues the rejection of Jesus at the cross and its reversal at the empty tomb was the purpose for the proclamation, celebration, and community called the early Church, and the early Church saw that Jesus was who he claimed to be because of the resurrection. This also provided future reality of eschatological expectation to a present reality
called the Church, in whom the risen Lord was operating for the expansion of the Kingdom and transformation of the world. Although the incarnation, baptism, and ministry of Jesus revealed the rule of God in human life, and although Jesus kept in step with the prophetic and apocalyptic predictions by making this a feature of his message, in the estimation of Pannenberg, because of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Early Church saw the rejected Messiah of God revealed, and that this same Jesus who was Son of David was also Son of God, Lord and Messiah, and the judge and hope for the world.32

Ultimately, Pannenberg contends it is through the resurrection Jesus of Nazareth is established to be the Christ:

The earthly Jesus was not yet designated as “Son of God,” but this title was, rather, attributed to him only on the basis of his resurrection and exaltation.33

The Early Church saw the issue between pre-Easter Jesus who “was already set apart from the multitude of other men,” and post-Easter Jesus who was exalted to the right hand of God.34 Similarly, the struggle he presents is the insertion of the word “adoption” respective to Jesus being the Son of God, although to his credit he takes time to nuance this word in a manner that does not connote the same sense as the Christological controversies of the Early Church. In this way the divinity of Jesus is not something conferred post-resurrection, nor is his divinity only of epistemological concern, but of ontological authentication as well. In other words, Jesus did not become someone new, nor did the events which he performed become something different. Rather, they were established and therefore illumined. The retroactive significance of the resurrection provides this hermeneutical key that casts light from post-Easter Jesus to pre-Easter Jesus. Essentially, the divinity of Jesus was authenticated retroactively via the resurrection, and it was the resurrection which cast epistemological and ontological illumination and authentication upon the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. The importance of this is a confirmatory character upon the pre-Easter claims of Jesus concerning his unity with God and the advent of the Kingdom in him. So, while his divinity and oneness with God did not change, it was indeed authenticated and revealed through the resurrection, and this is the reason why Pannenberg claims that the resurrection has retroactive power. Accordingly, Pannenberg is able to maintain continuity with the Greek tradition of ontology: things in their essence remain what they are in their essence.35

Mentioned above, this distinction Pannenberg has created between a pre and post Easter Jesus, as well as Son of David and Son of God is not without criticism. Some have made the claim of nestorianism, as the two
natures are irreconcilably divided. This is misguided, as Pannenberg is precisely against such a claim; the issue is not how the divine/human natures are divided or in competition, but rather how the resurrection provides authentication or confirmation of the activity and divinity of the pre-Easter Jesus. In this spirit, Pannenberg contends that the improper way to understand the distinction between the two is through Künneth who indicates “divinity was conferred upon Jesus only through his resurrection.”

To make such a statement is to change the divinity of Jesus from prior to the resurrection in his ministry, and to activate that divinity only in and through the Christ-event. This position is rejected by Pannenberg who espouses the meaning of the resurrection is not in a change of divinity but a confirmation of such divinity. Similarly, Pannenberg points to even the importance of the baptismal tradition of the Gospel of Mark, and claims that while there is an important claim made here that is pre-Easter in nature, and it can only be understood from the perspective of the post-Easter Church who recognized that Jesus had been crucified (thus denying such a claim) but then raised from the dead. Pannenberg typically dispatches his critics by pointing to the retroactive significance of the resurrection, and how the resurrection is neatly upheld by his methodological proposal of a theology from below, and how this forms a key hermeneutic for interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ which stands in continuity with the witness of Scripture and the authority of the early Church.

Summary: The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection

In sum, Pannenberg finds the impetus to retroactive significance for the resurrection through his methodological proposal from below that looks to history as the means of doing theology. In this way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ authenticates Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, and casts a key hermeneutical interpretive light back upon the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Pannenberg utilizes the lens of metaphor by nuancing the Christ-event as metaphor in the sense it has not happened to anyone else and cannot possibly be univocally understood, and yet the Christ-event has historically revealed the unity of Jesus with God and thus revealing the future eschatological destiny of humanity by reconciling humanity to God in Jesus Christ. Pannenberg finds validity for retroactive significance theology in and through the early Church.

What then does this retroactive significance mean for his Christology? To begin, it is central to his Christology. His chosen Christological methodology from below looks to the historical acts of God as the outworking of the relationship between God and humanity and the self-revelation of God finds its fulfillment in the resurrection. This is the reason for his careful delineation of the resurrection. This does not mean that at
some point Jesus became divine meaning that at another point Jesus was not divine. Rather, Pannenberg contends in a quite orthodox manner that Jesus is one with God from the beginning just as he is one with humanity in the incarnation. In terms of the oneness of Jesus with humanity, while Pannenberg claims the resurrection is a metaphor insofar as it is a unique experience that has no other human experiences offering replication, it is not limited to the resurrection of Jesus being a metaphor for authentic human existence God longs for humanity to have as in Bultmann. Rather it means humanity comes to experience fulfillment in being united to God through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it means the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and the cross of Jesus of Nazareth have been established by God revealing Jesus of Nazareth to be the promised Messiah and Christ. The resurrection then authenticates and establishes the pre-Easter activity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. Finally, Pannenberg attempts to maintain continuity with the early Church and its emphasis upon the resurrection as a hermeneutical key to understanding the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, for it is in the resurrection that Jesus is confirmed as the Christ of God which confirms the pre-Easter ministry and activity of Jesus in history.

How this relates to the present exercise becomes readily apparent. Scripture as it relates to theology is the source text, but one cannot forget that without theology to unlock its riches, its meaning is difficult to ascertain. The work of Pannenberg on a superficial level is simple almost to the point of wondering why one would ever study his theology, and yet on a deeper level he challenges the years from Ignatius forward who claim that the starting point to Christology is the incarnation of Jesus Christ or even human soteriological need. For the purposes of this paper, this is the juncture where the proverbial “rubber meets the road.” While the messianic promises in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, one could not say that this child was one with God simply because someone else said the prophecies of old were fulfilled. There had to be historical evidence to support it. While the miracles of Jesus Christ were indeed signs of the Kingdom, there were all kinds of sages and magicians who may have performed similar acts. While those who heard the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God breaking from the future upon the present may have claimed a divine or messianic status, there are other rabbis who shared similar messages, even if not with the power or authority of Jesus. More importantly, while the Christological titles in the bible are indeed important, and the Christological kerygmatic statements of the early Church are also important, one must ask why they came to expression—was it because of the statements themselves or that something happened historically to perpetuate them? And while the cross of Jesus
may be posited as the act of atonement to satisfy the wrath of God, to put an end to the enmity between humanity and God, or to recapitulate the life the first Adam was called to live, one cannot say that the cross itself is an authenticating function of the unity of Jesus with God nor the reality of human salvation and reconciliation with God. No, in all these historical events a requirement of authentication by a validating act of establishment—and a divine reversal of sorts in such an act—is necessary to authenticate Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. This event can only be the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which the promises, predictions, miracles, Christological titles, Kingdom embodiment, future inbreaking of God, reconciliatory act of the cross, and the reversal of those who claimed all of these acts to be blasphemous occurred. The resurrection was the impetus for the New Testament, for the kerygmatic statements, and the missiology of the early Church that followed a great commission. Again, it seems incredulous that Pannenbarg would create a systematic theology that seems to be concurrent with the Bible and the reason for the construction of it, and yet what (according to Pannenbarg) has occurred from Ignatius forward are both the acceptance of presuppositionary divinity on the basis of the logos and incarnational theologies. Later, modernistic presuppositions and methodologies undercut the very reason the Bible and the Church existed in the first place: that Jesus was put to death on a cross as a blasphemer on Friday and was vindicated on Sunday as Son of God and promised messiah of Israel.

Thus, the procession of reading the Bible then moves from resurrection retroactively upon the person and work of Christ, and then upon the Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic predictions. For this reason, Pannenbarg challenges the dominant Christological methodologies as well as the modernistic assumptions of his predecessors and contemporaries alike by returning to the reason the Scriptures exist and the key hermeneutic that epistemologically and ontologically confirms the content therein; the person and history of Jesus Christ which is confirmed in his resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was the reason for the New Testament Scriptures, even perhaps the most compelling reason why the resurrection narratives in the gospels appear truncated; after all, who has time to explain all of this when the good news has to be shared everywhere that the future of God, the reconciliation of humanity to God, and the eschatological salvation and destiny of humanity has arrived now through Jesus Christ? We are eighth day people, sons and daughters of the risen Lord, and in this we live, and move, and have our being!
End Notes
1 See Origen, De Principiis, Books III & IV for his allegorical hermeneutics.
2 Dr. Larry Wood offers an important work in this regard, showing how hermeneutics are required in biblical interpretation. See Wood, Laurence W. Theology as History & Hermeneutics. USA: Emeth Press, 2005, 27-60.
3 See Olive, Don H. Wolfhart Pannenberg. Waco: Word Books, 1973, 57-58. The word “probable” is an important distinction, as Pannenberg deals with probabilities rather than modern theological positivism. Pannenberg and his objectors typically disagree on one of the following: the miraculous nature of the event, the existential nature of the resurrection as the means rise to preaching and faith, or the divide between revelation and history, leaving the resurrection to be an event God reveals through faith. Migliore is helpful to show these distinctions, written in the form of hypothetical dialogue. See Migliore, Daniel L. “How Historical is the Resurrection?” Theology Today: Vol. 33, No. 1 Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976. Also important is Burhenn, Herbert. “Pannenberg’s Argument for the Historicity of the Resurrection.” Journal of the American Academy of Religion No. 40. 1972, 368-379. See also Dobbin, E. “Reflections on Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Revelation Theology.” Louvain Studies No. 4. 1972, 13-37
4 “Christ-event” represents a dialectical tension between cross and resurrection with the resurrection being the manner in which the cross is understood. See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, trans. by Wilkins & Pribe. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977
5 See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 135-141. This is an important distinction governing his Christology that stems from the below-above methodology he utilizes. Whereas the above to below method proves that the Christ is Jesus of Nazareth, Pannenberg seeks to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God.
6 Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 135.
7 Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 136.
8 This concept flows from his theology of history and revelation. Pannenberg contends revelation occurs within the greater scope of knowledge for it is universal and occurs in the process of history. He holds the end of history is the final and direct self-disclosure of truth between Creator and creature, and given the resurrection of Jesus is proleptic in form revealing the eschatological future in the present, the resurrection as future event is able to cast interpretive light upon the past. So the form of revelation is epistemological as humanity experiences the revelation of God indirectly in history, and its content is ontological having to do with the truth of the identity of Jesus Christ.
9 McDermott points to how Pannenberg looked to communicatio idiomatum and how this failed to show how Jesus Christ was one with God in the incarnation as the impetus for his theology of the resurrection. See McDermott, Brian. “Pannenberg’s Resurrection Christology: A Critique.” Theological Studies. 1974, 711. See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 108-110. McDermott critiques Pannenberg for a lack of clarity regarding the relation of Jesus and his divinity, an issue
Pannenbergs later clarifies in the systematic theology, as he points to the incarnation as being the totality of his life rather than any one distinct moment. See Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, 383-389.

10 Considering the New Testament is constructed after the resurrection, it is possible to see how authority was given to Jesus in his teaching and miracles on the basis of the resurrection a posteriori. Jesus is Son of God from the beginning, but through the authenticity given in the resurrection which proved the claims of blasphemy by the religious authorities false, these events take on deeper meaning. See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 136-137

11 Pannenberg points to Ebeling and Künneth in this regard, and this writer has pointed to Bultmann, with whom the theology of Pannenberg contrasts. See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 136.

12 If the resurrection is indeed a historical event as he Pannenberg contends, and if his retroactive significance is correct, then its implications are that God has prophetically revealed the future and as such the course of history from past to the future which has already been revealed is being brought to its fulfillment by God. Moreover, whereas Pannenberg contends that the history of religions is being tested and verified and truth will ultimately be brought to light in the eschaton, the resurrection in his Christology then claims the central place. Of course, the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can only fully be verified in the eschaton, but his theology makes a strong claim in this regard for the present. For more on the veracity of truth claims among the religions of the world see, Pannenberg, Wolfhart. “Redemptive Event & History.” Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. I, trans. by Kelm. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1970, 17 See also Tupper, Frank. The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, London: Westminster Press, 1973, 79-81. See also Pannenberg, Wolfhart. “Toward a Theology of the History of Religions.” Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. II, trans. by Kelm. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1971, 65-118. See also Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, trans. by Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, 119-188.

13 See Olive, Wolfhart Pannenberg, 55.

14 Elizabeth Johnson supports this notion claiming this was the concept of the New Testament which “slowly diminished over time.” See Johnson, Elizabeth. “The Ongoing Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg.” Horizons 9, No. 2, Villanova: College Theology Society, 1982, 243.

15 Pannenberg takes great care to delineate the resurrection as a historical event by utilizing historical-critical methodologies. This is not without contestation. Within the afterward of Jesus – God & Man, Pannenberg takes care to reflect upon the challenges of his critics, especially with respect to this issue. Their claims range from the ability to specify the resurrection as a historical event (Hodgson) to the claims of Jesus and its confirmation in the cross (Klappert & Moltmann). See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 401-404. Also Herbert Burbenn is an important voice in the challenges to the Pannenbergian methodology and this historicity of the resurrection. Burbenn contends that the Scriptures account for the resurrection as a vision and as such, it is impossible to claim that faith does not enter into the debate in regard to the resurrection. He methodologically challenges Pannenberg on the grounds that the historian must claim there is insufficient evidence for the resurrection if he or she is truly acting as a historian on the basis of the logic that dead men do not rise. This is precisely the point which Pannenberg claims one

16 See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 133-141. To be sure, Pannenberg has interspersed this element within the three chapters that are central to his Christology in Systematic Theology, Volume Two. These chapters include 9, 10, and 11. Within the scope and shape of these chapters, the retroactive significance of the resurrection is not oft mentioned by name, but is recognizable on the basis of the confirmatory language utilized when speaking of the resurrection. Moreover, the proposal for the unity of Jesus with God and the new eschatological age, are evidentiary on the basis of the resurrection as the confirmatory element of Jesus Christ.

17 For example the challenges of Bultmann, Cullmann, Barth, and other modern historical-critical challenges. Barth is especially negative toward the historical nature of the resurrection Pannenberg espouses, claiming his position is weaker than the historical Jesus of Vogel. See Molnar, *Incarnation & Resurrection*, 264-265. Original Source: Barth, Karl. *Karl Barth Letters 1961-1968*, ed. By Fanger, Soeversandt, and trans. by Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981. Molnar is critical of Pannenberg in this same vein, claiming there is a detachment of resurrection and incarnation because the pre-Easter appearance of Jesus depends upon a confirmation by God at the end of history. This is overstated as Pannenberg sees this as a confirmation of his unity with God as the unfolding of revelation to humanity, not as some kind of status which Jesus did not previously have as in Künneth or the like. Concurrently, while Pannenberg utilizes the symbol of adoption, he is very clear to state that he does not receive his divinity on the basis of the resurrection. See Molnar, *Incarnation & Resurrection*, 278-279. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135-136. See John Cobb also claims that the entirety of the Pannenbergian Christology hinges upon the agreement or disagreement of his treatment of the resurrection. See Cobb Jr. John B. *Journal of Religion* 49, 1969. See also Cobb Jr., John B. “Past, Present, and Future.” *Theology as History: Discussions Among Continental & American Theologians*, Vol. 3. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967

18 This is a point made in Olive. Olive contends that the Pannenbergian position is closest to 1 Cor. 15:17. See Olive, *Wolffhart Pannenberg*, 70.


20 In this regard, the work of N.T. Wright is invaluable as he shows the resurrection of Jesus as being set against the contextual backdrop of 2nd Temple post-exilic Judaism. Pannenberg is similar in this regard as he views it as a historical problem that fits within the context of salvation history as contained in the Scriptures and the apocalyptic framework. See Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 32-200. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 74-105.

21 Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 147-148. These six theses are a recapitulation of the explication of the significance of the resurrection of Jesus in the overarching consideration of the knowledge of Jesus’ divinity in the work of Pannenberg. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 66-73. Ayaw comments that Pannenberg is interested not in “philosophical presuppositions but Scriptural
hermeneutics. In this regard, Awad claims his interest is to show how the cross and resurrection concern the fulfillment of history in Jesus Christ. See Awad, *Conceptual Roots of the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 100.


Obayashi claims that Pannenberg is unique in positing the resurrection as revealing the meaning of history and doing this by merging universal history and salvation history together. Obayashi contends that whereas Plato contemplated the cosmos, Pannenberg contemplates eschatology. See Obayashi, Hiroshi. “Pannenberg & Troeltsch: History & Religion” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 38 no. 4d. 1970, 402-403.

The key hermeneutic concerns how the resurrection casts light upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is both epistemological and ontological in this manner, and authenticates the claims of unity with God, the miracles as signs of the future inbreaking of the Kingdom, and is indicative of reconciliation on the part of God reconciling the world and humanity to God. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 134.

This is an important point. Whereas those who espouse a from above theology claim that the titles, claims, or even incarnation is enough to claim the divinity of Jesus Christ and his unity with God, Pannenberg claims it is from the resurrection which these are authenticated. Thus, it is the resurrection which casts interpretive light upon the other events, although he does see these events as being held in tension. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 133.

In this regard, Pannenberg is utilizing his from below position against those who take a from above position. It is important to realize that when Pannenberg claims that the early Church stands in continuity with this position, he sees there being a change or progression from the time of Ignatius forward. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 329-330. See also Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 33.

Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 134. This is a key claim Pannenberg levels in his Christology and is affective of the manner in which the resurrection is the central feature of his Christology.

See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 326-327. Pannenberg creates some challenge in his Christology concerning how “Jesus could hardly identify himself as the messiah,” and further claims the implications of his message and titles allowed him to emerge more readily as the reconciler and enabler of salvation through the eyes of his hearers. This, he contends, led to the claims of blasphemy and the cross. The manner in which Jesus emerges is the confirmation of his unity
with God and his message in the resurrection, the negation of his rejection via claims of blasphemy and ultimately in the cross. See Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, 334-343.

33 Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 134. This statement has been debated since it emerged in Jesus – God & Man. Stanley Grenz points out that his historical approach has been widely questioned, especially by the likes of Carl Henry who challenges that the teachings and deeds are enough to disclose his deity. See Grenz, Reason for Hope, 180-181. See Henry, Carl F.H. God, Revelation, & Authority. Waco: Word, 1976.

34 Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 135.

35 See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 135-136.


37 This is a point Pannenberg makes by looking to the work of Künneth in Theology of the Resurrection. See Künneth, Walter. Theology of the Resurrection, trans. by James W. Leitch. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 114. Original Source: Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 135. Pannenberg guards against this by stating that one cannot simply disregard the methodology from above as if it were “a mistake.” In this regard, he looks to Weber who states, “No one can ascend from a ‘below’ which is somehow given toward an ‘above’ without holding this ‘above’ to be likewise at least potentially given in or with the ‘below.’” Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 34-36. Original Source: Weber, O. Grundlagen der Dogmatik, Vol. II. Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungvereins, 1955, 35.

38 See Pannenberg, Jesus – God & Man, 138.
KEVIN P LINES

Exegetical and Extispicic Readings of the Bible in Turkana, Kenya, and North America

Abstract

While a missional hermeneutic elucidates missiological interpretation of scripture, translation would be the key descriptive of missiological use of scripture. Articulating a Turkana extispicic hermeneutic as both a critical and a valid process for interpreting the Bible, this paper proposes that Christians have the opportunity to engage in alternative intercontextual critical hermeneutical processes when “reading” the Bible. This engagement could reveal an ontic expansion of God—if we are able to overcome eclectic diversity and the fear of relativism. Three locations: theological institutions, missionaries in the church, and diaspora communities are suggested for practical application of intercontextual hermeneutics.

Keywords: intercontextual, hermeneutic, missiology, Turkana, extispicy, ontic expansion

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Introduction

“There are now more Christians in Africa than there are people in North America.”¹ This is my favorite recent way to begin a teaching session on mission, a sermon in a church, or a Perspectives on the World Christian Movement class because it so clearly demonstrates the radical shift in the gravitational “center” of Christianity in the world. When 1,200 delegates from around the world gathered at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference 100 years ago, there was only one delegate from Africa, and his was a last minute invitation.² When delegates to the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference gathered this year they truly represented all parts of the world. The final gathering on June 6, 2010, which was broadcast live on the internet,³ closed with delegates singing, and dancing with African choirs and musicians.

Our world, and not just our Christian world, is rapidly changing in unexpected ways. Anthropologist Michael Rynkiewich has recently described the complex situation mission faces today:

Finally, in a postcolonial, post-cold war world that seems to be overwhelmed by globalization, local intersections are emerging as sites of resistance that are constructed by migrants, refugees, transnationals, and diasporas. There are channels, centers, peripheries, and reversals in global flows, and these produce complex social settings where people exhibit multiple, shifting and hybrid identities. This decenters the “building blocks” of Western social sciences: personality, society, culture, and environment. Even history is contested from multiple perspectives, and theology is no longer sourced from within “the tradition,” but rather from various standpoints. Social science and theology, the twin pillars of missiology, have been destabilized (the center is moving and the boundaries are falling), and we are poised to become all the richer for it.⁴

“We are poised to become all the richer for it” is Rynkiewich’s surprise ending to a description that would certainly perplex and possibly strike fear in many hearts. What exactly are the benefits of this decentering and contestation that Rynkiewich suggests? He insists “that we now live in a new earth, though it is not yet the one we are looking for,” and that one of our tasks to join in mission in this “new world” is to “strive...for perspectives that will allow as many voices as possible to be heard (a new Pentecost).”⁵ This paper strives to add the voice of Turkana Christians living in the northwest corner of Kenya.

Serving alongside Turkana brothers and sisters in Christ from 1999-
2007, my wife and I have been privileged to share life and hear voices from a perspective that has rarely been heard. Equipped with the standard tools of missiology (biblical studies, linguistics, anthropology, critical contextualization) we arrived to find that even in the remotest part of the world, God was already at work and that life was going to be much more ad hoc than we ever could have imagined. At the outset, this paper parallels my personal progression in understanding the relationship between the Bible and missiology: from initially using the Bible to validate mission endeavors, to an increasing understanding of a missional hermeneutic of the whole Bible that views missio Dei as a metanarrative; from participating in the translatability of the Gospel and contextualization, to the reception of the first translation of the text of the Bible in the Turkana language in the form of a book, which presented interpretive challenges. Through these progressions and ensuing challenges, a Turkana hermeneutical framework for reading scripture is observed.

This paper proposes that an observed Spirit-led Turkana hermeneutic can be considered as both a critical and valid process for interpreting the Bible. Furthermore, in view of the fact that standard western exegetical methods have been “decentered” and are no longer evaluated as having universal priority over other hermeneutical processes, missiological opportunities now exist in the possibility of intercontextual sharing of hermeneutical processes for “reading” the Bible. Just as Turkana Christian interpretations of scripture would benefit from engagement in a more historical-critical approach, North American Christians would benefit from a more communal extispicic approach, with the possible outcome of the blessing of an ontic expansion of God as revealed through the scriptures. I argue that we will first need to be honest about our tendencies toward eclectic diversity and the fear of relativism in order to fully benefit from this intercontextual sharing. Finally, three practical locations for the application of intercontextual hermeneutics are suggested.

While the church in the West may recognize that a shifting and decentering is occurring, we still cling to our structures of power and thus, the priority of our own interpretive frameworks when we approach scripture. It is only natural that Christians in any context would give priority to the frameworks that hold the most significance for them. The issue at hand is how we will respond to the interpretive frameworks of others.

My missionary inclination is to want to listen to what other people in the world think about God, and I am especially apt to want to hear what followers of Jesus Christ have to say about the Bible as they read it. We must seek to listen and learn from our brothers and sisters in Christ from different parts of the world. Not because the center of Christianity has shifted or because others should automatically be given priority in their interpretation of
scripture merely because they are “other” or poor or oppressed. But simply because we need to seek together, for “we are poised to become all the richer for it.”

From Biblical Basis to Basis of the Bible: A Missional Hermeneutic

How do missiologists use the Bible? My graduate seminary mission professor, Charles Taber, often chided us students of mission, and missiologists in general, for poor use of the scriptures:

It seems to me a dismaying fact that, at least since the beginning of what Latourcette called “the Great Century” of Protestant missions, missiologists have far too often used the Bible in naïve and superficial ways. Missiologists have too often lacked a solid grounding in the scholarly methods of Bible study, causing them not infrequently to be guilty of grotesque harmonizations, of taking texts out of context, of proof-texting, of *ad hoc* and *ad hominem* exegeses, and especially of reductionism.  

Taber suggests that much of this poor use of the scriptures in mission is a consequence of the increasing disconnect between the disciplines of biblical interpretation, theology and missiology. Biblical studies grew to be an internal endeavor of the church separated from the external nature of mission. Thus, in most institutions, mission courses became something that were added on to the seminary curriculum and could possibly even be found in a separate “school” with its own faculty.

Yet, as missiology continues to struggle with its identity in the worlds of theology and biblical interpretation, there is an increasing tide of both mission-focused biblical scholars and biblically-focused missiologists who do much more than highlight the few commonly quoted “Great Commission” mission texts. Instead of relying on small fragments of the scriptures to provide a biblical basis for mission, more recent works have successfully brought together the whole story of scripture to portray it as a unifying missionary text. Some of these have included Christopher J. H. Wright, (2006), Köstenberger and O’Brien (2001), and Dean Flemming (2005), in which renowned biblical scholars are no longer merely pulling out proof texts from the Bible to support the missionary task, but are at long last “consider[ing] the very structure of the whole biblical message,” which Johannes Verkuyl prophetically pointed to in 1978 as a deficiency in missiology that needed to be addressed.

Even beyond this, some scholars now argue that the Bible is not only seen correctly as a missionary document describing the missionary God who is seeking reconciliation with the whole world, but as a text that is dependant on the mission of God, or *missio Dei* for its very existence and interpretation. That is, without *missio Dei*, there would be no reason for the
scriptures to exist. The scriptures themselves were born out of God's mission to the world. The late African theologian Kwame Bediako explains:

Certainly, what we regularly understand as the theology of the New Testament is inconceivable apart from the cultural crossing from the Jewish world into Hellenistic culture. In fact, it is possible to describe the books of the New Testament as the authoritative documents illustrative of the major mission activity of the apostolic era; without that mission activity, the books and the theological teachings they have imparted to succeeding Christian generations would not exist.8

In *Canon and Mission*, H. D. Beeby further suggests that if biblical scholars can begin to see the canon of scripture as a unified whole, we will find that “the whole Bible seen as a whole points us to mission.”9 Beeby offers several models for looking at the whole canon as a unified narrative that undeniably leads us into mission. No matter which model one uses to formulate a unity of the scriptures, Taber proposes that the missiological theme will undoubtedly present itself:

If one sees the unity of the Bible Christologically, who is this Christ if not the eternal Word communicating God's grace to a lost world? If ecclesiology is the focus, one is obliged to notice that even in its most ecclesiocentric and triumphalistic versions, it is salvation that the church dispenses as its central function. If one opts for the eschatological motif, what is God's coming future but the restoration of humanity and the cosmos to himself? The same possibility obtains for every other possible formula that I know of. I invite you to test the hypothesis yourself.10

Scripture was formed in the context of God's mission. This understanding rightly compels us to place priority on a missionary hermeneutic of scripture that considers God's mission as the unifying theme and “combines the conceptual with action.”11

This is the nature of a mis-sional hermeneutic as recently developed and espoused by George Hunsberger and the Gospel and Our Culture Network. At both the SBL and AAR meetings in the fall of 2008, Hunsberger, coordinator for the GOCN, presented an articulation of the four main streams of thought from within the GOCN as to what defines a mis-sional hermeneutic. First, “the framework for biblical interpretation is the story it tells of the mission of God and the formation of a community sent to participate in it.” Second, “the aim of biblical interpretation is to fulfill the equipping purpose of the biblical writings.” Third, “the approach required for a faithful reading of the Bible is from the mis-sional location of the Christian community.” Fourth, “the gospel functions as the interpretive
matrix within which the received biblical tradition is brought into critical conversation with a particular human context.”

The GOCN presentations of a missional hermeneutic give full body to Taber’s, Bediako’s and Beeby’s earlier descriptions of *missio Dei* as the primary hermeneutic for understanding scripture. Not merely the theme of scripture, mission is now presented as the framework for interpreting scripture, with scripture understood to have been written with the intentional aim of forming a community for mission, a community that approaches scriptural interpretation for the purpose of participating in God’s mission in the local context, and finally, a missional hermeneutic provides an interpretive matrix for engaging all human contexts with the Good News of Jesus.

In sum, while we recognize that missionaries, long before there was such a specialized field as missiology, have always used the Bible as the basis and motivation for mission, we admit that many missionaries and missiologists have on occasion been poor biblical scholars. Even so, a shift has taken place, and is occurring even popularly in western Christian communities, in that the Bible as a whole is seen and interpreted as a missionary document. That is, the Bible reveals to us God’s mission throughout all time and calls us to be participants in that mission. Thus we find that mission, and most specifically *missio Dei*, provides a metanarrative framework for understanding all of scripture. While theologians may have previously said that missiologists were merely reading the Bible through the lens of mission we now find biblical scholars and theologians, untrained in specialized missiology, per se, writing important missiological works, missiologists writing timely theological works, and even a missiologist with an Intercultural Studies PhD, Tite Tiénéou, becoming dean of the school of theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

**Translate, Contextualize, and then, Let the Spirit Lead**

While a missional hermeneutic elucidates missiological interpretation of scripture, translation would be the key descriptive of missiological use of scripture. For the followers of Jesus, participating in *Missio Dei* has always required some form of translation. From the very beginning of the incarnation of Jesus, the idea that God’s message through the person of Jesus could be enfolded in a particular human context has been the basis of translating the good news in every context. This has often been a point of contention in the church, as displayed by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The question then was whether or not Gentile believers needed to become Jewish in order to be saved through Jesus. For many people, this was not a question at all; the believers were being taught, “Unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses, you cannot be saved.” God had to change their understanding. “How much must someone become
like me in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ?” remains a central question in the mission of every church in every context.

As missiologists, we believe that Good News is translatable into every context and that the universal can be grasped in the particular. African theologian Lamin Sanneh provided us a foundational articulation of the translatability of the gospel message based on the incarnation of Jesus in his 1989 book, *Translating the Message*. While much has been said about the negative colonialist tendencies of missionaries throughout history, Sanneh suggests that the very act of translating the scriptures worked to subvert those tendencies. While churches and missionaries have often attempted to confine the Gospel of Jesus to a gospel on their own terms, as when some Jewish believers required the Gentile believers to first become Jews to follow Jesus, the act of translating the scriptures into indigenous languages confirms that the Gospel could be received and lived out in *any* specific contextual reality.21

Bediako reiterates Sanneh’s perspective:

> While the type of mission theology that was brought from Europe and transmitted to Africa required that African Christian convictions be shaped, determined and established without reference to, or at worst in contradistinction to, the inherited cultural heritage, rather than in fruitful, positive engagement with it, in actual mission practice there was one major element that acted against these presumptions, and that was Bible translation. The Scriptures in the mother tongue thus enabled the experience of reality of African peoples and their apprehension and expression of truth to be connected to the actuality of the Living God.22

Translation of the scriptures by missionaries was a recapitulation of the truth of the Incarnation, that God is with us, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, translation of the scriptures became an important initial step in mission.

When my wife and I arrived in northwest Kenya in 1999 for our first 4-year term, we found that the entire Bible, which a translation team had worked on for nearly 20 years and had completed 3 years earlier, was yet unprinted in the Turkana language. There were small pamphlets of the Psalms, the Gospel of John, the book of Genesis, and a recently printed test edition of the New Testament in the Turkana language. The translation of the entire Bible, which was supported by the International Bible Society through the local Bible Society of Kenya, was ready for publication, but the BSK was unwilling to publish for fear that they would lose money on the printing, based on the knowledge that there were few literate Turkana.

Along with learning the Turkana language and planting new churches
along the north end of the Kerio River, acquiring a printing of the entire Bible in the Turkana language became one of my major goals for our first term. I remember sitting across the desk from the General Secretary of the BSK in Nairobi, negotiating terms for the long awaited printing of the Turkana Bible. “What is needed to begin printing the Turkana Bible?” I asked too directly. After drinking a cup of chai together, the General Secretary revealed the issue to be one of funding. I was ready to offer whatever it would take to finally have the Bible printed. Our mission was even prepared to purchase the translation from the Bible Society and publish the Bible ourselves. In the end, such drastic measures were unnecessary. All we needed to do was guarantee that we would purchase at least half of the Bibles in the initial printing and pay a 50% deposit on that order. The funds came readily from our churches in America—who wouldn’t want to support the very first printing of a Bible in a new language?

It was a beautiful day, nearly one year later in 2001, when the boxes of newly printed Turkana Bibles arrived. As a mission, we now had 2,000 complete Turkana Bibles available for our use and distribution. In anticipation of the Bible eventually being available to the Turkana, our missionary team had placed a high priority on literacy since the mid-1980s. This fit into our overarching vision for the ministry in Turkana: To plant a mature, reproducing church in Turkana. A significant portion of this vision would be accomplished through church leaders in every church that could read the Bible in their own Turkana language. One of our missionary teammates even had the fulltime role of coordinating our literacy program, which worked in conjunction with Literacy Evangelism Fellowship in Kenya.

By the end of our first term in 2003, many Turkana church leaders had learned to read their own language, many others were learning, and every woman and man in the churches who could read had their own copy of the Turkana translation of the Bible. ‘Mission accomplished!’ Or so we naively thought. Unleashing the vernacular Bible quickly aroused many questions and opportunities, as missionaries and the few bilingual church leaders no longer had control over the canon of scripture being read and taught. The “unintended consequences” of difficult questions began to arise. “Where does it say in the Bible that polygamy is wrong?” “Why did so many of God’s followers in the Old Testament have more than one wife?” “Why does the book of Hebrews call Jesus “the Great Witch-Doctor”? Then the women in the churches started wearing head coverings in worship. Not long after that, church leaders began to teach that women who had given birth must follow certain regulations before they could return to church again. These and other complications started to arise from Turkana Christians reading the Bible. These were all questions and situations for which my seminary education did not prepare me.
While missiology has accepted a very well defined critical contextualization process, developed by anthropologist Paul Hiebert, for evaluating beliefs, rituals, stories, songs, etc. in which an evaluation to accept, adapt or reject a practice is ascertained in the light of scripture, my experience has been that missiologists have not developed a very well defined hermeneutical process for understanding scripture from within specific contextual realities. It is plainly expected by Hiebert that a hermeneutical community, composed of both etic missionaries and emic Christians will come to an agreement on what the Scriptures say. If complications and contradictions do arise in the ways scripture is being interpreted, “they must be resolved by further examining the scriptures.”

Hiebert, who offers such a detailed process for critical contextualization, simply instructs the missionary that the first task of mission is translation of the Bible and the second is “to train Christians to read and interpret the Scriptures in their own cultural context.” Finally, Hiebert offers his key to training Christians how to read and interpret the Scriptures:

> Although we are deeply persuaded about our own theological understandings, we recognize that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of young believers, guiding them in their understanding of the truth.

Thus, the hermeneutical key for Hiebert is the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a common theme among other missiologists as well. Before Hiebert, one of Roland Allen’s harshest criticisms of the racism evident in missionary practice stated:

> we believe that it is the Holy Spirit of Christ which inspires and guides us: we cannot believe that the same Spirit will guide and inspire them. We believe that the Holy Spirit has taught us and is teaching us true conceptions of morality, doctrine, ritual: we cannot believe that the same Spirit will teach them.

Allen ends with his positive affirmation of the truth that “the Holy Ghost is given to [all] Christians that He may guide them, and that they may learn His power to guide them.” Even Taber, my strict mentor, relaxed his structured approach when it came to indigenous interpretation of the Scriptures: “the Bible does not need to be protected by a 19th century philosophical scaffold; it just needs to be turned loose;” and then reflecting on his role in interpretation, “the national church was capable of being guided by the Holy Spirit using the scriptures.”

Thus, while mission often begins with the translation of scripture, and this translation is a key image for understanding the translatability of the Gospel of Jesus into every context—translation of the text is not enough. Beyond *missio Dei* as the interpretive key for understanding scripture, beyond
translation and translatability, beyond critical contextualization, there is another layer of Spirit-led interpretation that is found in every context.

**Extispicic and Exegetical Reading of Scripture**

How does one define ‘exegesis’? Etymologically, ‘exegesis’ is literally a reading or interpretation that emerges (gesis) out of (ex) a text. In terms of exegetical readings of scripture, biblical scholar James D. G. Dunn has described the process of biblical exegesis as one in which scholars are “concerned to uncover the meaning of the text in its original setting and significance.” For Dunn, this is not simply an academic exercise but a hopeful action, one that enables the exegete to begin with the “particular Word-of-God force of the text in its original context” so that “the Word of God may speak with specific force to the different and diverse needs of today.” This is the ideal that guided me as I researched and wrote my first exegetical paper as a second year Greek student in my undergraduate studies. I was taught that if I implemented the hermeneutical tools passed down by Dunn, McKnight, Metzger, et al, I would be able to uncover the initial and primary significant interpretation of any text in the Bible and find application for that true interpretation today.

Throughout Africa, much of the legacy of the missionaries in the missionary-initiated churches is that Christians are referred to as “readers” because of their emphasis on literacy and reading the scriptures. Yet often, as is the case in Turkana, the vocabulary for “reading,” “studying,” “taking classes at school” is non-existent in the language of oral peoples. Loan words are instead borrowed from other languages to describe a “reader.” The words used in Turkana for this category are a Turkanized form of the Swahili root for reading, “soma.” As a missionary who had studied exegesis, I was concerned that simply calling study of the Bible “reading,” especially in the form of a foreign loanword, was not sufficient enough to carry the weight and importance of the exegetical process. But a concise alternative did not immediately present itself.

One day however, while preparing to eat a traditional Turkana goat roast, I noticed that the elders were having a heated debate while looking at the intestines of the goat we were about to consume. I inquired as to what the men were doing and was informed that they were looking at the intestines and interpreting the meanings in the patterns of the veins, spots, and different colors that were present, in order to discern the best place to take the animals for grazing. I have since then come to learn that this practice is common among pastoralists in Africa, and was popularly practiced in the Ancient Near East. Religious scholars and anthropologists use the term extispicy to specifically describe the practice of divination by “reading” the intestines of an animal as one might read a map to discern answers to
questions often related to the animals and the land. However, the Turkana didn’t borrow a Swahili loan word for “reading” the intestines. Instead, they used a verb I had never heard before, a word that means to look at something with the intention of finding knowledge, *akisemere*. The “aha” moment arrived; I had found my word for the exegetical study of scripture in Turkana.

Without much thought or discussion, we began to use this new word at the Turkana Bible Training Institute whenever we referred to serious study of the scriptures as differentiated from routine reading of the scriptures. The usage was accepted and is still used today in the same way nine years later. Turkana pastors come together and examine the “intestines” of the scriptures together, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in finding interpretations from the different themes, voices and stories that apply to living as a follower of Jesus in Turkana today. This is how a western missionary has forever linked “exegesis” of the scriptures with extispicy, a common divination practice in Turkana traditional religion. Thankfully, and unbeknownst to me at the time, extispicy in Turkana is done popularly and is not a practice reserved for the official diviners or traditional religious practitioners.

However you may feel about the propriety of using extispicy as a dynamic equivalent of exegesis without properly following a Hiebertesque critical contextualization model, I simply present this case study as a basic example of how people from different realities and epistemological frameworks will understand and describe what is happening when someone reads the Bible in contrasting ways. In Turkana, there is an implicit connection between the natural world, people as actors in the natural world, and the map that the intestines of a freshly slaughtered animal reveal. Thus, reading the Bible extispically means that God has placed a map in the scriptures that we can open up and examine in community, revealing direct connections with our actual daily lives.

**Different Interpretive Frameworks for Understanding**

This issue is much more than mere word play or semantics; it is intentionally taking into consideration the different ways in which the realities of people are shaped by their “webs of significance.” As the descendents of Gutenberg, in our western world of books and magazines and e-readers, it is assumed when you hand someone a book that they know what it is and they know what to do with it. Yet I would argue that there are very different meanings and understandings circling the event of someone being handed an English translation NIV Bible in Wilmore, Kentucky, USA and the event of someone being handed a Turkana translation Bible in Loupwala, Turkana Central, Kenya. This crazy idea that “the Word made flesh is now a book
that I can sit and read and understand on my own” is not a universal concept. In contextual realities where God works through nature and people (both living and dead), where wisdom and knowledge are passed from person to person through activity and story, and where books do not exist, handing someone a Bible with the instructions, “read this to know the will of God” is nearly incomprehensible.

It is instructive for those of us enamored with books to be reminded by Leslie Newbigin that it is of “great positive significance that Jesus did not write a book to record in unchangeable form the revelation which he brought.” This means that every context that is touched by the “secret” of Jesus must engage in “debate and struggle and difference of opinion about how to interpret the secret in new situations.” This is considered to have positive significance by Newbigin in that we are always required to reflect on _missio Dei_ through Jesus as “a matter of faith and never of indubitable knowledge.” There is freedom for people in each context to reflect on the Good News of Jesus from within their own interpretive framework.

One recent model that has been presented as a way of understanding these existential epistemological and interpretive differences is the oral-learner/literate-learner paradigm. One of the clearest recent voices for understanding how oral-learning preferences can aid our participation in _missio Dei_ is that of missiologist W. Jay Moon. In a recent article, Moon describes some of the different ways oral and literate learners approach a process of Christian discipling:

Discipling for literates is often dependent upon written materials covering abstract categories that dissect and systematize scripture for individual learning. While this is not wrong, it is not enough for oral learners who prefer more concrete, relational harmonizing that connects the past to the present in a corporate retrospection that unites people and aids memory recall.

Moon compels us to consider that a systematic dissection of scripture, especially for individual faith and learning, is not effective for Christian discipling among people who have an oral learning preference. His insight that “the oral learner prefers the concrete and relational knowledge that is experienced in the daily issues of life” could help us ask deeper questions about the very models of biblical interpretation we assume to be universal in nature. While other missiologists focused on orality may overstate their case, with strict categories that make it sound like oral learners can’t learn in literate ways, and non-oral learners can’t learn from stories, their main point, like Moon’s, is grounded in the reality that people not only have different learning preferences, but different ways of interpreting the world.
It would be presumed that the Turkana, with no written text before the translation of the Bible, have a preference for oral learning, as Moon describes. As I hand a Bible to a Turkana church leader I am reminded of the Bibles and books I have received as a literate preference learner: the Bible my father gave me when I was baptized, a collection of Shakespeare plays that was given to me when I graduated from high school, the commentaries given to me when I finished seminary, a *What to Expect When You Are Expecting* book when my wife was pregnant. But what is the Turkana church leader thinking of when I hand him or her a Bible? Is she reflecting on a time when the local diviner gave her mother a powerful stick that she then sewed into a small leather pouch on a necklace and wore for years to protect her from illness? Is he thinking of the small shields that all Turkana used to carry around with them for protection from their enemies, the Pokot? Are they thinking of the power that seems to come to the missionaries who carry these books around and the possibility of now receiving great wealth and power through their own possession of this book?

Furthermore, does the physical, material presence of the Bible, the medium of “the Word” matter? It’s difficult to find any discussion of this in the academic literature because the form of the Bible we have, the actual book, is accepted as “normal” media. And most of us now have Bibles that present no specific form at all; they are virtual, available to be read in an instant through a multitude of electronic devices. Is meaning assigned to an object by its medium and material composition? While Marshall McLuhan may have overstated the point when he declared that “the medium is the message,” the truth is, we rarely reflect on the ways that meaning is shaped by medium, especially when the medium is a printed book.

As an aside, let me attempt a few preliminary questions regarding the medium of a printed book in Turkana that contains the message of the Word of God. Turkana is a context where written language has only existed for 25 years and where objects from the natural world, especially pieces of wood, either blessed by a diviner or brought from a sacred location not only have meaning, but spiritual power manifested in the physical world. What is the meaning of a book brought by missionaries, with a material composition of all foreign (non-Turkana) materials? Are Bibles printed in Asia on the most cost-efficient materials possible, with plastic covers, the best medium for presenting the Word of God in this context? Would a Bible somehow hand-made in Turkana with locally available materials present a more holistically contextual understanding of the translatability of the Good News in Turkana? While these are interesting questions that I hope someone will at some time engage, these questions clearly exceed the scope of this paper. I only ask them to again point out our own assumptions regarding the universal nature of the ways in which we interpret Scripture.
In Turkana, I have seen the physical medium of the Bible, the book itself, used as an amulet to shield one from curses and illness by placing it under the head while sleeping at night; used as a talisman in a retail store for bringing success to the business; and used as strong medicine through touch to remove sickness from an individual. And these are just a few of the interpretations and uses of the Bible before it is even opened. This is where the joy of missiology begins, in connecting epistemological and interpretive frameworks found in many changing and multi-faceted realities with God through the person and message of Jesus Christ.

Articulating an Extispicic Turkana Christian Hermeneutic

From the previous sections of this paper and my experiences in Turkana, I would suggest that a Turkana hermeneutical approach to scripture is very different from a western historical-critical or literary approach, but it is an approach that is very consistent with a Turkana contextual framework. One example will suffice: when Turkana church leaders came together each year at the Turkana Bible Training Institute to “extispicate” Paul’s letter to the Galatians, I observed a number of differences in hermeneutical approaches from my own exegetical study of the same letter while attending seminar.

First, the text of the letter was repeatedly read out loud, in its entirety, in the Turkana language. Second, Paul’s use of an Old Testament story as allegory was not confusing to the church leaders. Third, the theme of seeking to attain righteousness through the Law was immediately connected to the “law” and “traditions” of Turkana through which a Turkana man or woman attains full, respected personhood. Fourth, “extispicy” took place in the midst of communal worship; teaching would begin and end with, and be interrupted by worship in the form of songs, prayers, stories, and the sharing of dreams. Finally, the participants memorized passages of scripture that would be used for teaching in their local churches.

From these observations, which are by no means a complete list, we can begin to scratch the surface of a contextual Turkana hermeneutical approach to scripture. I would describe the hermeneutic as communal, engaging and understanding the spoken text with existential issues, actively seeking and open to Spirit-led revelations and interruptions at any point, engaging the text in a cyclical, non-linear manner, and pointedly unconcerned with historical, literary, or text critical issues.

In much the same way that the old men at a goat roast extispicate to seek answers through dialogue, with the willingness to hear each other’s reading of the intestinal map, a Turkana hermeneutical approach is inherently communal. Interpretations of individuals are contested alongside the interpretations of others. This communal sharing of interpretations and seeking validation through consensus also occurs in the traditional
interpretation of dreams, in which one person shares a dream in as much detail as possible and others respond with interpretations after careful listening. A communal hermeneutical approach to scripture requires listening carefully and offering to the community, in vulnerability, the interpretations that present themselves. The sharing of interpretations does not occur only in a classroom, but can occur during prayer, during meals, or even in the midst of singing and dancing.

Extispicy in Turkana seeks to answer questions concerning the lives of pastoralists. Where is the best place to water the animals? Are the animals getting enough of the right kind of food? What effect has raiding had on the health of the animals? Are the young shepherds taking the animals to graze in the places they are supposed to be taking them? These are existential questions related to the very livelihood of pastoralists. In Turkana, there is not a “magic” power which is sought through extispicy, but rather a very real belief that there are natural ontological connections between the trees, the land, animals and people that will reveal themselves through examination of the intestines of an animal that has lived on that land. In similar fashion, Turkana church leaders read the scriptures expecting that the Creator has placed a map that will directly connect with the Turkana existentially here and now. In a Turkana hermeneutical approach, the hearing of the scriptures should immediately connect with everyday life.

Connected with this expectation that existential interpretations will become readily apparent, it is not considered unusual for an interpretation to interrupt the present communal activity. Just as extispicy occurs in the context of a meal, interpretations that present themselves from scripture could be presented at any time in worship. At any point the Holy Spirit can interrupt an event, song, prayer, teaching, meal, even sleep, with a revelation. That is, in a Turkana hermeneutic, Spirit-led revelations are expected and welcomed, even as interruptions. Finally, an extispicic Turkana hermeneutic is cyclical as characterized by the continual rereading of the text and the continual renegotiation of the interpretation through revelation. Because interpretation is expected to be existential, the same text may reveal new interpretations when reread.

Recognizing An Extispicic Turkana Christian Hermeneutic as “Critical” and “Valid”

What is a “critical” method of interpreting scripture, and how do we know which methods are valid and which are not? Is an extispicic Turkana hermeneutic “critical”? Is it a valid hermeneutic? If it is valid within the Turkana context, can it also be valid outside of the Turkana context? These are thorny questions, but questions that this paper seeks to answer.

First, what do we mean by a “critical” method of biblical interpretation,
as in “historical-critical”? Gerald West, a South African biblical scholar and missiologist who has spent most of his academic career studying intercontextual hermeneutics and seeking to activate living models of people from different contexts reading the scriptures together, has provided specific insight into this question of “critical” reading of the scriptures. For West, a key issue in the discussion begins with “whether the academic adjective ‘critical’ belongs to the west.”

West often uses the adjectives “critical” and “pre-critical” to differentiate between the hermeneutics of academically trained readers of the Bible and untrained “ordinary” lay readers of the Bible. In our common usage, the word “critical” can denote the “structured and systematic questioning” of just about anything. Thus we find “critical reading,” “critical thinking,” and the epistemological category of “critical realism.” Each of these terms is prefaced by “critical” to indicate a structured and systematic way of approaching reading, thinking and realism (as opposed to naïve realism). Any self-respecting professor’s syllabus will at some point state one of its objectives as, “to develop critical thinking in...” whatever the focused area of study might be. In biblical studies, “exegesis” has come to mean a “critical” reading of the text, a structured and systematic questioning of the text. The systematic questions in our western tradition of biblical studies include: “historical-critical, socio-historical, literary, semiotic, and others.”

Ordinary non-critical, or as West calls them, “pre-critical,” readers will ask questions of the text, but not in these academic structured and systematic ways.

West notes that in recent years there has been a proliferation of “critical” ways to read the Scriptures: reader-response criticism, autobiographical criticism, deconstruction criticism, and post-colonial criticism, to name a few. If all of these are now seen as critical ways to read the text, certainly there could be room for inclusion of an African traditional hermeneutic that is also “critical” in that it asks structured and systematic questions from within a specific reality. If it is possible to observe themes and patterns in an extispic Turkana hermeneutic, as I have done above, could we not then call this hermeneutic “critical” as it appears to ask questions in systematic and structured ways? I believe we can, based on those structured themes and patterns. But, even if a hermeneutic is identified as “critical,” how do we decide if it is “valid?”

Taber approaches the question, “Whose hermeneutic is ‘orthodox’?,” by beginning with the difficulties surrounding the hermeneutical variations found in our own New Testament. The writers of the New Testament sometimes used Old Testament passages in ways that seem to imitate rabbinic hermeneutics, following methodologies that we would today condemn because they ‘take passages out of context.’ Taber recognizes our
In other words, today we radically reject rabbinical hermeneutics of the first century; on what grounds? ...The fact of the matter is that what they considered proper hermeneutics was part and parcel of their cultural heritage, while what we consider to be proper hermeneutics and exegesis is part of our western cultural heritage.53

Furthermore, if we can reject a hermeneutical approach that is actually used in the New Testament:

a really disturbing question presents itself: If we can adopt a style of hermeneutics which differs radically from that used by biblical writers in their time—why can’t people in other cultures do the same thing? ...If we want to insist that our approach is universal, we must justify the claim: what is it that might give our particular style transcultural validity? Why should we be in a privileged position?54

If we take this leap of faith and agree that Christians throughout the world, through the Holy Spirit, are able to interpret the scriptures both critically, that is, in structured and systematic ways and validly, from their own frameworks, however dissimilar those frameworks may be from our own inherited and culturally constructed frameworks, should we not be able to learn from each other in practical and authentic ways?

**Moving Beyond Eclectic Diversity and the Fear of Relativism**

There is a tremendous opportunity for the church in all parts of the world if we can begin to see other hermeneutical approaches to scripture as not only valid for particular contexts, but as opportunities for learning more about ourselves and about God’s mission in the world. This paper seeks to acknowledge the possibilities for rich learning opportunities from Christians in differing realities. Theologian Stephen Bevans affirms my optimistic outlook for unity in diversity:

Rather than a bland uniformity, Christianity is endowed with a dynamic that moves toward unity through a rich diversity. Only if every group in the church is included in its particularity will the church be able to be truly the church. Only as the church enters into serious dialogue with every culture can it be a witness to the ‘Pleroma’ that is Jesus Christ (Bevans 2004:15).

The universality of the church is to be found in a dynamic particularity. As the church becomes more and more particular in its contextual realities, the question nevertheless remains: What can hold the church together in all its particularities? I note that Bevans is optimistic, because his vision is an ideal that is frequently absent in the church. Too often, it is the particularities...
of dominant realities that have controlled theology and the interpretation of scriptures. As West’s work points out, hermeneutics have been used by those in power to condone and justify injustices and burdens placed upon people at the margins, while on the other hand, western theologians and church leaders have looked at Majority World theologies and interpretations of scripture, not with sincere dialogue or opportunities for learning in mind, but with an eclectic view; that is, as collectors of the exotic to be set on display, but not as wisdom that has potential for transformation of multiple faith communities.

I believe there are two perspectives that act as obstacles to the opportunities that exist in recognizing other contextual hermeneutics as both critical and valid. These obstacles need to be addressed before we look to the opportunities. The first, as I have already begun to describe, is a surface level acceptance of all things “multicultural” and “exotic” with no true recognition of the potential for learning from the other. I identify this as eclectic diversity. Eclectic diversity is born out of an altruistic belief in multiculturalism and the academic acceptance of pluralism, but lacks significant relationship with the other. Two images will help us better understand eclectic diversity.

First, Stanley Fish has called this sort of pluralism a “boutique multiculturalism” in which the ideals of pluralism are rarely played out in actual interaction with the other.\(^5\) This sort of eclectic diversity is known “by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection” and “is the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high profile flirtations with the other” stopping short of involvement and relationship that calls into question one’s own belief system or “canons of civilized decency.”\(^5\)\(^6\)

The second image is that of the eclectic coffee house, a comfortable meeting place in which we are connecting with the world, but only on our own terms.\(^5\)\(^7\) This image is especially revealing in the popularity of short-term mission trips in the North American Church. We become collectors of bits and pieces of culture and theology and short-term relationships as we easily travel around the world with our dark blue passports. The eclectic collector learns from the bits and pieces, but only as much as our level of comfort will afford. While I may enjoy Kenyan Blue Mountain coffee tonight, I’ll likely try something different tomorrow, maybe from Java, maybe from Honduras. In economic terms, I am consuming the reified and then commodified fragments of the exotic.\(^5\)\(^8\) In the end I find that I have only sipped from “the other” for my own enjoyment, while relaxing in the comfortable eclectic atmosphere of the coffee house. Is eclectic diversity the way we interact with other valid and critical hermeneutical approaches to Scripture?
I identify the second obstacle to the opportunities that exist in recognizing other contextual hermeneutics as both critical and valid, as a fear, sometimes healthy, but most often exaggerated, that recognizing truth in another perspective will turn you into “something evil” called a “relativist.” This obstacle is the fear of relativism. Certainly the missiologist strikes a note of fear in some when suggesting that the ways other people read the Bible could not only be acceptable as a valuable way of understanding the scriptures in the particular context, but might even provide insights for reinterpreting scripture in our own context. When we look for the ways that God has been speaking to a people through their own prophets, myths, texts, through their own constructed webs of significance, and then reflexively ask the question, “what can we learn from them?” we might be accused of moving toward something often identified as relativism.

At this point I might diverge from a more standard “Evangelical” approach and suggest that the fear and dread of relativism may actually do us more harm than the fictive images we have of relativists. I find anthropologist Clifford Geertz instructive when he states “relativism serves these days largely as a specter to scare us away from certain ways of thinking and toward others.” As Geertz asserts, the anthropological data is in: people think differently about the world in different contexts. The real debate should not be about holding our ground against relativism, but about how we, as believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus, should engage with people who don’t think in our own patterns of understanding. What we fear in relativism is that it will lead to belief in nothing and ultimately, nihilism. Geertz questions whether relativism has actually led to such an unbelief, concluding:

There may be some genuine nihilists out there, along Rodeo Drive or around Times Square, but I doubt very many have become such as a result of an excessive sensitivity to the claims of other cultures; and at least most of the people I meet, read, and read about, and indeed I myself, are all too committed to something or other, usually parochial.

Let me be clear on this point: I am not a proponent of relativism, but likewise, I do not want to be a proponent of the fear of relativism. What the so-called relativists fear is an anti-relativist provincialism that asserts everything “other” as wrong and to be avoided. What the anti-relativists fear is a relativist universalism that asserts the meaninglessness of all morality and any sense of universal Truth. As missiologists, we are called to participate in the universal missio Dei in every particular context and we are called to carry the particular message of Jesus, the Good News as something that is universally translatable in every context. From a missiological perspective, I am soundly against closing our minds to the possibility that God could speak
to people, especially followers of Jesus, outside of our own frameworks. I am against the social-evolutionary, ethnocentric thinking still so prevalent in our communities and churches that say “we are the completed picture of what God has desired us to be and everyone else is not quite there yet.”

After challenging these two obstacles of eclectic diversity and the fear of relativism, we can begin to examine the deep opportunities available in sharing and learning from other hermeneutical frameworks of understanding. At the root of both these ways of thinking is an ethnocentricity that seeks to protect our own identity and way of thinking at all costs. Hopefully recognition of these two obstacles can help us move toward the wonderful opportunities available in intercontextual hermeneutics.

**Opportunity for the Ontic Expansion of God**

In spite of eclectic diversity and the fear of relativism, the hope for unity and transformative intercontextual dialogue remains. It is becoming more apparent, even among mainstream Evangelicals such as Timothy Tennent, that:

the Majority World church may play a crucial role, not only in revitalizing the life of Western Christianity, but in actually contributing positively and maturely to our own [western] theological reflection. The day of regarding the theological reflections of the Majority World church as something exotic or ancillary, or as the object of study only for a missionary or area specialist, is now over.61

Whether or not the days of the western church viewing Majority World theology as exotic or eclectic are truly finished remains to be seen. Yet, there is a missiologically exciting, mounting understanding of the need to relate with and learn from the “other,” especially when the other is self-identified as a follower of Jesus.

Tennent’s text, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, has already opened the eyes of numerous students in the West to the possibilities for learning from our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. While Christians have studied western theological thought around the world for centuries, Tennent’s premise is that “the theological reflections of the Majority World church need to be heard as a part of the normal course of theological study in the West.”62 What Tennent suggests is not a surface level eclectic diversity for theological studies. Instead, it is a suggestion that the sharing of Christian theology from different contexts will both “lead us to a deeper understanding of the depositum fidei, that ancient apostolic faith that forms our confession” and “help us recognize some of our own, less obvious, heresies and blind spots.”63 Thus, the sharing of theological reflection from the Majority World provides opportunity for the Church in
the West to re-focus on the core of our faith and to help us evaluate or own theological deficiencies and errors through an outside perspective. In this paper I am seeking to extend Tennent’s premise of the benefits for the sharing of theological reflections to also include the benefits of sharing particular hermeneutical processes from around the world.

In much the same way that Bevans states, “only as the church enters into serious dialogue with every culture can it be a witness to the ‘Pleroma’ that is Jesus Christ,” Tennent, in his chapter on African Christology, suggests that as the Good News of Jesus has been translated into a multitude of particular realities, “we gain more and more insights into the beauty and reality of Jesus Christ;” a phenomenon described by Tennent as the “ontic expansion of God in Jesus Christ.” Tennent clearly states that this ontic expansion does not change the ontological nature of either God or Christ, but instead refers to “how our own understanding and insight into the full nature and work of God in and through Jesus Christ is continually expanding as more and more people groups come to the feet of Jesus.”

As I seek to build on Tennent’s theory as it relates not only to theological reflection from the Majority World, but also to hermeneutical frameworks that could provide insight to our own western exegetical interpretive blindspots, the concept of the “ontic expansion of God in Christ” is a foremost explanation for why we should explore and listen to disparate hermeneutical frameworks. The recognition of a Spirit-filled Turkana extispicic hermeneutical framework that recognizes Jesus Christ as Lord can expand our understanding of the Scriptures and our God who communicates through the Scriptures and our participation in missio Dei. It is not the recognition of another truth or a new truth, but an ontic expansion, an opening up of our limited vision and perspective to the Truth.

In addition to the ontic expansion of God through the interpretive insights of an extispicic Turkana hermeneutic, we would also have the opportunity to grow in our understanding of the ways critical biblical interpretation could be connected to existential community life. That is, we could learn not just from particular interpretations that may or may not communicate in our context, but from the nature of the hermeneutical process itself. While western hermeneutical methods tend to focus on the individual seeking meaning and interpretation in the text through private consultations with their biblical studies ancestors, majority world hermeneutical processes, like the extispicic Turkana hermeneutic seek to confirm and contest biblical interpretation in everyday life. Both processes have their own strengths and weaknesses that could be revealed through shared practice of disparate hermeneutical processes.

This paper does not seek to evaluate one hermeneutical process as more or less valid than another. Instead, it proposes that the opportunities for
reflection on our own practices, for deeper understanding of God through
Jesus Christ, for further insight into the meaning of the scriptures, should
be enough for us to desire to learn more about and even attempt to interpret
the Scriptures through other valid, critical hermeneutical frameworks. No
bold claims are made here that intercontextual hermeneutics could, or even
should, be applied for the purpose of seeking or constructing a unified Global
critical hermeneutic for understanding scripture in all times and places, or
that an international hermeneutical community could exist outside of theory. My objectives are much less grand in scope yet deeper in meaning.

Locations for Engagement of Intercontextual Hermeneutics

If the varied hermeneutical frameworks of Christians in particular
contexts around the world offer us such wonderful opportunities, or
blessings, what are some ways we can practically engage these other Christian
interpretive frameworks in the context of the North American Church? I
offer three basic suggestions for the location of this practical engagement
of intercontextual hermeneutics: Theological institutions, the missionary
in the church, and diaspora communities.

Theological institutions in the West often host and train North American
and Majority World Christians together. There are many opportunities for
the engagement of intercontextual hermeneutics, but as I have learned from
fellow students from around the world, there is also a propensity toward
self-serving eclectic diversity in any institution. Asking an international
student to read the scripture passage or to pray in their own language in
chapel for the purpose of recognizing the diversity of the community is
eclectic, not necessarily wrong, but often self-serving. Authentic engagement
of intercontextual hermeneutics can occur in biblical studies courses where
professors of western exegetical, or inductive, hermeneutics intentionally
invite Majority World Christians to participate by leading the class in
alternative hermeneutics. This might not be able to happen in an hour and
fifteen minutes inside a classroom; we will need to be more creative.

Students in seminary preparing for ministry should take advantage of
the opportunities to build relationships with people from other contexts.
Visioning processes should certainly consider the ideas of sending students
to study in other contexts, hosting students from other contexts, hiring and
hosting professors from other contexts and sending away our North American professors, temporarily, to teach and learn in other contexts.

Missionaries are also ideal intercontextual hermeneutic bridges. In the
past, the missionary was seen as the bearer of a message that moved in one
direction, from the sending context to a particular group of people. Today
we recognize the multiple roles and directions of the missionary, as one
who both gives and receives, not only “on the field” but also in their home
context. Missionaries should be more explicitly recognized in our churches as bearers of the message of Christ to the other and back again to the sending community. In this way, missionaries would not merely inform and report stories to North American congregations in eclectic superficial ways, but could suggest and lead in the practice of re-reading and interpreting scripture through alternative hermeneutical processes learned and practiced in the Majority World. In an increasingly complex world in which Christians in North America will ever more frequently interact will people who have different frameworks of understanding, “this is the point in which the experience of the foreign missionary has something to contribute.”

As Rynkiewich’s description of the current globalized situation noted at the beginning of this paper, there are multiple “complex social settings” where people now regularly interact with “migrants, refugees, transnationals, and diasporas.” It is in these diaspora communities that the North American church could participate in intercontextual hermeneutics. This is a more difficult location for the church to engage scripture through alternative hermeneutical processes, as there are multiple hindrances to building relationships including linguistic barriers, socio-economic barriers, and power-structure barriers. Yet, if we are convinced of the blessings that would arise out of engagement in intercontextual hermeneutics and our participation in missio Dei, these are barriers that we should be willing to break through. The present reality in most North American communities is that diaspora communities, even Christian diaspora communities, are nearby.

Conclusion

This paper initially demonstrated that missiology has used and interpreted the Bible in various ways, shifting from use of various biblical texts for validation of mission efforts and missions to eventually, through the second half of the twentieth century, interpreting all of scripture through a missional hermeneutic that views missio Dei as a metanarrative. Through translation and contextualization we have come to understand the translatability of both the message of Jesus and the text of the Bible.

Translation of the text in the form of a book presents interpretive challenges that reveal the presence of different frameworks of interpretation and learning. When these different frameworks are observed, especially in their connection with biblical hermeneutics, it may be possible to recognize contextual hermeneutical processes as both critical and valid, as is the case with an extispicic Turkana Christian hermeneutic. Furthermore, standard western exegetical methods are no longer evaluated as having universal priority over other hermeneutical processes. Missiological opportunities now exist in the possibility of intercontextual sharing of hermeneutical processes for “reading,” “exegeting,” and “extispicating” the Bible together.
Just as Turkana Christian interpretations of scripture would benefit from engagement in a more historical-critical approach, North American Christians would benefit from a more communal extispicic approach, with the possibility of ontic expansion of God as revealed through the scriptures.

The conclusion of this paper is provisional. Much more research into the multitude of Spirit-led hermeneutical approaches to the Bible of Christians around the world would need to be completed before a more general theory could be proposed. For missiologists, this paper is not a license to ignore traditional western biblical scholarship for the sake of translatability and mission. Likewise, for biblical scholars this paper is not a rebuke for pouring yourselves into the minutiae of exegetical studies. For all of us, this paper is a call to recognize the positive opportunities God is offering us for both mission and the message in our increasingly centered world.

Works Cited


———. 2007 *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.


Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academic.

**End Notes**

1 There are approximately 489,000,000 Christians in Africa. The population of the USA, Canada, and Mexico combined is currently estimated at 463,000,000. The population of the African continent is now over 1 billion. Statistics from *The World Christian Database*, http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org, last accessed Sept, 1, 2010.

2 Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009) 97-98. Until Stanley’s research immediately prior to publication in 2009, most missiologists, including Stanley, believed there were no Africans present at Edinburgh 1910. The delegate, Mark Christian Hayford, did not appear on any of the official lists of delegates, but is listed as an additional delegate in the final edition of the *Conference Daily Paper*. Hayford “came from a distinguished Fante Euro-African family on the Gold Coast and is most noted for his decision in 1898 to leave “the Methodist family tradition to be baptized as an adult believer by Dr. Mojola Agbebi, founder of the Native Baptist Church in Lagos.”

3 The ability for anyone in the world, with internet access, to watch the final 3 hours of the conference live, is yet another marker of rapid change and globalization. The video is still available online for viewing at: http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/videos.html#c33174


5 Ibid, 41.

6 Charles R. Taber, “Missiology and the Bible,” in *Missiology* Vol. 11, no. 2 (April 1983), 229-230. My wife and I were some of the last students to have the opportunity to be guided missiologically by Charles Taber at the end of his seminary teaching career.

7 Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1978), 90.


10 Taber, “Missiology and the Bible,” 231.


13 Hunsberger suggest this framework is most clearly articulated by Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004).


17 Two examples of this missional hermeneutic taking shape in the church popularly include the resilience of the Perspectives™ on the World Christian Movement courses now in its 36th year, in which all of scripture and history is viewed through God’s mission, and Henry Blackaby’s “Experiencing God” study, now in its 20th year, in which one finds the basic theme of “joining what God is already doing” as a foundational building block for the entire study.


19 For example, Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).


22 Bediako, “The Emergence of World Christianity,” 52.

23 Literacy Evangelism Fellowship of Kenya is now called Partners in Literacy Ministries (PALM).


27 Ibid., 114.

28 Ibid., 114.


30 Ibid., 145.


34 Ibid., 17-18.


36 For more on ancient near eastern practices of extispicy (also known as haruspicy in relation to Roman divination practices) and hepatoscopy (reading of the liver) as described in Ezekiel 21.21 and many ancient (mainly Babylonian) texts see John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 239-274.


38 I would argue that the formal process of critical contextualization as outlined by Hiebert is something that is constantly happening informally in a more fluid, ad hoc, manner. For those of us at the Turkana Bible Training Institute, this was more a matter of translation. When I return to Turkana for research in 2011 to interview traditional Turkana diviners, I will be investigating further the different vocabularies for “divination.”


41 Ibid., 95.
42 Ibid., 95.


44 Ibid., 131.

45 For the seminal text on orality studies, see, Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London; New York: Methuen, 1982).


47 The Turkana Bible Training Institute, located in Lodwar, Kenya was started by CMF International missionaries in 2004 for more central and formalized training of Turkana pastors. It is the only theological training institute in Turkana district that teaches in the vernacular Turkana language. These observations were made from 2004-2007 when I served as an administrator and instructor at TBTI.

48 Gerald West’s endeavors in intercontextual hermeneutics began with the discussion of how Christians should respond when a dominant Christian hermeneutic is used to support and validate oppression and injustice, as was the case in South African apartheid. This led West to participate in the Kairos Document, seek societal transformation through Contextual Bible Study, partner in various projects in which Africans and Europeans are reading and interpreting the scriptures together, and most recently work on an intercontextual Bible commentary. West’s major works include:


50 Ibid., 148.

51 Ibid., 149.


53 Ibid., 12.

54 Ibid., 12.

55 Stanley Fish, “Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking About Hate Speech,” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (Winter 1997), 378.

56 Ibid., 378.
This image comes from a my own research paper that evaluates West’s “Contextual Bible Study” method written in Spring 2009 for Dr. Eunice Erwin’s “Contextual Theology” course at Asbury Theological Seminary.


Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, 13.

Ibid., 15.

Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, 111.


Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, 111; Also, in Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity,” in IBMR Vol. 29, no. 4 (2005), 174-175; and Tennent, Timothy C. Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 89

Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, 111.

While the phrase “ontic expansion” may be particular to Tennent in this usage and meaning, Tennent credits others for the concept, including Jonathan Edwards, see Tennent, Invitation to World Missions, 89; and the phrase “it takes a whole world to understand a whole Christ” see Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity,” 174; a phrase originally published by Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 183.

See Hiebert “Toward a Global Theology and Church” in Hiebert, Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts, 112-114, for Hiebert’s view of “the global church becoming an international hermeneutical community.” While I appreciate Hiebert’s theory, I do not want to associate my attempts in this paper as working toward a “global” hermeneutic.

We need to recognize and build more on this “giftive” aspect of missiology, an idea which moves to the forefront and is developed in Terry Muck and Francis Adeney, Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century, Encountering mission series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

Newbigin, Gospel in a Pluralist, 96.

Rynkiewich, in Van Engen, Paradigm Shifts In Christian Witness, 41.
Abstract

The following address was given by Dr. Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary as the Fall 2010 Convocation Address, first on the Florida-Dunnam Campus (September 7, 2010) and then on the Wilmore (Kentucky) Campus of Asbury Theological Seminary (September 9, 2010). It has been left in its oral form of address.

Keywords: missional, holiness, Christendom, post-Christendom, missions

Timothy C. Tennent is president of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky and professor of world Christianity.
It was July of 2009, just a few days after I began my ministry here as your President. Someone came up to me and thrust a copy of the Jessamine County Herald-Leader into my hands and said, “Congratulations, you made the front page!” Now the Jessamine County Herald-Leader is not the New York Times, or the Boston Globe. OK, it’s not even like being mentioned in Miley Cyrus’ blog, but there I was on the front page of the Herald. I glanced down and saw the Asbury article. and then it happened. My eye glanced around to see the rest of the front page and it was then that I saw it — the real front page story that had people talking - not my Presidency, but – on the same page as our presidential announcement, was the other front page story of the day – Cracker Barrel was announcing the opening of a new restaurant on Nicholasville Road! That was the real news on everyone’s lips! Cracker Barrel at Brandon Crossing!

There is at least one thing that Asbury Theological Seminary and Cracker Barrel have in common. We both have mission statements. Cracker Barrel’s mission statement is three single syllable words — it’s simple and it’s unforgettable, and it clearly captures their mission: eat, relax, shop! That is the Crackle Barrel mission: EAT, RELAX and SHOP. The “eating” is, of course, classic southern cuisine — the kind of stuff that many of us grew up eating — biscuits and gravy, corn bread, chicken, country fried steak, etc. You won’t find any sushi or cappuccino at Cracker Barrel. The “shopping” is a reference to the fact that every Cracker Barrel restaurant is attached to a store which sells a wide array of goods, all mass produced in China, but made to look like your grandparents handcrafted them in Appalachia. The “relaxing” is the most interesting part of the mission statement. You see, Cracker Barrel is not just selling food and knick knacks. they are selling an experience, a feeling of going back in time when the pace of life was slower, things were simpler, and people seemed to be happier. This feeling is conveyed through hundreds of symbols of the past which are hanging on the walls. Their walls are festooned with objects from the past — mostly early 20th century stuff — washboards, advertisements for talcum powders, old automobile tags, etc. The front of every Cracker Barrel is a porch, lined with rocking chairs and large checker boards, recalling a slower paced, more relaxed time. The store sells old TV serials like Leave it to Beaver, the Partridge Family, and the Andy Griffith Show. Cracker Barrel is really a shrine to the past. Modern 21st century people sit at tables in this shrine and eat and relax and maybe do some shopping. and then they go back out into the “real world” where nobody has ever heard of talcum powders and it’s hard to find a “Leave it to Beaver” family anywhere.

This is, in a nutshell, a picture of what it is like for many people who go to church today. The Church, for many, is a shrine to the past, a weekly escape from the worries and anxieties of the real world they inhabit. Modern
people come and sit in strange long chairs called pews in church buildings, surrounded by numerable relics from the past, many of which they know little to nothing about, but it does produce a certain kind of feeling. The stained glass, the agrarian scenes, the strange swaths of 1st century clothing, maybe even a sheep in Jesus’ arms, can be comforting. For many, the inside of a church is a strange, alien world – the sights, sounds, and even the smells are all unusual. The church has its own vocabulary – our own “foreign language” – words like redemption and sanctification are not normally bandied about the market place! All of it makes perfect sense to the cultural and ecclesiastical insiders - those who have been raised up in the church, who have learned the language of discourse, who are not surprised to see a group of people standing in choir robes, or people lifting their hands singing “blessed be your Name.” It is a “come and see” model - a “come and experience” model. It is not really set up to be a “go and tell” model. It is hard to export all of that into the streets. Its DNA is not really missional, though many have tried to adapt it as such. You see, the non-missional church is the inevitable child of Christendom.

By Christendom I don’t mean only the notion of an official state church like has been experienced in Western Europe or Latin America, but the broader idea of Christendom which is simply a church which occupies the center of cultural life and assumes that people grow up in Christian homes. Christendom recalls a church where the vocabulary of discourse is consonant with the broader culture’s vocabulary of discourse. In Christendom it is assumed that most people in the culture are “church-goers” and evangelism happens passively. The dominant values of the culture flow out of the church albeit in a domesticated form which has sanded down the harsh prophetic edges and, all too frequently, has succumbed to the seductive temptations of power and social location. However, that is a world of our past. It is no longer the world of 2010, nor will it likely be the world of 2050 which is the world where you will exercise your greatest influence and leadership.

Asbury Theological Seminary must awaken to these new realities and transition to equip men and women for ministry in a post-Christendom world. This is a challenge not only for those of us in the Western world which has become decidedly post-Christendom, and, perhaps, culturally post-Christian, but even more so for those parts of the world, particularly throughout Asia and Africa where the church is growing rapidly in a context where Christianity is on the margins of the culture, a post or non-Christendom world which doesn’t even have the memory of Christendom. The challenge of training, preparing and equipping a new generation of leaders for a post-Christendom world is a challenge which is shared by every Seminary in the country. But we here at Asbury have an additional
challenge. Namely, how do we extend our particular mission in this context? What does it mean for us to “spread scriptural holiness” in a post-Christendom, global Christian context?

**Missional Holiness**

In response to these questions, I dedicate my second convocation address to a call for Asbury Theological Seminary to embrace and become practitioners of what I call **MISSIONAL HOLINESS**. What do I mean by **missional holiness**? Missional Holiness brings together two streams of historical understandings of pneumatology which have often lived in isolation from one another. The **first stream**, central to our holiness roots, is the Holy Spirit’s primary role as inwardly sanctifying us from sin – the eradication of that sinful orientation and living a life of dedicated purity. It recalls the great call of God which stretches from Lev. 11:44, 45 to 1 Peter 1:16, to be holy, because He is holy.

The **second pneumatological stream** is the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering the church for effective and bold witness in the world. This stream recalls that boldunction of the Holy Spirit which turned the denying Peter of Matthew 26 into the proclaiming Peter of Acts 2. The first stream emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s work in our interior life. The second stream thinks of the Holy Spirit as the one who empowers us for bold, external witness in the world. Today, we must embrace a radical form of Missional Holiness which unites these two streams together - Inward and outward holiness in full embrace. Missional holiness is what our mission statement is pointing to when it calls us to “spread scriptural holiness throughout the world.” One or the other of these streams can be observed in the holiness movement, the Keswick movement, the Pentecostal movement, the Charismatic movement, the Convergence movement, the missional church movement, but rarely have they been effectively brought together.

Methodism was, as we well know, an 18th century protest movement to revitalize the church of its day. Because Methodism arose two centuries after the Reformation, Wesley was able to observe the long term fruit of the weak pneumatology of the Reformation. Therefore, Methodism represented, among other things, a pneumatological and ecclesiastical corrective to the theology of the magisterial reformers, who inadvertently had created a functional subordinationism in their doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This continues to this day in many of the classic works of Reformed theology. There is a robust defense of the deity of the Holy Spirit as a full member of the Trinity, but the actual work of the Holy Spirit is often organized as a subset of Christology as the One who applies the work of Christ to the believer. Compare, for example, the systematic theologies of
Henry Theissen or Louis Berkhof with Thomas Oden’s three volume work and you will really see this point in stark contrast.

We shouldn’t be overly critical of the Magisterial Reformers on this point. They never claimed that they had completed the Reformation. In fact it is Luther himself who proclaimed, *ecclesia semper reformanda* the church always in Reformation. Furthermore, the Reformers understood that the loss of Biblical Christology in the overall meta-narrative during the late medieval period was so great that it required the full attention of the church to re-articulate who Christ is, the centrality of his person and work, and the need to call men and women to faith in Jesus Christ — *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, sola Christus* — these are the rallying cries of the Reformation — and we should only applaud them for their focus on the central acts of the meta-narrative centered on Jesus Christ and our response to them. Luther’s task was to re-establish the doorway into the household of faith, i.e. to unambiguously set forth what it means to become a Christian. The full implications for what it means not just to become, but to be a Christian had to unfold over time. However, in retrospect — 200 years after Luther - Wesley discerned the glaring neglect of the significance of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, the life and social impact of the church in the world. The Reformation left us with a truncated meta-narrative which, speaking frankly, moves from Fall to Covenant to Incarnation to Cross and finally to the Resurrection and ascension, and then comes to a virtual stop. While this truncated meta-narrative did restore the centrality of Christ and his work, it also, over time, created problems in the life of the church which an 18th century Wesley keenly observed. The most obvious legacy which remains with us is the evangelical penchant towards equating the word ‘salvation’ with the word ‘justification.’ The church needed then, as it does today, more reformation, as it more fully responds to the full meta-narrative.

Wesley continued the ongoing reformation process by making the radical suggestion that a believer must be “filled with the Holy Spirit” as this alone is the evidence of true Christianity (*Scriptual Christianity*, vol. 5, pp. 48f, 52). In Wesley, faith and fruit are finally being joyfully wed! If the gospel ends in the resurrection of Christ, then the church has only an instrumental function to look back and proclaim what God did in the past, with no clear connection with what He is doing now in and through his church in the world. In this truncated meta-narrative a para church organization might get the job done with greater efficiency and less cost — a marketed gospel domesticated by American pragmatism. From this vantage point the church is like a food court, with varying programs to meet the needs of religious consumers. However, Wesley saw that the church had not merely an instrumental role in God’s unfolding meta-narrative, but was itself part of the meta-narrative. The church is more than merely the community of individuals who have
appropriated the work of Christ. The church has a corporate, ontological role, embodied in community, reflecting the Trinity, and central to God's unfolding plan. (*ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia* – where the church is, there is Christ) The church doesn't just proclaim what God did; the church *is* what God is doing in the world. “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18) declares our Lord Jesus. At the heart of the gospel may, indeed, be the cross and resurrection, but the gospel continues to unfold in the coming of the Holy Spirit, the life of the church in the world, culminating in the return of Christ and the ushering in of the New Creation. The Bible does not run from Gen 3 to Rev. 20 – the Fall to the Return. It runs from Gen. 1 to Rev. 22 – from Creation to New Creation. Missional Holiness enables the church to see the full meta-narrative which stretches from creation to fall to covenant to incarnation to cross and resurrection, ascension, coming of the Holy Spirit, the life of the church, the return of Christ and the final ushering in of the New Creation. Along the way, the *ordo salutis* gets a more robust understanding of sanctification!

Wesley profoundly understood this and therefore the Methodist movement represents a corrective – a renewed sense that the gospel continues to unfold in the world. Wesley saw that the people of God must not be declared holy in merely a forensic, judicial, private sense, but be holy in the practical, lived out public sense! Faith and Fruit must meet and be joyfully wed. Wesley’s emphasis on sanctification is his attempt to extend the meta-narrative to be fully Trinitarian; fully embracing that God is building the people of God. The subsequent holiness movement in all of its manifestations represents a holy “push back” of Luther’s doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* – simultaneously righteous and sinner. In Luther’s theology righteousness is *alien* righteousness – we are not made upright, we cannot become upright, we can only be declared upright as the righteousness of Christ is imputed into the life of the believer. For Luther, sanctification is still largely a subset of his Christology. This makes perfect sense from the perspective of a truncated meta-narrative which ends in Christ and never quite makes it to Pentecost. However, Wesley was not prepared to accept sin as the inevitable and ongoing experience of the believer. For Wesley, righteousness is more than God just looking at us through a different set of glasses. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Wesley affirmed that “one might overcome sin and the world.” The new creation has broken in to the present age in Jesus Christ and through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit it is being appropriated into the life and experience of the believer – that’s what the second blessing is all about! Brothers and sisters we are called to be holy, as the Scripture declares, “without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Luther’s anxieties about the book of James was because Luther’s task was to defend the front door of the house – but when you
look at the entire household of faith, James is more interested in the living room than in the front door. The life of holiness is not a novel doctrine. Wesley re-discovered it in the Scriptures. Wesley heard it afresh from the Nicene Creed, which set forth four marks of the true church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. Wesley learned it from the 4th century saint Macarius the Egyptian. He learned it from the 15th century Thomas a Kempis. He learned it from the pietistic Moravians of his own day like Peter Bohler and Nicholas Von Zinzendorf. The Moravians represented the non-magisterial reformation and therefore they were inherently more in touch with a post-Christendom world since they never accepted the Christendom project to begin with. These were Wesley’s tutors in holiness: Biblical authors, patristic saints, pre-Reformation mystics, and pietistic Moravians, not to mention his own heart-warming experiences of Aldersgate and Fetter’s Lane.

Wesley eventually emphasized the Spirit’s role in the sanctification of believers and accepted the idea of a “second” crisis experience subsequent to justification, a doctrine which would become a key feature in later holiness and Pentecostal pneumatology. He referred to this experience in various ways, including “perfect love,” “eradication of inbred sin,” “second blessing,” and “entire sanctification,” all of which influenced the theology of the holiness tradition. Christian movements around the world will use different terminology to describe this – we say “entire sanctification,” or “second blessing,” the Pentecostals and H. C. Morrison call it “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” the Eastern Orthodox call it becoming “living icons.” But, taken together, the church around the world is increasingly recognizing that along with sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, sola Christus, we must add sola Spiritus – the Holy Spirit alone makes the church holy! The Holy Spirit alone empowers us for holy mission in the world. Missional holiness!

Wesley’s emphasis on sanctification is his attempt to extend the meta-narrative – to continue the Reformation – to help the church be more fully Trinitarian. His theology began with a focus on holiness as the eradication of sin, i.e. the inward pneumatological stream. However, as Wesley’s pneumatology developed, he came to see the public and external power of holiness as the church bears fruit for the kingdom. The witness of the Spirit which confirms faith becomes in Wesley the power of the Spirit to produce fruit and to transform the world – to spread scriptural holiness through the world. This is missional holiness: The Holy Spirit empowering believers for witness, service, evangelism and church planting.

This is why I call us to embrace missional holiness. Missional holiness insists on discipleship and sanctification in the lives of believers, but also joins that with a deeper appreciation that we are cleansed from sin so that we can more effectively proclaim and model Christ’s life into the world. It
is this missional focus which unleashed the dynamic church planting ministry of Francis Asbury. It is missional holiness which made Wesley an evangelical “brick yard” preaching, church planting, holy club organizing, social visionary theologian.

What does this mean for us today at Asbury? What does it mean for us to embrace missional holiness? I would like to make three suggestions.

First, a renewed emphasis on our evangelistic-church planting history and calling. In the world of Christendom, evangelism happens passively, mostly within the home – pillow and hearth catechesis - and through the ordinary work of confirmation classes. However, the traditional heartlands of the church are today increasingly post-Christendom. The Western world is the fastest growing mission field in the world. The church in African and Asia is growing in a context where Christianity is on the margins quite separate from any Christendom models. Even Latin America, after centuries of Christendom, is today emerging as a post-Christendom church, in large part due to the dramatic inroads Pentecostalism is making in traditional, magisterial Roman Catholicism. We have to learn how to evangelize and plant churches again, and do it from the prophetic margins, not the center, of culture. I look for the day when Asbury Theological Seminary will be one of the great church planting sending centers in the world, modeling how to plant churches in a post-Christendom world, whether in Wilmore (multi-ethnic Orlando) or in China. This can happen if we embrace missional holiness.

Second, Missional Holiness reminds us that holiness is central to the meta-narrative; a true mark of the church, not a sectarian doctrine. We must embody for the world what it means to be a holy people. We must never forget the basic lesson of the Reformation about what is necessary to become a Christian, but we also dare not lose our holy momentum in setting forth what it means to be a Christian – to live as a disciple believer. We must not forget that the only actual imperative form in Matthew’s Great Commission is the word “mathetisasate” - ‘make disciples’ This was Wesley’s passion which led to holy clubs and class meetings and people being called “Methodists.” When people ask you what in the world has happened to Methodism today, just tell them that our current state can be traced to that time when the word Methodist became a noun rather than an adjective, and the day we get our adjective back is the day we will once again model missional discipleship. Wesley understood that discipleship is crucial for holiness. We must recapture this, because it is central to our DNA.. We still believe in a post-conversion experience with the Holy Spirit which re-orient our affections away from sin and towards holiness. The second blessing makes perfect sense once the meta-narrative itself is released from its truncated state and fully embraces not only the person, but the work of the Holy Spirit. Missional Holiness is the bridge between faith and fruit.
Third, if we, in true Wesleyan tradition, capture the full meta-narrative from creation to New Creation, then we will also, simultaneously, capture a truly global, non-sectarian vision of the church. This Fall we are launching our 2023 global prayer vision. It is a commitment to a process to pray and to envision what we are to become by the year 2023 when we celebrate our 100th anniversary as an institution. You see, what I am advocating today is not a “quick fix” but a generational transformation of Asbury. Like building a cathedral, each generation had its part. For us, missional holiness means understanding “theological education” holistically, including forming the mind, inward transformation and discipleship, and missional equipping for bold service in the world. We go forth not only as bearers of the gospel to those who have not heard, but as partners with the church of Jesus Christ around the world. We have resources and capacities which can enormously encourage and assist the global church. Likewise, the global church has insights into evangelism and church planting for a post-Christendom world which we desperately need to receive. In India I have met brothers who have seen the lame healed, the dead raised and the good news preached to the poor. I have had the privilege of training hundreds of church planters in India and have seen the fruit of this vitality. In Africa I have met sisters in Christ who have seen visions and seen thousands come to Christ in the dawning of new days of Pentecost. I had the joy of personally baptizing a new Chinese believer in the Yangtze River. I did it in the dead of night for fear of the authorities, but in the process I captured a renewed glimpse of what God is doing in China. God is moving in the global church and we being called to be a part of it.

It was John Wesley who once prophetically wrote what I believe is one of the best definitions of missional holiness. It is in his work entitled, the General Spread of the Gospel: “May we not suppose that the same leaven of pure and undefiled religion of the experimental knowledge and love of God, of inward and outward holiness, will gradually be diffused to the remotest parts of not only Europe, but of Africa, Asia and America.” (Works, vol. 6, p. 283). You see, Wesley’s missional holiness and fully envisioned meta-narrative, not only gives us sola spiritus, but it also gives us sola ecclesia—the Church alone is the embodiment of the New Creation and is the visible expression of God’s redemptive missio dei in the world. Students of Asbury, fall in love with God’s holy church!

Brother and sisters at Asbury Theological Seminary, we are called to go into all the world precisely because God’s prevenient grace has already beat us there. That prevenient grace becomes embodied in modern flesh and blood versions of the Macadonian Man who continues to call and beckon us. The worship of Jesus which John eschatologically sees in the New Creation is from men and women from every tribe, tongue and language,
worshipping the Lord. Today, worship is rising up in Spanish and English and German and French, but that will never suffice – not at this banquet! The New Creation is calling forth worship in Mandarin and Farsi and Kurdish and Afrikaans and Lao and Hausa and Hindi and Swahili and Korean and Arabic and hundreds more! I can almost hear the strains of the New Creation now as the global church explodes in growth! Holiness never impacts the world in some vague, generic, or merely forensic sense, but in the enfleshed lives of real people in local contexts. Missional holiness must become embodied in the lives of the rice farmer in Tianjin, China, the textile worker in Hanoi, the literature professor in Sao Paulo, the construction worker in Nairobi, the businesswoman in Budapest, the soccer mom in Seattle, the IT professional in Mumbai, the school teacher in Orlando. This is missional holiness for a post-Christendom world!

Conclusion

Cracker Barrel may have given us those three comforting words:

EAT, SHOP and RELAX

But, we have a far more compelling, powerful and transforming mission. Not, EAT, SHOP, and RELAX, but FAITH, HOLINESS, AND NEW CREATION. May those words summon us afresh as the people of God here at Asbury Theological Seminary, “a community called” to missional holiness. Amen.

End Notes

¹ Donald W. Dayton, Theological Roots of Pentecostalism (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 37
Kyle Blanchette

A Brief Look at Methodology and Grace in Wesleyan Theology

Abstract

In a recent piece for the Asbury Theological Journal, Nathan Crawford has attempted to put current understandings of emergent phenomena within the neurosciences in conversation with Christian soteriology; in particular, Crawford has sought to link up themes found in emergence with distinctively Wesleyan perspectives on sanctification. In this article, I offer some reflections on theological methodology in light of Crawford’s analysis, and I identify some needed clarifications of Kenneth J. Collins’s model of John Wesley’s soteriology. In the latter half of the piece, I present a critical analysis of the issue of monergism and synergism in Wesley’s understanding of grace.

Keywords: monergism, synergism, grace, methodology, John Wesley, free will, determinism, soteriology

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I. Scientific Emergentism and Theological Methodology

In a recent piece in the *Asbury Theological Journal*, Nathan Crawford has attempted to put current understandings of emergent phenomena within the neurosciences in conversation with Christian soteriology; in particular, Crawford has sought to link up themes found in emergence with distinctively Weslayan perspectives on sanctification. He defines emergence as "the theory that cosmic evolution repeatedly includes unpredictable, irreducible, and novel appearances." According to Crawford, theology can use the “kind of thinking” employed in the neurosciences to enrich its articulation of doctrinal matters, in this case the doctrine of entire sanctification. Crawford goes on to offer a constructive proposal that he believes sheds light on the debate between Kenneth J. Collins and Randy Maddox, proponents of the two main competing interpretations of John Wesley’s theology. Toward the end of his piece, Crawford argues that if the creation and evolution of human persons have been shown to be emergent phenomena, we can speculate that salvation and sanctification are emergent phenomena as well.

There is much to commend a methodology that seeks to illustrate coherence between the work of God in creation and the work of God in salvation. The achievements of science in terms of improving our understanding of the material world can illuminate and inform the task of soteriology, which is the branch of Christian theology that seeks to give a logical account of the nature of human salvation. Likewise, our understanding of how God works in salvation can shed light on God’s creating and sustaining work in the natural world. All truth is God’s truth, so we should expect general revelation and special revelation to be not only logically consistent, but also mutually reflective of one another. The Christian worldview has the wherewithal to provide such a unified and integrated vision of reality. So, for instance, science can tell us much about the makeup of the human person in terms of the brain and neuroscience, which we can then correlate with Christian theological anthropology.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the limitations and potential pitfalls of such a methodology, some of which Crawford himself is explicitly aware. To begin, we cannot assume that God’s work in creation will always have a direct or complete parallel with the Lord’s work in salvation. While some such parallels may exist between the two spheres, we need to possess more than merely suggestive evidence based on loosely analogous relationships before we can make responsible extrapolations. Moreover, the Christian Scriptures, interpreted in the context of the church, contain the clearest and most complete revelation of God’s saving activity in the world, and hence they should serve as our preeminent source for soteriological truth. This should have a significant impact on our theological methodology.
Because our independent knowledge of soteriological truth through general revelation is often spotty, limited, and unclear, we should start with God’s complete revelation in Scripture and work from there. Unless we have strong evidence from nature for a proposition relevant to soteriology—evidence that is stronger than the evidence we possess for a logically incompatible interpretation of Scripture—it is more epistemically and theologically sound to follow the light of God’s special revelation regarding that proposition.6

Our methodology should differ substantially if we are dealing with scientific propositions—propositions about the natural world. In what I see as the classical Wesleyan view on the role of Scripture, the Bible does not purport to speak authoritatively on the intricacies of the processes of nature. Questions about such topics are best posed and answered within the realm of the physical sciences.7 This is not to say that the Bible has nothing to say about the nature of physical entities, but its primary purpose is to speak on matters of salvation and our relationship to God. Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to view science and theology as occupying utterly disconnected epistemic spheres, “never the two shall meet.” As Alvin Plantinga has pointed out, belief that a divine creator is the ultimate cause of nature will (rightly) affect our evaluation of the plausibility of various scientific hypotheses, even if that creator never interferes directly in the world beyond the initial creation.8

In addition to these methodological considerations, to which Crawford may well be amenable, many would take issue with his seeming view that all of God’s work in creation from the Big Bang onward can be subsumed under a gradualistic, process-oriented paradigm via evolution.9 He importantly leaves out the Big Bang itself—God’s creation of the world out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo)—which surely must be seen as a non-gradual, instantaneous act; indeed it is a miracle.10 At the moment of the Big Bang, the natural universe in its nascent form comes into being out of nothing with all of the necessary prerequisites for life as the result of the sheer free will of God. Wesley pointed to creation and the giving of life as a species of the free grace of God, the sovereign work of God alone.11

But beyond this, insisting that all of God’s creative activity after the Big Bang falls under emergent or evolutionary labels seems to overshoot the scientific evidence. Are we certain that evolution or emergent phenomena can explain all complexity in nature, including the origin of life from non-life? It seems to me that this would be to go beyond currently available scientific evidence, even if all biological complexity can be explained via natural, Darwinian evolution (Darwinism can begin only when there is life). It is possible that God has performed miracles in the course of natural history that disrupt any emergent relationship between new phenomena
and old phenomena. Because we lack a comprehensive understanding of natural history, we should not assume that a comprehensive evolutionary or emergent paradigm can explain everything in the natural world.\footnote{12}

II. Competing Interpretations of Wesley Clarified

In his piece, Crawford briefly summarizes both Collins’s and Maddox’s interpretations of Wesley’s theology before presenting his own constructive proposal. Crawford concedes that his discussion is “slightly arbitrary” and that “the two are much more nuanced” than he has shown.\footnote{13} One certainly cannot expect Crawford to address each and every subtlety in these two competing readings of Wesley, but in this case Crawford’s lack of nuance results in a misrepresentation of Collins’s view. While Crawford does note that the “instantaneous” (Collins’s) and the “process” (Maddox’s) views, as he terms them, do not mutually exclude one another, he fails to illustrate adequately the conjunctive nature of Collins’s view of Wesley’s understanding of sanctification that incorporates both process and crisis elements.\footnote{14}

The source of the confusion, I think, lies in Crawford’s frequent conflation of the process of sanctification with entire sanctification, a distinction that is critical in understanding Collins’s view on these matters. In his published work, Collins has argued for a process of sanctification that begins after the crisis of the new birth and in which the tempers of the heart are gradually transformed and made holy by God’s grace.\footnote{15} The process of sanctification is to be distinguished from entire sanctification, which in Collins’s reading of Wesley is a second, distinct work of grace that issues in a qualitative change from an impure heart to a fully pure heart. In one moment the heart is impure, and in the next it is pure by the actualization of entirely sanctifying grace.\footnote{16} Once the distinction between the process of sanctification and entire sanctification is made clear, one can see that Collins has a place in his interpretation for gradual growth by degree in sanctifying grace. But whereas Maddox tends to focus on the process-oriented dimensions of Wesley’s thought in a seemingly exclusive way, Collins presents an ordo salutis that incorporates both process and crisis elements of Wesley’s soteriology.

It is worth noting two more aspects of Crawford’s presentation that need some tweaking. Firstly, he reports that Collins separates the twofold problem of sin into the “outward appearance” of sin and “the problem of original, inbred sin.” In point of fact, Collins, following Wesley, distinguishes between actual sin, pertaining to deliberate acts that go against God’s clearly revealed will (“willful transgression of a known law of God”), and original or inbred sin, pertaining to sin as a state in the form of unholy tempers and dispositions.\footnote{17} The distinction between outward and inward sin is a different matter. To illustrate the difference, one can commit actual sin, on this
definition, even if it has no outward manifestation whatsoever. For instance, one may surrender to the intention to commit adultery without ever having the opportunity to commit the act outwardly. Inbred sin, alternatively, can manifest itself in outward behavior, as when our partly well-intentioned actions are mixed with sinful motives.18

Secondly, Crawford seems to impute the view that original sin is a "juridical punishment upon all of humanity for the sin of Adam" to Collins, though this view is repudiated by both Collins and Maddox.19 Both interpreters highlight Wesley's growing opposition to the notion of original/inherited guilt, which is reflected in Wesley's work in two ways: first, Wesley eventually argued that any guilt inherited from Adam is cancelled at birth by the atoning work of Christ.20 Second, Wesley omitted the allusion to inherited guilt in the Ninth Article of the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles when he pruned and reformulated them for the Methodists in America. Both interpreters agree that the evidence from Wesley's works indicates that he was far more comfortable speaking about original sin in terms of inherited corruption rather than inherited guilt.21

III. A Fresh Look at Wesleyan Grace

Many of the church's hottest theological controversies have been over the role of divine grace in human salvation. It comes as no surprise then that some of the most central debates in Wesley studies are over the nature of divine grace and its relationship to the human will. On the one hand, Collins has argued for an overarching distinction between "co-operant grace" and "free grace." When he speaks of co-operant grace, Collins is lifting up threads of Wesley's thought that involve divine-human cooperation, what is commonly called synergism. With co-operant grace, God takes the initiative, but human beings must work as well. By free grace, Collins is referring to those points in Wesley's ordo salutis (order of salvation) in which God works "alone" apart from all human working, what is commonly termed monergism.22 He sees free grace as a departure from divine-human synergism in Wesley's thought. Collins seeks to hold these two conceptions of Wesleyan grace in a conjunctive balance. On his interpretation of Wesley's thought, God "works alone" in the ordo salutis (via free grace) in prevenient grace, justification/regeneration, and entire sanctification.23

On the other hand, Maddox identifies "responsible grace" as the overarching conception of grace in Wesley's theology. Maddox's responsible grace is essentially identical to Collins's co-operant grace. It highlights the necessity of God's gracious, empowering initiative, while affirming that human persons must also work with this grace in a divine-human synergism.24 Collins wants to affirm Maddox's insights, but he argues that a failure to incorporate free grace into one's overall view of grace results in a distorted,
semi-Pelagian reading of Wesley’s theology that neglects Wesley’s well-worked theme of the work of God alone. But although Maddox does not give the monergistic work of God a name or make it a central feature in his historical and constructive account of Wesley’s theology, he nevertheless finds monergism in Wesley’s theology in terms of God’s creating and sustaining activity in the world. Collins, too, finds the theme of monergism in Wesley’s understanding of creation.

Before we evaluate these two reigning conceptions of Wesleyan grace, we need to take a short excursus in philosophical/systematic theology in order to get a firm grasp on the concept of monergism. As a theological term, “monergism” is generally defined as entailing the work of God alone to the exclusion of all human working or activity. Whether God is working alone in a unilateral sense that does not entail determinism, or whether the Lord is working alone in a deterministic/irresistible sense, the basic idea is that the Lord is the only causal actor in any moment of monergistic grace to the exclusion of all human working, as the term itself suggests. Monergism is typically seen as contrasting with synergism, which involves both divine and human work—divine/human cooperation.

It seems clear from the evidence marshaled by Collins and Maddox that John Wesley did develop both synergistic and monergistic conceptions of grace. The conjunction of divine working and human working is not sufficient to capture the totality of Wesley’s thought on grace; one needs an even larger conjunction involving both divine-human cooperation and the work of God alone. As we have already noted, Wesley explicitly states that God works utterly alone in the creation of the world. In addition to this, Wesley sees God as working unilaterally in many of the Lord’s providential acts, including some that involve human beings and their salvation. For instance, as Wesley notes, God’s sovereign power alone establishes the following decree: “He that believeth shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Moreover, as Collins rightly notes, a logical implication of Wesley’s views on original sin and total depravity is that prevenient grace (in Outler’s “narrow sense,” which is the more common usage in Wesley) must also be understood as a species of genuine monergism in terms of restoring four key features of human personality in response to the fall: a basic knowledge of the attributes of God, a partial re-inscription of the moral law, conscience, and a measure of free will. Apart from God’s prevenient grace, we would be a mass of sin, utterly unable to respond to God either positively or negatively, for we would lack the essential features sufficient for personhood. Collins is explicit that God’s work is “irresistible” at this point. This might be something of a misnomer, as on Wesley’s view there is no person in place capable of resisting God’s grace apart from this restoring prevenient
grace due to the severe effects of the Fall. Nevertheless, God’s work in the initial restoring act of prevenient grace is at least unilateral in that God is the only one working. Indeed, even the ongoing prevenient overtures of God’s grace in addition to this initial restoring activity can be characterized rightly as monergism insofar as they continue to occur apart from our positive response (and in the face of our negative response), which reveals the unilateral, though non-deterministic, nature of ongoing prevenient grace. Any positive response to grace depends upon God’s ongoing bestowal of prevenient grace. So both initial, restoring prevenient grace and ongoing prevenient grace are examples of genuine monergism, for God works alone in both instances.

Does Wesley develop a monergistic understanding of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification? I think the answer to this is in one sense “yes” and another sense “no.” In order to approach this particular issue, we first need to note that Collins seems to use the language of “monergism” and “the work of God alone” (interchangeably) to refer to two somewhat different phenomena in his theological interpretation of Wesley. On the one hand, he uses it to refer to the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God that does not involve or entail any human response whatsoever, such as the Lord’s work in prevenient grace. On the other hand, he uses it to refer to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, which he holds are resistible works of God that require the necessary condition of our free reception. This dual-usage can also be seen in the fact that Collins uses his umbrella term for the monergistic work of God, “free grace,” to cover God’s conditional work in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, as well as the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in prevenient grace.

This ambiguity in Collins’s terminology is likely a reflection of Wesley’s own slightly ambiguous use of this language, which is actually an indirect testament to Collins’s faithfulness to the source material. Wesley himself applies monergistic language both to the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in creation, providence, and prevenient grace, which we have already seen, and to the resistible and conditional work of God in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification. An example of the latter usage can be found in Predestination Calmly Considered, in which Wesley asserts, “It is the work of God alone to justify, to sanctify, and to glorify; which three comprehend the whole of salvation.” Furthermore, in addition to speaking of the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in creation as a species of “free grace,” Wesley also speaks of God’s resistible and conditional work in conversion as “free” as well: “One may freely give you a sum of money, on the condition you stretch out your
hand to receive it. It is therefore no contradiction to say, ‘We are justified freely by grace, and yet upon certain terms and conditions.’”

It is straightforwardly clear how God’s work in creation, providence, and prevenient grace can be accurately described as monergism in Wesley’s thought: there are no conditions for human beings to meet at such junctures, so it clear that God works utterly alone at such moments, whether this is understood in a unilateral or an irresistible/deterministic sense. What is less clear is how God’s work in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification can be accurately described as monergism in light of both Wesley’s and Collins’s affirmation that aspirants of these graces must perform a free act of consent in order to receive them. Can this apparent contradiction be resolved? Can we make sense of monergism at these moments of grace, or must Wesley be interpreted as a synergist with respect to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification for the sake of logical consistency?

Collins describes the condition of consent required to receive these graces as an “almost passive” act of surrender and faith. He wants to avoid calling this surrender a “work,” but it seems clear that insofar as one is not totally passive when one exercises such an act of faith, one is engaged in some degree of activity, however minimal. Such an almost passive act is still an act, which is to say that it is a movement or operation of the will that requires some measure of causal exertion by the agent. Because this act is enabled by God’s ongoing prevenient grace, we are talking about divine-human cooperation here; in other words, we are still in the synergistic model at this point.

This does not, however, complete the picture of what happens in these crucial moments of grace. While we indeed do something even in an almost passive act of faith, what exactly is it that we do? If we understand this act of faith as leading to a state of “openness” before God in Wesley’s theology, as Collins does, it is plausible that the goal of such an act is to enter into a state of truly total passivity before God’s grace. Collins seems to express a worry that total passivity before God’s grace would rule out genuine human freedom and entail determinism, which is why he is careful to describe the act of faith in crucial moments of grace as being “almost” passive. While this concern is understandable, it seems clear to me that so long as God does not causally determine us to choose something in such moments, and so long as an agent freely chooses to enter into a state of total passivity before God’s grace, there is nothing incompatible between total passivity and standard accounts of libertarian freedom and human agency. What this means, interestingly enough, is that monergism does not necessarily entail determinism even when it comes to our positive responses to God.

In order to get an idea of what such an act of surrender would look like,
consider the analogy of a patient submitting to an inherently painful operation by a medical professional. The natural inclination of the patient is to resist the doctor's work altogether because of the unavoidable pain involved in the procedure. Resistance represents activity of the will, regardless of how considerable or slight that activity is. Now imagine that this operation requires the patient to lie flat and idle on a table. If the patient chooses to submit to the operation, she essentially chooses to cease resisting and enter into a state of complete and utter inactivity of the will. Although it takes an act of the will to enter into such a state, the state itself represents total passivity and a complete lack of human effort and willings. The only person working after such a surrender is the doctor who is performing the operation.

If we apply the same kind of sequential thinking to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, we can see the subtle way in which synergism gives way to monergism at these crucial operations of grace. By freely and cooperatively relaxing ourselves into the grace of God through an almost passive act of faith, we enter into a state of total passivity before God's grace. In this act, we simply cease giving into our natural inclination to resist the grace of God. Such an act of faith should be understood as a complete relinquishment of all exertion and activity, as one surrenders to an operation or to sleep. This synergistic act of surrender, which is enabled by the ongoing prevenient grace of God, gives way to genuine monergism once human activity completely ceases and the Lord alone is at work.

While justification/regeneration and entire sanctification are different from other instances of monergism in Wesley's theology in that they require a synergistic work of faith as a necessary condition to receive these graces, once this condition is met we indeed break through to genuine monergism at these soteriological points. By willing to enter into a state of non-willing, we choose a state of completely passive openness before God as the Lord alone works unilaterally. We need not first “be or do thus or thus,” as Wesley puts it, in terms of contributing to God's work beyond presenting ourselves to God so that the Most High can accomplish it. God is the one and only causal actor in such moments. Moreover, the powerful works of grace wrought by God at the soteriological points of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification are radically disproportionate to the paltry work we do to receive them, and far more crucial than the gradual growth in grace that takes place before and after these moments.

In the course of this analysis, I have touched upon two related issues that must nevertheless be kept distinct in order for fruitful dialogue on Wesleyan grace to continue to take place. The first is the matter of interpretation: What did Wesley mean? What reconstruction reflects his most mature theological reflection? The second is the question of logical
consistency and theological soundness: Was Wesley logically consistent in his various affirmations? Does he ever equivocate over certain terms? I have not developed a fully-orbed model of Wesley’s theology fit to compete with that of Collins and Maddox in this short paper. Instead, I have focused my analysis of Wesleyan grace on the issue of monergism and synergism in Wesley’s theology of grace. I affirm with Maddox and Collins that in Wesley’s thinking, God displays genuine monergism in the Lord’s creating and sustaining activity in the world. Furthermore, I agree with Collins that Wesley sees God as working alone in the work of prevenient grace. I also have noted that Wesley understands God to work monergistically in certain providential decrees.

When it comes to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, I believe Collins is on the right track in identifying these works of grace as instances of monergism in Wesley’s thought. There is no doubt that Wesley uses the language of “the work of God alone” to characterize these soteriological moments. I have presented some further clarifications and distinctions that can help us see that there is an irreducible element of synergism involved in almost passively receiving these graces. This synergism gives way to monergism as the will chooses to drain itself of all activity and effectively turn itself off before the grace of God. It does seem that genuine monergism logically entails total passivity on the part of the agent at these points, for God must be the sole causal actor in order to be the only one working. This does not, however, imply or entail determinism at these points. Moreover, it should be obvious that the cooperation entailed by almost passive acts of surrender is radically different from the synergism involved in our highly active works of mercy and piety, as we are talking about an almost passive act of surrender that results in a state of total passivity. We might employ a distinction between weak and strong synergism to make the difference clear.

I hope that the brief reflections offered in this paper can prompt fresh and exciting reflection on the topics of methodology and grace in Wesleyan theology. Examining our methodology of theology requires us to dig deeply in order to uncover our most basic philosophical and theological presuppositions about the nature of knowledge, revelation, and God. The more we examine these presuppositions, the better our theological thinking will be. And when we analyze grace, we are analyzing the work of God in bringing people to salvation, a task that is as important as it is challenging. Whenever we enter into either conversation, we must be sure to represent our dialogue partners accurately so that fruitful and illuminating interaction can take place.
End Notes


2 Ibid., 41.

3 Ibid., 50.

4 Ibid., 40.

5 Ibid., 48-49

6 Note that I am not claiming that the Bible should unconditionally override our independent judgments in every instance. The evidence from the Bible has to be strong enough, and the evidence from nature has to be weak enough, to make such moves epistemically sensible.


10 Crawford, 48.

11 All subsequent references to John Wesley’s works are taken from *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 1–14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). *Sermons*, 1:7 This is not to say that all miracles must be instantaneous. The concept of a progressive or gradual miracle is certainly coherent.

12 If God does not exist, evolution is the only explanation available to explain both the existence and the complexity of life. The theist has more explanatory options on the table.


17 Ibid., 217-222.

18 While I affirm the validity of Wesley’s distinctions here, I think more are necessary to explain the complex nature of the will, sin, and sin’s effects on our relationship with God. Willfulness, for instance, can come in degrees, from the most fully flagrant act to the most passive and subtle consent of the will. There are many actions that can be partly meant for good and partly meant for evil. Inbred sin (distinct from temptation) invariably results in actual/willful sin in some measure, the willfulness of which can come in degrees. The new birth may subdue our sinful nature, but insofar as we are still sinful, it will find expression in our everyday lives in some measure until we are perfected in love. It is therefore appropriate to speak of ongoing forgiveness in the Christian walk.


Determinism is the view that an agent's actions are determined by causally sufficient prior causes outside of the agent's control. To say grace is irresistible in a theological context usually means that such grace causally determines the choice(s) of the will, whether proximately or remotely. God clearly works monergistically when His work alone is causally sufficient to determine human choice(s).

29 Cf. “Pelagianism: A Monergist Model of Redemption,” http://evangelicalarminians.org/glynn.Pelagianism.A-Monergist-Model-of-Redemption (although I do think Arminianism allows for monergism beyond initiating prevenient grace); “A Simple Explanation of Monergism,” http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/monergism_simple.html; and “Monergism,” http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/monergism. We will see that God can be the “only efficient cause” of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification without overriding genuine human freedom, so long as God does not causally determine our choices in such moments, and so long as human beings are free to cause themselves to enter into a state of total inactivity of the will. In other words, God can work alone in a real sense without working deterministically, which may come as a surprise to some Calvinists.

30 Collins, 155-164; Maddox 91-93.
31 Collins, 164-165.
33 In my own view (distinct from Wesley’s), I believe it is more accurate to speak of God’s prevenient grace upholding or preserving these features of human personhood. In other words, I do not believe the first sin of the Fall caused humanity to plunge immediately into total depravity, at which point God needed to restore the basic features of personhood. Rather, I believe that God’s grace swooped in immediately (and unilaterally) at the Fall, checking the downward spiral of sin and giving us the choice to respond positively to God or to reject this grace and become yet worse. On this view, it is still the case that any goodness remaining in human beings is due to the special, prevenient grace of God; it is just preserved goodness, not restored goodness. I find it implausible that the first sin of the Fall would result in total depravity.

34 Collins, 70-82.
35 Collins seems to contradict implicitly his own view on the irresistibility of initial prevenient grace in a footnote, in which he denies that God ever displays “deterministic activity” when he works monergistically, including in prevenient grace. See Collins, 79; 350 n197 It is more accurate, I think, to describe God’s monergistic work in prevenient grace as unilateral rather than irresistible/deterministic.

36 Of course, our wills may be actively engaged in sin when God draws us with prevenient grace, but the point is that this grace continues to work even when we...
are not performing any positive work with respect to our salvation.

37 In my view, it is when we respond positively to preventive grace that it becomes justifying and sanctifying grace. Seemingly discrete categories of grace often bleed into one another in practice.

38 Collins, 80-82.

39 Ibid., 15, 160-165; 203-205; 292.

40 Ibid., 82; 160-161; 203; 291-292.

41 In fact, the ambiguity goes deeper in Wesley, as he is somewhat unclear as to whether conversion is resistible or irresistible. See Sermons, 6:280-289; Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses, 10:363; 10:230-231; 10:309. Collins picks up on this ambiguity in Wesley’s thought in his earlier work, The Scripture Way of Salvation (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1997), 98-99 As we mentioned, Collins is clear in his most recent work that he views justification/regeneration (conversion) as resistible. Evidently, Collins believes that the mature Wesley moved beyond the irresistibility of converting grace, at least in most cases.

42 Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses, 10:230.

43 Ibid., 10:209.

44 Wesley clearly has a libertarian (Arminian) view of freedom. Thus, for him a free act is an undetermined act. See Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses, 10:468-469. Calvinists do not deny that we repent and exercise faith, but they hold that such actions are determined by God, and repentance and faith are typically seen as following regeneration rather than preceding it. But how can Calvinists consistently hold that God is the only actor/agent in salvation from start to finish (total monergism), as they generally do, while also holding that human beings have any real kind of agency, as they generally want to do? What this reveals, I think, is that Calvinists often unwittingly display libertarian intuitions with respect to human agency; without explicitly affirming it, Calvinists implicitly find compatibilism to be insufficient to underwrite genuine human agency.

45 Collins, 15.

46 Ibid., 162-163; 204.

47 Ibid., 15.

48 Ibid., 15, 163.

49 What is crucial here is that the will ceases all exertion and activity. The body naturally will still display activity, though in an involuntary way, whether we are talking about surrendering to an operation or surrendering to the grace of God.

50 Wesley seems to hold that God can bring about entire sanctification (and presumably conversion) whenever the Lord pleases, it being a species of divine freedom and sovereignty. Indeed, in a key passage, Wesley seems to be affirming that it is only conditionally necessary that we do works do prepare to receive entirely sanctifying grace. See Collins 288-293. Two things need to be said about this. At the very least, as Wesley (and Collins) affirms, faith is absolutely necessary to receive the gifts of God. If we refuse to meet this condition, then God cannot grant us these graces without overriding our personhood. Secondly, most if not all persons require time and opportunity to arrive at the state of spiritual receptivity required to receive freely entirely sanctifying grace. It is precisely our pride that must be overcome before God can convey entirely sanctifying grace in a way that respects
our personhood. So while I affirm with Wesley and Collins that the soteriological timetable is surely in the hands and guidance of the Sovereign Lord, it is not just the will of God that is a factor here, but also the will of man. Most if not all people require time and opportunity before they are prepared to receive entirely sanctifying grace.

51 *Sermons* 2:53. Of course, we do have to freely receive these graces through an act of faith. While such acts of surrender themselves surely are almost passive, it often takes a great amount of moral effort–strenuous cooperation with God’s grace–to overcome one’s pride in order to be willing to perform almost passive acts of surrender to God.

52 Collins seems to assume that the work of God alone and receiving grace always entail a qualitative or instantaneous (crucial) change in Wesley’s thought, but I do not believe he has defended this entailment. See Collins 14-15. In my reading of Wesley, God works alone at various points throughout our Christian walk and the process of sanctification, not just at crucial moments of grace such justification/regeneration and entire sanctification. This means that there is “receiving grace” in Wesley’s thought beyond qualitative or instantaneous works of grace. For an example of this, see *Sermons* 1:226. In other words, I think God can and does work alone on us in incremental degrees (with us receiving this work over time through almost passive acts of faith) on Wesley’s view, as well as instantaneously and qualitatively (such as in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification).

53 Note that the issue here is logical consistency and proper use of theological language. While I certainly affirm that there is plenty of room for mystery, paradox, and tension in theology in their proper place, we ought to push logic and clarity as far as they can go before appealing to such notions, and we certainly should not be comfortable with logical contradictions. The point of a soteriological model, after all, is to explain, not to obscure.

54 As Collins rightly points out, Wesley does use parallel language when describing justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, implying that God works in comparatively instantaneous/qualitative ways in both. See Collins 287-288. In my own view (distinct from Wesley’s), entire sanctification is just the completion of the process of sanctification (which includes both receiving and responding grace along the way). On this view, entire sanctification is still a threshold change of sorts: it issues in a qualitatively distinct kind of life (a life without the drag of original sin) as well as a quantitative change (less sinfulness than before, namely, none).

55 Although I do not endorse the entirety of his analysis and conclusions, my analysis regarding freedom and grace here is indebted to Kevin Timpe’s “Grace and Controlling What We Do Not Cause” in *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2007).

56 Note that nothing here undermines Wesley’s quite Reformed view of justification, in which the forgiveness of sins is based solely on the work and merits of Christ alone. The fact that we must perform a synergistic work to receive this grace does not change the basis or ground of justification. Our act of faith is the “formal cause” (condition) of our receiving justification, but God’s work in Christ alone remains the meritorious cause of justification. See Collins, 107; 169-181.

57 Thanks to Kenneth J. Collins, Jerry L. Walls, David Baggett, Philip Tallon, Adam Blincoe, Jeremy Buchanan, and (last but certainly not least) my wife, Courtney Blanchette, for helpful criticisms and clarifying comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks to Adam Blincoe for challenging some of my former theological thinking on this topic and inspiring some of the insights of this paper.
A Review Essay: The Church and Postmodern Culture Series

The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens
Graham Ward
*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*

Whose Community? Which Interpretation?: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church
Merold Westphal
*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*

The geo-political world is turbulent with the breakdown of the secularization thesis. The textual world is turbulent with the supposed death of the author. Some fear the growing realm of religion in the geo-political world. Others fear the growing prominence of forms of relativity in hermeneutics. In the midst of this fear, the Church and Postmodern Culture series offers two texts that speak into these turbulent worlds. The first, *The Politics of Discipleship* by Graham Ward, is an impolite book (21) to an impolite world. It tackles a turbulent world with a turbulent word. The second, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* by Merold Westphal, uses another approach. It attempts to show that new worlds emerge from the words of the text whose “absolute author” is deceased. Whether or not the reader will agree with the authors’ approaches or answers, the Church and Postmodern Culture series continues asking the right questions. This review will discuss each text on its own and then as a tandem.

The wall of secularism erected between religion and politics is crumbling because it is false. An account of discipleship, then, must blur the lines between politics and religion. Graham Ward’s *The Politics of Discipleship* thus describes the world (Part I) and the church (Part II) to see how faith plays a role in the world (17-18). A deep connection between world and church is
necessary because the church is “hardwired” into the world (24). In this threatening world, owing some of its dangerous potential to its growing religious nature, mutual understanding of oneself and the other will only happen by “being impolite and listening to one another’s impoliteness” (22).

Ward describes the world under three categories: democracy, globalization, and post-secularity. Each category is handled as a chapter that offers a new vantage point on the world. First, Ward argues there is a crisis of democracy. While liberalism asserts the individual over the community, emphasizing a limited government whose main responsibility is security (41), egalitarianism emphasizes the benefit of the community even if individual freedom is curtailed (42). Democracy holds these values in tension. In crisis, the balance gets tipped. Ward believes that because democracy is always straining for appropriate authority that it is always unstable. Democracy is always “in search of a body,” a body that is most easily seen in a sovereign power.

Since that body is never permanently realized in democracy, it is in flux (56): “[W]hile pursuing equality and freedom, the democrat is always dreaming of the return of the king, the return of the body—and it is this dreaming that makes all totalitarianisms possible” (57). Postdemocracy, a challenge to democracy as a system because of the threat of totalitarianism, has four characteristics. First, the will of the people is created by media persuasion (66). Second, economic questions dominate the political sphere (68). Third, there are active forms of depoliticization (69), where the person is considered as a customer or client, more than a citizen. The fourth characteristic is a crisis of representation. Minority interests garner attention beyond what their numbers would warrant and politicians must communicate with concern for the party line, rather than their constituency (71). The answer to such a condition is not socialism as it has been practiced, but a “responsible capitalism” (74). This turns Ward’s attention to economics and globalization.

Globalization is a product of Christian theology and church history (79). The expeditions that took the Christian faith beyond national borders needed more than greed, acquisitiveness, and opportunity (91). Yet the result of a globalization detached from theology has been a dematerialized world (93). Everything is examined in relation to universal commodity (95), which creates ubiquitous desire and the global presence of credit. This means that globalization cannot be “at the vanguard of democratization” (113) because no one is accountable to the “unbounded market,” whereas democracy has systems of accountability (113). Perhaps using Ward’s language of the body, there is no body to hold accountable, in part, because the market is always dematerializing.

Ward then turns his attention to the question of postsecularity. Contrary
to the secularization thesis, which argues that religion is an effect and that it will die out without the appropriate cause (121), religion is now resurfacing in “hybrid, fluid, and commercialized” forms (131). This religion has become united to business, social networking, and video games and as a result “has become a special effect, inseparably bound to an entertainment value” (149). Ward cites the Harry Potter series and the Lord of the Rings trilogy as movies that express this “re-enchantment.” The religion of modernity “was not about discipline, sacrifice, obedience, and the development of virtue,” but a “spiritualized human subjectivity” (157). This spiritualization is a private affair and thus reinforces one theme of the religion of modernity (157).

Having described the world, Ward wants to know how Christians can speak into what remains of the public space. Ward wants Christians to engage boldly with those of other faiths (and no faith). There should be “more contestation and something much deeper than liberal tolerance” (162). Such engaging conversation challenges depoliticization because it helps to liberate religion from the private and to promote the importance of myth (163).

Discipleship—the effort to produce such Christian citizens—must therefore unmask the (false) mythologies in the world and re-read faith back into the culture (165). Why? Because God is never divorced from the history of this world (169). Theologically speaking, this is the eschatological remainder—a continuity between the coming Kingdom and now (167-69). Such an eschatology, a Christian one, is Messianism with a Messiah (179). The King is returning!

Eschatology thus forms the context for the Christian act. In a chapter entitled, “The City and the Struggle for Its Soul,” Ward affirms that Christians act in the space opened by Christ and so within the context of the church acting for the city and the city’s eschatological hope (181). Cities are places of eschatology because “[a]ll cities seek a timeless and universal perfection.” (214). Thus the church must struggle for the city, affirm its opportunities for social life, diversity, and help shape its social imaginary (218). This work is essential because by reaffirming a metaphysics of the body, the church counteracts the practices of bodies without material substances—identities that have simply become “user names and log-in codes” and “bodies are reduced to avatars” (231). How ironic in a culture obsessed with physical fitness! (223). Ward desires citizens who are postmaterial, not in the sense that avoid materiality, but that overcomes materialism and reaffirms the body’s importance as a body, rather than a “billboard” (224).

Discipleship means producing people who engage in the city’s life with the ability to see what is needed for the common good (266). Practices of listening and watching—listening to others and watching for the coming
future—enable discernment of the common good (279). Thus, discipleship is theocratic (299). Yet theocratic contestation does not mean war, but a return to the vibrancy of civil society with citizens deeply opposed to one another, especially because of religion. In such a world, Ward will not shy from this conflict. Instead he finishes with an impolite word. “There will be no new Enlightenment. So let us herald the next stage: the advent of the postsecular state” (301).

Merold Westphal’s project is not so broad as Ward’s, but it is no less ambitious. Whose Community? Which Interpretation? aims to help academics, pastors, and lay people to think philosophically about what is involved in interpreting the Bible (13). Such thinking is to enable better biblical interpretation, in part by forming interpreters able to engage self-critically in how philosophical commitments shape their interpretation of the Bible (14).

Westphal’s ambition is displayed in his book’s accessibility. He clearly wants an array of readers (who may be) leery of (what they believe is) postmodern hermeneutics to read, challenge, and be challenged by this book. He answers fears: No, postmodern hermeneutics is not an “anything goes” relativism (15). He challenges naivete: No, one cannot “just see” the text and know its meaning by a form of intuition (18-20). Instead, texts require “a multitude of different readings...because no single reading is able to capture and express the overflow of meaning...texts contain” (26).

Westphal builds to this conclusion starting with romantic hermeneutics. He introduces readers to deregionalization, the hermeneutical circle, psychologism, and objectivism. Westphal does not believe that the goal of psychologism, to work backwards from language to the inner life of the author’s experience (29-30), is the real goal of interpretation. People read Paul’s letters, for example, not to discern Paul’s experience, but his thought about a certain subject (31). Neither does Westphal believe that objectivism, which desires a “consensus in which all interpreters arrive at an identical meaning” (47), is attainable. Instead, Westphal believes author and reader are “co-creators of textual meaning” (61). While some might fear that this is the death of the author, Westphal affirms it is only the death of the absolute author (58). Meaning is a cooperative effort because the big question facing classic texts is how they might change the reader’s life (61).

Westphal also introduces the reader to Gadamer, arguing that interpretation is not just a reproductive activity, but a productive one, as well. Thus, while even Derrida affirms that “doubling commentary” has its place in interpretation (62) and Ricoeur believes that method is an “indispensable ‘guardrail’ in interpretation” (68), texts surpass their author’s horizons and achieve meaning in new contexts. Thus, texts are not objects over which the reader exercises mastery, but “voices to which we do well to
listen” that put the reader’s (and the author’s) world into question (73). As texts become illuminating for more people, they become classic texts, resisting definitive interpretation (89), and producing practices, attitudes, and propositions that form communities (91). Texts do not just produce propositions, but a world (93).

Westphal’s most important model for interpretation is conversation (115). This model requires the reader’s openness and vulnerability to the voice of the text. “This means genuine listening” (115). As the text poses questions of the reader in this conversation of meaning, the reader learns to ask one’s own questions of the text (116). Here one sees how the text does not have a meaning to be mined, but inspires a conversation with other interpreters that takes on a life of its own that challenges, replaces, and affirms presuppositions (117).

The church is such a community of conversation around a classic text. As a community, it must be considered politically, and Westphal offers and critiques liberal and communitarian approaches to the church as models for its conversation. Ultimately, however, Westphal wants conversation to allow the complexity of the text to form the unity of the church. The church’s range of interpretation in conversation gives space for the Spirit of God to be heard and for the Word of God to shape the church (143, 148).

Graham Ward and Merold Westphal have both written texts to shape communities. Taken together, these texts unite hermeneutics and political theology because they show how becoming appropriate interpreters of Scripture has important implications for how a community engages the world, especially when faced with other texts that have founded religious communities. We see this in Westphal’s model of conversation and Ward’s emphasis on the practice of listening. Listening is a political practice because it is a (communal) hermeneutical practice. As the church body is the place where interpretation is practiced through conversation, then the church can help re-form democracy as a community of dispute (Politics of Discipleship, 180) by being this community of dispute that produces citizens of dispute. In a postmodern world, these disputes will inevitably be religious. This means that classic texts will come into conflict with each other as the communities they have founded and which they sustain come into dispute. This is the church working toward the post-secular state that Ward predicts in a way that reflects an interpretation practice of the Bible.

The most striking difference between these books is their level of accessibility. On the one hand, Westphal has written a most accessible text, in the same vein as James K.A. Smith’s Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?, that captures the goal of the series to “provide accessible introductions to postmodern thought with the specific aim of exploring its impact on ecclesial
practice” (8). One mark of a good teacher is the ability to take complex writers and encourage students to read their texts. Westphal has written a text that will encourage many to pick up Gadamer’s Truth and Method and give it a first (or second, or third) attempt.

As a result of its accessibility, Who’s Community? Which Interpretation? is beneficial to the local church in a few ways. First, Westphal has given his fellow academics an example by writing for the sake of the church. Second, this book is accessible for lay readers with a beginning interest in hermeneutics. It is an appropriate introductory text, not least because it has good flow and is not dry. His brief discussion on lectio divina helps affirm the lay reader’s responsibility to read and interpret Scripture. The lay reader may not have the training to perform excellent historical criticism, but must still participate in discerning, performing, and translating what God is saying today (144-45).

In addition to this strength, this book is useful for pastors as they read and discuss Scripture to prepare for sermons. It provides a context in which preachers can begin to answer the challenge of preaching classic texts because new meanings emerge in new contexts and must serve to found contemporary expressions of the church. Texts that have served the church for centuries, proving to be classics, must be preached because they sustain the church and form the church in new ways. Preaching needs to be intentional at how it shapes this community at this time. This creates a space for preaching to be seen as a performance of the text, rather than downloading of information. More attention to preaching would have been welcome in this text.

On the other hand, Ward has written an often challenging and stunning text that illuminates what one might call meta-themes—themes that serve to illuminate different challenges, events, and conditions of the world. However, and this is a large however, this book does not fit the series in both level of content and length. The Politics of Discipleship is 142 pages longer than the next longest of the series and while others of the series have made challenging thinkers accessible, Ward does not so much help his readers enter a conversation, as extend an existing conversation, believing readers can be caught up to speed on the fly. Perhaps we could take a lesson from Westphal and say that The Politics of Discipleship requires a translation for the church.

This is unfortunate because Ward has written a text that helps to shape the theological imaginary, not least regarding contemporary discussions of ecclesiology. Ward capably defends the church as an institution. But even as an institution part of civic life, it is never (and should never) be encountered simply as an institution. People encounter the church in the
interactions of various agents. This can include the building as the work of “architects, stonemasons, carpenters, glassmakers, weavers of cloth, bankers, and bishops” (202). This means the institutional church does not exist for itself. Instead, it plays a role both regulating and “encouraging the development of the body of Christ well beyond its borders” (204n.32), forming Christ in believers through practices of prayer, confession, praise, and public worship that affect other social practices like nursing the sick and administering the law (189). Thus ecclesiology is always ecclesiality: It is what “this body of Christians do” (202). As a result, there is always room for critique and new practices for bodies—whether for the church or the city, or, as Ward might say, for the church for the city.

Let me offer two opportunities in light of these texts in a turbulent world. First, Christians can become more astute citizens in a world moving toward post-secularity by deepening the historical nature of their faith as they learn from their political ancestors, seeing that theology so often went hand-in-hand with politics. Ironically, I believe this grounds an appreciation of democracy and modernity. Indeed, because of his thorough critique of modernity and democracy, one wonders, with Luke Bretherton, whether Ward truly appreciates modernity and democracy. Could it not be the case that as political liberalism has kept the religious tiger caged it has also helped to minimize forms of violence? Ward answers by saying he agrees with Oliver O'Donovan that “democracy is the polity best suited to the West at this particular time in its history.” Yet this appreciation is now with full disclosure of the consequences of secularity and with an eye to shaping political engagement in light of the coming reign of the King Jesus.

Second, this theological politics provides the opportunity for Christians to re-engage Scripture as a political text. Modernity helped people think as the individual, thus prompting Christians to read Scripture as the individual, rather than as the community. Once philosophical presuppositions of individualism are challenged, then Scripture, especially the minor prophets, Psalms, and the Gospels begin to take on new light for the church. Westphal’s model of conversation helps guard against purely private and individual readings of Scripture.

In this turbulent time, the church must consistently place herself in the hands of the Spirit to face an uncertain future. Yet Politics of Discipleship and Whose Community? Which Interpretation? exhibit the virtue of hope, believing that the uncertain future will provide the context for God’s Spirit to illumine Scripture in new ways and form its readers into Christlikeness. So, whatever awaits Christians of the 21st century, it will not be a world that Scripture will not illumine or a history that God will abandon. As Jesus opened the Scriptures and opened the disciples’ minds to the Scriptures (Luke 24:32,
45), so may he open mind and text so that disciples may live in present anticipation of his coming Kingdom.

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End Notes

1 Interesting that as I was reading through this book, James Cameron’s Avatar was still garnering plenty of box office revenue and media buzz.

2 For further discussion of performance, hermeneutics and preaching, see John W. Wright, Telling God’s Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation (Downer’s Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2007).


Book Reviews

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May
Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture
2010. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
Reviewed by Desiree Segura-April

Listening to children, taking their reflections seriously, is a relatively new value in many societies. For most of history, including within the Christian tradition, children were “to be seen and not heard.” In recent times, childhood studies from sociological, anthropological, and psychological perspectives have challenged this assumption and focused on the agency of children (Corsaro 2004; Qvortrup 2005; Gielen and Roopnarine 2004, James and Prout 1997; LeVine and New 2008). Children are now often recognized as important contributors to society, rather than passive recipients of socialization. Development organizations champion child participation at all stages of programming, and listening to children is highly valued. In the book Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey Stonehouse and May provide a much-needed call to the church and families to actively listen to children’s reflections on their spiritual lives and faith journeys.

The book is equally valuable for children’s and family pastors, parents, church members, seminary students, and para-church groups. Stonehouse and May have artfully translated academic research into a helpful resource for all of these audiences. It is rare to find a book that includes so much data from primary research with children, yet also gives practical suggestions for ministry based on the research implications. This book is invaluable for graduate studies in Christian education, pastoral ministry, child development, and other related fields.

Several research projects form the basis of the book. “The Listening to Children Study” followed forty children over a period of seven years using a variety of methods. The children’s drawings and interviews over this span allowed a glimpse into how faith grows and changes through childhood and adolescence. The interviews with parents helped in understanding partnership between the church and the family. The “Adult Reflections Study” gave insight into experiences that may help and hinder children coming to faith. The “Good Shepherd Research” explored the Reflective
Engagement ministry approach with eighteen preschoolers, and the “Good Shepherd Family Research” tested the same approach with six families with children aged six to ten. Each of these projects brought insights into the ways in which children respond to particular styles of evangelism, discipleship, children’s worship, Christian education, family worship, and corporate worship. The book expertly weaves together the implications for ministry from all four studies.

Stonehouse and May carefully avoid presenting their findings as a theory on child spirituality or faith development. Rather, they emphasize that the research affirms the value of listening to and learning from children’s theological reflections and suggests how the church and families may help and hinder faith development. The research also demonstrated the profoundly positive impact of the Reflective Engagement approach to ministry. This approach emphasizes creating a sacred space where children worship that includes careful telling of Bible stories and a quiet, reflective environment where children can hear from God, talk to God, re-tell the stories using simple materials, and reflect theologically using art supplies, dance, song, etc. The research demonstrated the long-term impact of this type of experience for both children and families.

Some other findings include the crucial partnership between families and the church, the power of the biblical Story, and the value of cultivating compassion and service from a young age. Some very profound thinking about God was seen among the children whose families nurtured faith daily through their conversations and activities and intentional family times spent in the Word and worship. At the same time, the church was crucial in the child’s experience of the body of Christ, intergenerational corporate worship, and meaningful relationships with other Christians. The research also demonstrated the power of the Bible itself to impact a child’s thinking. Hearing key Bible stories multiple times from a young age through Reflective Engagement and family Bible experiences gave children a sense of the grand narrative of the biblical Story, and they began to find their own place within that. Finally, the authors were surprised by the way in which the children demonstrated an engagement with justice and compassion. Children treated marginalized children at school with care and kindness despite the unpopularity of doing so. They often initiated compassionate responses on their own. These actions seemed to stem from an understanding of a loving and compassionate God and their desire to be like that God. The research suggested that this image of God was rooted both in their exposure to God in the Bible and worship and their experiences and conversations with other Christians.

These findings corroborate research results from the “College Transition Project” of the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) which discovered that participation in intergenerational worship during high school, talking about
faith with their parents, understanding God as a loving God who cares about them, and participating in social justice activities were key factors in helping youth group graduates stick with their faith and connect with a faith community after high school graduation. FYI presents further findings on what contributes to “Sticky Faith” for youth in several forthcoming books (Powell, Griffin, and Crawford 2011; Powell and Griffin 2011; Powell and Clark 2011). The Stonehouse and May research indicates that this kind of faith begins cultivation long before students reach high school.

Stonehouse and May do not discuss spiritual development among children who don’t grow up in Christian families or the church. Further research is necessary to discover how the church can become more missional among the millions of children around the world who live in situations of risk. What might Reflective Engagement look like for children living and working on the streets? How does the Grand Story connect with children who have been sexually exploited or lost their families to HIV and Aids? How can we listen to these children about their understanding of a loving God who cares for them? The children in this book are leading the way in sharing God’s love outside the walls of the church. May we follow their lead.

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References Cited
Dyon B. Daughtry
The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion
2010, New York: Peter Lang
Reviewed by Meetaeng Lee Choi

The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion is researched and written “to understand how Christianity—originally a Middle Eastern faith—became the largest, most international religion in the world” as its author Dyon B. Daughtry states in the beginning chapter, “Christianity: the Largest Faith.” Daughtry, a historian of religion, who has most familiarity with Christianity among world religions, demonstrates a major change in the demographics of Christianity in relation to religious cartography “through the lenses of population trends, conversion rates, immigration, fertility, geographical diversity, politics, persecution, oppression, colonialism, and war.” Kenneth Scott Latourette, Stephen Neill, and Andrew Walls, the former missionary-western thinkers began to take notice of the epochal shifts in Christian demographics. Daughtry suggests, Lamin Sanneh (“The Changing Face of Christianity”) and Philip Jenkins (in his acclaimed trilogy, The Next Christendom, The New Faces of Christianity, and God’s Continent which reveals that the center of gravity for Christianity has shifted into “Global South”) as the leading historians in the field.

In this comprehensive project to describe the history and current trends of Christianity, world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) are divided into mainly eight cultural blocks (in the order of the book): the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, North America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In the first page of each chapter the book presents maps and tables with statistics of people (population, median age, life expectancy, and fertility rate) and religion (top religions, number of Christians, and major Christian groupings) for each cultural block to help us understand the demographics and access the updated information clearly.

“How Christianity functions in all eight of the world’s cultural blocks” could be analyzed in a similar methodology as anthropologist Clifford Geertz does in his book published in 1968, Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia (which outlined the intricate developments of a transcontinental faith). Travelling across the globe to places like India, China, and Malaysia, Daughtry has made observations and done research to analyze global Christianity and produce this work only as “a starting point” for further research more effectively and accurately. This book would be recommended for those (both scholars and students) who have just launched into a study of the field of Changing World Christianity and to gain basic encyclopedic knowledge in a very concise form of 290 pages.
Daughrity’s study resulted in fascinating surprises. The discovery that the world is not as diverse as one might think as opposed to popular belief was striking. His research shows that among seven billion current world population, one third (33%) are Christian, one-fifth (20%) are Muslim, one-eighth (13%) are Hindu, and one-seventeenth (6%) are Buddhist. Over half of humanity is either Christian or Islamic. Cultural geography demonstrates that these two religions prevail over 70% of the world’s inhabited territory. Other religions in the world including Judaism, Sikhism, Baha’I Faith are less than half of one percent of the world’s population. More importantly, this study overthrows some scholars’ comment that Islam is going to be the most predominant religion of the world. Daughrity even suggests that “it would be difficult to offer a truly global understanding of Islam because Islam has yet to significantly impact several cultural blocks in the world.” Islam is not so significant in Latin America and the Caribbean and it is tiny percent in North America and Oceania. Indeed six of the world’s eight cultural blocks, Christianity is the largest faith.

Daughrity, who teaches World Christianity and History of Christianity at Pepperdine University, California, explores the interplay of globalization and world Christianity: globalization is radically changing the nature of Christianity; vise versa, Christianity has deeply impacted globalization, resulting in what he suggests to call “Christobalization.” With his belief that “there is no greater social institution that demonstrates the complexities and effects of globalization in our world today,” this work balances between geographical and chronological globalization in delineating each cultural block Christianity: not only geographical global Christianity in each cultural block (region by region, and then country by country) but also chronological history of religion despite its limitations.

The book which deals with the history and analyzes the current situation of Christianity presents the future of Christianity for further study from “a global perspective” which has been envisioned in scholars like Justo L. Gonzalez (an encompassing future and a truly catholic future in his Changing Shape of Church History, 2002) and Alister E. McGrath (The Future of Christianity, 2002). The book suggests predictions such as the unavoidable academic study of Christianity in the social sciences and the humanities, since Daughrity believes that looking at Christianity, the comparatively recent phenomenon as a global institution (significant transformation) would present a very helpful lens for observing human culture, how it interacts with people from all eight of the world’s cultural blocks, how a religion “spans the globe, united in some things, yet marvelously variegated in others.”

One thing we need to consider in this book is the usage of the term, “southern Christianity” or “the South” or the “Global South.” To refer to Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Daughrity picked the “Global
South” as the preferred term today and other previous historic expressions such as the “third world,” the “two-thirds world,” or the “developing world” as rather antiquated and somewhat biased. However, it seems that Daughrity might ignore the term “Majority World” or “Majority World Christianity” which was unanimously voted to be used by participants in the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization, Bangkok, Thailand and is regarded as the best expression currently available and. There have been some challenges in utilizing the phrase, the “Global South” or “southern Christianity” to refer Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America due to a rapid expansion of Christianity in Asia, especially China.

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Derek Tidball
The Message of Holiness: Restoring God’s Masterpiece
2010. Downers Grove, IL., Inter-Varsity Press
Reviewed by Joseph R. Dongell

This well-written volume on holiness by Derek Tidball, former Principal of the London School of Theology and Baptist pastor, stands among several works addressing Biblical themes within the larger series entitled “The Bible Speaks Today.”

Tidball is certainly aware of the wide range of biblical interpretations and spiritual experiences encircling this matter. But in this present volume Tidball is less interested in debating the differences between respective theological systems than in proposing a positive vision of holiness constructed from a selection of key biblical passages. Lest we miss his point, the author explicitly declares that his primary objective is “not to inform our heads...or to warm our hearts...but to transform our lives.”

The author takes as his starting point the instruction repeated four times in Scripture: “I am the Lord you God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.” Accordingly, the core content of holiness must be found “in imitating the character of God... it means cultivating all that would reproduce his image in us. It means becoming increasingly God-centred, Christ-like, and Spirit empowered.”

There is much to admire in Tidball’s development of his theme. First, he sets the whole matter under six headings that move naturally through his agenda: The foundation of holiness; Visions of holiness; The transformation of holiness; The dimensions of holiness; Pathways to holiness; and The destination of holiness. Tidball’s decision to unpack the theme of holiness
through the examination of extended biblical passages (e.g. Isaiah 58:1-14; John 17:6-19; Proverbs 2:1-22) is refreshingly helpful. Such treatment of whole passages allows internal textual ligaments to be exposed, and prevents Tidball’s work from flattening out into a topical treatment of isolated proof-texts. Finally, Tidball’s analysis of the “dimensions” of holiness (inner; personal; corporate; and social) nicely extends the vision of holiness into ranges of human experience too often treated separately.

Though Tidball wishes to emphasize the common ground shared by Evangelicals about holiness, he graciously admits that his Baptist perspective will sooner or later be recognized by readers. We find four such indicators: First, Tidball contends that holiness is a “progressive experience rather than a sudden achievement” (p. 213), apparently believing that holiness must be experienced either progressively or suddenly. Is no combination of modes possible? Second, Tidball acknowledges that the Spirit may meet us in “out-of-the-ordinary” ways, but implies that such encounters will cause believers to imagine they incapable of being tempted or of sinning (p. 214). Does Tidball view experiences with the Spirit as somehow paranormal, and more troublesome than helpful? Third, though Tidball often enough exhorts readers to live a holy life now, he more often softens expectations for what is actually attainable in this life. He seems to imagine that only two pathways exist: absolute, sinless perfection (which all would deny), and an endless, slogging battle with sin, often characterized by failure (a pathway which Tidball apparently affirms). Is there no pathway of expectation marked out in Scripture that is characterized by victory without being confused with the pipe dream absolute, sinless perfection?

Fourth, we would have hoped that a book on holiness would have tapped into the rich and emphatic vein of Biblical teaching that love is the call that comprehends all other commandments (Rom. 12:9), and the unmistakable mark of those truly born anew. If (as Tidball asserts at the outset) holiness involves imitating the character of God, then should not the truth that God is love (1 John 4:7-8) highlight love as the central content of holiness? Ought not love become the organizing center of reflections about God’s character brought to life within us through the Spirit?

These reservations of ours should not obscure the overall quality and value of Tidball’s work. One would be hard-pressed to find a treatment of holiness with greater breadth in solid exposition, or depth in exploration, or urgency in pastoral concern.

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Accordance. Scholars Collection
DVD-ROM and CD-ROM, version 8
2008, OakTree Software, Inc.
Reviewed by Michael D. Matlock and Jason R. Jackson

Accordance 8 (Acc8) is a premier Bible study software program allowing seminarians, Church leaders who teach Scripture, and advanced Bible students an assortment of fine exegetical resources. In this review, we focus our attention more specifically upon the Scholars Collection of Accordance because it contains foundational original language texts and tools for Bible study. Acc8 is designed specifically for a Macintosh operating system (10.1 or higher). Windows and Linux users can obtain a free Mac OS emulator to run Acc8, but there is a slight loss of functionality in the areas of printing, copying Hebrew and Greek fonts, and viewing maps.

Acc8 is the kind of product Mac users expect: fast, reliable, and easy to use. This latest version features a universal binary format that runs natively on the new Intel-based Macs. Acc8 provides frequent free upgrades, exceptional online (podcasts and training videos) and toll-free technical support, and a vibrant discussion forum with frequent staff interaction. There are three levels in the Scholars Collection: Introductory, $149; Standard, $249; and Premier, $349. Scholar's Premier contains the Greek and Hebrew texts and lexicons in the Standard and Introductory levels, but also includes Rahlfs' revised Septuagint with the Kraft/Taylor/Wheeler morphology and two fine theological dictionaries: Jenni-Westermann for the OT and Spicq for the NT. Acc8 may be purchased with a group discount (for students, faculty, domestic and international ministers, et al.) such as the twenty-five percent discount currently offered to Asbury Theological Seminary students coordinated by a language teaching fellow.

While nothing new for Accordance, the Acc8 interface design continues to make studying and searching the Bible central to the overall program and is remarkably simple to operate. This is evident from the opening of the main window, the “workspace,” which is an integrated search and display window built on the “what you see is what you get” principle. For example, the workspace window is divided into three sections. At the extreme top, there is a tab section to organize and utilize each resource opened; this tab organization system resembles a physical file folder system. Directly under the tab section, the “search entry box” is located. Here, users can select which language and/or version of the Bible to search and choose if they want to search for words or verses. If users are interested in searching the category of words, they can perform basic search options such as simple word or phrase searches and also sophisticated grammatical searches. Bible students have the option to: 1) limit their search to a particular boundary
(e.g. clause, sentence, etc.) within a user-definable range (e.g. Matthew, Gospels, New Testament, etc.); 2) highlight textual variants; and 3) choose to view a range of verses surrounding the result verses. The results are instantly displayed under the search entry box in the third and largest portion of the workspace (the “search results” window), and the results can be viewed in a variety of ways.

Advanced searching options are astounding in Acc8, and users may harness the power by utilizing a set of memorizable commands and symbols, all of which may also be accessed through a convenient drop-down search menu or keyboard shortcuts. The commands are organized into connecting commands (e.g. AND, NOT, FOLLOWED BY, WITHIN # WORDS, etc.) and stand-alone commands, including two new powerful commands. The INFER command allows searching within a passage for quotations from and allusions to another passage, and the FUZZY command searches for inexact phrases. Acc8 also offers a “construct search” or graphical search option in English, Greek, and Hebrew, which enables users to find specific grammatical constructions more visually. There is also a “search all” function that allows users to search for occurrences of a word, verse, phrase, etc. throughout their library of resources. Finally, Acc8 provides an additional “details” option for every type of word search which will graph, chart, and analyze the search results and supply the user with a basic concordance.

A user may also expand the display portion by adding Bible study resources to the current workspace by opening additional panes containing other comparable texts or translations, reference tools (e.g. commentaries), or user-created notes. Within a particular workspace, panes may be arranged vertically or horizontally; dragged into a new position; customized with regard to colors, sizes, and highlights; and saved for future reference. In addition, other research tools such as lexicons, dictionaries, commentaries, maps, and timelines may be added to the workspace through the tab system or opened in a new workspace for concurrent viewing with other workspaces. Users are thus able to create their own unique uncluttered workspace.

In addition to the primary workspace window, Acc8 features three auxiliary windows: 1) an instant details box, 2) a searchable library providing easy access to modules, and 3) a resource palette. The instant detail box shows the basic parsing information, transliteration, key number, and primary gloss(es) for every word in a tagged text simply by scrolling the mouse over a word. Advanced information can be obtained by ‘triple-clicking’ on a word within any tool. The library window, which is fully searchable, allows user access to every tool within their library. Users may choose to open a new tool or look up a word or phrase selected within the current display in a new tool. The resource palette provides access to more detailed information of many resources in Acc8.
In the remaining balance of the review, beyond the impressive concordance features of the program, we will call attention to some of the more important exegetical features of the program for seminarians and other Bible students who understand original biblical languages. Users can click on the speech tool to hear the original languages read. In terms of syntactical analysis, users can construct their own grammatically color-coded sentence diagrams making grammatical analysis of texts more understandable; with one click on the “syntax” icon, Acc8 creates a syntax function chart for any passage which users can also conveniently fill out and print.


In the area of biblical Greek language lexicons, Thayer’s and Louw-Nida’s lexicons as well as Newman’s *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* come standard; Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG, 3rd ed.), Liddell and Scott’s intermediate lexicon (L. & S) and Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie’s (LEH) lexicon for the Septuagint are available for an additional cost. As for biblical Hebrew and Aramaic lexicons, program users can utilize the abridged Brown, Driver, and Briggs’ (BDB) lexicon; the unabridged BDB, *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (CDCH), and Koehler-Baumgartner’s (HALOT) lexicon are obtainable as add-on modules. With Scholars Premier, the user receives the following theological dictionaries: Jenni-Westermann’s *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Harris-Archer-Waltke’s *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, and Spicq’s *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*.

With regard to exegetical commentaries, students have several good options for purchase including the Word Biblical, Hermeneia, Pillar New Testament, New International Greek Testament, JPS Torah, and several other sets. The scholarly six-volume *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, the one volume Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, and the IVP black NT dictionaries can be purchased separately. When Bible study students need to compare parallel passages in the Bible, there are a host of options such as several Gospel modules, an Epistles version, Old Testament passages, and Old Testament texts found in the New Testament. For those Bible students interested in the study of Early Judaism, Early Christianity, and
Rabbinics, there are a plethora of excellent add-on original language texts (including many morphologically tagged) and translation resources. Lastly, we should mention that the (add-on) Graphics DVD includes excellent Bible maps, timelines and photos for personal and instructional uses.

With a portable computer, Bible students can conveniently tote what would be an otherwise massive hard copy library; in just a couple of months, the Acc8 app for the iPhone/iPad will be available making Bible study on the go even more convenient. We close our review by noting a couple of areas of improvement or items that buyers should realize. First, more Unicode support is needed for Acc8. The ability to import html documents with Unicode non-Latin languages (e.g. Chinese) into the Accordance user tools as well is not currently possible. Moreover, the able to export Unicode Hebrew fonts to word processors such as MS Word is problematic although fault lies with MS Word not Accordance. Second, even though Acc8 does have the option to display texts and background tools such as maps and timelines in a parallel pane if two workspaces are opened, the reviewers would welcome an option to have the parallel panes in the same tab so that the user does not have to open a new workspace and resize both workspaces to view them side by side. Finally, in terms of pricing, we would prefer a slightly more generous amount of modules in the various levels of the program. Nevertheless, the reviewers highly recommend this program for seminarians and others with higher level Bible study education.

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**Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Douglas M. Koskela, Jason E. Vickers, Eds.**
**Immersed in the Life of God: The Healing Resources of the Christian Faith**
Reviewed by Stephen Seamands

What do doctrinal resources have to do with healing and renewal in the church today? Very little in the minds of many Christians. Some would even set them in opposition to each other. Doctrine then is looked upon as an impediment to healing, a dose of bad medicine detrimental to the patient’s health. However, throughout his distinguished career spanning the last three decades, William J. Abraham, as a professor of philosophy, evangelism, or systematic theology, and as a leader in United Methodist and ecumenical church renewal, has passionately, perceptively and persistently insisted that
the exact opposite is true. When properly carried out, he has consistently maintained, immersion in the church’s rich and wide-ranging doctrinal resources is truly good medicine and will work wonders to bring deep healing for her ills.

During the first decade of his career, Abraham’s scholarly work largely reflected his philosophical interests. The second, by contrast, emerged primarily from his engagement in more practical ecclesial concerns related to evangelism and catechesis. The third has seen the integration and culmination of the first two in his development and articulation of “canonical theism,” the notion that the church’s canon not only includes scripture but also extends to creeds, councils, sacraments, sacred images, ministerial orders and saints.

This volume of academic essays, written by various friends, colleagues, and students of Abraham, celebrates and honors his rich and prodigious work over the decades. In festschrifts such as this, sometimes the contributors, reflecting various expertise and interests, cover a wide-range of subjects, but there is an overall lack of unified focus. Not so here. Regardless of what Christian tradition, belief or practice is under consideration—conversion, initiation, scripture, liturgy, ceremony, reconciliation, confession, cognition, ethics, theodicy—the concern is always, like Abraham’s, to explore how it contributes to the healing of human brokenness and provides good medicine for the church’s soul. No doubt John Wesley, given his generally acknowledged therapeutic approach to salvation, would be pleased.

In making the connection to healing as they do, the distinguished contributors expand and deepen our understanding of the nature and role of Christian healing. They also suggest that a healing dimension seems to permeate every aspect of our faith. As one who teaches a course on the theology and practice of healing, this volume will therefore be useful to me in helping students who often come with narrow conceptions of healing broaden their understanding.

I only wished another essay had been included—one dealing with what most people tend to think of first when they hear the word “healing,” i.e., the supernatural, miraculous kind of healing common in the ministry of Jesus. How does the church today recover a proper balanced understanding and practice related to this type of healing? Surely, that is a crucial question we must wrestle with today, especially in the light of our global context. An essay reflecting upon it would make this already useful volume even better.

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**Thomas Jay Oord**  
*The Nature of Love: A Theology*  
*St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010*  
Reviewed by Wm. Andrew Schwartz

*The Nature of Love* is groundbreaking work, in which Thomas Jay Oord does what few theologians have done – offer a coherent theology of love in dialogue with other important love theologies. The book compliments a second recent book by Oord, *Defining Love*, which defines love and engages the scientific and philosophical communities on the same subject.

Oord defines love as acting “intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being.” The middle chapters explore issues of love arising from biblical, historical, and philosophical concerns. The final chapter provides Oord’s own vision, a perspective he calls “Essential Kenosis.”

Early on, Oord examines biblical uses of love by using Anders Nygren’s work as his touchstone. This examination reveals two primary insights: 1) the Bible contains ambiguous and inconsistent uses of love language; 2) love is the overarching theme in the Bible.

Inconsistent uses of love in the Bible, says Oord, make defining love from a strictly biblical perspective impossible. “Love” possesses multiple uses and meanings. Oord captures the heart and dominant meaning of love in the Bible, however, which he identifies as intentionally responding to God and others to do good.

Oord sharply distinguishes his definition of love from St. Augustine’s. While Augustine requires a qualifying word like “proper” or “improper” to distinguish love as good or bad, Oord considers love always to pertain to doing good. According to the dominant use of “love” in Scripture, love is always proper; “improper love” is an oxymoron.

Oord says love takes diverse forms. A child’s love for a parent may take a different form than a spouse’s love for a spouse. Attempts to promote overall well-being can produce diverse results and consequences. But the lover’s intent to bring about good is of primary consideration.

Oord identifies both similarities and differences between his understanding of love and Clark Pinnock’s version of open theology. He is largely sympathetic to Pinnock’s views. As a relational theologian, Oord believes God is personal and genuinely experiences time. If love involves an empathetic/sympathetic response, God must experience time and relate to others moment by moment.

Oord departs from Pinnock’s version of open theism, however, on the issue of God’s voluntary self-limitation. Pinnock believes God voluntarily chooses to limit God’s own power to allow creaturely freedom. Oord
contends that a God voluntarily self-limited could, at any moment, choose to become un-self-limited. Divine voluntary limitation leaves God culpable for failing to prevent genuine evil and innocent suffering in the world. Such a God, Oord suggests, does not love consistently.

Oord titles the final chapter, “Essential Kenosis.” In doing so, he intentionally associates his theology of love with the kenosis passage in Philippians 2. Oord argues that Jesus is central to a Christian theology of love, and the kenosis passage is a significant means by which we understand the divine love Jesus displays.

Oord makes an important distinction between Essential Kenosis and the voluntarily self-limitation of theologies like Pinnock’s. For Oord, Essential Kenosis involves involuntary self-limitation. God is limited by God’s own nature—love; God cannot not love. Divine love always grants freedom and/or agency to creatures. This notion overcomes the problem of evil and other dilemmas for Christian theology, all the while not requiring that external forces, worlds, or laws outside God constrain divine power.

Some implications of Essential Kenosis are provided in the final segments of The Nature of Love. Oord presents what his new theory of divine love and power mean for understanding creation, eschatology, miracles, theodicy, and the resurrection of Jesus. If God’s essentially kenotic love is theology’s starting point, many traditional Christian doctrines must be reformulated in ways consistent with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Perhaps surprising to some readers, these reformulations often fit the biblical text better than traditional doctrines. The theology proclaiming God’s involuntary self-limitation and kenotic love offers new lenses by which Christians can revision theology and experience God in a fresh way.

James R. Payton

Getting the Reformation Wrong. Correcting some Misunderstandings
Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 240 pages, $23
Reviewed by Ben Witherington

History is unquestionably messy and complex, and this is all the more the case when one is considering some of the most turbulent and momentous epochs in history. One such period is the Reformation, and James R. Payton, professor of history at Redeemer University College in Ancaster Ontario, is determined to demonstrate to us how we have gotten various things wrong about the period called the Reformation.

Like any good historian, Payton insists that we study the Reformation in its proper context, which is to say in light of the previous era of the Middle
Ages and the Renaissance. This is why he spends the first two substantial chapters of the book giving us a précis about those two eras insofar as they have a bearing on how we should interpret the Reformation. For example, he stresses that there was already a considerable outcry for reformation of the church in both of these eras, and a few efforts at affecting such a change. Western Christendom knew things were not well and kept calling for "reformatio in capite et membris"—"reformation in head and members". The problem was, those who heard the cry and could do something about it, largely ignored it or practiced call forwarding. In his chapter about the Renaissance, one of the best in this helpful study, Payton rightly notes that the 'humanism' that arose in this period was not in fact the forebear of modern secular humanism. It was rather a reaction to scholasticism and an attempt to recover the wisdom of antiquity, through the study of what we today call the Greek and Latin classics, but also through the study of the master works of the patristic fathers as well. As Payton rightly points out, humanists like Petrarch or Erasmus were not attempting to shack themselves free from the shackles of Christianity. Rather, in the case of most of these humanists, they were sincere Christians who wrote treatises about both the 'classics' and about Christian antiquity as well. What they were reacting to was the stifling legacy of medieval scholasticism.

This book is very well written, and remarkably free of typos (but see p. 116 line 10), and beginning with the third chapter (pp. 72ff.) Payton really turns to the meat of his subject—the ways in which even we Protestants have gotten the Protestant Reformation wrong. At the epicenter of the early chapters of this part of the book is of course that former Augustinian monk, Martin Luther. Payton skillfully reminds us that Luther, despite all his fulminating against scholastic scholarship of various sorts was himself a product of a Catholic scholastic education, had an earned PhD, and unlike various of the other Reformers (e.g. Erasmus, Melanchthon, Bucer) was not a part of the humanist movement that wanted to get back behind the medieval ways of arguing and doing theology. Indeed, Luther used the very same sorts of invective, polemics, character attacks and the like that were all too common in scholastic debates. In this regard, he was very different from various of his fellow Reformers. Luther, for example, unlike Melanchthon was not trained in rhetoric, nor did he read the NT in a rhetorical manner, for the most part. It is thus all the more ironic that Luther saw Rom. 1.16-17 as the crucial thesis statement of Romans, which trumpeted the great truth of justification by grace through faith alone. Luther however was not a social reformer, and when the Peasant Revolt emerged, he was for its violent suppression. His theology of two kingdoms, with the realm of rulers and knights being part of kingdom No. 2 which could not be expected to run on Christian principles, set him at odds with
other Reformers, especially the more radical ones. He was a champion of church reform, not of state reform.

Chapter 4 succinctly chronicles how, while the Reformers all generally agreed on justification by grace through faith, and on the notion of Scripture as the ultimate norm, there were in fact many crucial subjects, on which they had heated disagreements, for example about the Lord’s Supper. The most crucial chapters in this book however are Chapters 5-6 which deal with the two banner notions of sola fide and the notion of sola scriptura (pp. 115-59). These chapters repay close scrutiny. One of the things Payton is exercised to demonstrate in Chapter 5 is that the Reformers did not think that ‘faith’ was ever alone. It was always accompanied by the work of the Spirit, and the enabling to do good works (though they were not viewed as salvific). The Reformers did not think that merely notional assent to the proposition that Jesus is Lord was all there was to being saved. Perhaps the oddest part of the book is pp. 127-30 where Payton is critical of camp meetings and revivals in North America, where he suggests the notion that a crisis experience and a moment of ‘decision for Christ’, even if followed by a dissolve life, had nonetheless saved the person for all eternity. It is hard to know what sort of revivals he is thinking of——certainly not the Methodist and holiness revivals which stressed not only conversion but holiness of heart and life. It may be that we have been getting some things wrong about the Reformation, but Payton is just as guilty of getting some things wrong about the Camp meetings and revivals of the 19th-20th centuries.

In Chapter 5, Payton rather easily demonstrates that the Reformers did not mean by sola Scriptura, that Scripture was the only norm for the church. To the contrary they also saw the ancient creeds, the ecumenical councils and the wisdom of the ancient church fathers as norms of a lesser sort as well. In this respect the Protestant Reformers stand quite apart from some modern Evangelicals who seem to think that their forebears insisted that the Bible alone is the authority and norm for the church. While the Reformers agreed that the canon should be the measuring rod for all else and the super norm of all other norms, they did not think that the Bible was the sole authority in and for the church. It is somewhat surprising that in an otherwise excellent chapter Payton takes a potshot at the NIV as if its translators had fallen prey to the ‘Scripture good, tradition bad’ caricature. Having personally known many of the NIV translators and their views, I can say without fear of contradiction, this was not the view of the translators like Doug Stuart and Gordon Fee who taught me.

Chapters 7-9 explain how the Anabaptists fit into this larger picture (they were not a unified group and are the forebears of the Mennonites and the Amish, but not so much the Baptists in America, who were more indebted to the English Baptists). What is striking is that in the big ‘baptism’
controversy, every single one of the major Reformers—Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, Bucer, Beza, Knox, Cranmer, Wesley all were convinced that infant baptism was a good Biblical practice. Adult baptism was not a doctrine of the major Protestant Reformers. Indeed, one could argue that while the Baptists owed something to the Radical Reformation, they were part of a different renewal movement than what has come to be called the Protestant Reformation. To his credit (in chapter 8) Payton covers the Counter-Reformation launched in large part by the Jesuits, against the Protestant Reformation, with the result that many of the successes of the Protestant movement in eastern and central and western Europe were reversed by the Jesuits. How did they do it? By founding great Christian schools that even the Protestants wanted to send their children to, children who mostly were converted back to Catholicism in these schools. Payton also covers in chapter 9 the rise of Protestant scholasticism after the time of the great Reformers, and here again he is on target in his critique of the successors of Luther and Calvin and the other Reformers who resorted to a scholastic method of systematizing and atomizing the Biblical text in ways that departed from the modus operandi of the Reformers and indeed from some of their theological conclusions as well.

In chapter 10, entitled ‘Did the Reformation Succeed?’ Payton demonstrates, reformer by reformer that each of the major reformers would not have been able to answer yes to that question. Indeed, many of them died prematurely or died disillusioned with the outcome, and that includes Luther. Had Payton extended his study, as he should have done, to the English Reformation, he would have come to the person of John Wesley—who witnessed, affirmed, and was indeed excited about, to his dying day, the incredible success of the Wesleyan revival, a revival that went on for over two generations and did not degenerate into some sort of theological scholasticism. Wesley was well satisfied with the Methodist revival’s ability to transform various aspects of both English and then American culture, and indeed would have seen Wilberforce’s remarkable success in ending the slave trade in England not long after his death as a further example of how the Gospel could affect both spiritual and social transformation. The difference between Wesley and the earlier Reformers is that Wesley did not set himself up in opposition to the Catholic Church, did not spend his time in continual theological bickering, did not see himself in apocalyptic terms, nor did he see himself as a prophet predicting on the near horizon the return of Christ. This is not to say Wesley was unconcerned about orthodoxy, but the orthodoxy he was concerned about was what the Bible clearly taught, or its clear implications. In fact, he would reject major tenants of the theological platforms of the previous Reformers (e.g. Luther’s ‘bondage of the human will’ idea and his two kingdoms notion, Calvin’s
predestination and eternal security, Zwingli’s under emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Anabaptists repudiation of infant baptism etc.). Payton’s study is excellent in what it covers in various ways, but it ignores the last full flowering of the Reformation in England and then America.

In Chapters 11-12 which conclude this study Payton is able to demonstrate that the Reformation period should not in itself be seen as a norm, or as some golden age of church history that we should seek to imitate in detail. He also shows that a balanced appreciation of the Reformation allows that it produced both triumphs (getting back to the heart of the Gospel of justification by faith) and tragedies, the latter being a movement that has now splintered into some 26,000 or more different denominations. It is a mark of a good study that it produces this sort of extended response. In view of the fact that this book is well under 300 pages, Payton would have done well to have finished the job—by dealing with the English Reformation that followed the Continental one. Had he done so, he might well have been able to modify some of his more negative conclusions.

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Kenneth Cain Kinghorn  
The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary  
2010. Published by Emeth Press  
Reviewed by Laurence W. Wood

Asbury Seminary has just released (October 2010) *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, written by Kenneth Cain Kinghorn. In 1910 Henry Clay Morrison became president of Asbury College, and that year the school began a special course of study for those planning to enter full-time ministry. At that time, the college constructed a two-story frame dormitory solely for those ministerial students. These divinity students soon formed a Theologues Club, which grew impressively until the Seminary was officially launched in 1923. The year of 1910 was a year of beginning, so in a sense this institutional history is a centennial volume.

The 498-page *Story of Asbury Theological Seminary* is a comprehensive chronicle of the Seminary, carefully documented with endnotes following each of its twenty chapters. Kinghorn has written a faithful, factual, and
fair account, devoid of his personal opinions in so far as that is possible. He said, “Although the chronicles of the Seminary are filled with numerous instances of God’s miraculous intervention, guidance, and blessing, this book is not intended to be hagiographic. The story of Asbury Theological Seminary is not without misunderstandings, missteps, and mistakes and this book does not avoid them.”

Kinghorn’s writing style makes this real history easy to read like a fascinating story, except there is nothing fictitious or unreal within these pages. Kinghorn carries the reader along with the inclusion of sagas of heroic drama, inspiring episodes, accounts of courage, examples of faith, and incidents of divine providence. An added feature of this book is its inclusion of more than 300 photographs. The appendices consist of a chronology, a list of faculty members from 1923 to 2010 (with their dates of service), an index of subjects, and an index of photographs.

The author closes the book with the following words: “Charles Wesley’s hymn And Can It Be That I Should Gain? is the Seminary’s official hymn. Considering the challenges that the founders faced and the obstacles the generations have overcome, Asbury Seminary’s very existence and the global work of theological education in which it is engaged are at once unlikely and astonishing. Indeed, one might ask, ‘And can it be?”’

Those interested in the history of Asbury Theological Seminary will find this book fascinating reading, although at times it becomes a bit tedious by giving too much attention to incidental details.

**Laurence W. Wood** is the Frank Paul Morris Professor of Systematic Theology/Wesley Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

**End Notes**

1 See www.fulleryouthinstitute.org/college-transition/ for more information on this and other related studies and resources.
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Asbury Theological Seminary and Asbury University will be holding a Wesleyan Studies Summer Seminar (WSSS) in June 2012! This seminar has been established to develop and support research, writing and publication in the broad field of Wesleyan studies. The seminar will promote the work of serious researchers by:

1. Making scholarly resources available to participants.
2. Fostering dialog between researchers and experts in the researcher's field.
3. Creating an environment for conversation, study and networking among scholars in the field of Wesleyan studies.

Designed for those who are working on articles, dissertations, and book length manuscripts in the field of Wesleyan studies with an eye to publication, the WSSS will take place June 4-28, 2012 on the Asbury Seminary Kentucky campus with sessions being held on Monday and Thursday afternoons.

Applications must be received by January 16, 2012.

Applicants will be notified of their acceptance by March 16, 2012.

This seminar is limited to ten persons. Application includes: application form, fifty dollar application fee, a full vitae, a description of the current research project as well as a projected plan for publication.

Application can be found online at asburyseminary.edu/wesleyan-studies