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EDITORIAL

Questions surrounding technology and human formation are of pressing interest to a wide range of religious and secular thinkers. In examining them, there is a legitimate place for a 'secular' orientation to the natural ends of human persons. But for pastors and theologians, the questions we ask and the answers we attempt take their rise in consideration of the Triune God, and of his outer works of creating, sustaining, judging, reconciling and perfecting creatures for fellowship with him.

A rightly ordered Christian theology of technology and formation will insist that divine reality-conferring and reality-shaping acts have absolute priority over any human acts, including the technologies used to serve those acts. We are formed by God, through God, and to God. Nevertheless, in this humans are not merely passive. God's acts call forth and enable creaturely enactment of a fitting form of life, oriented towards appropriate natural ends, and above all to our supernatural end of loving fellowship with the Holy Trinity.

The articles that follow approach these questions from a refreshing variety of perspectives within a broadly evangelical understanding of the Christian faith. Adam Copenhaver builds on St Luke's use of history and theology to provide assurance to show how pastors might similarly seek the spiritual formation of believers from doubt to certainty. Benjamin Espinosa compares John Wesley, George Whitefield and contemporary white evangelicalism to call for more faithful formation that is aware of and addresses racial prejudice. By means of a rich exposition of Jacques Ellul's thinking about 'technique', Joel Lawrence considers how Ellul can help Christians to avoid conforming to the world, and instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then, in a pair of more exegetically focused articles, Michael LeFebvre offers a careful and hermeneutically aware reading of the story of Abigail and Nabal (1 Sam. 25) to mine it for insights into mental healthcare, and Jim Samra brings 2 Corinthians 3-5 to bear on the insights of behavioral science to enable a more theological evaluation of their limitations in light of people's need for divinely accomplished rebirth and maturation. Finally, Joseph Sherrard articulates a biblical doctrine of

the mortification of sin that challenges and corrects the distortions of an exclusively therapeutic gospel.

It is appropriate, given the priority of the Holy Trinity as enabler and end of our formation, that reading and reflection on these essays be accompanied by prayer for divine assistance:

> Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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LUKE AS PASTOR OF DOUBT: FAITH AND CERTAINTY IN LUKAN PERSPECTIVE

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Christians have traditionally embraced certainty as an ideal goal of Christian faith, but in recent times, the precise opposite view has been increasingly argued, namely that doubt is the only realistic and authentic way to believe. This creates confusion for Christians who doubt—should they strive to overcome their doubt in pursuit of certainty, or should they reject certainty and learn to be content with their doubt? And this also raises questions for spiritual formation and for pastoral ministry—what does it mean to be formed spiritually as one who doubts, and how does a pastor shepherd doubters into that formation?

In this paper, we will explore doubt and certainty in light of the writings of Luke. We will see that Luke intends for his writings to in some way form certainty within his audience, and that Luke may thereby be seen as a pastor to those who doubt. The paper will develop in three sections. First, we will consider some of the voices speaking about doubt and certainty today. Second, we will explore Luke's understanding of certainty and how he expects his corpus of writings to produce that certainty. Third and finally, we will draw conclusions for spiritual formation and pastoral ministry today.

I. DOUBT, FAITH AND CERTAINTY IN THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the main character, Christian, inadvertently trespasses on the ground of Doubting Castle.[2] He is taken captive by Giant Despair, who is lord of Doubting Castle, and Christian suffers many torments during his captivity, though Hopeful remains faithfully by his side, so that he does not die, as have many captives before him. He escapes when, after a night of prayer, he realizes that he has always had the key in his chest pocket, near his heart, and that key is the promises of God. As his faith is renewed and his convictions restored, this key opens one gate after another, releasing him from captivity. Christian then erects

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[2] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come*, ed. Barry E. Horner (Lindenhurst, NY: Reformation Press, 1999; originally published 1678).

a monument warning future pilgrims about the danger of doubt, which is forbidden ground, for it leads to captivity, despair, and even destruction.[3]

Bunyan's view of doubt has been shared by many Christians throughout history. John Calvin, for example, defines faith as a "a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit."[4] Doubt, however, works against the "firm and sure" nature of faith, for "nothing is more adverse to faith than conjecture, or any other feeling akin to doubt."[5] For Calvin, though all believers experience the doubts that arise from the flesh, God equips believers for overcoming doubt by the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the promise of God's favor toward us in Christ and seals those truths upon our hearts.[6] Therefore, believers can have assurance in humility, for such assurance is the gift of God.[7]

More recently, Os Guinness has expressed the danger of doubt even more explicitly. He defines doubt in light of belief and unbelief as follows: "To believe is to be 'in one mind' about trusting someone or something as true; to disbelieve is to be 'in one mind' about rejecting them. To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and disbelieve at once and so to be 'in

[3] The monument reads (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 145):
Out of the way we went, and then we found
What 'twas to tread upon forbidden ground;
And let them that come after have a care,
Lest heedlessness makes them, as we, to fare.
Lest they for trespassing his prisoners are,
Whose castle's Doubting, and whose name's Despair.

[4] Calvin, *Inst*. 3.2.7. All citations of Calvin's *Institutes* are taken from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[5] Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.38.

[6] When a believer wrestles with unbelief, it has a limited power, for unbelief "reigns not in the hearts of believers, but only assails them from without; does not wound them mortally with its darts, but annoys them, or, at the utmost, gives them a wound which can be healed" (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.21). Further, doubt reflects the imperfect nature of faith whereby the believer both "delights in recognizing the divine goodness" and is filled "with bitterness under a sense of his fallen state." The former inclines the believer toward confidence, while the latter elicits alarm and incertitude. "Hence those conflicts: the distrust cleaving to the remains of the flesh rising up to assail the faith existing in our hearts. But if in the believer's mind certainty is mingled with doubt, must we not always be carried back to the conclusion that faith consists not of a sure and clear, but only of an obscure and confused, understanding of the divine will in regard to us? By no means. Though we are distracted by various thoughts, it does not follow that we are immediately divested of faith. Though we are agitated and carried to and fro by distrust, we are not immediately plunged into the abyss; though we are shaken, we are not therefore driven from our place. The invariable issue of the contest is, that faith in the long-run surmounts the difficulties by which it was beset and seemed to be endangered" (Calvin, *Inst*. 3.2.18).

[7] In contrast, those who protest that believers are arrogant to claim "undoubted knowledge of the divine will" prove themselves to be arrogant, for they are exalting themselves over the Holy Spirit, denying the Holy Spirit's work of revealing God's favor and sealing believers' hearts, and thereby are insulting the Holy Spirit (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.39).

two minds.'"[8] Guinness contends that doubt in and of itself is not unbelief, but if doubt is left unchecked and not overcome, it will lead to unbelief and disaster for the believer, and therefore doubt should not be treated as trivial.[9] Tim Keller would add that the believer who acknowledges and wrestles with both their own doubts and the doubts expressed by others will ultimately "come to a position of strong faith, to respect and understand those who doubt."[10]

However, in recent times, an alternative approach to doubt has emerged in which doubt poses less a threat than an opportunity to believers. For example, Rachel Held Evans describes her own spiritual journey in which she was a captive to certainty but she was rescued by doubt. Her faith "evolved" as she moved "from certainty, through doubt, to faith," so that she has experienced a "surprising rebirth" into an evolved faith that "means being okay with being wrong, okay with not having all the answers, okay with never being finished."[11] Her journey is, at least in part, a justifiable reaction to the attitude of some fundamentalists who are certain about every aspect of their faith and doctrine, even where such certainty is unwarranted. In the end, for Evans, certainty is the castle that held her captive and doubt is the key that opened the door and set her free.

Likewise Peter Enns argues that certainty is itself a sin, a false confidence that stems from pride rather than from faith.[12] Certainty reflects naiveté at best and deliberate inauthenticity at worst, since Scripture—in Enns' view—presents us with diversity and mystery rather than with clarity

[8] Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 29. Guinness also surveys the various Greek words used in the New Testament that could be translated with our English word *doubt*: first, δίψυχος refers to a person who is "chronically double-minded" (e.g. James 1:8); second, διακρίνω suggests a mind that is torn or separated, so that a person cannot make up their mind (e.g. James 1:6); third, μετεωρίζομαι indicates the restlessness or anxiety that comes with being "up in the air" because of our pride, and it can overlap with doubt (e.g. Luke 12:29); fourth, διαλογισμός refers to internal reasoning that gives rise to doubt (e.g. Luke 24:38); finally, διστάζω means to hesitate or to falter, perhaps because of reservations (e.g. Matt 28:17). He concludes that in all of these terms, the common theme is that the "condition of doubleness is the essence of doubt" (Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 24–25).

[9] "Continued doubt loosens the believer's hold on the resources and privileges of faith and can be the prelude to the disasters of unbelief. So doubt is never treated as trivial" (Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 29). Alister McGrath also adds a definition of skepticism, which is "the decision to doubt everything deliberately, as a matter of principle," but doubt itself arises only from within a position of faith, where the one who believes struggles against their own human frailty and sinful nature (Alister E. McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007], 13, 16–18).

[10] Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), xvii.

[11] Rachel Held Evans, *Faith Unraveled: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 22–23.

[12] Here Enns moves beyond Daniel Taylor, for whom certainty is merely a myth. Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our Correct Beliefs* (New York: HarperOne, 2017); Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986).

and precision in what we ought to believe. Doubt, therefore, plays a crucial role in breaking down our unwarranted certainties that we construct to give us a false sense of security, and doubt sets us free into the darkness, where we can trust God himself, in all of his mystery, rather than trusting in our inadequate conceptions of God.[13] Indeed, God may actually be closer to us in our doubt than in our certainty. Believers, therefore, ought to embrace doubt as it leads them out of certainty to trust but not back to certainty again.

If Enns and Evans were to create a Bunyan-like allegory, they might describe Christian trespassing at Certainty Castle and being taken captive by Giant Pride, but he escapes when, after a long night of asking questions, he realizes that the key of Doubt is in his pocket, and Doubt opens the gates and sets him free to continue his journey, but not before he erects a monument warning all future pilgrims against the danger of certainty.

These various authors exemplify two contrasting views of doubt and certainty. One presents doubt as captivity leading to destruction, while the other presents doubt as an escape leading to freedom; one seeks to overcome doubt as an enemy of faith while the other embraces doubt as a friend of faith.[14] What, then, shall we say to the believer who experiences doubt? Shall they embrace their doubt or overcome it? And if the latter, how shall it be overcome? We now turn our attention to Luke and consider how he would speak to these issues.

II. LUKE ON DOUBT AND CERTAINTY

In the prologue to his gospel, Luke describes the purpose of his project in terms of certainty—he writes in order that his audience might have certainty regarding what they have already been taught (Luke 1:4). He addresses his writings to Theophilus (Luke 1:3), who may be a real person, perhaps even the patron sponsoring Luke's work, or he may represent Luke's ideal reader, a person whom Luke envisions will benefit from his writings.[15]

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[13] "Doubt tears down the castle walls we have built, with the false security and permanence they give, and forces us outside to walk a lonely, trying, yet cleansing road. In those times, it definitely feels like God is against us, far away, or absent altogether. But what if the darkness is actually a moment of God's presence that *seems* like absence, a gift of God to help us grow up out of our little ideas of God? Doubting God is painful and frightening because we think we are leaving behind, when in fact we are only leaving behind ideas about God that we are used to surrounding ourselves with—the small God, the God within our control, the God who moves in our circles, the God who agrees with us. Doubt strips away distraction so we can see more clearly the inadequacies of who we think God is and move us from the foolishness of thinking that *our* god is *the* God" (Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*, 158).

[14] Lesslie Newbigin articulates this dichotomy in terms of fundamentalism and liberalism as follows: "From the point of view of the fundamentalist, doubt is sin; from the point of view of the liberal, the capacity for doubt is a measure of intellectual integrity and honest" (Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 1)

[15] Francis Watson is representative of scholars who see Theophilus as an ideal reader whom Luke hopes will find in his writings "the full, satisfying, and convincing account of the truth that has never been available before" (Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A*

Either way, Luke views himself as writing toward a specific kind of person in order to address a specific spiritual need. Theophilus represents a person who has already been instructed in the basic teachings about Jesus, but Luke perceives Theophilus to be experiencing some measure of uncertainty or doubt and Luke sets out to help Theophilus overcome his doubts and find certainty. At first glance, therefore, Luke seems to agree with Bunyan and Calvin that doubt ought to be overcome and certainty pursued. But we must carefully consider the nature of certainty in Luke and how Luke seeks to develop it.

Regarding the nature of this certainty, Luke uses the word ἀσφάλεια, which sometimes refers to being safe in the midst of a dangerous situation (e.g. 1 Thess 5:3; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.245) or the security that restricts the movement of a prisoner (e.g. Acts 5:23; *Mart. Pol.* 13.3), but in contexts such as Luke's, it refers to the stability of an idea, its truthfulness, or certainty (BDAG, 118). It is a "security against stumbling or falling" (LSJ, 266). We may define certainty as having confidence that what we know to be true is indeed true and reliable, and that no evidence or argument, whether presently known or unknown, is or will be able to discredit or refute what we know to be true. Doubt represents the absence of such confidence, when we have feelings of misgiving that what we hold to be true may in fact be false, and may be proven to us to be false, should sufficient arguments and evidence surface, so that we might one day be compelled to admit that what we now hold to be true is in fact false. Luke aims to move Theophilus from doubt to certainty.

But we must immediately note that in Luke 1:4, this certainty is the object of what we know rather than the quality with which we know. Luke wants Theophilus to "know the certainty," where certainty is the object of knowledge (ἐπιγνῷς...τὴν ἀσφάλειαν), not to "know with certainty," where certainty is the quality of knowing. Instead, this certainty more properly belongs to the instructions Theophilus has already received (περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων).[16] In other words, Luke does not here indicate a desire for us to be certain of what we know (or think we know) about these teachings but to know that these teachings are in and of themselves certain, whether we know them to be certain or not. Or we might say that Luke does not call us to be certain of what we know but to know the certainty of what

Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016], 62). On the other hand, Martin Hengel suggests Theophilus was an alias for a high-ranking Roman aristocrat who was also a "friend of God" and may have been Luke's patron (Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collectoin and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000], 102).

[16] Our English translations sometimes obscure the precise nature of Luke's intention. The ESV's reading, "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (cf. HCSB, NLT), locates certainty within Theophilus himself, while the NIV's reading, "so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (cf. KJV, NASB), locates certainty within the teachings. In this case, the NIV reading is preferred, since it correctly renders the accusative τὴν ἀσφάλειαν as the object of ἐπιγνῷς.

we know. Luke aims to demonstrate that the message about Christ stands securely upon its own merit.

To accomplish this goal, Luke compiles a narrative (διήγησις; Luke 1:1) of historical events that have taken place, namely the events involving Jesus. He acknowledges that other authors have already undertaken similar writings, and he may in fact be aware of the gospels written by Matthew and Mark, but Luke identifies his own gospel as an "orderly account" (καθεξῆς; Luke 1:3), perhaps indicating his intention to arrange his account logically or even chronologically (BDAG, 490).[17] He seeks an orderly narrative, and rightly so, since "an orderly account will also be a credible account; a disordered narrative undermines its own credibility."[18] Luke considers himself to be equipped for writing such a definitive history, since he has carefully followed these events for some time, and has himself received firsthand information from eyewitnesses and perhaps even the apostles themselves. Indeed, Luke may himself be an eyewitness of some of the events in Acts when he speaks in the first person (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-8; 27:1–28:16). Luke aims to be a meticulous historian, since he sees these events as the central proofs of the certainty of the teachings about Christ.

As a historian, Luke has a particular view of history in which these events represent the fullness of time, or even the fulfillment (πληροφορέω; Luke 1:1) of God's purposes and promises.[19] Luke, therefore, cannot restrict himself to merely reciting a sequence of historical events, but he must also comment on the *significance* of these events as the activity of God acting within history. In this regard, Luke also plays the role of a theologian who presents the character and work of God at work in Jesus' ministry.[20] Luke is "*both* historian *and* theologian," and his theology is inseparable from his history.[21]

But Luke is more than historian and theologian; he is also pastor, if we understand a pastor as someone who seeks to guide Christians into maturity as they trust Christ more deeply and obey Christ more faithfully. Luke undertakes this historical and theological project with such a pastoral purpose, as he aims to strengthen the faith of Theophilus by demonstrating

[17] Watson suggests Luke was certainly aware of Mark's and probably aware of Matthew's gospels, and yet he aims for his to be "the definitive version" (Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 62).

[18] Watson, *Fourfold Gospel,* 71.

[19] "The use of this verb suggests that Luke is thinking of events which were promised and performed by God: it conveys the idea of fulfilment. Thus the events recorded by Luke are seen as having a particular interpretation; they are not mere events, but form part of a series planned and carried into effect by God" (I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970], 41).

[20] Thus, "his purpose was not to draw important lessons from history, as it was the case with other Greek historians, but to serve Christianity with a true report of *God acting in history*" (I. J. du Plessis, "Once More: The Purpose of Luke's Prologue [Luke I.1-4]," *NovT* 16 [1974]: 271; cited by David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 57).

[21] Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 18.

the certainty of these teachings in order to overcome his doubts.[22] Our goal, then, is to consider how Luke envisions his history and theology to accomplish his pastoral aim, namely how the particular history he writes, with its particular theological distinctives, might engender the certainty he seeks for Theophilus. We might say that Luke's history informs his theology that serves his pastoral aims. We will therefore consider, first, Luke as a historian, second, Luke as a theologian, and finally, and most importantly, Luke as a pastor.

A. Luke as Historian

Luke's identity as a historian has been widely acknowledged and evaluated by scholars, whose work can be easily accessed. Our goal here is simply to sketch the broad contours of Luke's historical writings in his gospel and in Acts and to consider how his historical approach pertains to his pastoral aim. Generally speaking, Luke proves himself to be a careful and patient historian with a meticulous attention to detail, including establishing historical context by naming rulers and geographical locations, as well as naming characters and witnesses involved. In this way, Luke overloads his writings with falsifiable historical statements—statements that could be proven to be false if indeed they are false.

A statement is more probable not only based on the availability of data to support its truthfulness, if in fact it is true, but also on the likelihood of data being available to contradict its truthfulness, if in fact it is false.[23] Luke presents his sources from the outset—he relies upon the written narratives written by others as well as eyewitness testimony. Today's scholars recognize, in varying degrees, that Luke likely used in his gospel some combination of the writings of Matthew and Mark, and perhaps the hypothetical document called Q.[24] In both his Gospel and Acts, Luke uses the accounts of the apostles (the "ministers of the word; Luke 1:3), and the oral testimony of eyewitnesses, and, in the Book of Acts, his own experiences as an eyewitness

[22] Because Theophilus has already received these teachings and presumably possesses some measure of faith, Luke is better described as a pastor rather than an evangelist, as Marshall suggests (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 18-19), or an apologist seeking to defend these teachings against their opponents, as Hengel indicates (Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 101).

[23] Michael Licona identifies "three major components" for calculating the probability of a hypothesis, such as a historical claim, to be true: "the prior probability that the hypothesis is true, the likelihood that we would have the relevant extant evidence given the truth of the hypothesis and the likelihood of that evidence given the falsehood of the hypothesis" (Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010], 115.).

[24] Darrell Bock provides a summary of the parallel texts that Luke shares with Mark and Matthew, concluding that about 35% of Luke corresponds to Mark's gospel and an additional 21% of Luke corresponds to unique material in Matthew's gospel, though it is not clear whether Luke borrows from both these texts, or whether one or both of them borrows from Luke (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50; Volume 1*; BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994], 10-11). For an extensive analysis of Luke's use of written sources, see Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 156–216.

companion of Paul's.[25] Luke has done his research, and he uses sources that he feels are reliable, and he expects that his readers can also consult those sources to verify his account.

In his gospel, Luke attends to historical details far more than Matthew, Mark, or John. For example, when he tells of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, he explains the historical background of how Jesus' parents came to be in Bethlehem at this time. It was because of a decree from Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2).[26] And when John the Baptist appears baptizing, Luke first establishes the historical context "with references to secular rulers both well known (Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod Agrippa) and obscure (Philip, Lysanias), to leading clerics (Annas, Caiaphas), and to territories that will feature in Luke's narrative (Judea, Galilee) and those that will not (Iturea, Trachonitis, Abiline). Several of these persons or locations were no doubt as obscure to Luke's first readers as they are to his present-day ones;" nevertheless, Luke mentions them in order that "a well-informed reader such as Theophilus will be reassured that the gospel events unfold within historical rather than mythological time."[27]

In the Book of Acts, Luke continues to locate the story of the apostles squarely within particular historical contexts. They travel to real cities and engage with real people, both inside and outside the church. Luke tells of multiple experiences that would have left behind official civic and judicial records, such as the arrests of the apostles in Jerusalem and their appearance before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4-5), the execution of Stephen (Acts 7), the official documents authorizing Paul to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2), the Jerusalem church council's ruling (Acts 15), the earthquake that destroyed the Philippian jail (Acts 16:26), the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), and Paul's multiple trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, as well as the court documents regarding his appeal to Rome (Acts 21–28). Other events surely lived on in local lore, such as the attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods at Lystra after they healed a crippled man (Acts

[25] Richard Bauckham argues that the "eyewitnesses" and the "ministers of the word" in Luke 1:2 are one group of people rather than two, for the eyewitnesses were also active in bearing witness to what they saw all the way up to the time of Luke's writing (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Second Edition [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017], 30). In the second half of Acts (chapters 13-28), the occasional use of the first person "we" indicates Luke (or his source's) presence with Paul, but otherwise scholars are unable to agree upon the particular nature of Luke's other sources (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 67–68).

[26] Some scholars question whether Luke is accurate in this particular historical detail, since Josephus (*Ant.* 18.1.1) indicates Quirinius was only governor of Syria for a brief period of time in 6-7 CE, about ten years after Jesus was born. Various explanations have emerged in an attempt to reconcile this discrepancy, but the lack of additional evidence prohibit a definitive conclusion (see the discussion, for example, in Garland, *Luke*, 117–18). Thus, Joel Green's following conclusion, which he bases on such apparent historical problems in Luke and Luke's subjection of historical detail to his interpretation of Jesus' significance, is profoundly overstated: "This means, too, that we must reject any attempts to locate in Luke an historical basis for faith" (Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 146).

[27] Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 69–70.

14:8-18), and the humiliation of the seven sons of Sceva leading to the burning of an immense value of magical books in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-20). The external evidence needed to corroborate Luke's record of these events would have been available to the diligent First-century reader.

In addition, Luke incorporates eyewitnesses into his narrative and provides the information Theophilus would need to track down and consult with these eyewitnesses. Some of these eyewitnesses are named explicitly in his gospel, including Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary (Luke 1), as well as Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:22-38), the twelve apostles (Luke 6:14-16), Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38), Jairus (Luke 8:41), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2), Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26), Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50), Mary Magdalene (Luke 24:10), Mary the mother of James (Luke 24:10), and Cleopas (Luke 24:18).[28] Many of the events Luke records regarding these named individuals were publicly witnessed, so that even if the named eyewitness is deceased, others could likely still attest to the veracity of Luke's record.[29]

Further, Luke includes stories in his gospel of events witnessed by large crowds in small, rural communities, and of events in particular places where witnesses could be found with minimal effort. In a small village such as Nazareth, surely some synagogue members there remember the day they nearly threw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:61-30). How hard would it be to find the widow in Nain whose son Jesus raised from the dead, or her son, or other townspeople who witnessed this event (Luke 7:11-17)? One trip to the temple in Jerusalem, and a reader of Luke could surely find multiple witnesses who recount various events there, including the boy Jesus amazing the teachers (Luke 2:41-51), the cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45-46), and the crucifixion.

[28] Luke has a stronger inclination to name persons in his gospel than do the other gospel writers. He includes fourty-four named persons, as compared with thirty-three in Mark and Matthew, and twenty in John (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 56–66). Further, Bauckham compares the use of particular names in the gospels to how popular those names were in other Palestinian Jewish sources from the time period of Jesus. He concludes "that the relative frequency of the various personal names in the Gospels corresponds well to the relative frequency in the full database of three thousand individual instances of names in the Palestinian Jewish sources of the period" (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 84). If Luke was fabricating the names of eyewitnesses, he would have been very unlikely to be so accurate in distributing the names so closely according to popularity, since Luke wrote a generation later and was not himself Palestinian. Bauckham's research argues heavily for the authenticity of these named eyewitnesses.

[29] For this reason, G. A. Kennedy's suggestion that Luke "identifies no sources" and simply "sought to recreate in his own mind" what various characters such as Elizabeth *would* have said does not itself have any basis in the text (G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984], 107-8). Though Greek historians may have taken such liberties of *prosopoeia*, this kind of approach would have been self-defeating for Luke's aims. Luke actually labors to include historical details such as the precise date and location of these events because he understands them to be historical events that could be verified by witnesses. We would hardly expect such detailed reporting from Luke if indeed he is trying to cover-up his fabrications.

In the Book of Acts, Luke immediately reminds his readers of the eyewitnesses of Jesus by listing the eleven remaining apostles by name (Acts 1:13) along with Mary, mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). The apostles determine to replace Judas with a person who was present throughout the entirety of Jesus' ministry, and at least two qualified candidates emerge, Matthias, who is selected, and Joseph, who is also called both Barsabbas and Justus (Acts 1:23).[30] The rest of the 120 people present apparently witnessed portions of Jesus' earthly ministry but not his entire career (Acts 1:15). To this list we might also add the apostle Paul, to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared on the Damascus road, so that he could become an eyewitness, albeit one "untimely born" (Acts 9:1-19; 1 Cor 15:8). These eyewitnesses provide the foundational testimony about Jesus throughout Acts, and others also bear witness to Jesus on the basis of their testimony.[31]

As Luke advances his historical narrative throughout Acts, he continues naming the various people involved, including both believers and unbelievers, as well as obscure and public figures. These people serve as eyewitnesses of the events that took place concerning eyewitnesses of Jesus.[32] Luke specifically names no fewer than 68 people who played some role in various events recorded in Acts.[33] Some of these individuals played a major role and even traveled with Paul, sharing in multiple events, while others

[30] Matthias and Joseph would thereby qualify as eyewitnesses "from the beginning" upon whom Luke relies for his information (Luke 1:2).

[31] "What matters for Luke is the function of the apostles as witnesses to Christ and the saving events. It is arguable that only the apostles actually function as witnesses in the strict sense of the term, and that the task of other and later believers is to repeat the apostolic witness rather than to be witnesses themselves" (I. Howard Marshall, *A Concise New Testament Theology* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008], 64).

[32] Bauckham defines eyewitnesses as "firsthand observers of events," so that we may identify the apostles and company as firsthand observers of the events surrounding Jesus' life on earth as recorded in the gospel of Luke, but these additional named people in Acts are firsthand observers of the historical events following Jesus' ascension (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 117).

[33] My initial list of named persons in Acts includes Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, of the priestly family (4:6); Joseph called Barnabas (4:36); Gamaliel, a Pharisee on the Jewish council (5:34); Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, all in Jerusalem (6:5); Philip and Simon the magician in Samaria (8); Ananias in Damascus (9:10-19); Aeneas in Lydda (9:33); Tabitha, called Dorcas, and Simon the tanner, both in Joppa (9:36-43); Cornelius in Caesarea (10); Barnabas (11:22-26, etc.); Mary, the mother of John, and Rhoda (12:12-13); John, called Mark (12:25, etc.); Simon, called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manean, all in Antioch (13:1); Elymas and Sergius Paulus in Cyprus (13:4-12); Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, sent from Jerusalem (15:22); Timothy (16:1, etc.); Lydia in Philippi (16:14); Jason in Thessalonica (17:5-9); Dionysius the Areopagite and Damaris in Athens (17:34); Aquila and Priscilla (18:2), Titius Justus and Crispus (18:7-8), and Gallio and Sosthenes (18:12-17), all in Corinth; Apollos of Alexandria (18:24), Erastus (19:22), Demetrius the silversmith, Gaius, Aristarchus, and Alexander, all in Ephesus (19:23-34); additional companions of Paul, including Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, Gaius of Derbe, and Tychicus and Trophimus of the Asians (20:4); Eutychus in Troas (20:9); Philip the evangelist at Ceasarea (21:8); Mnason of Cyprus (21:16); Trophimus the Ephesian (21:29); Ananias the high priest (23:2) and Tertullus his spokesman (24:1); Felix the Roman governor in Caesarea and his

played a more obscure role in their own towns. In addition, he provides detailed descriptions of other individuals that might allow a reader to identify them, such as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), the priest of Zeus in Lystra (Acts 14:13), the town clerk in Ephesus (Acts 19:35), and the tribune in Jerusalem (Acts 21:38). He also refers to large groups of people that could be found in various cities, including the church community in many cities, the elders of various churches (e.g. the elders in Ephesus; Acts 20), the Jewish council, synagogues in various cities, and the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17). And we have not yet even mentioned the countless witnesses of Pentecost who came from and went back home to virtually every corner of the Mediterranean World (Acts 2:9-10)!

What shall we make of Luke's painstaking attention to historical detail? On the one hand, Luke may simply be lost in a historian's obsession with recording endless details that only distract from his larger agenda. But more likely, these details are essential to Luke's agenda of writing an orderly and definitive account that will corroborate the certainty of these historical events.[34] Luke leaves a trail of breadcrumbs for the skeptical reader to follow, a trail that leads to and through a treasure trove of evidence, from one eyewitness to another, through countless towns and cities spread around the Mediterranean Sea, from peasant shepherds to high priests and Roman authorities, and into the official records of the temple and of Jewish and Roman courts. Luke's history touches upon nearly every people group in every geographical region. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that a First-century reader would have been *unable* to find a source close at hand to verify or falsify some portion of Luke's narrative. Only a historian certain of the accuracy of his or her account would include such extensive falsifiable details. Luke presents to us a falsifiable narrative with full confidence that it cannot and will not be falsified.

In ancient historiography, it would have been unfeasible for Luke to provide further substantiating evidence. In our modern world, we might be dissatisfied with Luke's sources and skeptical of bias, since we favor the

wife Drusilla (24); Festus (25:1-12); King Agrippa and Bernice (25-26); Julius, the centurion of the Augustan Cohort (27:1); and Publius, the chief man of the island of Malta (28:7).

[34] Nevertheless, some scholars have challenged the accuracy of Luke's history on various grounds, such as supposed errors in geography, misstatements about political rulers, incongruency between Luke's narratives of Paul's life and Paul's own autobiographical statements in his letters, and the various speeches in Acts, which may or may not be recorded verbatim. However, Marshall demonstrates how these various challenges can be taken seriously and yet also explained in various ways without special pleading, so that on the whole "Luke's treatment of background details is basically reliable," as is his travelogue of Paul's journeys and his basic recollection of the essence of speeches (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 72; cf. 53–76). Regarding the speeches, we ought to remember that it would be entirely unreasonable to expect Luke to incorporate verbatim manuscripts of speeches, since an apostle such as Paul could speak for hours on end—remember poor Eutychus! Yet Luke himself acknowledges that the apostles preached "many other words" than are recorded (Acts 2:40). He is under no illusion about the summary nature of his recorded speeches, and yet he seeks a faithful summary that could be affirmed by the original listeners as a faithful recollection of all that was said.

objective and concrete evidence of photographs, videos, and CSI-style forensic data (e.g. DNA, fingerprints, and the like) that provide absolute proof. However, the absence of such concrete evidence in ancient historiography does not make ancient historiography any less reliable. As Licona argues, *absolute* certainty may not be realistic for the historian, who may nevertheless have *adequate* certainty based on "carefully examined inferences" and deliberate attempts to be unbiased and to follow proper methodology.[35] As a historian, Luke provides adequate certainty to the fullest extent possible.[36]

B. Luke as Theologian

We turn now from the nature of Luke's historical work to his work as a theologian, and we may summarize the theological theme of Luke's writings as the work of God through Jesus Christ to bring about the salvation of all who believe.[37] This statement incorporates several minor theological themes including the divine determination of God, the saving work of Christ, and how salvation truly does reach to all people, even the Gentiles, through the power of the Holy Spirit and by the proclamation and prayers of the apostles and the early church. We will consider briefly each of these themes and then we will see how they all converge in the resurrection, which is the center of both Luke's theology and history, and which is the key to his pastoral aim with regard to doubt.

[35] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 69. Likewise, Marshall says the conclusions of the historian "are not like those of a mathematician who can proceed with perfect certainty from a set of premises to a conclusion. *All* historical reconstructions have an inherent element of uncertainty about them" (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 24). Leslie Newbigin goes even further in his criticism of our modern Enlightenment ideals whereby we assume that certainty is an attainable and necessary goal that can only be reached in an objective, impersonal, and even mathematical way. But when we define certainty in this way, then we are inherently limiting the kind of questions that can be answered with certainty, namely questions that can be answered in a mathematical way. Therefore, historians are *a priori* judged incapable of providing certainty, as also are theologians, since such impersonal methodologies can never speak to the deeper questions of purpose, where we might introduce the personal God of Christian faith (Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 95).

[36] As a personal anecdote, my wife once served on a jury for a murder trial in which there was no absolute evidence in the form of surveillance videos, DNA, or smoking guns. The prosecution spent five weeks carefully piecing together the testimony of more than 50 eyewitnesses, none of whom had witnessed the actual murder, but each of whom had witnessed some small event related to the murder. The prosecutor built an entire narrative from this testimony and asked the jury to render a guilty verdict. The jury had not been allowed to discuss the trial with one another over these weeks, yet when they finally entered into deliberations, they had a unanimous guilty verdict within minutes. They had each become individually convinced by the overwhelming evidence from the testimonies of these witnesses. The jurors would probably not say that they were *absolutely* certain, as they might have been had they witnessed the murder themselves, but they were *adequately* certain, given the kinds of evidence actually available to them, that no other conclusion was possible. If the combined testimony of witnesses can still today have the compelling power to send a man to life in prison, how much more compelling would such testimony be in Luke's world, where videos and forensic analysis did not even exist!

[37] Similarly, Marshall says, "The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men" (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 116).

In Luke's writings, God is the primary actor who superintends all other events so that those events are properly described in Luke 1:1 as the activities "which have been fulfilled" among us (περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων), implying both a past promise that needed to be fulfilled and a divine agent who has accomplished this fulfillment, namely God himself. Though Luke does not specifically cite Old Testament prophets with the frequency of Matthew, he does see the story of Jesus as the continuation of the story of Israel. Jesus begins his ministry with an announcement of himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:17-21) and he ends his ministry in the gospel of Luke with a lengthy demonstration of how his death and resurrection fulfill what was foretold in Moses and the prophets, and even in all of Scripture (Luke 24:27). Richard Hays aptly observes, "[Of] all the Evangelists, Luke is the most intentional, and the most skillful, in narrating the story of Jesus in a way that joins it seamlessly to Israel's story."[38]

Therefore, in Acts the apostles cannot tell the story of Jesus apart from the story of Israel. Peter lectures his way through the prophecy of Joel before telling of Jesus' resurrection in light of King David (Psalm 2:14-36). Steven begins with Abraham and plods through the patriarchs, Moses and the exodus, Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, and kings David and Solomon, before finally making the briefest comment about Jesus being crucified and proclaiming his vision of the resurrected Jesus (Acts 7). Philip teaches the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-40), and the apostle Paul routinely argues from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (e.g. Acts 17:2-3). The working presupposition of the apostles and also of Luke is that the Old Testament constituted a promise that has now been fulfilled in Christ, so that the narrative of the fulfillment is really the continuation of the narrative of the promise.

The promise and the fulfillment are conjoined together by the all-embracing work of God which superintends all events past, present, and future. Luke repeatedly frames historical events within language of divine sovereignty, as if God is the director of the drama of history. Luke uses the Greek term δεῖ, indicating necessity, 40 times in his writings to show how God has predetermined what must come to pass.[39] For example, Jesus must preach the good news (Luke 4:43), must stay at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:5), and repeatedly says that he must be killed and raised on the third day (Luke 9:22; 22:37; 24:7, 26). In Acts, Peter acknowledges God as the primary actor in the saving work of Jesus, since God attested Jesus by signs and wonders, God foreknew and planned Jesus' crucifixion, and God has raised him from the dead, so that God has now made him to be Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 32, 36). And if God superintended Jesus'

[38] Further, "the story of Jesus constitutes the fulfillment of the story of Israel" (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016], 191–92).

[39] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 286. Joel Green (*Theology of the Gospel of Luke,* 29) observes that Luke also expressed divine intentionality with additional terms such as βουλή ("purpose"), βούλομαι ("to want"), θέλημα ("will"), θέλω ("to will"), ὁρίζω ("to determine"), πληρόω ("to fulfill"), and προφήτης ("prophet").

own suffering, then the apostles are justified to see their own suffering as part of the plan of the sovereign God (e.g. Acts 4:23-31). Behind every event in Luke's narrative lies the invisible, superintending hand of God.

At the center of the "definite plan" (Acts 2:23) of God we find the salvation that was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ.[40] It is fitting that Luke should use the resurrection to bridge the gap between his Gospel and Acts, so that Acts begins where the Gospel ends. In his preface to Acts, he describes the Gospel of Luke as containing all that Jesus began to do until he was taken up into heaven, after he had proven himself to be raised from the dead (Acts 1:1-3), and then Luke tells again of the resurrected Jesus ascending into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). The Gospel of Luke in many ways serves as a prologue to the main act in Jerusalem where Jesus will die and be raised. Jesus "sets his face" toward Jerusalem relatively early in Luke's narrative (Luke 9:51), and Luke then devotes a substantial amount of text to Jesus' slowly-developing journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:44) and the events surrounding his death and resurrection (Luke 19:45–24:53).[41] Luke's Gospel moves steadily inward upon Jerusalem, narrowing its focus more and more clearly upon Jesus, until only Jesus remains, upon his cross and then raised from the dead.

Acts, on the other hand, moves steadily outward from Jerusalem, expanding its vision until it encompasses the entire Mediterranean World. Acts is a kind of epilogue to the resurrection, looking back to the resurrection and unfolding its implications into the present world. The apostles now operate out of a clear conviction that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and, if Acts 1:1 refers to what Jesus *began* to do on earth, then the apostles naturally anticipate what Jesus will *continue* to do from heaven. They have been promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) and the return of Jesus (Acts 1:11), of which the Holy Spirit comes first. When Peter addresses the crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost, he attributes the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit and the miracle of tongues to Jesus himself, whom God raised from the dead, and who now is ascended and sitting at God's right hand, and *he* (Jesus) has poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). From this point forward, the central theme in all of the apostles' preaching is

[40] If Jesus' death and resurrection stand at the center of his work, and if his work stands at the center of history, as Burridge suggests in the following statement, then we may say that Jesus' death and resurrection stand at the center of all of history: "Recent studies of Luke have shown that Jesus stands in 'the Middle of Time', the pivot around whom all history centres, the time of fulfillment. Before Jesus, there is the past, the time of prophecy in the Jewish scriptures; after Jesus, there is the future, the period of the church which Luke will describe in the book of Acts. The gospel is carefully structured historically, from the deliberate Old Testament feel of the opening chapters, through to the disciples in Jerusalem at the end beginning the church, and on into the second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. Luke has a flow of events" (Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* [London: SPCK, 1994], 107).

[41] Perhaps as much as 49% of Luke's extensive coverage of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in 9:51–19:44 is unique to Luke (Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 23).

the death and resurrection of Jesus, which they unflinchingly proclaim as a certain historical fact (e.g. Acts 5:30-31; 7:52-53; 10:39-43).[42]

The apostles issue this proclamation with urgency because of the overwhelming good news that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has now accomplished salvation for *all* who believe. The universal scope of this salvation permeates Luke's writings and propels the apostles outward in Acts, for the gospel truly calls out to all people, not only to Israelites, but also to Gentiles, and in Luke's gospel, especially to the marginalized and outsiders. When Jesus first stands in Nazareth and announces that God will accomplish his promised salvation through Jesus, he is initially well-received, but only until he suggests that God's salvation will move beyond the Nazarene synagogue—even bypassing the Nazarene synagogue—to reach foreign widows and lepers (Luke 4:17-27). In Luke's Gospel, the ministry of Jesus focuses especially on the poor, the lame, Gentiles, women, and other "lost" people, whom he came to seek and to save (Luke 19:10).[43] To them, Jesus brings salvation in the form of healing, forgiveness of sins, and inclusion in his ministry and kingdom.[44]

In the Book of Acts, the outward impulse takes on epic proportions. Jesus himself sets the agenda in Acts 1:8 by sending out the apostles as witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth. Peter first bears witness in Jerusalem, and he ends his bold proclamation with an invitation to salvation, now a spiritual salvation in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, received by faith, repentance, and baptism (Acts 2:38-39). The message moves outward through the scattering of the

[42] In Acts, the apostle's apparent lack of interest in Jesus' earthly life is rather surprising given that Luke has written an entire gospel of the miracles Jesus performed and the parables he taught, not to mention the fantastic story of Jesus' birth! The apostles do still mention Jesus' deeds on earth, but only in summary form and only in passing, and in an apparent rush to get to his death and resurrection (e.g. Acts 2:22; 10:37-39). This gives further evidence to the centrality of the death and resurrection in Luke's writings and to the secondary role of all else as prologue and epilogue.

[43] Much of Luke's unique material focuses on God's attention to the poor and his aversion to the rich, including the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the focus on shepherds in Bethlehem (2:8-20), the parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), the rich fool (12:13-21), the seats of honor (14:7-14), the great banquet (14:15-24), the lost sheep (15:4-7), the prodigal son (15:11-31), and the nagging widow (18:1-8), as well as the stories of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) and the tax collector (18:9-14).

[44] Walters provides a helpful definition of salvation that connects the salvation Jesus brings through his ministry in Luke's gospel with the salvation the apostles proclaim in the Book of Acts. "(Salvation) means the action or result of deliverance or preservation from danger or disease, implying safety, health and prosperity. The movement in Scripture is from the more physical aspects towards moral and spiritual deliverance. Thus, the earlier parts of the Old Testament lay stress on ways of escape for God's individual servants from the hands of their enemies, the emancipation of His people from bondage and their establishment in a land of plenty; the later parts lay greater emphasis upon the moral and religious conditions and qualities of blessedness and extend its amenities beyond the nation's confines. The New Testament indicates clearly man's thraldom to sin, its danger and potency, and the deliverance from it to be found exclusively in Christ" (G. Walters, "Salvation," ed. J.D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* [London: Intervarsity, 1962], 1126; cited by Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 94).

church (Acts 8:1) and the preaching of Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The Gentile mission is fully born through the call of the apostle Paul, who is chosen by Jesus himself to carry Jesus name not only before Israel, but also before Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:16). Peter then has a vision in which he realizes that Jesus is "Lord of everyone" (Acts 10:36) and he therefore proclaims the resurrection of Jesus to Cornelius, a Gentile, and concludes, "Everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Most of the rest of Acts details Paul's missionary journeys as he ventures farther and farther towards the ends of the earth, and Acts concludes with a reminder that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 12:28).

Luke portrays this mission in such a way that it would not have been accomplished apart from the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the church. Before his ascension, Jesus charges the apostles to be his witnesses, but he instructs them to first wait in Jerusalem for the power they will receive by the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).[45] When the Spirit arrives at Pentecost, this power is immediately displayed in the miraculous ability of the apostles to be understood in foreign languages (Acts 2:1-13), and this same Spirit is promised as a gift for all who believe (Acts 2:38).[46] The Spirit continues to fill people in Acts and to empower their speech in mission (e.g. Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3; 9:17; 13:9; 11:24). Philip is directed by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26, 39), the Spirit is the driving force behind the Cornelius episode and the gospel going to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11), and the Spirit directs Paul in his journeys (e.g. Acts 13:2-4; 16:6-7).

It is because of their acute sense that the power for this mission comes from beyond themselves that the apostles and early church turned to prayer when they faced situations in which they were powerless. The apostles devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14; 6:4) as did also the first converts (Acts 2:42). They prayed before they made important decisions (Acts 1:24) and when they faced persecution (Acts 4:23-31). It was through prayer that they received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to witness (Acts 8:15; cf. 4:31). It is as Peter and Cornelius pray that the Spirit sends Peter to Cornelius (Acts 10:9, 30), and Peter is miraculously released from prison even as the church is gathered together and praying (Acts 12:12). The church sends out Paul and Barnabas with prayer (Acts 13:3) and elders are commissioned with prayer (Acts 14:23; 20:36). Paul and Silas pray when they are in prison (Acts 16:25). Their message about Christ went forth

[45] Bock notes the presence of the Holy Spirit also in the Gospel of Luke (e.g. Luke 1:35; 4:14), but there are four times as many references to the Spirit in Acts as there are in Luke's Gospel , and the Spirit is especially connected to power in both (e.g. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 219, 225).

[46] It is precisely because receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit was the normative Christian experience "that the apparent absence of the Spirit is treated as a situation that must be remedied" (I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004], 177).

not though their own power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their continual devotion to prayer.

Luke's writings, therefore, present a theology of salvation, in which God has worked through Jesus Christ to bring about salvation to all mankind, and this salvation goes forth through the witness of his people empowered by the Holy Spirit. As Luke's writings end, he has expanded his history *outward* to include all peoples and he has brought his history *forward* into the present moment, so that Theophilus and all of his readers are swept up into the narrative.[47] God's salvation is for all (including *me*) and God continues to save people through his gospel by the power of the Spirit (even *now*). In this way, the history meets the present, so that the story of Jesus is not mere historical abstraction about the past but it is relevant and personal for *me* in the present. Luke's theology, therefore, connects his historical work to his pastoral agenda, as he aims to guide his readers to personally share in the same experience of those Christians in Acts, so that we hear the same message, call upon the name of the same Jesus, and receive the same Holy Spirit, and we thereby come to share in the same certainty in our faith.

C. Luke as Pastor

What, then, shall we say about Luke's pastoral goal of strengthening Theophilus' faith? We can surely find numerous themes scattered throughout his history and theology that prove beneficial for strengthening the faith of believers in the face of various doubts.[48] But when we step back and absorb all of these themes together, we find that the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, for Luke's history and his theology ultimately work together to accomplish his superseding pastoral intention. We might say that his various themes are like beams of steel, each with its own individual strength suitable for bracing our faith in sundry ways, but Luke's ultimate goal is pastoral, as he aims for these beams to work together to form a trestle capable of bearing the full weight of our doubts and giving us certainty.

To see how Luke accomplishes this larger pastoral goal, we must turn to what is perhaps the most important story in all of his writings, the story of

[47] Because Luke does not tell the outcome of Paul's trial in Rome, it is possible that Luke wrote Acts while Paul was still in prison in Rome (ca. 62 CE). If so, then Luke literally brings his history up to his present moment when he writes. But even if Acts was written at a later date, a few years difference does not substantially affect the point that Luke has brought the gospel to the present time and place of Theophilus. On the dating of Acts, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 298–300.

[48] For example, if we doubt whether God exists, or whether he works in our world, Luke's narrative reminds us that God has worked in our world through Christ and he does work by his Spirit. If we doubt whether God loves us, Luke reminds us of God's love demonstrated in the saving work in Christ. If we doubt whether God's salvation is truly for *me*, Luke reminds us that God's salvation reaches all people, including outsiders like myself. Thus, Luke's individual themes offer various strands of assurance for us in our faith.

the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection.[49] Luke identifies one of these two disciples as Cleopas, and Cleopas serves not only as an eyewitness of the resurrection, but his journey from doubt to certainty provides Luke's roadmap for Theophilus and his readers who might doubt. As the story begins, Cleopas and his friend walk slowly, discussing the baffling events of the day and ruminating on their own sadness. They are believers in the sense that they belonged to the community of disciples (being "one of them" in Luke 24:13), they recognized Jesus as a prophet approved by God (Luke 24:19), and they had hoped in Jesus that he would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21; cf. 1:68; 2:38). But now they despair, for Jesus was crucified and their hope has died with him, and they are also confused, for they have heard reports from reliable sources that Jesus' body is missing from the grave (Luke 24:20-24).

Notice carefully how Jesus addresses these disciples in Luke 24:25: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe!" It seems their slowness to believe is more akin to the double-mindedness of doubt than to unbelief itself, for they remain disciples throughout the story even as they entertain confusion and uncertainty. In other words, Luke intends for Theophilus to identify with Cleopas at this point in the story, for they both share misgivings and doubts about what they have believed. In response to Cleopas' doubts, Jesus lectures extensively about himself, explaining from "all the Scriptures," including Moses and the Prophets, the theological necessity of Jesus' own sufferings and his subsequent glory as the fulfillment of all God's promises (Luke 24:26-27).[50] Essentially Jesus sets forth the full narrative of theological history with himself at the center, not entirely unlike the theological history Luke himself presents in his gospel. Interestingly, however, Luke does not tell us how Cleopas responded in this moment. The historical and theological lecture from Jesus, in and of itself, yields no apparent change of heart in Cleopas. Yet, this lecture plays a crucial and instrumental role in the transformative moment to come.

That evening, as they have dinner, Jesus the stranger plays the role of the host—taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing bread in accordance with his custom. In this moment, Cleopas' and his friend's eyes "were opened" and they recognized the resurrected Jesus. The passive form of their eyes *being opened* (διηνοίχθησαν) suggests it is a work of God and not something contrived by Cleopas or his friend. We might even call it a miracle, something only God can do, and yet this opening of the eyes happens only *after* Jesus has provided the historical and theological explanation, and only *when* Jesus breaks the bread, a seemingly mundane task of table

[49] "Luke 24 is a small masterpiece, designed as the closing scene for a large scale work of art" (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 647).

[50] For those of us who long to know what Jesus said in this lecture, Luke would perhaps point us to the first twenty-three chapters of his Gospel, where he has provided a history and theology of Jesus connected to the Old Testament, and then Luke might send us to the Book of Acts, where the apostles frequently tell the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Indeed, Luke may see his entire writing project as his own version of Jesus' lecture to Cleopas.

fellowship.[51] Thus, their eyes could not be opened apart from the work of God, nor could they be opened apart from the historical and theological narrative about Jesus and his work within the community of disciples.

When his eyes are opened, Cleopas recognizes that Jesus has truly been raised from the dead. Luke uses the word ἐπιγινώσκω here (Luke 24:31) to say they "fully know" Jesus in this moment, even as Luke intends for Theophilus to "fully know" (ἐπιγινώσκω) the certainty of what he has been taught (Luke 1:4).[52] For Cleopas, "knowing" Jesus in this way moves him from doubt to certainty, from "slow to believe" to confidently proclaiming the resurrection. He and his friend rush back to Jerusalem eager to report that "the Lord has risen indeed" and to tell the story of what happened on the road to the other disciples (Luke 24:34-35), who also initially disbelieve until Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures and the reality of his resurrection (Luke 24:36-49). Cleopas sets the example, and the other disciples follow. When Cleopas "fully knows" Jesus and the truth of his resurrection, he arrives at the certainty Luke aims to establish for Theophilus and his readers. Thus, Luke opens and closes his gospel with two kinds of knowing that are one and the same, knowing the certainty of these teachings (Luke 1:4) and knowing the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:31).

Belief in the resurrection clears away the confusion and the doubt and brings certainty. The resurrection is not merely the missing piece in the puzzle of these events; the resurrection is the puzzle box lid with its image that reveals how all the pieces fit together.[53] Suddenly Cleopas goes from having a jumbled up pile of random pieces of historical events and theological teachings that leave him confused and uncertain that any of it could be true, to now having the big resurrection picture that makes sense of it all. Now, when Cleopas realizes that Jesus has been raised from the dead, Cleopas realizes the certainty of all that God has done. Of course, it was certain all along, but now Cleopas *knows* that it is certain—now he himself has certainty.

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[51] This breaking of the bread probably did not refer to the eucharist itself but rather to the table fellowship that Jesus regularly enjoyed with his disciples and that was likely familiar to Cleopas (Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996], 357). In other words, Jesus was made known to them in the familiar way in which Jesus had worked among them. Perhaps we could say that still today, Jesus is revealed to us in the familiar and mundane ways in which he works in his community of his disciples, the church, through the means of grace, namely in worship, prayer, the reading and preaching of the word, and the Lord's Table. But at the same time, Luke does not set forth a recipe for replicating this experience, since the opening of their eyes is ultimately the result of God's sovereign work and not of human contriving, and we cannot today replicate the physical presence of Jesus in our table fellowship.

[52] Garland defines ἐπιγινώσκω as "recognize in full" (Garland, *Luke*, 56).

[53] If our faith depends upon the resurrection being true, then we would do well to carefully consider the historical reliability of the resurrection. Michael Licona has provided a superb historiographical analysis of the historicity of the resurrection, and he concludes that "the historian is warranted in regarding Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred in the past," for so long as we do not *a priori* rule against the possibility of God performing a miracle in our world, then the resurrection of Jesus is "the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock" (Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 610).

In this story, Cleopas undergoes a conversion of plausibility structures.[54] A plausibility structure refers to our deepest presuppositions by which we determine what may or may not be true and through which we come to interpret everything else (and is in this way similar to what is sometimes called a worldview).[55] We do not know much about Cleopas himself beyond that he was a disciple of Jesus longing for the redemption of Israel, but we can also deduce that he held a particular view of death in which death marks the absolute and irrevocable end of Jesus and of his ministry. His plausibility structure, in other words, had no place for the resurrection of Jesus, so he is unable to see Jesus' death as anything but a tragic termination. He is unable to assimilate and embrace the reports of an empty tomb, even when they come from otherwise reliable sources. Therefore, Cleopas remains confused and uncertain, even though he has all the proper information at his disposal, and even after receiving a thorough lecture from Jesus about the historical and theological necessity of his sufferings and glory. So long as his plausibility structure does not allow for the resurrection of Jesus, Cleopas remains uncertain about it all.

When his eyes are opened, Cleopas receives an entirely new plausibility structure centered upon the resurrection of Jesus. He does not merely fit Jesus' resurrection into his old worldview but Jesus' resurrection becomes the worldview by which he understands everything else, and with this transformation, Cleopas' angst is immediately replaced with peace, and his doubts give way to certainty. The resurrection interprets and confirms the entire historical and theological narrative about Jesus. If God has really raised Jesus from the dead, then Jesus must truly be the fulfillment of God's promises (Luke 1:1), a fulfillment that has taken place within the historical period of the First-century, and a fulfillment that has accomplished salvation

[54] Hays describes Cleopas' transformation as follows: "The ironic gap between Cleopas' presumption of superior knowledge and his actual ignorance of Jesus' identity prepares the reader…to interpret the dialogue that follows as a hermeneutical corrective to the preresurrectional understanding of Jesus that the Emmaus pilgrims articulate" (Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014], 55). Hays correctly suggests that Cleopas undergoes a "hermeneutical correction" but Hays underestimates Cleopas' error when he calls it only an "ironic gap" in his knowledge, for in fact Cleopas suffers from an entirely inadequate way of knowing.

[55] Peter Berger defines a plausibility structure in terms of the "social-structural prerequisites of any religious…reality-maintaining process." Within particular socially-constructed worlds, particular religious ideations become legitimate, and therefore these worlds serve as the "bases," or the "plausibility structures," for certain "religiously legitimated worlds" (Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969], 45). In other words, Berger uses "plausibility structures" to refer to the sociocultural contexts within which certain meanings make sense, and therefore Berger would argue that our deepest presuppositions are ultimately socially-derived. If Berger is correct, then Cleopas has derived his former plausibility structure from within his sociocultural context as a first century resident of Palestine, and the resurrection of Jesus conflicts not only with his personal presuppositions but with the social world from which they are derived. In the rest of this paper, we will use "plausibility structures" to refer primarily to an individual's intellectual presuppositions and framework for making sense of the world, though not to the exclusion of the social environment from which such presuppositions have been derived.

for all who believe. Through the resurrection, we can see that the entire narrative about Jesus is true and certain.

When we turn the page to the Book of Acts, we find that all of the apostles have walked the path Cleopas walked. Over the course of fourty-days, Jesus appears to them and proves himself to be alive, so that they also become convinced of his resurrection. When Peter stands at Pentecost in Acts 2 and proclaims the resurrection, we can see how the resurrection has become the plausibility structure through which he now understands all of history and theology. In his speech, he points to three Old Testament passages and shows how they have been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus has been raised from the dead in fulfillment of Psalm 16:8-11, and he has now ascended into the heavens to sit at God's right hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. Therefore, Jesus is the one now pouring out the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Peter pointedly attributes the Pentecost phenomena to Jesus himself, living and seated in the heavens. How could he make such a claim when Jesus was so publicly crucified just two months earlier in the very same city, and when Peter himself had at that time fled in fear?

The truth of Jesus' resurrection has led him to an entirely new way of understanding all that has taken place. The resurrection of Jesus has become the lens through which he reinterprets the Old Testament—it is the fulfillment by which the promises now make sense. Because of the resurrection, Peter can say with confidence that God superintended Jesus' death (Acts 2:23), and because of the resurrection, Peter can proclaim Jesus to be greater even than David, who is rotting in a grave, because Jesus has ascended into heaven. Therefore, Peter can make a bold and sweeping application, that all Israel must now "certainly know" (ἀσφαλῶς...γινωσκέτω) that God has made Jesus to be both Lord and Christ. In Luke 1:4, Luke calls Theophilus to know the "certainty" (using the noun ἀσφάλεια) that inherently belongs to the teachings he has received, but in Acts 2:36, Peter calls his audience to know these same teachings about Christ "certainly" (using the adverb ἀσφαλῶς, left-dislocated in the sentence for emphasis), where certainty now becomes the quality with which they know rather than the quality of that which they know.[56]

This shift from certainty as a noun to certainty as an adverb marks an important transition in Luke's writings, and it is the culmination of the change in plausibility structure evidenced by Cleopas. Luke moves from certainty that belongs to the teachings about Jesus (Luke 1:4) to the certainty of faith itself (Acts 2:36), from certainty as an external and objective quality of these teachings to certainty as the internal and personal quality of our own conviction regarding these teachings. But the two forms of certainty are necessarily interrelated, for believing with certainty is only justified where the object of faith is itself certain. In other words, only if that which we believe is intrinsically certain are we justified in believing

[56] Further, certainty (ἀσφάλεια) is the final word in Luke 1:4 and certainly (ἀσφαλῶς) is the initial word of Acts 2:36, suggesting perhaps that Acts 2:36 picks up where Luke 1:4 left off.

those teachings with certainty. Only if Jesus certainly has been raised can and should we be certain that he is Lord and Christ.

Therefore, when Peter stands at Pentecost and calls all of Israel to certainly know that Jesus is Lord and Christ, Peter's strong language does not arise from arrogant bravado or ignorant blustering but rather from his certain confidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead.[57] And the resurrection in turn provides the plausibility structure that makes sense of all of his other claims, for only if Jesus has been raised could Peter logically and sensibly claim that Jesus has ascended to God's right hand, that Jesus is pouring out the Holy Spirit, and that salvation is now found in Jesus' name. Even Peter's interpretations of the Old Testament are only plausible from within the plausibility structure of the resurrection. How could Psalms 16 and 110 speak of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, respectively, and Joel 2 speak of present salvation in Jesus' name, unless Jesus indeed was raised from the dead?[58] Peter now understands Scripture in a new way, in which Jesus' resurrection stands in continuity with the Scriptures and the narrative leading all the way back to Abraham (cf. Acts 3:13-15), but only when those Scriptures are interpreted in light of the resurrection. Thus, if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then Peter's entire speech is rubbish. It only makes sense and becomes believable if we first embrace the truth of the resurrection, even as Peter himself has done.

And the same can be said for the entire Book of Acts, where all of the acts of the apostles arise from the underlying assumption that Jesus has been raised. Peter heals a lame beggar "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 3:6). Then Peter rebukes the crowd for being astonished by this, since Jesus has been raised and now has the same power to heal from heaven as he did when he was on earth (Acts 3:11-16). Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The dramatic conversion of Saul from being the chief persecutor of Christians to being the chief apostle to the Gentiles only happens by the appearance of the living Jesus, a story which Paul retells multiple times in Acts (Acts 9:1-18; 22:3-21; 26:12-23). Repeatedly in Acts the apostles proclaim that Jesus has been raised and is now "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), and they call people to reject all other gods and to believe in

[57] "If what matters about religious beliefs is not the factual truth of what they affirm but the sincerity with which they are held; if religious belief is a matter of personal inward experience rather than an account of what is objectively the case, then there are certainly no grounds for thinking that Christians have any right—much less any duty—to seek the conversion of these neighbors to Christian faith. To try to do so is arrogance" (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989], 25).

[58] We could perhaps say that the resurrection has become for Peter the framework through which he now interprets the Old Testament. Therefore, rather than the Old Testament being the plausibility structure through which he understands the history of Jesus, the history of Jesus, and especially the resurrection, provides the plausibility structure through which he understands the Old Testament. Resurrection and the Old Testament are mutually informing, and both are essential, but the resurrection undergirds the rest.

Jesus alone. All of the stories and speeches in Acts are only plausible from within the plausibility structure of the resurrection of Jesus.[59]

At the same time, the resurrection of Jesus is incompatible with any plausibility structure but its own, and therefore the resurrection can be found at the center of the conflicts the apostles and Christians face in Acts.[60] The first direct persecution occurs when the temple leadership and the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection (Luke 20:27-40), become "greatly annoyed" because the apostles are "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 2:2).[61] The apostles are released and continue "giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 2:33). They are again arrested, and when Peter proclaims the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, the council is enraged and wants to kill him (Acts 5:17-32). Stephen is arrested because of the message he proclaims about the ongoing and future work of Jesus (Acts 6:14). The council hears out his long speech, until the moment when he describes his vision of the resurrected Jesus being alive in heaven. At that point their rage boils over, and they pick up stones to stone him (Luke 7:56-58). The Areopagus in Athens listens to Paul's ideas with an apparent open mind until Paul mentions the resurrection of Jesus, which then causes some members of the

[59] In 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, Paul will argue that if Christ has not been raised, the entire Christian faith is vain, as is also Paul's ministry and teaching. Christian faith and living all collapse into folly if the resurrection does not stand at its foundation, but with the resurrection as the foundation, everything else becomes plausible. The resurrection is the key to the Christian plausibility structure; it undergirds all the rest.

[60] Newbigin says, "The affirmation that the One by whom and through whom and for whom all creation exists is to be identified with a man who was crucified and rose bodily from the dead cannot possibly be accommodated within any plausibility structure except one of which it is the cornerstone. In any other place in the structure it can only be a stone of stumbling" (Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 93).

[61] First century Jews held a wide range of views regarding the idea of resurrection, with some rejecting it outright (e.g. Sadducees) while others affirmed a future general resurrection for believers (e.g. Pharisees), depending upon how they interpreted texts that imply resurrection in some sense, such as Job 33:15-30; Psalm 16:8-11; 104:29; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 12:2-3; and Hosea 6:1-2. Therefore, the idea of resurrection in and of itself was not necessarily incompatible with some strands of Jewish belief, but the notion that one particular person, Jesus, was raised as a firstfruit preceding the general resurrection, and the claim that this establishes his identity as Messiah and Son of God, was certainly incompatible with all first century Jewish plausibility structures (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 200–206). Further, Wright describes seven ways in which Christianity modifies resurrection as understood within second temple Judaism: (1) Christians universally held to resurrection, unlike Jews, who had a variety of views; (2) resurrection is central to Christianity while it is peripheral in Judaism; (3) Christians believed the resurrection body to be a transformed physical body, while Jews disagreed on this point; (4) Christians split the resurrection into two events, with Jesus rising from the dead ahead of the rest; (5) Christians are called to a "collaborative eschatology" in which they presently work in anticipation of the final resurrection; (6) in Judaism, resurrection refers metaphorically to return from exile and the renewal of ethnic Israel, while Christians use resurrection to refer metaphorically to baptism, ethics, and the renewal of humans in general; (7) nobody in Judaism imagined the Messiah rising from the dead, but this is central to Christians (N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* [New York: HarperOne, 2008], 41–48).

Areopagus to mock Paul while others believe in Jesus (Acts 17:31-32).[62] When he appears before the Jewish council, Paul proclaims that he is on trial on account of the resurrection, and the council erupts in dissension (Acts 23:8). Paul later tells of Jesus appearing to him on the Damascus Road and of his message that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. King Agrippa responds, "Paul, you are out of your mind" (Acts 26:24).

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, poses a direct threat to any plausibility structure other than its own. It is not simply one more truth to assimilate within a prevailing plausibility structure, but it is the one truth that demolishes all other plausibility structures. To accept the truth of the resurrection, therefore, requires that we adopt the plausibility structure that comes with it.[63] And this brings us full circle to Cleopas, whose eyes are opened and fully knows the resurrected Jesus. With that knowledge, he receives the plausibility structure of the resurrection, through which all the teachings about Jesus are confirmed as true. Cleopas becomes an eager, bold, and confident witness to the resurrection. So long as he lingers in his old plausibility structure—in which Jesus has not been raised—Cleopas remains mired in confusion, uncertainty, and doubt. With the realization that Jesus has been raised, Cleopas embraces a new plausibility structure in which all of the history and theology of Scripture makes sense and its truth is confirmed. Cleopas has confidence and certainty as he embraces the mission of proclaiming that Jesus has been risen indeed.

For Luke as pastor, therefore, the process of moving from doubt to certainty goes as follows: First, the historical and theological teachings about Jesus, including the entire narrative of Scripture, are intrinsically certain, whether we believe them to be or not; second, we recognize that the historical and theological teachings about Jesus are indeed intrinsically certain, even as those teachings are expounded to us; third, we thereby know with certainty that Jesus is Lord and Christ, by virtue of God having raised him from the dead; fourth and finally, the resurrection of Jesus

[62] C. Kavin Rowe observes that at this point in the speech, Paul also moves from a "universalizing scope" to the "radical particularity" of God's work through the particular man, Jesus, who died and was raised. In this way, Rowe says, "Luke's move in 17:30-31 thus entails a total determination of general cosmology by a radically particularized eschatology. Whether one's interpretive structure was Platonist, Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic, or something else (e.g. everyday paganism), to accept Luke's construal of the importance of Jesus' resurrection for the world would mean the destruction of one's theory(ies) – tacit or acknowledged – of the origin and (non-)end of the cosmos. It is therefore hardly surprising that some sneered (χλευάζω) at Paul after hearing of the resurrection (v.32)" (C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 39).

[63] Again, in Berger's summation of plausibility structures as ultimately being socially-derived (Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 45), this means that the resurrection must also locate itself within a sociocultural world within which the resurrection is legitimate. Because no such world existed before the resurrection, the resurrection must create such a sociocultural world, which we now know as the church. This creates a circle in which the resurrection establishes the new social world within which the resurrection functions as the cornerstone of the plausibility structure. In other words, the resurrection founds the church and the church legitimates the resurrection.

becomes the plausibility structure by which we understand everything else, including Scripture, God, our world, and our mission in the world.[64] Luke accomplishes his work as a pastor by means of his work as a historian and theologian, so that through his historical and theological narrative about Jesus, culminating in the resurrection, Luke shepherds Theophilus and his readers from doubt to certainty. Therefore, Luke recognizes certainty to be a reasonable, attainable, and necessary goal that Christians achieve when they embrace the resurrection of Jesus as their plausibility structure.

III. DOUBT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

For Luke, therefore, every doubt is ultimately a resurrection doubt arising from an ignorance that runs much deeper than we might initially suppose. When we encounter doubt, we often assume that our plausibility structure is sound but our faith is uncertain, as if we are owed another convincing proof or a persuasive argument that would be sufficient to make our faith plausible within our prevailing structure of plausibility. Luke presses much deeper with a comprehensive project that goes beyond trying to supplement our knowledge. Instead, he gives us an entirely new way of knowing. When we know his historical and theological narrative about Christ, and when the resurrection of Christ becomes the center of our knowing, then we find our way out of doubt and into the certainty of faith.

In our world today, most Christians who express doubt do so from within a plausibility structure that has been generally shaped by the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment's plausibility structure, certainty is only plausible when it is derived from rational and impersonal argumentation, scientific proofs, and mathematical computations. Therefore, any form of knowledge that cannot be proven by such criteria can never be known with certainty, including such categories as faith, history, and philosophy. The Enlightenment, therefore, *a priori* imprisons faith within insurmountable doubt, for Christianity makes claims that cannot be known with certainty, namely that a personal God has worked within history and calls people to faith. So long as we, as pastors, attempt to resolve Christian doubt within an Enlightenment plausibility structure, we will inevitably fall short and frustrate those Christians who experience doubt, for we will never be able to offer them the kind of certainty demanded by the Enlightenment. Thus, we must resign ourselves to living in a state of perpetual doubt, so long as we hold to this Enlightenment plausibility structure.[65]

[64] We might note a hermeneutical spiral here in which we only understand Jesus' resurrection in light of the Scriptures, but we only understand the Scriptures in light of Jesus' resurrection. In other words, Cleopas needed *both* Jesus' exposition of the Scriptures *and* the opening of his eyes to the resurrection.

[65] In this sense, Enns, Evans, and Taylor are right to conclude that doubt is inevitable in the Christian faith and certainty is a myth, for no one can ever be as certain about categories of faith as they can be about categories of mathematics and science, so long as certainty is being measured by Enlightenment categories (Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*; Evans, *Faith Unraveled*; Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty*).

If, as pastors, we wish to follow Luke's example, then we must seek to address doubt among our own congregants in a thorough, comprehensive, plausibility-structure-changing way. Why, Luke might wonder, would we allow the Enlightenment's assumptions to hold a position of truth greater than our Christian faith itself, so that our faith must demonstrate its plausibility on the Enlightenment's terms? Instead, Luke calls us to a radically new agenda, so that we no longer search for proof of certainty according to an Enlightenment plausibility structure, but instead we invite people into a new plausibility structure centered upon a personal God who works within history through Christ, with the resurrection as the foundational truth through which we evaluate and interpret all other truths. The resurrection demolishes the Enlightenment's plausibility structure by shifting from impersonal abstraction to the personal God, from reason alone to theology and revelation.[66] If within this new plausibility structure, the certainty of faith becomes plausible, then we make a grave pastoral error if we counsel our people to embrace their doubt within their old plausibility structure rather than inviting them into a plausibility structure where doubt gives way to certainty.[67]

Like Luke, we shepherd people toward certainty first by doing the work of a historian. Luke grounds his pastoral work in the historical narrative of what God really did do in Christ in the first century. Because Luke sees history as central to our faith and to certainty, he becomes a meticulous

[66] The resurrection does to the Enlightenment what it does to all other plausibility structures, and therefore it works no differently today than it did in the first century when it confronted Sadducees, the Areopagus, and so forth. Thus, Newbigin says, "It is no secret, indeed it has been affirmed from the beginning, that the gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel. The Church, therefore, as the bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and which calls in question, those that govern all human cultures without exception. The tension which this challenge creates has been present throughout the history of Western civilization" (Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 9).

[67] This is not to say that doubt cannot be a helpful heuristic tool in breaking down our unwarranted certainties and false conceptions about God, as suggested, for example, by Enns (*The Sin of Certainty*, 158). Indeed, Luke may very well agree with Enns that Theophilus' doubts have been *good* insofar as they have created the opportunity for Theophilus to examine more thoroughly what he believes. However, Luke would certainly disagree with Enns final rejection of the possibility that Theophilus could ever find warranted certainty in his faith. Perhaps this is why Enns does not interact with Luke but instead builds his case almost entirely on Old Testament texts where believers experience dissonance in their faith, especially within poetic and wisdom literature. His focus on Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain Psalms establishes his own kind of canon-within-a-canon, which in turn prejudices his judgment, since these texts represent the height of angst between God and his people. By focusing on the irrational experience of Job, the occasional imprecations of the psalmist, and the morbidly-obsessed musings of Qoheleth, how could Enns reach anything but a dystopian view of certainty? But when we bring Luke into the conversation, we can agree with Enns that doubt is a common experience for believers and that doubt can guide us out of unwarranted certainty, but Luke takes us one step further and suggests that a careful examination of theological history and the resurrection of Jesus will lead us into a new plausibility structure where certainty is warranted. This final step is not optional for Luke; it is the very heart of his pastoral purpose for writing in the first place.

historian and a patient history-teller, and we must do the same. And second, we must also do the work of a theologian, telling this history in a distinctively theological way, as the work of God within history, so that Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises and the one whom God raised from the dead and exalted as Lord. We must be historical theologians or theological historians, telling the tale of how God has raised Jesus from the dead and established him as Lord over all, so that all people are now called to repentance and faith. This is what Luke does for Theophilus in Luke-Acts, it is what Jesus does for Cleopas on the Emmaus Road, and it is what the apostles do repeatedly for numerous Christians in the Book of Acts. In Luke's writings, eyes are only opened and people only come to certainly know Jesus as Lord when the certain historical narrative about God's work in Jesus, culminating in his resurrection, is faithfully and thoroughly presented.

In practical terms, this means that we must work intentionally to incorporate history and theology into virtually every aspect of our pastoral ministries.[68] We dare not become so focused on the therapeutic benefits of faith, or the practical applications for Christian living, that we only lightly engage the historical and theological foundation of our faith. If we withhold from our congregations this historical narrative centered in Christ and his resurrection, then we are inadvertently withholding from them the very plausibility structure by which they would certainly know for themselves that Jesus is Lord. Instead, we must take on the role of a history teacher within our preaching, so that we demonstrate how our faith is rooted in real historical events which God has undertaken in Christ. We ought to utilize maps and teach geography, introduce major and minor characters, explain cultural intricacies, and, perhaps more than anything else, tell the stories about Jesus and the apostles recorded in Luke and Acts. We need to develop a culture of historical investigation within our churches so that our congregants themselves become historians and theologians well-versed in what God has done in Christ.[69]

The same can be said for the more personal aspects of our ministry when we engage personal questions and doubts of the people under our care. Luke guides us in how we might steer our conversations with doubting believers toward those things that facilitate confidence and certainty. Doubters often ask abstract questions. How do I know God is real? How do I know the Bible is true? How do I know God loves me? Luke encourages us to address such abstract questions with lessons in theological history, namely

[68] This is not to reduce the work of a pastor to merely being the work of a historian or a theologian, but we must recognize the extraordinary value of history and theology as pastoral tools, especially in contexts of doubt.

[69] We could perhaps further propose that if we follow the example of Luke, we will utilize biblical theology as much —or perhaps even more—than systematic theology in our ministries. This is not to minimize the importance of systematic thinking, but it is to say that we can teach many systematic concepts (e.g. atonement, justification, Christology, etc.) within the context of the historical narrative of Scripture. In other words, we teach theology within history rather than theology divorced from history.

by telling again the story of Jesus. At first glance, this may seem like we are avoiding the issue by not giving a simple and straightforward answer, but in reality, we are answering the question in the only way Scripture knows how, by inviting this doubting Christian into the new plausibility structure. In other words, when a Christian expresses doubt to us, perhaps saying, "I'm wondering whether God really exists," we might answer, "In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah" (Luke 1:5), and we might then walk them through the theological history of Christ and especially his resurrection, whether in ongoing personal discipleship or through the teaching ministry of our church. This plots a much longer path toward certainty than simplistic answers and platitudes, but as the length of Luke-Acts indicates, there are few shortcuts available to us if we really want to establish the certainty of this theological narrative and of Jesus resurrection, that they might come to certainly know Jesus as Lord.[70]

We ought to consider how we can absorb the historical and theological narrative of Jesus into our liturgies as well. Athanasius has said, "Christ, risen from the dead, makes the whole of human life a festival without end."[71] Surely this should, at a minimum, be true of our worship, when we gather as a church on the first day of the week in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.[72] His resurrection should be a recurring theme in our gatherings. We could recite creeds and other corporate readings that retell the work of Christ as the center of history and theology, such as the Apostles' Creed, which professes about Jesus our Lord that he was miraculously conceived, suffered, died, and was buried, then he rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, sits at God's right hand, and will one day return.[73] Likewise, we could incorporate these same themes into our

[70] This is especially true for that person who has intellectual doubts about the historical reliability of Luke's narrative, or the historical reliability of the resurrection itself. Several recent scholars are demonstrating that truly engaging with Luke's sources and evaluating the historical veracity of his account can be a multi-year process resulting in a very thick book (e.g. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 1-615; Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 1-641; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 1-738)! We might consider making such works available to some congregants, or we might at least make a point of summarizing these works when appropriate in our teaching ministries.

[71] Athanasius, PG 28, 1061b, cited by Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 192.

[72] Wright laments that "many churches simply throw away Easter year by year," noting that we identify with Jesus' suffering for fourty days of Lent but then have only one day of Easter celebration! He suggests we should recover the art of writing more Easter hymns and celebrating Easter more diligently throughout the liturgical calendar, and that we should incorporate Easter celebration "in creative new ways," including art, literature, poetry, music, dance, etc. (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 255–57). Further, Wright's lengthy reflections on how the resurrection, once we embrace it, ought to then guide how we undertake our occupations in this world and our mission as a church (including such themes as justice, beauty, and evangelism) merit careful consideration (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 189–290).

[73] We perhaps should issue a note of caution that the goal is not to become narrowly focused upon the narrative of Christ's work to the exclusion of the rest of Scripture's teaching about God the Father and God the Spirit. The Apostles' Creed appropriately begins by presenting God as the Creator, and it ends by reflecting on the Spirit's work and the church

singing, if we are careful to select those songs that speak specifically about the work of God in Christ rather than generically speaking of abstractions such as God's love.[74] When we incorporate these themes into our liturgy, we lead our congregations in rehearsing the very narrative that moves us toward certainty.

When we set forth the narrative about Christ in these and other ways, we invite people to embrace the resurrection of Jesus Christ as their own plausibility structure. This requires a certain amount of work from them as well. Luke does not anticipate that Theophilus will be a passive doubter simply waiting for certainty to find him; instead, Luke calls Theophilus to take an active role in pursuing those things that will lead to certainty, namely reading and carefully considering Luke's writings, evaluating the reliability of what Luke has said, and weighing the certainty of these teachings.

Here we find the closest parallel to what many regard as the disciplines of spiritual formation—through which the Holy Spirit works to transform our hearts—namely prayer, solitude, meditation upon Scripture, and so forth.[75] Even as Theophilus must exercise a certain amount of personal discipline in how he engages Luke's writings, if he is going to be moved from doubt to certainty, so also we must help our people take an active role in the midst of their doubts by guiding them into those disciplines through which they will be confronted with these teachings about Christ and his resurrection, that they might develop certainty in their faith. They must learn to diligently read and study their Bibles, to pray, and to gather together with God's people for mutual instruction, edification, and worship.

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as the communion of saints, and these are essential to the broader narrative of God's work. But more than half (perhaps two-thirds?) of the creed focuses upon Jesus himself as the center of God's work and thereby the center of the church's proclamation of faith.

[74] For example, we might incorporate J. Wilbur Chapman's *One Day*, where the five verses tell the story of Jesus, including his pre-existence, incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and second coming, and the chorus resounds: "Living He loved me! dying, He saved me! Buried, He carried my sins far away! Rising, He justified freely forever! One day He's coming—O glorious day!" Every time our congregations sing such a song, they rehearse the narrative of Jesus and the plausibility structure of his resurrection that will move them toward certainty. On the other hand, we might caution against filling our liturgy with songs that speak only abstractly of such themes as the love of God without mention of any narrative beyond our present and personal experience. For example, the chorus of Passion's *Never Gonna Let Me Go* says, "His love breaking through my heart of stone, love breathing to awake my bones, love reaching out to save my soul, love never gonna let me go, love calling me as I am, love making me new again, love lifting me when I can't, love never gonna let me go." How much more certain will our faith be if it is grounded in the concrete historical narrative of *One Day* rather than in the abstract personal narrative of *Never Gonna Let Me Go*?

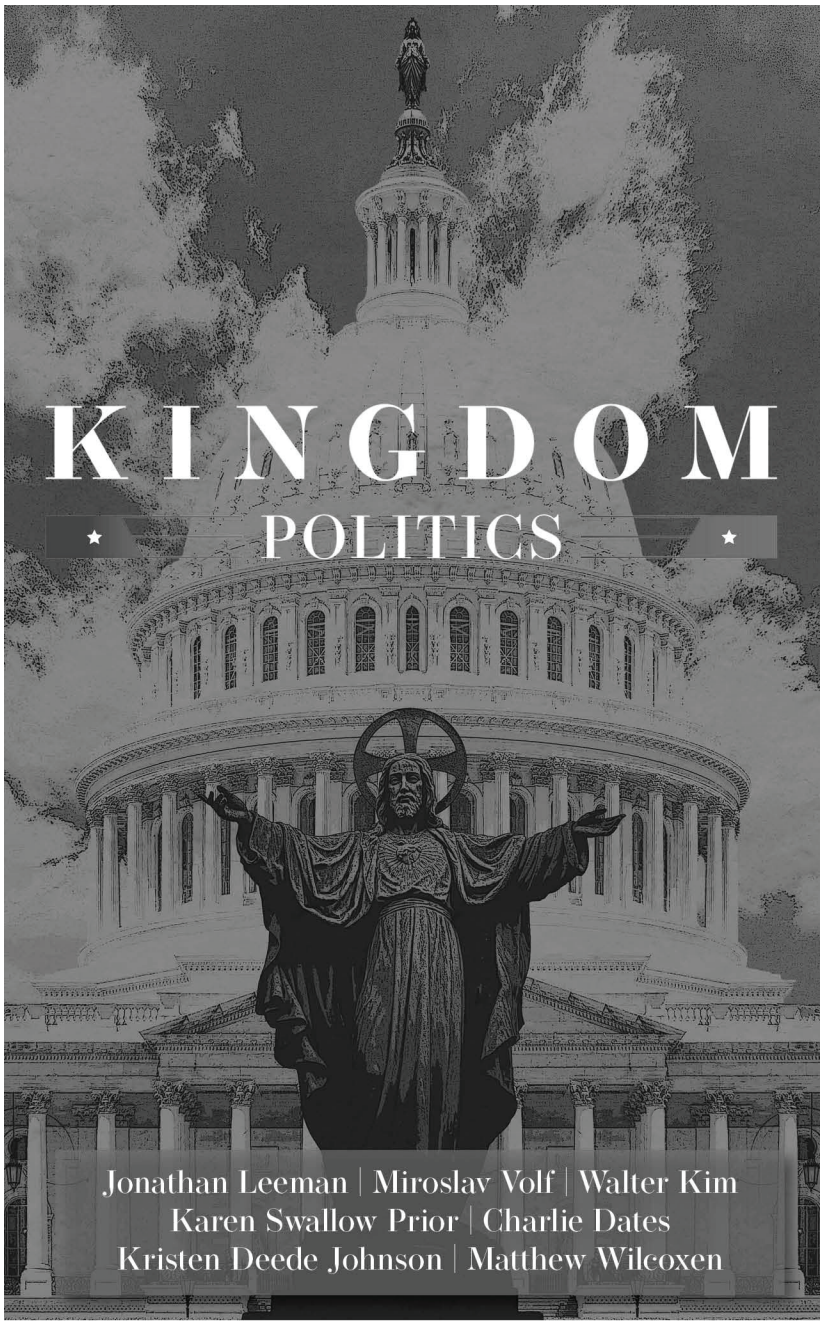
[75] Spiritual formation often speaks much more broadly to the "process of transformation" of our hearts and will "in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ" (Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done," accessed July 18, 2018, http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done). Here we are focused more narrowly on the transformation of doubt to certainty, but some (or even all) of the disciplines associated with spiritual formation apply here as well.

These are the disciplines by which they can take hold of this resurrection plausibility structure and find certainty.

Finally, in the midst of all of these practical pastoral suggestions, we must recognize our limitation, that we ourselves are ultimately not capable of opening people's eyes or forcing them to recognize Jesus as the risen and exalted Lord. It was only through the direct intervention of God himself that Cleopas' eyes were opened—though it is within the context of our faithful attentiveness to our historical and theological work that God does his work of opening eyes. Thus, like the apostle in the Book of Acts, we must devote ourselves not only to the work of history and theology, but also to prayer, as we pray with and for those who doubt, that God might open their eyes and bring them to certain knowledge of the resurrected Jesus.

V. CONCLUSION

We may conclude unequivocally that Luke intends for believers to overcome their doubt and to find the certainty that is only plausible from within a resurrection plausibility structure. For Luke, then, doubt is indeed a castle that takes believers captive, but doubt is ruled by the insufficient plausibility structures that restrict our ability to comprehend all that God has done in Christ. We must escape this castle and find certainty, and toward this end, we have our trusty companion, the historical and theological narrative of all that God has done in Christ, and this narrative points us to the resurrection as the key that opens the gates and sets us free from our doubts. The resurrection becomes our new plausibility structure, and by it we have confidence, security, and even certainty in our knowing Jesus as Lord.



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WESLEY, WHITEFIELD, AND WHITE EVANGELICALISM: ENGAGING RACIAL ISSUES IN PASTORAL MINISTRY & CHRISTIAN FORMATION

BENJAMIN D. ESPINOZA[1]

We often don't like to discuss racial issues in our circles. It's often uncomfortable, challenging, and risks offending some. But as pastor-theologians charged with overseeing "local productions" of the gospel,[2] we cannot ignore the racism present in our communities and in our society. Racism goes against the grain of the gospel by advocating for a superior class of people based on skin color or cultural differences, and for the structures and systems of societies to benefit the superior group. In contrast, the gospel claims that "all people are equally guilty before a holy God but who can be recipients of grace if they trust in Christ."[3] The very thrust of the gospel maintains that there is no distinction between races, which are socially constructed categories.[4] What is needed, then, is a fresh Christian vision to counteract our susceptibility to conform to the pattern of the world in the area of racism.

Rather than offer a dense treatise on tackling the issue of racism in evangelicalism, I would like to narrow my focus to look at a few key thinkers, ponder how they contribute to this conversation regarding race and White evangelicalism, and how pastor-theologians can help their people untangle racism from Christian formation. I will first briefly touch on how the gospel and racial conciliation go hand in hand before turning to the work of J. Kameron Carter and Willie James Jennings in discussing how theology and racism are more closely aligned than we may think. The work of Carter and Jennings sets up the core of my paper—a case study examining how John Wesley and George Whitefield disagreed on something other than

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[2] Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 448.

[3] Timothy Isaiah Cho, "Is Racism a Social Issue or a Gospel Issue?" Retrieved from https://cccdiscover.com/is-racism-a-social-issue-or-a-gospel-issue/?utm_ content=bufferd4411&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

[4] A helpful volume for thinking about the socially constructed nature of race is Tracy Ore's *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality,* 7th Edition (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

predestination: slavery. From there, I ponder how White evangelicalism specifically has been held captive by American individualism, and how such intellectual and spiritual captivity has manifested itself in the dismissal of important racial issues. I close by offering some thoughts on how pastor-theologians serve as agents of racial conciliation in both their ecclesial and academic circles. Ultimately, I argue that the church is often habituated and shaped more by the liturgies of society rather than by the gospel in the area of racism, and that racism is a matter of communal Christian formation rather than simply a problem "of the heart."[5]

THE GOSPEL AND RACE

We must begin by understanding that the gospel and racial conciliation are inherently connected. Gombis makes this connection quite well. He suggests that Jesus "came proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God—the arrival of that new reality in which the brokenness of creation is being restored," a byproduct of which is the conciliation of people.[6] The creation and fall narratives in the book of Genesis suggest that prior to the fall, creation was wholly integrated with God, living in perfect harmony together. However, the rebellion of Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, thereby bringing a schism between God and humankind. This relational divide between God and humankind extended to the relationships of humans.

Gombis suggests that whereas pre-fall relationships were characterized by transparency and intimacy, "things are now utterly broken, and sin is carried out within broken relationships...So even before we're out of Genesis, we have murder, incest, rape, racial strife, the enslavement of nations, and on and on."[7] The conciliation that occurs between God and humans and inter-human relationships extends to relationships between individuals and peoples from across a spectrum of racial, ethnic, and national identities. King asserted that "Racism is a philosophy based on a contempt for life," an assertion that "one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission...Racism is total estrangement. It separates not only bodies, but minds and spirits. Inevitably it descends to inflicting spiritual or physical homicide upon the out-group."[8] We see this play out throughout the Old Testament, as Israel, God's chosen people, thought themselves superior to other nations whom God was attempting to reconcile to himself. For instance, Jonah's contempt for the Ninevites,

[5] See George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006). Yancey suggests that racism can be understood individually and systemically. His thinking aligns with the work of Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). White evangelicals tend to think of racism as a problem of the heart rather than a systemic issue.

[6] Timothy Gombis, "Racial Reconciliation and the Gospel," ACT Review (2006), 117–128.

[7] Gobmis, "Racial Reconciliation and the Gospel," 119.

[8] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, (kindle ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1967), loc. 1141.

according to Piper, was because of his racism and "hyper-nationalism."[9] Racism thus runs counter to St. Paul's assertion that all are equal before God (Gal. 3:28).

The life and ministry of Jesus exemplifies how the gospel and racial conciliation are bound up with each other. While much of our literature asserts that Jesus reached out to those "on the margins," Jesus was, in fact, a part of the margins of society. While we often highlight in our churches that Jesus entered the world during the *Pax Romana,* this era was not "peaceful" for Jews, women, or slaves. Jesus Himself was a racial, ethnic, and religious minority living under Roman occupation. Moss even suggests that Jesus was the victim of racial profiling, state-sponsored oppression, and ultimately, state-sponsored execution.[10] As Moss notes, "Jesus lived a life as a colonized person and as a minority in a community that was under siege by an occupying army," and was acquainted with "poverty created by an empire," and with patriarchy, "since not a single brother would listen to any of the sisters when they announced, 'Guess what y'all, the tomb is empty!'"[11] Moreover, it is fascinating to note that much of Christ's activity did not take place in the context of the temple or synagogues; his interactions with people occurred in the countryside, on mountains, on seas, and in peoples' homes.

The ministry of Paul is another example of racial conciliation. Paul's epistolary corpus sought to bring together the Jews and Gentiles under the banner of Christ, as both had separate histories, theologies, and values that shaped their thinking on Christian faith. Paul was aware of the struggles that occupied these people groups, such as the matter of consuming meat that had been sacrificed to idols (Rom. 14), and sought to accommodate each group while emphasizing their unique oneness. Paul never sought to privilege one group or the other. Rather, he sought to create an equitable community for both Jews and Gentiles to worship and live together. As the body of Christ, our union with one another must reflect this cross-racial and ethnic unity, as we seek to "work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10, CEB). Thus, in our unity as the people of God, we are required to seek the good of one another; this necessarily extends to seeking justice for those marginalized in the church and in broader society.

Before turning attention to Wesley and Whitefield, I turn to the more recent proposal of J. Kameron Carter in understanding race as a theological problem. Carter argues in his masterful work, *Race: A Theological Account,* that the modern construction of "race" is primarily theological, and, thus,

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[9] John Piper, "The Education of a Prophet: Jonah," retrieved from https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-education-of-a-prophet-jonah. I would contend that Jonah's distaste for the Ninevites was based on more ethnic, cultural, and religious considerations, but his sense of superiority parallels contemporary racist thoughts and actions.

[10] Otis Moss, Otis Moss III, *Blue-Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

[11] Ibid., p. 19.

the solution to racism is theological as well.[12] Carter reasons that a number of early Christian writers, such as Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa were concerned that Christological heresies sought to dehistoricize Jesus, severing Him from His Jewish identity. Carter writes that Irenaeus of Lyons "reclaims Christ's humanity as made concrete in his Jewish flesh as a central feature of both Christian identity and the theological imagination."[13]

Fast forward to the time of Immanuel Kant. Carter suggests that in arguing for the supremacy of reason, Kant constructed a racial order upon the world. If reason is the epitome of thought and existence, and White European men are those who can lay claim to the tradition of reason, then White European males are the superior class. Bound up in reason came the superiority of *Whiteness* as a theological and racial category. This sense of superiority led to the idealization of Whiteness to the detriment of the *other*. Jennings defines Whiteness as "a social and theological way of imagining, an imaginary that evolved into a method of understanding the world" that privileges Whites.[14] Key to Carter's careful argumentation is the notion that Christian theology began embracing a theology of supersessionism, that is, the replacement of the Jews as the people of God by the church. The church in the modern era created a binary between the Jews (seen as the inferior race) and Gentiles (pictured as White Europeans). The Europeans, in Kantian thought, are destined to become the holders of "the supreme rational religion," over against the Jews and other non-Whites.[15] Carter, picking up on the concerns of Irenaeus, writes:

> Christology, that area within the theological curriculum that investigates the person and work of Jesus Christ, was problematically deployed to found the modern racial imagination. For at the genealogical taproot of modern racial reasoning is the process by which Christ was abstracted from Jesus, and thus from his Jewish body, thereby severing Christianity from its Jewish roots…In making Christ non-Jewish in this moment, he was made a figure of the Occident. He became white, even if Jesus as a historical figure remained Jewish or racially a figure of the Orient.[16]

The biologization of race and ethnicity and the *dehistoricization* of Jesus from his Jewish identity thus came to serve as a theological means of legitimizing the colonization of indigenous peoples in the Americas and the use of enslaved African labor in order to construct a new society—the United States.

Jennings provides a crucial anecdote that demonstrates the pervasiveness of the racist logic that preceded the modern era. In the Fifteenth-century,

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[12] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

[13] Carter, Race: *A Theological Account*, 7.

[14] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010): 58.

[15] Carter, Race: *A Theological Account*, 82.

[16] Carter, Race: *A Theological Account*, 7.

Prince Henry offered a "tithe" of thanksgiving to be given to God for his remarkable blessing on his expedition.

> This ritual was deeply Christian, Christian in ways that were obvious to those who looked on that day and in ways that are probably even more obvious to people today. Once the slaves arrived in the field, Prince Henry, following his deepest Christian instincts, ordered a tithe be given to God through the church. Two black boys were given, one to the principal church in Lagos and another to the Franciscan convent on Cape Saint Vincent. This act of praise and thanksgiving to God for allowing Portugal's successful entrance into maritime power also served to justify the royal rhetoric by which Prince Henry claimed his motivation was the salvation of the heathen.[17]

The "slaves as tithe" motif served a broader purpose by proposing a new grand story of salvation. "African captivity leads to African salvation, and to black bodies that show the disciplining power of faith."[18] The theological construction of Whiteness combined with this parody of the *ordo salutis* created powerful logic that formed and shaped racial attitudes for centuries to come.[19] Those who could not demonstrate an ability to "reason" were inferior, leading to a host of violent actions, such as mass slaughter of indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans.

If we believe that theology pervades our lives and being, and holds the key to understanding and interpreting the known world, it makes sense that the concepts of race and racism would have theological grounding. Racism is a deviation from the gospel, the product of a flawed theology whose telos is shaped by the gospel. However, as we will see, even the brightest theologians and preachers can embrace a problematic and troubling understanding of race and racism rooted in priorities other than the gospel.

WESLEY, WHITEFIELD, AND SLAVERY: A CASE STUDY

One of the most historic relationships in Christian theological history is that of John Wesley and George Whitefield. The two had met at Oxford University, where they founded the so-called "Holy Club." The Holy Club would later give birth to Methodism and its distinctive theology and practice. While Wesley and Whitefield are generally remembered for their conflict over the nature of predestination, election, and free will—a strong point of contention between the two was the institution of slavery. Wesley was adamant in his abhorrence of slavery, while Whitefield eventually took part in the practice. The following section details a small case study in how the logic of racism often forms believers in ways contrary to the gospel.

John Wesley was an ardent opponent of slavery. His abhorrence of slavery intensified in the later years of his life, as he worked tirelessly to

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[17] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, loc. 289-308.

[18] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, loc. 385.

[19] James K.A. Smith picks up on this language in *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

end the practice. Wesley's argument against slavery and racism had three elements: theological, ethical, and anthropological. His anthropological argument against slavery rested on an appeal to the equality that all humans possess before God. "Plainly, the Scriptures had concluded them all under sin—high and low, rich and poor, one with another."[20] In Wesley's theology, since all humans are born in sin and must respond to the call of salvation, there exists no difference between those Europeans and Africans. Madron suggests that for Wesley, "no valid distinctions [were] to be made between the races, insofar as human value or basic human nature was concerned."[21] Moreover, Wesley saw in many African societies the values of justice and mercy embodied in ways that the European societies did not. They were fair and just in all of their dealings, "unless white men have taught them otherwise."[22]

Wesley especially took issue with the practices of slave traders, whom he referred to as "men-butchers," directly questioning their humanity and compassion.[23] The practice of contriving wars and drunkenness among Africans was especially abhorrent to Wesley. The whole process of the slave trade was dehumanizing, particularly the voyage to the United States, which culminated in the enslaved Africans "again [being] exposed naked to the eyes of all that flock together, and the examination of their purchasers."[24]

Slave owners were just as immoral, as they were the "spring that puts all the rest in motion."[25] For Wesley, the very institution of slavery was a contradicted the traditions of liberty and freedom upon which rested Western society. "Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air: and no human law can deprive him of that right."[26] Therefore, it was within Wesley's heart to "strike at the root of this complicated villany," and "absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice"[27] Wesley grounded this aspect of his argument in an appeal to natural law and an understanding of good human relations.

While Wesley was against slavery in all circumstances, some of his contemporaries were more accepting of the practice, accommodating the predominant views of the day. Whitefield was initially a critic of slavery. Anthony Benezet, a Quaker, wrote in a letter that Whitefield "at first clearly saw the iniquity of this horrible abuse of the human race, as manifestly appears from [a] letter he published on that subject."[28] However, after

[20] Wesley, *Journal, Works*, Volume. I, 198 (June, 1739).

[21] Madron, Thomas, "John Wesley on Race: A Christian View of Equality," Methodist History, 2.4 (July 1964), 24-34.

[22] Wesley, *Works*, Volume XI, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," 64-65.

[23] Wesley, *Works* (Jackson edition), Volume IV (Journal), 95-6 (April 14, 1777).

[24] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," 67-68.

[25] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," 78.

[26] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," 79.

[27] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," 70.

[28] Quoted in Benezet's letter to Lady Huntingdon. Whitefield's complete letter is David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.

prolonged exposure to slavery, Whitefield's views began to shift. Whitefield, writing to Wesley, pondered whether or not those born as slaves have any concept of freedom, and thus, would be content to remain in a state of bondage.

> I also cannot help thinking that some of those servants mentioned by the apostles in their epistles were, or had been, slaves. It is plain that the Gibeonites were doomed to perpetual slavery; and, though liberty is a sweet thing to such as are born free, yet to those who never knew the sweets of it slavery, perhaps, may not be so irksome.[29]

Whitefield also believed that slavery was necessary in order to cultivate "hot countries."[30] "What a flourishing country might Georgia have been had the use of [enslaved Africans] been permitted years ago!"[31] While Whitefield did not believe the acquisition of enslaved Africans was fair or just, he did believe that God had somehow ordained the slave trade. He thought it good that he would purchase a number of enslaved Africans in order to "make their lives comfortable" and "lay a foundation" for them to come to know Christ. Ultimately, Whitefield saw the institution of slavery as a means to evangelize and disciple enslaved Africans. He also dismissed all other concerns as being subservient to the ultimate goal of evangelization. To conclude his letter to Wesley, he writes, "I trust many of [the enslaved Africans] will be brought to Jesus, and this consideration, as to us, swallows up all temporal inconveniences whatsoever."[32]

Brendlinger suggests that Whitefield's change of heart was primarily due to economic reasons. Whitefield had purchased the Orphan House of Georgia, and believed that funding could come from the cultivation of 640 acres of land he had inherited. As Whitefield mentioned in the aforementioned letter, he argued that enslaved Africans were necessary for the cultivation of land in hotter climates. "His commitment to the orphanage coupled with the prevailing view of the landowners of the south convinced him that black laborers, because of their previous African climate, were well suited to such labor."[33] Brendlinger also suggests that Whitefield's advocacy of slavery was also informed by sustained exposure to the practices of southern land owners. Benezet, the Quaker who had frequent correspondence with Whitefield, believed that Whitefield had grown to accept the prevailing sentiment of the day—that slavery, though an evil, could serve economic purposes while facilitating the conversion of a people group. In a letter written after Whitefield's death, Benezet observed about Whitefield that "for tho' the spiritual advantage of the Slaves is pleaded…it plainly appears that the temporal advantage, resulting from

[29] David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.
[30] David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.
[31] David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.
[32] David D. Thompson, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer*, 43-45.
[33] Irv Brendlinger, "Wesley, Whitefield, a Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 169.

their labour, is the principal motive for undertaking to defend the practice."[34] Thus, Benezet asserted that Whitefield's advocacy for slavery was based on economic reasons rather than spiritual or theological. His exposure to the predominant thought and practice of his day eventually convinced Whitefield in his heart that slavery *might* be a positive contribution to society, as some enslaved Africans *might* come to know Jesus through the witness of benevolent masters.

Some interesting observations can be made about Wesley and Whitefield's interaction regarding the institution of slavery. While Wesley was stalwart in his universal and transtemporal condemnation of slavery, Whitefield slowly succumbed to adopting the predominant ideologies of British colonial society at the time. His eventual adoption of slavery as a preferable, even Christian, practice was the result of continued exposure. In other words, the liturgy of support for slavery was ultimately what formed Whitefield's thought on slavery, leading him to cite biblical references to support his position while ignoring the broader thrust of the gospel message.[35]

The point here is to demonstrate that even in the midst of the logic and ideology that condoned and championed slavery, someone like Wesley was able to maintain a position that advocated for abolition, while his counterpart allowed himself to be formed more by the liturgies of the world rather than by the gospel. Reflecting on Whitefield's legacy, Kidd writes,

> I do admire Whitefield because of his passionate commitment to the gospel, but his relationship to slavery represents the greatest ethical problem in his career. It represents an enduring story of many Christians' devotion to God but frequent inability (or unwillingness) to perceive and act against social injustice…Even the most sincere Christians risk being shaped more by fallen society than by the gospel.[36]

Carter's accounts of race as a theological construct is evident in the interaction between Wesley and Whitefield. Whitefield had perceived that enslaved Africans, by virtue of living in hotter climates, were better-equipped to perform manual labor, rather than Whites. For Wesley, this appeared to be an aberration of the truth, for he himself was able to perform strenuous manual labor during his time in Georgia. Whitefield's thinking here demonstrates that he believed that the enslaved Africans were somehow inferior to Whites, for their purpose was to ultimately serve their White masters. This small case study demonstrates that even the most devout of Christians can find themselves on the wrong side of righteousness due to their inability to see injustice before their very eyes.

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[34] Brendlinger, "Wesley, Whitefield, a Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery," 171.

[35] Brendlinger, "Wesley, Whitefield, a Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery," 173.

[36] Thomas Kidd, "George Whitefield's Troubled Relationship to Race and Slavery," *The Christian Century,* accessed from https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-01/george-whitefield-s-troubled-relationship-race-and-slavery.

WHITE EVANGELICALISM AND RACISM

While Wesley and Whitefield lived and worked in a society that actively promoted slavery, we live in a different time. Slavery has been abolished, Jim Crow laws have been struck down, segregation is a thing of the past, and our nation's history of racism and violence is universally condemned by Christians. However, systemic racism, that is, racism that is infused into the structures of society, still exists. Before I move forward, I want to share several statistics that highlight the nature of systemic racism:

- Black people are 12 times more likely to be wrongfully convicted of drug-related crimes than Whites.[37]
- Schools are more segregated now than the 50's or 60's; over 75% of Black and Latinx students attend schools that are majority-minority.[38]
- A Black man is 3 times more likely to be searched at a traffic stop than a White man.[39]
- The average wealth of White families is $95,261, while the average wealth of a Black family is $11,030.[40]

These statistics are but a small sliver of the systemic racism present in the world today. One could interpret these statistics two different ways: that systemic racism is real and violent, inflicting perpetual pain on racially and ethnically minoritized groups, or, that racism is simply individualistic, and that these statistics demonstrate that White people work harder, have a stronger sense of morality, and have cultivated a developed sense of discipline and responsibility.

The latter (the individualistic belief) is the predominant viewpoint of White evangelicals. In their landmark study, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith interviewed over 2,000 White evangelicals on how they understand racial issues in the United States.[41] Their study suggested that White evangelicals often do not acknowledge systemic racism or interrogate their own White privilege. "Most white evangelicals, directed by their cultural tools, fail to recognize the institutionalization of racism—in economic, political, educational, social, and religious systems. They therefore

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[37] National Registry of Exonerations.

[38] S.F. Reardon, J.P. Robinson, and E. S. Weathers, "Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps" in H. A. Ladd and E. B. Fiske, editors, *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy, Second edition* (Lawrence Erlbaum), forthcoming.

[39] U. S. Department of Education. (March 21, 2014). Expansion survey of America's public schools reveals troubling racial disparities: Lack of access to pre-school, greater suspensions cited. Office for civil rights. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/expansive-survey-americas-public-schools-reveals-troubling-racial-disparities

[40] Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Traffic Stops," retrieved from https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?tid=702&ty=tp

[41] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press).

often think and act as if these problems do not exist."[42] White evangelicals tend to assume that ethnic communities fail to succeed in life due to some deficiency in their motivation or within their culture. In other words, White evangelicals rather would have society color-blind and focused on individual responsibility and achievement. As Emerson and Smith note, "From the isolated, individualistic perspective of most white evangelicals and many other Americans, there really is no race problem other than bad interpersonal relationships."[43]

Why do White evangelicals adopt such a negative reaction to the problem of systemic racism? Emerson and Smith suggest the following:

> On careful reflection, we can see that it is a necessity for evangelicals to interpret the problem at an individual level. To do so otherwise would challenge the very basis of their world, both their faith and the American way of life. They accept and support individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism. Suggesting social causes of the race problem challenges the cultural elements with which they construct their lives. This is the radical limitation of the white evangelical toolkit. *This is why anyone, any group, or any program that challenges their accountable freewill individualist perspective comes itself to be seen as a cause of the race problem*.[44]

D. A. Carson asserts a similar sentiment by suggesting that while Christians of color would contend that racial conciliation is a gospel issue, White Christians are "more likely to imagine that racial issues have so largely been resolved that it is a distraction to keep bringing them up."[45]

An example of the "freewill individualist" perspective in very recent history is in the case of the evangelical response to the police shootings in Ferguson, Missouri. A White police officer named Darren Wilson shot and killed a Black youth named Michael Brown. As a result, protests broke out, and in the midst, two police officers were shot and killed. In response, Franklin Graham tweeted out the following:

> Listen up—Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and everybody else. Most police shootings can be avoided. It comes down to respect for authority and obedience. If a police officer tells you to stop, you stop. If a police officer tells you to put your hands in the air, you put your hands in the air. If a police officer tells you to lay down face first with your hands behind your back, you lay down face first with your hands behind your back. It's as simple as that. Even if you think the police officer is wrong—YOU OBEY.

Graham's tweet generated the ire of a group of Black, Latinx, and Asian American religious leaders, who penned their own response to Graham.

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[42] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 170.
[43] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 89.
[44] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 89.
[45] D.A. Carson, "What are Gospel Issues?" *Themelios 39* (2)(2014): 218.

> Frankly, Rev. Graham, your insistence that "Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and everybody else" "Listen up" was crude, insensitive, and paternalistic...The fact that you identify a widely acknowledged social injustice as "simple" reveals your lack of empathy and understanding of the depth of sin that some in the body have suffered under the weight of our broken justice system. It also reveals a cavalier disregard for the enduring impacts and outcomes of the legal regimes that enslaved and oppressed people of color, made in the image of God—from Native American genocide and containment, to colonial and antebellum slavery, through Jim Crow and peonage, to our current system of mass incarceration and criminalization.[46]

For Graham, the problem of police violence is simple: do what you're told to and you'll be fine. However, this naive response places the blame on the victim, and assumes that the system (signified by the police) is fine. Moreover, subtly embedded in this response is individualism; racially and ethnically minoritized people who are shot by police shoulder some of the blame for their own suffering and death. However, the systemic position would argue that police violence is the result of centuries of oppression, and that individual instances of police violence are the result of a system stacked against racially and ethnically minoritized groups. According to Emerson and Smith's research, most White evangelicals tend toward the former perspective, not necessarily out of malicious intent, but more out of the way they have been socialized.

The conflation of evangelicalism and Americanism that Emerson and Smith observe here serves as an especially concerning marriage. In a recent survey, the majority (53%) of White evangelicals suggested that immigrants were more likely to "threaten American values" compared to 32% of Black evangelicals, and 26% of Latinx evangelicals.[47] In contrast, 59% of Latinx evangelicals and 53% of Black evangelicals believe that immigrants "strengthen American values," compared to 32% of White evangelicals. These statistics demonstrate that some White evangelicals conflate Christian values with so called "American" values. Thus, those who are "outside" the mold of White, American evangelicalism are considered "other." Here we see the perpetuation of a theological understanding of race that privileges the White population (and its corollary beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices) over other racial and ethnic groups.

Wilder writes that the earliest institutions in the United States "were instruments of Christian expressionism, weapons for the conquest of indigenous peoples, and major beneficiaries of the African slave trade and

46 Lisa Sharon Harper, "An Open Letter to Franklin Graham," March 19, 2015, http://sojo.net/blogs/2015/03/19/open-letter-franklin-graham.

47 Public Religion Research Institute, "How American View Immigrants, and What They Want from Immigration Reform," Retrived from https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/PRRI-AVA-2015-Immigration-Report-1.pdf

slavery."[48] In reacting to the marriage of White Christians, racism, and so-called "American values," Peter Leithart writes that

> Evangelicals fail to address racial issues in so far as they conform to American presumptions. A long-standing division in the church and society…becomes intractable because of evangelical inherence to the individualistic assumptions of the American way…To address the racial divisions in the churches more effectively, evangelicals have to repent, not (or not only) of our racism, but of our Americanism.[49]

The marriage between evangelicalism and Americanism has produced a body of Christians whose ideas regarding race and racism are informed more by cultural forces rather than the gospel. In some senses, the command to "work for the good of all" (Gal. 6:10) became more of an individualist charge than a command for a community. Thus, the church needs to push against the tendency toward individualism in the area of race, and consider how systemic racism continues to pervade our society, our churches, and our homes.

ENGAGING RACIAL ISSUES AS PASTOR-THEOLOGIANS: SOME THOUGHTS ON A MATTER OF CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Thus far, I have argued that while the gospel speaks into the need of racial conciliation and justice, Christians have often adopted attitudes more in line with societal tendencies and practices. This is evident not only in Wesley's interaction with Whitefield in the area of slavery, but also in how many of us respond to race-based violence and related incidents. Christian formation, thus, has not been effective in producing believers who stand with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized in society. Even James K.A. Smith in engaging with the work of Jennings suggests that the "virtue project," which assumes that Christian tradition is a cure for a myriad of ecclesial problems "conveniently ignores the church's capitulation to the horrors of modernity."[50] Thus, the art and science of spiritual formation needs to be understood within the context of greater societal forces that impact the church community and Christian individuals. As pastor-theologians, those charged with not only the theological nourishment of our churches, but also the broader landscape of Christendom, how can we effectively serve as agents of Christian formation in the areas of race and racism?

Perhaps a place to begin is in examining the kinds of texts and ideas with which we surround ourselves. By this I mean that we have a tendency to read and engage with the work of those with whom we agree. But I challenge my fellow pastor-theologians to examine the makeup of their bookshelves and see how many books by racially or ethnically minoritized

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[48] Craig Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy,* 17.

[49] Peter Leithart, *The End of Protestantism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 93.

[50] James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017): 173.

scholars they have in their possession. Black, Latinx, Asian, and feminist theologies are forged in the fires of oppression, while evangelical theologies (thought extraordinarily valuable and useful) do not share the same kinds of histories. These histories inevitably shape our theologizing. For instance, James Cone remarks in his epic work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* that "White theologians in the past century have written thousands of books about Jesus' cross without remarking on the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of black people."[51] For Cone, there was no theological reflection of our nation's wicked history of slavery and lynching, as the White church "needed theologians to interpret the gospel in a way that would not require them to acknowledge white supremacy as America's great sin."[52] Evangelical theological reflection on the crucifixion usually takes the path of exploring various "theories" of the cross while ignoring the obvious parallels between the cross and race-based violence. Another example is how Martell-Otero suggests that it is a "disincarnate Christianity," one that emphasizes abstract belief and individual salvation, "that allows its adherents to exploit the poor, ignore the suffering, and smugly await a heavenly reward at no cost to them."[53] Filling our theological diets with the works of racially minoritized pastors and theologians can assist us in garnering a broader sense of how the gospel impacts different types of communities, and raises our awareness of how people different than us theologize their experiences. Our theologizing is strengthened, our ability to speak into various contexts grows, and we include the perspectives of those marginalized. To radically reshape the racial attitudes of our people, our diets must include perspectives that don't necessarily reflect our own experiences.

While engaging the works of racially minoritized theologians is beneficial for us, we cannot succumb to the temptation to claim that we are experts. As pastor-theologians, our business is words; we preach with them; we teach with them; we disciple with them; and we write with them. But perhaps before we speak into issues of racial injustice, we need to listen carefully to those who are in pain. I asked a friend of mine, a Black woman, what pastors should do to better engage issues of race. Her response was "Listen. Just listen. Shut up. Listen." When we fail to listen well, we run the risk of saying things birthed out of our inexperience and ignorance that end up hurting others and damaging our witness. Listening well is especially important when we seek to help people ponder the reality of racism in the United States today.

As mentioned previously, White evangelicals tend to emphasize the individual sin of racial prejudice over the wider problem of systemic racism. Those who suggest that racism is something other than an individual sin

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[51] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012)*: 159.*

[52] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching*, 160.

[53] Loida Martell-Otero, "From Satas to Santas: Sobrajas No More," in *Latina Evangelicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013): 49.

are often seen as the cause of racism.[54] A better theology of systemic sin could possibly alleviate the concerns that White evangelicals tend to have about the notion of systemic racism. John Piper's article, "Structural Racism: The Child of Structural Pride" is especially instructive in developing a theology of systemic sin. Piper addresses the "instinctive, white, evangelical reaction against the idea of *structural racism* or *systemic racism,*" knowing this is the typical response among White evangelicals.[55] At the core of Piper's argument is that since humans have created systems, and humans are inherently prideful, then systems are full of pride. Piper writes "No sin is more systemic and structural than pride. It is woven into every human institution. Selfish ambition, vain-glory, looking out for our own interests first, valuing the world over God."[56] Pride manifests itself in greed, lust, and fear, and these sins are cooked into human systems. With sinful systems that institutionalize sin in all its forms, "it would be inconceivable and utterly astonishing if there were no such thing as *structural racism*. In this world of sin and Satan and a decadent world system, it is incomprehensible that one sin would be privileged to escape systemic expression."[57] According to Piper, racism is the child of pride, and thus should be a given when discussing individual and corporate sins. An account such as Piper's may help Christians see that sins can be institutionalized, especially the sin of racism. Pointing to historical examples of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and anti-immigrant rhetoric may also help, but so will naming other examples of corporate sin, such as political corruption, guilty criminals avoiding jail time, and allowing the legality of abortion and prostitution in some areas. To boil it down, if we are all sinners, then the systems we create are sinful and perpetuate sins against others—like racism.

CONCLUSION

As we strive toward oneness in Christ, we cannot forget about the histories and perspectives of those coming from the margins. It is often too easy to say that we want to emphasize our unity (or our "unity through diversity") while ignoring the racial issues that plague our communities. As pastor-theologians, we must remain steadfast in promoting a vision for Christian formation that requires us to empathize with our racially and ethnically minoritized brothers and sisters and seek the good of all. In other words, we must recover a vision for the gospel's communal and systemic dimension. While this work is difficult, uncomfortable, and can often be seen as "divisive," we must remain steadfast in seeking to untangle racism

[54] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 89.

[55] John Piper, "Structural Racism: The Child of Structural Pride," *Desiring God,* accessed from https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/structural-racism

[56] John Piper, "Structural Racism: The Child of Structural Pride."

[57] John Piper, "Structural Racism: The Child of Structural Pride."

from the process of Christian formation. In words traditionally attributed to John Wesley:

> Do all the good you can,
> By all the means you can,
> In all the ways you can,
> In all the places you can,
> At all the times you can,
> To all the people you can,
> As long as ever you can.

This includes challenging ourselves, our congregants, and those for whom we produce theological work in undoing any assumptions about race or racism that deviate from the inclusive and universal dimensions of the gospel.

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DO NOT BE CONFORMED: JACQUES ELLUL ON TECHNIQUE AND THE CHURCH'S RELATION TO THE MODERN WORLD

DR. JOEL D. LAWRENCE [1]

One of the crucial roles of a pastor is to lead the flock to resist conformity to the pattern of this world. This pastoral call comes from Romans 12, in Paul's letter to the church that is living in the shadow of the conforming Empire of Rome, with all its power and spectacle that so easily dazzles and creates patterns of life that demand to be followed. In contrast to the conforming pattern of Rome, Paul's letter outlines a reality that is fundamentally at odds with the reality constructed by Rome, a reality revealed through God's work in Christ that would conform those who follow Christ to his pattern rather than to the pattern of this world.

It is clear in this call to lead our flocks to be conformed to Christ that we must have a clear understanding of the pattern of the world in order that we are able to resist. As pastors, it is critical for us to know the pattern to which we ourselves, and the flocks entrusted to our care, are tempted to conform. In order to do so, we can find great help in the resources of others who have come before us and who could guide us in our work of discerning the patterns of the world. In this essay, I commend Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), a French sociologist and theologian, whose work spans the Cold War period of the Twentieth-century. In my view, Ellul is an important resource for pastors, and his work has a remarkable relevance to our day, as it exposes to us the deep structures of the West that continue to shape the world in which we live.

From his earliest published work in the aftermath of World War II, until his death in 1994, Ellul was engaged in a vast project of unearthing the hidden societal structures, assumptions, and commitments of the modern world.[2] Through that project, Ellul made visible the patterns of this world that dominate Western society. He showed how the intertwined structures of technology, economics, politics and propaganda shape the society in which we live. At the heart of Ellul's analysis is the dominance of what he calls *technique,* the unquestioned technological system that controls

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[2] And vast it is. Ellul published over 50 books and hundreds of articles.

the modern world.[3] As we will see below, Ellul proposes that *technique* is a totalizing system that pursues efficiency above all else. In so doing, *technique* creates a society in which ends have been replaced by means and truth has been replaced by facts, and is the driver of the other patterns, the economic, political, and communication structures, that dictate life in the modern world.

But Ellul's analysis is not merely concerned with "the machine." Additionally, Ellul is deeply concerned with what *technique* does to humanity, and in particular, to human freedom. According to Ellul, *technique* leads to a loss of freedom through the advent of "technical necessity," by which our actions are determined by and predicated upon the unquestioned dominance of the technological system. The age of *technique* has unique features that must be understood and countered if the church is going to reflect the freedom of Christ that we have been granted through grace, and through which we are called to be conformed, not to the patterns of this world, but to Christ himself.

1. JACQUES ELLUL AND THE AGE OF *TECHNIQUE*

A. INTRODUCING JACQUES ELLUL

Jacques Ellul was born on January 6, 1912, in Bordeaux, France, the only child of Joseph and Martha.[4] Ellul was born in poverty, experiencing in his early life the deep effects of scarcity on his parents and himself. These early experiences led Ellul, a brilliant student, to explore the writings of Karl Marx before becoming, through a striking conversion experience, a deeply committed follower of Christ. Ellul's training was in the history of Roman law, for which he earned his doctorate in 1936.

In the years before World War II, Ellul became deeply involved in the student political scene in France and was a lecturer at Strasbourg University. During the war, Ellul joined the Resistance, being forced to move away from Bordeaux and into the "free zone" in southern France because his wife, who was born in Holland and held a British passport, was on the list of those to be arrested. After the war, Ellul moved back to Bordeaux, where he was involved in the civic administration, an experience that proved deeply disillusioning.[5] This experience motivated him to reflect deeply on the nature of human political institutions and the bureaucratic nature of the modern world, reflections that tied in deeply to his growing interest in *technique*.

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[3] I have italicized *technique* in this paper in order to signal the technical use of this term by Ellul.

[4] For a helpful overview of Ellul's life, see Jeffrey Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, and Noah J. Toly, *Understanding Jacques Ellul* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 1-19.

[5] Ellul's disillusionment can be felt in the following line: "The politician is powerless against government bureaucracy; society cannot be change through political action." Quoted in Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 47.

In his book, *Presence in the Modern World,* published in France in 1948, Ellul lays out what would be the project that would consume him over the next 50 years:

> [I]n 1945, I realized that I had to write a short and simple book about the presence of the Christian in the world today…Christians and the church could not hold themselves aloof from the history of human beings, but neither could they become assimilated into one of the political currents (which too often had been the case throughout the church's history).[6]

This project led Ellul into his ongoing project of examining the foundations of the late-modern Western world to discern the societal structures that shape life in that world, with the goal of understanding the world and reflecting on it theologically for the sake of the church's presence in it. As such, Ellul was responding to Paul's admonition in Romans 12:

> I had to begin by understanding the structures of our society that determined the conformisms.[7] I had to critique them, starting from the gospel, and become engaged in a movement in which I would necessarily be alone, because it would be based in faith in a revelation that others did not share…I asked myself, if we must take this decisive verse seriously, what then might be the Christian's position…in the world?[8]

Jeff Greenman describes Ellul's first book, and so his overall project, as having "an overarching concern for the church's conformity to the world's ways."[9] For Ellul, the primary conformism of the Twentieth-century that can capture the church and cause her to be conformed to the pattern of this world is *technique*, the definition of which we will now explore.

B. Defining Technique

For Ellul, the foundational sociological fact of the modern world is *technique*. To demonstrate the importance he ascribes to *technique,* Ellul states early in his best-known book, *The Technological Society*, that "no social, human, or spiritual fact is so important as the fact of *technique* in the modern world."[10] But what is *technique*?

In *The Technological Society,* Ellul describes technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity."[11] From the beginning, it is essential to state an important point: *technique* is not the same as technology. He is no Luddite demanding that people reject all uses of technological innovation. Ellul is

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[6] Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), xvii.

[7] By which he means the patterns that seek to conform the church to the world.

[8] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, xix-xx.

[9] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 14.

[10] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 3.

[11] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv.

well aware that humans have always used technology, from the very earliest recorded history. In his book *Jacques Ellul and Dialectical Theology,* Jacob Van Vleet argues that Ellul's attitude to technology should be classified as *substantivist*. A subtantivist vision of technology is one that seeks to look through the means of technological machines to the "substance" of the technological system. For Ellul, the substance of technology prior to the Eighteenth-century consists of tools that supported the labor of humanity in its work cultivation and self-provision. However, according to James Fowler,

> …the place of technique began to change dramatically in the eighteenth century with the quest for efficient procedures to find the 'one best means' in every human endeavor.[12] By the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie recognized technique as the key to their material and commercial interests. The industrialized technical employment of technique became a monster in the urbanized and technological society of the twentieth century, 'the stake of the century' as Ellul termed it.[13] Technique became the defining force, the ultimate value, of a new social order in which efficiency was no longer an option but a necessity imposed on all human activity.[14]

In other words, in the modern world, and corresponding with the Industrial Revolution, the nature of technology shifted to "the drive for efficiency, calculability and control."[15] Whereas, before, tools were instruments employed in the service of human labor, now *technique* has become the master over the total social system, the result of which is, as we will explore below, the advance of "technical necessity" and the loss of human freedom. Fowler summarizes Ellul's concern when he writes, "Ellul's issue was not with technological machines but with a society necessarily caught up in efficient methodological techniques."[16] Ellul himself states it this way: "Today's technical phenomenon…has almost nothing in common with the technical phenomenon of the past...[I]n our civilization technique is in no way limited. It has been extended to all spheres and encompasses every activity, including human activity."[17] Or, in the words of Max Weber, "*la technique* is not machines, but machineness."[18]

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[12] "The one best way" or "one best means" is how Ellul refers to the most efficient method that then eliminates all other methods.

[13] This phrase comes from the French title of the book that has been translated into English as *The Technological Society*. In French, the titles is *La technique, ou l'enjeu du siècle,* which reads more literally, "Technique, or, the Stake of the Century."

[14] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv.

[15] Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 84.

[16] James A. Fowler: "A Synopsis and Analysis of the Thought and Writings of Jacques Ellul," Jacques Ellul Papers, Folder 66, Special Collections, Buswell Library, 2000.

[17] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 78.

[18] Quoted in Lawrence Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005), 48.

In the preceding conversation, it becomes clear that the drive for efficiency, which Ellul calls "the fixed end of *technique*,"[19] is central to Ellul's investigation of the place of *technique* as the pattern of the modern world. This drive for efficiency means that *technique* leads to a world that organizes activity in a way that maximizes output and productivity and creates a set of value judgments based on efficient output, and this value judgment is a methodological commitment that eliminates all other methods. In other words, if the means that one is using in a particular sphere of life is not the most efficient, then that means must be eliminated, and the human who cannot adapt to the "one best way" is devalued. In addition, the aesthetic is eliminated when efficiency dominates, and human productivity is placed in the service of efficient means of production.[20] Lawrence Terlizzese summarizes Ellul's concern with efficiency as the guiding methodology of society when he writes, "Technicization of the world places technical efficiency before any other goal or end."[21]

In order to better understand Ellul's idea of *technique*, let us analyze further some key features of *technique,* which will then set us up to reflect on Ellul's conception of the formative effects of life in a society dominated by *technique*.

C. The Features of Technique

1. Rationality and Artificiality

The two dominant features of *technique* are rationality and artificiality, and, of the two, rationality is the primary engine of *technique.* According to Ellul, "In *technique*, whatever its aspect or the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous and irrational."[22] By irrational, Ellul doesn't mean crazy, but that which isn't dominated by processes and methods of technicization. His point here is that a society committed to rationality as a determining premise will demote and devalue any other impulse of humanity, including, as mentioned above, the aesthetic and personal creativity. Rationality can provide expedient means to produce goods and services, and once these means have been established, any other less expedient means must be devalued. "Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments in the schema of logic."[23]

Artificiality, the second dominant factor of *technique*, is summarized in Ellul's pointed statement, "*Technique* is opposed to nature."[24] For Ellul, in times past, the tools that humanity developed to enable life in the world

[19] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 21.
[20] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 72.
[21] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 51.
[22] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 78-79.
[23] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.
[24] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

were tools native to the created world in which humans lived and were instruments of humans expressing their creativity in labor. However, in the age of *technique*, humanity is now using technology to create an artificial world: "The world that is being created by the accumulation of technical means is an artificial world and hence radically different from the natural world."[25] For Ellul, *technique* looks on the natural world and sees means to further support *technique*. "Just as hydroelectric installations take waterfalls and lead them into conduits, so the technical milieu absorbs the natural."[26] It is in rationality and artificiality that we can most clearly see the totalizing nature of *technique*.

2. Means Without Ends

Arising from the twin foundations of rationality and artificiality are two other features that are core to Ellul's engagement with *technique.* The first is the dominance of means and the attendant loss of ends. According to Ellul, "the first enormous fact that arises from our civilization is that today everything has become means. The end no longer exists."[27] In another place he writes, "Our civilization is first and foremost a civilization of means; in the reality of modern life the means…are more important than the ends. Any other assessment of the situation is mere idealism."[28] Why does Ellul make this claim and what are the implications?

In *Presence in the Modern World,* Ellul lays out his thinking on means and ends. Ellul acknowledges that individuals continue to have ends, to have goals in life, but at the societal level, there are no longer any defined common goals.[29] Where once society had clear notions of the direction of societal actions, now the purpose of the society has been lost in vague ideas like "humanity," "flourishing," or "the common good."[30] Perhaps the most common notion of an end in post-industrial Western society is "progress." On this, Ellul writes, "Everyone today knows 'more or less' the purpose that civilization pursues, and it seems completely pointless and outdated to pose ourselves this question. Everyone has some vague notion of progress, and this notion of progress can apparently substitute for the ends pursued. As long as we change, there is progress..."[31] But what is the purpose of change? What is the direction of change? A society dominated by *technique* can only offer vague platitudes. In other words, imprecise and apparent ends, masquerading as ultimate purposes, are no such thing. Instead, they are

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[25] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

[26] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

[27] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.

[28] Terilizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 51.

[29] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.

[30] In my view, Ellul is somewhat idealistic about the clarity of ends in pre-modern societies, and thus over-argues his point. But the essence of that point still holds: Whatever was the case of earlier societies, Ellul is correct that ours is adrift of ultimate ends, and that *technique* has come to dominate in this milieu in ways that Ellul helpfully makes clear to us.

[31] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 42.

signs of the confusion that reigns, and the lack of clarity created by the dominance of means. "Once these ends have become implicit in people's hearts and minds, they no longer have any formative power."[32]

So, in the absence of clear ends, we have the proliferation of means. What is the effect of this proliferation on society? The absence of ends corresponds with the dominance of efficiency that we explored above. Lacking a goal, society is driven by technical processes that become self-perpetuating goals in themselves, and humanity loses the ability to question these means and the system of *technique*. These means cloak themselves as ends, but are not, and instead become the mechanisms by which people are made to serve *technique.* Ellul writes, "Human beings who were originally the end of this whole humanist system of means, who are still proclaimed as 'end' in political speeches, in reality have entirely become means, and a means of these very means that were supposed to serve them."[33] This takes place at every level of the society dominated by *technique*. We read on:

> In order for the economy to function well, human beings must submit to the demands of the economic mechanism. As total producers, they place all their efforts into the service of production. As obedient consumers, they swallow blindly all that the economy feeds them, and so on. Thus, humanity is transformed into an instrument to these modern gods that are our means, and we do it with the good intention of making humanity happy.[34]

The instrumentalization of humanity is deeply concerning to Ellul, as it signals a significant change in humanity's relationship to the world around us, creating a loss of freedom that is masked by assurances of increasing freedom. We will explore the loss of freedom below.

3. Facts Without Truth

The lack of clarity about ends, and the proliferation of means, creates another key feature of the age of *technique*: the proliferation of facts without the quest for truth. According to Ellul, in the age of *technique*, facts dominate. If something is declared to be a fact, it is sacrosanct. This is seen in the role that science plays in the age of *technique*. As I said above, Ellul is not a Luddite, nor is he against scientific exploration. However, he does propose that science has taken on a different role in the system of *technique.* Ellul writes, "Once, knowledge of truth was what mattered, but then after the philosophers came the scientists. They developed their theories, which were then applied, first in order to approve the truth of these theories, and then because of their usefulness. From that point on, science was lost. Technical means gradually came to dominate the search for truth."[35] It is clear to see the connection Ellul posits between the loss

[32] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 43.
[33] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.
[34] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40-41.
[35] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 41.

of ends and the loss of the search for truth. The predominance of facts is equivalent to the predominance of means, which Ellul again points to with regard to the place of science in Western culture: "Science today takes its meaning from *technique*; it is completely oriented to application. It is in the service of means. It has become a means of perfecting the means. The abstraction 'science,' to which we still pay lip service, has replaced the search for truth."[36]

The eclipse of the search for truth is based in our unshakeable trust in facts. In his book *The Humiliation of the Word,* Ellul declares that "for today's individual a fact is the ultimate reason, the supreme value, and an unimpeachable proof. Everything bows before a fact. We must obey it… It decides everything."[37] I want to stress that Ellul is not here arguing that all facts are baseless or useless. Rather, he is pressing us to consider how facts operate as "the supreme value" in the age of *technique*, but do so without reference to any overarching end, any fundamental pursuit of truth. As such, facts operate as the unassailable truth, which masquerade as The Truth, and in so doing establish themselves as "the final reason."[38] In taking this position, facts become the object of worship in the age of *technique* and, once established, once declared unassailable, all that is left is to bow prostrate before the fact.

> Here we have the essence of truly modern religion, the religion of the established fact—the religion that the inferior religions of the dollar, the race, or the proletariat derive from, which are nothing but expressions of the great modern divinity, the Fact-Moloch…Fact and truth seem to everyone as one and the same. And if God is no longer true today, it is because he does not look like a fact."[39]

The Fact-Moloch obliges humanity to act and to "progress" in the direction that is established by facts. Thus, humanity hurtles toward the future, toward a vague end that is no end, driven along by facts but without any sense of truth. Ellul summarizes this condition as follows: "No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man [*sic*] has set out at tremendous speed—to go *nowhere*."[40]

D. The Loss of Freedom in the Age of Technique

We are now in position to turn our attention to the effects of *technique* on the formation of the human person. Inevitably, the totalizing nature of *technique* that we have seen has far reaching effects on being human, which can be most clearly seen in Ellul's analysis of automatism.

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[36] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 41.
[37] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 137.
[38] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.
[39] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.
[40] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.

1. Automatism

In our earlier description of *technique,* we noted the foundational features of rationality and artificiality. A third feature that Ellul discerns, and that has significant implications for human formation, is what he calls "automatism." Automatism is Ellul's way of describing the self-directing, autonomous nature of *technique*. As Terlizzese says, "once the 'one best way' has been rationally established, all technical movement becomes self-directing."[41] Here is how Ellul describes it:

> *Technique* elicits and conditions social, political, and economic change. It is the prime mover of all the rest, in spite of any appearances to the contrary and in spite of human pride, which pretends that man's [*sic*] philosophical theories are still determining influences and man's [*sic*] political regimes decisive factors in technical evolution. External necessities no longer determine *technique*. *Technique's* own internal necessities are determinative. *Technique* has become a reality in itself, self-sufficient, with its special laws and determinations.[42]

To underscore this claim, we read from Ellul elsewhere one of his most vigorous assessments of the self-sustaining nature of technique: "Technique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own laws and has renounced all tradition."[43] The last phrase, "has renounced all tradition" is an Ellulian declaration that humanity is now definitively no longer the master of *technique*. The traditions and norms that once guided communities and nations are now being swallowed up by the advance of *technique,* and none can stand against the advance of *technique*.[44]

> We are today at the stage of historical evolution in which everything that is not *technique* is being eliminated…Only a technical force can be opposed to a technical force…To be in possession of the lightning thrust of technique is a matter of life or death for individuals or groups alike; no power on earth can withstand its pressure.[45]

Automatism creates the "technical imperative." The technical imperative describes the way that humanity is required to adopt the latest techniques, having no choice whether we will do so or not. Once a new technology has been invented, once the method of efficiency, the one best way, has been discovered, it *must* be adopted. "What can be produced must be; what can be done must be done. The technological imperative cannot be tampered with or questioned. It undergirds the entire social order."[46] This imperative is a

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[41] Terlizesse, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 59.

[42] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 133-134.

[43] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 14.

[44] Though Ellul died in 1994, and so didn't see the extent of the globalizing reach that has emerged with the advent of the World Wide Web and cellular communications, he clearly envisioned the way that globalization would flatten the world and relativize culture through the spread of corporations.

[45] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 85.

[46] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 59.

necessity, and this necessity justifies decisions and gives value to the advance of *technique*. "Rather than moral and spiritual reasoning determining our relationship to and use of technology and technique, technical reasoning determines what is moral and what is the value of the spiritual."[47] Moral decision-making shifts from a conception of human agency determining the choice for oneself to the necessity to follow the path of *technique*. And why is it necessary? Because the determining nature of *technique* demands it be so.

2. The Loss of Freedom

We now come to Ellul's deepest concern regarding the impact of *technique* on humanity: the loss of freedom. This is implied in what has been said above about automatism, but let us draw it out clearly.

The nature of technical automatism unavoidably leads to the loss of human agency. In the age of *technique* we are led to believe that we are free to choose the path of our own determination. The illusions of choice are everywhere around us, but in reality, "once *technique* takes over the consciousness of a society, the free agency of individuals is radically diminished. No longer can one choose which course of action to take; technique has chosen already…Humans can only submit to the most efficient path, the one that technique has already decided upon."[48] The ability to make any kind of free choice is abridged, and humans are enlisted in the purposes of *technique*. I *have* to use technology in order to have success in my work; because of this, we don't stop to analyze what that technology does to me, or how I am being utilized by *technique* and being made to serve it. We are determined by technology's overarching dominance in a way that makes that dominance, that makes the pattern of *technique*, invisible, and our conformity to it inevitable. Our freedom is taken away as we think we are becoming freer. As Ellul states starkly, "technique enslaves people, while proffering them the mere illusion of freedom, all the while tyrannically conforming them to the demands of the technological society with its complex of artificial operational objectives."[49]

This loss of freedom is rooted in the promise that the technical system makes to grant humans power through technological innovation. However, the promise cannot deliver, and in fact, is a bait and switch. Promising power, humans become instruments of the technical system, and therefore "go through mechanical motions with the help of various success therapies and techniques that guarantee results, but never experience spontaneity, freedom, or meaning."[50] *Technique* promises the shattering of limitations, the advance of human happiness, life, success, and mastery over a scary world. But this freedom proves to be illusory: "Absolute power leads to

[47] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 29.

[48] Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*, 91.

[49] Quoted in Fowler, "A Synopsis and Analysis of the Thought and Writings of Jacques Ellul," Jacques Ellul Papers, Folder 66, Special Collections, Buswell Library, 2000.

[50] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 64.

absolute impotence…Technology makes everything possible. It grants our heart's desires—whatever and whenever we want—and in so doing inevitably leads to absolute exhaustion and terminal boredom."[51] If this was the case in Ellul's day, how much more are we seeing this in ours? How much more are we seeing the effects of the promise of technology to transcend boundaries leading to the frustration and boredom of humanity? How much more can we see humanity "lose ourselves in the pursuit of more and more possibilities; always striving but never reaching the goal; always wanting more but never satisfied with what we have already attained"?[52]

This loss of freedom is a burden that modern humanity is carrying in the totality of our pursuits even as we are being told that the burdens are being lifted. "*Technique* has proven a hard taskmaster in demands for time, education (most of it technical), work, energy, family, and moral and spiritual compromise."[53] The imposition of technical necessity is the result of *technique's* totalizing regime. Humans are shaped in ways that cannot be easily grasped by those being shaped, and the ability to question the pattern of *technique* is one of its main features.

So how should pastors lead congregations in the age of *technique*? Is it possible for the church not to be conformed to the patterns of *technique*, but rather be conformed to the image of Christ? What should our stance be toward *technique*?

II. CONCLUSION: PROFANING TECHNOLOGY

Paul has called the church to be a people who are not conformed to the pattern of this world. I am convinced that one of the fundamental roles of the pastor is to pursue a deep understanding of those patterns in order that we might lead our congregation to resist conformity. For many pastors, this resistance has been at the level of moral conformity. We have set a project of instructing our congregations in morality that would resist the moral standards of the culture around us. However, I believe that the church has been and continues to be deeply vulnerable to patterns of conformity that we are not even aware. The confusion that we see growing in the church is, I believe, a direct result of patterns of conformity that have taken hold of the church, not through explicit disobedience, but through a failure of the church, rooted in the failure of pastors, to grasp the conformisms that tempt us.

I believe that pastors of the Twenty-first century are called to give the energy to the task before us, a task which echoes the program Ellul set out to accomplish in 1948: "I had to begin by understanding the structures of our society that determined the conformisms. I had to critique them, starting from the gospel…I asked myself, if we must take this decisive verse seriously, what then might be the Christian's position…in the world?"[54] If

[51] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 57.
[52] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 57.
[53] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 58.
[54] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, xix-xx.

we, as pastors in the Twenty-first century, were to take this decisive verse seriously, what might we conclude to be the Christian's position in the world today? What might we discover about our conformity? How might we be called to lead the church to see and resist the patterns of the world? How can we equip our congregations to not be conformed to the pattern of *technique*?

According to Ellul, those who belong to Christ and live under His Lordship are to "profane technology."[55] By "profaning" Ellul means that we must refuse to consider *technique* as sacred. The church's work of profaning *technique* rejects the assumptions of the age of *technique* and therefore is the means by which we resist, in the power of the Spirit, the formative power of *technique* and the attendant loss of freedom that binds the human soul in necessity and determination to *technique's* purposes. In doing so, we reject the drive to efficiency that is at the heart of our modern world, and in so doing affirm the value of all humans. As we reject efficiency, we also proclaim the End, and reflect on the means in light of the End and have the courage to reject the world's "one best way," even if it means that we lose seeming power and influence in the world as we refuse to seek "relevance" but instead pursue faithfulness. And finally, we refuse to accept the worship of facts, and instead worship the Truth. As we do this, the church confesses the Lordship of Christ, being conformed to his image, thereby "deconstructing [*techniques'*] soteriological myth and refusing to submit to technological necessity."[56] By deconstructing the soteriological myth of *technique*, we open up new and fresh ways to proclaim the soteriological truth of the Gospel in a way that is free of the hindrances of conformity.

As pastors, we must lead our congregations in profaning *technique*. Again, this is not to say that we must insist that our congregants refuse all use of technology, nor do we preach that technology is in itself evil. Instead, we are to lead our flock so that they can grapple with *technique* and its implications and claims on their lives. Perhaps we as pastors will come to different conclusions than Ellul about the nature of the technological world in which we live or about the implications of that world. But wherever we land on our analysis of Ellul's specific claims, I believe we would benefit from wrestling with the challenges Ellul's body of work sets before us.

[55] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 36.
[56] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 36.

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ABIGAIL AND NABAL: A BIBLICAL ROLE MODEL FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

MICHAEL LEFEBVRE[1]

Pastors face some of life's most intimate difficulties with their congregants. God's people are not immune to the strains caused by job loss, family conflicts, and other hardships. A pastor is called to help his or her congregation navigate life's sorrows in faith. Mental health disorders are among the most perplexing burdens to bear with a church member. Thankfully, there are resources available from theologians and clinicians with relevant competencies.[2] But there is room for more. In this paper, I would like to make a small contribution from within the field of biblical studies to add to this body of resources for shepherding families through the strains of mental health care. In particular, I want to explore a case study in the Old Testament that offers affirmation and a biblical role model in the heavy burden of caring for those with characteristics approximating what might today be deemed severe mental illness.

I am referring to the story of Abigail and her care for her husband Nabal as described in 1 Samuel 25. In this account, we are introduced to a man who appears incapable of healthy social interactions, and whose social dysfunction leads to some bad behaviors on his part and certain individuals around him—including David. In telling his story, the text shows us Abigail as a model of grace and wisdom worthy of our respect, caring for her husband in his brokenness and guarding David from mis-responding to Nabal's behaviors. Abigail's example offers a focus of identification and encouragement for those in analogous positions today. I hope to draw out some of those resources in this paper, but let me begin with some important qualifications.

I. THE BIBLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

It is important to state clearly at the outset, that the story of Abigail and Nabal is not written for the purpose of addressing mental illness. In fact, there are no passages in the Bible that address the topic of mental illness,

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[2] E.g., Matthew S. Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2008); Mark R. McMinn, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

directly. Mental illness is a modern category that did not exist prior to the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. To raise this point is not to deny the relevance of Scripture for such issues which, after all, tie back to universal human brokenness; but I raise this point to caution against trying to make the Scriptures answer modern forms of inquiry into mental health.

Human beings have experienced phenomena of mental anguish and personality afflictions all through history. The ancient Mesopotamians documented rudimentary mental afflictions in the cuneiform medical texts, along with primitive diagnoses and treatments.[3] The Greeks developed the theory of humors to explain various moods and inclinations, a framework to link certain personality traits to blood "chemistry" which continued to dominate social thought until the rise of modern medicine.[4] It is not hard to find evidence of efforts to make sense of mental imbalances all through human history. But it was only as recently as 1808 that the term "psychiatry" was coined to embody the concept of truly medical treatments for afflictions—as physiological afflictions—which were traditionally ascribed to the soul (Gk., *psyche* + *iatrikos*).[5] The modern system of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment only emerged in the Twentieth-century, particularly with the introduction of the *Statistical Manual for the Use of Institutions for the Insane* in 1917, followed by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) developed in the wake of World War II and updated most recently with DSM-5 in 2013.

We should not expect the biblical authors to anticipate modern categories like "schizophrenia" or "depression," nor to interact at all—affirmatively or critically—with the notion of brain health as determining mind health. And certainly, we should not presume to "diagnose" biblical characters like Nabal using modern classifications. First Samuel 25 is obliquely relevant to the topic of mental health, but does not contain sufficient information to make diagnoses in psychiatric terms. Nevertheless, the Nabal narrative does provide its own native "diagnosis" of this man's disordered condition from within its own period's comprehension of traits and derived behaviors. "As his name, so he is," Abigail explains to David. "Nabal is his name and *nebalah* is with him" (1Sam 25:25, a.t.) There does appear to be something deeper than "bad character choices" identified with Nabal in this passage. Nabal's story seems to go beyond behavioral problems, but evinces underlying psychological brokenness and sociopathic traits.

Furthermore, although Nabal's apparent mental brokenness was combined with very bad behavior, the two are not automatically connected. Thankfully, many individuals who carry the burden of psychiatric disorders do so with grace. As we reflect on an example like Nabal, we must do so

[3] Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 80–81.

[4] Gerald D. Hart, "Historical Review: Descriptions of Blood and Blood Disorders before the Advent of Laboratory Studies," *British Journal of Haematology 115* (2001): 720–22.

[5] Johann Christian Reil coined the term with the explicit goal to create a branch of medicine for mental conditions previously dealt with as spiritual or judicial cases. *Beytrage zur Beforderung einer Curmethode auf psychischem Wege* (1808), 169.

with sensitivity to avoid turning his story into a stereotype for mental health. Individuals with strong mental health are probably just as apt as those with severe disorders to adopt bad behaviors and flawed character. The Nabal narrative presents us with an example of what appears to be a mental health disorder combined with bad behavior, but this is not always the case.

It will be important to proceed with these qualifications on the application of Scripture to mental health questions.

II. THE PASSAGE IN CONTEXT

It is also important to note that this paper explores tertiary features of the passage at hand. Nabal's personal traits are part of the backdrop of the story's main message, which is actually about David and not really Abigail or Nabal. Most commentators regard the Nabal narrative as a literary window into David's character, revealing insights into David's succession to the throne after Saul. Notably, this story appears between two accounts of David bypassing opportunities to kill Saul, thereby sparing the king's life. Jon Levenson explains:

> It is not hard to see why 1 Samuel 25 is spliced between the two variants of the tradition of David's sparing of Saul's life. In each case, David perceived a powerful advantage in killing, but is restrained by a theological consideration. In chaps. 24 and 26, that consideration is the foulness of slaying "YHWH's anointed" (1 Sam 24:11; 26:9); in chap. 25, it is, in Abigail's words, that "…when YHWH has appointed you ruler over Israel, it should not be a cause for you to stumble or to lose your courage that you shed blood without cause..." (1 Sam 25:30–31).[6]

Most scholars have adopted Levenson's identification of the Nabal narrative as an instance of "narrative analogy,"[7] where one story serves to elucidate the narratives it accompanies. The passage takes a real event in David's life and gives it a parable-like telling. It is remarkably stylized and lacking in the color that is typical of biblical narrative. Stephen Chapman notes,

> Ordinarily, the glory of Hebrew narrative lies in its astonishing three-dimensional characterizations, in which persons are hardly ever all good or all bad but thoroughly realistic composites. It is highly exceptional to find characters that are all good [e.g., Abigail]...or all bad (e.g., Nabal). Even more unusual is the symbolic identification

[6] Jon D. Levenson, "I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 40* (1978): 23. Cf., Mark E. Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization," JBL 121, no. 4 (2002): 617–38; Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal, and the "Son of Jesse": Readings in 1 Samuel 16-25*, LHBOT 497 (New York, T. & T. Clark, 2009), 67–70.

[7] Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Commentary* 60, no. 6 (1975): 70–77.

between a particular character and a representative virtue or vice (e.g., [Nabal =] foolishness).[8]

The Nabal narrative is really a roundabout story about David's internal struggle whether to kill Saul, and whether David will adopt the grace of Abigail or the churlishness of Nabal. For example, Barbara Green suggests, "The character Nabal is a thinly disguised Saul; Abigail resembles the Jonathan-like presence mediating between 'Nabal-the-Saul' and his opponent; and the character named David is David-out-of-control, galloping to do his worst to 'Nabal-the-Saul' who has so affronted him."[9] Other scholars suggest different ways of assessing the allegorical details of the narrative. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the story takes a real event in David's life,[10] and schematizes it into an allegory-like retelling that is actually appropriated as a window into David's restraint against killing Saul in the framing chapters.[11]

Recognizing this as the mainline intention of the Nabal narrative, it is important to appreciate the tertiary nature of the present paper's use of the text. Nevertheless, the text's stylized character may actually prove to be an advantage for this study. By taking the real person Nabal and flattening his description to fit period stereotypes, the text—for all its gaps in detail—offers us a helpful insight into the way period Hebrew classified such dysfunction. Just as the stylized Sherlock Holmes stories reveal very little about real life detectives in Victorian England, but can tell us some interesting things about how period audiences conceived of detectives, the adaptation of Abigail's husband to fit the "textbook *nebalah*" in period thought actually heightens the account's usefulness for present purposes.

In this passage, we meet a man whose mental and social brokenness lead to behavioral failures due to his wrong responses to that brokenness. We also meet his wife, Abigail, who is a model of grace in her care for Nabal and those impacted by his dysfunction.

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[8] Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016),189.

[9] Barbara Green, *David's Capacity for Compassion: A Literary-Hermeneutical Study of 1-2 Samuel*, Library of Hebrew Bible Old Testament Studies, Volume 641 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 101. Cf., Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginitively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *BibInt 11*, no. 1 (2003): 1–23; *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*, Library of Hebrew Bible Old Testament Studies, Volume 365, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 367–410.

[10] It must be a real event, since it results in David's marriage to a new wife who bears David children who figure elsewhere in his life story (1 Sam. 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:1).

[11] "Because of the Nebal incident, we are much more aware now of how easy it would be for David to put an end to Saul's hunting him like 'a partridge in the mountains' (26:20), by turning on his pursuer in vengeance" (Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010], 26).

III. THE DEPICTION OF NABAL

The narrative's opening verses (vv. 2–3) introduce Nabal as a man of great wealth. In fact, only after describing the man's extensive wealth does the narrator add the ironic twist, that this wealth belonged to a man whose "name…was Nabal" and that "the man was harsh and badly behaved" (v. 3). This behavior is consistent with the man's name. When used as a generic term (rather than a name), the verb nabal and its noun form nebalah are commonly translated as "fool" or "to be a fool." The translation "fool" is suitable in certain passages, but the rendering is imprecise and not necessarily suitable to all situations. It prejudices our view of Nabal, and skews our appreciation for the complexities of the story, to invoke the label "fool" unadvisedly.[12]

The term *nabal/nebalah* is, indeed, one of the various antonyms for "wisdom" (*ḥakam*) in biblical Hebrew,[13] but the peculiar nuance of the term is lost in the generic translation "fool." Anthony Phillips explains:

> The noun *nebalah* is, of course, related to the verb *nabal* usually rendered 'to be foolish, senseless', the opposite of *ḥakam* 'to be wise'. Behind the Hebrew concept of wisdom lies the idea that life is ordered by basic rules which man can discern from his experience. The wise were those skilled in seeing the order in things, how one thing related to another, how society functioned, how the natural world and science worked. They looked at relationships, objects and ideas, and tried to discern their pattern, structure, rule and order... They were the men who knew what to say in an awkward situation, and by saying it brought about peace and harmony…Folly, therefore, consists in failing to observe life's essential rules. The fool is unable to see the order in things, says the wrong thing at the wrong moment, and take action which results in unruliness and disorder.[14]

That is an awfully broad spectrum of social dysfunction to be covered by one term! Unfortunately for our purposes, the biblical writers did not distinguish between mental obstacles to healthy social interactions on the one hand, and moral rebellion against social norms on the other. Consequently, the term *nabal/nebalah* is ascribed both to those we would regard as sinfully foolish—one whose "heart is busy with iniquity, to practice ungodliness" (Isa. 32:6)—as well as those who are simply naive or socially inept, lacking the awareness for refined speech (Prov. 17:7). In the case of Abigail's husband, however, the term seems to point to psychological brokenness underlying his bad behaviors—what today might be diagnosed as a mental health disorder. While it is impossible to diagnose someone with

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[12] Breuggemann somewhat uncharitably but helpfully makes this distinction, saying, "He is not bad but stupid." (Walter Breuggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990], 175.)

[13] Trevor Donald, "The Semantic Field of 'Folly' in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes," *Vetus Testamentum* 13, no. 3 (1963): 285–92.

[14] Anthony Phillips, "NEBALAH—A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *VT* 25, no. 2 (1975), 237–8.

certainty through a written narrative, the implications seem compelling in Nabal's case. Nabal is described as a man who is incapable of recognizing social nuances or reading the intentions of others, and who lives out of those misperceptions in sinful behaviors.[15]

The presenting scenario unfolds around preparation for a feast day at the end of the agricultural year.[16] "[Nabal] was shearing his sheep in Carmel...[And it was] a feast day" (vv. 2, 8). Shearing sheep was among the final products of the farming year, indicating this feast was a celebration of the whole year's bounty with the barns full of grain, fruits, olive oil, wine, and the other increase now capped off with the sheep's wool (cf., Abigail's prepared fruits in v. 18). David and his men had assisted in the protection of Nabal's sizable flocks, so it was proper that Nabal would provide for David and his men along with his own shepherds during the year end feast.

The Mosaic instructions for Israel's harvest festivals are illuminating in this regard. Deuteronomy 16:13–15 reflects the custom of shared feasting, "when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns...so that you will be altogether joyful." It was in keeping with Hebrew practice (as well as general oriental "laws of hospitality")[17] that David's men would expect some benefit from the resulting abundance after their service to Nabal's shepherds. That Nabal refused them participation in the festival is itself disturbing (vv. 10–11). But what the text reports about Nabal's thinking around that refusal is especially revealing.

David presented his request with great humility. David's speech is "over-the-top" in its eloquence as the narrator seems keen to be clear that David's approach was faultlessly polite (vv. 6–8). Furthermore, after reporting on his labors to support Nabal's shepherds, David urged Nabal to verify those claims for himself with the shepherds. "Ask your young men," David said, "and they will tell you" (v. 8). Later in the narrative, the shepherds do confirm these claims when they speak to Abigail, "The men [of David] were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when they were in the fields, as long as we went with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with

[15] Note the *Kethib* reading of Nabal's introduction in verse 3: "but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite (*Kethib*, and he was like his heart)." Marjorie Boyle argues that the *Kethib* reading is correct and links Nabal's bad behavior with his heart, thus providing the backdrop for his demise when "his heart died within him" (v. 37). Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (1 Samuel 25)," *JBL* 120, no. 3 (2001): 401–27. Cf., Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal*, 58–9.

[16] The timing of events (i.e., after the sheep shearing) would fit with the Feast of Booths in the seventh month, although the feast in view is never named in the text and this would be a local (rather than pilgrimage) celebration of Booths if indeed that festival.

[17] George M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 136–9; David H. Jensen, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Theological Commentary on the Bible,* Belief (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 149–50.

them keeping the sheep" (vv. 15–16). But Nabal never checked with his shepherds himself. Instead, in spite of David's impeccable etiquette and offered references, Nabal was defensive and immediately charged David with attempting to steal from him.

"Nabal answered David's servants, 'Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?'" (vv. 10–11). Contrary to proper neighborliness and the spirit of the harvest festival, Nabal ascribed to David a presumption of criminality (runaways and marauders)[18] and regarded his request as an unjust attempt to take something to which he had no right. There is no indication that Nabal invented this response out of mere stinginess (though a lack of generosity seems to be present), but the implication is that Nabal was genuinely oblivious to the graciousness of David's request (see vv. 6–8) and really perceived his appeal as an unjust attack. In other words, the narrator demonstrates sensitivity to dysfunction at the perceptual level of Nabal's responses—the kinds of traits we might look for to identify and treat psychiatric disorders today.

This reading of the passage is supported by the description of Nabal by his servants, when they later reported these events to Nabal's wife Abigail. "Behold...our master...screamed ('it)[19] at them...He is such an irrational (*beliya'al*)[20] man that one cannot speak to him" (vv. 14–17, a.t.) Nabal's inability to entertain David's message as the polite request it was, seems to have been characteristic. His own servants regarded Nabal as unapproachable and prone to habitual anger stirred by his inaccurate perceptions of others. Nabal is treated by the narrative as fully culpable for his bad behavior. Nevertheless, the narrator also demonstrates awareness of an underlying dysfunction in Nabal's capacity to understand basic social interactions around him which contributed to his tragic responses.

It is for these reasons that the narrative identifies the man by the name "Nabal," which certainly was not his given name. Scholars generally agree that "the historical figure's real name has been suppressed in order to give him a name indicative of his character."[21] The term *nabal* is so deprecatory

[18] Within the mainline emphasis of the story, Nabal's charge is surely an allusion to David's having fled from King Saul, and to his men as similarly escaping from various distresses (1Sam 22:2). Levenson, "I Samuel 25," 15–16.

[19] "The related noun '*ayiṭ* refers to a bird of prey, which presumably makes a similar sound" (Chapman, 1 Samuel, 189 n. 45).

[20] *beliya'al* is a difficult to translate term which conveys the notion of being worn out, empty, vapid, or devoid of worth, principle, or sense/reason. It typically has the connotation of being morally corrupt, but that is not the term's meaning as much as the implication of the term's proper reference to something "lacking" in a person's soul. (*NIDOTTE* #1162.)

[21] Levenson, "I Samuel 25," 14. Steven McKenzie speculates that Nabal's real name might have been Jether based on 1 Chronicles 2:17 which identifies Amasa as the son of Abigail by Jether (cf., Ithra in 2Sam 17:25). (Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 97; cf., Jon D. Levenson, Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99.4 [1980], 507–18.) However, this is an unlikely coincidence of names.

that "it seems inconceivable that parents would give their child such a dreadful name."[22] Attempts to identify a plausible Hebrew name using another variation of the form *nbl* which might have been adapted into this negative characterization as *nabal* have proven unconvincing (e.g., *nebel*, "wineskin," Akk. *nablum*, "flame").[23] It is generally assumed that Abigail's husband had a different name altogether which has not been preserved, and that "Nabal" was a pejorative nickname (i.e., a "popular diagnosis") by which he came to be known by the surrounding community. It is this commonly adopted nickname for the man which Abigail was compelled to reveal, and to explain to David to alleviate his anger at being so abusively answered by the man. "Let not my lord regard this irrational (*beliya'al*) fellow, Nabal, for as his designation (*shem*) is, so is he. Nabal is his designation (*shem*), and *nebalah* is with him" (v. 25, a.t.).

IV. ABIGAIL'S INTERVENTION

It is hard to imagine what it must have been like for Abigail to be married to Nabal. The text gives us no information to determine—and no license to speculate—concerning their relationship beyond the remarkable efforts reported on her part to care for him. The allegorical nature of the account employs cutout portrayals of both Nabal and Abigail that leave us unable to penetrate beyond the stereotypes. But these stereotypes describe a woman who is at once both clear-eyed concerning her husband's brokenness and prudent in his care.

In the same paragraph where Nabal is introduced as "harsh and badly behaved," Abigail is given the opposite depiction. "The woman was discerning (*tobat-sekel*) and beautiful" (v. 3). Abigail's capacity to read the circumstances and persons around her (*tobat-sekel*) is the precise counterpart to her husband's oblivion (*nabal*) to his social surroundings. And her actions all through the narrative demonstrate the counterpoint. It is the stark "point and counterpoint" nature of these two characters that is among the indications we are dealing with a stylized narrative.[24]

Abigail is only brought into the story after Nabal's response to David created a crisis. David lacked context to understand Nabal's response, so he called his men to arms to answer Nabal's injustice. David's determination to kill Nabal and all the men of his house is overly harsh—and immorally so (v. 22). Biblical law does not countenance the wholesale slaughter of a household for refusal to pay wages. However, while David's overreaction is another exaggerated feature of the narrative, the core sense of injustice motivating David is legitimate. Nabal had deprived David's men of their due payment. "About four hundred men went up after David" to pursue vengeance, "while two hundred stayed with the baggage" (v. 13). With

[22] Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal*, 54.

[23] Levenson, "I Samuel 25," 14; Joseph Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal, and the "Son of Jesse"*: Readings in 1 Samuel 16–25 (LHBOTS 497; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 53–4; Stephen Pisano, "Nabal," ABD 4.969.

[24] Breuggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 176.

this danger looming, Nabal's servants turned to Abigail. "Now therefore know [what is happening] and consider what you should do" (v. 17). Only Abigail would be able to calm the trouble and discern a solution. Indeed, she goes behind her husband's back (v. 19)[25] to provide the festival gifts that he ought to have given to David's men (vv. 18–20), she speaks to David to mollify his overreaction to Nabal (vv. 23–35), and then she speaks to her husband only after he is in a proper disposition for her approach (vv. 36–37). Notably, Abigail's speech to David comprises the largest portion of the entire narrative (vv. 23–31).

Abigail begins her speech by asking David to disregard her husband on account of his "irrationality (*beliya'al*)" and to redirect the obligation (i.e., "guilt") for the unpaid debt upon her—which she promptly pays from her own access to household resources. "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. Please let not my lord regard this irrational (*beliya'al*) fellow, Nabal, for as his designation (*shem*) is, so is he. Nabal is his designation (*shem*), and *nebalah* is with him. But I your servant did not see my lord's young men whom you sent... But now regard this present which your servant has brought to my lord and let it be given to the young men who walk in the footsteps of my lord. Clear now the trespass of your servant" (vv. 24–28, a.t.).

Levenson describes Abigail's intervention as "a rhetorical masterpiece."[26] She successfully threads the needle in a way that neither excuses her husband's folly nor acts in disloyalty to him. Furthermore, she exposes to David the true character of the situation, thereby leading David to realize the injustice of his own misguided reaction. Explaining Nabal's incompetence places an entirely new light on the situation for David. David now realizes that he would have been the one to incur sin—"bloodguilt" (v. 26) for "shed[ding] blood without cause" (v. 31)—if he had proceeded to deal with Nabal at face value, without appreciating the complicating confusion behind Nabal's cruelty.

David accepted Abigail's payment as full satisfaction of what was owed, and he blessed both the Lord and Abigail for her wisdom. He commended Abigail for her "discretion (*ta'am*)" to so wisely read the situation, and he admits that he would have been guilty of shedding innocent blood had he killed Nabal under the circumstances as he now understands them (v. 33). Then "he said to her, 'Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition'" (v. 35).

The irony of the story is that Nabal was celebrating his feast and getting drunk back at home (v. 36), while his wife was intervening, without his knowing it, on his behalf. She tactfully waited until Nabal was in a better mental state the next morning before relating to him what had happened

[25] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Second Edition, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 10 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 249.

[26] Levenson, "I Samuel 25," 19. Cf., Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary,* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 203–4; Breuggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 178–9.

(v. 37). In a sudden and bizarre conclusion, Nabal suffered a heart attack or some other cardiac event; and, roughly ten days later, he died (vv. 37–38). Some undisclosed time after that, David learned of Nabal's death and sought Abigail's hand in marriage.

This strange conclusion serves the mainline analogical purpose of the narrative well, even if it seems a disappointing result in our (and Abigail's!) concern for Nabal. The mainline purpose of the narrative is to offer a window into David's inner struggle and his final determination to restrain his desire for revenge against King Saul. The purpose of the Nabal narrative is to show David that he can wait upon the Lord to remove Saul without taking vengeance himself, and thus the fact that God struck Nabal was an important part of David's learning to leave King Saul's judgment in God's hands. Ultimately, Abigail personified wisdom and served to teach David restraint—thereby, keeping David from becoming a *nebalah* himself. "Abigail provides a lesson in what makes a good ruler: one who is not out for personal vengeance, for that issue is up to the Holy God."[27]

As an analogical narrative, the story's outcome with Nabal's death at God's hand (and not David's) serves its broader purpose well. But it remains a tragedy that Nabal died. Indeed, Abigail's whole effort had been crafted to save his life, even if the Lord had other purposes ultimately in mind.

V. CONCLUSION

The narrative of Abigail and Nabal is one of the most curious episodes in 1 Samuel. And while it is not directly about mental health, it does provide an affirming testimony for those who face the burdens of caring for loved ones with psychiatric disorders.

Abigail's model should not be used as a prescriptive "how to" example. There is nothing in this passage that suggests readers should absolutize Abigail's actions as "the right way" to deal with social dysfunction. Someone who watches a Jane Austen movie might find the depiction of period dancing quite fascinating, but these cinematic depictions are insufficient to serve as a video course on "how to do the dances of the Regency period." Likewise, the present narrative is descriptive of one event and contains insightful but incomplete details about period perspectives on mental dysfunction.

Notwithstanding the text's limits for prescription, it is an extremely useful description of one biblically commended woman that can serve as meaningful encouragement in relatable trials in faith experienced by others. Abigail shows us that we are not alone in the strain of picking up the pieces in the pressure to compensate for a loved one's vulnerabilities. Abigail offers a literary "soul mate" for those who share the struggle to protect something close to a normal life for a suffering loved one, though frequently beset by crises that threaten to bring everything crashing down. The story of Abigail shows us the grace of those who, on the one hand, cover a loved one's stigma

[27] Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, *Reading Samuel: A Literary and Theological Commentary,* Reading the Old Testament, Volume 8 (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 135.

and, on the other, must discern when and how those disabilities need to be explained to offer context for those offended by them.

Abigail's story is not a "one size fits all" rule book or "how to" guide. A passage like this helps to train our sensibilities for navigating such difficult mental health issues wisely, but these are ultimately matters of biblically informed wisdom and not biblical prescription. Abigail is an example of love for the mentally broken, and in Scripture's declaration of God's blessing upon her discretion and grace in this calling (vv. 32–33), there is a vicarious word of blessing for those who walk in comparable paths today. Abigail's story contains pastoral encouragement for those called to care for loved ones with mental health afflictions.

Nabal's example is a "worst case" kind of story. There is nothing redeeming in his responses to his afflictions in this narrative. While Abigail does everything right in this story, Nabal does everything wrong. It is a deliberately flattened retelling of what was likely a more nuanced event in its actual occurrence. Because the mainline purpose of the narrative is to show David's transformation from his own Nabal-like "folly" to adopt more Abigail-like discretion, both Abigail and Nabal are given static presentations through the whole story. This realization should lead us not to generalize Nabal's "worst case" example, nor to despair of hope for better fruits in others who exhibit similar dysfunction. There are other passages of Scripture that we can turn to for encouragement in our prayers for healing and redemption. Nevertheless, this story's honor for Nabal's value in spite of his "worst case" behaviors, and its commendation of Abigail's care for Nabal, are inspirational features for those who feel hopeless as well as those who are faced with less severe cases than depicted in this account.

Perhaps one of the most important features of the text is its repeated attention to Abigail's "discernment" and "discretion" (vv. 3, 17, 24, 33, 35). This thread traced through the account is instructive for the church as a whole, in our attitudes toward mental and social dysfunction. It is far too convenient to ignore the mentally afflicted or, even worse, to deny the validity of psychiatric care. Matthew Stanford observes,

> A dangerous and damaging battle—a battle between faith and psychiatry/psychology—is being waged daily in churches throughout the world. And lives are being destroyed. Men and women with diagnosed mental illness are told they need to pray more and turn from their sin. Mental illness is equated with demon-possession, weak faith, and generational sin. The underlying cause of this stain on the church is a lack of knowledge, both of basic brain function and of scriptural truth.[28]

First Samuel 25 shows the church that it is important to exercise discernment as we strive to understand, accommodate, instruct, care for, hold to account, and love people even in the most difficult instances of mental affliction. And we need to come alongside the many "Abigails" in

[28] Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted*, 4.

our churches who bear this burden daily, in order to support and encourage them in their important ministry.

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2 CORINTHIANS 3-5 AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

JIM SAMRA[1]

The recent movie *I Can Only Imagine* is based on the true story of songwriter Bart Milliard and his abusive father, Arthur, and how God's work in both their lives inspired the best-selling Christian music single in history. Commenting on the essence of the story to *People Magazine*, Bart stated, "I got a front row seat to see this guy go from being a monster to falling desperately in love with Jesus. By the time he passed away when I was a freshman in college, not only was he my best friend, he was like the Godliest man I'd ever known. And it's literally changed the trajectory of my life."[2]

What happened to Arthur Milliard? What facilitated such an obvious and powerful change in his life? And how do such changes happen? Both the Scriptures and modern science attempt to answer these questions, and there are some striking similiarities in the answers they give.[3] However, as we shall see, the Scriptures themselves indicate that despite common ground between science and the Scriptures, God has imposed some limitations on science when it comes to understanding and bringing about human maturation. These limitations have important implications for how individuals and churches ought to think about the use and findings of the behavioral sciences with regard to maturation.[4] This is an important issue given the

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[2] https://people.com/movies/bart-millard-faith-based-movie-true-story/, accessed June 23, 2018.

[3] See, for example, Fraser Watts "Psychology and theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, edited by Peter Harrison (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 190-206. For more detailed studies, see James G. Samra, "Being Conformed to Christ in Community"; Oxford theses: Oxford University, 2005; Bradley J. Matthews, *Mature in Christ: the contribution of Ephesians and Colossians to constructing Christian maturity in modernity*, Durham theses, Durham University, 2009.

[4] In this essay, I will be using the term "maturation" to cover concepts often labelled "sanctification,""spiritual growth," and even "discipleship." The benefits of using the term "maturation" are that it reflects the New Testament's use of the word τελείοις and "maturation" is a word recognized by the behavioral sciences. The downside to using such a term is that the New Testament speaks only of maturation or spiritual growth in terms of believers becoming more like Jesus. Whereas, behavioral sciences use the term to refer to all humans and with a very different endpoint than becoming more like Jesus.

wide range of interaction that Christians have with psychology, secular counseling services, social work, and more.

For our study we will be using 2 Corinthians 3-5, which is one of the most powerful and important discussions of human maturation in the bible. Part of its value is that it places the discussion of human maturation within, among other things, the context of creation/new creation. Much has been learned in studying the interplay of science and theology with regard to creation. The fruit of such study can prove useful for studying the interplay of science and theology with regard to human maturation.[5]

This paper begins by highlighting the evidence that shows Paul's discussion of human maturation comes from a framework of creation/new creation. From there I identify three limitations from 2 Corinthians 3-5 that God places on science with regard to maturation.

2 CORINTHIANS 3-5: MATURITY AND CREATION

The exodus and creation are two major motifs Paul brings together in 2 Corinthians 3-5. The old covenant points us to the new covenant and creation points us to new creation. These two motifs are connected, but it is the motif of creation/new creation that most interests us here.

Among the references in these chapters, which place maturation in the context of creation, 2 Cor 3:18, 4:6, and 5:17 are the most explicit. A quick glance at each will reveal how Paul talks about maturation using the language of creation.

First, 2 Cor 3:18 says, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." Paul's references to "image" and "the Spirit" are echoes of Genesis 1. Humans were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) and the Spirit was present, participating in forming and shaping creation (Gen 1:2).[6] Paul goes on to tell us in 2 Cor

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The term "behavioral sciences" refers generally to sciences such as psychology, cognitive science, organization theory, psychobiology, management science, operations research, social neuroscience, anthropology, organizational behavior, organization studies, sociology, social networks, applied anthropology, and behavior genetics. (This list is from the scope of *Behavioral Sciences* journal published by MDPI.)

[5] For the past two years the Center for Pastor Theologians has been studying the relationship of theology and science in regard to the doctrine of creation. Some of the fruits of that study inform what is happening here. See the *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology*, Vol. 4.1 and 4.2 (2017). The seeds for such an opportunity can be seen in Chris Bruno's essay, "Creation and New Creation: How Should Our Understanding of the End Influence Our Understanding of the Beginning?" *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology,* Vol. 4.1 (2017): 49-64. Bruno is focused on the cosmological aspects of new creation, but helpfully highlights the way new creation and original creation elucidate one another.

[6] Cf. Ps. 104:30, cited by Kenneth Matthew, who argues that Genesis 1:2 is referring to the Holy Spirit (*Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996], 135). Note that when the coming of the Spirit is described in Joel 2/Acts 2 it is associated with "creational" language. There will be wonders in the heavens, signs on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke, the sun turns to darkness, and the moon turns to blood.

4:4 that Jesus is the image of God, so that the process of human maturation is the process of being transformed into the image of Jesus or conformed to Jesus.[7] This happens by means of the Spirit, who enables us to experience God's glory now in part and be transformed in ever increasing glory.[8]

Second, in 2 Cor 4:6 Paul quotes Gen 1:3 and applies it to the beginning of the process of transformation: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." Just as God spoke the world into existence and took the existing material of Gen 1:1-2 and began to bring life and order to it, so at conversion God takes an existing human life and begins to bring eternal life and order to it. Arthur Milliard's process of transformation began when God spoke light into his darkness at the moment of conversion. So it is with every believer.

Third, in 2 Cor 5:17 Paul says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" This statement places the anthropological transformation of humans within the larger scope of the cosmological transformation/renewal/recreation of all things.[9]

In addition to the three explicit references to maturation in the context of creation mentioned above, the whole of 2 Corinthians 3-5 is taken up with creation themes and ideas, including: Satan blinding humans as he did in deceiving Adam and Eve in the Garden (2 Cor. 4:4; cf. Genesis 3), the seen (creation) and the unseen (2 Cor 4:18), being found clothed and not naked (2 Cor 5:3; cf. Gen 2:25; 3:7-11, 21), and the themes of death and life that are present throughout the whole of chapters 3–5.

By drawing so many parallels between human maturation and creation, Paul has opened the door for us to be able to think about the interplay of science and theology in the area of maturation, using lessons from the interplay of science and theology in the area of creation. Just as God has placed limitations on science's ability both to fully understand creation and to actually create, so this passage suggests three limitations God has placed on the behavioral sciences both with regard to fully understanding maturation and in actually bringing it about.

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[7] For more on this, see J. G. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006).

[8] All the means of tranformation come about through experiencing God's presence. Prayer, worship, preaching, spiritual gifts, reading Scripture, sacraments, serving others, etc., are all means of experiencing God's presence, and it is God's presence that brings about the transformation of humans. This is Paul's point when he mentions the example of Moses being in God's presence in Exodus 32–34 alluded to in 2 Cor 3:7-13. Likewise, 1 John 3:2 tells us that what will ultimately transform us to be like Jesus is seeing him as he is. In 1 Peter 2:2-3 the pure spiritual milk that causes us to grow in our salvation is our experiences of God himself. The final culmination of this happens at the consummation of all things in Revevelation 22:4 where, "the 'name' on believers refers to the character of God, which they reflect" because they see his face (Greg Beale, *Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[9] Ryan Jackson helpfully reminds us that the anthropological nature of Paul's new creation language cannot be separated from its cosmological dimension (*New Creation in Paul's Letters* [Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010]).

LIMITATION 1: DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN ROLE OF GOD IN REBIRTH AND MATURATION

In a previous study of Heb 11:3 and the doctrine of creation, I argued that according to Heb 11:3 God purposefully used invisible words to create the visible world so that the source of creation would be hidden from science and accesible only through faith.[10] The same idea is present here. In 2 Corinthians 3-5, a key concept is living by faith, not by sight (5:7). The antithesis between faith and sight is important for Paul to establish because part of what gave rise to the need for the letter of 2 Corinthians were conflicts with those who "take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart" (5:12).

Paul may not look like a "super-apostle" if one takes into account his suffering, the way he changed his plans, his lack of rhetorical skills and abilities, and the fact that he has not been visibly vindicated by God the way Moses' was authenticated with his shining face. But that is because God, especially in regard to transformation and maturity, has hidden the process from those who do not have faith. Outwardly Christians are wasting away, but inwardly we are being renewed day-by-day. Our faces do not glow with the physical, tangible glory of having been in God's presence, but seen with the eyes of faith, we are displaying the glory of Jesus more and more as we become like him.

The parallel between 2 Cor. 4:6 and Heb 11:3 is instructive. Because God chose to create new life in each Christian in the same way that he chose to create this world, namely by speaking invisible words, the one who is creating new life in us will never be able to be detected using the findings of behavioral sciences anymore than the physical or life sciences can detect God as creator of the universe.[11]

Therefore, when Paul says in Philippians 2:12, "Therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence but much more in my absence—continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," there is some aspect in which behavioral sciences are able to observe and describe these human efforts. Arthur Milliard's willingness to engage in a Christian community, read the bible, and apologize to his son for his abusive behavior can all be catalogued and observed by the scientific community. Positive outcomes to such activities can be noted and repeated

[10] Jim Samra, "Faith as an Epistemology: Hebrews 11:3 and the origins of life," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology Vol. 4.1,* (2017): 3-14.

[11] This appears to be Jesus' point in John 3:8 when he speaks about the Spirit's role in new birth: "The wind blows where ever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." Craig Keener comments on this passage, "One would expect a comparison strictly between the Spirit and the wind, but the comparison is technically between the wind and those born from the Spirit. In this context, however, the application is apropos: those born of the Spirit replicate the Spirit's character (3:6), making their origin and destiny as mysterious to outsiders as their Lord from above, whose identity confounded the 'world'" (*The Gospel of John, Volume One* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 555).

by non-Christians who join a community, read religious or philosophical texts, and deal with issues related to forgiveness.[12]

However, when Paul goes on in Philippians 2:13 to say "for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose," that aspect of human maturation will be hidden from science. Not everyone who goes to church becomes mature; not everyone who reads the bible becomes more like Jesus; and not everyone who deals with their past actually accepts and lives in light of the forgiveness freely given by God. It is only to the extent that God is at work in and through participation in the believing community, in his word, and in forgiveness that maturation and transformation happens. But his activity will be hidden from science because science operates by sight, not by faith.[13]

More than that, Paul tells us that the transformation of humans is hidden from those in science because of the activity of Satan, who is actively blinding the minds of unbelievers from seeing the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4).[14] If nonbelievers were able to see God at work in the transformation of believers and were able to observe how we now reflect the glory of Jesus, they would accept Jesus as Lord and be saved. If so, everyone who saw the movie "I Can Only Imagine" would be led to believe in Jesus.[15] But Satan is actively working to keep this from happening, in the same way that Satan deceived Adam and Eve with regard to God's love and power in the Garden of Eden.

From this point, we can perhaps extrapolate further to say that not only is Satan blinding the minds of non-believers with regard to God's activity in the process of transformation, Satan is blinding people to his own activity as well. In the garden Satan came as a serpent, not in his created form, in order to contribute to the deception. In the same sense, for example, Satan's work in and through the agency of demonic activity in stunting and preventing

[12] On the area of forgiveness in psychology and the relevant sources, see *Forgiveness in Context*, edited by Fraser Watts and Liz Gulliford (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), chapters 6–7.

[13] Abraham Kuyper says it this way: "This means that science fails as soon as it attempts to penetrate from the observable to the spiritual background of reality, and for the acquired data proceeds to attempt to build an entire construct. It puts forth with great fanfare, what appears in God's light to be foolishness, that is, in conflict with essentiality and reality" (*Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, edited by Jordan Ballor and Stephen Grabill, translated by Nelson Kloosterman [Grand Rapids: Christian's Library, 2011], 91).

[14] Some early commentators understood "the god of this age" to be a reference to God, but most today take it as a reference to Satan. In that it is a reference to Satan, it is probably not a reference to Satan's personal activity but to the fact that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). The systems of this world, including the behavioral sciences, reflect the influence and control of Satan so that they cannot point to God apart from faith.

[15] *New York Post and Hollywood Reporter* critic Frank Scheck's cynical comments exemplifies how some saw not only the movie, but even the idea that a person might be transformed in this way. He writes, "It seems that Arthur has found God, thanks to a terminal cancer diagnosis. The movie treats this like a major life turnaround, but am I the only one who thinks deathbed religious conversions don't count? Like someone once said, there are no atheists in foxholes" ("'I Can Only Imagine': Film Review," https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/i-can-imagine-1095152, accessed July 4, 2018).

maturation is also hidden. Arthur Milliard was not on course to mature out of his abusive anger on his own, and it may have been because anger was a satanic stronghold he was powerless to overcome. My guess is that even after he became a Christian he needed God to continue to work in him to enable him to not give way to anger lest Satan continue to get a foothold in his life (Eph 4:26-27). The implication is that behavioral sciences are not equipped to diagnose and deal with demonic activity in the process of helping humans grow and develop.[16]

In summary, the first limitation of the behavioral sciences when it comes to maturation is their inability to recognize the presence and role of God (and other invisible spiritual forces).

LIMITATION 2: RECOGNIZING THE NEWNESS OF THE NEW CREATION IN REBIRTH AND MATURATION

A corollary to the idea that the behavioral sciences cannot recognize the presence of God in the process of maturation is that the behavioral sciences are less adept at recognizing the newness of what God is doing during the process of maturation.

To return to the idea of creation, one of the great contributions of science to the study of creation is describing the mechanisms by which things evolve and change. However, science struggles with explaining the "newness" of what God did in creating humanity in his image.[17]

Likewise, to take an example from the behavioral science of sociology, there have been helpful observations in describing how the church has evolved and changed over time, but the social sciences have been less adept in describing how it is that the church, as a sociological entity, came to be

16 For an example, see Leonard Seltzer, "Enough about 'Inner Demons' Already," *Pschology Today*, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201506/enough-about-inner-demons-already, accessed July 2018. In regard to sociology, Richard Fenn acknowledges that "angels and demons have long qualified for inclusion in the Sacred, but they tend to escape direct sociological observation" ("Sociology and Religion" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, edited by Philip Clayton [Oxford: University Press, 2006], 254).

17 *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology Vols.5.1 and 5.2* (2018) focus on the issue of the historical Adam. The implication of Genesis 1:26-27 is that even within the original creation itself, God did something new in creating Adam and Eve in his own image. But science struggles with accepting that something new happened in the creation of man. Even Christians who espouse an idea of the image of God as "referring to the gradual evolutionary process, stretching back over millions of years, whereby the distinctively human neuronal capacities have emerged that enable moral sensibilities and religious practices" still acknowledge that "the account that evolutionary anthropology and psychology describe for us *is necessary but certainly not sufficient* to do full justice to the theological notion of humankind being made in the image of God" (Denis Alexander, *Genes, Determinism, and God* [Cambridge: University Press, 2017], 282-283, *emphasis added*). In other words, God has still done something new in conferring upon humans status as God's representatives. No other creature is given this status, and science cannot see that.

in the first place, and social sciences are blind to how the risen Jesus was at work in creating and building his church.[18]

But what Paul is describing in 2 Corinthians 3-5 is something that is categorically "new." The passage begins with a discussion of the new covenant (3:6) and ends with a discussion of the new creation (5:17). While there are strong connections to what came before (old covenant, first creation), Paul's emphasis is on the fact that God is doing something new. The transitory old covenant brough death and condemnation, the eternal new covenant brings life and righteousness. The first creation has been subjected to death and decay. The new creation is eternal.

More specifically for human maturation, "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). While this passage is about more than just the transformation of believers, it includes certainly that.[19] And the emphasis is on the newness of what has come. Both the Old Testament background of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Paul's own context, focus on the newness of what God is doing.[20]

When it comes to human maturation and development, being recreated or renewed in the image of Jesus is akin to *creatio ex nihilo*. God is making something new.[21] In Colossians 3, Paul says, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." The terms "old self" and "new self" are not psychological terms, they are historical terms meaning that our "old self" represents who we used to be in Adam before we were placed into Christ and our "new self" is who we are now in Christ, a completely new creation.[22] The emphasis is on the contrast between the old and new selves. To further emphasize the "newness" of what is happening, Paul says that the new self is being "renewed" into the image of its Creator.

The newness of what God is doing in the process of maturation has implications for our use of the behavioral sciences in understanding maturation. In the same way that sciences dealing with creation struggle to recognize the newness of Adam and Eve in the larger picture of creation, so the behavioral sciences struggle with understanding the newness of

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[18] See for example, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton: University Press, 1996).

[19] On the connection between 2 Cor 3:18 and 2 Cor 5:17, see Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005), 429-436.

[20] See Mark Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007); Moyer Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thoughts* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002); Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*.

[21] It is important to note that the new thing that is happening is not metaphorically new only, but real: a genuine substantive transformation is taking place in and through the gift of the Spirit. For one discussion of how this happens, see Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul* (Tübergen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); cf. Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology 22*, no. 2 (2013): 187-205.

[22] Richard Melick, Jr., *Colossians*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991).

what God is doing in transforming us into the image of Christ. For Arthur Milliard—as well as for us—whatever happened in his life, whether good or bad, according to the behavioral sciences, is often inextricably tied to his past—back to his family of origin or related to the personality traits he has displayed in the past.

But the Bible speaks of Christians putting off the old self and putting on the new self. There is, of course, an imperatival aspect to this idea such that we are commanded to act in accordance with our new nature (cf. Eph. 4:22-23), but the command comes out of the indicative truth that we have a new self. God can and does set people free from slavery to sin. He can and does give people spiritual gifts they didn't possess before they were Christians. God can and often does genuinely step in and make changes to personalities. The behavioral sciences are ill-equipped to take into account the creation of new natures.

So while behavioral science can be useful in describing the ways in which we continue to reflect Adam and the old self, they are less helpful in recognizing that along with such inherited allegiances there can, should, and will be signs of new creation. Bart Milliard testifies to the "newness" in his father. He says that his dad went from being a monster to the godliest person he knew.

LIMITATION 3: BRINGING ABOUT REBIRTH AND MATURATION

Finally, the third limitation of the behavioral sciences relates to the inability of the behavioral sciences to bring about human maturation. We have already shown that behavioral science cannot recognize God's role in maturation and cannot adequately describe the newness present in the process of transformation. Now we are asking the question, to what extent does behavioral science participate in the transformation process? In other words, to what extent are psychological strategies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy able to contribute to the process of human maturation?

Second Corinthians 3:7-18 contains a detailed discussion of the Mosaic law and its relation to the new covenant. One of Paul's points in 2 Corinthians 3 is that while the Mosaic law is from God and is therefore glorious, in comparison to what happens in the new covenant, the law has no glory because it only brings condemnation and not life. In other words, what Moses experienced in God's presence—life and transformation—could not be achieved by those who only read the Mosaic law. To this day their minds remain dull and their hearts hard when the law is read because it cannot bring about rebirth or maturation (2 Cor 3:14-15).

What Paul says specifically about the Mosaic law in 2 Corinthians 3, he says more generally in Colossians 2:6-23 about human wisdom and rules, what he terms "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than

Christ" (2:8).[23] While there is great debate as to what Paul is referring to here, he goes on in Colossians 2:20-23 to describe more fully that these "elemental spiritual forces" belong to this world and consist of rules such as "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Paul says that these rules have to do with things that are destined to perish and "are based on merely human commands and teachings." They have the "appearance of wisdom" but lack any real value in restraining our sensual desires.

Read alongside 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is saying that the wisdom of this world, including our understanding of how the world works and the findings of behavioral sciences, have no power to bring about true transformation. It cannot be that it is just the Mosaic law that is powerless to facilitate maturation. Everything, other than the Spirit himself, lacks the power to bring about transformation into the image of Christ, including the behavioral sciences.[24] While the Spirit may in some cases use the wisdom of behavioral sciences as part of the transformation process, it is the Spirit who does the transforming.

In this way the findings and strategies of behavioral sciences for modifying behavior are just that: findings and strategies for modifying behavior. Apart from the Spirit, they are not able to bring about true transformation or maturity.

Yet, we should not conclude from this that the behavioral sciences are useless. Their usefulness is like that of other sciences. They are well suited for describing what is wrong and recommending strategies for being "successful" in this world and its systems.

Take for example the physical sciences and engineering. These sciences are useful in designing a building that will withstand the normal forces of nature. Consider the medical sciences. They are quite useful for providing strategies for avoiding diseases and providing guidelines to being restored to health after contracting a disease.

In the same way, behavioral sciences are well-suited for prescribing strategies for dealing with the kind of anger or anxiety that may prevent someone from enjoying healthy relationships with others at school. They can help discover best practices for how work teams can best function to accomplish a worldly goal. They can provide explanations at one level for why church staff interactions are dysfunctional and provide strategies to decrease the amount of dysfunction.[25]

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[23] The elemental forces of this world are connected to the Mosaic law in Galatians 4:3-4, 9-10.

[24] Bonhoeffer refers to psychotherapy as 'secular ascetism,' which seems akin to what Paul is talking about in Colossians 2. The benefits of psychotherapy for Bonhoeffer are limited to observing, evaluating, and analyzing (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care*, translated by Jay C. Rochelle [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985], 37-38, 81).

[25] L. Gregory Jones says it this way, "The gospel does not provide a full account of human psychology, and people need to attend to the complexities of the human pysche and human life. For example, at its best therapy can help people understand the ways in which human lives are enmeshed in complex intrapersonal, interpersonal, and more broadly political relations. Further, it can help people discern and disentangle those issues—particularly

What they cannot do, however, is actually bring about transformation into the image of Christ. They cannot create a new person, or cause someone to manifest the fruits of the Spirit. They cannot cause an angry person to become a person full of gentleness and self-control. They cannot do what the Spirit did in transforming Arthur Milliard from who he was to who he became.[26]

Consider another analogy, this time using Peter's language in 1 Peter 2:2 where he says, "Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." The means of growing in salvation—of being transformed as "living stones" into the image of Jesus the Living Stone—comes from pure spiritual milk of God's presence.[27] Cribs, clothing, pacifiers, sunscreen, strollers, vaccinations, and more are all useful aspects of helping a baby survive in this world. But none of them causes actual growth and development. Babies grow by drinking milk.[28]

CONCLUSION

The use of behavioral sciences in relation to Christianity is widespread, both within the church and in studying and analyzing the church from the outside. As the use and sophistication of behavioral sciences continues to grow, there is an increasing danger that the findings and pronouncements of the behavioral sciences will continue to confuse and disorient Christians in the same way that findings and pronouncements of the physical and life sciences confuse and disorient Christians.

Into this situation, God speaks the words of 2 Corinthians 3-5, which remind us that when it comes to human maturation there are limitations to what behavioral sciences can observe and achieve. Despite the important role of behavioral sciences in describing some of the effects of human

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in relation to the many horrifying tragedies that happen to specific people" (*Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 42).

[26] During a personal conversation with Michael Reiffer, a Christian social worker and counselor from Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, he suggested that the contrast between the values of the law and grace with regard to the issue of pornography can be seen in the success rate of two resources he recommends. On one hand, Arterburn and Stoeker's book, *Every Man's Battle*, is a more law-based approach, which does show some success in restraining the use of pornography, but doesn't result in true transformation(see *Every Man's Battle* [Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2000]). On the other hand, Heath Lambert's *Finally Fr*ee is much better at allowing the Spirit to actually bring about maturation and transformation for the person struggling with pornography through the grace of Jesus (see *Finally Free* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003]).

[27] While some think the milk is the "word" from 1 Peter 1:25, it is more likely a reference to God himself since the object of what is "tasted" in 2:3 is God himself.

[28] To this point we should add that when a Christian psychologist, for example, uses her spiritual gift of encouragement (or teaching, etc.) in a counseling session with a believer, she is manifesting the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). This manifestation of the Spirit can and does contribute to the process of transformation and spiritual growth. But the point is that this is happening through her spiritual gift and not as a result of the secular counseling material she may be employing in the session. The same is true when the counselor uses Scripture, prayer and other means of faciliatating people's experience of God.

maturation and prescribing behaviors, systems, and strategies for surviving in the world in which we live, behavioral sciences are unable to recognize the role of God in maturation; they cannot see that something new is being created through faith in Jesus; and they are incapable in and of themselves to bring about the true transformation that happens as the Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ.

But as Christians we can rejoice that—regardless of the limitations of the behavioral sciences—the "God, who said, 'let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." As a result, "the new creation has come: the old is gone and the new is here" because "we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 4:6, 5:17, 3:18).

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"HARD THINGS ARE GLORIOUS[1]": TEACHING MORTIFICATION IN A THERAPEUTIC AGE

JOEY SHERRARD[2]

Recently a clip of a well-known megachurch preacher came across my timeline. In this widely-shared video, the preacher described an experience of perceived spiritual abandonment, where friendships and other comforts run dry and the Christian feels as if she is alone in darkness. But, the preacher continued, there is a reason for this spiritual night. It is in the darkness that we can see the singular light of God's goodness without competition and with greater clarity.

While the preacher who shared this truth is of dubious theological integrity, the experience he described familiar from the Church's storehouse of spiritual wisdom. From time to time it may be the case that providence allows certain comforts to flee so that the Christian can find comfort in the only lasting and sure refuge: God himself. Theologians and pastors as diverse as John Newton and St John of the Cross have described in broadly similar terms this spiritual *askesis* that takes place in the course of a person's Christian life. In the designs of providence, our suffering may be used to the end of our sanctification.

What was remarkable about this restatement of that tradition was the immediate online response. The preacher's message was rebuked sharply. What the preacher described was not providence's design; instead, it was an instance of clinical depression. What was shared was not spiritual wisdom; it was dangerous folly, bordering on spiritual abuse. One should not name this moment as a loving design of the Father's providential care; it is a mental condition that should be addressed by a trained therapist in order to be alleviated.

This minor twitter controversy is representative of a larger tension that runs through basic questions of human flourishing, sanctification, and pastoral guidance. There is no need to set the church's theological reflection upon Scripture and the common grace insights of psychology and psychotherapy against one another in a false dichotomy. But certain visions of the human in our therapeutic culture appear to be incongruent with the dynamics of the spiritual life given to the church in Scripture. One

[1] From, "Providence" by George Herbert.

[2] Joey Sherrard is an Associate Pastor at Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church in Signal Mountain, Tennessee.

perspective sees an act of violence that cuts against the very grain of the creature's existence. The other perspective sees an act of loving obedience that recognizes intermediate suffering as a meaningful, and indeed necessary, prerequisite to the fullness of life the Creator intends.

In a culture where therapeutic language has a certain priority, the church must consider how to speak about the Christian life so that an alien vision of human flourishing does not capture our discipleship. This articulation of discipleship and sanctification should be internally intelligible to the church, not isolating this doctrine, but instead locating it within the body of Christian doctrine that the church has received and allowing it to speak within the context of the creating, saving, and redeeming work of the Holy Trinity. Jesus' invitation, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23) is a word of love to the broken and lost sinner. The church must learn to speak this word anew so that it can speak it with conviction.

To that end, this essay is a work of theological description of the Christian doctrine of the mortification of sin. We will proceed by naming the dynamics of the therapeutic culture that has occluded this doctrine and led the church to be hesitant to articulate it. Then we will locate mortification within other loci of systematic theology: theological anthropology, justification and union with Christ as aspects of the *ordo salutis*, and finally eschatology. In so doing we will situate mortification within the wider story of God's intentions for his creation. And finally, we will see how this work informs pastoral practice for those who preach, counsel, and lead God's people in worship.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE THERAPEUTIC

In his 1987 book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Philip Rieff described the emergence of a new culture in the West, founded upon the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. In this new world, men and women found themselves asking different questions of perennial human problems and reaching different conclusions. Humanity has always been faced with competing desires, with internal struggles, and with difficult decisions that take place when personal fulfillment and the moral life appear to diverge. But in therapeutic culture, this tension between fulfillment and morality is resolved to the point of being collapsed together.

Previously, renunciation was considered an essential part of the good life. In this world, deeply formed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, men and women knew that life was bound inextricably to an order outside of the self: relationships, institutions, and ideals. But that world has increasingly dissipated, replaced by one that locates the good life primarily internally in the desires of the individual. So Rieff explains, "What is revolutionary in modern culture refers to releases from inherited doctrines of…deprivation; from a predicate of renunciatory control, enjoining releases from impulse need, our culture has shifted toward a predicate of impulse release,

projecting controls unsteadily based upon an infinite variety of *wants raised to the status of needs*."[3]

The problem in the new therapeutic culture was no longer (to paraphrase C.S. Lewis' memorable quote from *The Abolition of Man*) how to conform the soul to the demands of reality and the good life. Instead, it was how to conform reality to the desires of the self. As Rieff's description above implies, the solution is therefore not to learn to renounce certain improper uses of good things in order to attain the good life; it is instead to realize those impulses as essential to attaining the good life. As Rieff goes on to say, "Religious man was born to be saved; psychological man is born to be pleased."[4]

Rieff's narrative resonates with what we find in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Taylor tells a similar story of the eclipse of divine purposes which are in tension with immediate human flourishing, in favor of the collapse of the good into that which is immediately and perspicuously intelligible to humans. In a secular age it becomes increasingly difficult to name as good those actions which contradict "ordinary human flourishing." What is increasingly lost is "a notion of our good which goes beyond human flourishing, which we may gain even while failing utterly on the scales of human flourishing, even *through* such a failing (like dying young on a cross)."[5]

What we are left with is an environment where the idea of postponing or forswearing certain human desires becomes less and less morally intelligible. To the contrary, to make such a request could be interpreted as an act of violence, causing harm to creatures and actually preventing them from receiving what their Creator desires for them now in this world. This tension is felt in manifold ways, but perhaps nowhere more sensitively than in the arena of sexual ethics. It is increasingly difficult for Christians to speak confidently and coherently about why the existence of sexual desire does not necessarily lead to the permission or even the responsibility to act upon those desires. This is certainly true rhetorically in the debate surrounding same-sex attraction. But it is just as true in the inability of pastors and ministry leaders to articulate to their flock and demonstrate in their own lives the spiritual wisdom that enables men and women to live faithfully in marriage and chastely outside of it.

In such an environment Christian teaching about the mortification of sin is hard pressed. To ears that have been formed by this vision of the good life, what does the following sound like? "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (Colossians 3:5). What is needed is a careful and comprehensive articulation of this teaching that informs and accompanies the church's proclamation. Mortification must be framed within the wider

[3] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2007), 13. Emphasis added.

[4] Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, 19.

[5] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 151. Emphasis original.

context of the Trinity's saving work of bringing fallen creatures into the fulness of the Creator's intended purposes of communion and beatitude. It is to that task that we now turn.

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A description of the shape of human flourishing can only be properly ordered when it is done with a view to the ends of human life. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor describes the gradual emergence of an understanding of the world which is increasingly plausible without reference to the transcendent, an understanding Taylor calls "the immanent frame."[6] Within this immanent frame of life within a secular age, it is increasingly difficult to attach moral value to that which transcends what can be realized in the course of the life we possess before life after death. The loss of transcendence and flattening of human existence in the modern world, the ambivalence within much contemporary Christian preaching and teaching regarding heaven and hell, and the decline of practices of contemplation and meditation on the excellencies of God all contribute to this situation. To imagine a life well-lived that postpones or declines the enjoyment of created goods for the enjoyment of the Uncreated Good requires swimming against this stream.

We can find assistance in the writings of John Owen, the Puritan theologian who penned one of the most well-known treatises on mortification, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. In this work, Owen frames mortification within the greater good of communion with God. Mortification is not isolated as an act of obedience. To do so is to lose the biblical and theological context for putting to death "what is earthly in you": enjoyment and experience of the goodness of God. In naming the necessity of mortification of sin, Owen describes the human end that sin frustrates: "[Sin] diverts the heart from the spiritual frame that is required for vigorous communion with God; it lays hold of the affections…so expelling the love of the Father, so that the soul cannot say uprightly and truly to God, 'You are my portion.'"[7] For Owen, the importance of mortification is really a complement to the corresponding significance of communion with God. Owen's writings on mortification do not stand alone but are instead only coherent in their connection to his other works of practical divinity such as *Communion with the Triune God*.

Owen is a helpful resource from which Protestant theologians can draw because he also articulates a robust doctrine of the beatific vision. This doctrine, which was a central component of theology in the classical tradition, affirms that the great hope of the Christian is that she will in the new creation behold God in his glory. Owen is representative of the wider catholic tradition in his belief that the creature's beholding of the beauty and goodness of God was significant not just in the life to come but in the life that Christians experience now. So Suzanne McDonald writes,

[6] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 539-593.

[7] John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 64.

"For Owen, it matters for our lives now and for all eternity that we should aside time for our minds to be shared by the foretaste that is offered to us of the beatific vision, in part because if this does not shape our minds and mold our desires, something else will."[8] Indeed, mortification and contemplation intertwine with one another so as to reinforce one another. The act of contemplation and the pursuit of the beatific vision is an act of mortification: "We are changed into the likeness of whatever most stamps itself on our thoughts, and our actions reflect the molding of our minds."[9] In setting our minds on things above, we are in the midst of the work of putting to death the things of the flesh (Colossians 3:2-5).

Surely it is a significant loss in our understanding of what it means to be human when we do not give a place to the great joy of seeing our God face-to-face. The promises of Scripture—the wedding feast, the bride being met by her bridegroom, the dwelling place of God being with man—remind us that for all the good things that we will know in the new creation, the greatest will be the beatitude of being with our God. Indeed, this is the end to which we were made. As Michael Allen has written recently in his evaluation and corrective of modern eschatology, "A loss of focus upon the beatific vision can skew a Christian account of humanity by foreclosing or, worse yet, dismissing a constituent facet of human teleology."[10] While life in the "immanent frame" places pressure upon us to be silent at this key juncture, to do so is to be silent about the nature of Christian hope.

All of human existence cannot be circumscribed in the end of contemplation of God. Any full description of creaturely existence will give great attention to ethical responsibilities that we have to our neighbors and all of the creation that will be made new. But there is love of God that cannot be collapsed into love of neighbor, as is the modern tendency. And so in order to preserve the important work of mortification that fits us for the new creation, we would do well to preach and teach that we have been created for friendship with God, our greatest Good. "Whom have I in heaven but you? / And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25).

THE ORDO SALUTIS

Within the Reformed tradition, we can locate mortification doctrinally within the *ordo salutis*, or the "order of salvation." This theological concept, which organizes the various aspects of the God's reconciling work of human creatures, was the fruit of a sustained tradition of exegesis on Romans 8:28-30: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

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[8] Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 143.

[9] McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," 143.

[10] Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Hope and Life on God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 64.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (ESV). We can see how this passage served as a framework for understanding how all the different aspects of God's restoration of humanity are connected to one another.[11]

While it is helpful to situate mortification within wider teaching about God's justifying and sanctifying work of humanity, the *ordo salutis* is also helpful in a complementary way for our present study. Paul's concerns in Romans 8 mirror those that drive this study: how can we speak of God's continuing good work in the midst of struggle and suffering? How is it that God makes use of suffering for the end of conforming Christians to the image of his Son? Resetting the *ordo salutis* in its initial exegetical register allows us to make sense of God's loving work of bringing creatures to their intended end as fully alive in Christ.

Within the tradition the *ordo salutis* has been put to a number of different uses, alternately giving logical, temporal, causal, and natural order to God's saving work.[12] For our purposes in this study we will consider how it gives expression to the logical unfolding of salvation. We shall do this because it frames two important distinctions within Paul's thought in Romans 8: the logical priority of justification over sanctification, and the material priority of vivification, the renewal of the creature in its created nature, over mortification. With these two distinctions in hand we will be able to better convey the place of God's mortifying work on the way to presenting us complete in Christ.

Justification and Sanctification

It is one of the great insights of the Reformation that justification must be distinguished from sanctification. Note the language of the Westminster Larger Catechism in response to Question 70, "What is justification?" Answer: "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts them righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone." In describing justification in this manner, the catechism is not relegating sanctification to an endnote in God's saving work. Instead, what we find is this distinction actually helps secure important aspects of sanctification.

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[11] See Richard A. Muller, "The 'Golden Chain' and the Causality of Salvation: Beginnings of the Reformed *Ordo Salutis*" in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 161-201.

[12] Richard A. Muller, "Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought" *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 243.

The declarative, forensic nature of justification by grace through faith in Christ, that the Westminster Catechism describes logically, precedes sanctification. It is important to say in the next breath that the two cannot be separated; John Calvin's description of justification and sanctification as a "double grace" that is given to the Christian in union with Christ is here instructive.[13] But even while he notes the inseparable nature of these two doctrines within the one gift of Christ, Calvin also notes the need to order them within our minds. Thus he writes, "For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one which to build your piety toward God."[14] Justification provides a foundation on which sanctification can proceed.

The way in which justification has both logical priority and also foundational importance with respect to sanctification is a topic over which much ink has been spilled. But, in the therapeutic society we have previously described, and for our purposes, we can draw attention to the way in which justification provides a context for understanding mortification and its sometimes painful work in our lives. Properly understood in its exegetical context, the *ordo salutis* demonstrates how the declarative nature of justification allows the Christian be secure and serene in his submission to God's mortifying and vivifying work.

Following Paul's description of the struggle between the sinful nature and the redeemed "inner being" (7:22) in Romans 7, we turn to Romans 8 with a declaration of the Christian's security within the justifying work of Christ: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Paul's argument flowers from this "therefore" in various directions, but it is significant that at multiple points within this chapter we find a connection to perseverance through suffering. And this suffering is for Paul always within the context of God's loving, redemptive work for the sinner. The Spirit's work in justification allows the Christian to be without fear (v.15) so that even as she suffers, she does so in the knowledge she is being transformed into the image of Christ (v. 17). Enclosed securely within God's justifying "yes," the Christian can consider that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (v. 18). The way in which justification provides the context for the Holy Spirit's work in our lives also allows us to live freely in weakness as well (v. 26).

All of this builds to the climax of this passage, which includes 8:28-30, the foundational text for the *ordo salutis*. Within the declaration of "no condemnation" we can be sure that God is indeed working all things for the good of those whom he has called. There is a pastoral logic that

[13] "By partaking of [Christ], we receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life" (John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004] 725.

[14] Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 725.

builds throughout this passage, urging the Christian to understand that all of her experience, even when it includes great suffering or self-denial, is enclosed within the security of God's settled judgment of love and favor upon her. Hence the final, resounding cry of the passage: "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

This truth is one crucial piece of the context of mortification within our modern therapeutic age. The uncomfortable work of self-denial and mortification must be narrated within the larger story of God's care and provision for his people. The therapeutic obsession with acceptance, security and love is a distortion of a good and beautiful truth that the gospel protects. The pastor must not deny the suffering Christian this comfort. Set within the order of salvation, we see how justification is one of the words of the gospel—indeed, a foundational, primary word. Giving justification that descriptive place within God's redemptive work allows the Christian to then enter into seasons of weakness, suffering, and self-denial secure in God's yes to her, free from the fear.

THE PRIORITY OF VIVIFICATION

Alongside the logical priority of justification, the *ordo salutis* also allows us to understand the material priority of vivification over mortification. When we speak of mortification, we are speaking of a "negative" work (in the sense that it is only preparatory), which is accompanied by the positive work of vivification that brings the Christian to fullness of life. Thus John Webster writes, "Vivification…has material priority, because mortification is a practice of negation, opposing old habits of life."[15]

Vivification describes the redeemed and renewed creature. We are implored to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). In vivification, we move toward becoming fully alive according to the Creator's design in all of our relations: toward God, toward others, and with our own selves. Scripture provides a multifaceted description of this doctrine. The creature is given a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26), new clothing (Colossians 3:12-15), and new life (1 John 3:14). Biblical teaching details the new character that Christians receive (Galataians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:17-25). The vivified life manifests in the ecclesial community as Christians are exhorted to relate to one another in love (Romans 12:9-21; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13). Mortification is not an end within itself; it is understood in relation to and directed toward vivification.

Within Christian teaching and preaching, this proportion is important. When doctrines lose either their context or their proportion, they begin to have unintended effects on divine proclamation and instruction. And

[15] John Webster, "Communion with Christ: Mortification and Vivification," in *Sanctified by Grace: A Theology of the Christian Life,* edited by Kent Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 133.

when mortification loses its relation and ordering to vivification, the result is that the good news of God's work of redeeming creatures begins to sound hollow, a word not of death and then life but instead only of death. Because of this, we must approach and handle this doctrine with care.

We have to this point spoken of mortification and vivification as categories within God's saving work for women and men, but to continue we must say more. In the life of the Christian mortification and vivification are specific actions, habits, and postures that are performed, enacted and assumed in response to and furthering the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Christian participates in mortification, then, they do so not as an end within itself, but ordered to and alongside a corresponding vivifying work. The material priority of vivification is in how the renewed Christian is the end to which all mortification works.

Mortification is not a permanent condition within the Christian life. Although it will be a perennial practice until the Christian enters glory, it is nonetheless only required as a part of the Christian participating in God's redeeming and renewing work. But vivification, rather than ending, is instead the state at which the Christian will arrive. Webster writes, "Mortification is not a permanent, essential practice of the regenerate nature but an interim necessity, and once its goal of clearing away the diseased remainders of the old nature is reached, it will no longer be required. Vivification, by contrast, is the implementation of the new nature and stretches out to perfection."[16] Vivification is the end; mortification is a necessary means to attaining that end.

Because of this, practices of mortification must resonate with corresponding vivified habits. "Mortification is not hatred of embodied life but opposition to death-dealing vice, its purpose being not nature's destruction but the ordering and forming of regenerate conduct."[17] The distortion of mortification within the Christian life occurs often where this principle is not recognized. The "no" which mortification speaks to the sinful nature is not matched with the "yes" vivification speaks to the creature as it assumes the renewed and intended goal of the Creator. Habits of fasting do not correspond to the proper use of the appetite. The use of silence or solitude is separated from the good exercise of speech or community. For each practice of mortification that is submitted to, there must be a parallel manifestation of the regenerate nature.

We can recognize this principle in Paul's letters. Whenever the Gospel commands us to put to death desires—"sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness" (Colossians 3:5)—we are almost immediately told to put on the redeemed nature: "compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience" (Colossians 3:12). The fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is received in coordination with putting to death the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21). The priority is always upon the

[16] John Webster, "Communion with Christ: Mortification and Vivification," 133.
[17] John Webster, "Communion with Christ: Mortification and Vivification," 133.

new life. And so even when it is by "interim necessity," mortification is constantly in relation to vivification.

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Mortification is one word of the gospel, and the gospel is good news. In a therapeutic culture that finds difficulty in saying "no" to distorted desires that have been elevated to the level of needs, speaking this good news compels us to describe how each "no" we are commanded to say corresponds to a good "yes" that God is saying as he puts disordered humanity into its good relation with the itself, the neighbor, and the world.

ESCHATOLOGY

We have just described how mortification is ordered to vivification, giving the renewed humanity material priority in Christian proclamation and instruction. The unfolding of God's work in the Christian's life works to the end of the renewed creature. In speaking this truth, though, there is more to say. In particular, how can we recognize this ordering and priority in all of Scripture? To this point, we have made much of the letters of Paul. Where else can this truth be seen as the Church speaks from its Scriptures?

To answer this question, we turn to one of the more remarkable biblical studies of the past five years, Jonathan T. Pennington's *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary.* In a work of impressive biblical, historical and philosophical synthesis, Pennington sets a body of teaching that has some of Jesus' main teaching about mortification—the Sermon on the Mount—within the contexts of both Jewish wisdom literature and the Greco-Roman virtue tradition. Within that context, Pennington suggests that the overwhelming concern of the Sermon is "the great theological and existential question of human flourishing."[18]

The question of the shape of human flourishing is at the very center of the friction that arises between Christian teaching on mortification and our therapeutic culture. The accusation proceeds in this way: "Religion actuated by pride or fear sets impossibly high goals for humans, of asceticism, or mortification, or renunciation of ordinary human ends. It invites us to 'transcend humanity,' and this cannot but end up mutilating us; it leads us to despise and neglect the ordinary fulfillment and happiness which is within our reach."[19] Christian faith, it is argued, is an enemy of human flourishing.

Pennington argues the precise opposite. Jesus' sermon, with its commands regarding speech, desire, and mammon, is not unaware of the perennial search for happiness, fulfillment and flourishing. Rather it is focused upon that question, providing an answer to the age-old question of the shape of a life well-lived. Pennington suggests that the best translation of *makarios* in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:2-11) is not "blessed" or "happy" but

[18] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1.

[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 625.

is instead "flourishing."[20] These statements, and indeed the sermon on the whole, are describing how this flourishing life might come to us.

One of Pennington's central insights is that the virtue tradition and the eschatological backdrop of the coming Kingdom of God are not mutually exclusive options that we must choose between as we interpret Matthew 5-7. Instead, what the Sermon does within the context of both the virtue tradition and Second Temple Judaism is to marry these two visions of the moral life. Thus Pennington writes, "I fully agree that there is a thoroughly Isaianic kingdom-restoring eschatological backdrop to the Beatitudes (indeed, all of Matthew), but this in no way undercuts the vision of human flourishing that the Beatitudes speak to. One is not forced to choose between these or to put asunder what Second Temple Judaism has joined together."[21] The Sermon on the Mount—and indeed Jesus' entire moral vision for his followers—is concerned with both human flourishing *and* the coming Kingdom.

What is crucial about this context for our description of mortification in the Christian life is that it provides an account of how mortification, vivification, and progress in sanctification can simultaneously lead to discomfort and suffering and also be a work that leads to fullness of life and flourishing. Sanctification has an eschatological aspect, not only in the sense that the Christian awaits the day when he will be made new, but also because sanctification takes place in the overlap of the ages. Christians are those "on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11), and sanctification is experienced both in that internal conflict between the old and new self and also in the tension between the old age which is passing away and the new age that has been established and is coming.

The Sermon on the Mount specifically and the Christian life generally are deeply concerned with the question of human flourishing and fulfillment. But this question is pursued within the biblical narrative's description of both creatures and a creation alienated from its Creator, deeply compromised by sin and in need of renovation. Because of this, Christians will find that the work of sanctification will require them to put to death actions and habits that are fit for the world that is passing away, all the while putting on actions and habits that put them at home in the new kingdom that Jesus has inaugurated. Pennington writes, "As the church awaits the return of the risen Savior, the disciples of Jesus are invited into a way of being in the world that leads them into an experience of present-but-not-yet-full human flourishing, aligning them with the reason God created the world as the place of life and peace for his beloved creatures."[22]

Proclamation and instruction that provides a coherent account of mortification within the Christian life will give attention to the eschatological nature of the Christian experience of sanctification. This attention will be done with a confidence in the promise that the Triune God will satisfy our desires, untroubled by complaints that this confidence is too "pie-in-the-sky." "The lure of self-denial flows from a good that outweighs and

[20] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 41-67.

[21] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 63.

[22] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 310.

outstrips the fleeting and faint allures of this present age."[23] This attention will also, though, be paid to the ways in which the church is an outpost of the coming Kingdom, a place where renovated desire is at home. The Christian will find herself alternately at odds and at home in her experience of growth in the Christian life as she experiences both the "not yet" and the "already" of the Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

We have sketched the shape of an account of mortification within the Christian life that is attentive to the age in which we proclaim the gospel now and is aware of how the doctrine must be located within the wider context of Christian theology. At a time when the word of God's redemption of distorted human desire and habits is heard not as good news, but as an act of violence upon the creature, we have said that mortification must be understood within the wider spectrum of Christian teaching—of theological anthropology, the order of salvation, and the cosmic eschatological nature of sanctification—so that the good news might be heard in all of its fullness.

What might this mean for pastor-theologians as they provide theological leadership in their contexts? A number of ways forward present themselves:

CATECHESIS: The renewed need to locate and contextualize mortification is a result of the continued movement of Western culture away from the legacy it has to some extent inherited from the Christian tradition. There is the increasing need to be more explicit and give more attention to certain doctrines so that they can be lived and experienced as they are in reality—as good news. This need is nothing more than a return to the practice of catechesis, of forming disciples who are grounded in the way of Jesus. Our approach here is one way that this may be done: locating God's saving acts between an aspect of the doctrine of creation (theological anthropology) and the ends to which his saving acts work (eschatology).

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: We have suggested that proclaiming the doctrine of mortification as good news in our therapeutic age involves reclaiming both the beatific vision and maintaining the material priority of vivification over mortification. Both of these are dogmatic decisions which require corresponding formative instruction and practices so that the Christian might experience the blessing mortification intends. Reclaiming the beatific vision, for instance, would require Protestants to engage in rigorous theological retrieval in order to give proper place to contemplation and prayer in a way that is congruent with other Protestant and Reformed commitments. Similarly, describing not only mortification but also vivification will also require an account of humanity that makes use of various theological disciplines and presents them to the church for practice and the putting on of Christ's character.

ECCLESIOLOGY: If the church is to be a foretaste of the coming Kingdom and the sphere in which the mortified and vivified life is at home, the church must examine its own life and ask to what extent its life is reflective of that

[23] Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 143.

reality. In our relationship to the world around us, do we possess a clarity regarding the relationship between "wants and needs" that our therapeutic culture finds difficult to distinguish? Is there a compelling witness found among us of those who have faithfully said "no" to a desire and can continue to tell the story of God's faithful "yes" to them? Is our community a place where those who wait for their wounded and disordered desires to be healed and transformed can find compassion? These are questions that push us to examine the nature of the church and how it serves as a hospital for sinners.

The doctrine of mortification is not the entirety of the gospel. It is one part of the good news of God bringing new life to men and women who have been estranged from him. But it is a necessary word, a word that God speaks to Christians that creates the space for his renovating work. For this reason, it is a doctrine worth reclaiming, so that the church may articulate with care and with wisdom the gospel of God's saving work in the world.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Matthew D. Kim, *A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. 126pp. $10.80

Matthew Kim, a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a former student of the esteemed preacher and homiletician Haddon Robinson, pens for us a little book in size and page numbers, but whose contents and significance are weighty because they pertain to the Lord and to His Gospel. Perhaps as a nod to the enduring form of a "three-point sermon" or more substantively to the fulsome trinitarian thrust and grounding of his own homiletical vision and theology, Kim structures the book in three easily-accessible sections, each of which is further divided into three chapters.

Kim walks us through the why, the what, and the who of faithful, Gospel-centered preaching. He assiduously but succinctly takes readers through naming the familiar mines and traps for us preachers. We can get mired in ourselves, in the maelstrom of ministry demands, in the seduction of life and seeming success, and in the plain desire to be faithful and finding that in our best efforts, we fall short. Kim is a pastor deep down. And he approaches the craft of teaching, preaching, and writing with that pastor's heart that will not let us off the hook, as one who personally knows the walk and the talk. He names the points of grace and those points that need confessing and repenting in order for our vocation and discipleship to the Lord be without blemish and without spot. His diagnosis? In our preaching, in our exegesis, and in our being, our hearts have gone wayward from the Lord Christ, who He is, what He has done, and what He has called us to be and to do.

In Part One, Kim recalibrates us to purpose, "Why Study Preaching?" He goes back to the mission, vision, and values of Jesus Christ, and the role of preaching in Jesus' ongoing ministry. The task of preaching is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, to give God the glory, and to be used by the Holy Spirit as a chief means by which hearts and minds are transformed to become disciples of Jesus Christ. If we missed it along the way in our careers, if we forgot it because of spiritual amnesia, if we ignored it because of willful sin – whatever might be the case – Kim drills down with confident grace and gracious confidence: preaching is all about God and what God is doing in and through you and the sermon to bring glory to Himself and to transform people whose lives are marked by Christlike worship and service.

In Part Two, Kim addresses the "what" of preaching: what makes for faithful preaching. He proposed the key ingredients: faithful interpretation, faithful cultural interpretation, and faithful application. He highlights with great passion the importance of always being students of the Word – like a farmer working the soil, so, too, we as preachers must plow the depths of Scripture. This means staying close to the text, praying over the text, and engaging in careful exegesis of the history and structure of Scripture. But there's more, because the text is not given in a vacuum. We need to

pay attention to both the cultural context of the Scripture text, and the cultural contexts of our ministry locations, the cultural dimensions of the surrounding culture, and our own predispositions, demographics, and identities that influence our reading and interpretation of the Scriptures. Still yet, in all those considerations, there's a sermon to preach to real people on a given Lord's Day, with particular fears, hopes, failings, and joys – after the study, after the ruminating, there's a sermon that we must preach. Here Kim reminds us that the world of the biblical context and the arena of our cultural lenses must now converge to a given time at a given place to a particular assembly of people who have been summoned by the Holy Spirit to hear the Word. Application, application, application. Faithful preaching requires the pastoral gravitas, like Michelangelo's artistic marvel above the Sistine Chapel, to bridge the finger of God with the heart and life of real people. How does this Good News in this text apply to the life of this congregation, of this community?

In the final section, Kim speaks to the "who" of preaching: you and me. He knows what it means to be a pastor. The call of being a pastor and a preacher are two sides of the same coin. The congregation needs to know you care and love them. They also desire a Word that has been entrusted to you to proclaim to them, to speak to their sins, to speak to their fears, so that the transformative power of the Good News is exhibited. This calls forth pastoral preachers and preaching pastors who are caring and loving, whose lives are Christlike demonstrating character and integrity, and who are prayerful. Here's the key to our ministry of preaching and pastoring: we live and move and have our being in the Spirit of God. This means, we must be always prayerful, lest we are nothing.

This book is not just for new preachers, as the title suggests. This volume is a must read for any pastor preacher no matter how many years have been logged. Taking to heart what Kim has written here enables us to be renewed again and again to the sacred vocation of proclaiming and living the Word of God.

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James D. Cook. *Preaching and Popular Christianity: Reading the Sermons of John Chrysostom.* Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019. 237 pp. $50.72

Time spent with the 4th century pastor posthumously surnamed "the Golden Mouth" proves a worthy investment for anyone who preaches or who thinks carefully about preaching. In recent decades, studies of

Chrysostom's preaching have focused on what his sermons tell us about the congregation. While this remains a worthy endeavor, James Cook's Peaching and Popular Christianity shifts the focus back to the role of the pastor and the importance of preaching as a discourse.

For Cook, current Chrysostom scholarship has mistakenly taken the harsh words in his sermons to betray his ineffectiveness as a pastor. The fact that Chrysostom challenged his congregants, earning him another less felicitous nickname, "the tongue which cut", must indicate tension in his churches. Cook, on the other hand, argues that when we correctly understand the historical context, Chrysostom's stern tone heightens the gravity of the sermon and the engagement of the congregation. In order to make his case, Cook makes a series of moves, a few of which we explore here.

Cook demonstrates that Chrysostom's language fits nicely among modes of classical pedagogy. Borrowing from widely used late antique educational practices such as the lalia, the device that employed the rebuke of a fictitious character, or the protreptic, "an exhortation to complete, all embracing commitment to the way of life advocated by the philosophical school, based on the belief that this was the best or only true way to live" (p. 80), Chrysostom's church services acted as a kind of schoolroom. As a trained classicist, Cook proficiently casts Chrysostom's firmness within the fabric of classical paideia. Chrysostom, the concerned but loving schoolmaster, rebukes, challenges, and nudges those in his care.

Similarly, like other ancient schoolmasters and philosophers, Chrysostom's self-understanding as a physician of souls illuminates his severe tone. Operating on the presupposition of universal spiritual sickness, the Golden Mouth positioned himself as a medical doctor aiming to cure this inner sickness. Unlike doctors who can treat the body with various remedies, "the priest… has only one means by which he can cure the sufferings of the soul: 'teaching through the sermon'" (p. 88). Influenced by classical notions of virtue formation, Chrysostom saw the need for his listeners "to be educated and habituated through spiritual exercises and sustained effort" (p. 104). In this vein, the preacher's firm instruction to control one's passions reflects his concern to cure their souls rather than an overall lack of commitment among those gathered.

Current Chrysostom scholarship fails to consider the liturgical, pastoral, and spiritual dimensions of the sermon. If the sermon is decoupled from its sacred setting, then the modern reader cannot appreciate the gravity of what was at stake. While the ancient rhetoricians persuaded their audiences towards a view of earthly flourishing, Chrysostom exhorted his congregants towards repentance so they might be delivered from God's judgment. When Chrysostom exclaims that some in the assembly should "hear and shudder" (p. 118), this does not so much indicate an ideological distance between preacher and parishioner, but rather the efforts of a faithful pastor to "arouse in his congregation this reverential fear" (p. 162).

For the pastor-theologian, Cook's study affirms the best use of contemporary rhetorical techniques to persuade one's parishioners to follow Christ. Chrysostom perfected the appropriation of secular devices to bring

about repentance in the hearts and minds of those he shepherded. This reminds us of Augustine's famous refrain that "all truth is God's truth" and that Christians should make the best use of their minds. It is not so far off to think that the pastor acts as concerned schoolmaster, challenging and pushing others forward, and as a physician of souls, addressing spiritual ailments by prescribing the healing balm of Christ.

Behind this study lies the debate as to whether patristic sermons supply us with a vehicle for analyzing the congregation's social make-up. While Cook sympathizes with the motivation on this matter, he casts doubt on the feasibility of convincing conclusions. Scholars defend a variety of incompatible theses from Chrysostom's 800 surviving sermons. Practically speaking, those of us who preach may ask if the social make-up of the congregation could be reconstructed from our words alone. I like how Cook concludes this matter in that "it was, after all, not of interest for [Chrysostom] what the social make-up of his congregation was; he was primarily concerned with the state of their souls" (p. 174). While we want to exegete our congregations, may we not fall into the sin of favoritism.

Most importantly, this book reminds us of the sacred nature of preaching. In a time when we witness the sermon's reduction to a few nuggets for self-help, Cook's monograph elevates preaching as an activity by which God brings sinners to the point of turning towards him. When viewed as anything less, the sermon disintegrates into an unintelligible discourse. Thanks to Cook's efforts with the great 4th century preacher, we have another means of moving forward by first going back.

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Kate Bowler. *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 368 pp. $29.95.

The subject of women in ministry is one which elicits strong emotion from congregants and pastors. It is indelibly tied to feminism in America, and it is a matter worthy of extended pastor-theologian reflection. Kate Bowler's history on evangelical women celebrities is an excellent starting point. Bowler organizes her study by dedicating a chapter to each of five roles of a "preacher's wife," which evolved in a particular manner over the course of the last century. These roles include: Chapter One, The Preacher; Chapter Two, The Homemaker; Chapter Three, The Talent; Chapter Four, The Counselor; Chapter Five, the Beauty. With each of these roles, conservative evangelical women bargained for power by playing according to socio-cultural rules acceptable at a given time. As culture shifted, these

women shifted with the currents and used what they could to their own advantage.

Bowler's study involves the use of material and print culture, which analyzes texts, advertisements, consumable products merchandized by women's ministries, along with numerous personal interviews either conducted at conferences or visits women made to Bowler during her cancer treatment. The book is pretty hefty because of its high-quality printing that includes much of the material culture related to *The Preacher's Wife*. These depictions, Bowler indicates, help readers understand the body image pressure that women in ministry, especially the pastor's wife, had to satisfy as the "slender wife at his side" (1).

Bowler presents Beth Moore as the pristine example of a woman successfully serving at a teaching capacity today. Moore is one among a rich heritage of women drawn from the Middle Ages to the present. American Christian women across nineteenth and twentieth century history exercised influence in areas of public policy such as temperance, suffrage, education, and labor, while simultaneously pioneering world missions. In 1815 Clarissa Danforth became the first ordained woman; a century later Aimee Semple McPherson became the first female radio preacher and founded a denomination; she is then followed by divine healer and evangelist Kathryn Kulhman. As time marches on, the depiction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's tattooed preacher, Nadia Bolz-Weber, becomes an interesting foil to other mainline protestant women in ministry and a foil to Beth Moore as well. Bolz-Weber is the exception to the rule that ordained women in protestant mainline denominations rarely yield as much power or influence as conservative evangelical women such as Beth Moore. Moore has accumulated significant celebrity and influence in spite of the fact that she has led within a social structure of submission and complementarity. The rest of *The Preacher's Wife* supports this foundational thesis.

Conservative, evangelical women functioned as homemakers, musical and stage talent, counselors, and beauties in order to work within the confines of conservative theological guardrails. These women started conference movements, fashion lines, biblical study and counseling resources, and maintained a public image in order to accumulate power and influence that frequently outshined husbands or the influence of particular churches. Bowler insightfully indicates that these women occasionally bucked accepted expectations or conventions and leveraged crises to their advantage. Kay Warren, wife of Rick, became a voice of vulnerability after their son took his own life. Liz Curtis Higgs used her "large and lovely" body and personality to her advantage when "slim" was the normal expectation for women conference speakers. Of course, occasionally women found that when they broke taboos they were wrested from power. When Jen Hatmaker spoke out about LGBTQ, her books were pulled from Lifeway Christian Resource stores. Jennifer Knapp voluntarily backed out of her CCM career because she did not wish to keep up the appearance of celibate, straight, and waiting when in fact she was waiting for another woman. Throughout the late

twentieth and early twenty-first century, these women brokered a delicate balance between theology, culture, and influence.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Bowler's study was her section on the emergence of women's ministry. By default most women's ministries were championed by the pastor's wife. They became a unique subculture within conservative churches for women to teach and mentor other women. These subcultures produced "Christian" copies of secular values—modest fashion, self-help and diet books, and feminine Christian merchandise. They also created conference and retreat space for women to be vulnerable, check-out from homemaking responsibilities, and recharge for a day or two. Women who led or organized women's ministries or the non-for-profits that serviced them accrued quite a bit of influence in their churches and denominations. Returning to the instance of Beth Moore, this kind of influence has yielded both opposition and affirmation for Moore to exercise her power for continued socio-cultural and theological change in her own tradition.

Another constructive aspect of Bowler's study is how she is able to peel back the ostensible layers of her historical actresses and their activities by leveraging interviews and her own expert testimony about these subjects. Bowler shares about the piety of Christy Nockels, who is not just talent but a model for reflective and humble creativity. Bowler brings to life the edgy appeal of Nadia Bolz-Weber. Nonetheless, some actresses continue to feel flat such as Victoria Osteen, who quietly and prettily remains under the protective covering of Joel's arm.

Bowler's contribution to the history of women in ministry is significant and she has offered compelling evidence to support her argument. One lament about this history is it would have been very interesting to see a construction of how women have nestled their way into various teaching spheres outside the church and in the academy. Evangelical women have found a space for their teaching talent in biblical studies, history, counseling, and even in theology departments. There is a handy appendix providing some of the data about these women, but their stories are not accounted for in Bowler's work. I found this interesting in light of Bowler's personal narrative at the beginning of the work and her important role in the historical guild. *The Preacher's Wife* is a much-needed study that paves the way for further exploration as women in ministry continue to press through glass ceilings in the twenty-first century.

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Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart.* Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. Xxii + 290 pp. $21.99

Harold Senkbeil, Director of Doxology, the Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, has written a practical pastoral theology from the classic model of pastoring as the care and cure of souls. By care of souls, pastors attend to the whole person through the context of the spiritual life; by cure of souls, pastors attend to the Christlikeness of their parishioners. For both aspects of this work, pastors are given the tools to use, the Word of God and the sacraments, by Christ. Thus, pastors engage in the care and cure of souls by the application of Word and sacrament through the whole of life and in its critical moments. Because Christ is the pastor who has given these tools, Senkbeil argues that pastors consider themselves sheepdogs for Christ.

The whole pastoral life—its rhythms, activities, pace, practices, etc.—lives out this vocation. Senkbeil calls this the pastoral *habitus*—a way of life. Senkbeil illustrates the pastoral *habitus* using mainly his father but also his mother and their way of life on a farm. Rather—their way of life *as farmers.* Senkbeil's father had a nose for farming—a disposition that both fostered and facilitated a set of skills that was the farming vocation. Likewise, the pastor "has a nose" for his people in this way of life, in this *habitus*.

As Senkbeil fleshes out this theology, there is an expected tension. Pastors are tools of Christ, but at the same time pastors are agents whose action matters. Senkbeil writes, "The Holy Spirit doesn't work through you as a person, but through the tools you've been given by Jesus for the blessing of his church and for the benefit of all the world: the gospel and sacraments" (p. 28). At the same time, Senkbeil holds that Jesus has "entrusted into [the pastor's] all too human and very flawed mouth and hands the gospel and the sacraments by which the Holy Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify his church on earth" (p. 30), maintaining profound belief the action of the pastor. In one of several poignant and powerful personal stories, Senkbeil writes, I tended Sarah and her family with the only tools I had been given: the firm sure promises of the word of God and his precious sacraments" (p. 50). So, Senkbeil can write of *his* tending, but using the "only tools" he had been given. Readers might consider *The Care of Souls* to be a book written in this tension: While the pastor has all the tools they need, there remain models of people who have developed the pastoral *habitus* and there remain skills that allow the deft use of these tools. Practical-theological topics covered under this mindset include exercise, spiritual warfare, prayer, communion, baptism, counsel, sexuality, and blessing.

Because this book lives in the tension, readers should be mindful of their posture when reading it. Yes, the book is practical—but not for basic management skills. Yes, the book is theological—but the reader coming to it expecting a biblical exegesis of the pastor will only find a *total* of eighteen resources in the Works Cited section. Instead, Senkbeil's theology, richly

grounded in his Lutheran theology, is focused on the practices of preaching, prayer, sacraments, and pastoral presence. Readers will find a book that is the *habitus* of a pastoral life put to paper. Not only is the book richly, theologically practical, it *practices*: it is a pastoral book. When Senkbeil writes, "I wrote [this book] just for you" (p. xvii), the reader quickly agrees—and *feels* under Senkbeil's pastoral care and ministry.

While the book is Lutheran in flavor, readers from various traditions may engage it. An emphasis on conscience, guilt, and forgiveness of sin is to be expected, but a Wesleyan with a strong theology of personal holiness and sanctification such as me could still have written (though not as well), "[Pastors] are called to be holy, yet we can only become holy and maintain our holiness as we share in God's holiness by participation in his divine life. He doesn't expect us, nor are we able, to come up with our own sanctification by working harder at it" (p. 164). Holiness is God's grace—and so is the pastoral life: both its call and its gift to the church. This is a book filled with faith. With anything but a blind eye to shifting cultural norms, Senkbeil believes in the pastorate because Senkbeil believes in the Christ who calls men to be his sheepdogs and who uses tools he has given to these sheepdogs to care and cure souls.

Educators and potential readers will want to be aware that *Care of Souls* is written to men. While not explicitly argued, Senkbeil seems to believe that only men should be pastors and writes to men. With this in mind, female readers seeking a pastoral theology and educators in traditions that ordain women will need to be selective with the text and/or position readers to obtain maximal benefit. And yet they should because this is a book rich with practical, theological wisdom, often illustrated with personal experience. Keeping with Senkbeil's language, it, too, is a tool that the Chief Shepherd will use in the formation of his sheepdogs who care for his flock.

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Edward L. Smither. *Christian Mission: A Concise Global History.* Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press, 2019. 384 pp. $26.94 (hardcover).

The globalized nature of the world means that the contexts in which pastor theologians minister are constantly changing. The landscape of the United States will no longer be majority White, and the locus of Christianity is no longer the United States. Pastor theologians must not only remain attentive to these demographic changes, but also be cognizant of *how* these changes have come about. Ed Smither's latest work equips pastors

and leaders with a succinct understanding of how the gospel has moved throughout the world and underscores the global nature of Christianity.

Smither's retelling of the history of global mission is divided into six chapters, each of which explore not only different eras, but what was taking place in different parts of the globe. The narrative that Smither seeks to tell does not follow "traditional" accounts, which tend to emphasize how the gospel came to Europe and North America and *then* the rest of the world. "Unfortunately, the trend among Western students of church and mission history is to focus so much on early Christianity in the Roman Empire that they overlook what was going on in the rest of the world" (29). Smither will describe how the gospel came to Rome, Germania, Gaul, and Ireland in his chapter on the early church, but then also describe movements in Edessa, Mesopotamia, India and China. You read about the Dominicans of Western Europe in the early medieval period, but also read about Timothy of Baghdad, who reasoned with Muslims and endured challenging questions from caliphs, such as "How could God have sex with a woman and father a son?" (62). In the chapter on early modern missions, you will read about Catholic missions to the Americas, but also the efforts of Pietists to contextualize Lutheran Christianity in India. This rhythm of treading familiar historical ground and then exploring how Christianity moved East characterizes much of Smither's book. In his words, for much of the church's history, "the gospel traveled further east than it did west" (29).

The final chapter of Smither's book explores what mission looks like *from* the majority world. Smither writes, "The profile of the missionary is no longer William Carey or David Livingstone but global workers from Korea, Brazil, Nigeria, India, and the Philippines" (179). While much of Smither's work subverts more "traditional" narratives around the history of mission, his final chapter is his capstone. The realities of globalization and the growth of immigrant churches have shifted the locus of Christianity to the global south, and missionaries are coming to minister *to* the Americans and Europeans. Historical realities have allowed Brazilian and Korean workers into Iran, and Chinese Christians into North Korea (193). "Since Argentina has never sent troops to the Middle East, they do not share a bitter history in the region as North Americans do" (193). The nature of Christian mission is now more fluid and less Western in nature, bringing opportunities for gospel witness than was previously thought possible.

Smither does not gloss over the many missional failures and atrocities the church has committed in the past. In discussing the crusades, Smither writes, "the so-called Christian kings of Europe united with the pope in a single-minded obsession to take control of the Holy Land" (63). In the same section, he writes, "at the height of Christendom, the church allowed the political aims of the state to overtake its Christian vision, and they embraced their own form of Christian *jihad"* (63). In his chapter on early modern missions (1500-1800), Smither points out that Christianity had become "inextricably linked with imperial motivations," and that this ideological partnership branded Christianity as a "western religion" (96). In describing the *encomienda* (a Spanish labor system), Smither points out that

while some colonists believed the system to have evangelistic possibilities, it was actually a form of slavery (87). Furthermore, Smither plainly suggests that "Columbus's mission of discovery and conquest paired with Isabella's reforms in Spain to reveal that religious devotion, political power, and even violent compulsion were not viewed as incompatible values" (77). Honesty regarding the connection between mission and colonization is punctuated throughout this work, which undercuts some of the celebratory narratives we often tell about mission here in the West. I commend Smither's honesty and careful scholarship in this regard, as it helps us gain a more realistic perspective on the history of mission.

Admittedly, until recently, I had very few books on missiology on my shelf. But I saw a deep need to understand the history of Christian movements in order to locate myself and my theological tradition within the Great Conversation. Smither's work helped me garner a more complex understanding of global missions and renew a sense of missional responsibility in my ministry. I recommend this book to pastor theologians who want a deeper, more honest take on the history of global mission, one that challenges us to see where God is moving and become more responsible partners in this work.

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Lauren F. Winner. *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018. 230 pp. $18.00

"Eucharist, prayer, baptism: These things are blighted" (137). So runs Lauren Winner's provocative and contrarian thesis, contesting the fashionable emphasis on formative practices in both postliberal academic theology and popular Christian spiritual writing. In light of a Christian doctrine of sin and its corrupting effects, Winner argues for the "depristination" (though not abandonment) of practices as formative of virtue. On her account, Christian practices are indeed gifts, but they are damaged gifts that therefore also cause damage.

Importantly, Winner contends that the damage caused by Christian practices— specifically in this book the practices of eucharist, prayer and baptism—is not simply arbitrary or incidental to the practices themselves (although it can also be that). Rather, the damage caused is often "characteristic" damage, damage that belongs to the very form of the thing that is damaged. Her account relies on an understanding that all creatures have distinctive God-given forms. This is coupled with the Augustinian notion of sin as *privatio boni*. Together, these doctrines mean that creaturely forms

are deformed by sin in ways that are characteristic to the form of the thing. The problem is not the practice in itself: eucharist, baptism and prayer are good gifts of God. Rather, it is that as fallen people we are damaged and so "receive things in a damaged way" (145).

The power and cogency of Winner's thesis is perhaps most easily grasped in her account of prayer as a damaged and therefore damaging practice. Winner gives several examples of the way prayer can become deformed, such as a church prayer chain that becomes a vehicle for spreading gossip under the guise of prayer requests. However, the bulk of this chapter focuses on accounts of prayer in diaries of slave-owning women in the antebellum and Civil War-era South. In the context of managing their slave-owning households, women like Keziah Brevard frequently asked God to grant them patience with and forgiveness towards their slaves. Yet these prayers sit uncomfortably alongside harsh criticisms, crude insults and severe violence towards these same slaves. Similarly, the prayers often ask God to teach the slaves humility and obedience. These prayers are the inward expression of a form of Christian teaching that emphasised to the slaves the Christian duty of obedience to their masters and trained the slaves to pray primarily for obedience. In this way distorted Christian teaching and piety served to reinforce and support the socio-political regime of the antebellum South.

In Winner's argument, these deformations of prayer are not incidental to what prayer is, but arise from a corruption of prayer's characteristic form. After all, in prayer we are encouraged to bring our desires to God and seek his help. This is because the chief good we seek in prayer is friendship with God, and friendship only flourishes where honest communication reigns. But what happens when our desires are for corrupt things? Or when our desires are—often unwittingly—shaped by and given in service to a corrupt social order? Even the wise teaching that the content of our prayers should be governed by the Lord's Prayer as this gives us Christ's own instruction regarding what to pray for is not enough. For the heart is deceitful and we are often blind to ways in which are distorted desires are out of step with the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

If the chapter on prayer is the most compelling example of the book's thesis, the chapter on the eucharist is the least convincing. Winner recounts the horrific history of allegations of Jewish host desecration in medieval Europe. Repeatedly, false allegations were made of Jews stealing a consecrated communion wafer and seeking to destroy it. There are tales of consecrated hosts being stabbed with knives and pouring forth blood, and other stories of crucifixes emerging from the hosts and hovering above them. However, such were the alleged powers of the transubstantiated host that it could not be destroyed and so overcame these assaults. Tragically, these fables then led to vicious violence against Jewish communities, often resulting in multiple murders. Winner argues that these evils, shocking as they are, are a characteristic deformation of the eucharist. This is because both the eucharist and the violence against medieval Europe's Jews relate to Christian contact with Jewish flesh: the Jewish flesh of Christ, physically

present in the consecrated host and the Jewish flesh of those persecuted for allegedly desecrating the host.

However, although it is sobering to be reminded of the Church's complicity in such evils, it is better to view this as a wicked deformity of an already deformed understanding of the eucharist and the mode of Christ's presence to his people in the sacrament. For the sake of the overall argument of this particularly book, it might have been more immediately beneficial to consider ways in which the eucharist as sacramental meal in which Christ welcomes sinners to feast can be distorted. On the one hand, Communion can do damage by practices that unduly restrict who is welcome to the Table in a particular Church (for example, by requiring a particular view of sacramental presence in order to participate). On the other hand, it can do damage through practices that are unduly lax and fail to exercise adequate discipline, so welcoming the impenitent to the Table.

This criticism of the particularities of Winner's chapter on eucharist should not blind us to the value of this richly written and challenging book. *The Dangers of Christian Practice* is a helpful corrective to unduly optimistic embrace of the positive formative potential of Christian practices. Winner is correct that a robust doctrine of sin renders such optimism naïve.

Nevertheless, helpful though it is, Winner's own account of Christian practices as *damaged* goods remains within a basically postliberal mode. This is seen formally in the resources she treats as authoritative in developing normative Christian accounts of baptism and eucharist. She does draws on Scripture, not least in a particularly insightful and nuanced treatment of the status of families in the Gospels. But she also treats a range of historical liturgical practices as normative, thus appearing to elide the distinction between God's Word and ecclesial practice. Materially, in her final chapter, although she emphasises eucharist, prayer and baptism as God's gifts, given for human use, she is less clear that the very action of the sacraments and indeed of prayer is principally God's action (though without effacing the actions of creatures as secondary causes). That is, the sacraments are not just gifts given to be used, they are themselves instruments by which God distributes grace. What seems to be lacking here is an operative theology of the Spirit as the one who works to renew our fallen nature, not least through the sacraments and in our prayers as his gracious instruments. Reflection on this might then fill out the prescription for our response to the damaged nature of our practices. Certainly Winner is right that reflection on how we shape and are shaped by damaged practices should call forth human acts of confession, repentance and lament. However, more than this, it should call forth prayer for the renewing power of the Creator Spirit to come and re-form us and our appropriation of the practices of the gospel.

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Tim Chester. *Truth We Can Touch.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2020; 176 pp.; $17.99

Why is that when evangelicals talk about baptism and communion, they tend to talk more about what they do *not* mean than what they do mean? According to Tim Chester, one possible reason is because evangelicals are still fighting the debates of the 16th and 19th centuries. This reason paired with modernity's influence on evangelicalism has left us anything but certain about the sacraments. What is needed, then, is a constructive account of the meaning and value of these physical acts. In seeking to provide such an account, Chester offers six chapters, with introductory and concluding chapters.

Chester begins by showing how baptism and communion are God's covenantal promises in physical forms. Thus, the sacraments have more than just subjective meaning. Utilizing Scripture, Chester seeks to demonstrate this by telling "the history of the world in twelve meals" (p. 55). For Chester, the final meal—the Last Supper—indicates that the believer's future is a feast in resurrected physical bodies in the presence of Jesus, which means that the physicality of the sacraments is a "reminder of the physicality of salvation" (p. 67). This implies that the sacraments are more than mere reminders of God's promises, but "genuine means of grace" (p. 72). For Chester, this indicates that God mediates his presence through the sacraments.

Yet, *how* should we understand this mediated presence? This is the question Chester moves to address by briefly surveying Catholic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian views. Following this survey, Chester moves to discuss—and subsequently champion—Calvin's view. Thus, while Christ may not be present in the sacraments physically, He is present spiritually (p. 97). As such, communion is a true "embrace of Christ" via the Holy Spirit (p. 105). And though Chester desires evangelicals to *move beyond* remembrance, he does not desire for them to *move on* from it, since remembering is an essential act of "covenant renewal" (p. 124).

Further, baptism and communion should shape our lives in significant ways (p. 125). Although baptism happens only once, each day believers ought to live into their changed identity. And by participating in communion regularly, believers should be shaped and formed in their character, attitudes, and service to the world. Finally, since baptism and communion are communal acts belonging to Christ's body, both baptism and communion ought to be reserved for the faithful. Chester, then, concludes the work by suggesting that the sacraments in general—and communion in particular—presents the opportunity for "re-enchanting" our world. In his words, "God's immanence in the world through the Spirit in Communion points us beyond this material world to the transcendence of God" (p. 164).

Therefore, Chester's book lays out a compelling vision for evangelicals to reconsider the significance of the sacraments. Chester's use of Scripture is particularly robust, and his utilization of sources from various Reformed

traditions makes it an even stronger work. It is also lucidly structured and clearly written. Nevertheless, as with most books, there are parts which elicit questions and points of dialogue and, for me, there are several. For example, Chester's claim of speaking *to* and *for* evangelicals ought to be examined given his narrow use of dialogue partners. Though he converses with many of the great reformers such as Luther and Calvin, he fails to consult some of the major figures within what Donald Dayton has referred to as "classical evangelicalism", which found its most distinctive expression in revivalist America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[1] While some might not consider this a weakness of the work, it might dissatisfy others, particularly those within Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations. Furthermore, I was left wondering why Chester opted for closed communion given his prior remarks on Jesus' meals with tax collectors. For instance, though he states that communion "is one moment where we draw a line in the sand" and the occasion that reveals "there are people who are in Christ and people outside of Christ" (p. 158), he also says that "by eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus shows us in the most tangible way that God welcomes his enemies" (p. 63). Perhaps most perplexing is when he states: "In the house of Levi, Jesus ate with God's enemies. And at every communion, Jesus welcomes us to the table" (p. 68). Therefore, further clarification on this point could have been valuable. Other minor quibbles could be mentioned, such as the use of the mechanistic metaphor "means of grace", which suggests that grace is a kind of created substance, rather than a personal encounter with God.

Yet despite these considerations, I am positive about the book. I believe Chester's voice is a needed one among the current chorus urging evangelicals towards a more sacramental understanding of baptism and communion. As such, pastor-theologians will benefit from *Truth We Can Touch*, as it may serve as a succinct primer on the sacraments. Given its readability, well-read lay people might also benefit from its contents.

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[1] Donald W. Dayton, "The Limits of Evangelicalism," *in The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 48.