



AMERICAN
THEOLOGICAL
INQUIRY

A BIENNIAL JOURNAL

OF

Theology, Culture & History

*A p o s t o l o r u m , N i c æ n o ,
Q u i c u n q u e , C h a l c e d o n e n s e*

Volume 3, No. 2.

MINNEAPOLIS

2010.

AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

A Biannual Journal
of
Theology, Culture & History

ISBN: 978-1-60899-882-1

ISSN: 1942-2709 (Print)

ISSN: 1941-7624 (Online)

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American Theological Inquiry (ATI) was formed in 2007 by Gannon Murphy (PhD Theology, Univ. Wales, Lampeter; Presbyterian/Reformed) and Stephen Patrick (PhD Philosophy, Univ. Illinois; Eastern Orthodox) to open up space for Christian scholars who affirm the Ecumenical Creeds to contribute research throughout the broader Christian scholarly community in America and the West broadly.

PURPOSE

To provide an inter-tradition forum for scholars who affirm the historic Ecumenical Creeds of Christendom to constructively communicate contemporary theologies, developments, ideas, commentaries, and insights pertaining to theology, culture, and history toward reforming and elevating Western Christianity. ATI seeks a *critical* function as much or more so as a quasi-ecumenical one. The purpose is not to erase or weaken the distinctives of the various ecclesial traditions, but to widen the dialogue and increase inter-tradition understanding while mutually affirming Christ's power to transform culture and the importance of strengthening Western Christianity with special reference to Her historic, creedal roots.

URL: <http://www.atijournal.org>

Indexing. This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database®, a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA. email: [atla\[at\]atla.com](mailto:atla[at]atla.com), <http://www.atla.com>.

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Volume 3, No. 2., July 15, 2010.
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

July 15, 2010
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CONTENTS

PATRISTICAL READING

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| On the Priesthood, Book II, 1c-4 | 1 |
| <i>St. John Chrysostom</i> | |
-

ARTICLES

- | | |
|--|----|
| Senses, Intellect and Spirit | 5 |
| <i>Paul Helm</i> | |
| Philip Pullman on the Miracles of Jesus | 9 |
| <i>Gerald O'Collins, S.J.</i> | |
| The Beauty of Frontier: A Revelation of the Human Destination In God | 15 |
| <i>L. Clifton Edwards</i> | |
| Paul Barnett and the Logic of History: Some Problems With His Approach to the Historical Jesus | 21 |
| <i>David H. Wenkel</i> | |
| “God Is In Your Head”: Neurotheology and Religious Belief | 29 |
| <i>Ryan McIlhenny</i> | |
| Knowing That God Exists: Retrieving the Teaching of <i>Dei Filius</i> | 45 |
| <i>Glenn B. Siniscalchi</i> | |
| Affective Constitution and the Problem Of Suffering | 69 |
| <i>Bruce Ballard</i> | |
| Objective Morality and the Nature of Reality | 77 |
| <i>Erik J. Wielenberg</i> | |
| An Inclusive Olive-Tree (Romans 11:11-24) | 85 |
| <i>Lyle Story</i> | |
-

BOOK REVIEWS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Myk Habets. <i>The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology.</i> | 99 |
| <i>Cornelis Bennema</i> | |
| Richard Bauckham. <i>Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity.</i> | 100 |
| <i>Glenn Siniscalchi</i> | |

BOOK REVIEWS (con...)		
Andy Crouch. <i>Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling.</i>	Ryan McIlhenny	102
Richard A. Muller. <i>Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins.</i>	Myk Habets	105
Christopher Southgate. <i>The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil.</i>	Myk Habets	108
Kathryn Tanner. <i>Christ the Key.</i>	Nathan Crawford	113
Andrew Root. <i>The Promise of Despair: The Way of the Cross as the Way of the Church.</i>	Jake Bouma	116
Daniel Pekarske. <i>Abstracts of Karl Rahner's Unserialized Essays.</i>	Benjamin Myers	118
Bernd Wannenwetsch (ed.). <i>Who Am I? Bonhoeffer's Theology Through His Poetry.</i>	Benjamin Myers	119
Francis X. Clooney. <i>Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders.</i>	Samuel J. Youngs	121
THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF CHRISTIANITY		125

PATRISTICAL READING

ON THE PRIESTHOOD, BOOK II, 1:4

St. John Chrysostom

1c. [To Basil]: What advantage, pray, could be greater than to be seen doing those things which Christ with his own lips declared to be proofs of love to Himself? For addressing the leader of the apostles He said, “Peter, lovest thou me?” and when he confessed that he did, the Lord added, “if thou lovest me tend my sheep.” The Master asked the disciple if He was loved by him, not in order to get information (how should He who penetrates the hearts of all men?), but in order to teach us how great an interest He takes in the superintendence of these sheep. This being plain, it will likewise be manifest that a great and unspeakable reward will be reserved for him whose labors are concerned with these sheep, upon which Christ places such a high value. For when we see any one bestowing care upon members of our household, or upon our flocks, we count his zeal for them as a sign of love towards ourselves: yet all these things are to be bought for money:—with how great a gift then will He requite those who tend the flock which He purchased, not with money, nor anything of that kind, but by His own death, giving his own blood as the price of the herd. Wherefore when the disciple said, “Thou knowest Lord that I love Thee,” and invoked the beloved one Himself as a witness of his love, the Saviour did not stop there, but added that which was the token of love. For He did not at that time wish to show how much Peter loved Him, but how much He Himself loved His own Church, and he desired to teach Peter and all of us that we also should bestow much zeal upon the same. For why did God not spare His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up, although the only one He had? It was that He might reconcile to Himself those who were disposed towards Him as enemies, and make them His peculiar people. For what purpose did He shed His blood? It was that He might win these sheep which He entrusted to Peter and his successors. Naturally then did Christ say, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord shall make ruler over His household.” Again, the words are those of one who is in doubt, yet the speaker did not utter them in doubt, but just as He asked Peter whether he loved Him, not from any need to learn the affection of the disciple, but from a desire to show the exceeding depth of his own love: so now also when He says, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant?” he speaks not as being ignorant who is faithful and wise, but as desiring to set forth the rarity of such a character, and the greatness of this office. Observe at any rate how great the reward is—“He will appoint him,” he says, “ruler over all his goods.”

2. Will you, then, still contend that you were not rightly deceived, when you are about to superintend the things which belong to God, and are doing that which when Peter did the Lord said he should be able to surpass the rest of the apostles, for His words were, “Peter, lovest thou me more than these?” Yet He might have said to him, “If thou lovest me practise fasting, sleeping on the ground, and prolonged vigils, defend the wronged, be as a father to orphans, and supply the place of a husband to their mother.” But as a matter of fact, setting aside all these things, what does He say? “Tend my sheep.” For those things which I have already mentioned might easily be performed by many even of those who are under authority, women as well as men; but when one is required to preside over the Church, and to be entrusted with the care of so many souls, the whole female sex must retire before the magnitude of the task, and the majority of men also; and we must bring forward

those who to a large extent surpass all others, and soar as much above them in excellence of spirit as Saul overtopped the whole Hebrew nation in bodily stature: or rather far more. For in this case let me not take the height of shoulders as the standard of inquiry; but let the distinction between the pastor and his charge be as great as that between rational man and irrational creatures, not to say even greater, inasmuch as the risk is concerned with things of far greater importance. He indeed who has lost sheep, either through the ravages of wolves, or the attacks of robbers, or through murrain, or any other disaster befalling them, might perhaps obtain some indulgence from the owner of the flock; and even if the latter should demand satisfaction the penalty would be only a matter of money: but he who has human beings entrusted to him, the rational flock of Christ, incurs a penalty in the first place for the loss of the sheep, which goes beyond material things and touches his own life: and in the second place he has to carry on a far greater and more difficult contest. For he has not to contend with wolves, nor to dread robbers, nor to consider how he may avert pestilence from the flock. With whom then has he to fight? with whom has he to wrestle? Listen to the words of St. Paul. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Do you see the terrible multitude of enemies, and their fierce squadrons, not steel clad, but endued with a nature which is of itself an equivalent for a complete suit of armor. Would you see yet another host, stern and cruel, beleaguering this flock? This also you shall behold from the same post of observation. For he who has discoursed to us concerning the others, points out these enemies also to us, speaking in a certain place on this wise: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, fornication, adultery, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults," and many more besides; for he did not make a complete list, but left us to understand the rest from these. Moreover, in the case of the shepherd of irrational creatures, those who wish to destroy the flock, when they see the guardian take to flight, cease making war upon him, and are contented with the seizure of the cattle: but in this case, even should they capture the whole flock, they do not leave the shepherd unmolested, but attack him all the more, and wax bolder, ceasing not until they have either overthrown him, or have themselves been vanquished. Again, the afflictions of sheep are manifest, whether it be famine, or pestilence, or wounds, or whatsoever else it may be which distresses them, and this might help not a little towards the relief of those who are oppressed in these ways. And there is yet another fact greater than this which facilitates release from this kind of infirmity. And what is that? The shepherds with great authority compel the sheep to receive the remedy when they do not willingly submit to it. For it is easy to bind them when cautery or cutting is required, and to keep them inside the fold for a long time, whenever it is expedient, and to bring them one kind of food instead of another, and to cut them off from their supplies of water, and all other things which the shepherds may decide to be conducive to their health they perform with great ease.

3. But in the case of human infirmities, it is not easy in the first place for a man to discern them, for no man "knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him." How then can anyone apply the remedy for the disease of which he does not know the character, often indeed being unable to understand it even should he happen to sicken with it himself? And even when it becomes manifest, it causes him yet more trouble: for it is not possible to doctor all men with the same authority with which the shepherd treats his sheep. For in this case also it is necessary to bind and to restrain from food, and to use cautery or

the knife: but the reception of the treatment depends on the will of the patient, not of him who applies the remedy. For this also was perceived by that wonderful man (St. Paul) when he said to the Corinthians, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." For Christians above all men are not permitted forcibly to correct the failings of those who sin. Secular judges indeed, when they have captured malefactors under the law, show their authority to be great, and prevent them even against their will from following their own devices: but in our case the wrong-doer must be made better, not by force, but by persuasion. For neither has authority of this kind for the restraint of sinners been given us by law, nor, if it had been given, should we have any field for the exercise of our power, inasmuch as God rewards those who abstain from evil by their own choice, not of necessity. Consequently much skill is required that our patients may be induced to submit willingly to the treatment prescribed by the physicians, and not only this, but that they may be grateful also for the cure. For if any one when he is bound becomes restive (which it is in his power to be), he makes the mischief worse; and if he should pay no heed to the words which cut like steel, he inflicts another wound by means of this contempt, and the intention to heal only becomes the occasion of a worse disorder. For it is not possible for anyone to cure a man by compulsion against his will.

4. What then is one to do? For if you deal too gently with him who needs a severe application of the knife, and do not strike deep into one who requires such treatment, you remove one part of the sore but leave the other: and if on the other hand you make the requisite incision unsparingly, the patient, driven to desperation by his sufferings, will often fling everything away at once, both the remedy and the bandage, and throw himself down headlong, "breaking the yoke and bursting the band." I could tell of many who have run into extreme evils because the due penalty of their sins was exacted. For we ought not, in applying punishment, merely to proportion it to the scale of the offence, but rather to keep in view the disposition of the sinner, lest whilst wishing to mend what is torn, you make the rent worse, and in your zealous endeavors to restore what is fallen, you make the ruin greater. For weak and careless characters, addicted for the most part to the pleasures of the world, and having occasion to be proud on account of birth and position, may yet, if gently and gradually brought to repent of their errors, be delivered, partially at least, if not perfectly, from the evils by which they are possessed: but if any one were to inflict the discipline all at once, he would deprive them of this slight chance of amendment. For when once the soul has been forced to put off shame it lapses into a callous condition, and neither yields to kindly words nor bends to threats, nor is susceptible of gratitude, but becomes far worse than that city which the prophet reproached, saying, "thou hadst the face of a harlot, refusing to be ashamed before all men." Therefore the pastor has need of much discretion, and of a myriad eyes to observe on every side the habit of the soul. For as many are uplifted to pride, and then sink into despair of their salvation, from inability to endure severe remedies, so are there some, who from paying no penalty equivalent to their sins, fall into negligence, and become far worse, and are impelled to greater sins. It behooves the priest therefore to leave none of these things unexamined, but, after a thorough inquiry into all of them, to apply such remedies as he has appositely to each case, lest his zeal prove to be in vain. And not in this matter only, but also in the work of knitting together the severed members of the Church, one can see that he has much to do. For the pastor of sheep has his flock following him, wherever he may lead them: and if any should stray out of the straight path, and, deserting the good pasture, feed in unproductive or rugged places, a loud shout

suffices to collect them and bring back to the fold those who have been parted from it: but if a human being wanders away from the right faith, great exertion, perseverance and patience are required; for he cannot be dragged back by force, nor constrained by fear, but must be led back by persuasion to the truth from which he originally swerved. The pastor therefore ought to be of a noble spirit, so as not to despond, or to despair of the salvation of wanderers from the fold, but continually to reason with himself and say, "Peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil." Therefore the Lord, when addressing His disciples, said, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" For he indeed who disciplines himself compasses only his own advantage, but the benefit of the pastoral function extends to the whole people. And one who dispenses money to the needy, or otherwise succors the oppressed, benefits his neighbors to some extent, but so much less than the priest in proportion as the body is inferior to the soul. Rightly therefore did the Lord say that zeal for the flock was a token of love for Himself.

SENSES, INTELLECT AND SPIRIT

Paul Helm¹

In coming to understand our faith, our minds and our senses are to be used in a quite natural way. Because of this, the Christian message is not at all discontinuous from ‘the natural’, even though our natural powers are fallen. We take this for granted, I suspect, and only notice the fact when it is drawn to our attention. Our senses are fallen but not obliterated. Christianity is not Gnosticism, which requires its disciples to be initiated into a special ‘language of heaven’, one that is discontinuous from the natural languages we all speak. At Pentecost those present heard in their own languages the account of the mighty works of God. Nor does Christianity require special, non-natural or supernatural access to the basic factual claims of the faith, even though, because of our fallenness, the enlightening and reviving work of the Spirit is needed to enable us to understand the significance of what we learn, and to apply it to our lives.

The Apostles themselves “saw with [their] eyes” and “looked upon and touched with [their] hands, concerning the word of life, the life which was made manifest and [which] we have seen and heard.” (1 John 1:1-2). They saw, they heard, and they touched the Incarnate one of God, and these facts provided John with an argument against Gnosticism. That which their senses told them about “we proclaim also to you” (1 John 1:3). What John and the others had seen and heard formed the basis of his declaration of the gospel and of the fellowship which all believers have with the Father and his Son. The exercise of senses and intellect provided the Apostle Peter with some reason, a good reason, for thinking that he and the other Apostles have not followed “cleverly devised myths.” Why? Because “we were eye witnesses of his majesty, for when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him in the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice, for we were with him on the holy mountain.” (2 Peter. 1.16) When Paul met with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus he saw a light from heaven and heard a voice and was then deprived of his sight. The men who were with him also heard the voice (Acts 9, Cf. John 12.29). Similarly, the Saviour said to doubting Thomas: “Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve. But believe” (John 20:27). Seeing, hearing, touching—these were all involved in learning of Christ, confirming the character of God’s revelation, and it seems that the Apostles went out of their way to stress their importance.

What did their senses tell them? First, that their faith was not a case of private or collective hallucination or delusion. They were not following myths or magical events in which the senses are tricked and deceived, but that the Saviour, being God made flesh, himself had that sort of objectivity which our senses convey to us, and the absence of which—“cleverly devised myths”—the senses are also able to detect. We are tricked and puzzled by the cleverness of a magician for some time, but not for all the time. We do not actually believe that the woman has been sawn in half, or that the rabbits were all in the hat.

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The Saviour did not seem to be magically “present” on the Mount of Transfiguration, but he was present, physically palpably present, for the one transfigured was a physical person, and the glory that surrounded him was visible to the human eye. Even the voice from heaven was not a purely interior voice of the sort we refer to when we talk of the voice of conscience, say, but “we ourselves heard this very voice,” not physically produced by means of human lungs and larynx, but nevertheless a voice objectively identifiable through hearing.

This account of identification by means of the senses is not the whole story, of course, but it is part of the story, and an essential part. Grace builds upon nature. Peter himself goes on to refer to a “more sure” word of prophecy. (2 Pet. 1:19). He recognizes degrees of certainty. Their experience on the holy mountain provided some degree of certainty, God’s word, the product of the inspiring activity of the Holy Spirit, afforded a surer ground of belief and hope than what they witnessed, when this is considered merely as a series of events. Peter speaks of these data as if they were on a sliding scale, with the matters eye-witnessed being less sure than the word of prophecy revealed to them, which is, by comparison, like a “a lamp shining in a dark place.”

Grace builds upon nature. Not in the sense that grace simply grows out of nature, for that would give us a wholly naturalistic religion; but in the sense that it presupposes nature and is not fundamentally at odds with it, overturning it and negating it. In particular, it presupposes the sort of objectivity that nature routinely conveys to us. The word of prophecy is “more sure” when measured against the sureness and certainty of our sensory experience. It has an objectivity that goes beyond the objectivity conveyed by the reports of two or three witnesses as to what they saw and heard.

Presupposing

Here I pause to say a word or two about “presuppositionalism”. There are those who say that the purely biblical way to convey the faith to others is to presuppose—as a kind of axiom—Scripture and all that it tells us. But it seems to me that the biblical data that we have briefly considered (there are other data too, I think) point in the other direction. What they indicate is that we do not, and cannot presuppose Scripture, but that we first trust our senses, and then trust Scripture, as a more sure word of prophecy. We cannot, without vicious circularity, derive our epistemology from presupposing Scripture.

For a moment, consider that phrase “presupposing Scripture”. What is Scripture? At its most basic, it is a library of sixty-six books, in various languages, mostly Hebrew and Greek. We have it in English translation, which for the most part serves us very nicely. It is a material object, a book, which we need to distinguish from other books. This one book, the Bible, has individual books, with chapters and verses, whose words we need to read and understand (if the words are in our own language) or to translate (if they are in their original languages). In order to approach the text of Scripture we need to use our senses, what we can see and touch, and to rely on these senses, as we generally rely on them in distinguishing, say, an apple from an avocado, or a peach from a pear. What entitles us to trust our senses at this point? However we answer that question, we cannot be warranted in trusting our senses by presupposing Scripture (as the presuppositionalists aver) because we need our senses to identify and understand the words, clauses, and sentences of Scripture to begin with. To rely on Scripture to warrant our use of our senses, while at the same time using our senses to understand what the Bible warrants, is viciously circular.

The disciples at the Transfiguration, and Thomas in the Upper Room, did not rely upon Jesus to verify the reliability of their senses, but they trusted their senses implicitly in the way that they trusted them when they counted the loaves and the fishes. It was by such a use of their senses and judgment that they witnessed the transfigured Christ, and the resurrected Christ.

There is no other recourse at this point than to recognise the working of learning processes that function prior to meeting Christ (in the case of the disciples) or to reading Scripture (in our case). There must therefore be an epistemology, however primitive, that is distinct from and prior to Scripture, though consistent with what it teaches us about our condition as a fallen race. It is at this point that (for some) the panic seems to set in. But there is no need to panic, for any epistemology which, consistent with what Scripture teaches generally about fallen human nature, warrants our use of our senses and intellect, and any account of which is not at odds with reliance upon the sense and intellect will do.

It is impossible to set up a “Scriptural epistemology” without vicious circularity, the procedure of appealing to Scripture to justify the use of our senses, etc. using our senses in making that appeal. The best we can hope for—and all we need reason to hope for—is an epistemology which is not at odds with Scripture. So, for example, an epistemology which delivered to us a general scepticism with regard to the use of our senses would be at odds with Scripture, and there are of course several such epistemologies which have been appealed to in the history of Christian theology that rule out scepticism. The “Reformed epistemology” of Plantinga and Wolterstorff is the latest of these, and currently prominent, but it is not the only candidate.

The Grace That Builds On Nature

So grace builds on nature, it does not supplant it. We have already identified one way in which this happens. First, the gospel is not a trick of magic, which though the senses are involved, deceives them, but events to which the senses of those who saw and heard bore reliable witness. There are degrees of certainty. There is a more sure word of prophecy than even the Transfiguration and its divinely-prophetic commentary. The testimony of eyes and ears may sometimes deceive us, as in tricks of magic, but it was not deceived in the case of the Transfiguration. Even here, the witness of eyes and ears is not to be gainsaid.

So for the Apostles at least, their teaching was not words about words about words, but words which identified and described realities which they learned of with their eyes and ears and fingers. To be sure, there is more to the revelation of God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ than this, but there is not less. Grace builds upon nature, it does not ignore it, or destroy it. This places the Gospel in the realm of objective realities, not a purely subjective teaching or a scripturalism which has a kind of Platonic, non-sensory character.



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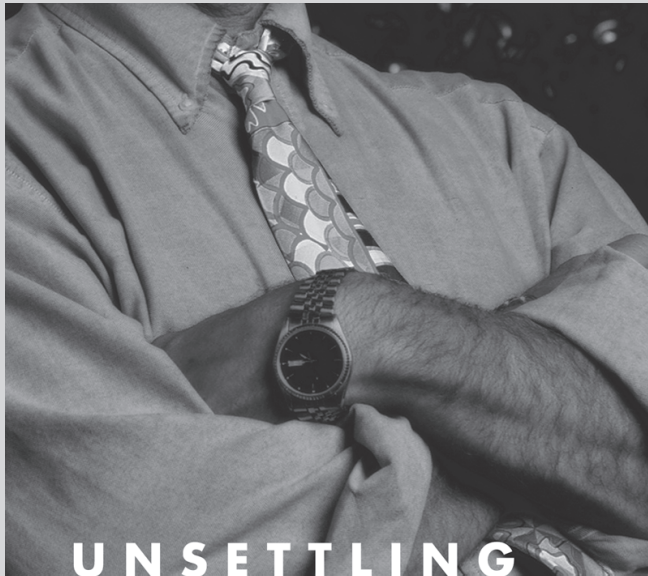
UNSETTLING ARGUMENTS

A Festschrift on the Occasion of
Stanley Hauerwas's 70th Birthday

*Edited by Charles R. Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson,
and Charles M. Collier*

ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-253-9

374pp / \$41 / Paper



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*A Festschrift on the Occasion
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PHILIP PULLMAN ON THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Gerald O'Collins, S.J.¹

Every year or so a book on Jesus is published that makes a big splash but then fails to leave much of a ripple. Will this be the fate of Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*?² When it appeared just before Easter 2010, the book instantly became the talk of the town. A writer of fantasy fiction whose *His Dark Materials* books have sold millions of copies in many languages, Pullman has now turned to historical fiction and the life of Jesus.

Those novelists who write fictional works about Jesus and other persons who belonged to human history and left well documented lives write under the constraints of well documented evidence. To be sure, they can and should invent dialogue and, where advisable, create and add further characters to the cast of their novels, as well as attending to psychological interaction, scenery and weather. But readers expect authors of historical fiction to remain faithful to the central, known facts.

Although Pullman's fantasy fiction has revealed his flair for brilliant scenarios, he deliberately refrains from adding to his Jesus book any descriptions, landscape and much psychological detail. He tells the story of Jesus in a flat, laconic fashion.

His book invites much comment and criticism, not least for creating a twin brother to Jesus, known as "Christ." Here I want to limit myself to Pullman's treatment of the miracles of Jesus. In a full length study, *Philip Pullman's Jesus* (to be published later in 2010 by Darton, Longman and Todd), I examine the book in full detail.

Pullman recognized that he could not ignore what the Gospels report about the miraculous activity of Jesus. It is no viable option to pass over or remove that activity; it is too intertwined with the flow of the narrative in the four Gospels.

But Pullman cannot imagine the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving God who, for good reasons, suspends or overrides the ordinary laws of nature by curing instantly the diseased and disabled or by multiplying food and drink for those who need it. Pullman is not able (or willing?) to entertain the possibility of such genuine miracles that signal the divine kingdom being powerfully present in the person and work of Jesus.

Magic?

Every now and then in *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, Pullman invokes "magic" to account for the miraculous signs that characterized the ministry of Jesus. Thus he toys with the idea that magic might have been responsible for the alleged miracle at the marriage feast of Cana.³ But how could a magician turn water into wine, which the guests then proceeded to drink? Or are we expected to imagine that all those guests were in fact

¹ Gerald O'Collins, S.J. is writer in residence at Jesuit Theological College, Parkville, Australia. He has authored or coauthored 55 published books, the most recent being *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

² Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010).

³ Ibid, 61

drinking only water but they were bluffed into thinking that they were drinking excellent wine?

In general, reaching for the “explanation” of magic slips over the fact that we do not find in the Gospels any stories of incantations, spells, conjuring tricks, and the usual stock in trade of magicians. It is with a simple word of command that Jesus works his miracles: “take up your pallet and walk”; “I do choose; be made clean”; “young man, I say to you, arise.” Occasionally he uses “sacramental” gestures, laying his hands on those to be cured, or putting his fingers into the ears of a deaf-mute and touching his tongue with spittle (Mark 7:31-37; see 8:22-26). But he refuses to have anything to do with the showy stunts of magicians and wonder-workers (Matthew 12:38).

“Rational” Explanations

Pullman normally rewrites the miracle stories by retrieving from nineteenth-century rationalists purely natural explanations. Delusion on the part of the observers, faith healing on the part of the “cured” or some other natural cause accounts for whatever happened. Thus Pullman entertains the suggestion that at the marriage feast of Cana the chief steward had hidden some wine which he hoped to sell later. But Jesus “shamed him into honesty” and he produced more wine.⁴ Here Pullman selects from the text of John 2:1-12 only what suits his rationalist purposes and shuts his eyes to what makes his “explanation” quite implausible. John writes of six stone jars, containing twenty to thirty gallons each. Someone might have concealed behind a curtain a small skin full of wine. But how could the steward have successfully hidden six large jars containing 120 to 180 gallons of wine? As often happens when confronted with forced, rationalist explanations of episodes in the Gospels, it seems easier to accept what the text says and, in this case, imagine that Jesus did change the water into wine.

A rationalist explanation also robs the episode at Cana of its rich, symbolic meaning. By providing miraculously a generous amount of excellent wine, Jesus offers a sign of the fullness of life in the new age of God that is dawning. The six stone jars when filled with water served for “the Jewish rites of purification” (John 2:6). Jesus replaces the old rites of purification with the exuberant wine of God’s final kingdom.

Five Further Cases

Let us see five further cases where Pullman explains away the miraculous deeds of Jesus. (1) We begin with the cure of Peter’s mother-in-law when she was sick with a fever (Mark 1:30-31). “Jesus went in to speak with her,” we read in *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, “and presently she felt well again and go up to serve them all food.”⁵ Here Pullman massages the text to imply a faith healing that took a little time (‘presently’). Mark writes rather of an instantaneous cure in which Jesus did not utter a word: “he took her by the hand and helped her up.”

In an interview with Laura Barton (*The Guardian*, 19 April 2010), Pullman admitted that he could not read the Gospels in Greek: “I have no Greek and it would take too long to have learned Greek for this purpose.” If he had known Greek, he might have noticed what

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 52.

was implied by the verb used of Peter's mother-in-law when she was cured: "she began to serve (*diakonein*) them." That verb will be used to describe the holy and courageous women who faithfully attended Jesus' death on the cross: "they had followed him and *served* him when he was in Galilee" (Mark 15:41). When she was cured of fever, Peter's mother-in-law joined the ranks of those women who ministered to Jesus right through to his terrible death by crucifixion.

(2) Second, when Jesus exorcised a man and drove away a devil (Mark 1:23-28), Pullman has a natural explanation both for the man's state and for his deliverance. The man "was a harmless obsessive, one of those poor creatures who shout and scream for reasons even they don't understand, and hear voices and talk to people who aren't there." Some calm words from Jesus let him "wake up" and find himself again in the company of other people.⁶

Before he is cured, the possessed man, according to Mark, shouted out in the synagogue: "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? *I know who you are: the Holy One of God*" (italics mine). Pullman paraphrases the words and ends with the man asking: "You call yourself the Holy One of God—is that who you are? Is it?" In Mark's text the demon speaks in the name of other evil spirits ("us" twice) and states what he knows: "you are the Holy One of God." Unlike the human beings around Jesus, the invisible forces of evil already recognize clearly the true identity of Jesus and know what is at stake: a final battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Pullman's paraphrase tames all this by inserting something not found in Mark's text ("you call yourself the Holy One of God") and by changing the evil spirit's statement into a question ("Is that you are? Is it?").

(3) Third, Pullman turns a leper into someone whose "skin was covered in boils and running sores." He approached Jesus for help, because he wanted to avoid paying the cost of the lengthy and expensive ritual needed for his cleansing (Mark 1:40-45). When Jesus embraced him and kissed his face, the man felt better at once.⁷ Pullman drops Jesus' words of command ("Be cured") and reduces the miracle to a case of autosuggestion, prompted by a loving embrace.

(4) The fourth case concerns the healing of a paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12), which is explained as another example of self-suggestion. The man felt so "strengthened and inspired by the atmosphere Jesus had created that he found himself able to move."⁸ Pullman overlooks the way the story in Mark sets what is visible over against what is invisible: the visible power exercised by Jesus in curing the disabled man as evidence of his invisible power to forgive sins ("my son, your sins are forgiven").

Pullman's way of handling the healing of this disabled man also turns up in more general terms. He assures us that "some people who were sick felt themselves uplifted by his [Jesus'] presence and declared themselves cured."⁹

(5) Fifthly, like many others before him, Pullman wants to account for the five thousand being fed through the multiplication of five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:34-44) as Jesus'

⁶ Ibid, 52-53.

⁷ Ibid, 62-63.

⁸ Ibid, 66.

⁹ Ibid, 89.

good example prompting others to share the food they had brought. Someone had brought some raisins, another some barley cakes, another some fruit, another some dried fish, and so forth. There was plenty to go around when people generously shared what they had brought.¹⁰ But such a “natural” explanation does violence to the text of the Gospel. Mark makes it clear that the disciples distributed to the crowd the bread and fish blessed by Jesus—not raisins, apples, barley cakes, dried fish and other food supplied by others. At the end the disciples collected twelve basketfuls of scraps of bread and pieces of fish that were left over from the bread and fish blessed by Jesus. They did not collect basketfuls of raisins, apples, barley cakes, dried fish and further food left over from what others had provided.

Three Unsatisfactory Features

The examples given above illustrate three unsatisfactory features in the way Pullman retells the miracle stories in the Gospels. First, he feels free to change what he reads (for instance, in the case of Peter’s mother-in-law). Second, his “natural” explanations remain quite implausible (for instance, in the case of the excellent wine being miraculously provided at the marriage feast). Third, his reductive rationalism robs the miracle stories of their deep and enduring significance. Such cures as those of the leper and the paralyzed man prompted St Augustine of Hippo to think of Jesus as “the humble doctor” come to heal us both now and in the hereafter. The healing activity exercised by Jesus in his historical ministry prefigured what he continues to do, for example, through all the sacraments.

In particular, Pullman never notices any richer significance in the multiplication of the loaves and fish, a significance taken up by all four evangelists. Jesus’ words of blessing and his gestures in breaking the bread and fish and giving out the food prefigure what he will do when instituting the Eucharist. There is a failure in imagination that cannot grasp how miraculously supplying ordinary food might prove a sign of the Bread of Life that, here and hereafter, feeds people spiritually.

Natural Explanations

All in all, Pullman doggedly seeks natural explanations that do away with the exercise of truly miraculous or divine powers. Thus he accounts for Jesus’ escape from death at the hands of the enraged people of Nazareth by bringing some of Jesus’ friends and followers into the story: “They fought the townspeople—Jesus managed to get away unharmed.”¹¹ Up to that point Pullman tells, more or less faithfully, what happened when Jesus returned to preach in the Nazareth synagogue on a Sabbath day (Luke 4:16-30). But then he slips in a group of “friends and followers” who, like a friendly posse in a Western film, turn up in the nick of time and allow the hero to escape.

In Luke’s story, no group of friends and followers intervene, and the episode ends with a sense of Jesus’ own mysterious power. The people of Nazareth hustle Jesus to “the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”

Pullman cannot entertain the idea of Jesus being more than merely human. That failure robs his Jesus not only of his genuinely miraculous activity but also of his unconditional

¹⁰ Ibid, 89, 90.

¹¹ Ibid, 55-56.

authority and reduces him to being a tragic example of a noble and passionate preacher finally crushed by the powers of this world.

THE BEAUTY OF FRONTIER: A REVELATION OF THE HUMAN DESTINATION IN GOD

L. Clifton Edwards¹

The Dutch theologian and phenomenologist, Gerardus van der Leeuw, writes that “true art is eschatological art...the building which is lost in the stretches of the infinite landscape.”² And similarly, P.B. Shelley in “Ode to the West Wind” expresses the desire that not just a building but he himself might become lost in the landscape or become one with the beauty of nature.³ Through such artistic sentiments, humankind expresses a desire to be enveloped in some way by natural beauty, and the pantheistic connotations can be translated easily into Christian terms. We desire to become one with nature’s beauty, because nature in its difference from human order is a desirable difference that speaks of God’s otherness.⁴ We also desire to “put on” natural beauty, like princely robes and finery, because we sense in natural forms—like the curve of an antler or the silkiness of beaver fur—a simple dignity and grandeur that is proper to our glorified human nature. This desire to “put on” natural beauty points toward beauty’s function as an image of God’s nature and reflects our deeper desire for integration with God. It reflects our being made for God and speaks of our proper place within the glory that he bestows in ways proper to our created nature, such as through beauty. This integration with God could take on many forms, but one form concerns our relationship to natural beauty within a new Creation. Thus, the integration of nature and humankind pushes us toward teleological and eschatological conclusions.

Our relationship with natural beauty, I believe, also involves beauty’s outwardly expansive eschatological impulse—that is, the beauty of humanity lost in an infinite landscape—a beauty that speaks to the lure of frontier. The American frontier-paradise eschatology is exemplified especially in Mormonism, with its retreat to the Utah desert in order to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Yet the frontier ideal is a pervasive enough ideology that John F. Kennedy needed only to refer to a “new frontier” to capture the hearts of Americans for space exploration. Frontier and wilderness evoke the biblical imagery of wandering and a paradoxical route to paradise.⁵ America as wilderness was once seen as “fresh from the hands of the Creator,” a holy place, “the unedited manuscript of God.”⁶ This same mythological pull today draws Americans to Alaska—the “Last Frontier.” Yet based upon a theology of Creation that includes humankind, and an understanding of beauty that requires human participation, I would submit that the ideal natural beauty is not wilderness alone but human beings and wilderness in eschatological harmony with an

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² Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art* (trans. David E. Green; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 333.

³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind,” in *The Golden Treasury of the best songs and lyrical poems in the English Language* (rev. ed.; London: Macmillan, 1891-97), 325-26.

⁴ Cf. Job 38-39, where God contrasts natural order with human knowledge and ability.

⁵ Robley Edward Whitson, “Wilderness and Paradise: Symbols of American Religious Experience,” *Religion and Intellectual Life* 5 (1987): 7-15.

⁶ J. Douglas Porteous, *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning* (London: Routledge, 1996), 78.

endlessly expansive frontier—in other words a fulfilment of both the hominess and wildness of Eden. This theological ideal could explain why many find European landscapes, such as Alpine villages, more beautiful than wilderness landscapes: the harmony of nature and humanity contributes to our sense of beauty even if wilderness holds as much symbolic appeal as “the unedited manuscript.” Yet this openness of wilderness is equally important and conjoins with the ideal of harmony between nature and humanity in the frontier ideal. Of course the frontier ideal has never succeeded entirely in practice; it has been marked by war and environmental disaster. But the persistence of the ideal despite impracticability speaks all the more to its eschatological implications.

Related to this frontier ideal, the influential nineteenth century art critic, John Ruskin, comments on our experience of the sky as a frontier or unbounded distance, an infinity typifying God’s incomprehensible nature: the light evening or morning sky over a dark horizon is ‘of all visible things the least material, the least finite, the farthest withdrawn from the earth prison-house, the most typical of the nature of God, the most suggestive of the glory of His dwelling place.’⁷ In line with Ruskin’s observation, the “height” of the sky symbolizes transcendence cross-culturally,⁸ and some cultures pray looking upward, with eyes and hands open toward the heavens. Ruskin says that the night sky by contrast does not give the same feeling of distance and transcendence, because it resembles an enclosed, star-studded dome.⁹ But in light of modern astronomy, the night sky also reminds us of the potentially infinite expansion of space.

I apply Ruskin’s typology not only to God’s unbounded nature but to humankind’s unbounded destination in God. We experience in the sky’s beauty a desire to take flight over the landscape, to occupy the space and distance presented to us there as an aspect of our destiny. In landscapes there is the emotion caused by wide open spaces, especially a sunlit distance behind a darker horizon, suggesting hope in distance and “joyfulness in the apparent, though unreachable, nearness and promise.”¹⁰ As Ralph Waldo Emerson notes, “The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.”¹¹ In paintings, this beckoning from the horizon is achieved by objects such as sun rays, mountains, cloud formations—anything partially revealed that can represent the cosmic “Beyond.”¹² Beauty in the landscape as it suggests this destination beyond is thus a “language of futurity.”¹³ Yet I would maintain that this onward gesturing of beauty can be obscured if we accept the tendency to reconcile beauty somehow with ugliness, temporal

⁷ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (vols. 3-7 of *The Works of John Ruskin*, library ed.; ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn; London: George Allen, 1905), 2:81.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (trans. Willard R. Trask; New York: Harvest, 1959), 117-18.

⁹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 2:81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:79, 87.

¹¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Riverside ed.; London: Routledge, 1883), 22.

¹² David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 116.

¹³ Phillip Blond, “Theology before Philosophy,” introduction to *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (ed. Phillip Blond; London: Routledge, 1998), 56.

death and decay.¹⁴ The futurity of beauty accords better with the idea that art (human or divine), in contrast with the temporal, should proclaim the eternal horizon of our endless human questing and desire.¹⁵ Indeed, humankind is ever open toward an elusive future goal.¹⁶

Beauty is an integral part of this human goal and openness, constituting an aspect of our destiny.¹⁷ It is for this reason that beauty in the frontier is a “manifest destiny” of the spirit, which also accounts for C.S. Lewis’s Narnian eschatology of “farther up and farther in.”¹⁸ We desire to push back the frontier to reveal further beauty in nature and our rightful place within it. The landscape painter, Claude Lorraine, evokes this idea well in his uniting of past glories with future expectation and in his ability to draw the viewer into the painting as a wayfarer who beholds beautiful prospects with beckoning horizons.¹⁹ This pursuit of beauty as a wayfarer also parallels the pursuit of knowledge: every page turned is a step taken; every concept grasped is a prospect viewed; every breakthrough in understanding is a new country explored. The most satisfying investigations are those that push the boundaries of our understanding, and yet any conclusions reached thereby are the hardest to justify. But our joy in understanding the world is tied to its ever greater mystery, and researchers in psychological aesthetics have found that the property of “mystery” in landscape—that is, the potential for new perspective to be gained through topographical exploration—is correlated with judgments of beautiful landscape.²⁰ Beauty resides not only in the landscape but arises as we move through the landscape in its unfolding mystery. Thus beauty as a function of exploration offers what Paul Ricoeur calls “a meaning in motion.” In “the phenomenology of the spirit,” he says, “each figure finds its meaning, not in what precedes, but in what follows. Consciousness is thus drawn outside of itself, in front of itself,” like the wayfarer.²¹ And as we move through the landscape our desire for new beauty is constantly renewed like our daily thirst. That is, we experience beauty as an unending source of delight and fascination. Yet our beauty-judgments also correlate with the familiarity of landscapes, such that we partake continually of both the excitement of the discovered and the comfort of the familiar.²² This trade-off reflects Eden’s bountiful provision as well as the Creation mandate

¹⁴ Cf. Augustine: “To things falling away, and succeeding, a certain temporal beauty in its kind belongs, so that neither those things that die, or cease to be what they were, degrade or disturb the fashion and appearance and order of the universal creation; as a speech well composed is assuredly beautiful, although its syllables and all sounds rush past as it were in being born and in dying.” *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans* 8 (NPNF¹ 4:353).

¹⁵ Cf. Karl Rahner, “Theology and the Arts,” *Thought* 57 (1982): 17-29.

¹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 147.

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 193.

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (London: The Bodley Head, 1984), 176.

¹⁹ See his *Embarkation of St. Ursula*.

²⁰ Porteous, 121.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 21-22. Ricoeur adds that “the symbolic activity of thought and of language appears in the prolonging of a part of my power to dream—this is the oneiric side of the symbol—but it appears also outside of me, bound to the countenance of my universe, to the appearances of the universe such as water, fire, earth, wind, and sky.” “The Language of Faith,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1973): 213-24.

²² Cf. Porteous, 126.

to subdue the earth and rule over it (Gen 1:28). Both the Edenic provision and the creational mandate require ultimately a harmony with, and repose in, an unbounded Creation.

Our harmony and repose in this Creation give rise to beauty and knowledge (as epistemology might also suggest), and consequently, to know and to perceive the beautiful is to recover a lost link with divinity, an Edenic human integrity.²³ It is no coincidence, then, that we anticipate increased beauty and knowledge, in all their ordinarieness, in our heavenly reward, and so Emerson's Romantic vision becomes fully true when realized eschatologically: "How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous."²⁴ This deification through knowledge and beauty is unending, because we can never fully represent or express what Creation is; we cannot complete its story, for reality is an overflowing, unfathomable plenitude.²⁵ And God is the superabundant mystery that unfolds with the landscape—a mystery that I would maintain expresses himself aptly in the beautiful. This mystery accompanies us on an unending and expectant journey of beauty and knowledge that contrasts happily with cold epistemic certainties and foundationalisms. And as we continue this journey—as sensuous, embodied beings-in-the-world—we wonder how, apart from beauty, we could even contemplate such eschatological destinations.

Such images as beauty in the frontier, according to Paul Tillich, "cannot be produced intentionally. They are born and grow and die."²⁶ Therefore, in his terms, beauty as an image must be verified by its power to relate us and our world to ultimate reality.²⁷ I conclude by commending the power of this interrelationship of God, beauty, and ourselves, which, I believe, applies at various levels, from the perceptual to the mythological. But it is ultimately a power actualized by others who would take up and employ natural beauty as a symbol of the divine. If Tillich is correct, my claim can only be confirmed by such use as theology engages Creation and its beauty as a theological source. This engagement with Creation becomes especially necessary as science teaches us more about our world and as natural beauty continues to speak to us of our alienation from a more comprehensive reality—continues to reveal, even, a reality beyond the quotidian. If our experience of the world constantly "interrogates" us as to possibilities of what lies beyond the world, then certainly the beauty of frontier could perform this interrogation as a natural symbol.²⁸ This beauty could disclose humankind's frontier or "boundary situation"—that is, not merely a situation within history but a situatedness within the larger scheme of the cosmos and on the

²³ Cf. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, "Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock; London: Routledge, 1999; repr. 2001), 10.

²⁴ Emerson, 23.

²⁵ Phillip Blond, "Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision in Christ," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward; London: Routledge, 1999; Repr. 2001), 241.

²⁶ Paul Tillich, "Environment and the Individual," in *On Art and Architecture* (ed. John Dillenberger; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 203.

²⁷ Paul Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality," in *On Art and Architecture* (ed. John Dillenberger; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 142.

²⁸ Cf. David Brown, *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology: An Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 10.

boundaries of the transcendent.²⁹ This situation of humankind is such that by a simple yet deeply felt consciousness of our interaction with nature and her rhythms, such as our watching the days and seasons and our moving through the landscape, we also sense something of the meaning and goal of our own existence. We come to participate in a way of being with nature that wards off our nihilism and superficiality without thereby transporting us inaptly out of history, Creation, and our experience of the beautiful.³⁰

In acclaim of these natural rhythms, Ruskin says, “the laws, the life, and the joy of beauty in the material world of God, are as eternal and sacred parts of His creation as, in the world of spirits, virtue; and in the world of angels, praise.”³¹ Moreover, “the Spirit of God is around you in the air that you breathe,—His glory in the light that you see; and in the fruitfulness of the earth, and the joy of its creatures. He has written for you, day by day, His revelation.”³² In apprehension of this revelation, we should sketch out the penumbra of the invisible in Creation, making it seen and known; for by perceiving the beautiful, we might even abound, overflow, and stumble forward through the landscape into another world for which our eye is the gateway. In so doing we respond to the phenomenality of God for his creatures that is beauty.³³ Natural beauty then functions as mythic reality and revelatory symbol, such that our lives, within history, the universe, and beauty, progress toward and take on their truer meaning, that of a glorious human condition realized in God.³⁴ Beauty begins the unveiling of this glorious condition, and in this way Ruskin’s intuition is confirmed that a proper spiritual understanding of beauty is “the fulfilment of our existence.”³⁵

²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (trans. Philip Mairet; Librairie Gallimard, 1952; London: Harvill, 1961), 34.

³⁰ Cf. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 36.

³¹ Ruskin, epilogue to *Modern Painters*, 5:464.

³² John Ruskin, *Deucalion: Collected Studies of the Lapse of Waves, and Life of Stones* (vol. 26 of *Works of Ruskin*; Cook and Wedderburn; 1906), 266.

³³ Cf. Blond, “Theology before Philosophy,” 57-58.

³⁴ Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 36.

³⁵ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 2:362.

PAUL BARNETT AND THE LOGIC OF HISTORY: SOME PROBLEMS WITH HIS APPROACH TO THE HISTORICAL JESUS

David H. Wenkel¹

Is there a methodology or historiography that will allow us to have a distinctively scientific approach to the (third) quest for the historical Jesus?² The evangelical Anglican *Neutestamentaler* and former Bishop of North Sydney, Paul W. Barnett, answers this question in the affirmative. He argues that the New Testament letters are “more valuable” than the Gospels and Acts for information about the historical Jesus.³ At the heart of Barnett’s methodology there is a logical syllogism at work.⁴ The major premise is that the letters contain information about the historical Jesus. From this reasoning two minor premises follow: 1) the letters are not intentional history and are occasional in that they “are innocent of any attempt to convey new information about the historical Jesus,”⁵ and 2) the letters are written only to “those who are already persuaded to be Christians.”⁶ The conclusion of these assumptions is that the letters are more historiographically neutral and therefore are “more valuable” than the Gospels and Acts for information about the historical Jesus.⁷ It is these premises that we will address in this study. This article will attempt to establish that because both of the minor premises are false, the argument is invalid. Barnett’s priority of the epistles above the Gospels and Acts extends beyond this particular syllogism but these propositions remains a critical component that has been overlooked in book reviews and recent scholarship.

The Promise of Scientific Historiography

The promise of science for the study of Jesus in the New Testament and the use of the scientific method in historiography are major backdrops to Barnett’s work on the issue of

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² The “third quest” appeared in N.T. Wright’s update of S. Neill’s *The Interpretation of the New Testament*. For an orientation to this nebulous term see James P. Sweeney, “The Death of Jesus in Contemporary Life-of-Jesus Research, *TrinJ* 24:2 (2003): 223-225. For a critical consideration of even using the “third quest” taxonomy see Stanley E. Porter, “Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus” in *Reading the Gospels Today*, Stanley E. Porter, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 35-36. For comments about the “historical Jesus” versus the “real Jesus” see Scot McKnight, “Jesus of Nazareth” in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 150. Here I follow McKnight and assume parity between the “historical Jesus” and the real figure.

³ Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, (New Studies in Biblical Theology series 3; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 25.

⁴ This method characterizes a majority of his three volume history of early Christianity entitled “After Jesus”: *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years* (A.D. 33-55), *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (A.D. 34-64) and *Finding the Historical Christ* (A.D. 60-80). For an explanation see the preface of Paul Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI /Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), vii.

⁵ Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, 25; Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 15.

⁶ Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

the historical Jesus. The source of Barnett's approach is the Tudor historian G.R. Elton who defines "history" in a rather benign way: "[history] deals with events, not states; it investigates things that happen and not things that are."⁸ What is more controversial is Elton's radical epistemology that denies a correspondence view of reality: "no connection exists between the initial event and the record of it."⁹ Barnett encountered this method in 1968 in a seminar with Elton for the BA Honours Program in History at the University of Sydney.¹⁰ Elton's work was influential in shaping general historiography and his work *The Practice of History* (Sydney 1967) is described as shaping "a whole generation of Cambridge modern historians."¹¹ Barnett appropriated this method and has continued to apply it to the field of New Testament history.

It is apparent from E.A. Judge's description of Elton's method why it was appealing to Barnett. Judge describes the method thus: "The objective truth of past actions can be reconstructed through empirical study of the documents left by people, who had chosen to act as they did. Cast aside were social theory, abstract causes and ideology, the image in the eye of the beholder."¹² This methodology offers the promise of objectivity and a truly scientific criterion that could be applied to the New Testament history. Subjectivity could be eliminated by a rigorous attention to the text. The appeal of this line of thinking would be obvious to Barnett. By managing the subjectivity and approaching the New Testament scientifically, he would be able to produce a New Testament history that can stand up to the rigors of the wider community of historians. This has the potential to move study of the historical Jesus (and the New Testament) out of the ghetto of dogmatics and into the respected realm of scientific historicism.

Objectivity and the Problem of Circularity

It will be helpful to develop how Barnett understands historiography and objectivity. Barnett's methodology is significant because he totally reverses the common approach to New Testament historiography. Whereas many studies begin with the Gospels and Acts and then move outward from them toward the letters, he employs the opposite.¹³ Barnett's approach turns on the hinge of authorial intention. If the biblical writers are understood to have intentionally written history, then the material is biased and less valuable. But if the biblical writers are understood to have written history only incidentally, then the material is more valuable.

⁸ Elton as quoted by Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, 18-19.

⁹ Ibid, 22.

¹⁰ E.A. Judge, "Paul Barnett and New Testament History," in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, Vol. 9; ed. S.R. Llewelyn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002), ix.

¹¹ Judge, "Paul Barnett and New Testament History," x.

¹² Ibid, x.

¹³ For example, Barnett's approach turns Porter's conclusion on its head: "[R]egarding the quest for the historical Jesus... the Gospels as transmitted to us will continue to be central to the discussion, and knowledge and appreciation of them must remain paramount, for without them we cut ourselves off from any direct link to the foundations of the investigation." Porter, "Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," 55.

Barnett has argued vociferously that ancient historiography and modern historiography differ in substance. The former is subjective and the latter objective.¹⁴ But a close examination of this argument reveals that it is based largely on appearances and the ability to *conceal* biases, not remove biases. He states, “[the] major difference between modernity and antiquity is the *identifiable* motivation of the authors.”¹⁵ Biases are actually present in both modern and ancient history or the difference lies in how much one identifies one’s motivations. Here it would be helpful for Barnett to interact with epistemological models. In sum, it is entirely justifiable to apply Barnett’s model to his own history. Therefore, to discount Luke’s history amounts to an admission that all intentional history is to be discounted or at least worthy of suspicion. The method becomes circular and vicious.¹⁶

Barnett’s approach to dealing with biases has changed significantly between his earlier and later scholarship. By arguing in more recent (and more important) works that the Gospels and Acts are too subjective to be first-tier historical documents about the historical Jesus, he has departed from his former position as articulated in *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (1986). In this book, which appeared early in Barnett’s writings, he cites Mark, John and Acts as examples of historical documents that provided evidence that “Jesus really lived.”¹⁷ His citations of the Gospels and Acts are used to prove his thesis that “the holding of personal convictions doesn’t necessarily mean blindness or dishonesty.”¹⁸ More importantly, Barnett argues, “Admiration may be the motive in writing, but it does not of itself destroy objectivity; this depends on the integrity of the writer.”¹⁹ The very use of eyewitness testimony in the Gospels is contrary to Barnett’s contention that “In antiquity writers understood that objectivity was a desirable goal, but they seldom knew how to achieve it.”²⁰

If we were to summarize the Gospels as evidencing admiration and worship of Jesus, under this earlier method we would still be able to state that they had both objectivity and an obvious bias. Barnett’s former method provides ample reason to reject his more recent approach because this earlier method is based on the biblical witness. This earlier method stated, “In fact, the presence in the New Testament of details which we find awkward, points to realism and honesty in the apostolic writers.”²¹ It is not too much of a leap to find the concept of objectivity in or around the terms “realism” and “honesty.” It is the texts of the Gospels and Acts that provide evidence of their own objectivity as historical documents about Jesus that are worthy of equal consideration with the Pauline letters.

¹⁴ Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁶ Paradoxical criterion in historical Jesus studies is not unique to Barnett. McKnight argues that N.T. Wright has successfully reconciled the criterion of similarity and dissimilarity to form one criterion. See McKnight, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 161.

¹⁷ Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?: A Look at the Historical Evidence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁰ Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ*, 6.

²¹ Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 34.

What Barnett's method lacks is the realization of its own subjectivity.²² In some sense it is unaware of its own existence. Consider the first minor premise as articulated by Barnett: the letters are "innocent" or more neutral because they are not intentional history. But for Barnett's method to be truly scientific it must stand the test of being applied to itself. But when this scientific method is applied to itself, Barnett's history becomes stained with the fact that it is an intentional history—even as Luke's history was intentional. The method can only produce a history as innocent as Luke's history.

Eyewitnesses and the Problem of Anachronism

Barnett's approach is an attempt to grapple with the implications of the biases of authors, but the end product is destructive to the reliability of eyewitnesses. Barnett notes that the "interests, competence, and integrity of the authors of the sources need to be assessed" as part of the "fundamental" task of the historian.²³ According to Elton and Barnett, we must begin with skepticism when reading the Gospels and Acts; because they claim to be accurate historical accounts (compare Luke 1:1-2) we must deny that this is actually historically valuable at the outset. This hermeneutic of skepticism does more than assess the integrity of the author, it begins by assuming eyewitness testimony is so biased that it lacks correspondence between the event that happen and the event as recorded. When it comes to history, the author is guilty until proven innocent.²⁴

Barnett explains his view on the priority of the letters in terms of the discontinuity between the historical techniques of antiquity and the historical techniques used by historians today. Biblical authors such as Luke were "unsuccessful in disguising their 'interests.'" This leaves history from antiquity "recoverable but incomplete due the limited extent and frequently tendentious nature of the sources."²⁵ One may question whether Barnett's discussion of Augustus's *Res Gestae* and Claudius's *Letter to the Alexandrians* is actually communicating that the Gospels and Acts are "limited" in nature. Barnett's work does make an association between these documents and the New Testament. He states, "We cannot fail to note the parallels in the prologue of Luke's Gospel, where the author disclaims the status of the eyewitness but nonetheless assures the reader of the pristine qualification of his sources, who were 'eyewitnesses and ministers' of the word no less. Nonetheless, despite their well-meant assurances, the authors of antiquity were different in that they did not disguise or were unsuccessful in disguising their 'interests.'"²⁶

Barnett is clearly aware that his method directly impacts the value of eyewitness testimony in the Gospel of Luke (at least). It is his contention that the Gospels and Acts remain a less valuable source of information about the historical Jesus because they use eyewitness testimony that acknowledges its own persuasive intentions. The eyewitnesses may have given true information, but they are not useful historically.

²² This is in spite of Barnett's own consideration of his own subjectivity. His comments on his own subjectivity do not address how his method might circuitously undermine his own history. See Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ*, 7.

²³ Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, 22.

²⁴ The apostle Paul viewed eyewitness testimony as valuable objective data that he included in his summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.

²⁵ Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 12-13.

Elton's work is appropriated by Barnett so as to create a polarity between the Gospels and Acts versus the letters. There is a "subtle distinction" between "sources that were intentionally written narrative, on one hand, and those from which information is gleaned incidentally, on the other."²⁷ Barnett clearly articulates that "The Gospels and the book of Acts belong to the first category. The letters of the New Testament, which are often concerned with the occasional, that is, with the ordinary events of life, are of special interest to the historian."²⁸

This position, as articulated in Barnett's more recent work, is also a departure from his position taken in *Is the New Testament Reliable?* In an early volume he argues that "[e]very part of the New Testament is, as far as I can see, a response to real life needs. It is a collection of 'occasional' literature, each part written for some specific occasion or purpose."²⁹ This is specifically inclusive of the gospels. One example that precedes this explanation is, "Mark was written to set down information about Jesus in a more permanent form and also to bring the good news about Jesus to a particular group of readers, probably Greek-speaking Romans."³⁰ Barnett's older position still presents a challenge. Even if the notion of gospel-specific communities (e.g. a Johannine community) is rejected, the Gospels still retain an occasional nature while being intentional history. Barnett's acknowledges this when he comments, "one Gospel and one or more letters are associated with each of the four mission leaders."³¹ The diversity amid the Gospels present a special problem for Barnett's proposal since they demonstrate that while they are intentional history they retain an occasional quality that should result in making them equally important to the historian as Paul's occasional letters.

The irony is that Barnett's historiography establishes a hermeneutic that gives due attention to eyewitness testimony only long enough to locate a text in a polarized grid. A critique of this view need not move to the other extreme of denying the importance of classifying ancient documents according to the intention of the author. Should we begin the search for the historical Jesus with the act of using statements designed to bolster claims of integrity and correspondence as evidence of the contrary?

This approach is highly anachronistic because eyewitness testimony is valued only when given in objective and persuasion-less reportage. The very value of eyewitness testimony is that there is a witness to claim that his or her account is first-hand information. To disguise the nature of first-hand information would be to erase all ability to communicate the quality and source of the information. But this is precisely what historians such as Luke did. It is this very act of eyewitness-based communication that make the sources intentional history and therefore tendentious.

Innocence and the Problem of Rhetoric

The second minor premise in Barnett's syllogism (as outlined in the introductory paragraph of our study) is that the letters are written to "those who are already persuaded to

²⁷ Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*, 15.

²⁸ Ibid, 15.

²⁹ Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 34.

³⁰ Ibid, 34.

³¹ Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ*, 16.

be Christians.”³² The conclusion of the syllogism is that the letters are more historiographically neutral and therefore are “more valuable” than the Gospels and Acts for information about the historical Jesus.³³ Subjectivity is understood in terms of how rhetorical or persuasive a text is and objectivity is understood in terms of how little it attempts to persuade. Barnett explains, “By subjectivity I mean the writer’s discernible tendency to report and interpret events according to his values and prejudices with the intent that the reader (i.e. hearer) adopt the writer’s values and prejudices in the interpretation of the events.”³⁴ Paul’s letters are assumed to have more historical value because the Gospel “authors have a strong loyalty to their subject, Jesus, and they write intentionally to confirm their readers in or win their readers to the same loyalty.”³⁵

Thus, a large piece of Barnett’s approach rests on the proposition that Paul’s letters are *less* rhetorically oriented than the Gospels and Acts. Whereas the Gospels evidence authorial intention to persuade the reader to convert oneself to Jesus, Paul’s letters are less biased because they assume the implied reader is a Christian. Barnett describes the rhetoric of the Gospels thus, “Biographies supplies comprehensive information to inform the mind of the reader; gospels inform the mind about Jesus in order to challenge the reader’s will and behaviour.”³⁶ This second minor premise in Barnett’s syllogistic historiography is plagued by the problem that Paul’s letters evidence a high degree of rhetoric and that the Gospels (and Acts) also addressed those who were already Christians. This approach is somewhat counter-intuitive in light of the trajectory of New Testament scholarship that assumes that Paul is a rhetorician and that the Gospel writers were not.

Are the Gospels and Acts more rhetorical than Paul’s letters? Although Barnett answers in the affirmative, this is problematic. Barnett’s approach does not seem to take into account the fact that the Gospels also addressed those who were Christians. In his earlier work *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, Barnett stated, “John calls his work ‘a book’ written so that the reader may ‘believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God’ (John 20:30, 31). This suggests that John may be writing for those who already have some knowledge of Jesus to ensure that what they believe about him is correct.”³⁷

If John were written with the intention to correct information about Jesus, it does not follow that it is so rhetorically oriented that it should be considered of secondary value as a primary source when compared to the letters. This same issue applies to Mark in which there

³² Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, 40.

³³ Ibid, 25.

³⁴ Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ*, 5.

³⁵ Ibid. For a similar position on rhetoric in the Gospels as “tendentious” see Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 78. It is not clear if Barnett follows Witherington in differentiating Paul’s rhetoric as simple persuasion as opposed to the sophistry of formal Greco-Roman rhetoric that Paul himself opposed in the Corinthian church. See Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 166 n14.

³⁶ Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 54.

³⁷ Ibid, 53, also 60.

are “clues” to a dualistic authorial intention to address unbelievers and “give instruction and encouragement to believers (Mark 13:37).”³⁸

Barnett provides fourteen points of information that Paul provides about the historical Jesus and explains that “the details are conveyed incidentally and innocently.”³⁹ It is not contested as to whether Paul exaggerates any details about the historical Jesus. What is contested is the incidental and innocent nature of Paul’s historical references such as Jesus “was a Son of David (Romans 1:3)” or Jesus “was born and lived under the Jewish Law (Galatians 4:4).”⁴⁰ Is the historical detail about Jesus being descended from Abraham in Gal 3:16 an innocent and incidental fact? If we understand innocence to refer to rhetorical or persuasive force this is not the case. Galatians uses argumentation that Witherington describes as “deliberative rhetoric,” and the reference to Abraham is integral to Paul’s argument in Galatians that works of the Mosaic covenant as human effort have failed and will fail.⁴¹

Establishing that Paul was addressing those who had come to some type of belief in the historical Jesus does not establish that his writings are less persuasive or less rhetorical. On the contrary, it may mean that Paul’s rhetoric is of a different nature or is simply constructed differently because he had different aims. Furthermore, by establishing the letters as “more valuable” for information about the historical Jesus, Barnett takes us one more step away from the eyewitnesses as primary sources. Barnett himself notes that “So as far as we can see, Paul himself had neither seen nor heard Jesus of Nazareth.”⁴² Paul learned about Jesus from his encounter with him on the road to Damascus as well as through visits to the church in Jerusalem. Paul’s history may be less biased in the sense that it is not designed to be an eyewitness-based account of Jesus, but it is also removed from Jesus’ pre-resurrection life and work.

As Barnett appropriates Elton’s method he loses the ability to fully consider the role of ideology and rhetoric in the New Testament documents. The Gospels are tendentious or rhetorically biased, but so are Paul’s letters. According to Barnett, the letters are innocent and of a higher “quality” for the historian because they use information that is occasional or incidental.⁴³ Such claims fail to recognize the role that rhetoric or persuasion played in the both the letters and the Gospels (and Acts).

Conclusion

The first conclusion to draw is that Barnett’s views have changed significantly but his more recent works evidence continuity in his historiography and are more influential. Second, while our criticisms of Barnett’s methodology and historiography are pointed, much of his material is helpful and biblically sound.

³⁸ Ibid, 54.

³⁹ Ibid, 131.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 131.

⁴¹ Witherington, *New Testament Rhetoric*, 126. The literature on Galatians and rhetoric is vast; for an example of integration of Abraham into a rhetorical outline in Galatians see, Robert G. Hall, “Historical Inference and Rhetorical Effect: Another Look at Galatians 1and 2” in *Persuasive Artistry*, Duane F. Watson, ed. (JSNTSS 50; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 317.

⁴² Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 128.

⁴³ Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*, 14-15.

The main focus of this analysis has been the proposition that the New Testament letters provide a “more valuable” source of information about the historical Jesus than the Gospels and Acts.⁴⁴ This elevation of the letters is plagued by three problems. First, when we reject his claim to a radical discontinuity between modern objective historiography and ancient reportage in texts such as Luke-Acts and modern texts, it can be demonstrated that his method undermines itself. Second, whereas Barnett claims that the letters are more objective and valuable because they are occasional we have argued that the Gospels have occasional qualities. Third, where Barnett claims that the letters are more “innocent,” we have argued that they are just as rhetorical and subjective as the Gospels and Acts. In addition, Barnett’s approach to New Testament historiography is detrimental to the Gospel’s own use of eyewitnesses.

Perhaps it would be helpful to speak of a quest for a scientific historicism that can be applied to the study of Jesus and the New Testament that is acceptable to both Christians and unbelievers alike. Barnett’s quest for the historical Jesus has long wrestled with this difficult apologetic issue. By positioning his historiography as scientific he was able to claim that he could establish the historical facts or historical probability of Jesus with the following caveat: “You will not be expected to accept anything in this book [*Is the New Testament Reliable?*] ‘by faith.’”⁴⁵ Much of the data used to develop our criticisms of Barnett’s more recent approach have come from his own earlier writings.

Methodologically, his approach to elevating the letters above the Gospels and Acts is less than satisfying because it is preoccupied with establishing a scientific historicism on the basis of supposedly neutral criteria. Our conclusion supports Stanley Porter’s criticism of the use of criteria in historical Jesus research that is known for its “failure to develop its own set of criteria.”⁴⁶ Barnett’s method for approaching the historical Jesus tries to become void of religious subjectivity (e.g. faith) but in doing so it borders on becoming antagonistic to faith; undermining biblical standards of objectivity such as eyewitness reportage. The connection between faith and history may be stronger than Barnett supposes. Contra Barnett, faith plays a key role in historiography. In support of this viewpoint, McKnight states, “historical judgment exercises itself with a framework of faith and presupposition, and those *a priori* have a significant impact on what counts as knowledge.”⁴⁷ To those seeking the historical Jesus, you will be expected to accept some things by faith.

⁴⁴ This is most clearly articulated by Barnett in his volume *Jesus and the Logic of History*.

⁴⁵ Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 12.

⁴⁶ Porter, “Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” 53.

⁴⁷ McKnight, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 161.

“GOD IS IN YOUR HEAD”: NEUROTHEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Ryan McIlhenny¹

“God cannot exist as a concept or as reality anyplace else but in your mind.”

—Andrew Newberg, Eugene d’Aquili
and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away*

“It is very difficult to explain this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it. The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and the world of thought. He [the experiencer] looks upon individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single, significant whole.”

—Albert Einstein

“You awaken us to delight in your praise; for you made us for yourself, and our heart is restless, until it finds rest in you.”

—Augustine of Hippo

As a historian, I’m wary of making predictions about the future, especially pertaining to revolutionary paradigm shifts. Yet having examined the latest studies from leading neuroscientists on the connection between brain activity and spirituality, what James Ashbrook first labeled “neurotheology” in 1984, I’m quite confident that the buildup of such work has already initiated a radical shake-up of western thought. Philosopher Paul Thagard believes that this “conceptual revolution,” akin to Copernicus, has already arrived: “Mounting evidence in neuroscience and psychology requires the abandonment of many traditional ideas about the soul, free will, and immortality.”² These various cognitive explorations, however, have barely scratched the surface of the brain’s spiritual frontier and have yet to evolve into a separate discipline.³ They have nonetheless reopened issues often relegated to the delusional or pathological. We live at an important juncture in the history of thought, where, James Ashbrook and Carol Albright tell us, “people are discovering the realm of the sacred.”⁴

The latest non-invasive neuroscanning technology has allowed scientists greater access into this realm.⁵ Michael Persinger, neurophysiologist at Laurentian University in Ontario,

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² Paul Thagard, *The Brain and the Meaning of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2010), xii.

³ Brian Alston, *What is Neurotheology* (n.p., 2007), xii. Alston defines neurotheology as “a nouveau discipline aiming to make good on the recent findings of neuroscience by relating the paradigms of theology and science” (xii).

⁴ Carol Albright and James Ashbrook, *Where God Lives in the Human Brain* (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2001), 15.

⁵ There a number of new ways to read what goes on in the brain. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have allowed specialists to recognize problem areas in the brain. The functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), perhaps the most popular method, measures the amount of oxygenated

Canada, has become quite the controversial figure in the world of modern science. His “transcranial magnetic stimulator,” a simple headpiece with electromagnetic field-emitting solenoids, has uncovered what he thinks is the brain’s spiritual component.⁶ Placed atop the human subject, the solenoids generate electromagnetic stimuli in certain sectors of the frontal lobe, producing feelings akin to that of an out-of-body experience, oneness with the universe, or what Persinger calls a “sensed presence” of something or someone other than the subject being tested. This “God Helmet,” as it came to be called, allowed Persinger to “experience God for the first time.”⁷ Studies done on Buddhist and Catholic mystics by Andrew Newberg and Emilio d’Aquili using single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) have shown how relaxing the orientation association area of the brain—the region across the parietal lobe that traces boundaries (e.g., judging the parameters of objects in space)—generates a feeling of boundlessness, what they call “absolute unitary being” (AUB): “the self is endless and intimately interwoven with everyone and everything the mind senses.”⁸ When one achieves AUB they experience “a state without time, space, and physical sensation; with no discrete awareness of any material reality at all.”⁹

These mystical experiences are remembered “with the same degree of clarity and sense of reality that it bestows upon memories of ‘real’ past events...[Religious practitioners] believe this sense of realness strongly, which suggests that the accounts of mystics are not indications of minds in disarray, but are the proper, predictable neurological result of a stable, coherent mind willing itself toward a higher spiritual plane.”¹⁰ The few who have experienced the “God helmet” or those engaged in frequent religious meditation have offered, to borrow from Emerson, the feeling of being “part or particle” of the divine.

A few of the important conclusions drawn from these still-controversial studies, however, may not seem all that revolutionary to many Christians. A neurotheological idea that echoes that of a philosophically aware Christian perspective, especially—I will argue—one coming from the Neocalvinist tradition, includes the ability of the brain to build worldviews apart from the human subject’s immediate awareness. Caltech philosopher Steven Quartz asserts that “studies of our biological constitution,” including our brains, “make it increasingly clear that we are social creatures of meaning who crave a sense of

blood sent to certain regions of the brain in action. Positron emission tomography (PET) measures blood consumption fueling the brain. Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography (SPECT), which is similar to the PET but less expensive. Magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS) examines concentrated levels of chemical activity in various regions of the brain. Magnetoencephalography (MEG) “reveals the source of weak magnetic fields emitted by neurons. In contrast with other imaging techniques, MEG can characterize rapidly changing patterns of neural activity...and can provide a quantitative measure of the strength of this activity in individual subjects.” See *The Britannica Guide to the Brain: A Guided Tour of the Brain—Mind, Memory, and Intelligence* with an introduction by Cordelia Fine (London: Constable and Robinson, 2008), 76-86.

⁶ Jack Hitt, “This is Your Brain on God” *Wired*. Vol. 7, no. 11 (Nov. 1999).

⁷ V.S. Ramachandra and Sandra Blakelee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* (NY: Quill, 1998), 175.

⁸ Andrew Newberg, Emilio d’Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (NY: Ballantine Books, 2001), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113, 145-46.

coherence and purpose,” what we may call worldview process thinking.¹¹ Another similarity neuroscience has with Christian belief is that the worldview mechanism of the brain, after considerable reflection, is a religious activity at its core. The brain is hard-wired for spiritual experience, yet when it comes to the reality of God, these same scientists seem to feel cozy in their Kantian bed.

This article addresses these two aspects and, in the process, calls upon the Kuyperian notion of the “antithesis” to address the limits of the new science, especially relating to the distinction between religious beliefs and knowledge of the true God. I will not offer a new rationalist argument for the existence of God nor rehash current discussions about how religious belief does not reflect cognitive faculties in disarray. Instead, this paper considers (or opens up a conversation, to use more popular terminology) that a lack of belief in God may actually conflict with the worldview function of the brain, producing a sense of uneasiness within the self akin to the feelings generated when the brain attempts to adjust to perceptual anomalies or cognitive malfunctions in lived experience.

Worldview as Brain Function

A spate of books in the last few decades dealing with the topic of understanding the nature and formation of a worldview has provided the church with an indelible defense of the Christian faith in the public square. An intriguing aspect of the more popular studies is the universal pursuit to answer a variety of transcendent or ultimate questions about the meaning of life. All humans, these evangelical authors suggest, strive for a comprehensive picture of the world; all humans have a worldview, and all humans ask similar worldview questions. James Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door*, argues that a worldview is essentially “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world”: (1) “What is prime reality—the really real?” (2) “What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?” (3) “What is a human being?” (4) “What happens to persons at death?” (5) “Why is it possible to know anything at all (are we products of an all-knowing conscious God or the result of evolutionary adaptation)?” (6) “How do we know what is right or wrong?” (7) “What is the meaning of human history?”¹² Sire believes that such questions represent “a fundamental orientation of the heart.”¹² Similarly, in *Transforming Vision*, authors Brian Walsh and J.R. Middleton ask “four fundamental” questions universal to all worldviews: “(1) *Who am I?* Or, what is the nature, task and purpose of human beings? (2) *Where am I?* Or, what is the nature of the world and universe I live in? (3) *What’s wrong?* Or, what is the basic problem or obstacle that keeps me from attaining fulfillment? In other words, how do I understand evil? And (4) *What is the remedy?* Or, how is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? In other words, how do I find salvation?”¹³ Answers to these questions are part of a shared human desire for

¹¹ Quartz quotation from Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (NY: Penguin, 2006), 222.

¹² James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 13, 19-20.

¹³ James Marsh and J.R. Middleton, *Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1984), 35.

internal stability, “a solution to the riddles of life,” Sire writes, “that provides a way of successfully thinking and acting in the world.”¹⁴

What is strange, however, is that these authors have ignored the actual working brain.¹⁵ This is unfortunate since our desire for coherence, harmony, or “epistemological satisfaction,” fundamental to worldview thinking, can be matched up with particular portions of the brain. In order to understand how the brain is both religious and worldview-oriented, it would be appropriate to begin with an overview of its structure. First, the basic unit that carries or sends messages to the various parts of the brain for thought and action is the neuron. Branch-like axons carry messages from neurons; dendrites receive those messages. Neurons travel through the various lobes in order to produce basic and more advanced conceptualizing for articulation and action. Next, the cerebral cortex is divided into two hemispheres, the left and the right. The former is associated with more localized, systematic, and detailed thinking, while the latter looks at the whole. The two coordinate the forest and the trees. The hemispheres of the brain are further divided into four lobes—temporal (language, memory, and conceptual thought), frontal (problem solving and muscle activity), occipital (sight), and parietal (perceptual and bodily orientation). These lobes form an interlinking economy that house important “association areas,” according to Andrew Newberg and Emilio d’Aquili—orientation (orienting the body in space), attention (coordinating body movement toward a chosen end), and verbal (placing higher level thoughts into language).¹⁶ Each association area corresponds with the primary, secondary,

¹⁴ James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 26. Furthermore, a worldview need not be explicitly worked out in exact detail according to James Olthius. See Olthius, “On Worldviews” *Christian Scholars Review* 14 (1985): “A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into a creedal form; it may be greatly refined through cultural-historical development. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns”

¹⁵This is not to suggest that all Christian scholars have fallen short. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga has offered a trenchant argument about the proper function of the brain vis-à-vis belief in God. Yet Plantinga’s three-part series on warrant and proper function should not categories as a popular evangelical study on worldview.

¹⁶ Andrew Newberg, Eugene d’Aquili, and Vince Rause’s outline of the brain in *Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* is perhaps one of the clearest. The temporal lobe, located at the immediate base of the brain stem, is the area associated with language, memory, and conceptual thought. Above the temporal is the frontal lobe, which takes up a large portion of the top-front of the brain, deals with attention (reasoning, including problem solving) and muscle activity. The ability to see comes from the occipital lobe, across from the temporal lobe. Finally, the parietal lobe, between the frontal and occipital and above the temporal, is responsible for sense perception as well as visual and body orientation. The cerebellum, the little brain at the base of the occipital and temporal lobes, helps regulate movement and balance.

Here is another explanation of the key association areas of the brain. The first, the orientation association area, “situated at the posterior section of the parietal lobe, receives sensory input from the sense of touch as well as from other sensory modalities, especially vision and hearing. These give it the ability to create a three-dimensional sense of ‘body’ and to orient that body in space” (28). Playing “a

and tertiary processes of brain activity—the latter of which gives rise to perhaps the deepest emotional meanings. Emilio and Newberg provide a helpful description of neural information processing, showing the primary, secondary, and tertiary stages:

A visual image originates in the electrochemical impulses streaming into the brain along the optic nerve. The first stop for these impulses once they arrive in the cortex is the primary visual area, where they are translated into crude visual elements—a jumble of abstract lines, shapes, and colors...the abstract shapes and colors processed in the primary visual area would be further organized in the secondary area, and a recognizable image would begin to form...If, for example, the sensory input in question is the result of gazing at a poodle, then the patterns formed at the primary stage will be assembled, or associated, into a composite shape resembling a small, curly-haired dog...This finished image may be accessible to the conscious mind; however, because the brain has not yet combined the image with the components of memory and emotion, which will allow the image to be associated with the concept of ‘dog,’ it lacks context and meaning...That final stage is carried out in the visual association area, where the image of the poodle is associated with input from other parts of the brain, bestowing it with dimensional fullness and emotional meaning.¹⁷

The intricate function of the cerebral cortex has been considered the “seat of human nature” whereby we work to put together the stuff of reality. The brain “requires the coordinated interaction of both sides of the cortex.” Cognition cannot be directly pinpointed as a strict “mental process per se but rather a selective combination of these processes that is purposively directed toward effective adaptation.”¹⁸ The brain, like the world it perceives, is an integrated system.

Finally, another crucial part of the brain—“integral to religious and spiritual experience”—that also relates to spirituality lies within the limbic system (from the Latin *limbus*, meaning border)—“composed of adjacent portions of the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes that surround the corpus callosum” that house the hypothalamus, amygdala, and hippocampus, among other structures.¹⁹ The system, identified by some as the “transmitter to God,” “interweaves emotional impulses with higher thoughts and perceptions to produce a broad, flexible repertoire of highly complex emotional states such

major role in governing complex, integrated bodily movements and behaviors associated with attaining goals,” is the prefrontal cortex, producing the attention association area: “this area helps the body organize the behaviors necessary for reaching desired objects of moving toward some chosen destination” (29). The attention association area allows us to focus on an object or idea. Finally, the verbal conceptual area, “located at the junction of the temporal, parietal, and occipital lobes, is primarily responsible for generating abstract concepts and for relating those concepts to words...the comparison of concepts, the ordering of opposites, the naming of objects and categories of objects, and the high-order grammatical and logical functions.” The inner workings of the verbal conceptual area develop consciousness “and the expression of consciousness through language” (31).

¹⁷ Newberg, d’Aquili, and Rause, 25-26.

¹⁸ *Britannica Guide to the Brain: A Guided Tour of the Brain—Mind, Memory, and Intelligence* introduction by Cordelia Fine (London: Constable and Robinson, 2008), 21.

¹⁹ Andrew Newberg, Eugene d’Aquili, and Vince Rause’s *Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, 42. *Britannica Guide to the Brain: A Guided Tour of the Brain—Mind, Memory, and Intelligence* introduction by Cordelia Fine (London: Constable and Robinson, 2008), 15.

as disgust, frustration, envy, surprise, and delight,” (all the things that make us human), organizing our involuntary (autonomic) impulses with voluntary (somatic) thoughts and actions.²⁰ The coordination of the amygdala, hypothalamus, and hippocampus jolts us awake when we hear that bump in the night, producing the emotion of fear, but also helps pull back our emotions from getting out of control by identifying that which caused our fear and then returning us to mental equilibrium.²¹ The tasks performed by the limbic system are “integral to religious and spiritual experience.”²² Stimulation of these structures produces “out-of-body sensations, déjà vu, and illusions, all of which have been reported during spiritual states.”²³ Likewise, the limbic system can be driven by repeated habits, especially religious liturgies, which isolate patterns of meaning and generate a deep feeling that one can move beyond bodily limits. To say it differently, ritualized behavior is a cognitive activity in pursuit of transcendence: “When ritual is effective...it inclines the brain to adjust its cognitive and emotional perceptions of the self in a way that religiously minded persons interpret as a closing of the distance between the self and God.” Damage to this region of the brain, which occurs among those suffering from Alzheimer’s, often contributes to a decreased interest in spiritual practice.²⁴

The limbic system also depends on social engagement, reinforcing the connection between memory and the emotional value of our core beliefs. Interestingly, ritual behavior (i.e., patterns of living that reinforce beliefs about meaning) activates the limbic system, generating deep emotional states that we associate as a religious experience: “When ritual is effective...it inclines the brain to adjust its cognitive and emotional perceptions of the self in a way that religiously minded persons interpret as a closing of the distance between the self and God.”²⁵ But what is the nature of such habits, especially with regard to spirituality? Ritualized behavior within a social context drives the limbic system to continually transcend the self. We regularly pray to God, attend services, and partake of the sacraments to reinforce not so much a denial of self, but to grow in closeness to God. When we gather for worship, we are united as a community under a gracious, covenant-keeping God. The Lord calls us out of the world to be community that praises his name, and we are a community that reflects the love of God to the world. The Christian life is not atomistic, but communal, beginning first with an encounter between God and humanity and then humanity to humanity.

It is important to note that the coherence-making capacity of the brain is ongoing even when we are unconscious of it. Consider the brain’s ability to “fill-in” blind spots. Those suffering from migraines have the tendency to develop jagged veins or spots that eventually take up a large portion of a person’s visual plane, but this is not a matter of “seeing” empty space; “instead of seeing an enormous void in its place,” UC San Diego neuropsychologist V.S. Ramachandran observes, migraine sufferers “fill-in” the blind spot with surrounding

²⁰ Newberg and Aquili, 42. See also Albright and Ashbrook, 72.

²¹ The hypothalamus acts with both the amygdala and hippocampus as the “master control for the autonomic nervous system.” See Newberg and d’Aquili, 43.

²² Newberg and Aquili, 42.

²³ Id.

²⁴ M.W. Hopper and F.S. Vogel, “The Limbic System in Alzheimer’s Disease: A Neuropathological Investigation” *The American Journal of Pathology* 85, no. 1 (October 1976): 1-20.

²⁵ Newberg and d’Aquili, 81.

colors and objects: “the region corresponding to the missing object is simply covered with the same color of paint or wallpaper.”²⁶ When there is more severe damage to the occipital region, the mind will fill in the blind area with more colorful images, some as odd as cartoon characters recalled from the brain’s storage bin. Similarly, as in the case of blindness, the brain attempts to “fill-in” the empty spaces left by severed limbs. Those with severed limbs often suffer real pain in the empty area only because the brain cannot reconcile the missing limb that is supposed to be there. The brain recognizes something incomplete. Ramachandran has developed a technique for phantom limb pain sufferers by tricking the brain into moving beyond the primary sensory input that causes the pain. His so-called mirror box, a device whereby an intact limb is reflected in the corresponding mirror at the place of detachment, has allowed phantom limb sufferers to train the brain to “think” there is an attached limb when in fact the person knows better. Ramachandran’s point in these examples is that the brain, “abhors a vacuum,” whether blind a spot or severed limb, “and will apparently supply whatever information is required to complete the scene.”²⁷ When the areas cannot be filled in or are filled with something foreign, the patient is unsatisfied.

The desire of the mind to complete scenes or “fill in” gaps extends even to the brain’s social connection. Wexler articulates how the mind struggles to readjust to the loss of a significant other. The loss is more than just emotion, but is concretely “seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and being touched by the other person.” The “interpersonal sensory environment,” which shapes our interpretation of the external world, “is now gone.” “The feeling that part of oneself has died is common enough to be one of the diagnostic criteria for pathological grief, as is the feeling that one’s worldview has been shattered.” The bereaved have experienced voices or even hallucinations of their lost loved ones. They have also reenacted past conversations and experiences. “The successful restoration of harmony,” key to worldview structuring, “requires the systematic and thorough restricting of the inner world to match the now-altered outer world.”²⁸ The brain, in other words, even fills in social blind spots. The death of a loved one has been “considered pathological” by many doctors. These individuals experience great uneasiness “even while ‘knowing’ full well that he or she is no longer alive, and at times attempt to recreate the deceased by assuming his or her behavior, characteristics, and even medical symptoms.”²⁹ Western philosophy has understood man as a social animal. I would fine tune this: God created humans not simply as social but communal beings—beings who, *through community*, not only gain a sense of meaning but also imaginatively help to create their own unique identity.

Mind-Brain Harmony

While it seems cogent that our sense of the world rests largely on how the brain works (e.g., “damage to the occipital lobe results in the impairment of vision”; “damage to the temporal lobe can affect the ability to speak”), it doesn’t necessarily follow that a poorly constructed worldview negates a tacit awareness of how the world and our brains *should* work.³⁰ All humans, the apostle Paul writes in Romans 2, have an innate moral sense, placed

²⁶ Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 89.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Bruce E. Wexler, *Brain and Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 172.

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

³⁰ Newberg, d’Aquili, and Rause, 17.

there by the creator. Those outside the Israelite community who had not been exposed to the special revelation of the law nonetheless do the things of the law. Whether humans acknowledge a sovereign God, they nonetheless presuppose the created order of the world. This can extend to ideas about human nature. Severe brain damage may impede our desire for balance or harmony. It may even alter our personality, as in the famous case of Phineas Gage who lost the ability to make decisions after a freak explosion removed a portion of his prefrontal lobe. Gage knew there was something different about himself, and he attributed it to the accident. In other words, Gage knew how he was supposed to be and act, but could never come back to that place. Severing the connector between the fusiform gyrus (the face recognizer in the brain) and the amygdala, symptomatic of Capgras' syndrome, removes the emotional response necessary for recognizing and therefore experiencing deeply meaningful relationships, like that between a parent and child.³¹ Those who suffer from Capgras' syndrome, for instance, think that their mother or father as some sort of imposter. They can acknowledge objectively that so-and-so is their parent, but there is no emotional response to the objective belief. Yet the person suffering from Capgras' syndrome recognizes that something is wrong, tacitly acknowledging how the mind should work. The ontological self (or mind) is not necessarily dependent on a well-worked out worldview that corresponds with a fully-functioning brain. Indeed, certain malfunctions, as the University of Montreal's Mario Beauregard insists, may not alter the self or the mind. Patients suffering from severe OCD have the ability to intuit a distinction between properly functioning activity from their particular disorder and, through meditative habits, can even rewire their brain to avoid such tendencies. Human beings are tacitly aware of a good created order. They are also aware of a broken world, which they seek to correct.

Considering the brain and its proper function raises the issue of what philosophers have identified as the difference (without antagonism) between the brain and the mind. The mind manifests itself in the coordinated physiological function of the various parts of the brain that makes us who we are. The mind is the metaphysical reality inextricably linked to the physical brain. Newberg and d'Aquili make a simpler distinction: "the *brain* is a collection of physical structures that gather and process sensory, cognitive, and emotional data; the *mind* is the phenomenon of thoughts, memories, and emotions that arise from the perceptual processes of the brain."³² There is no inherent tension between the physical and the metaphysical, none between the brain and the mind. Yet metaphysics presents a difficulty for empirical science. For a seemingly large majority of scientists, the brain is nothing more than a biochemical organ. In his latest work, *The Brain and the Meaning of Life*, philosopher Paul Thagard makes the argument that the brain is the mind and the mind is the brain. There is no accounting for separate consciousness, the self, free-will, or the soul. But this is logically untenable and exposes the reductionism of materialism. Why would naturalistic processes preclude the supernatural? According to philosopher Alvin Plantinga even naturalistic explanations of how the mind works fail to counter religious beliefs:

³¹ Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 161-162. "The patient, who is often mentally quite lucid, comes to regard close acquaintances—usually his parents, children, spouse or siblings—as impostors" (161). Damage to the fusiform gyrus, the face recognizer. The amygdala gages the emotional import of images—predator, prey, love interest, close associate, etc. Ramachandran's solution: Can determine the arousal of the amygdala by the sweating in one's palms, for instance. Galvinic skin response. But Capgras, the fissiform girus is intact, but the wiring to the amygdala has been severed.

³² Newberg and d'Aquili, *Why God Won't Go Away*, 33.

To show that there are natural processes that produce religious belief does nothing, so far, to discredit it; perhaps God designed us in such a way that it is by virtue of those processes that we come to have knowledge of him. Suppose it could be demonstrated that a certain kind of complex neural stimulation could produce theistic belief.... Clearly, it is possible both that there is an explanation in terms of natural processes of religious belief (perhaps a brain physiological account of what happens when someone holds religious beliefs), and that these beliefs have a perfectly respectable epistemic status.³³

Our physiological brain produces, among other things, belief in other minds—i.e., a non-material reality issues from a material function. Our acceptance of the reality of other minds is taken on faith. Scientists certainly have to take it on faith that the human person is more than his brain.

Reflection on the mind-brain relationship becomes particularly interesting when neuroscientists seriously consider near-death-experiences (NDEs), a veritably unclean animal for materialists. In 1991, Pam Reynolds underwent a controversial treatment to reduce a “basilar artery aneurysm” (a massively swollen blood vessel in her brain), which would have permanently killed her if she had not gone through with a controversial procedure that required her to die, literally.³⁴ In order to operate, doctors had to lower her body temperature (60 degrees Fahrenheit), generate a cardiac arrest, and wait for the electrical activity in the brain to stop. Reynolds was clinically dead. When revived, she recounted what she saw during the time of her death, including details of what doctors were doing to her skull and brain, which only an objective observer could see. At the same time she reported “entering the presence of a brilliant, wonderfully warm and loving Light and sensed that her soul was part of God and that everything in existence was created from the Light (the breathing of God).” According to Beauregard and O’Leary, the Reynolds case suggests that “mind, consciousness, and self can continue when the brain is no longer functional” and, what is more, that phenomena generally associated with mystical states “can occur when the brain is not functioning.”³⁵

For skeptics, Reynolds’s postmortem interview (as strange as that sounds), however, would not be enough to draw a convincing scientific conclusion. But there are numerous studies by other scientists on NDEs, including the interviews collected by cardiologist Pim van Lommel and psychologist Susan Blackmore, both of whom have classified various types of NDEs. Resuscitated individuals have described what they experienced while brain dead. If materialism is the best route for scientists, Beauregard and O’Leary wonder, then why do NDE patients tell of their consciousness when the brain is not functioning? Furthermore, even in the limited amount of NDE cases, materialists cannot account for them given their prior epistemological commitments. Critics have pushed the argument that those who have undergone NDEs can fabricate their experiences. If that is true, Beauregard and O’Leary respond, then why do the same people characteristically have such long term change not only in their behavior, especially in the way they interact with others in a more altruistic

³³ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (NY: Oxford, 2000), 145.

³⁴ Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul* (NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 150.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

manner, but also in the radically different way they look at life? They exhibit a greater appreciation for life. If NDE experiencers undergo a more lucid metaphysical state over a long period, then perhaps that lucid metaphysical state “deserves further study.”³⁶ Why should science negate, *a priori*, such investigations?

Worldview and Faith

The rediscovery of the metaphysical in and through the physical, although not dependent on it, has opened issues related to spirituality and the divine. Identifying brain-mind harmony has a direct relationship to belief in God as the ultimate source of the brain’s coherence-making function. Settling the gaps in our perspective—blind spots, phantom limb pain, Capgras’ syndrome, OCD, etc.—gives us a settled being, a balanced coordination of our association areas. If belief in God is part of the brain’s pursuit to find ultimate meaning of both ourselves and the world, then we need to consider the degree to which that belief gives a sense of harmony. Does the more intense sense of synchronization, greater than the return to normalcy after migraine blindness, reflect a higher activity of the brain? Would our anxiety about the self and the world dissipate when our restless hearts find rest in God? In other words, like lesser brain malfunctions, if we are delusional for believing in God, wouldn’t we feel it and wouldn’t our brains work against it?

The brain’s desire to make sense and intuit a properly ordered world is also its active pursuit to make contact with that real world. It is a journey. As philosopher Esther Meek suggests, knowing is the “active striving” to identify patterns of coherence and to submit to their authority. Knowledge as an activity that shapes our whole person, not just the mind, requires a journey. In negotiating the self in a foreign environment, humans “are partners, not owners, in an unfolding drama.”³⁷ The brain, as it works toward coherence, allows the human subject to think in terms of narrative; especially in our highly technical and commercial world, humans see themselves as part of a greater existential story, even as they live mediated lives. In their latest introduction to the concept of worldview, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen emphasize the role that *story* plays in every worldview: “Worldview is an articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story that are rooted in a faith commitment and that give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives.”³⁸ Neuroscience has helped to confirm the notion that the process of conceptual maturity is like functioning as a constituent part of a story. As Leslie Paul Thiele has argued that “there is perhaps no better advocate for a narrative understanding of the human condition than cognitive neuroscience...it is the thick, complexly interdependent, multi-dimensional character of narrative that primarily fosters” not just a knowledge of the stuff but an integrated pursuit of understanding the world as a whole, what Thiele would refer to as “practical wisdom.”³⁹ But it is a cognitive pursuit to

³⁶ Beauregard and O’Leary, *Spiritual Brain*, 162.

³⁷ Carol Albright and James Ashbrook, *Where God Lives in the Human Brain* (NY: Sourcebooks, 2001), xxxiv.

³⁸ Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 23.

³⁹ Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment: Practical Wisdom, Neuroscience, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 289, 287.

answer ultimate questions. Christians shape their worldview as they live in the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption.

Albert Einstein once stated that science looks to a “comprehension, as *complete* as possible, of the connection between the sense experiences in their totality, and, on the other hand, the accomplishment of this aim *by use of a minimum of primary concepts and relations* (seeking, as far as possible, logical unity in the world picture).”⁴⁰ Michael Gazzaniga, a leader in the world of neurology and former member of the President’s Council for Bioethics, wrote in his 2005 study, *The Ethical Brain*, that “the human species is a believing animal searching for order and something to believe in. That is the way our brains work.”⁴¹ Such a move requires a religious center and a faith belief. In fact, Einstein identified the drive toward comprehension as the “cosmic religious feeling.”⁴² The brain’s pursuit of higher order coherence, to make sense of a “challenging, changing, [and] confusing world,” is, for James Ashbrook and Carol Albright, a religious activity. The brain desires an integrated whole: “Our human brain—with its imaginative symbolizing predisposition—is constantly sifting the messy world of randomness for the ‘tiniest hints of order.’”⁴³ It satisfies this by latching on to an identifiable center, resting on a self-sufficient foundation from which we order the world. This is faith, “our most basic life-orientation,” Albright and Ashbrook continue, “the pivotal expression of meaning seeking. As such, faith is built into the activity of our biology, our nervous system, our neurocognitive processes.”⁴⁴ These cognitive operations connected to a neural faith center activate our spirituality. We tacitly submit to an authority—an authority that cannot be proved in an objective sense, otherwise it would depend on another foundation—from which we live and move and have our being. Consider a comment made from the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, “religious persuasions and beliefs, [including those of] atheists, all tended to use the same electrical circuits in the brain to solve a perceived moral conundrum—and the same circuits were used when religiously-inclined people dealt with issues related to God.”⁴⁵ What we have faith in becomes our God.

God and Belief in Him

If the brain is naturally hardwired for belief in God, as the highest point of its worldview function, pacifying in turn our sense of disconnection with ourselves and our world, then we need to explore the reality of those beliefs. It is one thing to say that our brains are working just fine when believing in God, but it’s quite another to say that God exists. The cognitive

⁴⁰ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, ed. Carl Seelig and trans and rev. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), 293.

⁴¹ Michael Gazzaniga, *The Ethical Brain: The Science of Our Moral Dilemmas* (NY: Harper Perennial, 2005), xviii. The majority of neuroscientists adopt an evolutionary perspective regarding the origins of the religious and worldview functioning brain. This study is not interested in entering the creation-evolution debate, although it does presuppose the former as a starting point.

⁴² Andrew Newberg, Eugene d’Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (NY: Random House, 2002), 154.

⁴³ Albright and Ashbrook, *Where God Lives in the Brain*, 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁵ “Belief and the Brain’s ‘God Spot,’” *The Independent*, 10 March 2009, available from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/belief-and-the-brains—god-spot-1641022.html>; Internet; accessed 2 December 2009.

operators connecting our belief in mom to an actual mother may apply. My feelings of mother are connected to my actual mother. But the common-sense idea of recognizing other minds is not applied consistently when talking about knowing God. The Kantian paradigm of Newberg and d'Aquili limit their knowledge of God: "If God does exist, for example, and if He appeared to you in some incarnation, you would have no way of experiencing His presence, except as part of a neurologically generated rendition of reality."⁴⁶ Christians can agree that both knowledge and experience of God have their cognitive correlates. But, as represented by Newberg and d'Aquili, such an experience occurs *only* in our heads. Where then does the identity of God come from? Neuroscientists seem to agree that the God's specific identity is culturally relative. There is no way, scientifically speaking, to make contact with a true God.

The first way to answer this would be to question the presupposition of neuroscience. "[I]t is in no way obvious," philosopher David Ratcliffe argues, "that agnosticism is the proper *scientific* attitude to adopt in relation to the claim [that] God really does communicate with people during religious experience."⁴⁷ Ratcliffe continues:

...naturalism or scientific objectivism in its various forms is not simply a neutral or default methodological backdrop for empirical inquiry but involved acceptance of a specific ontology, which functions as an implicit and unargued constitutive commitment. Hence, these neurological studies can be employed as a lever with which to disclose something of the ways in which different frameworks of interpretation, both theistic and atheistic, serve differently to structure and give meaning to empirical findings.⁴⁸

Ratcliffe speaks to the still relevant Neo-Calvinist idea of the antithesis. Neo-Calvinism traces its history to the nineteenth-century thinker, Abraham Kuyper, who articulated the "antithesis" as the heart-attitude a person has as he or she engages the world. For Kuyper, the antithesis refers to two opposing paradigms. The Christian conceptual framework is one that submits to the lordship of Christ in all areas, which therefore shapes the way in which a Christian interprets the world. Opposed to this is the attitude of unbelief, which also shapes how one understands the world. A neuroscientific worldview—like any worldview—has already been shaped by the pre-theoretical attitude of the heart—that "supra-temporal" concentration of our being—according to Herman Dooyeweerd.⁴⁹ The heart, we could say, is that favored idiom used to describe the focal point of the whole person, physical and metaphysical: it is, we might say, part of the brain-mind harmony. The New Testament exhorts Christians to love God with all their heart, soul, might, and mind. These are codependent parts that come together to make our whole being.

An awareness of one's presuppositions, therefore, must precede the conclusions drawn concerning the reality of God. Every person has a faith commitment, beliefs situated at the core of his or her being, making humans inescapably religious. As H. Evan Runner wrote in

⁴⁶ Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away*, 37.

⁴⁷ David Ratcliffe, "Scientific Naturalism and the Neurology of Religious Experience" *Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (Sep. 2003): 323-345.

⁴⁸ Id.

⁴⁹ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. 3, trans. D.H. Freeman and William Young (Philadelphia: P&R, 1953), 784.

Scriptural Religion and the Political Task, “our whole life is religion. And that not only for Christian believers (true religion), but also for unbelievers. For unbelief is not described in Scripture as absence of belief, but as mis-directed [sic] belief. Religion...is man’s ineradicable situation: he has been created ‘before God’...and must render an account.” As a religious presupposition, unbelief shapes the way in which one looks at the world. “[A]postate man,” Runner continues, “appropriates to his own heathen [noetic fantasy] the role that the Word of God really has, and thus from the beginning places himself in a world where the relations are (imagined) other than they really are. Human analysis always takes place within the context of the Lie or the Truth.”⁵⁰ Runner’s position, articulated over three decades ago, has remained among Reformed Neo-Calvinists. Goheen and Bartholomew, for example, write that: “Our heart, the religious core of our being, is directed either toward the living God or toward an idol, and the grand story that we indwell is an expression of this direction of the heart.”⁵¹

Uncovering presuppositions leads to a second approach: appealing to scripture. In Romans 1, Paul presents the reality that all humans—all brains, let’s say—know God. Our “cognitive mechanism,” to use Plantinga’s terminology, is outfitted to produce a basic belief not in just any God, but in the true and living God. The particular identity of God is not restricted to our social or cultural context, though it is revealed there. And this is the distinct problem between neuroscientists and Paul. Our cognitive apparatus produces a belief in the true God; his “invisible attributes” are clearly scene in the things of creation, which includes the brain. In the same way that we have the cognitive makeup to produce language or recognize from birth the unique voice of our mothers, we are endowed with the knowledge of our creator. Before his conversion, Paul perennially kicked against what his brain was encouraging him to pursue. Even if one were to say that the sense of God is hardly explicit, such a sense is nevertheless still related to the true God. If this fails to satisfy materialists, then perhaps we can return to the original argument of this article: While our fallen will suppresses the knowledge of God, the brain, even in its physiological function, may be working against our will. In a converse way that our will works desperately against cognitive anomalies, so perhaps the proper working of the brain is a working against the will’s suppression of the ultimate coherence maker. In the end, of course, to say that we cannot know the specific identity of God based on neurological function is to offer an excuse which the Word of God does not allow.

A few caveats are in order before concluding. First, does a neurotheological approach to Romans 1 mean that the unbeliever is brain damaged? The answer is certainly not, at least no more than an alcoholic or drug addict is, even though the brain is rewired in such a way that alters personality. Yes, the brain is changed by years of habitual drug use, but even those in the midst of a drug trip, feeding what the brain demands at the moment, often imagine what the mind was like before their addiction, lamenting the loss of appropriate cognitive function. As mentioned above, some neuroscientists believe that humans have the ability to intuit a properly functioning brain even while suffering a significant cerebral malady. Romans 1 does not suggest that the unbelieving brain is malfunctioned, but that the will, distinct from the pure physiological function, actively pushes down that knowledge in a similar way to a child disobeying the will of his or her parent when they clearly know better.

⁵⁰ H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge, 1974), 15.

⁵¹ Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 24.

What is more, if we believe something false long enough, we tend to believe it as surely as any other truth claim in our noetic repertoire. In “Credibility of Repeated Statements: Memory for Trivia,” clinical neurologist F.T. Bacon “shows that if a falsity is repeated frequently enough, we will begin to believe it.”⁵² “[R]epeating untruths often enough will increase the likelihood that some people will believe them.... Our brain is organized in such a way that assertions, if repeated often enough, tend eventually to be accepted as facts. What is the basis for this so-called frequency-validity effect? Familiarity is the key concept: the more something is repeated, the more familiar it becomes.”⁵³ Nonetheless, the unbeliever’s conscience works as a witness against him, recognizing a gap and trying to fill it in with another idol.

Knowledge of God is both internal and external, both in the brain and outside of it. A biblical theological approach to belief in God includes the idea that knowing God necessitates *his* condescension. While God has, as it were, implanted knowledge of who he is in our heads, he must come to us and demolish our darkened wills. We cannot rely solely on our inner-subjective ideas about God. This leads to the second caveat: the danger of imaging God in *our* image. A 2009 neuropsychological study suggested that when humans image the beliefs of others they do so from an egocentric paradigm; that is, quite often what we think others believe is an imagined reflection of what we (not the other) would believe. The same is true when it comes to what we would imagine God’s beliefs would be. “Intuiting God’s beliefs,” the researchers contend, “serve as an echo chamber that reverberates one’s own beliefs.”⁵⁴ These researchers found that reflecting on the beliefs on others by a subject tested under an fMRI scan, which measures the oxygenated blood flow of an activated region of the brain, revealed “heightened activation in the medial prefrontal cortex.” The same area was galvanized when the subject imagined God’s beliefs. Consequently, “religious believers are particularly likely to use their own beliefs as a guide when reasoning about God’s beliefs compared to when reasoning about other people’s beliefs...estimates of God’s beliefs are causally influenced at least in part by one’s own beliefs.”⁵⁵

Modern epistemologies, hinging on the work of thinkers like Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, would suggest that the finite mind cannot know an infinite being and, thus, our idea of God is ostensibly nothing better than an apotheosis of our self. But before conservative evangelicals raise a clamor about the death of God and morality (which they’ve done for the past three decades), they need to understand that they are likewise guilty of fashioning God in their own image. The “WWJD” fad, bracelets sold and worn as a sort-of infrared “morality” detector, is symptomatic of such imaginative constructions. The What-

⁵² Richard Restak, *The Naked Brain: How the Emerging Neurosociety is Changing How We Live, Work, and Love* (NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 78. F.T. Bacon, “Credibility of Repeated Statements: Memory for Trivia,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, Vol. 5, 3 (1979): 241-52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Epley, Benjamin Converse, Alexa Delbose, George Monteleone, and John Cacioppo, “Believers’ estimates of God’s beliefs are more egocentric than estimates of other people’s beliefs” *PNAS* 106, no. 51 (December 22, 2009). <accessed> www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0908374106.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

Would-Jesus-Do question, in reality, means “What Would I Do?”⁵⁶ Of course, a lot can be concluded from the activity of the medial frontal cortex vis-à-vis God’s belief. Even when we fashion an image of God from the self-reflexive portion of the brain, interpretively guided by the centralized self, we nonetheless make contact with God. Just as a person’s racist stereotypes, whatever they may be, negates a proper understanding of a human being and, by extension, humanity, we are still in contact with a real human being. The fallen mind that suppresses the true God still touches him. Furthermore, knowledge of God requires human imagination or the self-referential imagining of the medial frontal cortex. It is true that humans cannot have an absolutistic or completely exhaustive knowledge of God. This is one reason God used different names to describe himself. Likewise, there are attributes of God—his eternality, omniscience, and unchangeability—are attributes not communicated to us, but we nonetheless know that these are part of God’s nature. As a result, we imagine not only who God is but who we are (and are not). And, of course, there are attributes that *are* communicated to us—wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth. Although these latter attributes are perfect and infinite in God and not so in us, further revealing the gulf between the creator and creature, we have genuine ontological contact with God through them. God communicates to us in another and final salvific way: through Jesus Christ, who humbled himself by taking on human flesh in order to satisfy the demands of God’s law. God requires payment for humanity’s rebellion and sin. But what God asks of human beings—i.e., to make recompense for their sins—can only be done by a divine being. This is why Christ completed the work on our behalf. If humans are unable to imagine this reality, then how can they come to know this reality?

Yet while we are not severed from the knowledge of God, a transformed mind demands habitual denial of our idolatrous conjectures about who he is and what he thinks. Even Christians who have been saved by the active obedience of Christ in the imputation of his righteousness to us continue to work against the tendency to determine God’s own mind and identity. Our redeemed state requires not so much a working against the medial frontal cortex, but working within the context of the gift of sanctification to commission this region of the brain to pursue the end goal of acting in accordance with its created intent. But it is imperative to rely on God’s revelation of himself in both creation and, especially as it relates to a redeemed mind, the scriptures. The stimulation of the limbic system through religious habit is a bodily action connected to the growth of our spiritual maturity.

In the opening pages of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin proposed that the knowledge of self requires knowledge of God:

In the first place, no one can look upon himself without turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he ‘lives and moves’ (Acts 17:28)... For what man in all the world would not gladly remain as he is—what man does not remain as he is—so long as he does not know himself, that is, while content with his own gifts, and either ignorant or unmindful of his own misery? Accordingly, the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him... Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself

⁵⁶Russ Reeves, Ph.D., “Imaginary Lord and Savior: Following Jesus in America” paper presented at the *Reformed Spirituality for the 21st Century: Faithful Living in Postmodern Times* conference sponsored by First Chino United Reformed Church, Chino, 23 April 2010.

unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinizing himself.⁵⁷

When humans turn to God, they enter a dialogue with the diversity and coherence of human nature, the holistic mind, and the universe. When we attain this "genuine self-knowledge," Dooyeweerd writes, we "draw together the totality of our existence...and focus it upon our authentic, fundamental relationship to God, who is the absolute and single origin and creator of all that is."⁵⁸ Once the human subject turns to God, the creator of all things, then he or she will better understand who they are. God is not simply the depositor of a true knowledge of the world; through him our minds come to know, even on an experiential level, the one who providential upholds and sustains the cosmos. Through this, we come to know the world and ourselves in it. As Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16-18, "in Christ all things hold together." He is the final "filler" that brings coherence and thus peace to our restless brains.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:1-2.

⁵⁸ Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), 33.

KNOWING THAT GOD EXISTS: RETRIEVING THE TEACHING OF *DEI FILIUS*

Glenn B. Siniscalchi¹

One of the traditional hallmarks of Catholic theology is that God's existence can be known with certainty apart from the influence of authoritative, divine revelation. This longstanding belief in the Church reached somewhat of a high point at the First Vatican Council on April 24, 1870 when, in response to the prevailing trends of traditionalism, rationalism, and fideism,² the Council Fathers steered a middle course in response to these extreme positions, declaring that God's existence can be known by the natural light of human reason. This pronouncement was officially ratified in the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Catholic Faith (Latin: *Dei Filius*).

Most Catholic theologians and philosophers vigorously defended the Council's teaching well into the middle of the twentieth century. But almost immediately after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) theologians began to neglect it, and, in some cases, argued that it was irrelevant or even problematic for faith. Both Catholic and Protestant scholars launched various objections against it. As Hans Küng points out: "Against the exaggerations of a natural theology that assumes that it is possible to prove by pure reason the existence of God and even the attributes of his nature, objections have increased enormously."³ Denys Turner of Yale University adds that "most theologians today do not so much think that the existence of God cannot be proved as seem altogether to have given up thinking about the issues involved, and simply assume—probably on unexamined arguments from Kant—the impossibility of it."⁴

Regardless if one is Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, or Eastern Orthodox, believers can empathize with the deleterious effects that atheism and unbelief is having on Christendom and society. Part of the reason why atheism—whether it is of the critical or practical variety—is gaining such strong headway in the West is due to the ongoing separation of faith and reason. When this separation occurs, the fundamental doctrines of the faith must be seen as opinions or personal preferences, undermining one's motivation to believe in Christ and the Church. Of course, if faith is nothing other than an opinion, then why should one seek to evangelize others to believe in the Gospel when the claims of faith are strictly a matter of taste?

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² While rationalists insist that reason is the sufficient means by which one can discover the truth, fideists hold that reason is irrelevant in matters of religion, arguing that faith is the only way to know that God exists. Emanating from the French thinker de Lammenais, traditionalists maintain that knowledge of God is based on believing the prelapsarian message that was given to Adam and Eve and subsequently preserved in Jewish and Christian oral tradition.

³ Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, trans. Edward Quinn, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 531.

⁴ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ix. Cf. 3, 6.

Despite the many protests to the contrary, the First Vatican Council's (1869-1870) teaching on the natural knowledge of God's existence needs to be retrieved if the spiritual tide is to turn against the ongoing progress of secularization. In this essay I discuss and defend the Council's teaching in *Dei Filius* on God's existence and then answer the most salient objections that have been raised against it, arguing for its importance and ongoing relevance.

Vatican I on Knowing That God Exists

Of all modern documents of the Catholic Church, *Dei Filius* stands as a prophetic voice in the midst of a bewildering amount of intellectual and pastoral problems now facing the Church. While most of the attention surrounding Vatican I is dedicated to papal primacy and infallibility, many theologians forget about the vital and bold statements pronounced in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith about faith, reason and the existence of God. Because the contents of the document was highly speculative (meaning that it contained highly abstract theology), the Roman curia debated for months as it was being prepared. But these debates had more to do about the intramural debates between the representatives of the competing schools of theology at the Council and the document's written style rather than the substance of its teaching.⁵ As Dom Cuthbert Butler argued in what is perhaps the definitive treatment on the history of the Vatican Council in the English language, no document up to that point in the history of the world was subjected to as much scrutiny as *Dei Filius*.⁶

But in the end, the Thomists prevailed. According to Romanus Cessario: "Just as Thomism significantly influenced the formulation of Trent's decrees, the short Constitution of Vatican I on the Catholic faith, *Dei Filius*, reflects Thomist views on faith and reason."⁷ Avery Dulles concurs, noting that "Without actually mentioning Thomas Aquinas, Vatican I endorsed his position. A decade later, in 1879, Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, proposing St. Thomas as the thinker whose synthesis of faith and reason should be accepted as a solid foundation from which to grapple with more recent questions in philosophy and science."⁸ Thus, in order to understand the Dogmatic Constitution, it would be profitable for us to understand Aquinas's view on faith and reason.

In the view of Aquinas, faith sees the importance of using reason. If one has faith in supernatural revelation, then they will resort to reason in order to understand and defend what (and who) they believe in. Faith, then, comes first; reason follows afterwards. Within the context of faith, says Aquinas, one can know that God exists. Therefore, to deny that God's existence can be proven as an article of faith not only gets something wrong about philosophy, but it also gets something wrong about the nature of faith. Faith, moreover, does not stretch the shape of reason in a direction that is unnatural to it, but strengthens and

⁵ Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council, 1869-1870, based on Bishop Ullatborne's Letters*, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962), 160, 161, 212.

⁶ Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council*, 158.

⁷ Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2003), 87.

⁸ Avery Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David R. Foster and Joseph W. Koterski (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2003), 193, 194.

clarifies what human persons naturally desire to know. As Turner notes, the idea that faith leads one to reason about God is not “some pretentious, cross-disciplinary claim to a merely arbitrary epistemic hegemony of faith as if, say, equivalently, a microbiologist were on grounds of some need of microbiological theory absurdly to require the mathematician to come up with a particular mathematical result regardless of whether it could be defended on mathematical grounds.”⁹

Conversely, reason can demonstrate God’s existence without the influence of faith.¹⁰ “The same holy mother church,” says the Council, “holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason: ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”¹¹ The Church condemns anyone who denies this proposition in its corresponding canon: “If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason: let him be anathema.”¹² Hence, if anyone maintains that God’s existence cannot be known with certainty, then they depart from the Church’s teaching. In short, fideism and traditionalism are heresies. God’s existence can be known without a shadow of a doubt.

In the case of demonstrating that God exists apart from the influence of faith, grace is still at work through the use of reason. No one can argue themselves unto faith. *Contra* rationalism, faith is not based on reason, but on the authority of God who reveals himself in the person of Christ. As the Council Fathers state: “With regard to the source, we know at the one level by natural reason, at the other level by divine faith. With regard to the object, besides those things to which natural reason can attain there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, are incapable of being known.”¹³

Echoing the Vatican Council almost a hundred and fifty years later, Pope John Paul II emphasized the natural knowledge of God in what he calls the “propaedeutic path to faith”:

With its specific character as a discipline charged with giving an account of faith (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), the concern of *fundamental theology* will be to justify and expound the relationship between faith and philosophical thought. Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. Rom. 1:19-20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and an acceptance of God’s Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths. In studying Revelation and its credibility, as well as the corresponding act of faith, fundamental theology should show how, in the light of the knowledge conferred by faith, there emerge certain truths which reason, from its own independent enquiry, already provides. Revelation endows these truths with their fullest meaning, directing them towards the richness of the revealed mystery in which they find their ultimate purpose. Consider, for example, the natural knowledge of God, the possibility of distinguishing divine

⁹ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 4.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.2.2, 1a.2.3; idem, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.9.

¹¹ Vatican Council I, Session 3, Chapter 2, *On Revelation*.

¹² Vatican Council I, Session 3, Canons, *On Revelation*, 1.

¹³ Vatican Council I, Session 3, Chapter 4, *On Faith and Reason*.

Revelation from other phenomena or the recognition of its credibility, the capacity of human language to speak in a true and meaningful way even of things which transcend all human experience. From all these truths, the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith, one that can lead to the acceptance of Revelation without in any way compromising the principles and autonomy of the mind itself.

Similarly, fundamental theology should demonstrate the profound compatibility that exists between faith and its need to find expression by way of human reason fully free to give its assent. Faith will thus be able 'to show fully the path to reason in a sincere search for the truth. Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time, it becomes apparent that reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own.¹⁴

Notice that emphasis that John Paul places on reason and its ability to know that God exists *before* one has faith.

Unfortunately some Catholic and Protestant thinkers still hold that Aquinas did not believe that reason can demonstrate that God exists. But this is a serious misreading of the Angelic Doctor (and, by extension, of the Vatican Council). "As a lifelong student of Aristotle," Ralph McInerney urges, "Thomas was convinced that there are sound and cogent proofs of God's existence. For Thomas, natural theology is not a possibility. It is a fact. It is the achievement of pagan philosophy. *Ab esse ad posse valet illatio*."¹⁵ Elsewhere, Aquinas says that demonstrable arguments are to be preferred over probabilistic arguments for God's existence.¹⁶ Eisegesis of Aquinian texts abounds in many theological writings in this regard. Like so much of Christian theology in the mainstream, most Catholic theologians are highly concerned about safeguarding the faithful against the dangerous theological drifts that accompanied the movement in Catholicism known as neo-scholasticism (that school of Thomism that was influenced by an Enlightenment epistemology—where reason is stressed over faith).

When Aquinas speaks of demonstrating God's existence, he does not speak of proving God in the logical sense of proving something (as the Enlightenment thinkers would have it). What Aquinas is saying when he speaks of demonstrating God's existence is that the human mind is capable of knowing that an unknowable God exists. We can apprehend God's existence, but never comprehend it in full. Commenting on the Council's declaration, Turner claims: "for Thomas, to prove the existence of God is to prove the existence of a mystery, that to show God to exist is to show how, in the end, the human mind loses its grip on the meaning 'exists.'"¹⁷ Certainty, it must be added, allows for differing degrees of conviction in Thomistic terminology. Aquinas's proof is not a logical proof, but is an existential one.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, N. 67.

¹⁵ Ralph McInerney, *Characters in Search of Their Author*, The Gifford Lectures: Glasgow, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 66.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.9.

¹⁷ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, xiv.

Following the theology of Vatican I, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts, “Created in God’s image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of ‘converging and convincing arguments,’ which allow us to attain certainty about the truth.”¹⁸ The theistic proofs are not demonstrations in the mathematical or logical sense of proving something.

While God’s existence is self-evident to himself, is it only relatively evident to human beings. Reason can only prove some things about God: that he exists, that he is one, unchanging, eternal, etc. But it cannot tell us everything about him (e.g., that God is triune, that Jesus of Nazareth was God-incarnate). Reason can prove *that* God exists; but it cannot convince anyone to trust *in* God. As such, rationalism is heretical. Having knowledge of God’s existence is not salvific in and of itself. But believing in God’s revelation in Christ brings one to salvation. As an indirect result of the dogmatic declaration, the Fathers also condemn materialism, absolute pantheism, emanational pantheism, fideism, and rationalism.¹⁹ All of these worldviews are shown to be fallacious, for theism can be positively proven in advance.

The person’s knowledge of God is not necessarily philosophical. It is (and can be) pre-philosophical. Professional philosophers are not at an advantage over the ordinary person when it comes to knowing that God exists. As Walter Cardinal Kasper poignantly explains: “Thomas says the same thing in a more substantive way...This element of the unconditioned in the conditioned is not first brought home to us by a complicated proof; it is grasped unthematically in every knowledge of the conditioned as conditioned. When thus understood, the cosmological argument is in the final analysis simply reflecting this primordial knowledge; it is an explanation of the astonishment felt at the wonder of being.”²⁰ The ordinary person does not have the time, energy, or resources to study the arguments for and against the existence of God. But this does not prevent them from knowing that there is a God.

Statistics indicate that the majority of the world’s population, whether they are religious or not, believe in some sort of God. Although most of the world’s religions tend toward monotheism, their understanding of God is formulated in different ways. Thus, the average person does not ask him or herself “Why is there something rather than nothing?” and then attempt to answer this question by assessing the various explanations that can account for it. For this would be a purely philosophical pursuit. These statistics show that most persons in the world have a pre-philosophical intuition that tells them that God exists simply by being in the world and wondering about it. And this is why, at the end of each of the famous Five Ways in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas says with confidence: “and this is the God that *all* people speak of.”

Now at this point of the council someone might ask: “Is the God of the philosophers the same God as the God of Christianity?” In response to this question, the Council Fathers relied on the Thomistic distinction between the formal and material objects of knowledge.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 31.

¹⁹ Vatican Council 1, Canons, *On Revelation*, 1-4.

²⁰ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984), 103.

Persons can recognize the same material object in different formal respects. We can see and touch a blueberry, but neither seeing or touching it can be reduced to the same thing. Seeing the color blue enables one to know the blueberry's color. Touching it gives one access into its roundness and how it feels. But in both cases, seeing (form) and touching (form) acquaint us with the same material object—a blueberry. Prescinding from this example to the Council's theology, the Church contends that the God of the philosophers is the same God as the God of Christianity, but that he is known under different descriptions by the philosopher and the Christian theologian. The philosopher's God is the same God as the God worshipped by Christians. But the philosopher's God cannot be known *as* the God of Jesus until she begins to have faith *in* Christ.

Still others challenge the conciliar teaching by saying that "Vatican I never explained how one can arrive at the knowledge of God." If these theologians mean that Vatican I never gave a specific example of an argument that lays out each of the individual premises along with a conclusion, then what they have said is true. But if they mean that the Council never gave any indication as to what the proof might look like, then they what they have said is wrong. There are a few indications in the Council as to what the proof will look like.

First, the Church does not say that individuals can only know that God exists through faith in the Christian message. That would be fideistic and contrary to its teaching. The way that individuals can know that God exists is by considering the things that have been made. Hence, the move will be from effect to cause, not through an innate awareness of the idea of God. Thus a demonstrable proof will proceed through an *a posteriori* form of argument. Arguments that take their starting point with the intellectual, historical, moral, and religious experiences are not considered demonstrable arguments. Rather, the cosmological argument resonates with the mind of the Church (a Thomistic design argument would be considered a type of cosmological proof). This conclusion reveals yet another way in which Aquinas and Vatican I overlap with one another.

Like Aquinas's cosmological proof, the person's knowledge of God is discovered through a mediating knowledge which is acquired through God's work of creation. Coming from reason, God's existence is not merely a truth of faith; on the other hand, the *a priori* arguments are not seen as demonstrable proofs. Pope Pius X made the Council's definition explicit in the Anti-Modernist Oath (1910), stating that God can be known by means of the principle of causality.²¹

The Church does not hold that if anyone exercises their reason they will arrive at the knowledge of God. This knowledge is not easily attainable for every person. Says Küng: "Against Russell it must be pointed out that Vatican I asserts not that every human being actually knows God but that knowledge of God is possible in principle for every human being."²² Personal factors can prevent individuals from knowing that God exists. Because everyone is without excuse before God (Romans 1:18-20; Acts 14:16, 17), the exceptional cases—meaning those who deny God's existence—are referring to those who live in a serious state of sin. These persons will have a more difficult time discerning God's existence through nature than those who live by the natural moral law to the best of their abilities.

²¹ Pius X, *Anti-Modernist Oath* (1910).

²² Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, 513.

This is precisely what is meant when commentators say that the knowledge of God's existence is "possible." Knowledge of God's existence is not guaranteed in every individual situation. The norm is that all persons know that God exists by a direct apprehension of the world. Consequently, *it is not normal for anyone to become an atheist*. But if those living in a state of sin rehabilitate themselves by living an upright life in response to the natural moral law, then they will regain natural knowledge of God. Regardless of one's situation, it is *possible* for everyone to arrive at a clear understanding that God exists.

Like Augustine and Anselm before him, Aquinas was a theist (albeit Aquinas was a Trinitarian theist). The Council follows Aquinas directly in this regard: "The holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman church believes and acknowledges that there is one true and living God, creator and lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immeasurable, incomprehensible, infinite in will, understanding and every perfection. Since he is one, singular, completely simple and unchangeable spiritual substance, he must be declared to be in reality and in essence distinct from the world, supremely happy in himself and from himself, and inexpressibly loftier than anything besides himself which either exists or can be imagined."²³

Commenting on this declaration, John Hardon states that these attributes were not chosen incidentally, but were defined deliberately for the purposes of safeguarding the faithful: "Fifteen internal attributes of God, independent of his role as Creator, are enumerated. These are not mere expressions of piety and still less were they chosen at random." He continues: "They represent so many affirmations about the Godhead as the genius of unbelief had raised to the surface. In the century since this divine litany was assembled and, more than ever today, it serves as a check list of faith in a being without whose existence no other premise of Christianity has meaning."²⁴

Thus Catholic theologians who deny the Thomistic conception of God (as seen in the recent popularity of Catholic pan-en-theisms) inevitably depart from official Catholic teaching. By referring to the divine intellect and will, the Church excludes impersonal pantheism and deism. The idea that God is distinct from the world excludes all of the many types of pan-en-theism. The infinity of God means that God possesses every perfection without limitation. God is not lacking in power, goodness, etc. As such, theism is endorsed and is dogmatically defined therein. The Council does not stop short of a bland theism, however. The Fathers designate God by the principal names that the Bible speaks of him, not merely what philosophical theologians can say about God.²⁵

A Representative Case

In this section I will summarize and defend the intuitive knowledge that all people have of God's existence by painting with broad strokes a Thomistic cosmological argument for God's existence. Although I will not explicitly mention all of the philosophical criticisms that have been raised against the argument, I will anticipate these objections and attempt to address them without sacrificing too much space. As we have already discussed, Vatican I

²³ Vatican Council I, Session 3, Chapter 1, *On God the Creator of All Things*.

²⁴ John A. Hardon, *The Catholic Catechism*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 55.

²⁵ Cf. Vatican Council I, Session 1, Chapter 1. Cf. Session 1, Chapter 2.

affirms as a statement of faith that God's existence can be proved. Right reason can lead one to know that there is a God.

Some scholars might conclude that there is no good reason to formulate a cosmological argument for God in this section of the essay, asking: "If the knowledge of God's existence is pre-philosophical, then why spell out this knowledge of God's existence?" The reasons for discussing the proof are twofold. First, many theologians rarely discuss them anymore. By discussing the proof on a philosophical level, one can be confirmed in their belief that God exists, reinvigorating their confidence in the faith. Second, discussing the proofs can be used for evangelical and/or apologetical purposes for unbelievers who demand some sort of evidence for faith.

The immediate implication of the proof is that theologians can indirectly show where anti-theists have committed fallacies in defense of their worldviews. The proofs are not just relevant for Christians in response to atheists, agnostics, and skeptics; they also apply to non-theistic religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, etc. Publications are screaming to be written on the implications of a Catholic natural theology that is faithful to *Dei Filius* for interreligious dialogue.²⁶ Just as natural theologians can prove that God exists, so they can also prove that non-theistic religions are ultimately mistaken or shortsighted. If one religion is true, then it must be a religion that is monotheistic, not one that is pantheistic, pan-en-theistic, polytheistic, or atheistic (or any other view which limits the attributes of God).

For the rest of this section, we will elaborate and defend this version of the Thomistic argument:

1. At least one potential being exists.
2. The existence of every potential being is actualized by another being.
3. An infinite amount of potential beings (which have been actualized by another) is not possible.
4. Therefore, a first actualizer of all potential beings exists.
5. The nature of the first actualizer must be necessary, one, good, eternal, infinite, simple, immutable, and omnipotent. There cannot be two purely actual beings.

The *first premise* in the argument is that "At least one potential being exists." Thomists insist that it is impossible for persons to deny that something exists without implicitly conceding to the truth of the premise (in the process of denying it). If someone denies that something exists, then it must be admitted that *someone* is saying something significant (regardless if what they are saying is a negative or positive affirmation). Otherwise, why listen to what she is saying? Hence, the proposition "nothing exists" is self-defeating. While it is logically possible that nothing exists, it is actually undeniable that something exists.²⁷ The argument does not proceed on the assumption that we are proving logically the existence of

²⁶ Perhaps the best example to date is Francis Clooney, *Hindu God-Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

God. It is logically possible that nothing ever existed (including God), but it is undeniable that something exists.

The object that exists must either be a potential being or a purely actual being. This philosophically exhausts all of our options. There is no third category of being. There is no being known as a sheer potential. Sheer potentiality is not actual in any respect. It does not exist.

In response to the first premise (and/or second premise) some anti-theists have argued that it begs the question in favor of God's existence. But this argument is simply false. If such an objection implies intuitively that if something exists then God must exist, then it would be a quick short-cut through the argument. Such an intuition would make the point of the argument without going through the sequence of the premises (which is precisely the point that Walter Cardinal Kasper defends above, albeit he does so in theological terms). But if the objector means that the argument cannot be made unless the natural theologian was already convinced in her mind that there is a God before she even sits down to lay out the premises of the cosmological argument in defense of God's existence, then we must admit that this is psychologically true, but it is nevertheless a trivial objection. Nobody formulates an argument unless they intend on demonstrating the likelihood of a conclusion. But this should not be considered a case of circular reasoning because nowhere in the first premise does it state that God exists.

We are also on safe ground with the *second premise*: "The existence of every potential being is caused to exist by another being." Whatever has the potential for nonexistence is not a purely actual being. Because a potential being is not the same thing as an actual being, the former must be caused or preserved in existence by something other than itself. When I speak of a cause, I am referring to the transition that takes place in being from potentiality to actuality (all the while retaining its potential for additional causal change). Likewise, if a potential being is not caused to exist by another (or preserved in existence by another), then it would immediately go out of existence. No matter how many potential beings there are, they are unable to remain in existence without an actualizer that is external to them, causing them to be.

Moreover, the existence of every potential being is either self-caused, caused to exist by another, or simply uncaused. This, too, logically exhausts all of our options. Potential beings cannot cause themselves. They would have to ontologically precede themselves which is impossible. Neither can potential beings be uncaused. For if they are uncaused, then they would be the ultimate ground of actual being. Nothing, however, can produce something. Therefore, we conclude that all potential beings must be caused to exist by another. The type of causality involved in this premise is conserving causality. It is concerned with the cause of potential beings that exist now, not with originating causes in the temporal sense of becoming.

In response to the second premise, philosophers such as David Hume have challenged the validity of the causality principle. They insist that the principal is assumed (and so must be rejected until proven otherwise). Until it can be shown that every finite, changing being must have a cause, then the principle of causality remains nil. The only legitimate inference one can make, according to Hume, is that one sees one phenomenon following another. There is no cause involved. One cannot infer that a potential being is caused by another. But

the Thomistic argument is not based on empirical observation, but on metaphysical necessity. The principal of causality is not based on conceptual or definitional necessity as in the Leibnizian form of the cosmological argument, but is based on the fundamental idea that nothing cannot cause something. If a potential being exists, then it must be caused by another. The only kind of being that is not caused to exist by another is a being that has always existed. But a being that has always existed is precisely what is meant by an actual being. Since an actual being is not the same thing as a potential being, the latter must indeed have a cause.

The *third premise* is that “an infinite amount of potential beings (which have been actualized by another) is not possible.” A chain of causes where every potential being is preserved in existence by an actually infinite amount of potential beings is impossible. Either the series of all potential beings is sufficient to account for itself or it is not. But the series cannot account for itself as an entire whole. Certainly, if each being in the series is itself a caused being, then adding all of them together will not alter the fact that they are still in need of a cause. If each part in the entire series is potential (i.e., finite, changing, limited, and dependant), then the entire sum of these beings will still remain finite and changing. If someone chooses to make the series longer, this will not make the sum of potential beings a fully actual set of beings (or that they are able to account for themselves). No effect has within itself the power to cause something else. Rather, it is an actual being that is working in and through each potential being that causes them to be what they are. Arguing that an infinite amount of causes is possible is tantamount to saying that every single potential being has come from nothing, for not a single potential being has any real ground for its own existence, but depends on something else to account for it.

Some anti-theists respond: mathematics is known to have actual infinities. Two distinctions need to be made in response to this. First, there is a difference between mathematical infinities and concrete infinities. The one is theoretical and has no place in the actual world; concrete infinities, on the other hand, cannot exist in the real world. In dealing with the Thomist argument we are dealing with the actual world. Second, there is a difference between actual infinities and potential infinities. Potential infinities are always reaching toward actual infinity, but never actually reaching it. An actual infinite cannot be added to or subtracted from.

Finally, we come to the *conclusion* of the argument: “An uncaused first cause of all potential beings exists.” This conclusion follows logically and inescapably from each premise which has been given. We know that if something exists, then it must exist necessarily or depends on something else for its existence. Something exists. But the existence of this being is not a necessary existent. Thus its nonexistence is a possibility. Its nonexistence has already been (say, before it existed). Conversely, an actual, necessary being has no potential for nonexistence.

Because a potential being’s nonexistence is a real possibility, it exists potentially (or, as a metaphysical composite of actuality and potentiality). Every being that is a composite of actuality and potentiality is caused to exist by another. So long as the regress does not terminate in the existence of a purely actual being, then we are left with a limited regress of causes. Because the series could never reach an actually infinite amount of potential beings.

It must come to a stop. The only kind of being that can keep the series going is a purely actual being that has no potential for change and, by extension, for nonexistence.²⁸

There cannot be an additional regress of actual beings. So it is easy to see why the question “if everything has a cause, then what caused the purely actual being?” is wholly mistaken.²⁹ Not *everything* has a cause. Only beings that have potential need a cause. But what if there are many actual beings, each of which is uncaused?³⁰ To this question we must now turn.

The “first cause” must be necessary, one, good, eternal, infinite, simple, immutable, omnipotent. This, says Aquinas, is what *all* people mean when they speak of God. As we have already mentioned, a purely actual being has no potential. Therefore, it cannot change; it is immutable. The necessary uncaused cause must be nonspatial (infinite) and atemporal (eternal). Since time and space involve a change of position and time, an actual being cannot exist in space or time. It lies beyond space and time and therefore transcends them. A necessary being must also be simple. If the necessary, unchanging, timeless, and spaceless being were composed of parts, then it would eventually be capable of decomposition. But an actual existent does not have any potential whatsoever. We conclude: a pure, actual being must be utterly simple.

A being that is pure actuality must also be infinite in power. Having the power to keep things in a state of potential change, it can have no limitation in any respect whatsoever. It must be infinite in power. A necessary existent is uncaused; its essence is to exist. All other beings (i.e., potential beings) have existence. They are participating in the unlimited existence of the actual being. Without the actual being, all potential beings could not exist and be what they are. Lastly, an actual existent must be good. Nonexistent beings are neither good or evil, for they are not. But if something exists, then it is good. For, goodness and existence are convertible in existent beings.

But there is more: there can only be *one* purely actual being (a being that also simple, good, eternal, infinite, immutable, and omnipotent). There cannot be two or more actual beings. For if there were more than one, then there would have to be something that distinguishes each of them from the others. But there is no way for one being to differ from another unless there is some potential for differentiation inherent in them. In order to distinguish between two beings, there must be something that is different about them.

²⁸ Refusing to accept the conclusion of the Thomist argument, George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God*, (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1974), 247, says: “If the theist has no problem accepting an uncaused God, why does he complain when asked to accept an uncaused universe?” In response to Smith we note that because an actually infinite amount of hierarchical causes is impossible, we must resort to a cause that is itself uncaused. Otherwise we are left with every potential thing coming into existence from nothing without a cause—a logical impossibility.

²⁹ J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 92.

³⁰ As David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 51, memorably argued through the fictional character Philo: “And what shadow of an argument, continued Philo, can you produce, from your hypothesis, to prove the unity of the Deity? A great number of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world?”

Otherwise, one could never differentiate between them in order to identify any of them. Because an actual being has no potential for differentiation, there can only be one of them.

Sometimes it is argued that the concept of an actual being is meaningless. But this objection is fallacious for a variety of reasons. On the face of it, there is nothing logically contradictory with the existence of an actual being. Since we know what a potential being is, we can just as easily conceptualize the idea of a non-potential being (i.e., a pure actual being). We know what an actual being is not: necessity denotes that it is not dependant on anything else for its existence; immutability is another way of saying that it does not change. These limited attributes stem from our experience of the world. Knowledge of God is derived from negating what is already known about potential beings. The negative terms used to speak about God does not mean that we are left with nothing. Positive information about God is derived from applying the principle of causality. He is a being because all potential beings depend on him for their existence. He is pure actuality because he is the first cause of all lesser actualities. We can prove *that* God exists, but we will never be able to grasp *what* he is.

Addressing Objections

We know that we are living in a period of crisis when theologians are promoting teachings that preserve the problems that Christendom is now facing. My hope is that this essay will play a partial role to convince some theologians to focus more of their energies on the arguments for God's existence and not to participate in the attempt to destroy the project of natural theology. That being said, Catholic theologians should be aware that one of the greatest tasks in their reflections on divine revelation is to restore the role of reason in the life of Christian faith. "Theological science," says Cardinal Ratzinger, "responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it."³¹ With this in mind, let us turn to the more salient objections that have been raised against the Council's teaching on the natural knowledge of God's existence. None of these objections can overturn the Council's teaching or diminish its relevance for today.

First, the noetic effects of sin have so damaged human nature that people can never be certain about the question of God unless they have faith in Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can bring unbelievers to trust in God, not arguments. Human reason cannot be so easily trusted.

Now there is something right and wrong about this objection. Two things must be kept in mind. First, the Spirit can work through natural theologians who use the theistic proofs for God's existence to reinforce previous Christian commitment. It is not an either-or approach. It is not the Holy Spirit or natural theology. Rather, God can use theologians who present the proofs in order to reach modern persons who demand evidence before they believe in something. God can work through the intellect to lend credibility to the decision of faith. Anything less would be fideistic. The Council Fathers were well aware of this predominantly Protestant reformed objection and addressed it in *Dei Filius*: "although the assent of faith *is by no means a blind movement of the mind*...no one can accept the gospel preaching in the way

³¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, (May 24, 1990): N. 6. Cf. 1, 5, 7, 10.

that is necessary for achieving salvation without the inspiration and illumination of the holy spirit, who gives to all facility in accepting and believing the truth” (emphasis mine).³²

Although faith has its own unique rationality that corresponds to the life of Christian discipleship, this does not mean that theology has its own unique logic that is only available for believers. Otherwise this would make the theological enterprise undiscussable and impossible to criticize from inside or from without by unbelievers. No one has faith in the Gospel by accident. Rather, a reason is always involved. As St. Augustine once argued, nobody believes in anything unless they know that it is believable. Faith, as we noted, is not a blind leap in the dark without evidence (fideism). Neither will evidence demand faith. When considering reasons for faith, theologians should never give the impression that belief in the Gospel is based on the preambles of faith (rationalism). Rather, the Christian faith is based on the word of God. Faith, however, can be supported and reinforced by reason (Vatican I). Ralph McInerney puts it this way: “As a believer I accept on faith that God exists. As a Catholic, I take it to be of faith that God’s existence can be known apart from faith.”³³

Those who insist that human nature is so depraved are making self defeating claims, for they insist on using reasonable arguments in the process of trying to convince Catholic theologians that the proofs are either doomed to failure or are spiritually useless. In this respect, Reformed theologians are sitting on shaky ground indeed. Not only are there many biblical and philosophical problems associated with the doctrine of the total depravity, but the near unanimous testimony of the Church Fathers (aside from the later Augustine) militates against it.³⁴ Further, the testimony of the world’s population tells us a story that is quite different from that of the strong Calvinists. If asked, most people believe that there is a God.

The *second* argument is that natural theology is unbiblical. God’s existence must be held on the basis of faith alone, not human reason. On the contrary, natural theology has a strong biblical basis. Paul wrote that: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened” (Rom. 1:19, 20). Thus all persons can perceive that a certain kind of God exists. They have no excuse to not search for him.

In the book of Acts Paul and Barnabas once said “Men, why are you doing this? We are of the same nature as you, human beings. We proclaim to you good news that you should turn from these idols to the living God, ‘who made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them.’ In past generations he allowed all Gentiles to go their own ways; yet, in bestowing his goodness, he did not leave himself without witness, for he gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filled you with nourishment and gladness for your hearts” (Acts, 14:16, 17; cf. 17:26-29). Hence we see that God has even left the Gentiles with the witness of his existence through nature.

³² Vatican Council I, Session 3, Chapter 3, *On Faith*.

³³ Ralph McInerney, *Characters in Search of Their Author*, 5.

³⁴ For a discussion, see Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).

In Psalm 19, we read, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims its builder’s craft. One day to the next conveys that message; one night to the next imparts that knowledge. There is no word or sound; no voice is heard; Yet their report goes forth through all the earth, their message, to the ends of the world. God has pitched there a tent for the sun; it comes forth like a bridegroom from his chamber, and like an athlete joyfully runs its course” (Psalm 19:2-6). In the book of Wisdom it is said: “For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen” (Wisdom 13:5; cf. 13:1-9). In sum, there is a strong biblical basis for natural theology.³⁵

The *third* argument is that the proofs for God are impractical. Believers need something that applies to life experience, not theoretical arguments which can only distract persons from faith. Others put it like this: since reason can only take persons so far, we might as well focus on divine revelation to begin with. One does not have to embrace the arguments of natural theology to be saved.

By contrast, there is always mutual interplay between theory and practice in Christian faith. Every time one reads a book or an article in theology, the reader will have to absorb the contents of the writing and then mentally process what is written. Thus beliefs have an impact on values; and values have an impact on behavior. As someone rightly said, ideas have consequences.

As a case in point, Kenneth Baker testifies that the lack of natural theology in the classroom has led to a loss of conviction in his students: “I have been teaching university students for almost twenty years. Over ten years ago I began to notice the mounting skepticism among Catholic students about the existence of God and especially about the ability of the human mind to be certain about the existence of God.” He explains the reason for this ubiquitous skepticism: “It seems to me that much of this skepticism and practical atheism flows from lack of clear knowledge of some basic principles of philosophy and theology. It is not necessary for me to belabor the point that in many of our schools Catholic doctrine and faith are not taught with the clarity and conviction that they once were.”³⁶ One of the ways for theologians to cultivate Christian commitment is for them to bring these “basic principles of theology and philosophy” back into serious discussion. Good ideas can foster and motivate one’s behavior in the life of faith. Genuine respect for the mystery of faith expresses itself in the attempt to understand it as fully, not less. If one has faith, then one will make an appeal to reason in the attempt to understand why and what they believe.

It is only natural for a person who has been changed by the grace of God to want others to know Christ as well. The believer’s ability to reason about the Gospel becomes enhanced, evangelizing believers and unbelievers with every means at their disposal (not just in ways that exclude the use of reason). So if one goes by what Scripture says (1 Cor. 5:11), then persons will seek to evangelize others by appealing to common points of reference that all persons share with one another. One of these common points of reference is that we live in a world that points toward the existence of the Creator.

³⁵ For more on the biblical roots of natural theology from a Catholic perspective, see Francis Martin, “Revelation as Disclosure: Creation,” *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, Matthew Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, ed., (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 205-247.

³⁶ Kenneth Baker, *Fundamentals of Catholicism*, vol. 2., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 14, 15.

Fourth, related to the third objection is that Thomists have depreciated the personal, saving action of God in favor of a strictly monistic conception of deity. Static metaphysics takes precedence over the dynamism of grace. In effect, theists such as Aquinas subordinate God's existence to an abstract object and therefore make him irrelevant.

One often hears in theological circles that Vatican I was heavily theocentric, not Christocentric, Trinitarian or biblical. But I am at a loss as to what the problem is with this. If one examines the Council and *Dei Filius*, one will indeed note the lack of Trinitarian theology. But this was not because the framers of the Council did not see Trinitarian theology as unimportant or irrelevant, but because Trinitarian doctrine was not under dispute at the time (as it was in the fourth century). Rather, the very foundations of the possibility of faith were under attack. This is precisely what the Council was facing. I agree with the majority of Catholic theologians who argue that in order to combat the modern rise of atheism we must retrieve the fine nuances of Trinitarian theology. Aquinas himself was a profound Trinitarian thinker.³⁷ But those following the lead of Rahner in the current renaissance of Trinitarian theology should not forget the equally important enterprise of natural theology. What is desperately needed in the apologetics literature is a forceful natural theology that is coupled with the tenets of sacred doctrine, not one at the expense of the other.

Fifth, theistic proofs convince few people. Whether the theistic proofs provide us with a little bit of information about God is questionable. Most theologians (let alone believers in the pews) do not accept the validity of the proofs, let alone use them regularly in discussion and in writing. If anything, we have seen an upsurge of Trinitarian theology in recent years, not the Oneness of God. How can anyone deny that theologians with a bent toward natural theology are in the minority today? Even so, the proofs prove enough. They demonstrate that *Almighty God* exists. The implication of the proofs is that all other world and life views are fallacious (and that the religions that endorse these worldviews are incorrect). Do the proofs not give believers the confidence that is needed for faith?

It is not clear to me whether anyone can know for sure that hardly anyone believes in Christianity without recognizing that there are good reasons to think that Christianity is true.³⁸ At the very least, those who are capable of studying the arguments for God should do so to become more motivated to believe and thus live by the Gospel. When believers are motivated, this can stir up the desire in other persons to believe in Christianity. Listen to Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*: "In proclaiming Christ to non-Christians, the missionary is convinced that through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is

³⁷ Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁸ Cf. C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays in Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 173. Lewis was convinced that many of the people that he knew in England at the time who believed in God did so because of arguments for God's existence: "nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him to be at least a probable argument for Theism."

responding to that expectation, and so he does not become discouraged or cease his witness even when he is called to manifest his faith in an environment that is hostile or indifferent.”³⁹ If one is truly convinced that God exists (and, by implication, that the Christian God exists), then they ought to become more confident in preaching and persuading others unto Christian belief. Theory and praxis are an inevitable part of all Christian life.

Given the emphasis on theological anthropology, theologians would rather begin from below, not with theology proper as Aquinas did. Theology begins from below, not from on high. This counts as the *sixth* challenge to *Dei Filius*.

Although there are many strengths to beginning with anthropology, it cannot appease the skepticism and agnosticism of modern persons (whether this skepticism is explicitly expressed by them or not) who rightfully expect reasons to believe in something, especially when it comes to believing in supernatural, celestial realities. A divine revelation is simply not a credible thing to believe in for those who already think that religious issues are simply a matter of opinion. Representative of this argument are known as the Transcendental Thomists (e.g., Karl Rahner, Joseph Maréchal, Pierre Rousselot, Bernard Lonergan). Arguing from the fact that humans continuously ask questions throughout their lives, Transcendentalists argue that the only thing that can appease human questioning is the Final Absolute. But this kind of argument is far from convincing in a secular age (though it might appeal to those who already believe).

Aside from the fact that Transcendentalist Thomists have utterly failed to interact with the leading secular humanists of the twentieth century, they seem to have missed a key premise: our questions must be elicited by human experiences that enable us to ask meaningful questions in the first place. In this way, the Transcendental Thomists presuppose some sort of non-Transcendental method. Their epistemological emphasis presupposes the fact that something exists. We might add that atheists can easily challenge Transcendental Thomists by responding that all human questions can be (or will be) answered in terms that are consistent with a naturalistic understanding of the universe. Perhaps our questions will be frustrated in the end. What if the universe *is* absurd?⁴⁰ But for the traditional Thomist this challenge is laid to rest in advance. Beginning with the fact that something finite and contingent exists, there must be an Actual Existent that grounds the existence of every finite being.

Seventh, Aquinas’s theology marks the beginning of secular humanism. It was not until René Descartes and Immanuel Kant that the rational arguments for God’s existence became the foundation by which Christian theologians sought to prove God. The upshot was that theologians began to think of religion strictly in terms of reason. The effect of all this was that revelation became relegated to a lower, less important role in religion. Deism flourished, and then atheism followed shortly thereafter.

Martin Heidegger has influenced an entire generation of theologians to resist the arguments of natural theology in what he dubs the problem of “onto-theology.” For him, the God of the philosophers is not the same God as the God of Christianity. According to

³⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, N. 45.

⁴⁰ Cf. Richard Dawkins “God’s Utility Function,” *Scientific American*, (November 1995): 85.

him, the Western philosophical tradition's obsession with metaphysics has been used to control reality and thus persons instead of being open to a reality that evades human cognition. However, Heidegger radically misunderstood Aquinas. His assault upon Western philosophy was valid against the neo-scholastic interpreters of Aquinas (who were influenced by an Enlightenment rationalism). Like Heidegger, these thinkers failed to see that Thomas's approach to God's existence consisted of two distinct phases governed by two different methods.⁴¹ As Benedict Ashley reports, "First natural science proves the *existence* of God by the arguments just discussed. Second this makes possible a metaphysics in which the question of the *nature* of God is explored by a methodology very different from that of natural science but presupposing its demonstration."⁴² Nowhere in the *Summa* does Thomas provide a definition of what God is. As Turner explains:

This is clearly Thomas's view, though Thomas's apophaticism is from one point of view even more radical than Milbank's formula might suggest: unaided reason's is the less powerful theological capacity, for it knows only the half even of our ignorance. For through revelation we know that there is more to the unknowability of God than reason could ever have suspected: after all, reason does not know that it knows nothing of the inner Trinitarian life of God, or of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus. Even more, reason only half knows even what it does not know that it cannot know. For through faith that unknowability is deepened experientially, and not merely extended; for faith is the manner of our participation in the unknowability of God.⁴³

The *via negativa* of Aquinas does not leave us with nothing. Indeed, that we cannot form any adequate conception of God is not due to the withering away of human understanding, but to the excessive plenitude of the divine nature. The darkness of God is, simply put, the excess of divine light. When natural theologians forget that their discipline has its boundaries, then one can easily be led to deism or atheism. The truths of the faith should never be seen as a stepping stone that build on top of the preconditions of faith. One can bring a horse to water, but no one can make him drink.

Other approaches to God's existence must complement the philosophical approach. So in reaction to neo-scholasticism, which was heavily concerned with the truth of Christianity, theologians must now emphasize the beauty, goodness, and relationality of God. When one stresses the truth of faith (thus, the emphasis is placed on the mind) at the expense of these other transcendentals, then one can be easily led down the path of rationalism which can make one combative, triumphalistic, and, in the worst case scenario, atheistic. But then again, this should not become an excuse to give up on truth. As Brian Davies maintains: "although Aquinas says that the Five Ways are arguments for the existence of God, they are not intended as an exhaustive defense of belief in God's existence."⁴⁴

Eighth, Vatican II did not include the teaching of *Dei Filius*. As a result of newer conciliar emphases, theologians are focused on other aspects of Catholic theology such as

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.2, intro. Here Thomas says: "First, we will consider whether God exists, and second, what God is, or rather *what he is not*" (emphasis mine).

⁴² Benedict M. Ashley, *Choosing a World-View and Value System: An Ecumenical Apologetics*, (New York: Alba House, 2000), 160.

⁴³ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 76. Cf. 121.

⁴⁴ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26.

interreligious dialogue, globalization, inculturation, the liturgical renewal, the media, and ecumenism.

This objection is a serious misreading of the Council (and of subsequent papal teaching to the Council). For starters, the Second Vatican Council did reiterate Vatican I's teaching on God and made it explicit yet once again. In *Dei Verbum*, we read: "God, who creates and conserves all things by his mighty word, (cf. John 1:3), provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities (cf. Rom. 1:19-20)."⁴⁵ In paragraph 6 of the same Constitution, the Council Fathers affirm that: "The sacred Synod professes that 'God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world, by the natural light of reason.'"⁴⁶ The doctrine of Vatican I can also be seen in *Nostra Aetate* 2 and *Gaudium et Spes* 12.

Now although Vatican II did not elaborate on the natural knowledge of God, this does not mean that the issue was seen as unimportant. Theologian M. John Farrelly clarifies the way in which Catholics should understand the relationship between the two Councils: "Vatican II gave primacy to the meaning of God and Jesus Christ but also insisted that reason, common human experience, and the historical value of the Gospels support our faith in the existence of God and his revelation through Jesus Christ."⁴⁷ Correct readings of the Council will therefore include the arguments of natural theology but go beyond them as well. According to Francis Martin: "It is, after all, not a council's role to embark on new speculative teaching but rather to clarify and substantiate the Church's traditional teaching and to elucidate the way in which it is a light to the pilgrim Church of the present and the future."⁴⁸

This point by Martin is underscored by Walter Kasper: "Admittedly, the conciliar text is cause for some dissatisfaction, inasmuch as the intellectual questions raised by atheism are not to be answered solely by a concrete, historical and existential approach. The historical aspect should therefore have been more clearly connected with the traditional teaching on the possibility of a natural knowledge of God."⁴⁹ Vatican II displayed more historical consciousness and cultural awareness than Vatican I, but the former emphasized the validity of permanent truths.⁵⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirmed the twofold order of faith and reason and praised Aquinas's theology as a model for understanding this relationship.⁵¹ The evolutionary model of Vatican II simply does not exclude unchanging truth, but complements the older vision.

Even if Vatican II did not express itself on God's existence as much as some Thomists had hoped, the recent Magisterium has recently put this complaint to rest. Continuing the orthodox line of thinking, the *Catechism* says that "Man's faculties make him capable of

⁴⁵ Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1975), *Dei Verbum*, 3.

⁴⁶ Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, 6.

⁴⁷ M. John Farrelly, *Belief in God in Our Time*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 46.

⁴⁸ Francis Martin, "Revelation and its Transmission," *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition*, Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 55.

⁴⁹ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 51.

⁵⁰ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 10; *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.

⁵¹ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 10, 59.

coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God...The proofs for God's existence...can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason."⁵²

Nowhere are the tenets of *Dei Filius* vindicated more than in John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. In many places the Pope reaffirmed the belief that human beings have a natural knowledge of God.⁵³ Even a cursory reading of this encyclical will convince the reader of the deep respect that John Paul had for Vatican I.⁵⁴ While Vatican I was concerned to combat rationalism, John Paul sees the contemporary situation as one in which reason has been deeply impoverished. This is one of the great themes of his great encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. Because faith and reason have been increasingly sundered, both of them have now suffered as a result. The Pope continuously urged that we must not be modest in using reason in matters of faith.

Pope Benedict XVI agrees with his predecessor: reason must open up again, not brushed to the side in the name of faith: "The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur—this is the programme with which a theology grounded in biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. 'Not to act reasonably, not to act with logos, is contrary to the nature of God,' said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Christian interlocutor. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners of in the dialogue of cultures."⁵⁵ Benedict goes further: "The faith cannot be liberated if reason itself does not open up again. If the door to metaphysical cognition remains closed, if the limits of human knowledge set by Kant are impassable, faith is destined to atrophy: It simply lack air to breathe."⁵⁶

Ninth, the historical, political, and cultural conditions in the nineteenth century had a direct impact on which decrees were formulated at Vatican I. The social climate of today is considerably different. And since all human knowledge is historically conditioned, we cannot expect Vatican I to provide us with universal affirmations which are applicable to our current situation.

Roger Haight is representative of this view: "That God is, that God is personal and universally gracious, are not assertions that are based on knowing in an ordinary sense and cannot be demonstrated or verified in any objective way...In the end there can be no universal power of reason to uncover the shape of transcendent reality because reason itself is historically conditioned."⁵⁷ According to Hans Küng, there is no "substructure of reason" that all persons can agree with. The "uncertainty of human existence and of reality as a

⁵² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 35.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, N. 53, 67, etc.

⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, N. 8, 9, 43, 52, 83, etc.

⁵⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections," Lecture at the University of Regensburg, Germany, September 12, 2006. Found online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html (accessed June 21, 2009).

⁵⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," *Origins*, Vol. 26, No.20, (October 31, 1996): 316.

⁵⁷ Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2001), 57, 62, 63.

whole” prevents persons from reasoning about God’s existence from the things that have been made.

In response it should be emphasized that Councils are not always invoked in response to challenges the Church is facing at the time they are called. Sometimes they are invoked because the Church is anticipating problems in the future. As John Hardon states:

Among the satisfying features of the Catholic faith is seeing how providentially, sometimes prophetically, the Church’s magisterium anticipates the needs of the future. Who would have thought, as early as 1870, that by 1970 almost one-third of the human race would be under the political domination of an ideology that professedly excludes the existence of a personal God? Yet in 1870 the same Council that elaborated the divine attributes to strengthen the faith of believing Christians also evaluated the position of those who, only vaguely then, were devising to supplant the divine majesty...By the second half the twentieth century, loss of faith in God or indifference to his existence had assumed global proportions. Vatican II took stock of the situation in the longest and most elaborate analysis of atheism in the sixteen hundred years of conciliar history. This fact alone gives some indication of how different are the issues facing the Church today from those that threatened its integrity during the days of Arius, Nestorius, and Pelagius.⁵⁸

Further, how one understands Church teaching is different from what is understood. If contexts determine what should be believed, then theologians will be left with an infinite regress of factors that must be considered every time they seek to understand the past and its relevance for today. And if one is left with an infinite regress, then one will never be able to understand anything. In effect, Haight and Küng explain everything and so explain nothing. We can presume that *they* have said something historically conditioned and that they expect their readers to understand them. So if what Haight and Küng have said is true, then their views cannot be trusted. But if what they said is false, then what they have said about *Dei Filius* must be false.

Historical consciousness illuminates our understanding of the past, but it never determines what is taught. The issue is not whether theologians ought to recognize the conditioned nature of human knowledge (that is a given), but to take the next logical step and make rational arguments to the best of their abilities. The more interesting alternative is not to affirm that our knowledge is conditioned, but to make arguments that might be able to persuade others who do not share their convictions given the contingencies that affect us all.

Nonetheless, the proofs are built on a few undeniable first principles of knowledge that apply to all persons.⁵⁹ The substructure that Kung might be referring to applies to a higher order of rationality, not the fundamental first principles that make knowledge possible. Regardless of one’s culture or upbringing, all people know that something exists. All persons know that all limited things need a cause. And as such, Aquinas’s cosmological proof is deceptively simple in its structure as an argument. It is simply an extended reflection on what

⁵⁸ John A. Hardon, *The Catholic Catechism*, 58, 60.

⁵⁹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, 2 vol., 5th ed., (St. Louis: Herder & Herder, 1955).

all normally functioning persons recognize about the basic features of reality. Consider the words of John Paul II:

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos, recta ratio*.⁶⁰

Even though classical foundationalism—an epistemological stance which insists that all knowledge is based on or derived from indubitable first principles—has been universally rejected, this does not mean that *all* foundationalist philosophies are unacceptable. Some principles remain universally applicable to all human knowers and are inherent to reality itself. Otherwise, nothing at all could be known and shared by persons across time and culture.

The kind of foundationalism that the pope mentions is not completely Cartesian. Rather, his modified foundationalism seeks to uphold a few basic principles such as the law of non-contradiction, the law of identity, and the law of the excluded middle (the foundational principles that are necessary for individuals to have a natural knowledge of God). In this philosophical view, epistemological first principles are necessary, but they are not totally absolute. Other forms of knowing derive from human experience and faith, not just reason alone.

Still others argue that unless the theistic proofs persuade all persons, then they should be given up. A proof must satisfy at least two requirements: they must be logically and psychologically compelling. According to the Protestant philosopher Ronald Nash, “All of this is to say that proofs must pass tests that are both logical and psychological. No argument can become a proof *for some person* until it persuades that person. In the real world, unfortunately, the logical and psychological requirements we have noted often get separated.”⁶¹ Since these two conditions cannot be met, we must resort to probabilistic arguments, not proofs.

But no one can ever guarantee that everyone will accept every proposition that is thought to be proved. Even though scientists know that the earth is a huge sphere, there will always be people who will call this fact into question. No reputable scientist would say that because

⁶⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, N. 4. Cf. Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius*, 15.

⁶¹ Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1994), 109.

the flatlanders association says that the earth is flat that the scientific community should give up on the spherical shape of the world. As Thomist philosopher Brian Davies says, it does not “follow that there could be no proofs of religious conclusions since there may always be people who reject all proofs for such conclusions. Such people may be bad at following proofs. Or they may be unable to recognize the truth of the premises out of which the proofs they reject are constructed.”⁶²

Moreover, the classical proofs for God’s existence are rational exercises in theoretical reasoning, not practical reasoning. An inquirer of the proofs, provided she understands the each premise in the argument, will arrive at a new truth that she did not know before. Psychological dissatisfaction might occur because many people think that if they embody Aquinas’s mind throughout the sequence of premises then their life will be changed. But this is not what the proofs are primarily designed to do. Believing in God will have an impact on one’s life, not merely knowing that God exists. But the proofs can reinforce *previous* Christian commitment.

Paul Copan makes a similar argument. Because we cannot logically prove the existence of God, he says, we must resort to probabilistic arguments: “Successful arguments aren’t *knock down, airtight, and non-negotiable ‘proofs’* or ‘self-evident’ reasons with mathematically certain conclusions. The aim of these arguments regarding God’s existence and nature is more modest than this—namely, to show that their conclusions are *more plausible or reasonable* than their denials, that they’re highly probable and offer the best explanation for important features of our universe or human experience...We should probably speak of pointers and signposts for God’s existence—echoes of God’s voice (Ps. 19:2)—not ‘proofs.’”⁶³ Thus probabilistic arguments are much more honest in their attempt to argue for God’s existence and nature.

Surprisingly one hears this objection quite often (especially among analytic philosophers of religion). But one does not need to have a logically compelling argument in order for it to be considered a proof. While Aquinas’s argument is not a logical proof, it is still a full blown proof. We have already discussed the fact that certainty allows for different degrees of conviction in scholastic terms: logical certainty, moral certainty, virtual certainty, and so on. Aquinas’s proof is not a logical proof, but an existential one. While there might be good probabilistic arguments for God’s existence, Aquinas would argue that these are entirely too weak. Probabilistic arguments do not make sense unless it is assumed that we live in an ordered universe. And if we live in an ordered universe, then we need a Supreme Orderer who gives it order. This is precisely what Aquinas argued for in his the fifth proof in the *Summa Theologiae*. Whether probabilistic arguments are more honest is besides the point. What matters in these discussions is what is true (and how this truth is presented).

Lastly, many Catholic theologians are keen on noting that holiness is the most convincing means by which skeptics will be persuaded to believe in Christianity—not rational arguments. “Between the First and Second Vatican Councils a profound change took place,” Rene Latourelle declares, “a change from a perspective of object to a perspective of person, from a perspective which looked at things from outside to a perspective which looked at them

⁶² Brian Davies, *Thinking About God*, (London: Cassell Ltd., 1985), 242.

⁶³ Paul Copan, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 72.

from within.”⁶⁴ St. Francis of Assisi is usually invoked as an authority: “preach the Good news always, and if necessary, use words.”

Like so many of the objections that have been raised against *Dei Filius*, this one gets some things right. But *if* one is holy, then they would use *every* means at their disposal to reach the lost, not just ways that exclude the mind and verbal persuasion. Holiness may be *more* than rational, but it is certainly not *less* than rational. Conversely, if one uses rational argument, then this can become a means by which one is made holy by the Spirit. While Vatican II is often interpreted in this way, even Latourelle recognizes the continuity in thought between the two Councils in his book. Latourelle wants to emphasize that the primary emphasis in post-conciliar apologetics should not be rational (which is how the neo-scholastics did things). Of course, Vatican II wants to get away from the neo-scholastic approach to theology in general. Thus the new emphasis will include rational approaches, but it will go beyond them.

St. Francis’s aphorism cannot be understood in the strict sense of the phrase without becoming self-refuting (why use words to argue that we should not preach with words?). In order to understand his point, we must recognize that he is emphasizing the importance of one’s lifestyle for evangelization, not that we should do away with verbal discourse altogether. Holiness is the best way to win converts, but this will include the use of reason given the appropriate circumstances. In light of the pressing problems of our day, I have argued that rational demonstrations for the existence and nature of God need to be more seriously considered by theologians, not that holiness is unimportant. It seems to me that the rational approach to Christianity has been generally overshadowed. On the one hand, if one is holy, then they will use rational evidence as a motive of credibility. And on the other hand, contending for the faith is a sign of holiness. It can also serve as a means to holiness.

Conclusion

Vatican I’s teaching needs to be retrieved yet once again. One repeatedly hears many objections in conversations and in the relevant literature against the Church’s official view on faith, reason, and God’s existence. I personally do not believe that most Catholic theologians want to be unfaithful to *Dei Filius*, but that they do so unintentionally by casting the same arguments that were formulated by so many theologians in the middle of the twentieth century. These theologians were not sympathetic to traditional Thomism. And in so doing, the “new theologians” influenced a generation of Catholic theologians to think in categories that were, for the most, hostile to *Dei Filius*.

Of the many different types of Christianity, the Catholic Church undoubtedly has the most venerable tradition of natural theology. Let us not forget the importance of this discipline. Kasper elaborates on the cultural malaise, offering a solution in the process. Let us heed to his words, lest we fall away from the Dogmatic Constitution on Catholic Faith:

Modern atheism [which stems from the philosophies of the Enlightenment] has put theology in a difficult position. Of particular importance here is mass atheism, a phenomenon unparalleled in past history; it regards the practical, if not theoretical

⁶⁴ Rene Latourelle, *Christ and the Church: Signs of Salvation*, trans. Sr. Dominic Parker, (New York: Alba House Publishing, 1972), 9.

denial of God or at least indifference to belief in God as being by far the most plausible attitude to take. As a result, theology has been stripped of its power to speak to people and to communicate with them. There are now no generally accepted images, symbols, concepts, or categories with which it can make itself understood. The crisis in the presuppositions for understanding talk about God is the real crisis of present day theology. To put the matter in more Scholastic terms; the crisis of contemporary theology arises from the loss of the *preambula fidei*, that is, of the presuppositions which faith needs if it is to be possible as faith and if it is to be able to make itself intelligible as faith. The quandary becomes clear when we consider the various ways in which theology comes to grips with modern atheism.⁶⁵

If the Vatican I era was known for stressing the rationality of the faith (at the expense of other lines of theological thinking), the Vatican II era is characterized by a general resistance to anything that even resembles the use of reason in support of Christianity. If we seek to incorporate the emphases of both Councils, then we would truly have the mind of the Church.

⁶⁵ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 47.

AFFECTIVE CONSTITUTION AND THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Bruce Ballard¹

“If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-benevolent, then why is there (so much) evil in the world?” runs the problem of evil. Or more forcefully, doesn’t the occurrence of (so much) worldly evil actually imply the non-existence of such a God, as the leading atheological gambit, the “argument from evil,” contends?

In the context of theodicy or defense against the argument from evil, “evil” signifies both what is wrongly done by humans (moral evil, sin) and what is bad, something we undergo which runs counter to our desires (suffering). Following Aristotle, we may think of the ultimate good as happiness, that which we seek for its own sake and which, as a goal, conditions our choices and habit formation across the range of human actions and feelings. Happiness is the fulfillment of our human nature. For Christian theism, ultimate happiness is found in relationship with God. That divinely intended good is the final end for humans. In its fullest expression it is the end of sin and suffering.

Because the argument from evil primarily concerns suffering (most often it pertains to human suffering), that will be our focus in this essay. We begin by examining the connection between the philosophical and existential dimensions of the problem and argument from evil as suffering. Next we consider the role of the affect in the constitution and interpretation of experience generally, together with some implications for the argument from suffering. Third, we look at how a key affectual element of the argument from evil might undercut the argument. Fourth, we consider a proposal to categorize suffering as a species of moral or spiritual failure, i.e. as affectually wrong. Finally, we reflect on the affectual nature of Christ and its significance for the problem of evil.

The Philosophical and Existential Problem(s) of Evil

The apologetic or philosophical problem of suffering, that is, how one may respond to the argument from suffering as a philosophical challenge, is often distinguished from the existential problem of suffering, or how one’s beliefs, attitudes and actions will be affected in relation to God in the face of, say, one’s own experience of suffering. The existential problem has also been called the psychological or pastoral or religious or practical problem. Alvin Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen, among many others who address the apologetic problem, disclaim any direct connection between the philosophical and existential challenges. Yet there may be more connection between the two than first appears.

In principle, even slightly negative experiences are logically available to the argument from suffering. Woody Allen joked that he could not believe in the existence of a beneficent creator who would let him get his tongue caught in the typewriter. Were we to adduce such negative experiences to argue against God’s goodness, however, the general consensus of what should count as misery would ordinarily disqualify them. Any “Argument from Annoyance” will fail. A certain experiential threshold is necessary to really motivate the

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problem of suffering and especially the argument from suffering, albeit that threshold varies over time and across cultures. So in the context of the argument from suffering, the really serious challenge comes not from the existence of *any* negative experience, but from negative experience in an extreme amount, especially if it looks like gratuitous suffering. Hence John Hick defines suffering as a state of mind “in which we wish violently or obsessively that our situation were otherwise.”² So the philosophical problem follows the contours of the existential problem.

When do we reach the appropriately motivating threshold? Here the social context can be significant. If, for example, members of a religious congregation, friends, and family rally round the cancer victim, his or her experience of suffering, all things being equal, will not play in the same register as the one who suffers alone. Indeed, the magnitude of the suffering experienced will be directly correlated with its lived interpretation. The inner, personal argument from suffering the sufferer may begin to consider, in doubt, will be harder to make for the socially loved one. The same might be said where there is a direct inner experience of divine love. Indeed, in both cases, the affectual experience of being loved can bring about tranquility and with it a rationale for our living apart from any intellectual defense against the argument from suffering. Our personal standard of what is rational for us to believe or continue believing seems to contain an affective component, at least in relation to certain kinds of beliefs.

Human Affect and the Constitution of Experience

Martin Heidegger noted that every mood or affectual orientation has its understanding and every understanding its mood. That moods have rationales illustrates the point here. If, for example, I am angry at X for losing my book and then discover that it was Y who lost it, my anger at X disperses at once. Facts matter in affective rationales. Aristotle’s account of emotional virtue and vice makes sense to us for the same reason: “We can experience fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and generally any kind of pleasure and pain either too much or too little.... But to experience all this at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner—that is ... the mark of virtue.”³ Were emotion sheer subjective projection or expression, we could make no sense of Aristotle here.

Moods tune us in to our environment in particular ways, highlighting certain features and directing our purposeful action. They contain interpretations of ourselves and others. Parental love, for example, configures a whole world of relationship; it creates a teleology according to its own intrinsic logic. It makes certain courses of action rational and others irrational. Hence rationality in the case of the typically hedonic agent of so-called rational decision theory, affectually and ideologically determined in its individualism as it is, cannot count as rationality *per se*; it offers one rationale among many other possibilities.

Altogether then, without the affective contribution we could not live, since nothing would count as significant or important to us, nothing would move us to act. So, far from being a stumbling block to dispassionate reason, the affective contribution to the constitution of human experience is a *sine qua non*. In that sense the affect’s role resembles

² John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 354.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 43.

the contribution of Kant's a priori categories to sensory inputs in the synthesis of experience. At least to some degree then, an experience of suffering, like all human experiences, is an interpretation constituted by an affectual understanding. As Heidegger puts it, human existence is care, about ourselves, others, and our environment.

Particular intellectual constructions of suffering, then, have their corresponding moods and vice versa. So, for instance, accepting the free will response to the problem of suffering intellectually can also bring emotional solace. And as we saw earlier, an immediate powerful experience of love can directly evoke a new self-understanding and rationale for decision-making. But, in addition, the affect is or can be made subject to the will or intellect directly in important ways. Hence classical Stoicism aimed to achieve serenity by withdrawing all affect from what exceeds the individual's control, namely everything in the world but one's attitude about it. Yet when the experience of suffering is denatured by *apatheia*, what remains of existence falls short of what most would consider life. Even so, the fact that affect partly constitutes our experience and is at least in part subject to the will shows that there is no fixed, objectively determined quantum of suffering. The morose boyfriend who kills himself over a breakup with his girlfriend may suffer more than the person with end-stage cancer who is loved deeply and has the hope of faith. Circumstances where the will or intellect is no longer intact would pose a special case here, as would the cases of children and animals. Such suffering requires a different kind of accounting.

For the one who develops wisdom and virtue through the challenge of suffering, that suffering is not of the average "amount." Indeed, on balance, it may be felt and understood as a good. This is the crux of the soul-making defense against the argument from suffering. And it is nowhere more relevant than with the affect. It is under the pressure of suffering that key virtues develop. For if there were no bad consequences of our free will, there would be no occasions calling for patience, self-sacrifice, unselfishness, courage, or honesty as virtues or excellences in the world. In fact, as Hick argues, the capacity to sympathize with and love those in calamity actually requires that there be a distribution of evil not in keeping with our desires since, if it were so distributed, no one would deserve our sympathy. Hick cites Royce here: "Even love shows its glory as love only by its conquest over the doubts and estrangements, the absences and the misunderstandings, the griefs and the loneliness, that love glorifies with its light amidst all their tragedy."⁴ And the famous discourse on love of I Corinthians 13 speaks similarly of the nature of love in relation to what it overcomes. For Christian theism all of these character qualities are important preparation for and incipient experience of eternal life with God, a limitless good transcending all finite suffering.

But those outside any particular religious confession have also seen the soul-making result of suffering. Aristotle's discussion of the development of virtue in the passions certainly includes this overcoming aspect. Or consider Michael J. Fox in his 2002 memoir, *Lucky Man*: "If you were to rush in to this room right now and announce that you had struck a deal with God, Allah, Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Bill Gates, whomever-in which the ten years since my diagnosis [with incurable progressive disease of the central nervous system] could be magically taken away, traded in for ten more years as the person I was before, I would, without a moment's hesitation, tell you to take a hike [dust jacket]." So what looked

⁴ As cited in Hick, 362 footnote.

like a clear instance of severe, long-term suffering and a premise for an argument from suffering is intellectually and affectually reconstituted as something quite different.

Or consider Mabel and the effect of divine love in her suffering: “One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek, and it had pushed her nose to one side, dropped one eye, and distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly...this woman was eighty-nine years old and ...had been bedridden, blind, nearly deaf, and alone, for twenty-five years.”⁵ It is probably impossible for those outside such affliction to genuinely appreciate it. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how a well-meaning visitor might even address her.

Her life also seems to be paradigmatic evidence for the argument from suffering. Yet to a visitor who asks her what she thinks about while lying in her bed, she replies: “I think about my Jesus. I think about how good He’s been to me. He’s been awfully good to me in my life, you know.... He’s all the world to me.”⁶ And with her experience of Christ, Mabel not only preempts a personal argument from suffering, but also makes her suffering unavailable to the outsider for a more general argument from suffering.

An Alternative Rejoinder

Other rejoinders to the argument from evil from an affectual angle are possible, of course. William Hasker, for example, finds an apparently self-thwarting element in the argument from suffering based on our moral sentiments. He notes that the argument from suffering depends on a moral sentiment which, when violated, gives rise to moral protest. Extreme and/or gratuitous suffering seems unjust. Without some moral feeling, apparent discrepancy between evil done and evil received would not issue in protest. Even the philosophical challenge depends on this sort of moral care. Yet can the indignant one be existentially authentic in his or her protest? Hasker argues that this is impossible.⁷

He begins by asking the objector whether he or she is glad to exist, a person-relative appeal to each one’s core value sentiments. Next he proposes that my existence depends on the coming to be of my body. If I am glad I exist, I cannot be sorry my body came to be. But if my body is a necessary condition of my existence as a person, then whatever my body needs to exist, I also need. To be the person I am requires particular parents at a particular time. Many contingent causes played into my parents meeting, marrying, and conceiving me at a given time. Were I to trace back through their ancestors for the same sorts of contingent causes, I would very likely find that war, famine, sickness, disease, betrayal, even murder and adultery all played a role in making my existence possible. So Hasker concludes: “Had major or significant events in the world’s past history been different than they were, then in all probability neither I nor the persons whom I love would even have existed.”⁸

Here is where the moral protest against evil becomes self-thwarting. If I object that no good or just God would have tolerated the manifold suffering of the world, yet I am glad for my own existence and its necessary conditions (the manifold suffering), I have a

⁵ William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2003), 110.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

⁷ Michael Peterson, *God and Evil* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), cf. 114-120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

contradictory will. On the other hand, if I am not glad that I exist, perhaps even leaning to suicide, this argument cannot be successfully formulated. Altogether, then, Hasker very intriguingly suggests how the affectual component of the argument from suffering might be turned back upon itself.

Does Hasker's argument work? If his premises were all true, it would be a powerful argument speaking directly from and to the existential element of the problem of suffering. Yet his principal move is suspect. If I will my existence, even my body, am I thereby committed to willing, say, the abduction and rape of my great-grandmother, had that led to the conception of a grandparent? Or, alternatively, must I will the suicide of her fiancé so that she could come to marry my great-grandfather? If my German parents met and married in the US having fled as children with their parents from WWII, am I committed to willing Hitler?

Here a question of personal identity arises. Abstracting away from all but biological conditions for my existence, I might have to commit to a certain genealogy. But that just means my parents meeting, marrying, and conceiving me, for example. I am just as consistent to will this having happened in Germany as in America. I can will that my great-grandmother decided to drop suitor number one in preference for my great-grandfather rather than suitor one killing himself. It isn't easy to see why I must commit beyond a set of sufficient historical conditions of my coming to be, why I must commit to the actual historical sequence. For that actual sequence is not necessary in principle for my existence. Alternatively, I could consistently will that God create me like Adam, *de novo*, without any human progenitors, without any history.

Suffering as Sin

But perhaps suffering just is sin, as John Hick proposes. In that case, the problem of suffering is successfully met by a changed affectual understanding away from our self-centeredness and toward God. As Hick puts it: "If we were fully conscious of God and His universal purpose of good we should be able to accept our life in its entirety as God's gift and be free from anguish on account of it."⁹ There is clearly something to this for Christian theism. Hick could garner significant support for this claim by drawing on the pertinent biblical sources, as also for his claim that Christ suffered for others. Yet protest Psalms are also part of the canon. And Christ appeared to suffer for his own part as well. On the cross he cries out to God as having forsaken *him*. He is clearly full of anguish in Gethsemane with his disciples, sweating blood over his coming crucifixion. Is he weeping only for others at the tomb of his friend Lazarus? Since for Christian theism the life of Christ is the paradigm of goodness and he suffered, not all suffering can be sin, as Hick suggests. But this is not simply a negative result.

Divine Affect and the Constitution of Experience

Because the life of Jesus is the exemplar, it presents a picture of a perfect human emotional life and of divine personality. In the former, anger, frustration, disappointment, fear and grief appear. Of course the occasions of those emotions are not the petty or otherwise self-centered matters for which we often condemn such feelings. They also show

⁹ Hick, 355.

how even for a perfect affectual understanding, the negative charge of suffering cannot be completely extinguished and a humanly feeling life remain. But in addition to Hick's theological objection, there is a significant contemporary current of opinion for which such negative emotions have no place. Shouldn't Christ have been a bit more patient and self-controlled in the temple or with his slow-to-learn disciples, this tradition might ask. Shouldn't he have been more impassive? Yet it is difficult to imagine a strong argument for this conclusion which did not presume what needed to be proved. Still, impassivity has been a larger issue concerning divine personality.

The idea that God's perfection requires that nothing outside of himself affect him, that he be free of emotion as we know it, has been a popular one in the history of Christian theology. On one hand, it has seemed beneath God's dignity to be affected by lesser creatures, for his emotional life to be dependent. And on the other hand, divine emotions also seem to play havoc with God's sovereignty, since such feelings, as dependent on others, would seem to be out of God's control. Whatever one makes of these objections, they fail to square with the biblical accounts of God and Christ. The portrayals of God's emotional life in the Old Testament are too numerous to need citation. And the same is true for the Jesus of the New Testament. An impassive God above the human fray is a picture borrowed from Greek philosophy, a picture quite opposed to the Christian conception. And while we can and do recognize scriptural anthropomorphisms regarding God's "eyes", "right arm", "wings", etc., divine emotions cannot be relegated to the same category. The biblical God would be unrecognizable as impassive.

Since God is worshipped for his goodness, an impassive God would probably fail to attract worship. Divine goodness cannot be so different from human goodness that it fails to exemplify the humanly best. And for the suffering, when we cannot or should not relieve them (yet), the best people weep with those who weep. A God devoid of sympathy would fall short, to say nothing of a God who is Love, as the New Testament puts it. Nor can we properly distinguish the emotional life of Christ from God since, as Hebrews tells us, Christ is the exact representation of his nature.

What, after all, is the appeal of Christianity? Isn't it the love of God in Christ? Isn't it the father, quite oblivious to his humanly-conceived dignity, running out to embrace the still far off prodigal, falling on his neck and kissing him repeatedly, making him a great feast in celebration? Isn't it the Jesus who says how often he wanted to gather his people under his wings like a mother hen *on his way to be crucified for them*? Isn't the angels' joy in heaven over the repentant one a sharing in God's joy?

The appeal of Christianity reaches to the problem of evil. In making the argument from evil, atheists often contend that God could and should prevent all suffering, or at least all significant suffering. The presumption is that nothing constrains God's action in particular situations, as though every part or aspect of a scenario were separable. But the death of murderer X is also the death of Y's father. And Z's acceptance to college is a signal event in the life of his or her parents as well. So the objector may depend on a false anthropology. On that atomistic view, we are all essentially individuals only. Any bonds we form with others are elective, revocable, inessential. We alone define ourselves. Individualism, expressive in private life and competitive at work, becomes, as Michael Sandel puts it, a virtual religion of the self.

But even a cursory review of the actual relations constituting any person's life should be sufficient to dispel this capitalist myth. We picture the "self-made" man or woman delivering this tale of all-sufficiency in the presence of parents, siblings, teachers, and friends only with amusement. We are in key ways constituted by our relations to others, and perhaps most significantly in the non-elective relations of the family.

But if human reality is an essentially interrelated whole of internal relations, then perhaps God, in altering certain aspects, might destroy a larger good or goods. On the Christian account, Christ's *having to* suffer, and in the worst ways, is often taken to assume this larger perspective. The passion of Christ is taken to show that even severe suffering can be an ineliminable facet of life in the overall plan of a loving God. And like the free will defense, this understanding carries its own mood: it can bring solace to human sufferers.

But the best solace is personal, the sympathy that comes from others who care and have experienced significant suffering firsthand. Of the human claimants to god-head, Christ is unique in this way. Earlier we noted how the experience of divine love can help affectually reconstitute the lived experience of suffering. Now we can add the key qualification that this divine love has its effect as proceeding from one who suffered most deeply and on our behalf. In the final analysis, the sympathetic love of this foremost fellow-sufferer has been found to suffice in the lives of his followers and to motivate, both intellectually and emotionally, faith in an eternal future free of all suffering.

OBJECTIVE MORALITY AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

Erik J. Wielenberg¹

Editor's Note: In our January 15, 2010 issue (Vol. 3, No. 1), Glenn Siniscalchi wrote an article titled, "In Defense of Christian Theistic Metaethics." In it, Siniscalchi argues against atheistic scholar, Erik J. Wielenberg, asserting that atheistic moral realists (such as Wielenberg) ought to infer that a "personal transcendent anchor" is needed to account for the objectivity of moral virtue. Dr. Wielenberg read the article and here furnishes a reply. American Theological Inquiry is committed to publishing articles from those who affirm the Ecumenical Creeds of the historic Christian faith. However, we are happy to make an exception in this case and are grateful to Dr. Wielenberg for taking the time to respond to Siniscalchi's article.

On February 12, 2010, biology professor Amy Bishop, who had recently been denied tenure, stood up at a biology department meeting and unexpectedly opened fire on her colleagues with a shotgun, killing three of them. Most people, upon hearing about this episode, would agree that the professor's actions were morally wrong. But moral wrongness and other ethical properties are deeply puzzling.² Some find such properties so problematic that they deny their existence altogether. What must reality be like in order for Bishop's actions really to be morally wrong—morally wrong in a robust, objective sense?

This question connects with a contemporary debate over the basic nature of reality. In this debate, two views appear to dominate. One view is theism, according to which the foundation of reality is a perfect person, God. Another view is naturalism, according to which the limit of reality coincides perfectly with the limit of what can be studied by the empirical sciences (and hence God does not exist). It seems to many that the instantiation of robust, objective ethical properties makes sense if theism is true but not if naturalism is true. Different thinkers draw different conclusions from this claim. Some appeal to this claim to argue for theism: Since ethical properties are instantiated, and only theism can account for this, this is a reason to accept theism. Others appeal to this claim to argue against the instantiation of ethical properties: Since naturalism is true, ethical properties are not instantiated.

There is a third, less popular view about the nature of reality on the menu. According to this view, reality extends beyond what can be studied by the empirical sciences, yet there is no God. This view has it that moral properties are instantiated and ethical facts do obtain, but such facts cannot be directly studied by empirical science and do not depend on God for their existence.³ Objective morality, on this view, has no foundation external to itself. We may call this view *non-natural, non-theistic moral realism*.

¹ Erik Wielenberg, PhD, is Associate Professor of Philosophy at DePauw University and is author of several books including *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

² Throughout this essay, I use 'ethical' and 'moral' interchangeably.

³ This view has made something of a comeback in recent years. For recent sympathetic discussions, see Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Glenn Siniscalchi is a Christian theist who holds that objective morality requires a theistic foundation, whereas I adhere to non-natural, non-theistic moral realism.⁴ My work on the relationship between theism and morality focuses on the defense of two main theses. The first of these is that objective morality does not require a theistic foundation. The second of these is that philosophical attempts to ground objective morality in God tend to suffer from one sort of defect or another.

In a recent article in this journal, Siniscalchi defends the view that objective morality requires a theistic foundation and critiques my version of non-natural, non-theistic moral realism.⁵ In the present article I briefly explain my view and respond to some of Siniscalchi's objections.⁶ I also discuss Siniscalchi's proposal about how God might serve as the ground for objective morality and argue that, like many such proposals, it is defective.

Morality Without an External Foundation

A fundamental category in my ontology is *states of affairs*.⁷ Examples of states of affairs include *Wielenberg's being a philosopher*, *Wielenberg's being more than six feet tall*, *humans being mortal*, *2 and 2 equaling four*, and *Wielenberg's being a unicorn*. States of affairs that hold or obtain are sometimes called facts; in the list above, the first four states of affairs obtain and the last does not. Some obtaining states of affairs are *brute*, meaning that the fact that they obtain has no external explanation. Theists typically maintain that the state of affairs of God existing is a brute fact in this sense.

I hold that there are some ethical states of affairs that obtain. Examples of such ethical facts include: *Pain's being intrinsically bad*, *it's being just for people to get what they deserve*, and *it's being morally wrong to produce intrinsic evil for no good reason*. These ethical facts, I believe, are not reducible to physical facts or any other kind of fact. They are *sui generis*—they are their own kind of fact.⁸ Furthermore, at least some ethical facts are brute: They obtain, and the fact

⁴ A complicating factor here is that 'naturalism' admits of many definitions. My own approach is naturalistic to the extent that I deny the existence of God and non-physical souls; it is non-naturalistic in that I maintain that there is more to reality than what can be studied by empirical science. In my earlier work, I described my view as a form of naturalism, whereas more recently I have characterized it as a kind of non-naturalism. This is a consequence of the existence of multiple senses of 'naturalism'; the view itself has not changed, though my preferred way of characterizing the view has.

⁵ Glenn B. Siniscalchi, "In Defense of Christian Theistic Metaethics," *American Theological Inquiry* 3:1 (January 2010), 81-98.

⁶ It is important to see that my project here is entirely defensive. I explain my view without presenting any arguments for it; my argumentation is devoted entirely to responding to Siniscalchi's objections to my view and, in section 6 below, to critiquing Siniscalchi's theistic approach to objective morality.

⁷ For a helpful overview, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on states of affairs: [<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/states-of-affairs/>], accessed 5/10/10.

⁸ Siniscalchi seems to suggest at various points that my view is that ethical facts are part of the physical universe. For example, he writes: "Wielenberg departs from the theist when he insists that moral truths reside solely in the physical universe" (Siniscalchi, "Theistic Metaethics," 85). This is not my view; my view is that moral facts and properties are non-physical facts and properties.

that they obtain has no external explanation.⁹ Possible examples of such brute ethical facts include the first and last in the list of ethical facts at the start of this paragraph.

Of course, not all ethical facts are brute. Imagine, for example, that Wielenberg is repeatedly jabbing a needle into a squirming puppy just because he likes hearing the puppy whimper in pain. That what Wielenberg is doing is morally wrong is an ethical fact. The obtaining of this ethical fact is explained in part by the truth of other, more fundamental ethical facts. For instance, Wielenberg's action is an instance of producing intrinsic evil for no good reason, and this is always morally wrong. When we appeal to the claim that producing intrinsic evil for no good reason is always morally wrong, we have reached the foundation of morality. The question, *why* is producing intrinsic evil for no good reason always morally wrong? has no answer; that sort of thing just is morally wrong.

I propose, then, that objective morality rests on a foundation composed of brute ethical facts. Such ethical facts are foundational in at least two senses. First, they are ontologically foundational. By this, I mean that they have no explanation outside of themselves; no further facts make them true. Second, they are epistemologically foundational. By this, I mean that they can be known to be true in a direct way; they need not be inferred from other things that we know.

With this very brief sketch of my view in hand, I turn to consideration of some of Siniscalchi's criticisms.

Moral Truths vs. Moral Values

Siniscalchi notes that "Wielenberg affirms that moral truths exist without a deeper metaphysical and personal foundation."¹⁰ He then quotes a passage by J.P. Moreland and William Craig that begins with this rhetorical question: "What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value *justice* just exists?"¹¹ Following this passage, Siniscalchi writes: "Are moral values impersonal 'abstractions' in Wielenberg's view? In his book he asserts that they constitute the furniture of the universe."¹² The worry here seems to be that my view posits the existence of impersonal moral values, and that there is something incoherent or at least problematic about such entities.

Notice the shift from talk of moral *truths* to talk of moral *values* in the passages just quoted. I claim that (some) ethical *facts or truths* are brute and hence are true without resting on a further explanation or foundation. The passage from my book to which Siniscalchi refers reads as follows:

These necessary ethical *truths*...are part of the furniture of the universe. ...These necessary ethical *truths* constitute the ethical background of every possible universe. It

⁹ Siniscalchi seems to suggest at various points that my view is that ethical facts are products of evolution. For example, he rhetorically asks: "[H]ow can moral truths evolve in such a way that persons can respond to them?" (Ibid., 84). I do not hold that moral facts are products of evolution.

¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹¹ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 492.

¹² Siniscalchi, "Theistic Metaethics," 83.

is within this framework that all beings and their actions, divine and human alike, are to be evaluated.¹³

The point of the language about the “furniture of the universe” is to suggest that these necessary ethical truths are brute. Nowhere do I commit myself to view that there are brute moral *values* that just exist (whatever that means). Thus, the remarks by Craig and Moreland, as well as Siniscalchi’s rhetorical question about moral values, are not relevant to the view I hold.

As I note in a later paper to which Siniscalchi refers, I am committed to the existence of *states of affairs* and *properties*.¹⁴ But this by itself is surely no objection to my view. While there are, of course, various questions and puzzles that arise concerning states of affairs and properties (philosophy being what it is), many philosophers of a variety of persuasions (theistic and non-theistic) accept the existence of such entities. Thus, Siniscalchi’s worries about moral values make no trouble for my view.

Value from Valuelessness

Siniscalchi repeatedly asserts that entities with value cannot be produced by entities that lack value: “It is, one hardly needs to point out, difficult to see how value can occasionally just emerge out of utter valuelessness.”¹⁵ What Siniscalchi does not provide is a reason to think that this principle is true. Perhaps the thinking here is that value or goodness is a kind of substance that is conserved but is never created or destroyed. However, there is no particular reason to think that this is the correct way to conceive of value. Indeed, a perfectly plausible alternative view implies that the “no value from valuelessness” maxim is false.

According to this alternative view, moral properties (such as goodness) supervene or depend upon non-moral properties. Thus, if a given entity is good, it is good in virtue of or because of certain non-moral properties of that entity. Pleasure, for instance, is good because of the qualitative feel that pleasure has. Persons are valuable, and possess certain rights, because of certain capacities they have—for instance, the capacity to experience pain, and to reason. When an entity possessing the right sort of non-moral properties comes into existence, that entity will also possess the property of being good. When such entities are produced by entities or processes that do not possess moral properties, then value arises from valuelessness. More precisely, in such cases, entities that have the property of being good arise from entities or processes that do not have this property. For example, for many years the universe was devoid of sentient life. Eventually, valueless processes produced beings that could experience pleasure, and, at some point, the first episode of pleasure occurred. At that moment, the property of goodness was exemplified for the first time. There is nothing particularly puzzling about this; it is just one of many cases in which entities that lack a given property produce an entity that possesses the property in question.

It should be emphasized that it is no part of my view that ethical *truths* are produced by valueless processes; indeed, on my view ethical truths are not *produced* at all. Thus, Siniscalchi

¹³ Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Erik Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (January 2009), 34.

¹⁵ Siniscalchi, “Theistic Metaethics,” 84.

is mistaken when he declares that “Wielenberg maintains that valuable truths can *sometimes* spring from the greater context of complete and utter valuelessness!”¹⁶ This remark of Siniscalchi’s is accompanied by a footnote that references a page in my paper “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism.” That page includes the following passage:

Necessarily, any being that can reason, suffer, experience happiness, tell the difference between right and wrong, choose between right and wrong, and set goals for itself has certain rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and certain obligations, including the duty to refrain from rape (in typical circumstances). Evolutionary processes have produced human beings that can reason, suffer, experience happiness, tell the difference between right and wrong, choose between right and wrong, and set goals for themselves. In this way, evolutionary processes have endowed us with certain unalienable rights and duties. Evolution has given us these moral properties by giving us the non-moral properties upon which they supervene.¹⁷

This passage begins with an appeal to the following ethical principle:

(P) Necessarily, any being that can reason, suffer, experience happiness, tell the difference between right and wrong, choose between right and wrong, and set goals for itself has certain rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and certain obligations, including the duty to refrain from rape (in typical circumstances).

I take it that (P) is a brute ethical fact. This ethical fact is not a product of evolution (whatever that would mean); indeed, it is not produced by anything, as it has no explanation or foundation external to itself. It was a fact long before life existed and hence long before evolutionary processes began to occur. Evolutionary processes produce biological organisms, not ethical facts. Among the biological organisms produced by evolutionary processes are human beings. Normal human beings can reason, suffer, experience happiness, tell the difference between right and wrong, and so on. Because human beings have these capacities, and because (P) is true, human beings possess certain moral rights. Unless there is some reason to reject this view, there is no reason to accept the claim that value cannot arise from valuelessness.

Perhaps Siniscalchi would reject the view that unguided evolutionary processes could produce beings that can reason, suffer, experience happiness, and so on. For example, at one point Siniscalchi writes: “Wielenberg presupposes that human beings are capable of morality...humans have free will and the ability to assess ethical dilemmas...But this is precisely where the inconsistency is situated.”¹⁸ Once again, what is missing is any sort of support for this claim; we are left with bare assertion. The mere claim that unguided evolutionary processes cannot produce human beings hardly constitutes a challenging objection to my view.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wielenberg, “Moral Realism,” 40.

¹⁸ Siniscalchi, “Theistic Metaethics,” 84.

Facts vs. Persons

Siniscalchi writes: “[O]ne does not offend a ‘brute fact.’ One can only offend a *person*.”¹⁹ I agree; it is no part of my view that ethical facts can be offended or that one can have moral obligations toward ethical facts. What is part of my view is the notion that we have moral obligations because certain ethical facts obtain; however, this does not imply that the relevant moral obligations are obligations *toward* the ethical facts in question. To see this point, consider an example given by Siniscalchi:

I have strong reasons to listen to my wife if she wants me to come home after studying at the library. I have less reason to listen to a colleague who insists that I go out for a beer with him. The nature of the person and the kind of request that they make of me has a direct impact on my decision. It is much more important for me to listen to my wife than to stay out late on a weeknight drinking beer.²⁰

Here, Siniscalchi seems to appeal to certain moral facts, including, for instance, the fact that everything else being equal, a request made by someone with whom one stands in a loving relationship carries more weight than a request made by someone with whom one does not stand in such a relationship. Imagine that Siniscalchi foolishly opts for the beer rather than going home to his wife. In this case, he would offend his wife, not the moral fact just mentioned. Similarly, if he has a moral obligation to follow his wife’s request, this obligation exists at least in part because of the truth of the moral fact just mentioned. But it does not follow that by going out for the beer he violates a moral obligation to this moral fact; rather, the moral obligation is toward his wife.

Siniscalchi also says that “[p]ersons are only accountable to other persons. ... If we feel guilty for violating moral rules, then there is probably a personal being that we have offended.”²¹ In the example at hand, the offended party is Siniscalchi’s wife. There is nothing in any of this that conflicts with my view.

However, Siniscalchi also asserts that “moral principles are grounded in a source that is personal. ... There is a greater person that we are accountable to.”²² Continuing a pattern that runs throughout Siniscalchi’s article, we are presented once again with bare assertion and little or no supporting argumentation. More importantly, however, when Siniscalchi attempts to explain how God “grounds” morality, he runs into serious trouble. That is the topic of the next section.

God as the Foundation of Objective Morality

Robert Adams and William Craig both provide God-based theories of objective morality.²³ One of the main conclusions of my paper “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism” is the following:

¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰ Ibid., 85.

²¹ Ibid., 87.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Moreland and Craig, *Christian Worldview*.

It is somewhat misleading to characterize theorists like Adams and Craig as providing a theistic *foundation* for objective morality. This characterization can easily give the impression that, on their approaches, *all* objective ethical facts are *explained* by God. But this is not at all the case. What is really going on is that *some* objective ethical facts are explained by appeal to *other* basic ethical facts (*some* of which are *also* supernatural facts). Adams, Craig, and I all agree, then, that objective morality is somehow built into reality. We all posit a moral foundation of substantive, metaphysically necessary brute ethical facts. They *also* see divinity as built into reality, whereas I do not. But it is a mistake to think that on their approaches, the divinity that is built into reality provides a complete external foundation for objective morality. On both types of views, the bottom floor of objective morality rests ultimately on nothing.²⁴

Siniscalchi seeks to present a God-based account of objective morality that avoids this implication by claiming that “[o]bjective moral norms are not distinct or even distinguishable from God himself.”²⁵ This remark suggests that, despite the fact that Siniscalchi sometimes speaks of God as the source of objective moral truths, Siniscalchi’s view is that objective moral truths are *identical* to God.

Such a view is problematic at best and incoherent at worst. Let us consider what it might mean to say that objective moral norms are not distinct from God. On the one hand, we have propositions such as the following:

- (i) It is morally wrong to torture babies just for fun.
- (ii) It is just for people to get what they deserve.
- (iii) Pain is intrinsically bad.

On the other hand we have a person—a very special person (i.e. a perfect one), but a person nonetheless. What could it mean to say that propositions like (i)-(iii) are *identical* to a person? The entities that are said to be identical seem to be in entirely different ontological categories: propositions and persons. Recall Siniscalchi’s insistence that persons but not facts can be offended.²⁶ This remark supports the view that moral norms and persons are fundamentally different kinds of things. Worse for Siniscalchi, by identifying moral norms or facts with God, Siniscalchi commits himself to the view that one *can* offend moral facts (since presumably Siniscalchi holds that one can—and many do—offend God). Thus, the claim that objective moral norms are not distinct from God seems no more plausible or coherent than the claim that $2+2=4$ is not distinct from Wielenberg. Siniscalchi has failed to provide a plausible account of objective morality.

Conclusion

As far as I can see, Siniscalchi has provided no good reason to reject my version of non-natural, non-theistic moral realism. As I have tried to show above, Siniscalchi’s objections to

²⁴ Wielenberg, “Moral Realism,” 39-40.

²⁵ Siniscalchi, “Theistic Metaethics,” 89. Siniscalchi quotes C.S. Lewis approvingly in developing his moral argument (*ibid.*, 86-88). It is worth noting that Lewis struggled to account for the relationship between God and morality as well. For a detailed discussion of this as well as Lewis’s moral argument, see Erik Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 59-93.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

my view tend to depend either upon (a) misunderstandings of my view or (b) unsupported assertions. Moreover, Siniscalchi's own proposal for a God-based approach to objective morality seems flawed in that it rests on the implausible and perhaps incoherent view that God is identical with moral facts.

It is worth commenting briefly on another aspect of Siniscalchi's argument that I have not yet addressed. Siniscalchi writes that there is an "intrinsic connection between someone who believes in Christianity and the way in which this is thought to lead one to stronger forms of moral motivation."²⁷ The thought here seems to be the familiar one that Christian belief produces a greater concern for morality (and presumably a greater adherence to moral norms as well) than does non-belief.

The effect of Christian belief or its absence on moral behavior is a complicated topic and I will certainly not attempt a full discussion of it here. Siniscalchi is correct in noting that I have had little to say about this sort of argument.²⁸ This is at least partly because I view this as primarily an empirical issue rather than a philosophical one. Here, I will be content simply to emphasize the complexity of the issue and encourage interested readers to examine evidence from all quarters. Siniscalchi provides a list of works making the case that Christian belief yields moral behavior and better societies.²⁹ I point here to some works that offer evidence that challenges this view.³⁰ In any case, it is far from clear that Christian belief and moral behavior are connected in the straightforward way that Siniscalchi suggests.

Finally, I would like to thank Siniscalchi for his engagement with my work on the relationships between theism and morality. While disagreement clearly remains, I hope that our exchange will encourage readers to examine the debate and surrounding issues more closely.

²⁷ Ibid., 95.

²⁸ Ibid., 97.

²⁹ Ibid., 96, n. 64.

³⁰ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "Atheists: A Psychological Profile," in Michael Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300-317; Phil Zuckerman, *Society without God* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Gregory S. Paul, "Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies," *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005); Gregory S. Paul, "The Chronic Dependence of Popular Religiosity upon Dysfunctional Psychosociological Conditions," *Evolutionary Psychology* 7 (2009), 398-441; Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

AN INCLUSIVE OLIVE-TREE (ROMANS 11:11-24)

Lyle Story¹

Paul makes special use of the agrarian image of the olive-tree in a highly developed allegory.² The olive-tree imagery develops salvation history in a unique and comprehensive manner, emphasizing the Gentile mission to which Paul is committed. It will be argued that *Paul provides a new understanding of God's plan for the Jew (cultivated olive-tree) and Gentile (engrafted wild olive-branches) that points to the grand eschatological consummation.*

Recent scholarship suggests that Paul uses the persuasive language of the diatribe throughout his letters, most notably in Romans.³ Since Paul is not personally known by the Roman Christians, he speaks in an indirect and rhetorical manner to allay possible fears, misunderstandings or misgivings. Paul does not directly accuse Roman Gentile believers for religious bigotry but uses the imaginary opponent to make his point about possible wrong attitudes towards the Jews. He expresses great passion regarding the issue of Jewish and Gentile incorporation into the same people of God and presses his readers to sense the eschatological and corporate fulfillment that is yet in store for the inclusive people of God. Tobin's suggestion that Paul develops his argument in three stages, will be argued for in this article.⁴

The paper gives special attention to the broad structure of the passage noted by the following diagram:

First Stage— <i>God's choice of Israel & her subsequent history</i>	⇒	Second Stage— <i>God's choice of the Gentiles</i>	⇒	Third Stage— <i>Eschatological fulfillment for the people of God, which includes the restoration of Israel</i>
have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! (v. 11 a)				
through their transgression (v. 11b)	⇒	salvation has come to the Gentiles (v. 11b)	⇒	so as to make Israel jealous? (v. 11b)
Now if their stumbling (v. 12)	⇒	means riches for the world (v. 12)	⇒	how much more will their full inclusion mean! (v. 12)

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² Although the specific genre is variously identified, the point-by-point nature of the argument suggests "allegory" as the best term. Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 669.

³ Thomas H. Tobin, SJ, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Context* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004). Stanley Kent Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale, 1994). Tobin notes some of the features of the diatribe. rhetorical questions, apostrophes (addresses to imaginary interlocutors), refutations of objections, comparative speech, examples. e.g., "O Man" ἄνθρωπε "What then?" τί οὖν, "May it never be" μὴ γένοιτο 3.

⁴ Tobin, 101-2.

and if their defeat (v. 12)	⇒	means riches for the Gentiles (v. 12)	⇒	(how much more will their full inclusion mean!) (v. 12)
		I am an apostle to the Gentiles (v. 13)		
		in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them (v. 14)	⇒	(so as to make Israel jealous.) (v. 11b)
For if their rejection (v. 15)	⇒	is the reconciliation of the world (v. 15)	⇒	what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (v. 15)
If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy (v. 16)	⇒	then the whole batch is holy (v. 16)	⇒	(<i>A guarantee of final restoration</i>)
and if the root is holy (v. 16)	⇒	then the branches also are holy (v. 16)	⇒	(<i>A guarantee of final restoration</i>)
But if some of the branches were broken off (v. 17)	⇒	and you, a wild olive-shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive-tree (v. 17)		
		do not boast over the branches (v. 18)		
		But if you do boast... (remember that) it is not you that support the root, but the root supports you. (v. 18)		
"Branches were broken off" (v. 19)	⇒	"so that I might be grafted in." (v. 19)		
		you stand only through faith. (v. 20)		
		So do not become proud, (v. 20)		
For if God did not spare the natural branches (v. 21)	⇒	(Gentile pride)	⇒	neither will he spare you (v. 21)
severity toward those who have fallen (v. 22)	⇒	God's kindness toward you... if you continue in his kindness, otherwise you also will be cut off (v. 22)		

			⇒	And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in , for God has the power to graft them in again. (v. 23)
		For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive-tree and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree	⇒	how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. (v. 24)

The chart lays out salvation-history in three interdependent stages. In the threefold scheme, Paul builds the force of his argument through ten conditional sentences, which carry each element of the argument further. The interpretive comments will successively look at each “slice” of the chart, keeping in mind the way that each “slice” contributes to the argument of the whole—expressed through the various developments in the three stages. We have not found anything similar in early and recent scholarship. Scholarly works on this text often fail to keep the broad structure in mind in their discussion of the individual verses.

Paul preaches no “replacement theology” in which the Church replaces Judaism, to the effect that God has “had it” with the Jews. Instead, Paul portrays the goal of salvation history, and in doing so, delineates three organic stages of God’s interaction with humanity (Jews and Gentiles).

“This age”		“The age to come”
<i>The First Stage</i>	<i>The Second Stage</i>	<i>The Third Stage</i>
God’s choice of Israel and her subsequent history ⇒	God’s choice of the Gentiles ⇒	Eschatological fulfillment for the people of God, Jew and Gentile

The unbelief of some of the old people of God in the first stage continues in the second stage as a partial hardening (παρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους—11.25, “**some** broken off,” “hardening has come upon **part** of Israel”—not the whole), which will be removed when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (11.25), at the “age to come” when there will be eschatological fulfillment for the people of God (Jew and Gentile).⁵ In the second stage, the believing people of God live in continuity with OT Israel and the final goal of eschatological fulfillment embraces believing Jews and Gentiles.

⁵ ἄχρις οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ. This expression parallels Luke 21.24, —”and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles *until the times* (ἄχρι οὗ...καιροί) of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Müller finds parallels for this structure in the OT and inter-testamental literature, and calls attention to the way in which one stage will close and the other begin. Zech 12.3 (LXX); Dn 9.27 (LXX)—the handing over to the Gentiles is limited by ἄχρι ου|. Test of Zeb 97-9 Test of Ben 10.8-9; 4 Ezra 523 9.26-10.58; Wis 48.10. Christian Müller, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit und Gottes Volk* (Gottingen. Vandenoek und Ruprecht, 1964) 42.

Paul uses salvation history to encourage a Gentile faith-response to God that includes Gentile attitudes of humility, dependence and appreciation for the Jews and their rich heritage. Therefore, the unfolding instruction is based upon the meaning and involvement of *both* Jew and Gentile within Salvation-History. God's purpose is inclusive. "From the trunk of the holy tree of the OT Israel, some branches had been broken off; and the Gentiles, shoots of a wild, alien tree, have been grafted into the trunk of the holy tree. But this makes it perfectly clear that the Church of Jesus Christ lives from the root and trunk of OT Israel."⁶

In the diatribe, the primary audience for the allegory is the Gentile constituency of the Roman Church. The Jews and Gentiles are treated in vss. 11-12 in the third person. However, in v. 13, the real purpose of this third-person address comes to light with the second person, "But I am speaking *to you* who are *Gentiles*." Through the allegory, the persons addressed are spoken to in the second person, usually in the singular (collective). While the Jewish example and future hope is repeated at several points through the conversation, they are always referred to in the third person. Further, we find the personal pronoun "you" (σύ/ὑμῖν) in vss. 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24. Even the verbs are all found in the second person singular:

"you became"—ἐγένου (v. 17)

"do not be arrogant"—μὴ κατακαυχῶ (v. 18)

"if you are arrogant"—εἰ κατακαυχῆσαι (v. 18)

"you who supports"—βαστάζεις (v. 18)

"you will say"—εἰρεῖς (v. 19).

Since Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles by divine mandate, he is vitally concerned with Gentile believers that they not misread the meaning of God's dealings with Israel. Since God is not finished with Israel, Gentile attitudes are to reflect God's inclusive concern and activity. At the same time, he is certain that Jews will be motivated by jealousy and subsequent faith as they observe the all-encompassing purpose of God.

Thus, we find that there is only one Israel into which the Gentile believers are now engrafted. One people is grafted into another—while that other is not now "one," for some branches were broken off. "Paul's exclamation, 'I too am an Israelite' (Rom 11.11) reveals how firmly he holds to the fact that the Christian *ecclesia* is the continuing body of OT Israel."⁷

Structural Analysis

The structure of the argument in the allegory is expressed through ten conditional sentences in a diatribe (11.12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24), composed of both protasis and apodosis. Most of the conditional sentences are of the type in which both halves are regarded as true (true-condition). Another important feature of several conditional sentences

⁶ H.J. Kraus, *The People of God in the OT* (New York: Associated, 1958) 87-89.

⁷ Earl Ellis, *Paul's Use of the OT* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957) 137.

expresses the minor-major⁸ (πὸσσὺ μᾶλλον) and major-minor conditional sentences. Paul uses the conditional sentences to express his certainty of eschatological fulfillment for the people of God (Jew *and* Gentile). There are a few verses (11.11, 13, 19, 20) which do not follow the conditional sentence format, but can be regarded as supplementary parallel concepts. At each point of the argument, Paul builds the next logical step, and in so doing, he outlines three stages: 1) God's choice of Israel and her subsequent history, 2) God's choice of the Gentiles and 3) eschatological fulfillment for the people of God, which includes the restoration of Israel, all within the broader context of the Jewish two ages. The *Interpretive Comments* will detail the specific argument and analyze each distinct statement of the allegory as it bears upon the broad structure of the whole.

Interpretive Comments

1. *Israel's stumbling is not irrevocable ruin (v. 11a).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
¹¹ So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means!		

Verse 11 introduces the issue of Israel's *stumbling*. The negative, "not" (μή) with the question, leads to the translation, "they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" evoking the clarion answer, "By no means!" The combination of the rhetorical questions with *no* or *not* and the strong answer, *By no means!* makes it clear that *stumbling* is not the final word; it does not indicate a "falling" or "irrevocable ruin," from which there is no recovery.⁹ "The deepest ground of this חלילה (*by no means*) springs from Paul's Jewish faith in the faithfulness of God, who cannot revoke covenant, law and election."¹⁰ Paul's thought develops in the following verses, illustrating the positive note of hope that. a) Israel's rejection is not complete and final, b) Israel's present rejection results in the conversion of the Gentiles.

2. *The result of Israel's stumbling has been salvation for the Gentiles, which in turn, will provoke the Jews to jealousy (v. 11b).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
¹¹ But through their stumbling ⇒	salvation has come to the Gentiles, ⇒	so as to make Israel jealous.

In v. 11b, Paul highlights the positive benefit¹¹ of this *stumbling* for the Gentiles—now blessed with salvation, and the indirect positive result for the Jews, who will be motivated by jealousy to make a faith-response. The reference to Rom 10.19 (LXX-Deut 32.21) is clear;

⁸ In Rabbinic studies, the terms "light" and "heavy" are used for this type of argument (see how the second statement is more significant than the other (2 Cor 3.7-11).

⁹ Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul. An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975) 357.

¹⁰ H.J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 241-2.

¹¹ The conjunction, "but" (ἀλλά), has a strong adversative force, contrasting Jewish *stumbling* with beneficent results.

just as Israel stirred God to jealousy by what is *no god*, (idolatry), so God would provoke Israel to jealousy by what is *no people*, meaning the Gentiles. Jealousy has a salvific purpose, which Paul envisions in the third stage, subsequent to the fullness of the Gentiles (v. 25).

3. *The assured riches for the Gentiles in Israel's restoration are predicated upon the riches to the Gentiles (v. 12).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
12 Now if their stumbling means ⇒ and if their defeat means ⇒	riches for the world, ⇒ riches for Gentiles, ⇒	how much more will (be the riches accompanying) their full inclusion!

This, the first of the true, conditional sentences (minor-major), embraces all three stages and underscores the message of v. 11—the positive results from a negative failure.

The riches in the third stage will be immeasurably greater than the present riches for the Gentiles in the second stage, conditional upon Israel's positive response. These *riches*, which will accrue to the Gentiles, are “an abundance of benefits.”¹²

In view of the fact that the *remnant* (λείμμα—v. 5) and the *rest* (λοιποὶν—v. 7) were mentioned earlier, the term *full inclusion* (πλήρωμα—also v. 25) means the filling up of this remnant as a whole from *all* of those who have come to faith.

4. *Paul applies himself directly to the Gentiles and indirectly to the Jews, and desires for the Gentile constituency to feel the same burden for the Jews (vss. 13-14).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
	13 ...I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry 14 in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.	⇒ (so as to make Israel jealous). (v. 11b)

The Gentiles must not misinterpret Paul's role as an apostle to the Gentiles. “Contrary to what you may be inclined to think...[Paul's]...labors as an apostle of the Gentiles have an Israel-ward significance—of good for Israel.”¹³

Paul longs for his own *flesh*¹⁴ (σάρξ), his brethren and kinsmen. This commitment reflects Paul's bond of identity with his people,¹⁵ and his hope that Gentiles will recognize

¹² BAGD, 217.

¹³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979) 559. See Sanday and Headlam, 323 for a lengthy discussion. William Sanday, Arthur Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977, reprint 1926) 323.

¹⁴ Rom 9.3 “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.”

the same line of continuity with Israel. They are dependent upon Israel despite the unbelief of many Jews; “God grants no mercy to Israel without the Gentiles...neither does he do so to the Gentiles without Israel.”¹⁶

Paul’s direct ministry to the Gentiles is an indirect ministry to the Jews—provoking them to jealousy (11:11). The eschatological thought of the restoration of Israel, prompted by jealousy, is a driving force in his ministry.

5. *The assurance of the end, acceptance = life from the dead, are predicated upon the reconciliation of the Gentiles (v. 15).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
15 For if their rejection ⇒	is the reconciliation of the world, ⇒	what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!

This minor-major form verse, builds toward the climax, depicting the happy state of Israel’s *acceptance as life from the dead*. Paul’s argument demands a climax of far greater importance than *the reconciliation of the world*.¹⁷ The meaning of *life from the dead* is found in the last act of salvation history, the *Parousia*, wherein resurrection-life will prevail, “the universe must wait for its final destiny of blessedness until Israel has been brought to God.”¹⁸

God intertwined the histories of the Jews and the Gentiles making their consummation interdependent. Israel’s *rejection* is linked to the reconciliation of the world, and her acceptance will be the harbinger of the final consummation.”¹⁹

6. *Israel’s restoration is guaranteed in spite of Jewish unbelief (v. 16).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy,⇒ and if the root is holy,	then the whole batch is holy; ⇒ then the branches also	<i>A guarantee of final restoration in spite of Jewish unbelief in First and Second Stages</i>

¹⁵ See the corresponding use of σαρκ for kindred in Rom 9.3 and the LXX of Gen 37.27; Lev 18;6; 25.49; Judg 9.2., T.W. Manson, ed. by Matthew Black *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962; reprinted in 1976), 949. For a critique of Wheeler Robinson’s “corporate personality,” see J.W. Rogerson, “Corporate Personality” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. by David Noel Freedman, 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1156-57.

¹⁶ Ridderbos, 360.

¹⁷ See the references in Judaism in which the idea of the Resurrection is connected with the inauguration of the Messianic Age. *Jubilees* (Jub) 23.29; Enoch 51.1. Others cited by W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948) 293-323 and Ulrich Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus* (München: Kaiser, 1968), 393.

¹⁸ Dodd, *The Epistle* 128.

¹⁹ Jewett, “global reconciliation,” 681. Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949) 397. See David Michael Stanley, *Christ’s Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* (Romae: E. Pontifico’s Istituto Biblico, 1961) 197. Diter Zeller, *Juden und Heiden in der Mission des Paulus*, Hoffman follows Michel in his estimation of this term “life from the dead” as a popular tradition. Paul Hoffman, *Die Toten in Christus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 196) 184.

⇒	are holy. ⇒	
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Verse 16 reveals a three-fold purpose: 1) confirmation of Israel's acceptance in the third stage, 2) rationale for Israel's acceptance, 3) preparation for the olive-tree metaphor with the mentioned metaphor of the *root* and *branches*.²⁰

The holiness, which the dough /first-fruit and root possess, is transferred to the whole batch and branches respectively. *The root*, in which the Gentile believers have had a share, is the rich root of the cultivated olive-tree (Jews) (v. 17). This dependent relationship is the rationale for the enjoiner for Gentile humility for the Jewish root supports them, who are externally engrafted wild olive-branches (v. 18).

The point of comparison in both metaphors is the quality of transferred holiness. The dough/first fruit and root are consecrated to God in their entirety, which will guarantee a holy batch and holy branches. The holiness of the dough/first-fruit and root denotes a choice (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν —v. 28), through which holiness was conferred upon the fathers and is then transferred to Israel. The equation of the root with the patriarchs, particularly Abraham, can be found within Judaism.²¹

Some branches were broken off (v. 17), yet these same branches are holy; since God planted a holy root, the branches then are necessarily holy. Drawing upon the Semitic concept of solidarity,²² Paul makes it clear that the character of the root or dough/first fruit carries over into the tree's branches and the full batch of dough; it will mean an outgrowth of that which was latent in the root or dough/first-fruit.

7. *Through an "unnatural" process, the Gentiles share a rich legacy with the Jews and are to feel a dependence upon God and the Jews (v. 17)*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
17 But if some of the branches were broken off,	and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree,	

²⁰ Some scholars (C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938) 173, Sanday & Headlam, 326) separate this verse from vss. 17-24.

²¹ "The pious of the Lord shall live by it forever. The paradise of the Lord, the trees of life, are His pious ones. Their planting is rooted forever; They shall not be plucked up all the days of heaven." Ps of Sol 14.3; "And he (Abraham) blessed his Creator who had created him in his generation, for He had created him according to His good pleasure; for He knew and perceived from him would arise the plant of righteousness for the eternal generations and from him a holy seed, so that it should become like Him who made all things." Jub 16.26; See also Jub 21.24; Eth Enoch 10.16; 93.10—Israel is the race of the elect root (Eth Enoch 93.5,8), cited by Christian Maurer, "ῥίζα" *TDNT*, VI 987. Maurer also cites several references in Rabbinic literature which equate the fathers (Abraham) with this root.

²² A.R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales, 1942). See Herbert Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 207, "Israel is thought of, not as a series of individuals each with his own personal responsibility to God, but as a solid whole."

The negative “cutting off” is replaced by the positive “engrafting” with the second action dependent upon the first. This horticultural grafting procedure Paul describes is *contrary to nature* (παρά φύσιν ἐνεκεντρίσθης, v. 24); in horticultural practice, one grafts cultivated-slips onto wild trees, not wild slips onto cultivated olive-trees. We should allow the absurdity of this process to be the strength of Paul’s point. “Paul describes God’s dealings in salvation history by means of a metaphor as strange as the reality it represents.”²³ He is asserting something miraculous.²⁴

The olive-tree (v. 17) suggests that the people of God are one and the same throughout the successive stages. It is true that branches may be cut off, due to unbelief, and other branches may be grafted onto the trunk, but these operations take place on the same tree. The new Israel of the Church is thus the continuation of the original Israel and engrafted Gentile believers share (“fellow participants” συγκαινωνός) in the same rich legacy that Israel has received (9.1-5).

8. *Instead of becoming proud, the Gentiles are to remind themselves of their dependence upon the legacy of the Jews (v. 18).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
	<p>18 do not boast over the branches.</p> <p>If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.</p>	

Verse 18 concerns the Gentile attitude of humility toward Jews. Three imperatives reveal Paul’s thought and intensity (“do not brag” v. 18; “do not be conceited” v. 20; “fear” v. 20) to forbid that which the Gentiles are already doing.²⁵ Either Paul is speaking from his own missionary activity or had learned from others of some exclusionary Gentile attitudes in the churches.

The Gentile believers are entirely dependent upon the holy root which supports, nourishes and sustains them. “Paul’s symbolism is doubly deliberate. It suggests not only his high estimate of Israel, but also his low estimate of the spiritual attainments of the Gentiles.”²⁶ They have nothing to bring to the salvation event, but everything to gain. Paul expresses the sober reminder to a Gentile audience. “You owe all you are and have to the race that you despise.”²⁷

²³ Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 129.

²⁴ Compare to John the Baptist’s pun about God’s ability to raise up from *stones (eben)*, *children (ben)* to Abraham (Matt 3.9).

²⁵ Present imperatives that are negated express the stopping of something already in process.

²⁶ William Davies, “Romans 11.13-24. A Suggestion” *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme*. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1978) 134.

²⁷ Danell has succinctly summarized this attitude of pride, a persistent theme in the OT and NT, which marks the conclusion of successive stages in the history of the people of God. G.A. Danell,

Gentile arrogance is a roadblock that hinders Israel's necessary jealousy. Berkouwer noted, "We cannot overestimate the extent to which contempt for the Jews—even in the Church—has broken down—and hindered this 'jealousy,' and closed off the way that Paul saw opened."²⁸

9. *The same temptation of complacency and unbelief to which Israel succumbed constitutes a grave danger for the Gentiles. Faith, coupled with fear is the only criterion for Jew and Gentile alike (vss. 19-20).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
<p>19 You will say, "Branches were broken off ⇒</p> <p>20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, ⇒</p>		

Some Gentiles stated that unbelieving Jews had been cut off to make room for the Gentiles. Paul answers their statement with concession, i.e., "in a way that is true" (καλῶς), "but taken in isolation it is a dangerous half-truth."²⁹ Israel had fallen into unbelief by trusting in her own advantages and privileged position—she was not able to maintain her ongoing dependence on the grace of God. This same temptation confronts the Gentile. As Nygren says, "The Jew says, 'I belong to God's own people.' He puts his confidence in...the promises to the fathers. In his complacency he refuses faith...in a similar manner, the Christian is tempted to say, 'I belong to the spiritual Israel.' He is tempted to put his confidence in...his Christianity."³⁰ "Faith is genuine eminently in Christ *and* as it fears by realizing that it will remain in God's kindness only as it continues to trust in what God has promised."³¹ Failure to respond to God's inclusive kindness is tantamount to unbelief.

10. *God's judgment upon his unbelieving peoples serves as a warning and example to the Gentiles as well as the rationale for Gentile awe (v. 21).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
<p>21 For if God did not spare the natural branches</p>	<p>(Gentile pride)</p>	<p>neither will he spare you</p>

The major-minor warning provides support for the preceding imperative, "fear" (v. 20). The second half of the conditional sentence expresses the inevitable judgment of God for Gentile pride in the second stage, which will lead to their exclusion in the third stage. If God

"The Idea of God's People in the Bible" *The Root of the Vine*, ed. by Anton Fridrichsen (Westminster: Dacre, 1953) 23-36.

²⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963) 357.

²⁹ Cranfield, II, 568.

³⁰ Nygren, 401.

³¹ Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible*, an unpublished syllabus for Fuller Theological Seminary, XX-8. See also 12.16; 1 Tm 6.17; Rom 11.20.

has not spared the “natural branches” neither will he spare complacent, exclusive and arrogant Gentiles.

11. *The above salvation history reveals God’s character of severity and goodness, which is to evoke Gentile gratitude and fear (v. 22).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
22 ...severity toward those who have fallen,	but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off	

God’s character is revealed in the first stage as *severity*, to the Jews who fell. During the stage of the Gentiles, God’s character is revealed as “kindness.”³² The Gentiles are to be particularly mindful of his severity as they celebrate God’s kindness. The only basis of confidence for Jew and Gentile alike is the goodness of God, his free grace and the sovereign will of his love.

12. *The reverse process of Jewish inclusion is based on God’s power (v. 23).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
		23 And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

The same grafting-in process, which applied, to the Gentiles in the second stage will be applicable to the Jew. “It was unbelief that excluded them; when unbelief is gone, exclusion is at an end.”³³ In support of Israel’s restoration, Paul affirms the power of God to graft them back onto the tree from which they were cut off.³⁴ Paul’s affirmation of God’s power offsets erroneous Gentile conclusions and expresses God’s ability to overrule human limitation; he is powerful enough to abrogate exclusionary attitudes.

13. *The restoration of Israel is predicated upon the more difficult “unnatural” inclusion of the Gentiles. In short, it will mean eschatological fulfillment for the people of God (v. 24).*

First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
	24 For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree	how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own

³² Jeremias draws attention to the ab/ba chiasm, *kindness severity* and *severity kindness*, which is not simply a literary device, but serves the theological point Paul wishes to make. Joachim Jeremias, *Abba* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 279.

³³ C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 219.

³⁴ Rom 4.21 καὶ πληροφωρηθεὶς ὅτι ὁ ἐπήγγελεται **δυνατός** ἐστὶν καὶ ποιῆσαι.

	and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree,	olive tree.
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This minor-major verse sums up the main argument of the *allegory*, expressing Paul's certainty of Jewish restoration in the third stage. Jewett suggests a helpful chart, which encapsulates the parts of the same tree:

Gentiles were cut out	Jews were cut out
From wild olive tree	From domestic olive tree
Gentiles were grafted in	Jews will be grafted in
(unnatural status)	(natural status)

Both share in the same olive-tree.³⁵

Here Paul characterizes eschatological fulfillment by *natural branches grafted into their own olive-tree*. If Gentile Christians (wild olive-branches) could be assimilated to the cultivated olive-tree, then how much easier a process will it be, to restore the Jews (cultivated olive-branches) to the trunk from which some were broken.³⁶

Summary-Implications

As Paul continues in vss. 25-36, he makes it clear that Salvation-History is a *mystery* (μυστήριον), something formerly hidden but now revealed by God. This mystery can be expressed as an eschatological duet, wherein both parties recognize the role of the other and celebrate God's inclusiveness. It includes: a) the partial and temporary hardening of Israel (πάρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρις οὔ), b) the inclusion of the fullness of the Gentiles (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν) and c) Israel's restoration (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται—v. 26), which will mean eschatological fulfillment. Insight into this mystery is inaccessible to natural investigation but can only be mediated through revelation. The mystery leads to Paul's praise, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (v. 33).

In the *allegory*, the special area of concern is the Jewish and corresponding Gentile attitude that reflects a common, intertwined and mutually dependent history. Thus, Paul deals with the problem of pride in the Gentile constituency of the Roman Church; such arrogance and derogatory attitudes amount to unbelief. He provides instruction to the Gentiles concerning faith, humility/lack of boasting, gratitude, dependence, hope and a sharing in Paul's driving missionary concern.

Paul's major thrust to the Gentiles is the certainty of the eschatological fulfillment for the people of God, which includes Israel's restoration; the whole of the people of God (Jew and Gentile) is enjoined to sense the continuity of God's redemptive activity. He argues that God is vitally involved with people who are not yet his. The whole people of God (Jew and Gentile) are invited to understand, appreciate and participate in God's redemptive and

³⁵ Jewett, 692.

³⁶ Theodor Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1910) 518-19.

inclusive activity. God does not cut down the whole olive-tree and plant another, but grafts wild branches onto the original root and trunk.

In our day, both Church and Synagogue are called upon to respect and celebrate a common and intertwined history with the certainty of an eschatological consummation yet to come. Each community will profit from attitudes of inclusion trust and humility—not arrogant posturing and demonization of the other. When people are grateful, they can become grace-full and find their anchor of dependence upon God; they can experience a solid hope, and a respectful sharing of missionary concern. Such attitudes will lead to recognition of “others” and the healing of alienated communities. It remains for various faith-communities to implement forms of shared history in local communities.

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology.* By Myk Habets. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 129. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010, x+329 pp., \$29.60.**

Myk Habets, lecturer at Carey Baptist College in Auckland, New Zealand, presents a convincing case for the recovery of a Spirit Christology that complements rather than replaces the dominant Logos Christology. He does so in a robustly Trinitarian framework. Habets' argument is that "the dominant Logos Christology inherited from the Great Tradition needs to be complemented by the equally biblical and historically sound theology known as Spirit Christology...an [sic] Christological approach from below; one that seeks to give adequate space to the real humanity of Jesus Christ without doing violence to his divinity" (258).

The mandatory introduction, the nature, task and scope of the study take up chapter 1. Chapter 2 deals with three dialectical issues in relation to the study of Spirit Christology: (i) ontological versus functional Christology; (ii) the priority of the person versus the work of Christ; and (iii) a Christology from above versus one from below. Chapter 3 examines the development of Logos and Spirit Christology in the Patristic era (100-451 AD), and the prevalence of the former in the West as is witnessed in the Chalcedon creed and much of contemporary Western Christology. After these methodological and historical considerations, chapter 4 surveys the various approaches to Christology proposed by New Testament scholars. It is in chapter 5 that Habets examines the New Testament evidence (i.e. the Gospels and Acts) regarding Jesus' identity and mission. Habets is then in a position, in chapter 6, to evaluate various contemporary proposals for a Spirit Christology and outline his own proposal for a Trinitarian Spirit Christology. Chapter 7 places Habets' Spirit Christology in the broader context of a so-called "Third Article Theology"—a theology that starts with the Spirit and examines other loci of theology from that viewpoint—and shows its relevance for the twenty-first century. In the final chapter, Habets draws out the implications of a Trinitarian Spirit Christology for systematic theology and Christian life and ministry.

I offer a few evaluative comments. First, the book is lucidly written and Myk Habets demonstrates an excellent grasp of the issues and produces a compelling argument for the recovery of a Spirit Christology that is methodologically and biblically sound, theologically coherent and orthodox, and contextually relevant. Second, coming from the field of New Testament Studies, I admire Habets' ability to hold together the disciplines of biblical studies and theology. The book's extensive bibliography also reflects an excellent balance between the two disciplines. Third, I appreciate Habets' concern for remaining orthodox (but not in a dogmatic sense) and biblical, and his desire to address both the academy and the church.

The only weakness I detected was in chapter 2 where Habets examines methodological issues with regard to an orthodox Christology. Habets tends to evaluate other views or traditions from an a priori commitment to his own Reformed Evangelical tradition and understanding of what is orthodox. This is not to say that Habets could have come presupposition-free to the subject, but he could have allowed the other views/traditions to test his own view/tradition rather than letting his understanding of orthodoxy become the benchmark against which everything else is measured. This initially caused me to be wary of

and even resistant to what was to follow. However, Habets makes an excellent recovery in the remainder of the book, critically engaging other positions and producing a fair and balanced argument. Especially in chapter 5, on the New Testament evidence for a Spirit Christology, Habets interacts with a wide range of views and provides a comprehensive, coherent and persuasive biblical basis for his case.

Myk Habets can be applauded for this book that should speak to both the academic community and the church. I recommend it highly to scholars, theologians, seminarians, pastors and lay people with a theological interest in the person and work of Jesus.

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***Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity.* By Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, pp xii-285, \$34.00.**

In 1998 Richard Bauckham published a small book entitled *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*. Because of its significant impact upon the scholarly community, Bauckham decided to publish a more in-depth study in *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and other Studies in on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*. His basic contention in both of these books can be stated as such: "When New Testament Christology is read with this Jewish theological context in mind [i.e. a strictly monotheistic context], it becomes clear that, from the earliest post-Easter beginnings of Christology onwards, early Christians included Jesus, precisely and unambiguously, within the unique identity of the one true God of Israel. They did so by including Jesus in the unique, defining characteristics by which Jewish monotheism identified God as unique" (ix). According to Bauckham, we can safely surmise that the Christology of the earliest Christians was already the highest Christology. Hellenistic Christians were not as concerned to develop this Christology as much as they sought to "transpose it into a conceptual framework more concerned with the Greek philosophical categories of essence and nature" (x).

Contending that there are two ways to interpret the literary evidence from the Second Temple Period, he argues that the Christians' earliest beliefs about Jesus were not possible by "applying to Jesus a Jewish category of semi-divine intermediary status, but by identifying Jesus directly with the one God of Israel, including Jesus in the unique identity of this one God" (3). Rather, it must have stemmed from an extraordinary experience of the exalted Jesus. Analyzing biblical passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and the Decalogue, Bauckham is adamant that Second Temple Jews were strictly monotheistic well before the origins of the Christian movement.

Instead of focusing on *what* God is, we are told to emphasize *who* the God of Israel is instead (154). God's identity is constituted by two major aspects: God is viewed as the exclusive Creator and Ruler of the universe. In his words: "To our question, 'In what did Second Temple Judaism consider the uniqueness of the one God to consist, what distinguished God as unique from all other reality, including beings worshipped as gods by Gentiles?', the answer given again and again, in a wide variety of Second Temple Jewish literature, is that the only true God, YHWH, the God of Israel, is the sole Creator of all things and sole Ruler of all things" (9; cf. 10, 11).

Bauckham illustrates how earliest Christian worship corresponds with the same basic features of the Jewish worship. Thus, “if we attend carefully and accurately, on the one hand, to the ways in which Second Temple Judaism characterized the unique identity of the one and only God and, on the other hand, to what New Testament writers say about Jesus, it becomes abundantly clear that New Testament writers include Jesus in the unique identity of the one God. They do so carefully, deliberately, consistently and comprehensively, by including Jesus in precisely those divine characteristics which for Second Temple Judaism distinguished the one God as unique. All New Testament Christology is, in this sense, very high Christology, stated in the highest terms available in first-century Jewish theology” (32).

He provides many examples to support this contention. First, YHWH is viewed as the only sovereign being. On the other hand, Christians saw the Exalted Jesus as sovereign (23). While Jews held that YHWH was higher than all angelic beings, the earliest Christians affirmed that Jesus was higher than all angels (23, 24). While YHWH has a unique divine name in the Old Testament, so Christians also give Jesus the same unique name. Jesus also plays a role in creating the universe—an act that is reserved for YHWH alone (cf. 87). Lastly, Jews held that God was to receive exclusive worship, not worship alongside of other pagan deities (84). Similarly, the first Christians exclusively worshipped Jesus. No other gods in the Greco-Roman world deserved honorable worship. The New Testament writers therefore presupposed Jewish monotheism (Rom. 3:28-30; 1 Cor. 8:1-6; John 10:30), but infused it with new meaning. Says Bauckham: “With the inclusion of Jesus in the unique identity of YHWH, the faith of the Shema is affirmed and maintained, but everything the Shema requires of God’s people is now focused on Jesus. Exclusive devotion is now given to Jesus, but Jesus does not thereby replace or compete with God the Father, since he himself belongs to the unique divine identity” (106). Moreover, the highest Christology was accompanied by a particular pattern of worship (127-151). This pattern of worship has many parallels with the Jewish worship of YHWH, the Most High God.

One of the best features of Bauckham’s book is that it seeks to undermine evolutionary understandings of Jesus in earliest Christianity. His thesis coincides with the Church’s traditional beliefs about Christ. As I. Howard Marshall reminds us: “If Jesus meant so much to his followers, then it is overwhelmingly improbable that they remembered so little about him, or that they so completely refashioned the content of their memories” (I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, 219).

And yet, Bauckham says very little about the causal theories responsible for the earliest Christology of the Christians (cf. 232). One is left wondering about who or what was responsible for this radically abrupt change from Judaism to what we now know as Christianity. As Larry Hurtado recommends, “The real challenge in historical understanding is to figure out not only what happened, but also how it happened and why” (Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 27). Even so, Bauckham’s very fine book will serve as a standard point of reference for orthodox Christians wishing to find historical evidence that challenges the older skepticism.

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***Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling.* By Andy Crouch. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008, 284 pp., \$20.00.**

The Christian religion is a paradox. The kingdom of God, the New Testament tells us, is not of this world, yet the transcendent and spiritual God condescended and embodied himself in this world, inaugurating a message of a heavenly kingdom that was to be spread by earthly labor. The physical and metaphysical are inextricably woven together. People of faith walk a fine line: they are called to be witnesses *in* but not *of* the world.

For centuries, Christian thinkers have debated the relationship between Christ and culture. The questions raised by Reinhold Niebuhr's mid-century *Christ and Culture* continue to guide discussion. Is Christ against or above culture? Should Christians retreat from culture? Should they transform it or seek relevance by adjusting to the spirit of the age? Should they be culturally aware but stay silent about the hidden things of culture? The genius of Niebuhr's study is not that the answers to these questions represent different blue prints for considering culture, but reflect corresponding moods that every Christian faces while engaging culture at one time or another and with varying degrees of intensity. Yet many Christians, and perhaps most evangelicals, fail to read Niebuhr in this way. Consequently, the numerous studies in the last half century have yet to settle the debate.

If orthodox Christians are to have any headway in the discussion, defining *culture* needs to be as equally important as defining *Christ*. Christians must recognize that theological truths are packaged differently and often understood in competing ways and in different historical contexts. Indeed, theology is historical. While Christ, his person and work, is unchangeable, culture is not. Many Christians have resisted the notion that the meaning of Christ is always already embedded in a changing culture. We can affirm that culture is unstable, dialectic, and discursive, but our pursuit of true piety would be pointless if we could never project, via faith, beyond the linguistic turn. God, his work, and his word stand forever unmoved.

In his latest book, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Andy Crouch pursues a clearer definition that adroitly touches on contemporary discussions without derogating traditional Christian belief. The result is a well-written discussion that attempts to move passed Niebuhr's interrelated moods to conscious action. "*Culture is what we make of the world*," Crouch writes, "the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else." Making the world includes imbuing it with meaning. Thus as an activity, culture making is likewise "meaning-making." This culture/meaning-making can only be done by human beings, who, reflecting on their creator, have the freedom to reach the limits of their cultivating activity, working in accordance with the created order. This echoes Terry Eagleton's trenchant discussion of culture and nature in *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000): "Meanings can mould physical responses, but they are constrained by them too" (87).

Much of the first part can apply to cultural activity in general, but Crouch, as is clear in the second part of the book, has a more specific audience, namely, the evangelical community. Christians are tied to a gospel message that is itself cultural, centering on a worldwide message of creation, fall, and redemption. In discussing the relationship between culture and the gospel, Crouch contrasts the imagery of the garden and the city, both of which are employed to illustrate not only the fall but also redemption. The garden not only represents the initial act of creation by God, but also humanity's duty to be cultivators,

submitting with integrity to the limits of the natural order in exploring the boundaries of cultural freedom. For Crouch, the garden is not in tension with the city. The two are bedfellows. Cities likewise manifest the peak of human wickedness and the realities of divine redemption. They “are the place where culture reaches critical mass—where culture overtakes nature as the dominant reality that human beings must make something of” (116). The city of Babel in Genesis 3 represents the desire of humanity to usurp the sovereignty of God. The curse of Babel was the scattering of language—hence, the dispersion of culture. Again, Crouch is abreast of current theory: at the center of culture is language (text). Yet “just as the curse on the citizens of Babel was a dramatic divine intervention in human affairs, so its reversal comes as a gift—a supernatural (or more to the point, supercultural) overcoming of separation” (149). In the heavenly city of Revelation 21, “God walks among redeemed humanity...not just on garden paths but also on city streets.” The gospel, in a sense, redeems Babel: it brings together the nations of the world as Acts 2 clearly shows: “*Nations* was now a word of inclusion, not exclusion” (155). “Completely unlike Babel, with its attempt to reach the heavens by building upward toward heaven, this city is not a human achievement. It is a gift, just as the first creation was a gift” (163).

The coming of redemption and the anticipation of the heavenly city was inaugurated by Jesus Christ. The term *transformation* presupposes both a state of being and a way of living. Through his death and the historically pivotal reality of the resurrection, Christ released humanity from the bondage of sin. Consequently, a changed state generates a new way of living. Culture, an activity done by humans, requires a public—a culturally educated public shaped by a shared meaning that is always engaged with the past and the present. Echoing Marx’s discussion on Feuerbach in the nineteenth century, Crouch reemphasizes the importance of changing the world instead of describing it: “culture is not changed simply by thinking” (64). The great commission is opposed to a privatized faith; the message of the gospel must be cultivated in public; more directly, it must be made public. Early Christians “were not cut off from their neighbors [rather] the culture they created was public and accessible to all” (156). This revolutionary and truly inclusive faith was grounded in a divine kingdom that produced “an alternative culture where grace and forgiveness are the last word” (146).

Crouch concludes with one final issue familiar to cultural theorists: *power*. Like culture, power is present in every facet of human life. Indeed, there is no way of separating cultural identity from power. Not only does it need careful attention but also harnessing. The negative aspect of power is the human effort to usurp the authority of God, “an all-too-accurate summary of the human quest to secure enough power to become finally free from dependence on God” (227). Put another way, cultural oppression from any sector is simply humanity’s desire to be God. The positive aspect of power, on the other hand, relegates the self to empower the powerless. On this point, the Christian has a unique standpoint. Mimicking the cultivating activity of the creator, Christians are driven by a new kingdom ethic: to love God and neighbor. The Christian’s cultural identity is not one suffused with pride or self-affirmation, but one shaped by self-sacrifice that pursues the elevation of others. As “custodians of God’s resurrection power in the midst of the world,” Christians are to serve the needs of culture (231).

So how are we to deal with power in order to initiate meaningful cultural change? Crouch reins in those who believe culture can be changed through a revolutionary one-sided putsch.

He likewise implicitly challenges those at the top (or middle) who feel that their social status justifies their imperial leadership. Significant cultural change can occur not only at the top but from the bottom—from the marginalized, the oppressed. “Our ability to change culture,” Crouch concludes, “is a matter of scale,” and it must be done at the local level (196, 239). Cultural change begins with our immediate relationships. The impact we have on the few around us will cause a ripple effect that will multiply the immediate influence. In the end, however, it is the sovereign God who “is at work lowering the high places and raising the low places—so that *all flesh*, low and high, will see his glory together, the glory of the one who brings the possible out of the impossible, the one who raises the dead” (212). All flesh, as a public, will share a cultural identity cultivated by a righteous creator.

Crouch has certainly provided an appealing study that should, at the outset, move Christians to make more relevant their understanding and engagement of culture. While mindful of current theory, Crouch also resonates with the discussions of modern Christians. For instance, the differing human responses to God, especially as it manifests in cultural production has been referred to as the “antithesis” by nineteenth-century Protestant statesman and university founder Abraham Kuyper. Accordingly, there exist only two types of cultural attitudes: opposition to God and submission to him. The fall makes us enemies of God; our submission to him only comes through his gracious work of redemption. In either case, whatever we do as culture makers reflects one of two opposing positions. Kuyper’s followers, most notably Herman Dooyeweerd, argued that the antithesis is the deep “pretheoretical” religious ground motive of all of life. For those following Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, culture/meaning making is at root a religious activity.

A further elaboration of the antithesis, however, by Crouch would have sharpened an already fascinating study. How close is the relationship between the antithesis and culture? Would the elimination of human pride in the new heavens abolish the antithesis as it is reflected in cultural products? This is something that needs further discussion. The new city will be, Crouch says, “furnished with culture” (169)—and not just culture created by Christians. “Cultural goods too will be transformed and redeemed, yet they will be recognizably what they were in the old creation—or perhaps more accurately, they will be what they always could have been” (169). Concerning the meaning of culture, Crouch seems to equivocate. He initially presents culture as activity. Yet he also presents culture as things. What is the relationship between the two? This confuses categories. Perhaps we should consider culture as the language that springs from our interaction with the material world. It is not simply what we do, but the burgeoning text that immediately appears from what we make. In this way, culture is purely phenomenal. If we follow Crouch, we are forced to inquire what these transformed cultural items might look like.

Avoiding this potential question, Crouch indulges the reader with his own ideas of what cultural items will be in the new earth: “My own personal list of ‘the glory and honor of the nations’ would surely include Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* and Arvo Part’s “*Spiegel im Spiegel*”; green-tea crème brûlée, fish tacos and bulgogi; *Moby Dick* and the *Odysey*; the iPod and the Mini Cooper.” Yet these items, he continues, will not “appear without being purified and redeemed” (170). Pride and idolatry play a central role in *Moby Dick* and the *Odysey*. To remove—that is, purify—such elements would eliminate these products. What is more, why does he privilege these? If the works of non-Christians are included, then could we not include Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra, Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, P.T. Anderson's *Boogie Nights*, or Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*? While creation groans, speculation will always accompany the knowledge of consummation.

Crouch's use of scripture may be questioned by readers as well. What things are to be taken literally and what things are to be taken figuratively in the Bible, especially the book of Revelation? How would he deal with texts like 2 Peter 3, which states that the things of this world will be burned up with the coming of the new heavens and new earth? Likewise, Christians need to consider their citizenship in this world. 1st Peter refers to New Testament Christians as aliens and exiles scattered throughout the world, a clear parallel to the literal Babylonian captivity in Jeremiah 29. In neither the Old or New Testament are Christians encouraged to involve themselves in culture production. Of course, if culture is unavoidable, then an exiled identity is itself a cultural identity. Captive Hebrews in the Old Testament and persecuted Christians in the New have been given a cultural identity vis-à-vis the powers and principalities of this world, but this is not a goal to which believers should aspire to. In other words, we should be involved in fostering an *exilic* culture.

Finally, there is too facile an association between Babel and the divine city of Revelation. Does the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and the reality of inclusion in Acts 15, erase cultural differences? Babel was a curse, but the coming of an inclusive faith is a blessing to a culturally divided world. As D. A. Carson writes in his *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), "it is not transparently clear whether the multiplicity of languages *in itself* was a good or bad thing [conversely] at Pentecost God did not give the gift of one language, a kind of restoration of the pre-Babel situation; rather, he gave the gift of many languages, so that the one message could be heard in all the relevant languages, thus preserving the diversity" (74). This raises the issue of what a specifically Christian culture really is, since our faith can be separated from our cultural identity.

Such observations in no way undermine this timely and accessible study. Perhaps those within the faith community will ponder their place in culture. We may not always have to get the ideas right before we act. Many would reject such rationalism. Crouch offers a more philosophically pragmatic approach. When Christians live their other-worldly life, while *in* this life, they cannot help but be culture makers.

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***Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins.* By Richard A. Muller. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986, 2008, xiv+240 pp., \$30.00.**

Originally published in 1986, Muller's *Christ and the Decree* was released again in 1988 and again in 2008 highlighting the ongoing interest in this field of study and the importance of Muller's work. Muller's basic thesis is that there is continuity between the Reformer's theology and what he terms Reformed scholasticism/orthodoxy; the codification of that theology in late sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed theology. *Christ and the Decree* is divided into two sections; the first surveys "Reformed theology in its first codification", the second part considers "the formulation of orthodox system."

Muller's thesis is established in direct antithesis to all attempts to divide the theology of the early Reformers, notably Calvin, Bullinger, Musculus, and Vermigli, from Reformed systems of theology of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, such as are found in the systems of theology developed by Beza, Ursinus, Zanchi, Polanus, and Perkins. In the 2008 Preface Muller reaffirms his commitment to continuity between these period of Reformed theology with the contention that "barring rather different definitions of doctrine, such differences in order and arrangement have more to do with the literary genres of works examined than with any implied theological messages" (xi). In short, according to Muller, the differences between Calvin and Perkins, to take just two examples, are merely cosmetic rather than material. In order to establish his thesis of theological continuity Muller rejects certain features of modern historiography. First, he shows that Calvin, while being an important early source, is simply one of a number of Reformed thinkers and thus a comparison of his theology with that of seventeenth century examples proves nothing. To show continuity or discontinuity between periods of Reformed theology the various Reformed confessions need to act as the boundary markers. When this method is followed Calvin is seen as one of many Reformed thinkers to stress common Reformed themes, but in idiosyncratic ways largely dictated by contextual factors. All such discontinuity thus dissipates. Second, the idea that there is in Reformed theology generally, or Reformed theologians of this period specifically, anything like a central dogma or singular defining motif is erroneous. The commonly made assertion that Calvin's central dogma is the sovereignty of God, or Christ, while that of the Reformed orthodox is predestination, is utterly rejected by Muller as a complete misunderstanding of the sources. Third, the use of the scholastic method by late sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed systematians must be seen simply as the adoption of a method which does not affect theological content. Fourth, Muller argues against those who contend that the differences between the Reformers and the Reformed scholastics is based upon the use of rationalism by the latter group as the primary principle of explaining the will of God, as opposed to the use of faith and Scripture by the former group. According to Muller, this argument is misguided, Reformed scholasticism resorted to scholastic methods of reason in order to defend their theology from sophisticated critique from Roman Catholics (and others) who were themselves using scholastic methods of argumentation. A fifth contention of Muller's is that Christology and predestination are not antithetical in Reformed scholasticism but must be seen as interrelated in just the same ways as they are in the theologies of the Reformers. Simply because Beza, for instance, located predestination in the doctrine of God and not in Christology/soteriology does not mean, according to Muller, a difference in doctrinal content, merely a difference in logical arrangement.

Christ and the Decree has been followed up by Muller in a series of major publications which develop the same thesis. In his *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (2000), Muller attempts to understand Calvin in his 16th-century context, with attention to continuities and discontinuities between his thought and that of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. In the sequel to this work, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (2003), Muller carries his thesis forward, with the goal of overcoming a series of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological frameworks characteristic of much of the scholarship on Reformed orthodoxy, or what is often termed Calvinism after Calvin. This in turn was followed up by his *magnum opus*, the four volumes of his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520*

to ca. 1725, (2003). Contending that the theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is often misrepresented in church histories and scholarly treatments, Muller exhaustively (and exhaustingly!) studies four specific doctrines (Prolegomena, Scripture, God, Trinity) to demonstrate how doctrine developed in the early Protestant period. These works should in turn be read in conjunction with *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (2004), and *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (2006), which include important essays by Muller on the same theme.

Muller's work is meticulous, exhaustive, and dense. His project is focused and significant. In his opinion he has proven his case and "convincingly set aside the negative caricatures of Protestant orthodoxy that they persist only among the most historically blinded of dogmaticians" (ix). While that is really a decision best left to others, it is true that Muller's work has established some useful parameters in the study of doctrinal development, has unearthed a wealth of important information that must be taken into consideration when venturing into this field, and he has constructed a formidable argument against those, like Brian Armstrong (*Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy*, 1969), and Basil Hall ("Calvin Against the Calvinists," 1966), who wish to argue for radical discontinuity between the theology of the Reformers and Reformed orthodoxy. For this alone Muller's work proves itself to be absolutely essential for studies on Reformation theology.

This does not mean, however, that Muller's is the last word on the subject, despite him having the most words on it. After working through Muller's arguments I am still not entirely convinced. Despite his protestations to the contrary Muller tends to flatten out the diverse thinkers and their theologies into neatly packaged categories. While he dismisses Armstrong's thesis outright, Armstrong does show how diverse Reformed thinkers are not cut from the same cloth and do in fact differ over essential theological points. Muller's claim that these are merely cosmetic differences is not true enough to the case. A second concern relates to Muller's repeated claim that method does not affect content. While this may be true it is not a necessary truth, each case in point has to be evaluated on its own merits. Muller simply assumes his point and then seeks evidence to illustrate it rather than entertaining a genuine historical inquiry to see if his point is true or not. In this regard Muller does not appear to critique his own subjective presuppositions sufficiently. A final concern relates to this point; when one reads Calvin's *Institutes*, Beza's *Tabula praedestinationis*, or Perkins' *A Golden Chaine* one gets a very clear sense of the differences between Calvin and the Reformed scholasticism of Beza and Perkins; and this strikes me as more than merely cosmetic. There are substantial differences of doctrine. Whether the divine decree is singular or plural makes a huge difference materially to soteriology not to mention proclamation and worship. These differences have been played out in the rejection of Barth's doctrine of election by federal Calvinists, for instance. Clearly they recognise doctrinal difference and not merely cosmetic masking, so much so that federal Calvinists refer to Barth's theology as "neo-orthodox". Would Muller's method extend to this debate as well? One thinks not. Perhaps Marshall McLuhan's adage, "the medium is the message" holds true here, more so than Muller is willing to concede. These and other concerns remain over Muller's thesis, despite its undoubted value to scholarship.

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***The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil.* By Christopher Southgate. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008, xii+196 pp., \$24.95.¹**

Southgate is a Research Fellow in Theology at the University of Exeter and editor and principal author of an influential textbook, *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, now in its third edition. In *The Groaning of Creation*² Southgate explores what it means to take the evolutionary development of nature seriously as a Christian, specifically addressing the questions: If God as Creator has allowed so much suffering through extinction and natural selection, can he ever be justified or rightly worshipped? And if so, how? His reply constitutes what he calls a “compound evolutionary theodicy” which he bases upon his own “Trinitarian theology of creation and redemption.” According to the publisher’s website:

Southgate argues that pain, suffering and extinction are intrinsic to the evolutionary process. The world that is “very good” is also “groaning in travail” and subjected by God to that travail. Southgate evaluates several attempts at evolutionary theodicy and then argues for his own approach, an approach that takes full account of God’s self-emptying and human beings special responsibilities as created co-creators.

More particularly, Southgate wants to rationalize for believers how an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, sovereign, and fully responsible God who is worthy of our worship could ordain evolution with all its disvalues as the means of creating and sustaining animal life. In his own words:

I am trying to see how the two propositions (a) God is creator of this ambiguous world, which is “good” but also “groaning in labor pains,” and (b) God is “worthy of worship” can be held together within the community of faith.

As a summary of the work we may explicate the basic contours of Southgate’s argument in the following seven points.

1. The goodness of creation engenders many sorts of values.
2. Pain, suffering, death, and extinction are intrinsic to a creation evolving according to Darwinian principles.
3. An evolving creation was the only way God could engender all the beauty, diversity, sentience, and sophistication we see around us in the biosphere. (The “only way” argument.)
4. God co-suffers with every sentient being in creation.
5. The Cross of Christ is the epitome of divine compassion, God’s assuming of ultimate responsibility for creation’s pain. Along with the Resurrection, the Cross inaugurates the transformation of creation, making possible the redemption of even the nonhuman creation, the eschatological doing-away with creation’s groaning.

¹ Parts of this review were read as a formal response to Dr. Christopher Southgate, The Theological Meaning of Evolution Conference, Laidlaw College, Auckland, June 2009.

² Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

6. The need to give an account of how a loving God of loving relationship must provide an eschatological fulfilment for creatures that have no flourishing in this life. Such a God could never regard such a creature as a mere evolutionary expedient. This leads Southgate to posit an eschatological afterlife for individual animals.
7. Humans are of particular concern to God, if divine fellowship with creatures such as us is in any sense a goal of evolutionary creation. This makes human beings “co-redeemers” or “created co-creators” with God, or perhaps “stewards or priests or contemplatives of creation,” with respect to the nonhuman creation and the healing of the evolutionary process. This leads Southgate to vegetarianism and a project to end biological extinction.³

Points 1 and 2 above present a dualistic view of creation wherein its glories (“values”) as well as its horrors (“disvalues”) are constitutive. Southgate calls this the “ambiguity” of creation. Points 1 and 2, when coupled with point 3, lead to the proposition that the “values” of point 1 are not achievable except by the awful “disvalues” of point 2. God himself is fully responsible, then, for the horrific disvalues within creation, since he is the one who chose to use evolution to accomplish his ends. Southgate contends that any adequate theodicy will emphasize not only that suffering and extinction occurs as necessary concomitants of the evolutionary process, but also:

1. that God suffers alongside God’s creatures (the “fellow sufferer who understands” in Whitehead’s terms) and;
2. that there will be some form of eschatological redemption for creation, possibly including those individual creatures who lived frustrated lives of pointless suffering.

Southgate’s evolutionary theodicy for non-human suffering affirms that a world of evolving life, with all its attendant pain and suffering, was the only way, or at least the best way, for God to bring into existence a diversity of life-forms to realize complex values in a law-governed universe. However, the suffering of individual creatures that never get the chance to flourish cries out for Divine compassion and solidarity as well as the possibility for redemption in the next life.

In Chapter 4, “An Adventure in the Theology of Creation,” Southgate develops a trinitarian “theology of creation,” an admittedly speculative enterprise that seeks to illuminate the relationship between the triune God and an evolutionary process that operates according to Darwinian principles. Taking up the theme of kenosis, Southgate suggests that God’s self-emptying love is foundational both to intra-trinitarian relationships and to the relationship between God and the world. God the Father pours out his love, the essence of his being, giving rise to (begetting) God the Son, who, in turn, returns all that he is to the Father. And this intra-divine relationship of self-emptying love constitutes God the Holy Spirit. Southgate suggests that this inherently self-emptying, or kenotic, character of the divine love is the ground of God’s desire to create the genuinely “other”. This desire is realized in the creation of the world and in the evolutionary process where God “lets be” a great variety of creatures.

³ This summary is adapted from the one provided by Tim Deibler, Review of *The Groaning of Creation*, American Scientific Affiliation (2009), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7049/is_1_61/ai_n31375133/pg_2/?tag=content;col1 (accessed 15.6.2009). Southgate provides his own summary at *The Groaning of Creation*, 16.

The Spirit, meanwhile, both provides creatures with their “thisness,” or particularity as unique individuals, and lures them onward toward new possibilities of fulfilment and self-transcendence. At any given time living creatures are in one of four possible states:

1. *Fulfilled* (flourishing as the kind of creature they are), a state in which the creature is utterly itself, in an environment in which it flourishes.
2. *Growing toward fulfilment*, not yet mature, but still with the possibility of attaining the ‘fulfilled’ state.
3. *Frustrated* (prevented from flourishing), held back in some way from fulfilment for a variety of reasons.
4. *Transcending itself* (either by chance mutation or some new learned capability).⁴

The first state is that a true “selving”, a “gift of existence from the Father, form and pattern from the Son, particularity from the Holy Spirit, and that the creature’s praise, in being itself, is offered by the Son to the Father, in the delight of the Spirit.”⁵ The second state involves the pain of survival “because of the need to learn an aversion to negative stimuli.”⁶ This is not due to some supposed “fall” or “sin” but is a necessary and God ordained process such that “The Godhead that is so committed to the creation as ultimately to experience birth and infancy as a human may be imagined to take an especial delight in the growth of young organisms.”⁷ It would then seem that what Southgate is affirming is the Creator’s delight in the pain of his creatures! The third state of frustration is consistent and explainable by Darwin’s model of natural selection, and this too is not an “evil” or frustration of the Creator’s will but is also a natural part of the good but groaning creation. In Trinitarian terms the pain and frustration of the creature is explained as being “received by the Son through the brooding immanence of the Spirit, and uttered in that Spirit as a song of lament to the Father. All that the frustrated creature suffers, and all it might have been but for frustration, is retained in the memory of the Trinity.”⁸ The final state is the “especial gift of the Holy Spirit in creation”, the invitation for creatures to explore new possibilities of being. “The Spirit longs for creatures to transcend themselves, to find new ways of relating,” writes Southgate, and illustrates with the examples of the symbiosis that gave rise to the first eukaryotic cells or the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic “Transition” to *H. Sapiens*.⁹ In short, self-transcendence occurs whenever cooperation between organisms results in producing new types of “selves”.¹⁰

In the final three chapters of the book Southgate makes suggestions on the eschatological implications of his position—that there must be a “heaven for pelicans”—and makes certain ethical considerations based around ways in which the human is to relate to the rest of creation, where he utilises such notions as “ethical kenosis”, and human priesthood of creation. Finally Southgate makes various proposals in environmental ethics, including a case

⁴ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

for vegetarianism and a critical commentary on global warming and the issue of species extinction.

Christopher Southgate has provided a fascinating discussion of an evolutionary theodicy, opening up many helpful avenues of investigation, travelling down some of these avenues himself, and leaving others to be explored by those who follow. Evolutionary thought has long been accepted by many in the theological world and it has received a good deal of examination, and yet much of the literature is tangential to the strictly *theological* issues involved. Southgate's work exemplifies an approach to theology and evolutionary theory that knows what questions to ask and is able to address many of these questions in a lucid and helpful fashion. For this the work is to be recommended for all those interested in the interface between theology and science. The doctrines of creation, anthropology, God, Trinity, and eschatology are examined and constructive proposals are provided that begin to explore in some detail what a reconceived Christian theology may look like in light of an uncritical acceptance of Darwinian evolution. There is no doubt that further work from Southgate and further works in response to Southgate will be generated by this courageous publication.

This, however, does not mean the work is without its problems. A number of critical questions emerge from reading Southgate's book. In the following I will simply raise a number of questions and provide reasons for raising them.

The first series of critical questions are general ones and concern hermeneutics—both as it applies to the science-theology discourse in general, and specifically to the text of Scripture. In relation to the former: How does Southgate's theology of creation relate to a scientific explanation of the evolutionary process? Are there "gaps" in the process that require divine intervention to move it forward? Or does it operate according to purely naturalistic laws? And, if so, what explanatory power does the theological description add? To the latter: What hermeneutic is actually at play in the interpretation and application of Biblical texts such as Genesis 3, Psalm 8, and Romans 8? At key points throughout the work biblical texts are appealed to but in each instance the actual hermeneutic is ambiguous, leaving the impression that Southgate uses biblical texts to illustrate his own points (*eisegesis*) rather than working *a posteriori* from the biblical texts themselves (*exegesis*). A more general but related issue that deserves to be addressed in this regard is the notion of natural theology as opposed to a theology of nature. Southgate shows little awareness of the difference between these two notions and thus his work does not explicate his theological method, an issue of central importance, one would think, to the science-theology dialogue.

A second and more important issue concerns the constituent features of a genuinely *theological* account of creation. Southgate correctly stresses the triadic relations between God, the world, and humanity, as opposed to simply God and man, as the old language had it. However, is his work a genuinely *theological* account of creation? In her 1988 work *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, Kathryn Tanner outlines what is required in a theological account of creation in terms of theological language pertaining to God and creation in order to establish, what she calls, "rules for forming first order statements."¹¹ Her argument, in

¹¹ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 11, 27.

quite orthodox fashion, first argues that basic to Christian discourse on creation one must recognize the transcendence of God as a central presupposition.¹² The second conviction is that God is active as a creative agent in the world. These two convictions are to govern Christian discourse on creation and thus also theological accounts of creation.

On both accounts Southgate's work is rather ambiguous. While Whiteheadian process philosophy is ruled out as an option by Southgate, it is not clear that a panentheism, similar to Moltmann's, is not actually what is being espoused. From the perspective of panentheism, God and the world are distinct and yet they mutually constitute the other so that what happens to, with, or in one; radically and ontologically affects the other. I make the suggestion of panentheism in regard to Southgate for a number of reasons: first, the language by which he speaks of the triune God's *kenosis* into the world and in himself, the so-called "deep intratrinitarian *kenosis*"; second, the way in which he regards human suffering to affect the intratrinitarian relations, and finally the appreciative way in which he draws upon the panentheism of such figures as Jürgen Moltmann. In such ways as these, and others, Southgate seems to threaten a Christian commitment to these first-order claims about God and the world that Tanner correctly identifies as properly basic to Christian discourse.

The basis for these first-order claims about God and the world is to be found in the doctrines of God the Trinity and Christology, and this raises a third but related point of criticism. As Kimlyn Bender has recently written, "To speak of creation is therefore implicitly yet intentionally to speak not first of a cosmology but of a relation between God and the world."¹³ This too is properly basic to a genuinely *theological* account of creation. In the words of Thomas Torrance: "it is distinctive of Christian theology that it treats of God in his relation to the world and of God in his relation to himself, not of one without the other."¹⁴ Torrance makes it clear that Creator and creation must be thought of in vital relation to each other. More specifically, "Our evangelical commitment to Jesus Christ 'through whom and for whom the whole universe has been created,' as Paul expressed it, will not allow us to divorce redemption from creation, but compels us to give the empirical reality of the created order its full and proper place in theological interpretation of divine revelation, especially in the incarnate form and reality in Jesus Christ."¹⁵ It is for this reason that Torrance correctly appropriates the Patristic axiom that 'creation is proleptically conditioned by redemption.'¹⁶

The economic activity of God the Son proceeds in tandem with that of God the Father and the God the Spirit, albeit in a distinctive way. The Son incarnate in Jesus Christ is the Word and Wisdom of God, the one through whom all that is has come to be and who sustains the creation itself, the one who has imparted to the universe its rational order and has come to restore it to the law of his divine love. Scripture paints a grand picture of the re-

¹² Ibid., 38.

¹³ Kimlyn, J. Bender, "Christ, Creation and the Drama of Redemption" "The Plays the Thing..." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 no.2 (2009), 150 (149-174).

¹⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶ For more on this see Myk Habets, "How 'Creation is Proleptically Conditioned by Redemption'", *Colloquium* 41 (2009), 3-21.

ordering of a fallen world in or through the incarnate Son as *omnipotent grace* (cf. Col 1.16-17). In the identity and mission of Jesus Christ the purposes of God for all of creation are realised.

It is this linking of creation with redemption that appears to be missing, or at least downplayed, in Southgate's work. While Southgate is willing to assert that creation is *through* Christ there does not seem to be any emphasis, as there is in Scripture, on creation being *for* Christ (cf. Eph 1.10; Col 1.16-17). As an example we may turn to the end of *The Groaning of Creation* where we read: "What God alone could do, has done, once and for all, was to suffer death for the transformation of the world, to bear in the Christ the pain of the creation and of human sin."¹⁷ This is linked, throughout Southgate's work, to the notion of the *kenosis* of the triune God into the world and into himself. But this is *not* all that God could do or has done in the world! In Christ God has reconciled the world to himself, summed up all things, conquered death and evil, and established, in proleptic fashion, the *imago Dei* in humans and their eschatological *telos*. It is precisely on this basis that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, our *arche* and *telos*, our Great High Priest, Saviour, and ever-ruling King. An articulation of this cosmic Christology appears to be absent in Southgate's work.

In the Incarnation, redemption intersects and overlaps with creation in such a way that all of history is encompassed by Christ and his Kingdom. Purpose is deliberately built into creation from the beginning and, as with human beings so with creation itself, perfection is anticipated from the very beginning of creation, yet this perfection will not come about mechanistically or "naturally," but rather through divine grace—through Christ. Southgate's work appears to present a somewhat Christologically-anaemic account of creation given the dislocation of Christ from the centre of the story to its periphery, or by turning Christ into a symbol of some prior commitment to a form of general divine love and *kenosis* rather than the Christ of Gospel revelation.

Having addressed only one or two issues briefly here it is clear that Southgate's work is as ambiguous and problematic as it is compelling and courageous. In the year of Darwin (2009) this work makes a welcome contribution to the ongoing discussion over science and religion within a Christian context.

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***Christ the Key.* By Kathryn Tanner. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 322 pp., \$28.99.**

In Kathryn Tanner's *Christ the Key*, she offers Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical or epistemological key to theological thinking. Tanner constructs a theological thinking with the encounter of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ as the place where all theological thinking should begin. Christ becomes, in this view, the key to all theological problems, that which unlocks the mysterious doors of theological thinking. This will specifically take place for Tanner through an analysis of the role of Christ in the redemption of humanity.

¹⁷ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 114.

Tanner begins her argument with an exposition of human nature. She picks up the motif of human participation in God. However, instead of focusing strictly on the idea of participation, she wants to distinguish between weak and strong forms of participation. She says that all of creation, as a matter of being created, does participate in God, but that this is weak participation (8). Strong participation, on the other hand, is when someone makes the choice or decision to participate in God and the life of God found in the redemption brought by Jesus Christ (12ff.). In this strong participation, one images the life of God, which is why human nature was created.

She moves from the discussion of human nature to a two-part exposition on the nature of grace. The first part is a theological underpinning of what it means to participate in God in a strong sense, predicated upon the redemptive work of God in both the sending of the Word and Spirit (70). What Jesus does is to not only offer a moral example of what it means for the human person to be redeemed and transformed, but to actually be the source of such (76). She continues by arguing that redemption comes in the attachment of the human to Christ, who is righteous while the person is not (86). The human attachment to Christ, though, comes from the nature of faith, which allows the person to have faith that what Jesus does is to extend his righteousness to the human, and that through this a person may attach oneself to Christ in order to act like him, leading to not only justification but also sanctification (91-2). This means that, while not ever proper to humanity, divine power is extended to humanity (104).

The second part of Tanner's discussion of grace looks to deal with the problem of nature and grace, keeping the integrity of human nature while also allowing for grace to be freely given. Tanner argues that there is something unique about human nature in that it is open to God's grace in a passive way, where the human only seeks God after grace has been given (118-19). She goes on to say that this openness of the human and the giftedness of grace is the natural relationship of the human, where what is natural is the human to have grace (130). But, for Tanner, this does not blur the line between the human and divine, as God is perfect in Godself. Rather, "the whole of what we are by nature achieves a new state by God's grace; grace raises our full human nature, complete on its own terms, up to another divine level of existence and functioning" (138).

In her treatment of the Trinity, Tanner wants to look to Christ and the incarnation for a way of understanding the Trinity and the significance that this doctrine has for humanity. The chapter has a twofold focus, then: first, to understand the relationship between the Godhead while, second, trying to understand how it is that humanity can image God by leading Trinitarian lives (141). For her, the incarnation is that which shapes the human understanding of the Trinity as it is about humanity and what we gain (144). The incarnation of the Word brings the human person of Jesus of Nazareth into the closest possible relationship that can exist between God and human (144). The humanity of Jesus has no existence apart from the relationship with the Word and this special relationship extends to the life of all humanity who can, through this relationship, now live "in and with the Word" (144). The end result of this relationship is the redemption of humanity (145-47). She articulates this understanding through a focus on the biblical narrative, pointing to the Father sending the Son, "as the mediator of the Father's beneficent will towards us..." (159). Through this mission of the Son, Tanner argues that the Spirit is involved as gift given to humanity by the Son from the Father (160). Redemption, then, becomes the focus of the

Trinitarian life, where the Triune God affects redemption in such a way that humanity can now become like Christ and humanity is now empowered by the Spirit to participate in the mission of the Father by imitating the life of Christ. For Tanner, then, “Bound to Christ through his Spirit we gain the Father’s favor and become recipients of the Father’s gifts as Christ was; for example, we become with him the inheritors of eternal life (Rom 8:17; Gal 6:8)” (160).

The redemption enacted, then, through the person of Jesus Christ through his relation with the Father and subsequent gift of the Spirit results in a Trinitarian way of life for humanity. The Trinitarian way of life comes into focus when we see the work done by the Triune God in justification and sanctification. In justification, Tanner says that there is an ascending movement where humanity can now boldly approach the Father because of the reconciliation and peace established through our relationship to Christ, united to him in baptism through the power of the Spirit (198). She then articulates a process of sanctification, which Tanner sees as a descent from the Father, with the gifts of the Son and Spirit, being made into the form of Christ through the power of the Spirit in order to enact the mission of God on earth (199). Transformation of the human life occurs and this leads to a service which “takes the form of a Trinitarian descent: from the Father to become the image of the Son in the world by way of the power of the Spirit, or from the Father to live a Spirit-filled life with Christ in his mission for the world” (205).

Tanner moves from the discussion of the Trinity to one of the relationship between the church and politics, countering current proposals that rely on a Trinitarian emphasis by turning to a Christological emphasis. She believes that the problems associated with an appeal to the Trinity as a way of engaging various social and political issues outweigh any potential benefits. The first problem that she sees with the turn to the Trinity in current theological engagement with the social and political is that this turn is often seen to be quite progressive, but is not, as the doctrine of the Trinity has lead to various problems (208-9), there is not a good way to advocate for difference and pluralism without a turn to tritheism (210-11), and there has been the continuing problem of male bias in the doctrine (212-15). The other factor complicating the use of the doctrine of the Trinity in social and political theology is that God is not us (221), meaning it becomes very difficult to move from a discussion of the perfect mutuality of relationship that exists between the persons of the Trinity and the corrupted, sinful relationships that exist between persons (228). For Tanner, the way for constructing a theology that adequately deals with social and political issues comes from taking into account how God enters into the world, switching the focus from the relations that exist in the Godhead to looking at how the incarnation of Christ shows the living out of the Father’s will in the world of corruption and sin and death (231-32). The person of Christ sheds light on the nature of relationships by showing us “what the Trinity looks like when it includes the human, and what humanity looks like when it is taken up within the trinity’s own relationships” (235). The incarnation shows us the way that human relations are to exist through the imitation of Jesus in his work with other humans. The life Jesus exhibits in his relationship with people is the Trinitarian way of life (236-37). Christ shows the unity of the human to the Father, then, but also, through this unity, shows how a human community can be formed in the common worship of God (239). This leads to a unity of people through a collective will (245). Thus, Tanner shows how a social and political theology can be formed through an emphasis on relation in Christ to both God and humans.

Next, Tanner moves to a discussion on the nature of the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The goal here is to overcome “happy exchange models” that focus exclusively on the death of Jesus. Instead, she suggests a model predicated upon the incarnation as the “primary mechanism for atonement” (252). The entire life of Jesus is at work in atonement, where God, through the Word, assumes the very life of suffering and death (256-57). This view also means that the entire life of Jesus, from birth to death to resurrection, is necessary for the atonement of humanity. If Jesus simply living covers humanity, then this means that atonement would occur from the moment of Jesus’ birth. However, it is in the full taking on of humanity’s suffering and death in the full life of a human that Word works atonement (260-61). The entire life of Jesus Christ, then, is meant to sanctify the life of humanity, transforming the power of death and suffering through the life-giving properties and nature of the Word, incarnate in the life of Jesus (269). The sacrifice of the Word on the cross is a life-affirming moment, “a life-giving sacrifice given by God for us to feed on, for our nourishment” (272).

The final chapter of Tanner’s text is one on the working of the Spirit. She wants to articulate a way of viewing the Spirit that sees the Spirit’s work in the whole of the ordinary, fully human and fully fallible operations of creation (274-75). Tanner believes that this takes a change in perspective, similar to what she did in response to grace and nature; we cannot look at the world in purely naturalistic terms, but should understand the work of the Spirit in the ordinary of creation, suggesting that creation’s natural place is within the Spirit’s operations (279). Oftentimes this view of the Spirit, leads to a conservatism that supports established institutions. However, Tanner finds within this view a way of loosening these institutions by “increasing their flexibility, tolerance for diversity of opinion, openness to change” (291). This is because if the Spirit is in all the mundane of life, then all places offer a site for theological thinking. For Tanner, the entire discussion of the Spirit follows the Christology developed in the text, where God does not push aside the human, but works in and through the finite (296). Due to the work of Christ, there can now be “a new human manner of existence; human lives re-formed, reworked as a whole by the Spirit into a life-giving, Spirit-filled form” (301).

Overall, I find Tanner’s book to be an excellent text, full of interesting ways of reading the Christian tradition from the hermeneutical vantage point. And, while there is always room for disagreement, Tanner offers an interesting point of entry into a multitude of different theological conundrums that, if explored in the way Tanner suggests, would bear much fruit for contemporary theological thinking. All in all, then, a highly recommended text that offers much to the reader willing to put forth the effort to wrestle with Tanner.

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***The Promise of Despair: The Way of the Cross as the Way of the Church.* By Andrew Root. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010, 161 pp., \$18.00.**

Several weeks ago I received an email from a friend of mine named Chandler. Aware of the high praise I’d been doling out about Dr. Andrew Root’s newest book *The Promise of Despair*, Chandler offered this profound remark in an otherwise innocuous correspondence: “Good Lord, I have never had a book reach out and kick my ass so quickly as that one did.”

I have a feeling Chandler's destabilizing experience is not unique; in *The Promise of Despair*, Root wastes little time in drawing you into his personal and theological worlds, which are steeped in joyful despair.

Root sets the stage by recounting a heartbreaking story about the pain and confusion of losing a childhood friend to cancer. Although the particular story is not our own, it is hauntingly familiar; we find ourselves confronting death—"the monster"—and despair far more frequently than we would like, and certainly more than we care to admit. While Root adroitly employs personal anecdotes to illustrate his arguments, this is neither a memoir nor even a work of simple theology. At its heart, *The Promise of Despair* is a work of ecclesiology, about how to be a "weird community" (89) called the Church that refuses to gloss over the death and despair all around us by witnessing to the God who in Christ is *found* in despair, on the cross.

In 2000 Slate.com ran a series of articles that engaged the theology of the wildly popular *Left Behind* novels, in which religious historian Randall Balmer dubbed premillennialism a "theology of despair" and argued that premillennialists "look forward to the return of Jesus to get the true believers out of this mess."¹⁸ Using Martin Luther's *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) as its foundation, Root's theology of despair argues that it is precisely in "this mess," in the despair of death, that God meets believers.

But if this is a work of ecclesiology, how would the church come to embody despair? And would we really want it to? Before these questions can be answered, Root walks us through four symbolic "deaths" which are manifesting themselves in late modernity: The deaths of meaning, authority, belonging, and identity. To explore the demise of these concepts, Root delves deeply into the theories of philosopher Jean Baudrillard, and sociologists Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Zygmunt Bauman. In doing so, he draws somber conclusions about the current state of affairs in Western culture and its churches.

For example, in the chapter brilliantly titled *Disneyland and the Defecating Goat*, Root engages Baudrillard's philosophy to explain how meaning is becoming increasingly difficult to construct. "The ground is always shifting," he says, "as I am bombarded with new images giving me new products, perspectives, and entertainment to incorporate into my already image-saturated person" (17). In a world where mass-produced and escapist images obscure the line between real and unreal, how strange it is to encounter the putrid reality of goat feces in a theme park renowned for serving up the unreality of incessant happiness and sterility.

While he builds his arguments on some intimidating intellectual heavyweights, Root's primary vocation as seminary professor has prepared him well for translating dense subject matter into understandable and enlightening prose. Indeed, I have found myself on several occasions recommending this book to non-theology types in the full confidence that they would not be inhibited by a preponderance of academic-speak.

¹⁸ Balmer, Randall. "The 'Left Behind' Books: Revelations on 'Left Behind'." *Slate Magazine*. Washington Post/Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 20 June 2000. Web. 28 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2000179/entry/1005543/>>. Premillennialism is the theological conviction that the second coming of Christ will occur before the thousand-year reign ("millennium") alluded to in Revelation 20:1-6.

Because meaning, authority, belonging, and identity as we knew them are slowly being laid to rest, and because they are vital to the life of the church, Root calls us to re-examine the concepts themselves through the lens of the *theologia crucis*. “Because God encounters us in death for love,” he says, “it may be that we discover meaning in love that shares suffering, authority in the one who chooses weakness over power, belonging in the community that seeks God in despair, and identity as those broken and yet made whole through the brokenness of our Lord” (85).

But what promise is there in despair for the church? How can the way of the cross possibly be the way of the church? The promise is that even in death God is working to bring new life, but the problem is that the church has largely ignored the fact that you can’t have one without the other. Only out of death is new life wrought, but the prospect certainly seems brighter if you eschew death and despair and construct your ecclesial camp in the illusory safety of life; which, Root claims, is exactly what the church has done. Not only has the church fallen victim to this deception in its programs, but also in its very structure: “As a social organization [the church] seeks its own life...because it must fight for enough power to exist in society” (84).

A church that took seriously the notion that God works life out of experiences of death would indeed be a “weird community”. It would stand out in the world as an utterly unique community, which, trusting in God, actively seeks to find God within suffering and despair to bring life—even joy. The church for Root should be “a community unlike all other communities, one that treasures its weakest members, who offers children, the disabled, and the sick not only in seats of honor but places of leadership” (121). That kind of church sounds very Jesus-y to me, not because it makes me feel good, but because it actually reflects the life and message of God-with-us.

A message like that will indeed “reach out and kick your ass”; it’s what caused such a ruckus in Jesus’ time, and it’s a message that Root endeavors to bring back to center stage. I believe it’s a call we, within and without the church, desperately need to heed. If you’re in any way invested in the future of the church, reading Andrew Root’s *The Promise of Despair* should be a top priority.

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***Abstracts of Karl Rahner’s Unserialized Essays.* By Daniel Pekarske, SDS. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009, 565 pp., \$47.00.**

Karl Rahner was one of modern theology’s most prolific and accomplished essayists. He was a consummate master of the genre, using essays to develop unsystematic sketches, suggestive hints, paths for future exploration. His great essay collection, *Theological Investigations*, spans 23 volumes and covers innumerable theological topics.

Unfortunately, the arrangement of these essays is often more or less arbitrary, making it difficult to track down Rahner’s writing on a particular theme. So I’ve often made use of Daniel Pekarske’s marvelous 659-page reference work, *Abstracts of Karl Rahner’s Theological Investigations 1-23* (Marquette University Press, 2002)—a true labour of love, in which

Pekarske provides a concise, informative overview of each essay, together with a detailed index.

So I was delighted to see that Pekarske has now released this sequel. In this volume, Pekarske provides abstracts of numerous essays that didn't make it into the *Theological Investigations*. As you'd expect, the essays here represent the extraordinary breadth of Rahner's interests—there are essays on Marxism and the economy, Concilium and renewal, prayer and silence, freedom, and hominisation. As in the previous volume, Pekarske provides a very brief abstract of each essay, followed by a list of main keywords, then a list of subsidiary topics (these are often the most interesting bits), and finally a more detailed precis of the essay's argument.

Students of modern theology are indebted to Pekarske for his selfless and painstaking labours. With these unique reference works, the vast library of Rahner's essays becomes less daunting and much more accessible.

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***Who Am I? Bonhoeffer's Theology Through His Poetry.* By Bernd Wannenwetsch (ed.). London, New York: T&T Clark 2009, 259 pp., \$110.00.**

I've been waiting eagerly for this book, and I wasn't disappointed. An impressive range of scholars—including Oliver O'Donovan, Stanley Hauerwas, Bernd Wannenwetsch, Hans Ulrich, Brian Brock, Philip Ziegler, and others—offer theological readings of Bonhoeffer's poetry.

The ten poems that Bonhoeffer wrote in Tegel prison in 1944 were among his last works. This book includes the text of the poems (German and English on facing pages), together with an essay on each poem. The kind of close reading modeled in these essays is unfortunately rare in contemporary theology; and the essays show that our own theological horizons can be extended through such a discipline of slow, attentive reading.

Of course, Bonhoeffer was scarcely a first-rate poet. Yet, as Marilynne Robinson has observed, poetic language for Bonhoeffer “functions not as ornament but as ontology”; or as Philip Ziegler puts it, “even at its most stylized—as in the prison poems—[Bonhoeffer's] writing advances nothing less than decisive claims about reality” (142). This does not mean that the poems should be regarded merely as “versified theology”, as though they could be translated without remainder into prose. The contributors to the volume are aware of this, and so their aim is not so much to *explain* or *interpret* the poems as to think along with them and to see what theological possibilities they might open. Indeed, as Hauerwas very aptly remarks: “I do not, however, want to give the impression that the poem is an *explanation*...For I assume that one of the tasks of poetry is to teach why ‘explanations’ are not all that interesting” (101).

Three of the essays here really stand out. Hauerwas offers some incisive reflections on the poem, “The Friend”. This poem was written for Bonhoeffer's friend Eberhard Bethge; some early readers mistakenly took it to be a poem about a homosexual partnership. “Such an assumption,” Hauerwas notes, betrays our own “impoverished understanding of friendship” (100). For Bonhoeffer, friendship belongs not to the sphere of the orders of

creation (work, marriage, government). It belongs instead to the sphere of *freedom*; it is grounded in nothing and has no necessity. It is not divinely mandated, nor is it a matter of ethics and obedience. But since friendship stands outside the mandates of creation, it is also able to transform these mandates, turning them from law to gospel. Marriage, for example, is divinely ordained; it requires obedience and responsibility. But marriage can be “given life by the realm of freedom in which friendship flourishes” (106). It is thus friendship that “saves the mandates from their potential to be repressive” (108). On this basis, Hauerwas goes on to argue that this poem evokes an alternative politics: “‘The Friend’ is Bonhoeffer’s attempt not only to say, but to enact in a world of terror, that God’s church exists making friendships possible” (111).

Michael Northcott’s essay explores the relation between human identity and spiritual disciplines in the poem, “Who am I?” In a brilliant reading of the poem, he critiques the way Rowan Williams and Bernd Wannenwetsch (he might also have mentioned Hauerwas) have “enlisted Bonhoeffer...in the post-liberal attempt to recover the moral self through the public worship and the politics of the body of Christ” (15). In Northcott’s view, Bonhoeffer is not trying to overturn the modern quest for interiority or authentic selfhood. He is comfortable using language of inwardness and individuality; but against modern narratives of the self, he argues “that *moral responsibility* is the mark of true personhood” (17).

Another critique of post-liberal ecclesiology appears in Hans Ulrich’s remarkable essay on the poem, “Stations on the Way to Freedom”—far and away the most powerful and compelling contribution to the book. Ulrich argues that Bonhoeffer’s whole theology is pervaded by the theme of God’s acting, God’s presence. The poem indicates “the places of God’s acting”, the stations of God’s presence in our lives: God is present where our lives are structured by the *disciplines* of discipleship; God is present where we *act* rightly; and God is present where we *suffer* because of our dedication to God. In ecclesiological terms, this means the church does not represent God’s action, but is instead “the place holder for God’s acting in the world”. As a place holder, the church “does not become the new *polis*”; it is “the place of transformation, the place of change, the place of giving oneself over to God” (165).

Ulrich thus argues that Bonhoeffer’s political theology must be understood as a distinctively Lutheran theology of the cross: not a political theology in which the church represents God’s gifts or action, but one in which “God stands in our place—and there happens our suffering because we cannot act any more” (162). And it is only in this way that true *freedom* appears in our lives: not a freedom consisting in a plurality of options, but a kind of cruciform freedom, the suffering experience of God’s presence, guidance, and action.

I’ve highlighted just three of the essays here, but the whole collection is an exciting, creative, tightly-focused exploration of Bonhoeffer’s poetry and theology. It’s not only an invaluable contribution to Bonhoeffer studies; it also contributes significantly to contemporary conversations about ecclesiology, ethics, politics, and human identity.

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***Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders.* By Francis X. Clooney. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 182 pp., \$29.95.**

Since the inception of religious studies as a specific department of academia in the 1960s, there has been constant tension between the “faith-based” enterprise of theological inquiry and the “scientific” study of religion. The findings of anthropology, textual criticism, cultural semiotics, and the sociology of religion have often been seen by theologians as combative and naturalistic attempts to reduce religion to merely human action or psychology. By contrast, the teaching of doctrine, construction of metaphysical paradigms, and assertions about the supernatural have been viewed by religion scholars as material that has no place in the objectively rigorous realm of higher learning. Due to this often-combative dichotomy, religious studies has suffered from a lack of understanding of religious experience and the necessity of theology to lived faith, and theology has suffered from a lack of in-depth interreligious scholarship. Comparative theology, an emergent area of study, offers hope of bridging this divide by claiming to provide an arena of scholarship where religious academics can study other faiths in a comparative manner without sacrificing the truth claims of their “home tradition.”

Francis X. Clooney is a prominent scholar in Christian-Hindu studies and has practiced comparative theology in his work for over two decades. His previous work which illustrates this focus include the books: *Hindu God, Christian God* (Oxford, 2001); *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother* (Oxford, 2005); and *Beyond Compare: St. Francis and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God* (Georgetown University, 2008). Having taught at Boston College for many years and now a distinguished professor at Harvard Divinity School (where a graduate academic journal, *The Journal of Comparative Theology*, has recently taken wing under his auspices), Clooney stands as perhaps the foremost figure in this developing area of religious thought. As such, it is fitting that he should propose the first full-fledged treatment of the discipline’s history, scope, and methodology. His latest book attempts this, using as its basis Clooney’s own experiences of engaging in comparative theological work.

The book is neatly divided into three parts. The first section (Chapters 1-3) deals primarily with the background and development of comparative theology. Chapter 1 provides the basis for comparative theological work by arguing that religious diversity has tended to engender either a fundamentalist or relativist response; in contrast, comparative theology “is a manner of learning that takes seriously diversity and tradition” (8). Clooney proceeds to helpfully distinguish comparative theology from related fields of inquiry, most notably comparative religious studies and theology of religion (9-16). The chapter concludes with Clooney describing what he sees as the “autobiographical nature” of the discipline, and the fact that it will, in some way, affect the scholar who participates in it. Chapter 2 gives a brief and useful historical overview of comparative theological interaction. Clooney gives special attention to the Jesuit missionaries in colonial India, many of who displayed both deeply felt evangelistic passion and deep learning of a faith outside of their own (29-30). He then details the work of a handful of historical scholars who utilized aspects of comparative theological method, including Christian thinkers who employed comparison for the purpose of apologetically vindicating Christianity over and above other religions. Clooney offers a mild critique of this sort of “apologetic” approach to the discipline, stating: “Faith can drive the study of religion, and the study of religion can over and again purify a faith that rushes to comfortable conclusions” (36). Chapter 3 continues this survey on into the contemporary

scene, focusing on the work of such thinkers as Keith Ward, Robert Cummings Neville, and Raimon Panikkar, among others. Each of these theologians and philosophers brings a unique approach to the issues of comparative theology, which helps to demonstrate the discipline's broad range.

The second major section (Chapter 4-6) addresses some specific methodological details. The method that is most fully illustrated is Clooney's own preferred approach: immersive reading of religious texts utilizing a comparative rigor that is tempered by spiritual sensitivity. This cross-religious reading is the primary focus of Chapter 4, where Clooney emphasizes that it can lead to a kind of reshaping dialogue between religious ideas, where the scholar can view the crossing of religious boundaries "as a spiritual event as well as intellectual accomplishment" (59). Chapter 5 gets even more particular, with Clooney diving into the nuts and bolts of comparative work, focusing on the tradition which he has spent his life studying alongside Christianity: Hinduism. This chapter gives excellent methodological details and is filled with concrete examples from Clooney's own work. Chapter 6, which consists of a plenary address which Clooney gave to the Catholic Theological Society of America in 2003, shifts to more scholar-oriented concerns, discussing how a comparative theologian's religious mindset can be affected by honest interaction with other faith systems.

The third and final section (Chapter 7-9) concerns the "fruits of comparative theology" as well as some of the presumptions that attend Clooney's particular approach. In Chapter 7, he presents his position as assuming that "God chooses to be known...through religious traditions...[and] God can speak to us in and through a tradition other than our own" (115). This is followed by another key example of actual comparative theological work, analyzing Christian-Hindu correspondences in the conception of God, the *Imago Dei*, the naming of God, and religious devotion (116ff.). Chapter 8 details a theology of "divine accommodation" which Clooney claims to be perceivable as one engages in comparative theological work. His basic idea here, developed through a correspondence between a verse of Hindu devotional writing and a section of the *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola, is that "God graciously meets us where we manage to be" (148); basically, he suggests that God chooses to be encountered across faiths by "humans who truly seek [him]" (150). Recognizing the potential vulnerability of this inclusivist approach, Clooney even-handedly states that his position stands "in need of further discussion before it can be fully accepted" (151). Chapter 9 concludes with an appropriate emphasis on fostering further interreligious discussion and allowing for more effective religious study through deeper learning: "[S]ome readers...may read the same materials I have read and still bring different emphases to the fore. Some may wish to explore differences more vigorously, even points where traditions may be irreconcilable" (164).

As stated above, comparative theology is truly an emergent discipline, and has progressed so far without a thorough attempt at defining possible approaches or methodological boundaries. Clooney's book thus provides an extremely needful, as well as accessible, contribution to the furthering of this developing discipline, and as such it is a very valuable piece of scholarship. This work's greatest strengths come through in the clear and appreciable discussion distinguishing comparative theology from other disciplines, the fascinating and concise overview of the history of comparative theology, the description of the major contemporary thinkers in the field, as well as the excellent introduction to cross-religious comparative method, in particular Chapters 4 and 5.

However, there were some problematic areas of Clooney's presentation which deserve emphasis. For one thing, the epistemic dimension of Clooney's approach remains somewhat vague throughout. E.g., Clooney insists that comparative theology may just as well be thought of as "interreligious theology" (11). However, Clooney recognizes that theology, in whatever form it takes, must bear value for the religious community out of which it arises (in the case of Christianity, the church). Clooney also emphasizes that traditions should be treated in their full particularity. The difficulty arises when these elements are viewed together: how can a theological tradition, in all of its particularity, interact on a theological level "interreligiously" with another, equally particular, religious tradition in a way that is significant and meaningful for the home tradition? It would seem that the differences between traditions would be noted and then some sort evaluative judgment would take place (which Clooney takes issue with, 34-35) or the differences would be relativized and some sort of religious blending would occur (which Clooney seems to suggest at times, 158ff.). This difficulty makes it hard to see Clooney's specific approach being utilized by a scholar standing within any relatively conservative religious tradition.

Another element that is somewhat unclear is the progression of Clooney's method itself. He lays out a series of steps: (1) a deep reading of texts from multiple traditions, (2) the identification of "intuitive" similarities from these texts that are then (3) pressed into dialogical interaction. This system, overall, seems to lack rigorously applicable structure and suffers from being seemingly vague (the section on Mary and Hindu Goddess displays this sort of wandering comparative method, 93-99). This is an odd problem, since in other places there appear some very helpful examples of solid comparative methodology, especially in Chapters 5 and 7. The presentation of method is thus not entirely uneven, but does seem to lack cohesion. This is seemingly affirmed by Clooney when he says, "This odd and bountiful learning is untidy on both the academic and religious levels" (152).

In conclusion, it stands to be emphasized that Clooney graciously and consistently maintains that his specific way of doing comparative theology is "hardly representative of all Catholic thinking, and readers will think of other Christian starting points...for doing comparative work" (70). What this work provides is of great value: history of the discipline, examination of key approaches and thinkers, and in-depth demonstrations of a possible way to approach the task. Whether or not one is sympathetic to Clooney's more inclusivist theological starting point, this book still presents comparative theology as an emergent field of great value. Comparative theology can initiate deeper interreligious understanding and communication, deeper learning of traditions outside of one's own, and even aid a scholar in discovering the cultural biases that overlay his or her "home" tradition (113). The implications for this new discipline are numerous, and one need not accept all aspects of Clooney's program to be a comparative theologian, nor would he seemingly want it to be so.

Overall, the survey nature of the book, its lucidity and conciseness, directed by the perspective of a leading comparative scholar, plus the consistent emphasis on "ways to go" in the field, make this slim volume a virtual requisite for anyone interested in Christian interaction with other faiths, theology amidst religious diversity, or comparative studies in general.

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THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF CHRISTIANITY

THE APOSTLES' CREED (OLD ROMAN FORM)

I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; [and] the resurrection of the flesh.

THE NICÆNO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such is also the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Spirit uncreate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal; just as there are not three uncreates or three infinities, but one uncreate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately to be both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both trinity and unity and unity in trinity must be worshipped. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity.

Who, although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of His humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead; at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved. Amen

THE DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.