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Essays on Spiritual Formation

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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. In an example of theological ressourcement in service of pastoral ministry, Chris Bruno repristinates an Augustinian reading of the Good Samaritan to show its value for spiritual formation. Joey Cochrane brings theological anthropology into conversation with technology and transhumanism as he examines the theological significance of data. Jeff Hubing argues that the primary goal of formation is shaping disciples for life in the kingdom, and offers strategies for this from Acts 2:42. Then, in a complementary article, Edward Klink argues from a robust Reformed ecclesiology for the importance of prioritising the Church in practices and priorities of spiritual formation. Babatunde Oladimeji offers a challenging and important African perspective as he considers what can be learned from the Nigerian Church about the importance of mentoring for spiritual formation. In an article at once exegetical and pastoral, B. G. White reflects on depression in the light of Christ's experience in Gethsemane. Finally, Todd Wilson articulates the importance of an integrated approach

to formation that takes seriously our embodiment and also the recent discoveries of neuropsychology.

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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ST. AUGUSTINE'S GOOD NEIGHBOR: INTERPRETING PARABLES AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I attended an academically solid, theologically conservative Christian high school. In that school, I learned many glorious truths about Christ and Scripture that I treasure to this day. But when we learned about biblical hermeneutics, any hint of symbolism, allegory, or typology in the Old Testament was quickly quashed because it was not perceived to line up with historical, literal, grammatical meaning of the text.

Neither did our instructors limit the requirement of strict literalism to the Old Testament only. When reading the Gospels, the parables of Jesus were to be interpreted as "earthly stories with heavenly meanings." With a kind of analogy built into this definition, we had to allow for some sort of symbolism, but this symbolism was strictly limited to the main point of the parable. Every parable had one, and only one, single point. Any details that did not serve that single meaning were disregarded.

I am likely overstating the woodenness of the literalism that I learned, but, according to a principle I learned from the same Bible teacher I had in high school, the teacher's doubt is often the student's denial. I was taught to be suspicious of symbolic readings of the parables, and this led me to be antagonistic to all but the most literalistic interpretations.

A problem with this way of reading the parables is that Jesus himself encourages a symbolic reading of his parables. Moreover, failing to read the parables this way often keeps us from seeing the very points that the parables make. This will then limit the ways that both the divine and human authors intended the parables to shape us.

In the case of one of Jesus' best-known parables, there is a certain irony to this, for if we do not read the parable of the Good Samaritan in a symbolic way, then we may fail to understand the divinely intended meaning and application of the parable. That is to say, we may both fail to see who the "Good Neighbor" truly is and fail to be good neighbors ourselves. In order to evaluate the symbolic interpretation of this parable, we will begin by considering one of the best-known but also frequently-rejected

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interpretations of the parable.[2] From this, we will consider the implications of such a reading for spiritual formation.

AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

St. Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan has been a perennial whipping boy for scholars who argue against symbolic and allegorical interpretation or its abuses. In recent years, there has been a trend toward recovering Augustine's reading, but many continue to waive off his interpretation of particular symbols without considering his larger interpretive method or goals.[3] I do not aim to evaluate in this short essay whether all of the details of Augustine's interpretation are correct. [4] Rather, I want to consider whether his general interpretive approach is more faithful to the patterns that we see in the Gospels themselves. If this is the case, it will give us better insight on how to answer the question that is asked of Jesus in the prologue to this parable: "And who then is my neighbor?" (Lk. 10:29).

We will begin by considering Augustine's interpretation. His summary of the symbolic elements of the parable is worth citing in full.

> *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho*; Adam himself is meant; *Jerusalem* is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; *Jericho* means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. *Thieves* are the devil and his angels. *Who stripped him*, namely; of his immortality; *and beat him*, by persuading him to sin; *and left him half-dead*, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called *half-dead*. The *priest* and the *Levite* who saw him and passed by,

[2] Joseph Fitzmyer argues that the story is not a parable per se, but rather "it is better understood as an 'example' (in rhetoric, *exemplum*). It supplies a practical model for Christian conduct with radical demands and the approval/rejection of certain modes of action (*The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, Anchor Bible Commentary, volume 28A [New York: Doubleday, 1985], 883). However, this is based on an overly narrow definition of a parable. Although the parable of the prodigal Son is not labeled as a παραβολή in Luke, it clearly contains symbolic elements, for the father and the two brothers likely symbolize God the Father, the religious leaders, and the "sinners" in Israel.

[3] For an overview of recent interpretation of the parable, see Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 733–35.

[4] It should be noted, however, that Augustine's general interpretive approach was not a type of unrestrained allegory as it is sometimes characterized; he advocated reading the "literal sense" of historical narrative wherever possible. Moreover, he was often responding to the decoupling of the historical and allegorical senses often practices by groups like the Manichees. See Roland J. Teske, "Introduction," in *Saint Augustine On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, The Fathers of the Church 84 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 27. Thanks to my colleague Richard Shenk for directing me toward this point.

> signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament which could profit nothing for salvation. *Samaritan* means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The *binding of the wounds* is the restraint of sin. *Oil* is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The *beast* is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us. The being *set upon the beast* is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The *inn* is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage. The *morrow* is after the resurrection of the Lord. The *two pence* are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The *innkeeper* is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him "to live by the gospel.[5]

For many modern interpreters, this understanding is preposterous. Laughable, even. If a student at a modern university or seminary suggested this reading in an exegetical paper, he or she would be likely to fail. I. Howard Marshall insists, "This was surely not the original meaning of the story, and the allegorizing involved is unnatural."[6] It is certainly true that this reading is unnatural to our modern ears.[7] What could have inspired Augustine to read this parable in such a way?

I wonder whether we are too quick to dismiss this reading simply because it sounds unnatural to us. If we dig below the surface, we might find Augustine's interpretation of the parable more plausible than it may initially sound to us . This is not to say we should accept his explanation of every symbol. Rather, my argument will be that Augustine's inclination to read the parable symbolically, when perhaps adjusted and grounded in the text , is more faithful to the intended meaning of the parable itself.

As we make this argument, we will briefly consider three factors. First, the Gospel of Luke points us toward seeing the Good Samaritan as a picture of Christ. Second, in the only place that Jesus gives extended instruction on interpreting parables, he teaches us to read them symbolically. Finally, our view of the divine authorship of Scripture should press us toward reading the parables symbolically. From this, we will consider how a symbolic interpretation of this parable (and parables in general) might result in more robust application and spiritual formation.

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[5] Augustine, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, II, 19; Abridged by C. H. Dodd in *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribners, 1961), 1-2.

[6] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 450.

[7] To be fair, there are a number of modern interpreters who argue for a symbolic reading of some kind (Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 734, n. 83). However, the overwhelming majority of modern Luke commentaries argue against an allegorical or symbolic reading.

THE PARABLE IN CONTEXT

First, we have a clear warrant to see a parallel between Jesus and the Good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel. This point is derived largely from the observations of Mikeal Parsons. He begins with a simple linguistic observation: "The term ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, 'he had compassion,' occurs three times in all of Luke/Acts; in the other two instances, only God's agent, Jesus (Lk. 7:13), and a figure for God, the father of the Prodigal (Lk. 15:20), show compassion."[8] Therefore, though the evidence is limited, Luke and Acts view compassion as a divine prerogative.

Next, Parsons demonstrates that in Luke's narrative, the parable is the first in a series of stories that illustrate love for God and love for neighbor. The stories alternate between Jesus as the example of loving God and neighbor and another person following his example (Mary in Luke 10:38–42 and a friend asking for bread in Luke 11:5–13). For the pattern to work, Jesus' own example must come before those of others who love God and neighbor.[9] If this is the case, the pattern in this section is as follows:
A. *On loving neighbors* (Parable of the Good Samaritan, Lk. 10:29–37)—example: Samaritan as Christ figure

B. *On loving the Lord* (Mary and Martha, Lk. 10:38–42)—example: Mary

B. *On loving the Lord* (the Lord's Prayer, Lk.11:1–4)—example: Jesus
A. *On loving neighbors/friends* (Parable of the Friend at Midnight, Lk. 11:5–13)—example: the friend seeking bread.10

Both the language and the structure of Luke's Gospel are pointing to a Christological focus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We will return to this point below, but this reading does not mean that the Samaritan cannot also be a moral example, but to insist that the Good Samaritan is not a symbol for Jesus fails to see the parable's christological focus in context.

JESUS' INTENT IN PARABLES

Not only does the Gospel of Luke point us toward the Samaritan as a symbol for Jesus, Jesus' own instruction about interpreting parables in Matthew should encourage us to look for symbolism throughout the parables.[11] Snodgrass observes that parables are "stories with intent, the

[8] Mikeal C. Parsons, "The Character of the Good Samaritan: A Christological Reading," 126. David Garland observes of Luke 7:13, "For the first time the narrator describes Jesus as 'the Lord.' ...It reflects the Christian confession that Jesus is more than a great prophet and he has been exalted Lord (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4)" (David E. Garland, *Luke* [Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 302).

[9] Parsons, "The Character of the Good Samaritan: A Christological Reading," 127–28.

[10] Parsons, "The Character of the Good Samaritan: A Christological Reading," 123.

[11] I recognize that the parables cannot be read monolithically. In his comprehensive treatment of Jesus' parables, Snodgrass notes, "Hardly anything said about parables—whether defining them or explaining their characteristics—is true of all of them" (*Stories with Intent,* 7). However, Snodgrass recognizes that there is enough commonality that ties the parables

communicative intent of Jesus."[12] Wherever possible, we should consider Jesus' stated intent in his parables. The Gospels rarely include Jesus' own interpretation of his parables; therefore, in those places that we find further explanation, we must pay careful attention.

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells what are commonly called the parable of the sower (or the seeds) and the parable of the weeds. In almost every other parable, Jesus leaves the interpretation to his hearers to comprehend (or fail to comprehend, as the case may be). The parables in Matthew 13 are the only places in the Gospels where Jesus gives his disciples substantial instruction about how to interpret his parables. We have to be careful that we don't expect all of the parables to fit the same mold, but the uniqueness of these explanations provides a window into how Jesus and the apostles expected us to interpret the parables.

We need not consider all of the details of these parables to see that Jesus interprets both of them symbolically. In the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of the kingdom, the birds are the evil one, the rocky ground is persecution and tribulation, the thorns are the cares of this world and the deceit of riches (Mt. 13:18–23). In the explanation of the parable of the weeds in Matthew 18, the symbolism is even more explicit:

> The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (Matt 18:37–43, ESV).

Jesus and the Evangelists expect us, as a rule, to read his parables looking for symbolism throughout.[13] If we take our cue from Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 13, our default reading of the parables should be symbolic.

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together to classify them together and to define a parable as "*an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade*" (Stories with Intent, 9; emphasis original). The instructions of Jesus in Matthew 13 help us understand how the analogical features of a parable function.

[12] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 3.

[13] Because different writers define them differently, I am intentionally avoiding the hard distinction between symbol and allegory that many make. For example, C. S. Lewis writes, "Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression. It belongs to the form of poetry, more than to its content, and it is learned from the practice of the ancients" (*The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 60). For simplicity and to avoid confusion, however, I prefer to avoid the label "allegory." I'm also avoiding the language of "figural interpretation" used by Richard Hays,

THE DIVINE INTENT

My third point is less of an observation from the Gospels themselves and more of a cluster of hermeneutical presuppositions that support the first two points. In short, while interpreting parables, the nature of stories combined with a commitment to the divine authorship of Scripture should incline toward a symbolic meaning.

The story form of the parable should push us toward seeing symbolic meaning. If the only point of the parable of the Good Samaritan was "Love your neighbor even when you don't want to," Jesus or the Evangelists were very capable of expressing this command in other ways. Yet stories communicate truth in a different way than propositional statements do, and this communication often includes symbolic meaning.[14] Note that this does not mean *any* possible meaning; the meaning of the symbols is still determined by the context (both broad and narrow). As is the case with all Scripture, this context includes the whole canon. The near context typically provides more direct connections, but if the Bible has a single divine author, then we must allow for the whole Bible to interpret the whole Bible.

Moreover, if we are serious about the doctrine of inspiration, we should read the Bible differently than we read other books. The Scriptures are divine communication; theologians have long recognized that any of our knowledge about God is incomplete and comes to us by way of analogy or metaphor.[15] If we understand God by way of analogy, the analogies of the parables could be epistemological or hermeneutical training grounds. They create patterns of thinking about God that are often analogically understood.[16] That is to say, we read the Bible not as a scientific manual, as many modern readers unconsciously tend to do. The Holy Scriptures are not "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." Instead, they are the witness of the Triune God to his work in the world and the ongoing means through

for he primarily applies it to Old Testament readings. See Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2015).

[14] This is not meant to imply that the symbolic meaning is any less true or binding on the church than propositional statements; both communicate truly, and both, when properly interpreted and applied, are binding on the church.

[15] The analogical nature of our knowledge of God is often traced to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.13.5. More recently, in his discussion of the doctrine of analogy, Michael Horton describes the difficulty of human language in relating to God: "Unless we are willing to ascribe to God (in a univocal sense) all attributes of human personhood, predications must be analogical. Human language cannot transcend its finitude, so when God reveals himself in human language, he draws on human analogies to lead us by the hand to himself. It is correct description, but not univocal description" ("Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 45*, no. 2 [June 2002]: 324).

[16] The apostles themselves read the Old Testament in symbolic ways. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:4, when he speaks of the Israelites drinking from the rock in the wilderness, Paul explains that this rock was Christ. I cannot see how an overly literalistic reading of Exodus can lead to this interpretation.

which he is present and at work in the world. Moreover, the symbolic nature of the story-form of parables communicates this reality differently than the epistles or straightforward historical narrative. Therefore, when we read the parables, our primary task is not to carve away all the extraneous details to get to the single point of the parable. Instead, we should read the parables as a testimony of God's work in Christ and expect to see the presence of Christ in all of the layers of meaning.

Far too often, even evangelical biblical scholars treat the stories of the Bible little differently than twentieth-century German higher-critical scholars did. However, since parables and stories communicate differently than propositional statements do, if we recognize the parables as stories with divine intent, we should expect to see divinely-intended symbolism. To faithfully honor the intent of the parable, we must not seek to demythologize them, removing the husk of the story and symbols to find the kernel of real truth. After all, that would be an unneighborly way to read the text.

A NEIGHBORLY READING

With these preliminary observations in place, we can now return to the parable of the Good Samaritan. From this, we can consider the implications of how the parables more broadly might form us. If we grant that Luke's Gospel points us toward the Samaritan as a figure of Christ, that parables are primarily to be read symbolically, and that the nature of Scripture in general supports a symbolic reading of parables in particular, then Augustine's interpretation is not unnatural to the Bible itself.

I am not persuaded by all of the symbols that Augustine suggests. I am persuaded, however, that if we are instructing members of our congregations to read the parables with the grain of the Gospels, we will find ourselves more in tune with Augustine than with the non-symbolic interpretations that I learned in my formative years.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

To be candid, I am not entirely certain which of the symbols Augustine suggests are correct and which are not. Moreover, I am not persuaded by all aspects of his allegorical reading of the parable. In this essay, I have tried to couch aspects of his interpretation in more exegetical observations.[17] As a twenty-first century evangelical Protestant, I am not very attracted to the allegorical interpretation that the payment left at the inn represents Paul's counsel of celibacy. But this may simply be my bias showing. Regardless, my concern here has been to show that, regardless of whether he gets the details right or not, Augustine's symbolic interpretation is not unnatural.

[17] Mike Higton observes, "It may be that the critics and commentators who deride Augustine's allegorical interpretation will be a great resource here, as a constant reminder of the intractable historical messiness of the parable" ("Boldness and Reserve: A Lesson from St. Augustine," *Anglican Theological Review 85*, no. 3 [Summer 2003]: 455).

What is clear, however, is that Jesus Christ is *the* Good Neighbor in the parable. This reading fits both the evidence for the Christological focus of the parable as well as the interpretive guidelines that we have in the Gospels. This is what we might call a pedagogical-participationist understanding of the parable.[18] In his parables, the Lord Jesus intends to instruct in such a way that they see both his unique character as savior and the moral example of the parable. He is *the* Good Neighbor, and if we are reading the Gospels in a neighborly way (with the grain of both the human and divine authors), then we will seek to participate in and follow his example.

So which parts of Augustine's interpretation fit best? First and foremost, Jesus Christ himself is *the* true good neighbor, who rescues his enemies, brings them to safety, and commits himself to their good. Beyond this, identifying the symbols in the parable is more difficult. However, if parables in the Gospels are generally symbolic, then we should consider other possible symbols in the story.[19]

The priest and the Levite may symbolize the limits of the law or the failure of the leaders to keep the law, for the lawyer asking the question that precipitates the parable has failed to understand the law (Lk. 10:25). The inn may indeed represent the church or the new covenant community, where we are set on the path toward sanctification, for the first part of Luke 10 is focused on the sending of the seventy-two. Before the seventy-two were sent, Jesus sent the twelve on a similar mission (Lk. 9:1–6), and most interpreters see a link between the missions of the twelve and the seventy-two.[20] Both are focused on the reconstitution of Israel and the mission of the new covenant community. As James Edwards observes, "If Jesus' choice of twelve apostles signified a reconstitution of Israel…it seems equally probable that the commissioning of the seventy(-two) signified an extension of his ministry through a larger secondary cohort."[21] If the twelve and the seventy-two are closely linked, then it makes good sense to see symbols of both the larger community and the apostles in the parable that follows.

Therefore, the innkeeper, rather than a specific apostle, may represent the apostles and prophets (or perhaps the Holy Scriptures they produced) that guide us while we wait for the return of the Samaritan. Again, the sending of the twelve as the first representatives of Israel may give us

[18] I am using "participation" in two senses here. We participate with Christ first through our union with him, which then allows us to subsequently participate in his moral example. This pattern is usually described as justification followed by sanctification.

[19] I offer these suggestions with the realization that some will discount these symbols as overly speculative and others will be frustrated because I am not going far enough in my symbolic interpretation. To this I can only confess my inability to please everyone.

[20] See, for example, James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 304.

[21] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*. Edwards links Luke 10 to the Number 11 account of Moses commissioning elders in Israel.

warrant to see a link to the apostles here. Thus, just as the seventy-two and the twelve are closely linked, so also are the inn and the innkeeper.

Finally, the Good Samaritan bound up the man's wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and then brought him to an inn (Lk.15:34). Christ does not leave us to ourselves, but instead provides healing. The parable may suggest that Christ provides both physical healing, perhaps represented by oil (Jas. 5:14), and spiritual healing, represented by the wine of the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 10:16).

SYMBOLISM AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In light of this admittedly limited symbolic reading, we can turn to the question of how this hermeneutic informs our application of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In short, an exegetically-sensitive symbolic reading of this parable provides us with a richer well for transformation and application.

First, consider what this parable might teach us about Jesus, our Good Neighbor. Rather than remaining aloof to us, he "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7), and came to dwell among us (Jn. 1:14). Contrast this with the leaders of Israel and even the law itself. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side (Lk. 15:31–32). Rather than being a kingdom of priests who were to bring the blessing of Abraham to the word, Israel failed in her commission. Therefore, as the people of God, our lack of compassion for others outside the covenant community not only fails them, but it is also a betrayal of our calling to be the new Israel, the ones who bring the blessing of Abraham to the world. The threat of judgment remains for those who follow the path of the priest and the Levite from Luke 15.

Note as well that the injured man's healing was not completed until he brought the man to the inn, the place where he would wait for the Good Samaritan's return. There the Samaritan provides for continued nourishment from the innkeeper. If the inn symbolizes the church, and the innkeeper the apostolic witness, then we are reminded that the return of Jesus is assured to those who have been rescued by him, but that he has entrusted our healing to the ongoing apostolic witness provided in the context of his church, the covenant community.

If we grant these symbols are indeed part of the meaning of the parables, as the wider context in Luke and the other Gospels indicate, then the parable's usefulness for spiritual formation is greatly enhanced. Rather than simply saying, be a good neighbor, the parable is full of symbols that teach us what this actually looks like. To be a good neighbor, we follow the example of the Lord Jesus in meeting needs, both physical and spiritual, and bringing to his church, where they will be strengthened as they wait for his return.

We too ought to be good neighbors, for, having been rescued, healed, and restored by Christ, we are then called to follow his pattern in loving our neighbors well. The patterns in the Gospel of Luke indicate that we

are to follow the example of Christ in loving God and loving neighbors well. We have not fully understood the parable without reaching this application. To be a good neighbor, we must follow well in the steps of the Good Neighbor, our Lord Jesus Christ.[22]

READING PARABLES FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

If the Gospels lead us toward reading the parables in a simlar way to what we have suggested here, how then might this understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan help us read other parables symbolically for spiritual formation? While every parable will have unique features both in the parable itself and in its setting in the Gospel, we can suggest three considerations that might be applied to both the parable of the Good Samaritan and other parables as well.

First, we must read parables expecting to encounter biblical analogies and symbols. That is to say, have our eyes open to symbols that appear elsewhere in Scripture. For example, the oil and wine in Luke 10:34, while seeming to be insignificant, may take on greater significance when read in light of the place of oil and wine in the rest of the Bible.[23] So might also be the case for the inn or house to which the Samaritan brings the injured man. A house as a representation for the people of God or the covenant community is a familiar image (see 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). In the same way, images such as vineyards, seeds, and other agricultural terms, sheep, goats, and livestock, and weddings and similar feasts are common throughout both the Old and New Testament. Thus, we should read parables with our eyes and ears attuned to the symbolic world of the Bible. In this way, a symbolic reading of the parable will not simply be an exercise in reading our own ideas into the parable, but instead will allow all of Scripture to serve as the context of the parable.

Related to this, second, we should read parables in the light of the broader stories of redemptive history. In addition to looking for symbols that echo other parts of the Scriptures, we can ask the question, what story is this parable telling and where do we find this story elsewhere in the Scriptures? The parable of the Good Samaritan tells the story of an unexpected rescuer who binds up the wounds of an injured traveler and

[22] It is noteworthy that this interpretation fulfills Augustine's well-known dictum the necessary outcome of proper biblical interpretation: "Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought." (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 1.36.40). While there is more to be said about what constitutes proper biblical hermeneutics, it is certainly not less than this.

[23] The symbolism of wine in the Passover and the Lord's Supper links the blood of the Lamb and the salvation of the people of God. Oil appears often in the Old Testament, but it is less frequent in the New Testament. However, in Mark 6:13 and James 5:14, it is connected to physical healing.

brings him to a place to recover and await his return. As noted above, there are significant parallels to the gospel story. However, other parables tell other stories, or at least other angles of this story. The parable of the wicked tenants, for example, retells the story of Israel (see Mt. 21:33–46; Mk. 12:1–12; Lk. 20:9–19). The agriculture imagery, and especially the vineyard, clearly symbolize Israel. Moreover, the repeated rejection of servants sent to the vineyard from its owner, culminating in sending the son and heir, clearly bring to mind the story of Israel's history. Thus, we ought to interpret the parable of the tenants as a symbolic retelling of Israel's story.

Alongside interpreting the symbols and the story of the parables in light of the story of the rest of Scripture, my final suggestion focuses on how to apply the parables for spiritual formation. Briefly, we must read the parables both christologically and ecclesially. This accords with the first of Augustine's seven rules of biblical interpretation: Christ and his body are often interchangeable, so that what is true of Christ is also true of his body.[24] This principle is often described by modern biblical interpreters as "corporate solidarity."[25] As believers are united to Christ, they will increasingly follow in his steps, to use the language of 1 Peter 2:21. When we read the parables expecting Christ to be present, we should also expect the church to be present. What Jesus does, his body, the church, also does. Therefore, when we interpret the parables christologically, we ought also to interpret them ecclesially, with the result that the church of Christ is called to follow in the steps of Christ because of their union with Christ.

CONCLUSION

A common rule for the strictly literalistic approach to the Bible I learned growing up is, "If the plain sense makes good sense, then seek no other sense." The fundamental flaw with this dictum, however, is that it assumes what makes best sense to me is the plain sense. We make our own judgment about the "plain sense" the final arbiter of interpretation. However, our appeal to the "plain sense" may actually put us in a place of judgment over Scripture rather than letting our senses be reshaped by the Scripture. As we have observed here, however, letting the Scripture speak for itself may sometimes overturn what we first perceive to be the "plain sense."

To be clear, I do not intend to argue that our hermeneutic for reading parables applies to all parts of Scripture or the Gospels in the same way. Rather, our discussion has been focused on a proper interpretation and application of the parables. Our observations from the Gospel of Luke, the other Gospels, and the wider context of Scripture have led us to conclude

[24] From Christopher Levy, *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation: The Senses of Scripture in Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 24; summarizing *De doctrina christiana*, 3.30-37.

[25] E.g., G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 96–97.

that a symbolic reading of parables in general and of the parable of the Good Samaritan in particular are correct and therefore most fruitful for spiritual formation.

To be rightly formed by the parable of the Good Samaritan, we must understand and apply its symbolic meaning well. As the Venerable Bede, who follows Augustine's reading, concluded, the parable instructs us both in "how the Son of God deigned to become a neighbor to us by taking on human nature" and "in the mercy to be shown to our neighbor."[26] That is to say, the command to love our neighbor as ourselves is seen first in the example of Christ himself and from that in the church's application of that command. As we have seen, understanding the parable in this way does not require us to choose between either the Christological reading *or* the moral formation reading. Instead, as a properly Christological reading of all the parables should do, it instructs us in how to live in the pattern established for us by Christ himself.

[26] See Bede, *Expositio in Lucae Evangelium* 10.28–29 (CCSL 120: 221–22). As summarized in Levy, *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation*, 49–50. Augustine himself elsewhere emphasized the moral command to love God and neighbor in his application of this parable (see Higton, "Boldness and Reserve," 448–50).

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BECOMING DATA, ENHANCING HUMANITY: HOW TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSHUMANISM CHALLENGE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

JOSEPH T. COCHRAN[1]

A disenchanted Moody Bible Institute student, Meghan O'Gieblyn, dropped out of Bible school and became enamored with Posthumanism and Transhumanism. Her April 2018 article in the Guardian is a tantalizing exposé on the danger and allure of these ideas.[2] Though she became disillusioned with them, her story reveals that Posthumanism and Transhumanism are an influential and viable alternative to the Christian worldview. What is Posthumanism and Transhumanism? Jacob Shatzer's definitions are helpful. Posthumanism is the idea that "there is a next stage in human evolution." This stage may be guided through the use of technology. "Transhumanism… promotes values that contribute to this change."[3]

This essay introduces new horizons of study in the realms of technology and science. It suggests that technological advances challenge Christian scholars and pastors to readdress theological topics that these advances affect. The first section looks at scientific fields of study involving data, intelligence, and environments in order to introduce these developments and suggests further research opportunities for pastor-theologians. The second section addresses human enhancement, which in some way interplays in all three areas of data, intelligence, and environments. This article argues that pastors and theologians should take the objectives of Posthumanists and Transhumanists seriously. Their aims may appear to be the preoccupations of adults who never outgrew a childhood fantasy with science fiction. However, their objectives, propositions, and forecasts produce ethical dilemmas and present real challenges to Christian theology and what it means to be human. Many of these objectives might be achieved before the close of the twenty-first century, which adds urgency to the task of responding to them.

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[1] Joey Cochran is a PhD Candidate at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

2 Meghan O'Gieblyn, "God in the Machine: My Strange Journey into Transhumanism," The Guardian, April 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/apr/18/god-in-the-machine-my-strange-journey-into-transhumanism (accessed February 20, 2019).

[3] Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 16.

This is a futile task if Christian scholars and pastors remain unaware of philosophical and scientific developments in technology and how they shape everyday life. Throughout church history, theologians were conversant with thinkers from other worldviews and concerned about how those worldviews affected their own. Pastors' bookshelves are often filled with works from Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Edwards. Perhaps it is a helpful reminder that Edwards' shelves contained Locke, Berkley, and Hutcheson, among others.[4] Today's pastor-theologians ought to be familiar with those who work on complex ethical, philosophical, and practical dilemmas that scientific advances introduce to the world. After all, these advances have immense bearing on scriptural interpretation and theological construction. In truth, if pastors and scholars do not include today's philosophical and ethical technologists as interlocutors, they will have to reckon with being caught unaware and unprepared for what the rest of the twenty-first century holds for humanity.[5]

Many who encounter this information will assume these ideas are appropriated from future myths, whether from mythological universes like Star Wars, Star Trek, Marvel, or others within the film industry. The juxtaposition of Silicon Valley with Hollywood is not incidental. Could it be that Hollywood introduces ethical dilemmas and implications of technological advances in order to prepare the public for what is to come? Perhaps this is why many 2019 Super Bowl commercials introduced the public to artificial intelligence? Perhaps this is why we were smitten with

[4] On Jonathan Edwards' engagement of the Enlightenment, British Moral Philosophy, and other worldviews see William S. Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction*, The Jonathan Edwards Classic Studies Series (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1955, 2005); Jonathan Edwards, *Catalogues of Books, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 26,* ed. by Peter J. Thuesen (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008); Jonathan Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 6,* ed. by Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1980); Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*, The Jonathan Edwards Classic Studies Series (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006); Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths, Religion in America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Josh Moody, Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005).

[5] Michael S. Burdett is on the cutting edge of considering the intersection between the technological future and theology. He contended, "While I would suggest that not enough attention has been devoted to technology, there has been a vibrant tradition that has significantly contributed to Christian reflection on technology and the future" (Michael S. Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future* [Routledge Studies in Religion. New York: Routledge, 2015], 1). Others engaging the intersection of theology and Transhumanism include: Ronald Cole-Turner, *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011); Douglas Estes, *Braving the Future: Christian Faith in a World of Limitless Tech* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2018); Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God*; Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

the puppy-like friendship between BB8 and Rey in Star Wars, or a little discomforted by the sexual tension between Lando Calrissian and L3-37? Perhaps this is why Ready Player One and Alita Battle Angel captured the fascinations of young adult audiences? These illustrations from the film industry confront rising generations with the ethical quandaries regarding technological advances. Max Borders may be correct when he asserted: "science fiction is often the first step to innovation."[6] The assertions that drive this research are not derived from the film industry. Rather, the interlocutors throughout this study include top minds in the fields of technology and science. They are today's philosophers and ethicists who work to develop and protect the technological future. Some are Posthumanists and Transhumanists. Others are critics. While this essay does its best to accurately present the views of Posthumanism and Transhumanism, it is not affirming of those views. Rather, the aim is to introduce pastor-scholars to developments in this worldview and invite them to engage with these interlocutors in a productive manner.

DATA, INTELLIGENCE, ENVIRONMENTS

Are humans becoming data? Have they always been data and not known it? Many technologists believe both are the case.[7] This assertion should trouble many Christians. Nonetheless, the task of a Christian scholar and pastor is to help congregants navigate these kinds of assertions. Advances in scientific areas of data, intelligence, and environments apply pressure to Christianity's biblical and theological foundation and risk creating cracks and fissures in its foundation. Each of these three areas have corollaries in major branches of theology. Data's corollary is within the realm of authority and interrelates with Scripture. The consequences of advances in intelligence research tend towards blurring the creator-creature distinction. Thus,

[6] Borders, *The Social Singularity*, loc. 1594.

[7] Cf. Ethem Alpaydin, *Machine Learning,* The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016); Max Borders, *The Social Singularity: A Decentralist Manifesto* (Austin: Social Evolution, 2018); Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York: Norton, 2014, 2016); John Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Pedro Domingo, *The Master Algorithm: How the Quest for the Ultimate Learning Machine Will Remake the World* (New York: Basic Books: 2015); John D Kelleher and Brendan Tierney, *Data Science*, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018); Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Steve Lohr, *Data-ism*: *The Revolution Transforming Decision Making, Consumer Behavior, and Almost Everything Else* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015); Murray Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity,* The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015); Susan Schneider, ed, *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence, second edition* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); Chris Skinner, *Digital Human: The fourth revolution of humanity includes everyone* (Malden:Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

intelligence studies correlate to studies in theology proper and theological anthropology. Technological progress in the realm of environments impact what constitutes this world, other worlds, and heaven and hell. All three advances give cause for philosophical, ethical, and theological reflection.

DATA

In the midst of the COVID-19 global crisis, the key health advisor to President Trump's administration, Dr. Deborah Birx, made the following remarks about the supremacy of data during an interview with the Christian Broadcast Network:

> What the president has asked us to do is to assemble all the data and give him our best medical recommendation based on all the data…This is consistent with our mandate to really use every piece of information that we can in order to give the president our opinion that's backed up by data…He's been so attentive to the scientific literature and the details and the data…I think his ability to analyze and integrate data that comes out of his long history in business has really been a real benefit during these discussions about medical issues because in the end, data is data.[8]

The *fin-de-siècle* of the twentieth century ushered in the primacy of data. Global circumstances in the early twenty-first century reveal how much certainty, salvation, happiness, and hope depend upon data. Data has become king. In premodern Christianity, the devout turned to the authority of the church and Scripture to inform them how to live. In the modern period rational man looked inward toward reason to answer questions once answered by the Bible. The former looked outside of the self to derive authority and found it in divine revelation. The latter found authority within the self and derived it from a rational response to sense experience. This epistemological turn eliminated the need for external authority, like divine revelation, in order to interpret and navigate reality. Many advances occurred by turning to the authority of human reason. However, as time progressed, humanity proved to be a poor, impartial arbiter of truth.[9]

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[8] Quoted from the associated press, "Virus coordinator Birx is Trump's Data Whisperer," US News and World Report, March 28, 2020, https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2020-03-28/virus-coordinator-birx-is-trumps-data-whisperer (accessed March 30, 2020).

[9] This "Age of Reason" experienced rapid shifts in biblical authority and interpretation as critical interpretive methods developed. Some such as Jason A. Josephson-Storm underplay the significance of disenchantment during this era (*The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human* Sciences [Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2017], 41-62). Otherwise, see the following on the shift from biblical authority to empiricism and skepticism: Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (New York: Penguin, 1960), 47; Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind 1680-1715* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1961); Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

This could be one explanation for Tom Nichols' assertion about the death of expertise.[10] Expert thinkers are human thinkers, and human thinkers are capable of errors in judgment and fact. On the other hand, many argue that cold sterile facts and data are free from human error. Perhaps the campaign against established knowledge is because data is more trustworthy than human rationale.

Indeed, many have turned outward from human rationale to regain a confident knowledge base. Just as God revealed Scripture from the clouds above, people turn upward to where data is stored in the digital cloud.[11] Rather than turning to divine truth, people frequently rely upon empirical data to ask complex questions about meaning and life and to handle those everyday questions. Whether people adopt a post-Christian or Christian worldview, this is increasingly their reality. Data helps people decide political candidates, and it helps them get to the pharmacy. Data helps people decide whether to have a major heart surgery, and it helps them pick what movie to watch. What makes data so powerful is its *network effect*.[12] More people rely on data every day to shape their lives. As they do so, data becomes a powerful engine to drive, control, and assert authority over them. Fundamentally, this is the concept of dataism, which is perhaps the largest

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1974); John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: the Age of Enlightenment in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York; Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1978); John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2014), 158-260; Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 75-76, 241-48; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translations, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005); Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2006); David Steinmetz, "Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis" in *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3; Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment, third edition,* New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Charly Coleman, "Religion" in *The Cambridge Companion to the* Enlightenment, ed. by Daniel Brewer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 20014), 105-121; John Robertson, *The Enlightenment: A Very Short Introduction* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[10] C.f. Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise*, 1-7.

[11] Though, in reality, all this data is solidly stored here on earth in large data centers filled with innumerable servers all over the globe. This quip about dataism is adopted from Yuval Noah Harari's talk at the WEF Annual Meeting 2018, "Will the Future Be Human?", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npfShBTNp3Q (accessed Feb 18, 2019).

[12] Brynjolfsson and McAfee used the Waze app to describe the power of *network effect*. "That waze gets more useful to all of its members as it gets more members is a classic example of what economists call a *network effect*—a situation where the value of a resource for each of its users increases with each additional user" (*The Second Machine Age*, 60).

threat of authority that theism has encountered.[13] Steve Lohr, a journalist with the New York Times, said this about dataism:

> Indeed, the long view of the technology is that it will become a layer of data-driven artificial intelligence that resides on top of both the digital and the physical realms. Today, we're seeing the early steps toward that vision. Big-data technology is ushering in a revolution in measurement that promises to be the basis for the next wave of efficiency and innovation across the economy. But more than technology is at work here. Big data is also the vehicle for a point of view, or philosophy, about how decisions will be—and perhaps should be—made in the future.[14]

As people rely on data to inform their decisions, they inevitably find theism dispensable. This begets the fall of theism and supremacy of dataism.

In many ways people have voluntarily abdicated their authority and submitted themselves to data's authority. Data decides the next date or next car. It decides the next vacation, job, or spouse. Data tells people what to think about history, economics, politics, and sociology. Doctors collect data from people's bodies and return data to them to help them decide how to prolong and produce the healthiest life possible. Smart phone and Apple™ watch apps substitute for doctors.[15]

Many technological futurists believe that if researchers produce the correct study and input a substantially sufficient amount of data, then an output will definitively answer any research problem. This is the basis of the emerging field of data science. Data science exists to "improve decision making by basing decisions on insights extracted from large data sets." John Kelleher asserted, "Today, data science drives decision making in nearly all parts of modern societies."[16] Businesses leverage the internet to collect, store, process, and analyze large amounts of data through social media and user's web-surfing habits. This process has created the industry of data science, and it is used to forecast market needs and suggest user behavior.

Data science employs machine learning to maximize its affect. Machine learning is the science of designing and evaluating algorithms for discovering and interpreting patterns of data.[17] Machine learning produces models of data that aim at creating regressions (an estimation of an output), which

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[13] On the concept of dataism see: John Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Steve Lohr, *Data-ism: The Revolution Transforming Decision Making, Consumer Behavior, and Almost Everything Else* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

[14] Steve Lohr, *Data-ism*, 3. Steve cred. his colleague David Brooks of the New York Times for coining the term data-ism and the mindset entailed in the meaning of the term.

[15] Martin Rees off-handedly predicted the Apple™ Watch in *Our Final Hour* (published 2003): "Even within ten years, wristwatch-size computers will link us to an advanced internet and to the global positioning system" (Rees, *Our Final Hour*, 16).

[16] John D. Kelleher, *Data Science*, 1.

[17] John D. Kelleher, *Data Science*, 1.

is a form of supervised learning. If a model is a successful predictor of an output it has a strong generalization ability.[18] Data scientists use machine learning to produce pattern recognition. Applications for pattern recognition include character recognition for AI reading, facial recognition, speech recognition, natural language processing and translation.[19] The power harnessed by data science and machine learning has reshaped much of life.

Many philosophers believe that all of life's questions could be answered by applying the correct algorithm.[20] Input enough data and the most beneficial output will reduce pain and maximize human pleasure. Christian scholars and pastors should anticipate how this kind of claim might turn against a Christian worldview. Why couldn't data and algorithms supplant a savior? Why need Jesus Christ when there is a master algorithm? Perhaps a master algorithm could rescue humanity from its base problems—famine, plague, war, and death? Why need pastors when you have data scientists? Data scientists can expertly organize, categorize, and control data to help plan purchases, travels, finances, and business ventures. Data scientists are great consultants for marital, emotional, and spiritual well-being. All data scientists need is access to people's data in order to offer solutions to these questions. People already create a substantial data print every day just by surfing the web, responding to notifications, and participating in social media.[21] All this data could be used by data scientists to help order every aspect of life.

Whereas premodern theism and modern rationalism were both derivative, data has become so powerful that it can learn, predict, and execute outcomes. Data is generative.[22] As more ways to collate large amounts of data are produced through advances in hardware and software, data is empowered with the capacity to be intelligent. If generative data is empowered with intelligence, then it will be an authority structure fundamentally different from Scripture. Scripture is a text, and it is a revealed text from God.[23] As a

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[18] Alpaydin, *Machine Learning*, 40-47.

[19] Alpaydin, *Machine Learning*, 60-74.

[20] Alpaydin, Machine Learning, 60-74; Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data*; Domingo, *The Master Algorithm*; Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*; Kelleher and Tierney, *DataScience*; Lohr, *Data-ism*; Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity.*

[21] Chris Skinner, *Digital Human*, 105, 117.

[22] Alpaydin said: "An approach that has recently become very popular in data analysis is to consider a generative model that represents our belief as to how the data is generated. We assume that there is a hidden model with a number of hidden, or latent, causes that interact to generate the data we observe. Though the data we observe may seem big and complicated, it is produced through a process that is controlled by a few variables, which are the hidden factors, and if we can somehow infer these, the data can be represented nd nderstood in a much simpler way. *Such a simple model can also make accurate predictions*" (*Machine Learning*, 65-66).

[23] That said, God's revelation is not reduced to his special, closed, and canonical revelation in Scripture. Helpful texts for studying the doctrine of revelation, canonicity, and the limits of canonical revelation include: Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text*

canonical text, it is closed revelation.[24] Truth is derived from Scripture, but Scripture does not reveal or generate new truth.[25] Data once was subject to human interpretation, much like the Bible. However, technologists assert that data is now a generative, intelligent source using complex algorithms developed by advances in machine learning and data science. It no longer functions or relies on human interpretation, unlike Scripture.

If these assertions about data are correct, then dataism contends against Scripture as an epistemological authority. The authority of Scripture will likely be undermined by the authority of data in the coming century. Partly this is because the other elements of technological advancement—intelligence and environments—are becoming so altered that the content of Scripture and its culture present a challenge to correspond the biblical world with the technological future. On the other hand, data is a native source of authority for the present culture, which makes it all the more equipped to navigate today's questions.

In reference to the issue of authority, the most pressing question pastor-scholars must ask today regards how to preserve the authority of Scripture and proffer its usefulness in a world that seems to dismiss it as antiquated and useless. Follow up questions include: How to protect God's people from the temptation to exchange the authority of Scripture for the authority of data? What is the place of data as an authority? If Scripture alone is the infallible authority for Christians, can data come alongside church history and tradition to augment the authority of Scripture? If so, how does big data and its intelligibility integrate with the doctrine of Scripture? Could people leverage big data, machine data, and data systems to better understand biblical data?[26]

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch,* Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship, Volume 4* (Phillipsburg: P&R: 2010); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012); Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

[24] On the idea that the canon of Scripture is closed, most Christian scholars appeal to Revelation 22:18–19.

[25] See 2 Timothy 3:16–17. This is why the Scripture principle or Analogy of Scripture is vital to the doctrine of special revelation. This principle emphasizes the significance of letting unambiguous Scripture interpret ambiguous Scripture. For discussion on *analogia Scripturae* see, Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, 1986), 33.

[26] Software like Logos and Accordance pave the way for this kind of integration.

INTELLIGENCE

There are a few ways to speak about intelligence research and a few methodological approaches that scientists take on the biological and the technological sides of this field of research. Before introducing these approaches, a simple assertion needs to be made. Industry leaders in biomedical and technological development are pouring out millions, even billions of dollars in research development for this field.[27] They have their reasons for doing so. One of those reasons is to evade the inevitable "terror"—death.

Shanahan argued that "any intelligent agent, whether artificial or biological, can be analyzed according to its structure."[28] This entails responding to three questions: 1) What is the intelligent agent's reward? 2) How does the intelligent agent learn? 3) How does the intelligent agent maximize its expected reward? Researchers developing artificial intelligence are concerned about the level of artificial intelligence that is being fabricated. Animal-, human-, and super-intelligence are three grades of intelligence that roboticists are developing in the coming decades.

Advances in intelligence may be achieved by advancing the human mind. This may include integrating tech or leveraging medicine and organic technologies to strengthen the human mind. Intelligence development may restrict itself to the realm of technology and robotics, either attempting some sort of whole brain emulation or creating a wholly different infrastructure for intelligence, what some refer to as "AI from scratch." Since humanity's familiarity with general intelligence comes from the human infrastructure of a body and mind, many believe that whole brain emulation is the path forward for developing artificial intelligence.[29] Since studies indicate that the human mind and body are interdependent, some of those who wish to achieve artificial intelligence suggest we must account for the fact that the

[27] The headline from a March 2017 MIT Review article demonstrated this: "The Entrepreneur with the $100 Million Plan to Link Brains to Computers" (Antonio Regalado, "The entrepreneur with the $100 million plan to link brains to computers," MIT Technology Review, March 2017, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/603771/the-entrepreneur-with-the-100-million-plan-to-link-brains-to-computers/ [accessed, February 20, 2019]). Ray Kurzweil, leading Transhumanist and author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines* and *The Singularity Is Near* has unrestricted funding from Google Corp. as the director of engineering and founder of the Singularity University.

[28] Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity*, 77.

[29] Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity*, 160. Kurzweil predicted that we would get there by 2015, which did not occur. His prediction was based on a projection where IBM's Blue Gene/P supercomputer would have one million gigaflops, which would be 1/10 of the 10^{16} calculation per second computational power needed to power an AI full-brain emulation (Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, 71). On the other hand, David Chalmers imagined that we're still a ways out, but to him it's a matter of decades and whole-brain emulation should be achieved before the close of the twenty-first century ("The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis" in *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, 175-176).

human mind is housed in a human body. Thus, it makes sense to design an embodied artefact to house artificial intelligence.

However, this technique may only bring artificial intelligence to the same level as human intelligence. Many researchers wish to advance intelligence beyond human intelligence. They assume that once AI reaches human intelligence level, it will quickly advance beyond that level. This is called superintelligence. There are strong philosophical arguments that assume if artificial intelligence can exceed human intelligence, then there is the prospect of recursive self-improvement. The superintelligent being exponentially advances its intelligence, creating an intelligence explosion, which has been dubbed "the Singularity."[30] If this intelligence explosion occurs, then strategies have to be in place to contain the power of superintelligence. Some techniques may include housing the reward function of the superintelligent being with a need to protect and value human-level intelligence and reward it for doing so.[31]

Another factor to consider in the area of intelligence development is the role that consciousness plays.[32] Phenomenology will have a bearing on the kinds of rights that prospective artificial intelligences have. If scientists are able to duplicate human intelligence, then it will likely be a fully-orbed, feeling and sensing intelligence. If a truly conscious artificial intelligence is fabricated, consideration of how to minimize the pain and maximize the pleasure of this intelligence will be vital.

Scientists, philosophers, and ethicists wrestle with the ethical dilemmas that might unfold as a result of developing these kinds of intelligences.[33]

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[30] Kurtzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*; Kurtzweil, *The Singularity Is Near.*

[31] Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 185-187. Bostrom discussed ways to program a "decision rule" and "utility function" within pre-superintelligent artificial intelligence in order to value human values, including human life before it reaches superintelligent capacity. This prevents human intelligent agents from being in the scenario where they must take down the superintelligent being through brainwashing, replacement, or extermination.

[32] Some introductory discussions on consciousness include: Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 159-176; Brynjolfsson and McAfee, *The Second Machine Age*, 254-56; David J. Chalmers, Chapter 16, "The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis" in *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, 201-204; Murray Shanahan, The Technological Singularity, 117-149; Joshua Shepherd, Consciousness and Moral Status (Routledge Focus. New York: Routledge, 2018); Susan Schneider and Max Velmans, eds, The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness, second edition (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); Susan Schneider, Chapter 17, "Alien Minds" in Science Fiction and Philosophy, 229-234; Zoltan L. Torey, The Conscious Mind, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

[33] David Chalmers commented: "If there is AI++, it will have an enormous impact on the world. So if there is even a small chance that there will be a singularity, we need to think hard about the form it will take. There are many different forms that a post-singularity world might take. Some of them may be desirable from our perspective, and some of them may be undesirable" ("The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis" in Science Fiction and Philosophy, ed. by Susan Schneider, 190).

What safeguards are put in place in order to prevent a super-intelligent being from oppressing or supplanting humanity?[34]

Though this section is cursory, it introduces a number of conundrums for the Christian worldview. At what point does human-level artificial intelligence require reconsideration to whom salvation and the gospel is applied? Just as C. S. Lewis reflected on whether hypothetical extra-terrestrials might be spiritual creatures in need of redemption, is it possible that human-level AI may be spiritual creatures in need of redemption?[35] Why or why not? If human-level AI achieves the status of having consciousness, with all the accompanying sensory hardware, should these beings be barred from church membership? Will they be able to attend services like an American slave during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century? Would AI partake in the sacraments?[36] What would a pastor say to a human and AI couple seeking marriage?[37] At what point does a super-intelligent being with recursive self-improvement become essentially all-knowing and all-powerful?

ENVIRONMENTS

There are two major environments to consider in respect to technological advances. The first is inter-planetary colonization. The second is alternate reality. These two habitations for humanity will become more attractive as humans consume and deplete earth's natural resources and escalate the current ecological and energy crises.[38] Of course this is a dystopian projection regarding future-earth, which informs the function that these two environments fulfill. For many, these two environments present the potential of technological utopias.

Though it might be feasible for humans to colonize the galaxy, the best hope for interplanetary exploration is to develop consecutively advancing levels of artificial intelligence. At least this is what has been done so far with the Lunar and Mars Rovers.[39] Nonetheless, initiatives exist to colonize Mars.

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[34] Cf. Eliezer Yudkowsky, "Artificial Intelligence as a positive and negative factor in global risk" in *Global Catastrophic Risk*, ed. by Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Cirkovic (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 308-345.

[35] C. S. Lewis published an essay response to F. B. Hoyle in the Christian Herald called "Will We Lose God in Oute89r Space." Later this essay was republished as "Religion and Rocketry" in a collection of essays called *The World's Last Night*. In this essay he explores whether there could be "spiritual animals" on other planets in need of redemption (C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harper One, 1952) 87-97.

[36] On slavery, Christian status, and the sacraments, see especially Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[37] This question might cause chagrin for some, but a similar response might have been had during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even early twentieth-centuries in reference to homosexual couples seeking marriage.

[38] Burdett made this same observation (Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technical Future*, 1).

[39] NASA declared Mars Rover Opportunity's mission closed on February 13, 2019 ("Nasa's Record-Setting Opportunity Rover Mission on Mars Comes to End," Nasa, Feb 13, 2019, https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasas-record-setting-opportunity-rover-

Scientists are exploring ways to successfully land there and establish a base camp.[40] As AI research continues, a better understanding of the limitations and opportunities for further space exploration with AI become clearer.

Christian pastors and scholars should consider what it means for humans to explore other planets. Does this call for an inter-planetary mission movement? Who will go and how will these astronaut-missionaries train for space exploration? Will those who go tolerate ecclesiological differences because there is a lack of multiple expressions of faith and denominations on colonized planets?

Christians will have to account for the environment of alternate reality.[41] More of reality appears to be occupied with screen time. Many integrate tech on their bodies and always have it with them. With the expansion of networked reality, where all of space collapses due to a global computing network, humanity has the potential to strip itself from the bounds of space.[42] People do not have to sit across from one another to have a conversation. They can interact with one another via phone, e-mail, video-chat, social media, or other mediums. All of these mediums make materiality less essential or fundamental to human interaction.

A recent innovation of this sort is the Oculus Rift. Oculus.com's website has the tag "With 1000+ apps, meet up in VR, watch with friends, listen to music, play games and more."[43] Once goggles are applied, wearers slip into an alternate reality. More technology like this will reach the market with an end goal to convince people that the data-life is the better life. Why be encumbered with materiality? Simply slip into an alternate, digital, immaterial reality. Alternate reality may become the next contender to heaven and hell.

It is tempting to dismiss a world like Matrix, Ready Player One, or Wreck it Ralph—but there are millions of people who long for and are

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mission-on-mars-comes-to-end [accessed February 18, 2019). The Curiosity Rover was still active on Mars along with the stationary InSight Lander when this article was written (Jonathan O'Callaghan, "This Was the Last Photo Taken by Nasa's Opportunity Rover on Mars," Forbes, Feb 18, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathanocallaghan/2019/02/18/this-was-the-last-photo-taken-by-nasas-opportunity-rover-on-mars/#367fab295a9a [accessed February 18, 2019).

[40] Two articles that explored potential ways of colonizing Mars: M. Z. Naser, "Space-native construction materials for earth-independent and sustainable infrastructure," *Acta Astronautica 155* [February 2019]: 264-273; Jiateng Long, "Mars atmospheric entry guidance for optimal terminal altitude," *Acta Astronautica 155* [February 2019]: 274-286.

[41] Nick Bostrom, Chapter 2, "Are You in a Computer Simulation" in *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, 22-25; David J. Chalmers, Chapter 16, "The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis" in *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, 201-204; Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, 198-201; Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity,* 196-203; Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), loc. 1774-2846.

[42] Chris Skinner, *Digital Human*, 27.

[43] Oculus.com/go (accessed February 18, 2019).

excited about alternate reality.[44] So much so that advocates for the singularity contend against those who follow more traditional theistic beliefs like those of the Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Questions that pastor-scholars might reflect upon regarding alternate reality include: How does the idea of living a disembodied alternate reality affect an understanding of the body-soul composite, which is assumed from a traditional theological anthropology? If a conscious mind can be uploaded to an alternate reality, could a person evade bodily death by moving from one shell to another? Is alternate reality heaven or hell? How does this "eschatological future" contend against alternate futures anticipated by biblical eschatology? How does achieving an environment of alternate reality affect interpretations of apocalyptic literature in the Bible? What is lost by not experiencing death? Is the heroism related to Ernest Becker's "terror of death" lost? Is the inexperience of death something God wished for humanity?[45]

BECOMING DATA, REMAINING HUMAN

Tech and biomedical leaders and companies fund research in human enhancement for a number of different applications. Some applications make life easier. Other applications seek to extend life indefinitely. Some enhancements are medical and biological. Other enhancements are technological. Integrating the two is also possible.

Transhumanists are concerned with the ethical implications of their work. Thus, they have setup some foundational presuppositions about humanity to safeguard it and ethically affirm its progress.[46] The first presupposition is grounded in evolutionary theory. Humanity was the product of its environment and ascended to its height as a result of its intelligence. Humanity manipulated its environment and controlled it and demonstrated its capacity to adapt to that environment. Because of its intelligence, humanity has the potential to adapt itself and guide itself through the next stage of evolution. In order to do so, humanity must come to terms with its own mechanics.

This leads to the second presupposition, which concerns the nature of humanity. Humans, organic as they are today, are manipulable, serviceable,

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[44] Organizations and societies that advocate for this kind of life include: Humanity+, Singularity University, Foresight Institute, Mormon Transhumanist Association, Christian Transhumanist Association, Alcor Life Extension Foundation, London Futurists, Institute for Ethics, and Emerging Technologies, and SENS Research Foundation.

[45] It seems to me that death is an essential experience of humanity. If not, the Son of God would not have had to endure death.

[46] See "Transhumanist Declaration (2012)" in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classic and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 54-55.

and upgradable machines.[47] Humans can be enhanced, given enough raw resources and the capital to fund these enhancements. Enhancements prevent problems, augment advantages, or enhance features (e.g., eye color, hair color, skin tone). Individuals might go so far as to blend animal, mythical, and human features (e.g., cat eyes/ears, elf ears).[48]

What this means is that future humans may have the option to be other than (*hetero-*) or more than (*supra-*) human. Martin Rees projected this in 2003:

> These projections assume that our descendants remain distinctively "human." But human character and physique will soon themselves be malleable. Implants in our brain (and perhaps new drugs as well) could vastly enhance some aspects of human intellectual powers: our logical or mathematical skills, and perhaps even our creativity.[49]

More recently, Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus* heralded similar expectations about humanity's future. Harari pointed out the striking inevitability of circumstances. In a world of global competition, Americans must enhance their children biologically with gene editing, given the medical technology to do so. There is nothing stopping a Russian, Chinese, or North Korean parent or government official from doing the same thing. Global competition demands Americans to participate in producing the best competitive athletes for the Olympics or the most efficient and effective soldiers on the battlefield.[50] As Doug Estes indicated, this kind of posture towards gene editing and human enhancement is a pragmatic response to the problem.[51] It may not be pragmatic in the normal sense of, "We can do something, so we should." Rather it is pragmatic in the sense that,

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[47] The Enlightenment figure Julien Offray de la Mettrie in his *Man a Machine* (1747) may be the earliest figure to propose the mechanistic nature of humanity (Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine and Man a Plant* (Cambridge: Hackett, reprint 1994). Kurzweil proffered that humans are spiritual machines, and he predicted that through technology humanity will achieve the ability to manipulate neural pathways. "With the understanding of our mental processes will come the opportunity to capture our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual experiences, to call them up at will, and to enhance them" (Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, loc. 3174).

[48] See Laura Beloff, "The Hybronaut Affair" in *The Transhumanisty Reader*, 83-90 and Jacob Shatzer's related discussion in *Transhumanism and the Image of God*, 55-89. For another Christian distillation of enhancement see, Stephen Garner, "The Hopeful Cyborg" *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. by Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 87-100.

[49] Rees, *Our Final Hour,* 18.

[50] "And if the government forbids all citizens from engineering their babies, what if North Koreans are doing it and producing amazing geniuses, artists and athletes that far outperform ours? And like that, in baby steps, we are on our way to a genetic child catalogue" (Harari, *Homo Deus*, 55).

[51] Estes, *Braving the Future*, loc. 942-43.

"Since someone else is doing it, we must likewise act." This is the expedient response and the pragmatic version of "might makes right."

People will make all sorts of very good arguments in favor of human enhancements such as gene editing. Some will include the opportunity to reduce disease and defects. Other arguments will include prolonging human life or allowing humans to accomplish the impossible. Perhaps humans will deep-sea dive without equipment. Maybe they will travel great distances in space without experiencing the trauma that interplanetary space travel induces.[52] Perhaps heart disease or Alzheimer's will be cured by a nip to the genetic code. These are the better reasons to enhance human life.

In spite of these exciting advantages and opportunities, it is vital to curb enthusiasm for human enhancement with a few sobering threats. Christian Posthumanist Jeanine Thweatt-Bates commented:

> Technological advances make promises of better health, elimination of genetically heritable disease, longer lifespans, and perhaps even enhanced capabilities, *but at the same time can also represent an invasion of bodily integrity, as well as economic and political exploitation and oppression*.[53]

Human enhancement will have consequences and forever alter global political and economic policies. It may take decades to clarify these policies, reassessing them for injustices. For instance, shouldn't everyone be entitled to enhancement, if indeed it could prolong life? Is there not some sort of equal opportunity legislation to be expected?

Weightier questions include: Will this change what it means to be human? Does the essence of humanity become altered in these processes, especially if scientists integrate technology and medicine to accomplish these aims? Once this is done, are they tinkering with the conventional understanding of anthropology? Could it be that what was once *anthropos* (man) then becomes *anthro-tekné* (man-tech)? This all raises the question of human nature's immutability? These are important questions for pastor-theologians to consider.

If all this speculation is reduced to an ultimate aim, it leads to the final objective of eluding death. The efforts of Transhumanists can be reduced to what Ernest Becker calls heroism in the face of humanity's greatest fear, for "of all things that move man, one of the principal ones is his

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[52] Shanahan proposed that unenhanced humans would not be able to colonize the galaxy because of their feeble and vulnerable nature. On the other hand, AI might accomplish this purpose. He commented: "Unhampered by earthly biological needs, capable of withstanding extremes of temperature and doses of radiation that would be fatal to humans, and psychologically untroubled by the prospect of thousands of years traveling through interstellar space, self-reproducing superintelligent machines would be in a good position to colonize the galaxy. From a large enough perspective, it might be seen as human destiny to facilitate this future, even though (unenhanced) humans themselves are physically and intellectually too feeble to participate in it" (*The Technological Singularity*, 157).

[53] Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves*, loc. 133 (emphasis added).

terror of death."[54] This response to "terror" is the fundamental impulse of self-preservation, which drive advances in technology. The problem with this is that if preventive measures are not properly put into play, then AI and human enhancement could be the undoing of humanity rather than the salvation of humanity.[55]

Ethicists like John Harris have waged the argument that human enhancement is a moral obligation.[56] He dismissed objections with methodical precision. He dismissed the "Precautionary Principle" that risk outweighs reward. Rather, there is a responsibility to protect the human gene pool and not relegate it to the invisible hand of evolution. The responsibility to handle the integrity of the human genome is humanity's burden to bear. Harris argued that the outcome of letting evolution continue unguided is uncertain. A more favorable outcome comes from guiding the process. He dismissed the objection of "Playing God" because it is built on fallacious superstition, which is clearly a naive presupposition from which humanity should have already recovered. He demonstrated that much of human progress has occurred through human intervention of natural processes (e.g., pasteurization, immunization, antibiotics, et al).

As Harris concluded his argument for the moral necessity of human enhancement he contended:

> The overwhelming moral imperative for both therapy and enhancement is to prevent harm and confer benefit. Bathed in that moral light, it is unimportant whether the protection or benefit conferred is classified as enhancement or improvement, protection, or therapy.[57]

The reward over risk argument will win the day when it comes to human enhancement. This puts Christians in a precarious position. What does a Christian do when public policy permits, and everyone else participates in, genetic preventive measures? For instance, what might a Christian do with the scenario of giving birth to a Down Syndrome child? Are they morally obligated to participate in gene editing because societal pressure says that Down Syndrome is a defect and should be prevented? Rather, Christians ought to argue that the condition of a child being Down Syndrome falls under the watch of a kind, merciful, and providential Creator.

However, how do Christians properly engage in this sort of conversation with technologists, transhumanists, and biomedical professionals? How

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[54] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 11.

[55] Fortunately, there is an ongoing conversation for philosophers and ethicists who anticipate these scenarios. See Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 115-144; Eliezer Yudkowsky, Chapter 15, "Artificial Intelligence as a positive and negative factor in global risk" in *Global Catastrophic Risk,* ed. by Nick Bostrom, 308-345; Ali Nouri and Christopher F. Chyb, Chapter20, "Biotechnology and biosecurity" in *Global Catastrophic Risk*, 450-480; Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, eds, *Human Enhancement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[56] John Harris, Chapter 6, "Enhancements are a moral obligation" in *Human Enhancement*, ed. by Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, 131-135.

[57] John Harris, "Enhancements are a moral obligation" in *Human Enhancement*, 154.

do they engage public policy makers on these issues? They cannot do so on the authority of the Bible alone, or if they do, they must first convince these people that the Bible stands as a reliable source of authority. The turn to dataism and the general dismissal of biblical authority compels Christians to engage this discussion on the grounds of natural law rather than on biblical law, which will be a hefty task to undertake. After all, not many Christians are cognizant with these technological advances and how they impact the Christian worldview.

CONCLUSION

Possibly many readers of this essay will respond with incredulity. After all, doesn't technology always plateau? Yes, technology may be gauged as a series of exponential S curves rather than a single exponential explosion.[58] Yet, it seems that every time technology reaches a glass ceiling, it breaks through it. It somehow explodes to new heights. Whether the explanation for this is divine providence or human progress through human evolution—the intellectual, communicative, collaborative potential of humanity has not restricted the bounds of what might be accomplished. There is no substantive evidence or reason from the past that gives cause to conclude that humanity will not achieve its future goals in respect to AI, environments, and enhancement. Furthermore, humanity will use data science and machine learning to justify these objectives.

Theologian James K. A. Smith has gone to great lengths to help the church reflect on what it means to "imagine the kingdom." However, what if the majority of the non-Christian world has a very different vision and imagination for the kingdom, one that takes the evolutionary agenda to its guided potential? The incredulous will conjecture, "Surely man will not fabricate his own way to defeat death? After all, the death of death is what Christ accomplished as he emerged from the tomb." Yet, scientists in the twenty-first century wish to accomplish this feat. Perhaps apprehension drives incredulity. Perhaps temptation drives anxiety. Faced with the choice of embracing a Christian view of life and death or the guarantee that integrated biotech could deliver humans from this dilemma of death, what might many choose? Pastors and scholars should anticipate these challenges to their worldview and engage in the conversation now rather than wait until what is potential becomes actual.

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[58] "If we zoom in on this larger curve, we find that each distinct computing paradigm from mechanical switches to large-scale integration, follows a pattern of initial slow growth while the technology is in its infancy, followed by rapid (exponential) growth, ending with a plateau when the technology reaches its fullest potential. The overall exponential, in other words, is made up of a series of smaller S-Curves, one which corresponds to Moore's law. The laws of physics ensure that the larger exponential trend will also reach a plateau eventually, and reveal itself to be just another big S-curve" (Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity*, 160); also see Domingo, *The Master Algorithm*, 287; Kurzweil contended that we will see unforeseen exponential advances in the twenty-first century (*The Age of Spiritual Machines*, loc. 296).

If Transhumanists achieve their lofty ambitions during the twenty-first century, their discoveries will challenge the philosophical and theological worldview of Christians. Pastor-theologians should not be caught unaware but should be prepared to respond to objections these discoveries bring to Christian doctrines. C. S. Lewis's sage advice in his essay "Religion and Rocketry" is both noteworthy and comforting for those living in a time of uncertainty:

> This is a warning of what we may expect if we ever do discover animal life (vegetable does not matter) on another planet. Each new discovery, even every new theory, is held at first to have the most wide-reaching theological and philosophical consequences. It is seized by unbelievers as the basis for a new attack on Christianity; it is often, and more embarrassingly, seized by injudicious believers as the basis for a new defence. But usually, when the popular hubbub has subsided and the novelty has been chewed over by real theologians, real scientists, and real philosophers, both sides find themselves pretty much where they were before. So it was with Copernican astronomy, with Darwinism, with Biblical Criticism, with the new psychology. So, I cannot help expecting, it will be with the discovery of 'life on other planets'.[59]

[59] Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, 87.

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SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS KINGDOM ORIENTATION

JEFF HUBING[1]

The following essay is more "pastoral" than "theological." It is a way of understanding spiritual formation that emerges from the two central realities of Jesus' message and mission as I understand them: God's Kingdom and God's people. It is written in straightforward language with very few appeals to scholarly texts or books about spiritual formation. I seek to integrate both biblical/theological observations with practical implications and address steps forward in the process of spiritual formation.

The first part of the essay rehearses the centrality of the *kingdom* in the message of Jesus. This leads to a discussion of the relationship between the Messianic/royal mission of Jesus and the formation of the *ekklēsia* as a Spiritual family. The second main part of the essay offers a perspective on the *goal* of spiritual formation: orienting people to life in God's Kingdom through experiential knowledge of God, his agenda, his people and his ways. The final part of this essay is a brief consideration of how Acts 2:42 provides a glimpse of the earliest disciples' *strategy* for "spiritually forming" those who entered the Kingdom through faith in the gospel. It may also point a way forward for some of us as we consider how we might best continue the work of making disciples in our generation.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN A GOSPEL CONTEXT: KINGDOM, FAMILY, MISSION

The synoptic gospels illustrate the central message of Jesus by narrating introductory scenes in which the good news of God's kingdom is proclaimed (Mk. 1:14–15; Mt. 4:12–17; Lk. 4:14–44). That kingdom announcement is explained, and its implications demonstrated, using the various stories and speeches recorded in these accounts. And, although these three authors have unique points of interest and emphasis along the way, they are united in their conviction that Jesus' announcement of the nearness of God's kingdom is the lens through which his words and deeds must be perceived and understood.

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John, too, is committed to illustrating Jesus' focus on the kingdom of God. Although he does not record an inaugural speech in which Jesus clearly outlines his message, he does describe a critical scene near the beginning of his gospel in which the priority of the kingdom in Jesus' own mind is revealed. Most readers remember Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3 for its emphasis on being born again/from above, or the role of the Spirit in this process. What is often neglected, however, is that being born again is not presented an end in itself here—it is a means to an end. According to Jesus, the purpose of being reborn is to "see" or "enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3, 5). This goal is made possible by means of Spiritual rebirth but is not to be equated with it. As in the synoptic gospels, the kingdom is Jesus' central concern.

Jesus' message is certainly a foundational element in the Gospels. But Jesus was not just a public speaker. His objective was not simply to persuade people that his teachings were accurate in order to reform the doctrinal convictions of Israel. If that were the case, Jesus would have spent his time primarily among the educated, making arguments designed to open the eyes of Israel's rabbis to their theological blindness. It is true that there were times of public proclamation—in synagogues, in the temple courts, on hillsides, and seashores. It is also true that there were times of private explanation for those who had left everything in response to his gospel (Mk. 4:34). So, it is right for those who lead God's people to embrace this role of educating, provoking, proclaiming, and unveiling the mystery of the kingdom in a deliberate and thorough manner.

However, some of us who lead seem to miss another component of Jesus' public ministry that occupies just as much, if not more, of his attention throughout the gospel stories: Jesus was building a spiritual family. Jesus did not just come to fulfill the prophecies God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in matters concerning his dying for sins and rising for righteousness and life. He also came to fulfill the promises related to the building of a people that go all the way back through God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 ("I will make you a great nation"), to his original design for Adam and Eve at the creation of the human race in Genesis 1:28 ("be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"). This required that Jesus not only speak the truth about the kingdom, but that he provide his disciples with a vision of the kingdom in operation among them and through them. He needed to provide them with language to describe and explain the truth, but also a *way* in the world that would demonstrate how the truth translated to the lives of those who came to believe it. Jesus was generating a social movement designed to reveal and establish a culture among those who entered the kingdom, one that would reflect the character, will, and work of God.

Several passages in the Gospels help us see this element of Jesus' work more clearly. One is found early on in Mark's gospel at a time when both enemies (3:6) and natural family members (3:21) object to and react against Jesus' message and its implications. In the midst of all this hostility and

misunderstanding, Jesus is found "calling to him those whom he desired." These people are contrasted with those who oppose him and cannot see his identity and mission clearly. And, while he does call these men to "preach and have authority to cast out demons," we should not neglect the *first* thing the twelve are invited into: "that they might *be with him*" (Mk. 3:14-15). Jesus requires not just their apprehension of his message; he requires their *presence*.

The closing section of Mark 3 confirms that Jesus understood the formation of this group of disciples through the lens of family. Jesus' mother and brothers approached the house in Capernaum that served as his base of operations (Mk. 2:1; 3:20). Jesus is told that they have arrived and are looking for him. His response is both culturally offensive and perfectly logical, given his mission to fulfill God's intentions for Israel: "looking about at those who sat around them, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother'" (3:34–35). This reference clarifies Jesus' perspective on his mission. He understood himself to be generating a great spiritual family that he sought to develop and release into the earth to fulfill God's covenant purposes.

Another passage that brings this goal of Jesus' life and work to the forefront is found in Matthew 16:13–20. This scene represents a key turning point in the life of Jesus, where he embraces his identity as the Messiah and reveals to his disciples his intention to suffer death on a cross. We also find an additional component of Jesus' intention. When Simon Peter identifies him as the Messiah, "the Son of the living God," Jesus first affirms the divine origin of this perception: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (16:17). Peter's insight into the identity of Jesus is revelatory. God is working in Peter to open his eyes to the truth. Now, Jesus continues to reveal the implications of what Peter has confessed: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my *ekklēsia*" (16:18).

Jesus' *ekklēsia* is his "congregation" or "assembly." The term is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in other Greek literature of the time to refer to a gathering of people—whether it is an assembly of citizens of a Greek city-state or the entire congregation of Israel. It is significant that Jesus connects the revelation of his identity with his mission to build his *ekklēsia*. The first implication of Jesus' identity as Messiah/King in Matthew 16 is the unveiling of his burden to establish a human community that would defy and defeat Satan by learning his ways.[2] Jesus came to build a society of people who reveal the existence of, and give physical expression to, the nature and mission of the kingdom of God.

One more passage will illumine this overarching purpose of Jesus. It is one of the most beloved statements of the mission of God's people

[2] The words "binding" and "loosing" in Matthew 16:19 probably reflect Rabbinic language for determining the legality/right-ness of peoples' actions and behaviors. This is a way of projecting the future role of Peter in establishing the culture of Jesus' people.

recorded in Scripture: the 'great commission' in Matthew 28:16–20. Here we find the core elements of Jesus' life and message. The words "all authority" remind the disciples of Jesus' message about the kingdom, and that power and right to rule all things now belong to him. Nothing lies outside of his authority. A direct result of this universal sovereignty is the responsibility of the disciples to extend the reach of his kingdom into all nations. The time for addressing only the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15:24) has come to an end. Now the reign of God in Jesus is to be released among all the peoples of the earth, fulfilling the initial vision that God gave Adam and Eve to fill the earth, and the promise God gave Abram that "all the families of the earth would be blessed" through his descendants (Gen. 12:3).

The way that authority was to be manifest was through the process of making disciples of all the nations. The command signifies that their mission reaches beyond proclamation into what we might call "formation." They are not just being sent to speak. They are being commissioned to generate a social reality: disciples. These are people who, like the eleven, have entered the kingdom and are now called to embody and validate the claims and implications of this kingdom among the nations. Like Jesus, the eleven are to ignite and shepherd a social movement. They are to give birth to spiritual families in villages, cities, and regions of the earth that will testify to the central confession that Jesus is Messiah, King, Lord. The preaching isn't enough; it may be the starting point, but it is not the end product. The product is the people. The goal is the gathered ones, those called forth from among the families of nations to form one new family recognized by its One Father, loyal to His One Son, and unified in the One Spirit.

Immersion/baptism, then, is not solely a "public symbol" of one's private convictions—whether they be repentance from sin and dead works, or faith in Jesus as Messiah/King. It is not only a personal seal of one's covenant with God, like circumcision. It is not only a means of experiencing grace by which the individual realizes her/his true spiritual identity and is empowered to walk in newness of life. As true as these things may be, it is critical to see Jesus' command here in context of his purpose in Matthew 16 to build a people. Baptism constitutes the means by which people are integrated into God's *ekklēsia*/family and by which they come, together, to bear his name. God is revealed here as "Father" and "Son," along with the Spirit. In a sense, God himself *is* a family who generates the archetypal vision for human community. When people enter the kingdom, they come to know God as he is—a perfect, triune being whose unity is not contradicted by his diversity. God is the grid for family. Baptism is the means by which people identify with God's family, because they emerge from the water not only bearing his name, but also bearing the special and high calling of demonstrating God's nature and purpose, *by conducting themselves as a spiritual family* among the nations of the earth.

This explains the final instruction of Jesus in the passage: "teaching them to observe everything—whatever things I have instructed you" (28:20). It's very important here not to truncate Jesus' command, as if the only thing he said was "teaching them…everything—whatever things I have instructed you." That would give his disciples the notion that their mission was fundamentally concerned with conveying information or communicating theological content. But, that is far from Jesus' intention here. Rather, he is appealing to the eleven that they "teach them *to observe* everything." What he means by "observe" is grounded in his own mission with his disciples—not simply to memorize and understand…but to put into practice (see Mt. 7:24) the instructions they were given, based not only on his teaching but also his example.

Jesus called the disciples to be with him. He was not only interested in communicating information; he was providing a vision of what it looked like to live in God's kingdom, to operate under God's authority and to fulfill God's purposes as a human being. Jesus was not just interested in his disciples "knowing things;" he was interested in them *doing things in a manner that was consistent with the presence of the kingdom, and its overarching objectives in creation and history.* So, when he tells his disciples to "teach them to observe," he is inviting them to imitate him…to reproduce not only his kingdom proclamation, but also his method of integrating people into God's family and orienting them to the kingdom so that every component of their lives can become a reflection of *the ultimate reality of heaven's rule*.

Jesus' mission was to announce the arrival of God's kingdom and establish a people who would function as the people of that kingdom. His gospel was a proclamation that God's rule was accessible, and that people could enter into a relationship with Him, and others, that would manifest the joy, love, power and life of that kingdom. He sought to form a human community that would demonstrate the values, convictions, vision and practices that are consistent with God's rule—a *culture* that is shared by a *people* in order to provide evidence of his ascension to his throne in the heavens (Acts 2:30).

The agenda Jesus gave to his disciples prior to his ascension was to continue this same mission, only without the ethnic and geographical restrictions under which he himself operated. They were to carry the gospel of God's rule in Jesus to all the families of the earth. As they were doing this, they were to integrate those who believed the message into the now multiethnic family whose God had made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were to train them in the ways of the Master by instructing them and modeling for them the way God intended for them to live—whether that was in Jerusalem, Athens, or Rome—until Jesus himself returned to them at the close of the age. They were to generate and shepherd a new *social reality* over which Jesus reigned, and through which their testimony about his reign could be observed and validated. This new people would serve as a lasting testimony to God's covenant faithfulness and integrity.

THE AIM OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION: KINGDOM ORIENTATION

At its core, the responsibility of making disciples involves helping people enter the kingdom of God and then guiding them through a process that will orient them to the King himself, his agenda, his people, and his ways. The goal is that individuals become whole, functional and fruitful citizens of this kingdom, and that along with the rest of the King's people, they contribute to a demonstration of the identity and mission of Jesus on the earth.

Orienting people to the King himself requires an approach that guides people in the development of a vibrant relationship with him, while at the same time helping them to understand this relationship in the context of God's eternal purpose for creation and history (Eph. 3:11). Entering the kingdom is only possible through a specific kind of relationship with Jesus (one that acknowledges him as King/Lord), and progress in the kingdom is going to be marked by the ongoing development of that relationship. (This is one implication of Jesus' command to disciples, "follow me.") This means that people need to grow in their understanding of Jesus' identity and mission. It also means that people need to develop in their capacity to relate to Jesus experientially as those who are members of the family that he is forming under his Father's wise leadership.

Learning more about Jesus' identity and mission requires that we listen to the voice of God through the Scriptures. Disciples come to understand Jesus more through reading, studying and meditating on the testimony of the Bible—both old and new covenants. This awakens their hearts to the plan of God, and shows them his character, objectives and ways. Learning about the Lord in this way provides them with insight into who God is, how he has revealed himself definitively and reliably, and a grid for why their relationship with God is necessary and satisfying. Mature saints and leaders, then, should begin by laying solid foundations for a life of scriptural study and then giving younger saints tools to continue their studies as they grow. Encouraging saints to take initiative in this area will come with many rewards as people come to see the personal and communal benefits of drinking deeply from the well of biblical revelation.

In addition to learning *about* God in this way, disciples need to learn to know him experientially for themselves. This is certainly a more subjective kind of undertaking.[3] However, it is for that reason no less significant. After all, we serve a living King, whose resurrection, ascension, and endowment of the Spirit to his people make him accessible to us now, and always—even to the end of the age. It is necessary for disciples to learn to experience the

[3] The reading and interpretation of the Scriptures is certainly not an objective process, though I think it is somewhat *less subjective* than someone's personal interactions with the Lord. I think over time, the perceived quality of someone's personal relationship with God can be validated or invalidated based on the degree to which it is consistent with the identity and mission of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures.

presence of Jesus in their lives. They need to learn to discern his voice, the convictions he wishes to shape in their hearts and minds, the sense of his joy and approval when they obey, the sense of his loving rebuke and discipline when they disobey, and over all, the powerful and energetic working of his Spirit carrying them deeper still into his heart and mind.

In this light, prayer and adoration should become a standard practice by which the experiential knowledge of the Lord is developed. The cultivation of personal intimacy with God was something Jesus himself practiced (Lk. 5:14), and something he urged his own followers to practice (Mt. 6:1-6). It is also something highlighted in Acts as a component of the lives of key apostles like Peter (10:9) and Paul (16:9; 18:9-10). But, personal, secret prayer is by no means the exclusive context in which the experiential dimension with the Lord is to be pursued. Indeed, prayer with others is far more commonly narrated in the Gospels and Acts, and perhaps just as valuable for the growth of young believers. It is valuable because not only can they learn from the prayers of the saints, but they can also sharpen their discernment through observation and participation in the Spirit with their older spiritual siblings. They can give and receive in a way that both encourages and trains their spiritual "senses" to recognize the moving of the Spirit through the body of Christ.

On the part of the shepherd(s), a different kind of guidance than training disciples to read and understand Scripture is needed here, because here we are dealing with matters that are not only personal, but also potentially dependent upon how the Holy Spirit has gifted individuals to become aware of and respond to his voice. This can be tricky, because there is no guarantee that the young disciple will find a parallel in his/her experience in the more mature disciple who is guiding him/her. Hopefully, wisdom will assist in this process, and those who are helping guide new believers will realize that there are experiences in the Lord that can be true of the young disciple that may not have been true for them.

Young disciples may also benefit from reading autobiographies or biographies of other saints to glean from their lives and relationships with God. This can provide other "mentors" outside of his or her immediate community of faith and broaden the spiritual imagination to include other avenues of connecting with the Lord.

Orienting believers to Jesus is the foundational reality that should define "spiritual formation." There is no discipleship without Jesus, and in Jesus, the believer ultimately finds everything she or he needs to flourish in the kingdom. Of course, what the believer finds in Jesus will also be the entire community of faith, which will contribute to the orientation process in unique and critical ways. But, the church can never replace Jesus, himself. In him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

In addition to being oriented to the King's identity and personality, disciples need to become aware of his agenda—not only for themselves as individuals, but for his people, for the world, for all creation and history.

As we saw above, Jesus had a profound and clear sense of mission and how his disciples were both a partial fulfillment of it and the people he was developing in order to extend and ultimately complete that mission. For disciples, this mission is their reason for being. It is what brings purpose, order, and vision to their lives. Without a keen sense of this overarching plan, disciples can be confused, misguided, ineffective, and unfruitful. They can feel like someone lost in a country without a map or a guide. With this plan deeply embedded within them, however, disciples are equipped to interpret their experiences and circumstances in a way that helps them navigate the present age with wisdom and grace.

The process of orienting people to God's agenda depends in large part upon their knowledge of the Scriptures. Here is where we find both the larger elements of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11), specific instructions that have been given to believers in the past, and as a result, an invitation to consider the implications of these things for our own lives in any moment of time. Tracking the big-picture concerns of God's purpose over time is a valuable way for believers to read Scripture and discover both the consistency of the Lord's intentions, and the specific or unique objectives he has provided for his people in different eras. God's story provides the context for any individual believer's story. It provides people with a proper landscape in which they can find themselves, as well as lens through which they can truly see and appreciate the meaning of their lives, and the contributions their lives are making to the unfolding of God's plan.

The Scriptures will also locate them within a community that helps to shape their sense of identity and mission. As we saw above, this community is a partial demonstration of God's ultimate purpose. And, in any generation, people's participation in this community will affect both their understanding of God's purpose, as well as their ability to contribute to it. Church as Christ conceives it, and as the apostles describe it, is the spiritual family without which it is impossible to perceive our identity or fulfill our purpose accurately. This becomes most clear in passages like 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes about the nature of the church using the analogy of a human body. Here parts are both interdependent and uniquely designed. There is no way for the body to function without the contribution of all its parts. And there is no way for an individual part to function properly without an organic and life-giving connection to the rest of the body. God's people are meant both to shape our sense of God's mission and also help us discover the unique ways we may contribute to that mission.

Finally, much like knowing Jesus himself, coming to a deeper understanding of his agenda will also depend on an experiential knowledge of the Lord. In fact, this should be one of the things we take away from our increasing study of the Scriptures. God reveals himself to people. He speaks to them and tells them who they are and what they are to do. This information comes through personal encounter with God, prophetic speech, and even through physical contact from other believers (laying on of hands).

People can discover a profound sense of their calling, their Spiritual gifts/endowments, their direction and purpose, through direct connection with God. Dreams, visions, audible voices, internal "knowing," and prophecy are just some ways that people make these discoveries in Scripture. Alerting disciples to these very real and potentially life-changing avenues of divine communication can help to shape an open heart, and a courageous attitude, as they remain alert to the many creative ways that God may want to speak to them about their own destiny and contribution to his plan. In addition, disciples should be trained in the way of wisdom, which allows them to evaluate their life experiences through the lens of God's truth. This will help them develop a treasure trove of insight and understanding as they continue to walk according to the truth of the gospel.

A third responsibility in disciple-making is to orient believers to God's people. On one level, this means helping disciples to understand what the church or *ekklēsia* is, and what it represents in God's overarching plan. But, on another level, this means literally to orient them to other believers as spiritual siblings who are being formed together with them into a family and dwelling place for the Lord. The conceptual theological vision of the church must be combined with a practical expression, or disciples will either fail to grasp God's design for his people or fail to develop relationally in order to implement that design in concrete ways.

As it was for Jesus, the *ekklēsia* is of primary concern to disciples. This is because, in the end, God's goal is to create, nourish and perfect for himself a people on the earth who bear his image, host his presence, and do his will. This is both the beginning and end of the biblical drama (Gen. 1 and Rev. 21–22). People are at the center of God's interests. And, the Scriptures describe God's tenacious commitment to be in relationship with a specific people in order to fulfill his intentions through them.

God's way of defining the kind of relationship he wants with a people is through covenant. This is a unilateral, definitive way of shaping people's understanding of God's expectations for them, and what they can expect from God. Disciples need to see how God's covenant people were formed initially from the descendants of Abraham in order to create a society that was marked by his presence, his justice, his wisdom and his loving concern for all the people of the earth. They need to see the story of Israel as both an expression of God's vision for His people, and as a preparatory step toward the fulfillment of that vision through Jesus, and subsequently the church. And they need to see the story of the church as the new covenant culmination of God's plan for human community—one which awaits its final chapter through the proclamation of the gospel to all nations, the ingathering of the fullness of the Gentiles, the salvation of Israel and ultimately, the resurrection of the dead. This *ekklēsia* is destined to become the brilliant and final goal of God's creative work—a family, a dwelling place, and a bride for Jesus Christ himself. Seeing this vision in broad strokes will

help disciples cultivate a deep love and profound devotion to the *ekklēsia* as God's treasured possession and their true spiritual family.

In addition to learning the place of the *ekklēsia* in God's master plan, disciples must learn to develop vital relationships with the King's people in their own time and place. The church is not just an idea or a placeholder in God's big picture; it is a collection of human beings to which the disciple belongs. These people are meant both to shape the disciple and to be shaped by him/her. Cultivating healthy and life-giving relationships is a process that people may not be equipped for prior to their immersion into the body of Christ. The family and social background of individual believers tends to play a huge role in their capacity to understand what such relationships look like, and how they are built and maintained. Without attention to these interpersonal realities, expecting disciples to fulfill the vision of kingdom community contained within the Scriptures will be a frustrating and nearly impossible task. As a result, shepherds and leaders need to commit themselves to modeling such relationships with disciples to provide them with a practical expression of the values and instructions conveyed within the apostolic writings.

God's intention is to develop people into a concrete expression of family (a household, per Gal. 6:10 or 1 Tim. 3:5). As we saw above, Jesus envisioned this very thing when he called his disciples to "be with him" above everything else (Mk. 3:14). Disciples need time with other believers. Shepherds and leaders need to make time for disciples in order to show them healthy relationships. God's people need to provide a warm and accessible "home" for new believers, being ready to commit chunks of time to invest in them, not just to teach them about the Bible or Christian doctrine, but to relate to them as people and form the kinds of bonds that are appropriate for people who have become an eternal family with them.

The urgency of this need at the present time is significant. The brokenness of many family structures in our specific era of history is a serious obstacle to disciples understanding the fatherhood of God, the brother/sisterhood of the saints, and the quality of family life that the Lord seeks among us. It is crucial for shepherds and leaders to open their homes, their lives, and their hearts to the flock. Being hospitable is a foundational qualification for elders/overseers, and part of the reason for this is to demonstrate the quality of family relationships that should characterize not only the individual's "blood family," but God's own spiritual family (1 Tim. 3:2–5; Tit. 1:8). Young disciples need genuine relational intimacy with God's people just as much as they need Bible knowledge and doctrinal instruction. Investing in relational intimacy is time-intensive, but it will yield the return of a strong family unit that understands how to "build itself up in love" (Eph. 4:16).

A final area of orientation for disciples is to God's ways. In a sense, disciples are certainly being oriented to God's ways through the three previous areas of emphasis (God, his will and his people). What I am

primarily concerned about here is something that we might refer to as the *culture* of God's kingdom. Believers need to orient their lives around the values, priorities, characteristics, and commitments of God's people. In any generation, these things will stand in stark contrast to the culture generated by the world system. Disciples will need to learn the difference between the kingdom's culture and that of those who are not living their lives in submission to the King. God's people constitute a society of their own. This society is grounded in God's character and power and functions in such a way as to provide evidence for the reign of Jesus before the eyes of an unbelieving world. Training believers to develop a way in the world that corresponds to the vision of heaven for them and God's people as a whole is therefore a high priority.

Learning God's ways is essential for the individual disciple to please the Lord, and to execute his/her personal assignments in the kingdom. Developing personal character, healthy habits, eternally-relevant values, and a strategy for determining and keeping commitments are core components of an ethic that corresponds to the image of Jesus. Training believers to recognize areas in their lives that will require repentance and realignment to God's pattern for them is necessary. Turning away from works of the flesh and learning to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit is a foundational component of maturity in the Lord. Learning how to resist temptation, renew one's mind, and "put on the new self" in any kind of situation should be a focus of developing people in Christ (Eph. 4:24). The best way to help disciples develop in this area will likely be a combination of instruction and practical demonstration. This means that not only should the shepherds/leaders expect to *teach* believers about who they are in Christ, but that they should be ready to invite disciples into their lives to *demonstrate* how that new identity looks in a variety of situations.

It is also very important to help disciples see how their new kingdom identity needs to be expressed in the multiple social contexts of which *they* are a part. How do God's ways affect them in the workplace? How ought God's ways to be manifest in their marriage or family life? How are God's ways relevant to their friendships and memberships in other social contexts? How do God's ways help them map out a pattern of faithfulness among unbelieving and believing people alike? Each individual disciple is invited into the commission to be a "witness" to their world of the resurrected King who now has his/her love, loyalty, and devotion (Acts 1:8). This sense of mission should be communicated early on to disciples, though without mandating the specific manner in which that witness should be executed. That must ultimately be a responsibility for the Holy Spirit.

In a broader sense, disciples also need to learn about God's ways for his people as a whole. They need to discover who the saints are and what God has called them to do together in the context of their neighborhood, city, region, and world. This sense of corporate solidarity is the counterpart to the disciple's focus on individual moral development. God's ways are

never worked out in a vacuum; they encompass a person's life, geographical location, and historical period. The sweeping nature of God's plan demands that disciples discover together what suits God's purpose for their generation (Acts 13:36). Shepherds and leaders should be dedicated to helping younger disciples connect these dots, so they can become increasingly aware of the implications of their membership in God's people for their time and place. As the *ekklēsia* grows in its capacity to understand and express the culture of the kingdom, it can learn to play its part in advancing the cause of the gospel in the socio-cultural-political spheres it inhabits.

ACTS 2:42 AS A STRATEGY FOR KINGDOM ORIENTATION

A final concern of this article is to consider the way in which the earliest followers of Jesus set out to fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples. Although the book of Acts does not provide us with anything close to a complete record of all that the earliest churches thought, believed and put into practice, it does offer a glimpse of the way one such community responded to the Lord's "Great Commission." After experiencing the promised outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we are told that the believers, now numbering over 3,000, "were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Is it possible to perceive in this description a way of orienting people to the kingdom of God as a spiritual family on mission?

It is important to consider the fact that the believers are described as "devoting themselves" to these four things. The word here can mean something like "being busily engaged with" or even "persevering in" something.[4] This reflects a conscious choice and an ongoing commitment. It reveals that these were areas of specific dedication that emerged as a result of what these people had experienced and what Peter (with the eleven) had communicated up to this point. They pursued these things as an expression of the new reality in which they found themselves, and in fulfillment of the instructions of Jesus (1:1–8) and Peter (2:14–40) through the Holy Spirit. In other words, this is not a mere "observation" by Luke; rather, it serves as a description of an apostolic strategy for the fulfillment of Jesus' mission for his people.

The first thing they were busily engaged with was the teaching of the apostles. What was this teaching? Simply put, it was the gospel of the kingdom. It was the substance of what Jesus had communicated to them during the period in which they followed him and learned from him. But, it was also the very focus of what Jesus communicated with them after his

[4] BDAG, 881, §2.

resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:3).[5] It was the focal point of their lives, and the determining factor for their new understanding of their identity and mission. The kingdom is the heart of Peter's proclamation in Acts 2, as he proves through Scripture and experience that Jesus is both Messiah/King as a result of his resurrection (as David's promised heir, per Ps. 16; Acts 2:24–32) and universal Sovereign/Lord by virtue of his ascension (per Ps. 110; Acts 2:33–35). And, all of this was verified by his outpouring of the Spirit upon the disciples on Pentecost. The teaching of the apostles, then, was their proclamation of this kingdom gospel, through the lens of the Scriptures (Lk. 24:44–49), the experience of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It must ultimately have led to their ongoing unfolding of the implications of this good news for the people who now came to see themselves as citizens of this kingdom. This instruction likely would have covered the areas of interest we discussed above: God, his agenda, the identity and mission of his people, and his ways.

Something that should also be considered here is the *manner in which* they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. As we read Luke's narrative, we notice that in Jerusalem, the apostles preached this gospel in public, outdoor spaces (Acts 2), semi-private though accessible locations like Solomon's Portico (Acts 5:12), and more intimate places like people's houses (5:42). It seems that "teaching" was not something confined to a specific location, like a synagogue. Rather, the apostles made use of whatever environments were available to them, or which they were led by the Spirit to inhabit, in order to convey the gospel and its implications. This pattern seems also to have been embraced by the apostle Paul. Throughout the second half of Acts, we find him proclaiming the gospel in synagogues (e.g. Acts 13:14ff.), in public places in cities (e.g. Acts 14:8–18), in marketplaces (Acts 17:17), in a place of prayer by a river (Acts 16:13), in a place of public philosophical debate (Acts 17:19), in a public tribunal (Acts 18:12), in the lecture hall/school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), in an upper room (Acts 20:8), on the steps of the Temple (Acts 22:40), before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23), before magistrates (Acts 24; 25), and in people's households (Acts 16:32ff.; 18:7; 20:21), not to mention Paul's own quarters in Rome (Acts 28:16ff.).

It is very likely that in pursuing this flexible and spontaneous approach to proclaiming the kingdom, the apostles were simply following the example of their Master and King. Jesus' own habit of using whatever context in which he found himself to articulate the truth of the kingdom is clearly outlined in the Gospels. The apostles followed suit, and the people persisted in this teaching, presumably accessing it however and whenever it was available to them.

I think this flexibility is quite important for us to recapture. Though I am sure there are exceptions, it seems to me that for "professional clergy,"

[5] Craig Keener says, "because the apostles' teaching provided the historic link to Jesus's ministry (1:21-22), it is essential for Luke in emphasizing the continuity between the mission of Jesus and his church" (*Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012], 1001).

there is a strong temptation to locate "apostolic teaching" within the confines of a church building, or even more narrowly, the Sunday morning service. The assumption that this, and other, official-type settings are the most conducive to instructing people is something that is not only challenged by Scripture but can also be challenged by our own life experience. Teachable moments abound—and not only in the lives of children, but in the lives of adults who have a multitude of opportunities to grow throughout the rhythm of the work week. We should be ready and willing to help people access the kingdom gospel in diverse and informal contexts—whether that be at the kitchen table, at a local park, or at a hospital bedside. Apostolic teaching is also something that we should be ready to deliver using the technological tools we have at our disposal. I am not ashamed to admit that in our large, urban context, where traffic, weather and other obstacles can prevent people from gathering physically, FaceTime and online platforms have often served us well as we continue to educate and train disciples. Preaching in an organized gathering of saints on Sunday is a beautiful thing. But, developing a community of people who are 'busily engaged' with the apostles' teaching is going to require much more of us than this.

The second thing the believers were busily engaged with was "the fellowship." The term employed by Luke in this verse is significant. It means much more than believers simply exchanging friendly greetings or being in the same place with one another instead of hanging out with unbelieving friends. The word here being translated fellowship is *koinōnia*. Another way of defining this term is "a close association involving mutual interests."[6] The implication here is that the disciples were busily engaged with the *ekklēsia* itself—that is, with one another. The term is used in the ancient world to describe the sharing of goods and resources. It also refers to the idea of participation together in the same activities or responsibilities, as we see in Acts 2:44-47.

As we have seen above, the arrival of the kingdom generates a people. And those people earnestly devoted themselves to one another in ways that expressed solidarity, partnership and mutual care. This is a foundational strategy to learn about God's agenda, his people and his ways in the context of interdependent community life. Indeed, some might even call this way of life "familial"—that is, characteristic of the way members' families would care for, provide for and serve one another. Without using the term "family," New Testament scholar Darrell Bock comments, "Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church at all levels…There is a real sense of connection to, between, and for each other."[7] In other words, the *ekklēsia* participated in a common life together much like a family.

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[6] BDAG, 438, §1.

[7] Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 150.

I think we are all familiar with ways of supporting others in our congregations in times of great need and urgency. Meals for new moms, comforting people during times of loss, and contributing to celebrations of weddings, graduations, and the like are all expressions of solidarity and support. It is necessary, however, to make sure that we do not restrict "participation" to something reserved for such punctuation marks at the end of long sentences, as it were. Instead, we need to help people to be proactive about learning how to partner with one another for kingdom advancement in response to the Spirit's voice. We as leaders need to provide both the vision and the "green light" for disciples to actively engage one another, their neighbors, communities and cities together. We need to model, and encourage, families to eat together for no other reason than to build relationships, share one another's needs and dreams, and learn to trust and pray for one another. We need to encourage people to tap into the Spirit's gifts and presence to open their homes for meals with neighbors, to team up to host block parties, or to organize massive outreaches on Halloween for kids and parents wandering the streets. The kingdom is capable of dignifying every member and mobilizing every member for eternally fruitful work.

The third thing these believers devoted themselves to was "the breaking of the bread." Some scholars believe this to be a reference to the ritual or sacrament of the Eucharist/Communion. Others simply see it as a reference to the habit these believers developed of eating their regular meals together. The latter would have certainly been the case, even if the former was also true, since as far as we know, the bread and the cup Jesus introduced at the "Last Supper" continued to be shared as a part of a "Lord's Meal" during the rest of the New Testament period (see 1 Cor. 11:17–34 and Jd. 12). The sharing of meals in one another's homes is reiterated in Acts 2:46, and so it is very likely that at a minimum, what Luke is showing us is that the disciples were busily engaged with hosting and attending meals in one another's homes.

If we are curious as to how meals became such a center of the life of the disciples, we need look no further than the mission strategy of their Master himself. The number of times Jesus is described as attending, going to or coming from meals in the Gospels is eye opening. He engaged "sinners" and Pharisees at meals. He instructed disciples at meals. He cultivated intimacy with his friends at meals. He was welcomed into homes, and he welcomed others into his home. Indeed, as Luke 7:34 says, "the Son of Man came eating and drinking!" Even after the resurrection, it's possible that some of his instructions came in the context of meals.[8] It seems, then, that the disciples picked up where Jesus left off, committing themselves to a way of life organized around the table. Why would this be?

[8] One way of translating the language in Acts 1:4 is "while *eating* with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem..."

The table is a powerful indicator of intimacy, friendship, and welcome. Meals in the New Testament period were avenues used to cultivate relationship and to demonstrate unity and harmony. New Testament scholar Craig Keener notes, "a host who shared a meal with guests was thought to have formed a bond of relationship that never should be taken lightly."[9] Jesus used meals to reveal and extend the grace of God to people no one believed deserved it. He used meals to open his own heart to his friends and to demonstrate the kind of vulnerability that true loyalty requires. He used meals to enact his own kingdom proclamation by welcoming a ragtag group of mismatched people and increasingly forming them into a family unit. As Tim Chester puts it, "the meals of Jesus…represent a new world, a new kingdom, a new outlook. But, they give that reality substance. Jesus' meals are not just symbols; they're also application…They represent the meaning of the mission, but they more than represent it: they embody and enact" it.[10] Meals form family. Meals build intimacy. Meals extend mission. Meals proclaim and demonstrate God's new kingdom family, and provide a point of orientation in everyday life for this kind of manifestation.

By being busily engaged with meals in one another's homes, the disciples were repeatedly enacting the new kingdom realities proclaimed in the gospel. They were building relationships, providing for one another, rehearsing the Lord's death and resurrection (whenever the meals included those special moments with the bread and the cup), and extending the reach of the kingdom into new physical spaces.

Practically speaking, the sharing of meals may be the practice that has made the most significant long-term effect on the nature of the community in which I serve. It is not always easy. Sometimes, it is downright messy and even frustrating. But, over the long haul, eating together is such a rich and sanctifying discipline. Most of the church gatherings I participate in begin or end with meals. Our Lord's Suppers (when we share in the bread and the cup) are actually suppers, in which people look each other in the eyes, as well as remember the sacrifice of the King that has brought them to the same table. Hospitality and generosity are shocking to many people in my city, who are used to a fast-paced, utilitarian approach to meals and the table in general. Some people we have met in our city never even ate with their families, and are profoundly stirred by the *time* we take just to enjoy our food and one another. For those of us who lack patience, devoting an hour to a meal at the beginning of a gathering will challenge us. We are convinced that the time would be better spent doing more "spiritual" things. But, this is where our theology fails us. From the perspective of the Scriptures, these meals *are profoundly spiritual*. They are covenant meals in which we feast under the shadow of the Lord's wings. They are manifestations of the kingdom family into which we are baptized, and in

[9] Keener, *Acts*, 1005.

[10] Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 14.

which we must now grow. The table is a microcosm of the kingdom, and we neglect it to our peril. Here we recognize the body of Christ—both in terms of his sacrifice and in terms of his people (see 1 Cor. 11). And, here we continue to be conformed, as the body of Christ, more and more into his beautiful image.

Finally, according to Acts 2:42, the believers were busily engaged with "the prayers." Acts describes a diversity of contexts and purposes for prayer. Believers participate in more "organized" gatherings for prayer at the temple (3:1). They gathered in private locations to pray like upper rooms and individual houses (1:14; 4:31; 12:12). They prayed on rooftops privately (10:9), in prison cells in pairs (16:25), and in small groups of leaders (13:1–3). Sometimes they prayed for specific things (signs, wonders and bold proclamation of the gospel in 4:29ff.), but sometimes they simply pray and minister to the Lord (13:1–3). Presumably, they continued to apply Jesus' teaching of private, personal prayer combined with more public, united times of prayer (see Matt. 6).

Prayer is a foundational way to know and experience God. It is also a key to accomplishing the will of God, according to the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 6:9–13. Private and united prayer combine to orient the disciple to the Lord, his agenda and his people. Moreover, when God responds to his people in prayer, he further illumines these things for them, which develops the disciples' understanding of his ways.

How desperately we need a fresh vision of and devotion to prayer! Trying to make progress in the kingdom apart from prayer is like trying to plant seeds on stainless steel. Prayer is the fundamental work of the kingdom, and it is the engine that makes every other thing we do in obedience to the Lord work. Church leaders should be setting the pace—both in terms of private devotion and public participation— providing an example to God's flock of the value and joy of deepening our communion with the Lord. It is again necessary for us to make very sure that we do not restrict our prayers to the "official services" of the church. I think it is safe to say praying in church services is the expected role of spiritual leaders. For that very reason, our dedication to prayer must not stop there. We must be consistently turning to prayer throughout the day. It should be the default setting for our reactions to bad news and good news alike. It should be the serious and constant business of those following in the footsteps of Jesus. In the same way, we ought to be helping disciples to develop in prayer by praying with them, giving them resources to understand prayer better and encouraging them to join their voices to ours when we pray together. How much sweeter is it for our brothers and sisters to hear about answers to prayer for which they, themselves have contended on their knees! Let it not be strange to end conversations with prayer, to end meals and evenings of sweet fellowship with prayer, nor to offer thanks and praise together for the many precious drops of mercy that fall on us as we inhabit kingdom spaces throughout the day.

The process of spiritual formation can be understood through the lens of orienting disciples to the reality and implications of the kingdom of God in the context of spiritual family. This is accomplished by helping them grow in their knowledge and experience of God, his agenda, his people and his ways. Acts 2:42 illustrates four foundational areas of ongoing devotion that characterized the earliest disciples' strategy for accomplishing this kind of kingdom orientation. It may be worthwhile for early twenty-first century American churches to revisit these commitments in consideration of our own responsibility to make disciples of all nations in a new generation.

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SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND THE CHURCH

EDWARD W. KLINK III[1]

The spiritual formation movement has provided a healthy resurgence in the theory and practice of the spiritual life, or the trans*formative* process of being and becoming faithful and fruitful—even healthy—disciples of Jesus Christ. Rather than a fad, this movement has been viewed by some as a God-ordained and Spirit-empowered response to a crisis of the lack of spiritual formation, especially in Western culture, where a more holistic approach to following Christ is needed.[2] The movement is tied to a shift in thinking about the nature of catechesis—a shift from "in-formation" to "formation," reflected in both the church and the academy.[3]

It is not easy to define "spiritual formation," however, and there are several reasons that can be offered as an explanation. First, although this movement is new,[4] its methods are often borrowing and adapting very old Christian practices, maybe especially the influence of Catholic monastic writings and practices. Second, and related to the first, the spiritual formation movement is a collection of practitioners from different traditions within Christianity and with very different theological bents regarding Christian spirituality and the nature of the spiritual life. Finally, even if we try to address "spiritual formation," we are speaking of a movement that is made up of a complex matrix of principles, postures, and procedures that cannot easily be defined as a collection, let alone equally or uniformly applied.

These difficulties, however, do not prohibit a general definition of the spiritual formation movement, since there are several commonly articulated

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[2] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church…and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21, 28.

[3] Paul Bramer, "Christian Formation: Tweaking the Paradigm," *Christian Education Journal 4*, no. 2 (2007): 352-63.

[4] "New" needs to be qualified. In one sense, it is *not* new at all, for what some over the last decade or so have branded as "spiritual formation" is actually what the church has long been doing and what the Bible has always commanded: discipleship and sanctification. But in another sense, the spiritual formation movement *is* new in that it is arguably a rejuvenating approach to the nature of discipleship and the process of sanctification. It is also new in that it serves as a corrective to poorly done discipleship or poorly conceived sanctification.

values and intentions that have become recognized and practiced, at least as it is addressed in the academy. For our purposes, we will offer a one-sentence definition of spiritual formation that contains six primary components:

> Spiritual formation is (1) the process of being formed as a person (2) through various spiritual postures and practices (3) by the power of the Spirit (4) and in the context of community (5) in order to be united to Christ (6) for a life of mission and blessing.

Some might argue that there are other primary components that should be included, and certainly some of the components are stated so generically that a much fuller description might be deemed necessary, but these six components summarize the way spiritual formation is being defined in theoretical and practical resources for more than two decades.[5]

The spiritual formation movement has not been immune to questions and criticism. In one of the earliest volumes of the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care,* Steve Porter addressed what he called "evangelical anxieties" over spiritual formation, and explained that the movement can simply be understood to be a fresh way of addressing what the church has long referred to as sanctification—"the nature and dynamics of growth in Christian holiness."[6] Clearly Porter was more serving as an apologist for the movement, offering context, correction, or nuance to common objections and concerns. A few years later and in the same journal, Rick Langer presented what he called "points of unease" with the spiritual formation movement.[7] Langer, an outsider to the movement proper, began with what he called some "virtues" of the movement, before offering "a few cautionary

[5] Some of the primary voices in the spiritual formation movement, whose definitions fit the six-part definition provided above, include the following: M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 12; Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22; Paul Pettit, "Introduction," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A community Approach to Becoming Like Christ,* ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 24; Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 268; Jeffrey P. Greenman, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 24; and Richella Parham, *A Spiritual Formation Primer* (Englewood, CO: Renovaré, 2013), 6.

[6] Steve L. Porter, "Sanctification in a New Key: Relieving Evangelical Anxieties over Spiritual Formation," *JSFSC 1*, no. 2 (2008): 129-48 (130). Porter's eight common objections to spiritual formation include (1) it is just another passing fad; (2) it is Catholic; (3) it is New Age; (4) it is contrary to the sufficiency of Scripture; (5) it complicates and confuses good old-fashioned obedience; (6) it encourages works righteousness; (7) it is overly experiential; and (8) it neglects missions/evangelism.

[7] Rick Langer, "Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement," *JSFSC* 5, no. 2 (2012): 182-206.

words" that addressed concern with "current tendencies."[8] Both Porter and Langer addressed the profitability of raising such concerns, with Porter suggesting that "concerns are often rooted in some helpful corrective."[9]

The essays by Porter and Langer reflect the intention and approach of this essay—or more loosely, its genre.[10] The overall goal of this essay is to examine the fourth component listed in the definition above: "in the context of community." More specifically, this essay would like to explore how the spiritual formation movement understands the role and ministry of the church in the process and purpose of spiritual formation. The motivation behind this essay is "unease" with the loss of the church, both doctrinally and practically, in the contemporary spiritual formation movement. We will attempt nether a full assessment nor solution to the spiritual formation movement's practice of "community" or theology of the church. Our goal is more basic: to explore this movement's understanding of the church with the aim of helping Christians (and their local churches) think more critically about the identity and purpose of the church in their spiritual life and formation.

I. SPIRITUAL FORMATION "IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY"

The spiritual formation movement is in part a critical reaction to the failures of the church to perform its duties. The general consensus of the spiritual formation movement is that the church has failed to be properly *concerned with* or a meaningful *context for* Christian spiritual formation. In his introductory guide to spiritual formation, Evan Howard claims that "times are changing. People are asking questions about church and about formation," and more specifically, about the relation between them.[11]

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[8] Langer, "Points of Unease," 187. Langer lists six virtues of spiritual formation: (1) it has helped restore a "thicker" notion of salvation; (2) it offers a corrective to spiritual cognitivism; (3) it invites expectant engagement with the Spirit; (4) it is a corrective to hyper-activity and hyper-consumerism of modern American life; (5) it links body and soul as partners, not aliens or enemies; and (6) it places the sword of the Spirit back in the hands of the Spirit. But Langer lists five "points of unease" with spiritual formation: (1) unease about the dualistic tendency to value spirituality at the expense of the material world; (2) unease with devotional practices grown in the soil of monastic Catholicism; (3) unease with a rhetorical strategy that sharply distinguishes between being and doing; (4) unease with devotional practices that fail the "soccer mom" test; and (5) unease with certain ways of using Scripture which are devotionally fruitful but hermeneutically questionable.

[9] Porter, "Sanctification in a New Key," 148.

[10] While this author is not an insider in the spiritual formation movement, he served for nearly a decade on the same theological faculty with major proponents of the movement (John Coe, Judy TenElshof, and Steve Porter), and within ear shot of and in regular participation with the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. With this authorial context, any "anxiety" or "unease" stemming from this essay is raised with a collegial spirit and an equal desire to make disciples who grow in Christian holiness.

[11] Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spirituality: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 9.

Howard goes on to say that "Every aspect of church life is currently being reexamined with an eye toward formation."[12] A survey of recent literature from the spiritual formation movement reveals two failures of "the church."

First, *the church has failed to adequately form the spiritual lives of people.* Dallas Willard believes the contemporary church has not successfully aimed its sights at its actual mission: "spiritual formation in Christlikeness [is] the exclusive primary goal of the local congregation."[13] The root of this failure, according to Willard, is distraction. The church is simply failing to focus on what the Bible makes clear is the primary thing—spiritually forming our people. But for Willard, the issue is not simply naivete, but a misplaced purpose. When thinking about the role of the church, Willard challenges a philosophy of ministry that posits the institutional church as a light to the world. For Willard, that is not the task of the church but of Christians; the task of the church is to spiritually form Christians into faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus. According to Willard, "the most successful work of *outreach* would be the work of *inreach* that turns people, wherever they are, into lights in the darkened world."[14] Such a statement may turn on its head the way churches—and Christians—think about what they do, and offers content to the kind of "reexamination" Howard mentioned above.

Willard and Howard are not alone in their critique and concerns of the failure of the church to form disciples. In a recent essay, several leaders in the spiritual formation movement addressed the nature and need of spiritual formation in the church.[15] All of the contributors echo the sentiments of Willard regarding the primary focus of the church, but they were even more specific with their criticisms of the church: "the church is in crisis…has lost her spiritual moorings" (Chandler); even churches where spiritual formation is occurring "seem more to have stumbled into spiritual formation more than intentionally chosen it" (Wilhoit); "The church has chosen another way… the evangelical church has leaned heavily on teaching and understanding the text of God's word and far less on what is being experienced of God's word in the heart and emotions" (TenElshof); "[Numerical] growth without

[12] Howard, *Guide to Christian Spirituality,* 10. Howard goes on to add that "the notion of spiritual formation" is also "being reexamined in light of a rich theology and the practice of the church." The goal of this essay is to participate in this reexamination.

[13] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 235.

[14] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 235 (emphasis original).

[15] Ruth Haley Barton, *et al.*, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," *JSFSC* 7, no. 2 (2014): 292-311. The topics addressed include the following: (1) What is the role of the church when it comes to spiritual formation in Christ? (2) To what degree should the local church be focused on the spiritual formation of its members and why should it be so focused? (3) What is your sense of how the local church is doing when it comes to facilitating spiritual formation? (4) What do you think are the biggest obstacles to spiritual formation in the local church? (5) What are some of the best practices when it comes to implementing spiritual formation in the local church? (6) If a leader could only do one thing [related to spiritual formation] in their local church community, what would you recommend?

depth. No doubt God is not pleased with superficial discipleship"[16] (Tan); "churches in general are struggling for clarity about what spiritual formation is and how it happens in the life of [a] person. There is still a bias toward assuming that if one is attending church services regularly, participating in a small group, serving with one's gifts, and tithing faithfully they are transforming. This is decidedly not the case" (Barton).[17]

Interestingly, when those spiritual formation leaders were asked how churches could implement spiritual formation in their local congregations, the answer had little to do with the traditional "marks" of the church and more to do with personal and relational practices: "a deeper journey with God and each other" (TenElshof); "a personal devotional life…a welcoming atmosphere of grace" (Chandler); "being involved in a small group of a few people who meet regularly to share and pray together and practice spiritual disciplines in their lives, and doing some spiritual reading or Bible study together but with a focus on application and obedience with the help of the Holy Spirit and God's grace" (Tan); "Help people get in touch with their spiritual desire and then guide them in crafting a rule of life of 'sacred rhythms' that correspond to their hearts' deepest desire" (Barton).[18] Some of these leaders did understand and even try to coalesce spiritual formation practices and principles with the traditional aspects of the church, but generally not without a strong and primary sense of correction.

These constructive criticisms point to the second failure of "the church:" *the church has failed to provide a proper context in which spiritual formation can occur.* More specifically, the movement has found the formal practices of "the church" to be lacking the kind of life-engagement and life-propelling aspects necessary for the formation of disciples. In response, the movement has presented what they deem to be a more holistic and interpenetrating category for the context in which Christian spiritual formation is best accomplished: "community." Community that is Christian (biblically- and Jesus-based) and authentic (relational- and life-based) exerts proper pressures on a person so that their life is properly formed (inward—in identity and character) and oriented (outward—to God and others). Since this is the goal of every Christian, this should also be the goal of any ministry (church or otherwise) in Christian discipleship.

While the term "community" gets placed in prime position in most spiritual formation definitions, it often is used with little specification. In general, however, spiritual formation literature does provide some basic

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[16] Tan quotes from the opening address given by John Stott at the First International Consultation on Discipleship held in September 1999 in England, cited in S. Y. Tan, *Full Service: Moving from Self-Serve Christianity to Total Servanthood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 135.

[17] Haley, et. al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 298-301.

[18] Haley, et. al, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 304-308. See also the fuller work by Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

tenets for the proper practice and place of "community." A clear summary of what many seem to be thinking when using the term is given by Paul Pettit, who defines how spiritual formation is intended to take place: "the change or transformation that occurs in the believers' life happens best in the context of authentic, Christian community and is oriented toward God and others."[19] Note the two necessary or "best" components: (1) an authentic, Christian community to *form* a person's life and (2) a proper orientation (to God and others) to *direct* a person's life.

It is important to note the implications of this understanding of a spiritually-forming "community." First, rather than using the traditional marks of the church as the agents of spiritual formation, all that is needed is what James Wilhoit calls an "intentional communal process."[20] While this does not exclude the church and its traditional means of grace, it certainly does not necessitate it. What is necessary is an "intentional process" through which the personal nature of God forms a Christian through personal relationships in a forming and directing "communal context." If the church matters, it is only in a functional or utilitarian sense. The functional forces of the church, apparently empowered by the Spirit, are what truly matters. Togetherness, with all of its intentionality and productivity, becomes the sacramental means of grace.

A further implication is that the church has no special claim as a context for spiritual formation. Wilhoit actually suggests that the spiritual formation of a person—in an intentional communal process—"must extend beyond the individual to the church, the family, and society."[21] In this sense, the church becomes one of many possible formative groups, or simply a subset of a larger group in which spiritual formation takes place. All that is needed is an intentional "community," a term which now must carry not only all the life situations of human relationships, but also all the theological force of God's personal, Spirit-empowered work in the formation of Christians. The thrust of Wilhoit's argument for this extended communal context is based on the belief that "all true formation has its origins in God."[22] For Wilhoit the implications of this doctrinal truth are clear: Christians "may avail themselves of avenues of change that promote the presence of gospel virtues. *Our change does not come in two forms: good Christian church-based change and ordinary change.* All true formation has its origin in God, and we must humbly receive it as a gift."[23] But what makes something an "avenue of change?" And is there nothing unique about the church's role in the work of God and the life of the believer? By Wilhoit's own logic, God may or may not choose to use the church, for all things can become God-utilized

[19] Pettit, "Introduction," 19.

[20] James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

[21] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 23.

[22] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 36.

[23] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 36 (emphasis added).

avenues of change. Even if Wilhoit would never say such words, by implication the church does not necessarily matter—something his title suggests. What seems essential, however, is "community," of whatever sort, as long as it has intentionally forming and directing capabilities that provide an "avenue of change."

The general consensus within the spiritual formation movement seems to be that the church is more disappointment than discipleship, and strongly missing the mark when it comes to spiritually forming Christians. Some actually frame the church as a potential handicap. Diane Chandler warns that Christians who place too much reliance on the church may actually hinder their spiritual growth. In her words: "If spiritual input occurs only on Sunday mornings, then *believers risk becoming overly dependent on the church for spiritual formation*."[24] To be fair, in the larger context Chandler was trying to explain the importance of Christians having and adopting personal spiritual formation practices. Yet such a statement runs the risk of presenting and facilitating a kind of spiritual-formation Gnosticism, where the Christian is expected (at least the mature ones!) to be spiritually formed without the church, or at least partially independent, as if the church is spiritual milk and not the source and sustenance of the Spirit-directed feast of the Christian's spiritual life and maturity.

Even more extreme is the position of Kelly Bean, representing what are called "non-goers," those who do Christian "community" but not "the church" (the "unchurched" or "dechurched"). While Bean is not a voice in the spiritual formation movement, her position is growing in popularity and has many resonances with the role of "community" in the spiritual formation movement. Bean appropriates many biblical terms and images regarding the church and applies them directly to a church-free context:

> As a person who led and served in church for more than two decades, I know the importance of gathering together as the visible body of Christ and encouraging each other to practice love and do good deeds. Now, as a non-goer and cultivator in an ever-evolving Christian community, I also believe there are healthy, visible, doable alternatives to the traditional church. Becoming a non-goer does not have to lead to a waning faith or cynicism but instead can lead to a life-giving, world-changing, growth-inducing community-building way of being.[25]

Ironically, for Bean, the act of "gathering together" actually requires one to be a "non-goer." This truly is an alternative to the classic doctrine and practices of the church. Rather than meeting in the sacred gathering of corporate worship and feeding on Christ in the sacrament, Bean's practices on a Sunday morning involve being "curled up in my cushy orange chair,

[24] Haley, et. al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 306 (emphasis added).

[25] Kelly Bean, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church: The Unofficial Guide to Alternative Forms of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 13.

sipping tea and loving Jesus."[26] Although Bean offers more protest than principle, even in the spiritual formation movement it can seem as if the key ingredient is this often nebulous but functional concept of "community" and some abstract work of formation.

II. THE DOCTRINAL FORMATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The spiritual formation movement's assessed failure of the church to form its people spiritually has led to the creation of a modified or expanded understanding of the context needed to foster Christian spiritual formation. The question needs to be asked: Can intentionally-forming and God-directing "community" replace "the church?" The answer to this question must be sought in the doctrines of God and the church

Since spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the person and work of Christ, we must first make clear the necessary connection between the Lord Jesus Christ and his Body, the church. This connection is the theological grounds upon which any understanding of spiritual formation in the church must stand. This is because the church and its power or ability to achieve Christian formation has a necessarily derivative character. John Webster explains the church's derivativeness this way: "its ecclesial character derives solely from and is wholly dependent upon the gospel's manifestation of God's sovereign purpose for his creatures. The church is because God is and acts *thus*."[27] This order is essential: "the church is not constituted by human intentions, activities and institutional or structural forms, but by the action of the triune God, realized in Son and Spirit."[28] Already doctrine is offering a caution: to speak of "community" without the "triune community" is, quite simply, to misspeak. Since, "[t]he doctrine of the church is only as good as the doctrine of God which underlies it," all Christian teaching must be properly ordered by the doctrine of the Trinity.[29]

The ordered connection between the person and the body of Christ already makes one thing clear: no matter how authentic and intentional, *we cannot think of "community" as a self-existing, self-facilitating entity through which spiritual formation happens.* If the people of God are rooted in the person and work of God made known through Jesus Christ, then "the gathering" of God is an entirely unique "community," driven and directed by something outside itself. The church is a new covenant community between God and humanity "which is grounded in the self-offering of

[26] Bean, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church*, 10.

[27] John Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 75-95 (76).

[28] John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 195.

[29] Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," 78.

Jesus Christ."[30] All of this is to say that all such language about authentic, properly-oriented Christian "community," or even language in regard to the church, must be properly situated on the doctrine of the triune God. And the doctrine of the triune God makes three things clear about the gathering community of God, each of which will help us more accurately understand and define the context of spiritual formation.

First, the gathering community of God can only be "from the Father." The church's derivativeness means that it can claim nothing for itself, for it exists only by the will of God. The relation between God and his people is asymmetrical; they are distinguished because one gives and the other receives. This is where the community called "the church" must begin, for this is required for right relation. The church is "from God," and must function as having a divine "from-ness" reflected in its posture to all things. To say that the church is "from the Father" is to say that the church is "by the initiative of the Father."[31] It is God alone who determines the task and content of the church's work and the community's life.

The spiritual formation movement walks on thin ice when it rebukes or reorganizes the church's efforts of formation in any way that denies or delimits the transformative design of God. When suggestions are offered that lack the asymmetrical character of the God-human relation or assimilate the individualism and voluntarism of more modern political and philosophical culture,[32] then the "community" in view is not properly from God, and therefore, not spiritually formed enough. Spiritual formation is ultimately rooted in the will of the Father, who creates and wills creatures for fellowship with him. It is not a formula but a fact, like gravity, that simply is and can only be obeyed. "All God's creatures are moved [formed] by God to their fulfillment in him."[33]

Second, the gathering community of God can only be "in the Son." The church's derivativeness means it can accomplish nothing by itself, for it exists only by the work of God. The Father chose the Son to be the source, savior, and sovereign of the church. This truth about God also reveals a truth about humanity's absolute need of Christ: "condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we should seek righteousness, liberation, life, and salvation in him."[34] To say that the church is "through the Son" is to say that the church finds its life in him—in Christ alone. It is Christ alone who resources the

[30] Douglas Farrow, "Doctrine of the Church," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 115-19 (116).

[31] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2:215.

[32] Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," 77.

[33] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2:172.

[34] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.16.1.

church's existence and life. The church is the Body of Christ, which means that in actuality "the church is Christ's."[35]

The spiritual formation movement must guard against positing any method or means as the facilitating resource for spiritual formation and communal life. The doctrinal foundations above that make clear the asymmetrical relations between God and humanity will not allow the church's ministry to be viewed as a cooperative effort between divine and human agency. Webster explains it well:

> Jesus Christ is not inert, but present with force, active as prophet, priest and king. The task of ministry is thus not to complete that which he has done, or to accomplish that which Christ himself does not do now, but rather to indicate or attest his work both past and present. That to which the ministerial action of the church is ordered is the 'showing' of Jesus Christ's self-proclamation in word, baptism, and the Lord's supper.[36]

Thus, the church truly is "the body" of Christ, the one *in whom* the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and *through whom* "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Col. 1:19-20). And the church's ministry is most accurately depicted as "a responsive movement to the dynamic force of the Word of God."[37]

Third, the gathering community of God can only be "through the Holy Spirit." The church's derivativeness means it can empower nothing for itself, for it exists only by the ways of God. The church has no gathering or forming power outside of the Holy Spirit. The church is a "responsive movement" in Christ and through the Spirit. It is only through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that the church is and becomes a gathering of God—the *ecclesia*. In short, formation is the Spirit's job—it is "Spirit formation" or "formation by the Spirit."

> The office of the Holy Spirit is…to apply to creatures the benefits of salvation, in the sense of making actual in creaturely time and space that for which creatures have been reconciled—fellowship with God and with one another. In perfecting creatures, sanctifying them so that they come to take the form purposed by the Father and achieved for them by the Son, the Spirit is…'the giver of life…'[38]

Just as the church finds its origin in the will of the Father, and the mediation through the Son, so also the church works, ministers, and lives "in the

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[35] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2:212.

[36] Webster, *Word and Church*, 201-202.

[37] Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: Conversations with Tudor Christianity* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 120.

[38] John Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible,'" in *Community of the Word*, 96-113 (101).

freedom reign of the Spirit, the material determinant of what generally can be and cannot be."[39]

The spiritual formation movement can focus so strongly on the functional nature of the church that it fails to understand correctly its ontological nature. The danger with such leanings is that the asymmetrical nature of the God-human relation is imbalanced. It is actually the Spirit "who brings to completion the work of reconciliation by generating and sustaining… so that they attain that for which they were created."[40] And as Christ announced, this work of the Spirit is assigned to take place in the church! This doctrinal alignment is important because it ensures that true spiritual formation, which is really the work of the Spirit, is as much a divine work as the Father's initiated purpose and the Son's accomplished work.[41]

> There can be no sense in which, whilst God's first and second works are pure grace, his third work involves some kind of coordination of divine and creaturely elements. The history of…the church...is the history of the new creation, the history of the resurrection of the dead…[The church] is what it is because in the Holy Spirit God has completed the circle of his electing and reconciling work, and consummated his purpose of gathering the church to himself.[42]

In this way, every work or aspect of the church's life is empowered, directed, and obtained by the Holy Spirit through the life in word and deed of the communion of saints. The Spirit is not used for spiritual formation but the first and final forming agent.

In summary, any talk of "a deeper journey with God," "a welcoming atmosphere of grace," "the practice of spiritual disciplines," and even "helping people get in touch with their spiritual desire" can be highly misleading or misappropriated if not firmly defined and directed not by techniques or methods but by the triune God and his new covenant community, the church. The church's existence begins in the eternal purpose of the Father, is established through the Son's reconciling mercy and love, and is formed by the Spirit's life-giving power. For this reason, any strategy that assumes a symmetrical work between God and humanity—whether individualism, utilitarianism, voluntarism, or social-psychology—is itself misaligned from the Way, Truth, and Life of the work of the triune God in the church.

III. THEOLOGICAL SCAFFOLDING AND PASTORING FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

To evaluate practices and their assumptions about the church is ultimately to expose theological scaffolding. Our examination of the context

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[39] Jensen, *Systematic Theology*, 2:215.

[40] Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible,'" 101.

[41] Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible,'" 102.

[42] Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible.'" 102.

for spiritual formation in the spiritual formation movement is no exception. Cultural forces in every generation can pressure and warp the beliefs and values of Christians. Even in our own churches, forged in a modern, western culture that is drenched with democratic, egalitarian, and free-enterprise models of community, and dictated by forces of consumer preferences and demographic affinities, beliefs about the church and its ministry can crumble beneath the pressure. These pressures, however, are more implicit than explicit.

There are also explicit beliefs about the nature of faith and the work of God in us that go a long way to define how we speak of church and the context (common or special) in which spiritual formation is practiced. Michel Horton offers a brief but helpful summary of different systems for understanding the means and contexts through which God works:

> ...it is of decisive importance whether one thinks that faith is assent to everything the magisterium teaches (as in Roman Catholic teaching), a personal choice that the individual makes to become born again (as in evangelical Arminianism), or the gift that the Spirit gives from the Father, in the Son, because the triune God choose us, redeemed us, and now calls us effectually to Christ [as in Reformed theology?].[43]

Each of these approaches or traditions, even if described in simple terms, reveals not only the theological scaffolding behind approaches and methods for doing ministry, but also the significance of contexts where ministry happens. The place of ministry is connected, as we discussed above, to the personal ministry of God in the world and, therefore, the way he extends himself to us. What kind of context of God's work do each of these positions produce? Horton suggests that the first view will "generate hierarchical models" and the second "a more egalitarian and individualistic approach." [44] The third view, however, produces something of a hybrid approach: "…the Spirit unites us to Christ and makes us grow more and more into Christ (and therefore into communion with each other) through creaturely means."[45] Notice how this definition of the church directly addresses spiritual formation and the context in which it is actualized—an asymmetrical work of God in Christians *through creaturely means.* The first two views have very different emphases regarding the relation between God's work and "the creaturely means." In the first view (Roman Catholicism), the work of God is *identical* with the context so that the church's actions actually cause grace to grow. In the second view (evangelical Arminianism), the work of God is *separated* from the context so that the Spirit's work is "reduced to immediate and private operations within individuals without

[43] Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 388.

[44] Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 388.

[45] Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 389.

any mediated and public ministry."[46] In a sense, the first and second views lack a proper asymmetrical balance. Only in the third view (Reformed theology) does God become the primary worker and yet use "creaturely means" with both purpose and power.

All of this scaffolding talk was simply to show how this discussion is strongly directed from the outside, pressured by larger theological forces that give definition to the common terms we use like church, Spirit, formation, and specifically the phrase, "in the context of community." For the second view, one in which the work of God is separated from the context, the community "exists because of the inner experience of individuals whose gathering together is primarily a means of fellowship, sharing each other's experiences of personal transformation."[47] This seems to be the theological scaffolding behind much of the spiritual formation movement. Statements like "the practice of spiritual disciplines," and "helping people get in touch with their spiritual desire" can stand outside any church talk and yet meet the context criterion—not by means of an authoritative community, but an instructive, therapeutic, and advisory one.

We would like to conclude this essay by offering some pastoral prescriptions from the perspective of the third view, rooted in Reformed theology (or at least a baptistic, congregational, free-church kind of Reformed theology). By showing our scaffolding, we may distance ourselves from those who adopt the other views, but we also offer an exercise in connecting principles with practices. In one sense, our concern with the spiritual formation movement may simply be the theological scaffolding used to construct it. But at the level of ministry, our concern is that true spiritual formation is not misaligned from how God works (in a triune way) and where God works (in the local church). We will offer in brief three suggestions for spiritual formation "in the context of community," and three prescriptions for spiritual formation in the church.

A. SUGGESTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION "IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY"

First, *the category of "community" is not distinct or unique enough for Christian spiritual formation.* While "community" language may appear to penetrate more deeply and address more naturally the various aspects of human relations as a significant context for formation, it fails to adequately ground formation in the context of the triune God. It fails to explain both "the what" (context) and "the how" (content) of God's work. The context (the what) in which God works is not just any gathering but "the Gathering" (i.e., the church), which is what God himself calls it because he created it

[46] Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 389. Regarding this view, Horton adds: "At most, that public ministry of preaching, sacrament, and discipline can be only instructive, therapeutic, and advisory, but not authoritative in any sense. In such a view, public ministry is merely the ministry of human beings, not the ministry of Christ."

[47] Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 389.

and cares for it. The content (the how) through which God works is not simply common means and relationships, but through the special grace means of the church and its marks—word, sacraments, and authority. God works through "creaturely means," but very specific ones—local churches.

Second, *the activity of a "community," even when authentic and intentional, cannot replace the work of the Spirit.* As much as most definitions of the task of spiritual formation speak of the power of the Spirit, too often the force behind formative life change is the community itself and not the Spirit, who is the true giver of life. Personal and relational practices —always with the Spirit assumed—are often prescribed as if the practices themselves accomplish the task. Not only does this treat the Spirit like an "app" to be downloaded or a medicinal salve to be applied as necessary, but it also puts the burden of formation on the relational dynamics of the community. It is almost as if the relational dynamic of permeation and pressure does the work of uniting, molding, and developing that are doctrinally credited to the Spirit. It is the Spirit who applies the work initiated by the Father and made possible by the Son, and is alone responsible for the gathering (church) itself.[48]

Third, *practices, procedures, and even language that fail to express the proper relation between God and humanity in the work of spiritual formation need to be revised.* Admittedly, this suggestion is rooted in a more particular theological scaffolding, but doctrinal alignment is itself a part of spiritual formation. An example of concerning language is the following from Dallas Willard:

> We know, as Jesus says, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). And I think everyone here will agree with that. It is the initiative of God and the presence of God without which all of our efforts are in vain—whether it is in justification or sanctification or in the realm of the exercise of power, all our efforts will be in vain if God does not act. But we had better believe that the back side of that verse reads: "If you do nothing it will be without me." And this is the part we have the hardest time hearing.[49]

Besides exegetical problems with his explanation of John 15:5,[50] Willard's exhortation is lacking in theological precision, positing such a cooperative work that the actual asymmetrical relation between God and humanity is lost. Such language may hope to motivate human work, but it strongly misses (at least in the third view) the way God is already working. This is not to say that all the theories or techniques of the spiritual

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[48] See Webster, "'The Visible Attests the Invisible,'" 102.

[49] Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done," http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual /spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done (accessed June 21, 2019).

[50] See Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ZECNT 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 652: "To separate the Christian from Jesus, even for the purpose of explaining more responsibility … is to make a category mistake."

formation movement lack the gravity of the doctrine of God and its correlation to the doctrine of the church, but far too often the language used and practices employed by the spiritual formation movement are not appropriately grounded.

B. PRESCRIPTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE CHURCH

First, *the church offers a sacred, special-grace community that is distinct from other, common-grace communities.* God can and does offer all people common graces, some of which include significant communities like families, friends, and other supportive groups. The church is not, however, a mere common grace, like sun and rain which falls on the righteous and the unrighteousness (Matt. 5:45). Rather, the church is "the Gathering" or *ecclesia*, created and called by God alone. "Thus the church exists in the midst of the world with an origin, essence, activity, and purpose of its own."[51] Not any community can be the church or perform the church's duties, for the church is entirely unique, other-worldly and not from this world (John 15:19; 17:16; 18:36), and therefore a sacred, special-grace "gathering." The church is so connected to who God is and what God is doing, that movement away from formal church is, in the words of Calvin, a movement away from God: "separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ."[52] The church is the prescribed "creaturely means" through which God has chosen to minister in and to the world. Spiritual formation is to happen "in the context of the church."

Second, *what the church has confessed as "the marks of the church" are the God-designed, biblically-prescribed means of grace for the formation of Christians.* The church has been instituted by God as a ministering agent of God. Calvin offers helpful commentary of the church's role in our spiritual formation:

> …the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. 'For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder,' so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother. And this is so not only under the law but also after Christ's coming, as Paul testifies when he teaches that we are the children of the new and heavenly Jerusalem.[53]

In this one statement, which summarizes all of book four in his *Institutes*, Calvin locates the church as the mother of God's people. The church's

[51] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:435.

[52] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.10.

[53] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.1.

mothering happens through creaturely "aids" so that God "may provide for our weakness." These aids or marks, which demarcate the ministry of the true church, include the ministry of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments of God, and the oversight of the authority of God. In a real sense, the mediation of the Son and the empowerment of the Spirit are made manifest among the children of the New Jerusalem through these creaturely means.

Third, *a properly theological account of the church is able to handle the formal and informal aspects of Christian spiritual formation.* One of the primary critiques of the church given by the spiritual formation movement is that the formal practices of "the church" have been lacking the kind of life-engagement and life-propelling (informal) aspects necessary for the formation of disciples in the real world. While some of these concerns likely spring from a different theological scaffolding, specifically the Spirit's completing work of sanctification, it may have also led to the pragmatic expansion of "community," so that the sacred ministry of the church has been transferred to any and all gatherings, as long as they are properly spiritually forming.

While doctrinal convictions should maintain a distinction between the special-grace gathering of the church and all other, good-intentioned gatherings, there might be a way to facilitate their proper relation using Kuyper's distinction between church as "institute" and church as "organism." In trying to keep distinct the church and the state, yet maintain a real engagement between the two, Kuyper presented a two-fold understanding of the church.[54] The church as institute refers to "Christians gathered institutionally" in worship and sacred community; whereas the church as organism refers to "Christians scattered organically" throughout the world in their various public or common roles.[55] The former is responsible for internal, institutional activities, particularly on Sunday (word and sacraments, discipline, catechesis, and the communal life of the church), and the latter is responsible for external and organic of the church in the world, primarily on Monday–Saturday (working, volunteering, evangelizing, serving the poor, raising families, and engaging in civic life). As much as the relationship between the two was one of distinction, for Kuyper the two needed one another: without the institute of the church, the organism would drift aimlessly into the world, and without the organism of the church, the institute would have no connection in the world. The relation

[54] Cf. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 2017), 161-89, especially 173-77. For a critical analysis of Kuyper's larger proposal regarding a public theology, see Daniel Strange, "Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Church as Institute and Church as Organism, and Its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology," *Themelios 40*, no.3 (2015): 429-44.

[55] Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 141-42.

is both biblical and created: formal to informal, conscious to instinctive, and structural to natural.[56] While the "institution positions itself between us and the world, in order to protect the uniqueness of our life,"[57] the organism positions the life of the church to "penetrate into the world's joints."[58] With the conceptual assistance of Kuyper, the spiritual formation movement can maintain its desire for authentic, deeply-relational, porous communities that are "rooted" in the world that is and yet be firmly "grounded" in the world to come through the institutional church.

IV. CONCLUSION: RE-"INSTITUTING" THE CHURCH IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

This essay was written with a posture of appreciation for the spiritual formation movement and the healthy resurgence it has brought to the theory and practice of the spiritual life. And with the advice of Porter, we hope our "concerns are…rooted in some helpful corrective."[59] Our concern, stated simply, is that the language of "community" fails to make enough space—in theory and practice—for the essential ministry of the church—the local church. Our goal has been to help Christians (and their local churches) think more critically about the identity and purpose of the church in their spiritual life and formation. Our desire is not the end of spiritual formation as a movement (in the words of the apostle Paul: "May it never be!"), but the inclusion of spiritual formation into the framework and cooperation of an ecclesial formation, so that, with Kuyper, all Christians may be both "rooted and grounded" (Eph. 3:17) in every way.

[56] Abraham Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. John Halsey Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 50, provided his own explanatory metaphor: "The church of the lord is one loaf, dough that rises according to its nature [organism] but nevertheless is kneaded with human hands and baked as bread [institute]."

[57] Kuyper, *On the Church*, 57.

[58] Kuyper, *On the Church*, 53.

[59] Porter, "Sanctification in a New Key," 148.

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MENTORING, SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY: THE CHALLENGES FROM THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Spiritual formation is key to leadership development in the church in Africa. And Nigeria is critical to this. To use an illustration: it's as if Africa were shaped like a gun, with Nigeria as the trigger.[2] Nigeria is therefore critical for any major movement in Africa. In spite of all the growth we have had in the various segments of the Christian church in Nigeria, there do not seem to be enough well-differentiated leaders on the religious stage in Nigeria. This is because there are many cultural, theological, and political challenges to spiritual formation. Mentoring is a tool that could be used for effective spiritual formation if properly fine-tuned to yield the desired result. This paper proposes that effective mentoring is key to effective spiritual formation in order to have a more robust leadership development in African Christianity.

WHY NIGERIA?

The first question that comes to mind is why the emphasis on Nigeria, instead of looking at Africa in general? Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It occupies a very crucial place in Africa and global Christianity.[3] In the view of Patrick Johnstone, a missiologist, Christianity makes up 51.3% of the population while Islam makes up 45.1%. Ethnic

[1] Babatunde Oladimeji is the Pastor at Chadron United Methodist Church in Chadron, Nebraska.

[2] A. David, "Where on earth is Nigeria?" https://total-facts-about-nigeria.com/where-is-nigeria.html.

[3] It is situated on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. Its neighbors are Benin, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The lower course of the river Niger flows south through the Western part of the country into the Gulf of Guinea. Swamps and mangrove forests border the southern coast; inland are hardwood forests. It is also surrounded on the southern side by the Atlantic Ocean and in the north by the Sahara Desert.

The capital city is Abuja, while the commercial city is Lagos, which is also the tenth most populous city in the world. Land area is about 351,649 square miles, and the total area is 356,667 square miles. The population according to the World Factbook of the Central Intelligence Agency is about 162,470,737 in 2011, including more than 250 ethnic groups, such as the Hausa and Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo 18%, Jaw 10%, Kanuri 4.9%, Ibibio

religion comprises 3.3% while non-religious people represent 0.3% of the population.[4]

The various statistics of Nigeria conflict because religion is a very sensitive issue. The question of religion is exempted whenever a census is conducted. The questioner, therefore, determines religious statistics by educated guess. I am, however, of the view that Islam is growing faster than Christianity because of Muslims' emphasis on biological growth. The life expectancy for the population is 47.56 years. As of 2010 the life expectancy for males was 46.76 years; for females 48.41 years.[5] Among Christians, 35.5% are Protestant, 24.5% are independent, 20.4% are Anglican, and 19.6% are Roman Catholics. As of 2005, the total number of Anglicans in Nigeria is put at 18.5 million.[6]

Nigeria today is in a state of poverty, though, it is full of natural resources like oil, solid minerals, very fertile ground, with enormous capital wealth in human resources. Yet, it has continued to rank very low economically. Nigeria has been rated 133 out of the 180 economically developed countries.[7]

Today Nigeria has the largest church building in the world, sitting over 100 thousand worshippers. The largest of churches is in Nigeria with conservatively over 2 Million worshippers once a month. In spite of the poverty in Nigeria, it also boasts of the richest preachers in the world.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION.

Spiritual formation has been very important in mission work and this is not different in the Nigerian situation. Robert Mulholland's definition is very instructive: "Spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of the Christ for the sake of others."[8] In his book *Shaped by the Word,* Mulholland invites the reader to learn to read the scripture

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3.5%, Tiv 2.5%. The official language is English, but more than 500 other indigenous languages are also used.

According to a Central Intelligence Agency report, 50% of Nigerians are Muslims while 40% are Christians. The other 10% are people of indigenous beliefs. The Muslim population is expected to rise to 117 million in 2030 (see Central Intelligence Agency, "People and Society: Nigeria," under "The World Factbook: Africa: Nigeria," htpp//www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact book/geo/ni.html (accessed November 10, 2012).

[4] Patrick J. G. Johnstone, Jason Mandryk, and Robyn Johnstone, *Operation World*, 21st century ed., upd. and rev. ed. (Waynesboro, GA; Gerrards Cross, England: Authentic Lifestyle; WEC International, 2005), 798.

[5] Central Intelligence Agency, "People and Society."

[6] ttp://www.worldchristiandatabase.org.ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Detail&Mode=2&Detail=45&Key=nige&Instance=104725&LIndex=6

[7] Uwadia Orobosa, "How Nigerian Economic Status can be Improved Upon," *Nigerian Tribune*, 29 February, 2012, http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/news/36804-how-nigerian-economic-status-can-be-improved-upon-wbank (accessed December 11, 2012).

[8] Robert Mulholland, *An Invitation to the Journey. A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 12.

formationally, rather than functionally. He encourages us to allow the scripture to master us rather than just us trying to master the scripture. [9]

The importance of practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, silence, study, humility and others have always been a part of the discipleship process for a very long time in many parts of Africa. Unfortunately, in many places, the emphasis on spiritual formation has been fading away in the past two decades. The study of the Bible has become very mechanical and self-centered. In many places in Africa, and specifically Nigeria, people are tempted to attempt to use scripture as a tool for manipulating God. Also, prayer which is supposed to help the believer to learn humility and faith in God and aligning ourselves with his will, is now being used in many places in Nigeria as a way of revenge and expression of anger.[10]

MENTORING

The word *mentoring* comes from the Greek word meaning *enduring*. The original *mentor* appears in Homer's *Odyssey* as an old and trusted friend of Odysseus.[11] In the myth, Odysseus, a great warrior, asks his old and trusted friend Mentor, to look after his household while he goes off to fight. Mentor serves as guardian and teacher of Odysseus' son, Telemachus. Mentor is, therefore, seen as wisdom personified as he guides young Telemachus into manhood, where he becomes an effective and loved ruler.[12] In considering this mythical figure, the traditional understanding of mentoring "involves a relationship between a younger, less experienced person and an older who wisely guides the younger through some significant transition in life."[13] This idea is the primary understanding of what mentoring should be.

Mentors help their mentees in a variety of ways. First, mentors give their pupils timely advice, information, financial support, and freedom to emerge as leaders even beyond the level of the mentors. Second, mentors risk their own reputation in order to sponsor mentees. Third, mentors model various aspects of leadership functions to challenge their students to move towards them. Fourth, mentors direct mentees to needed resources that will further develop them. Finally, mentors co-minister with the protégés in order to increase the mentees' confidence, status, and credibility.[14]

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[9] Robert Mulholland, Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation (Nashville: Upper Rooms Books, 1985).

[10] The idea of praying against one's enemies is very common among Christians in Nigeria and many places in Africa.

[11] Laurent A. Daloz, Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 20.

[12] Shirley Peddy, *The Art of Mentoring: Lead, Follow and Get Out of the Way* (Houston: Bullion Books, 1998), 24.

[13] Keith Cowart, "The Role of Mentoring in the Preparation of Church Planters in Reproducing Churches" (D.Min, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2002), 16.

[14] Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 39-40.

Stanley and Clinton identify three major mentoring types.[15] Intensive mentors are disciple makers, spiritual guides, and coaches. The occasional mentor, on the other hand, is a counselor, teacher, and/or sponsor. The passive mentoring model seeks to mentor or receive mentoring without any personal contact through writing letters and sending tapes. Recently, the preferred methods of contact occur via internet or telephone. A good mentoring relationship includes attraction, responsiveness, and accountability. Attraction and responsiveness must be present in all types of mentoring or empowerment will be minimal.[16]

Ministers should encourage the concept of mentoring even up to the international level, where experienced leaders in the West can begin to work consciously toward mentoring younger leaders in Africa, Asia, and other less developed areas. National leaders should raise people from within their respective spheres of leadership to assume future positions of leadership. As Clinton mentions, leaders must establish a downward mentoring relationship with individuals who are attracted to them and their ministry. Leaders should have a good, appropriate, unique, and long-term plan to master the Word of God in order to use it with impact in their ministry and those around them.[17]

Pastors must become Bible-centered leaders; leaders whose task is reformed by the Bible, who have been personally shaped by biblical values, who can apply these values to correct situations, and who use the Bible in ministry to impact their followers.[18]

Russell West explains that mentoring is not a recent innovation, but he argues that the process merely has been ignored for a long time. "The church is rediscovering mentoring as an indispensable strategy for developing leaders because it attends to the demands of the relational-based ministry that churches develop today."[19] In order to achieve the purpose of training effective leaders, the church needs to be intentional. Making new leaders does not happen unless the leader intentionally emphasizes the progression.[20] Intentionality means developing a model to implement a leader-making system and carrying it to completion. Jesus' discipleship method is the best among a variety of methods. Jesus was an intentional mentor. He selected twelve, stayed with them, taught, trained, and sent them. History attests to the use of mentoring in transmitting values and resources from one generation to another, even in traditional African and some contemporary African societies like the Igbo in South Eastern Nigeria.

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[15] Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 46-145.

[16] Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 33-34

[17] J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 257.

[18] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 257.

[19] Russell W. West, "Church-Based Theological Education: When the Seminary Goes Back to Church," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2, no. 2 (09/01, 2003): 113.

[20] Dale E. Galloway and Warren Bird, *On Purpose Leadership: Multiplying Your Ministry by Becoming a Leader of Leaders* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001), 31.

Contemporary writers in the field may refer to almost any kind of helping relationship as a mentoring relationship, even one in which a personal relationship does not exist (i.e., an author to a reader or preacher to listeners). Cowart maintains that this view represents a significant departure from the traditional model of mentoring, which is described by a close, personal relationship between an older and wiser mentor and a younger and eager-to-learn protégé.[21]

Stanley and Clinton describe eight types of mentoring relationships involving various degrees of intensity and personal involvement.[22] Cowart asserts that Stanley and Clinton depart from the traditional understanding of the nature of mentoring. Cowart writes, "[D]rawing from tradition, the existence of a personal relationship was determined to be essential."[23] This personal relationship is even more relevant especially in Africa where relationship is a major part of their existence.

According to Nathalie J. Gehrke, the mentor-protégé relationship is characterized by mutual involvement, a comprehensive focus, and affection. She writes, "It is this quality that differentiates the mentor relationship from other kinds of helping relationships."[24] Another incident of effective mentoring involves the protégé-focused aspect. The mentor should have certain goals for the relationship, but he or she should not dominate the relationship.[25] Many mentors within the Nigerian setting attempt to take sole responsibility for directing the relationship, as in the role of the disciple in Stanley and Clinton's mode.[26] The mentor should avoid the temptation of self-cloning but instead should endeavor to draw out the unique qualities of the protégé.[27]

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[21] Galloway and Bird, *On Purpose Leadership*, 31.

[22] Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 41. They categorized the eight types into three subtypes. The first, the most intensive mentoring, consists of the *discipler, spiritual guide,* and *coach*. *Intensive* mentoring always involves the presence of a personal relationship and is characterized by high levels of attraction, responsiveness, accountability, and empowerment. The second category consists of the roles of *counselor*, *teacher,* and *sponsor*. This level is termed *occasional* since it may or may not involve personal relationship. The occasional mentoring does not usually include the dynamic of accountability. Tending to have a shorter lifespan, this style is often engaged for a specific purpose. One benefit of an occasional mentor is their availability, but they are often invited according to their ability to empower the protégés. The final category is described as *passive* mentoring because it involves using materials such as books, seminars, and conferences.

[23] Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*,13

[24] Nathalie J. Gehrke, "On Preserving the Essence of Mentoring as One Form of Teacher Leadership," *Journal of Teacher Education 39*, no. 1 (01/01, 1988): 43.

[25] Bobb Biehl, *Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One* (Nashville: Broadman, 1996), 42; Howard G. Hendricks and William Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 196.

[26] Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 47-59.

[27] Cowart, *The Role of Mentoring in the Preparation of Church Planters in Reproducing Churches*, 39.

Also, a mentoring relationship by nature is flexible and intuitive. The mentor must avoid inflexible adherence to a present curriculum. Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese affirm from a Christian perspective that the mentor should use discernment in identifying and focusing on those needs or issues where God is already at work.[28] The job of the mentor, then, requires not developing an agenda, but using spiritual discernment to recognize and move in the direction of God's agenda.[29]

Another quality is that of the transitional relationship. Laurent A. Daloz describes mentoring as a journey in which a mentor helps a protégé navigate transition by pointing the way, offering support, challenging, and then letting go of the protégé.[30] Hendricks and Hendricks go further when they write that mentoring is "less about instruction than it is about initiation—about bringing young men into maturity."[31] This concept is very important especially for Nigerian church leaders who mostly believe in giving out instructions as their only means of doing mentoring.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MENTORING

The Bible always must provide the foundation for belief and practice within the Christian church. Therefore, this study examines mentoring and leadership development considering the Bible. The Church is God's organization and so runs according to the precepts of the Scriptures. The Old[32] and New Testaments[33] provides us with the foundation for mentoring—the principle in a major way through which leaders are developed.

The concept of mentoring continued throughout Church history. Spiritual direction was the primary model at work in the Egyptian desert

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[28] Keith Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 52-53.

[29] Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 16-26.

[30] Laurent A. Daloz, "Mentors: Teachers Who make a Difference," *Change*, no. 6 (1983): 25-27.

[31] Hendricks and Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, 183.

[32] The Old Testament provides an example of mentoring in the relationship between Jethro and Moses as recorded in Exodus 18:13-27. Furthermore, Joshua learned about leadership from Moses, which eventually prepared Joshua for the work of taking God's people to the promise land. The relationship between Eli and Samuel provides another example of mentoring (1 Sam. 2:11; 3:1). Samuel served as a mentor both to Saul and to David. The relationship between Elijah and Elisha presents another clear example of mentoring (1 Kgs. 2:13-15).

[33] In the New Testament, Jesus mentored his twelve disciples for three years before he eventually commissioned them. The meaning of the word *disciple* is a pupil or learner. Jesus devoted the majority of his time to his disciples, and they observed him as he ministered to people. They were with him (Mk. 3:14), and they enjoyed a deep relationship with him. Later in the New Testament, Barnabas mentored Paul when Paul became converted to the Christian faith (Acts 9:26-31). In addition, Barnabas continued to mentor John Mark even when Paul felt they should leave the younger man behind. Paul himself became a worthy

in the fourth century, and this custom continued to operate effectively among clergy and members of religious orders for centuries.

NIGERIAN INDIGENOUS EXAMPLES FOR MODERN MENTORING

Examples of mentoring also can be found among historical Nigerian church leaders, including Moses Orimolade, Ayo Babalola, and Josiah Akindayomi. These leaders were within the Nigerian church, which eventually influenced many other countries in Africa.

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mentor of Timothy and Titus. Hence, Scripture indicates the importance of mentoring in relation to leadership development and succession.

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES: The ministry of Jesus offers a clear example of effective mentoring. He began his ministry by calling a few men to follow him. Robert E. Coleman writes, "Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God" (Robert Coleman, *The Master plan of Evangelism* [Westwood: F.H. Revell Co, 1964], 21). This point must continue to be emphasized to have continuity with the Christian message.

Although Jesus did not choose to mentor the rich or the religious elite of his day, Jesus' mentees were willing to learn. Coleman writes, "Jesus can use anyone who wants to be used. We cannot transform a world, except individuals in the world are transformed. Jesus did not neglect the crowd, but he concentrated on the few disciples" (Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism, 23). The same thing must become the principle for meaningful transformation in the churches and the society in general. Coleman summarized the other principles Jesus used in mentoring his disciples. Jesus lived with his disciples, which constitutes the principle of *association.* He required obedience from them, which represents the principle of *consecration.* He gave himself away, which the principle of *impartation* describes. He also showed them how to live, this action fits Coleman's description of the principle of *demonstration.* Jesus then assigned work to his disciples, according to the principle of *delegation.* He oversaw them, which Coleman describes as the principle of *supervision.* Finally, Jesus expected them to *reproduce*, or to mentor others (See Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21-97).

Mentoring thus represents a major way of teaching in the Old Testament and in the days of Jesus. Jesus trained his disciples in informal settings such as while they ate, traveled, and prayed throughout their shared life experience. They did almost everything together, even attending weddings and funerals, and they observed the way Jesus did things. According to Gunter Krallmann, this shared life involves the transference of knowledge, skill, and character through the combination of teaching and modeling that comes in a shared life experience (Gunter Krallman, *Mentoring for Mission* [Hong Kong: Jensco, 1992], 62).

Jesus gave his disciples the opportunity to practice that which they had learned. When they made mistakes, Jesus corrected them. Apart from when he asked them to go out to preach, he also demonstrated to them by modeling many of his own teachings. One vivid lesson occurred when Jesus demonstrated humility and love by washing the disciples' feet in John 13.

PAUL AND TIMOTHY: Paul exhibited effective mentoring in his relationship with Timothy. He calls him "my true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). Paul, at different times, expresses his love to young Timothy. He also challenged him not to be discouraged. Paul influenced Timothy greatly. He traveled with Timothy to many places, and Timothy was chosen to become the overseer of the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul also sent Timothy to address problems in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17). He became a good representative of Paul. This was Paul's example which has been left as a heritage within the pages of the New Testament.

MOSES ORIMOLADE: Moses Orimolade pioneered the first African Independent Church in Nigeria. According to A. Omoyajowo, "Orimolade was like John the Baptist, a forerunner."[34] The Cherubim and Seraphim church, which he founded in 1925, is generally and historically regarded as the prophet/prayer healing movement in Nigeria. This movement involved groups of people who practiced belief in the efficacy of prayers for healing sicknesses and in giving specific directions for its members. H. W. Turner, a foremost scholar of the Aladura Movement in his explanation of this movement notes, "There was no dominant charismatic figure or prophet in what came to be known as the Aladura (or prayer) movement until 1925 when Moses Tunolashe (Orimolade) detached from Anglican and other churches that led to the Cherubim and Seraphim societies as they exist today."[35]This detachment from the old, mainline churches created the identity of the Aladura churches.

During the revival days, Orimolade mobilized men who accompanied him wherever he went. These men included E. A. Davies, E. O. Bada, and his elder brother Peter Omojola. Orimolade chose seven men and a band of seventy men. The Cherubim and Seraphim movement in its different variety has hundreds of thousands of followers in Nigeria and many parts of Africa

JOSEPH AYO BABALOLA: Joseph Ayo Babalola (1904-1959) was responsible for the revival of 1930s Nigeria. Many African church historians have regarded this revival as the origin of modern-day Pentecostalism in Nigeria. During the revival, a Christian Missionary Society missionary commented, "Babalola has been able to accomplish more in six weeks than the Anglican Church has been able to do in sixty years."[36] Thousands of souls were converted, healed, and delivered. The dead were raised, the national newspaper wrote about it, and people from other parts of Africa came to receive the blessing.[37]

In spite of the revival's time consuming and tedious nature, Babalola fostered men who have continued to affect Nigeria. He trained people by involving them in praying, fasting, and including them in his daily travel. Such men included Babatope and Daniel Orekoya, who continued the revival at the base while others travelled, such as A. Medaiyere, S. G. Omotosho, Adegboyega Ajilore, and some leaders of Faith Tabernacle. Daniel Orekoya took the revival to Ibadan on his way to Lagos. According to Moses Idowu, a dead pregnant woman was raised after three days.[38] The revival led to the founding of an indigenous church in Nigeria that has

[34] A. Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim*: *The History of an Independent Church* (New York: NOK, 1982), 42.

[35] H. W Turner, *History of An African Independent Church: The Church of the Lord (Aladura)*, volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 3.

[36] Moses Idowu, *More than A Prophet* (Lagos: Divine Artillery, 2009), 216.

[37] Idowu, *More than A Prophet*, 216.

[38] Idowu, *More than A Prophet*, 206.

contributed to church growth and power evangelism, which is an attempt to win souls through the use of signs and wonders to prove the superiority of God to this day.

Josiah Akindayomi: Reverend Josiah Akindayomi founded the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which is one of the fastest growing church denominations in Africa, planting thousands of churches every year. Akindayomi was a prophet in the Cherubim and Seraphim movement before he was called to begin a prayer group. The *Ogo oluwa* prayer group eventually became the RCCG church, founded in 1952.

Akindayomi's church eventually began to branch out into different parts of Nigeria. Although he could not read, he had strong faith in God and devoted himself to prayer. He developed his ministers in prayer and fasting together with substantial Bible study. Enoch Adejare Adeboye, who eventually became Akindayomi's successor, joined the church in 1973. He became a Christian and began to work within the church. Two years later he was made a pastor. The church's founder chose Adeboye, a lecturer with a Ph.D. in mathematics, as his successor.

Akindayomi commissioned Adeboye to interpret his messages during the service. Josiah gave special tutoring to his successor and took him everywhere he went, including Jerusalem. Akindayomi made several pronouncements concerning the nature of his successor. For five years, in various ways, Akindayomi prepared the minds of his followers for the future. He finally prepared a written will, thereby sealing his choice of a successor and identifying Adeboye as the choice of the Holy Spirit. After about thirty years succeeding Akindayomi, RCCG's popularity increased after Adeboye came into leadership. His spiritual gifts and insights superseded and transcended that of his predecessor and spiritual mentor. Mentoring has truly been a pattern of leadership development and succession in church history, even among Africans.

MENTORING IN TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Leadership development has been a part of various professions within the typical Nigerian society. The concept of mentoring is embedded in the apprenticeship form of education. According to Babatunde Fafunwa, a foremost educator and former Minister of Education in Nigeria, before the advent of the European order, all the Nigerian ethnic groups had their own distinctive cultures, traditions, languages, and indigenous systems of education. They all had common educational aims and objectives, but their methods differed from place to place as dictated by social, economic, and geographical circumstances.[39]

Within the old Nigerian society, functionality was the guiding principle. The society regarded education as a means to an end and not an end in itself.

[39] Babatunde Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (Ibadan: NPS Educational, 1974), 2.

Education was an immediate induction into the society and preparation for adulthood. Children and adolescents were engaged in participatory education through imitation, recitation, and demonstration particularly during ceremonies and ritual.[40] Indigenous education was therefore an integrated experience, combining physical and intellectual training with character-building disciplines. The aims, contents, and methods of indigenous education "were intricately interwoven; they were not divided into separate compartments as is the case with western education." [41] Africans tend to see everything in wholeness and not in fragments.

Nigerians in traditional societies raise farmers, weavers, hunters, and even traditional leaders using these methods. At different stages of education, students take practical tests relevant to their experience. In a traditional sense, the father is the male child's first mentor, and subsequent mentors assume a patriarchal posture. However, over time, and with the influence of individualism from the West, such practice is gradually fading.

Vanessa P. Dennen describes apprenticeship as an inherently social learning method with a long history of helping novices become experts in fields as diverse as midwifery, construction, and law.[42] More experienced people assist less experienced people, providing structure and examples to support the attainment of the goals. Dennen asserts that apprenticeship as a method of teaching and learning is just as relevant within the metacognitive domain as in the psychomotor domain[43]. Of course, as already discussed among the indigenous Nigerian people, apprenticeship is the major way of mentoring. Today I note that the West is now attempting to teach Nigerians about this type of mentoring.

In discussing mentoring from the Nigerian perspective of relationship or apprenticeship, Andy Roberts describes eight necessary attributes: (1) a process form, (2) an active relationship, (3) a helping process, (4) a teaching and learning process, (5) reflective practice, (6) a career and personal development process, (7) a formalized process, and (8) a role constructed by or for a mentor.[44] These attributes if used within the context of the culture of the people could be very effective.

The traditional system of apprenticeship involves all of these attributes. If Christian leaders had followed the above method with consistency, young leaders in the Christian churches might have experienced more effective mentoring relationships. Today a more effective form of mentoring system

[40] Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, 2.

[41] Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, 2.

[42] Vanessa Paz Dennen, "Cognitive Apprenticeship in Educational Practice: Research on Scaffolding, Modeling, Mentoring, and Coaching as Instructional Strategies," in *Handbook of research on educational communication and technology.* ed. by David H. Jonassen (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 813-828.

[43] Vanessa Paz Dennen, "Cognitive Apprenticeship in Educational Practice," 813.

[44] Andy Roberts, "Mentoring Revisited: A Phenomenological Reading of the Literature," *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning 8*, no. 2 (Aug. 2000): 151.

within the organization is possible by using the apprenticeship method of indigenous Nigerian tribes and at the same time adjusting this method within the context of the contemporary world.

Research among clergy in African American congregations also confirms the effectiveness of mentoring through intentional apprenticeship. Timothy Larkin's doctoral research in sociology, completed in 2007, evaluated this pattern as still effective. He examined the extent and variations in apprenticeship patterns across the different dimensions of region, class, religious denomination, and age.[45]

The same pattern existed in many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, in which the younger pastor lived with the senior pastor, but this pattern has since changed as many young pastors are becoming more individualistic in their nature.

Of course, it is no longer a controversial statement to say that Christianity's center has been moving to the global south during the last two decades. Philip Jenkins,[46] Kwame Bediako,[47] Stephen Offutt,[48] and Paul Gifford[49] are among those who have done substantial studies in this area.

African Christianity could be said to be very Pentecostal in nature, irrespective of the tradition one may be talking about—Catholicism, Anglicanism, Baptists and so on. In his preface to *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity,* Allan Anderson of University of Birmingham noted that, "The global South has been seen a remarkable expansion of Pentecostal forms of Christianity in the last century, an expansion that altered global religious demographics considerably."[50] One reason for this immense growth is that Pentecostalism addressed allegations of both the foreigners and the irrelevance of Christianity in African societies. They emphasized the priesthood of all believers, which broke down barriers of race, gender, and class—and they challenged the long practice of ordained male and foreign clergy. Pentecostalism was able to adapt itself to different cultures and societies and give contextualized expressions of Christianity. There was also the involvement with social issues, transposing into the local African cultures, and religions. Most important was the emphasis on the experience

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[45] Timothy Larkin, "The Clergy Apprenticeship Pattern in the Black Church" (PhD, University of Illinois, 2007), 1.

[46] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[47] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

[48] Stephen Offutt, *New Centers of Global Evangelicalism in Latin America and Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[49] Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Global African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004); Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[50] J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013), xii.

of the Spirit and the spiritual callings of leaders, without the need for formal education in church dogma.[51]

Notwithstanding all these, spiritual formation is still a major issue within African Christianity, especially in Nigeria, the giant of Africa. The problem is that there are some key challenges to the ability of Christian leaders using mentoring as a tool for spiritual formation. We shall examine a few of those.

CHALLENGES OF MENTORING AS A TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Many in Nigeria still do not have a proper understanding of what the Christian ministry should be from a theological perspective. Stephen Seamands' definition is instructive here: "The ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world."[52] In this definition, Seamands proffers a trinitarian description for the Christian ministry. Seamands, himself an experienced minister and from the family of international ministers and missionaries presumes that many people in ministry have not adequately observed or applied the doctrine of the Trinity significantly in their ministry vocation. He therefore emphasized that the minister should have a strong communion with God in which his life is impacted by the passion and the desires of God. This is why spiritual formation is very critical in doing ministry; the person who is acting on behalf of God has to of a necessity have the knowledge of all that God is. This idea is exemplified in the story of Moses in Exodus 3, when he asked God to reveal his name so that when he showed himself to the elders, he would be confident in the person that had sent him.

BIBLICAL ILLITERACY AND DISCIPLESHIP GAP

Spiritual formation is more effective when new believers are not left as infants but allowed to grow up. Andrew Walls talked about the indigenizing and pilgrim principles, that Christians should feel at home in their various cultures but also should live as though they do not belong in their cultures. The tension between the two existences is where the church is expected to live.[53] According to Hiebert, the Christian religion operates with a "centered set"; therefore, the essentials of the Christian faith remains the same while

[51] Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, xiii.

[52] Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 9-10.

[53] See Andrew F Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

the peripheral things are for individual differences.[54] This reality opens Christians as they journey in their faith to various categories of people without compromising the core of the gospel. For example, integrity of the heart, which leads to a good moral life, is core in the Christian faith. The subject of discipleship becomes very important.

In reference to the problem of discipleship Rene Padilla reveals that one major problem with the majority world is that we have a church without theology.[55] He attributes this to two factors: the divorce between evangelism and theology and the concentration of evangelistic work on numerical growth.[56] This results in the church's inability to articulate a proper theology. It has also led to the lack of contextualizing the gospel in different cultures, the inability of the church to withstand the ideologies of the day, and the loss of the second and third generation of Christians.[57]

The fact that there is not much of a church-based discipleship effort in which members are systematically taught the Bible is a major downside of African Christianity. This problem is also echoed by Gifford when he asserts that, what we have in Nigeria is "enchanted Christianity."[58] This brand of Christianity has been championed by Daniel Olukoya of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, a church with multiple branches all over the world. Gifford is right to explore this emerging Christian imagination from the Nigerian Christian milieu. It is, however, instructive to mention that there are some ministers who are considered biblical evangelicals in Nigeria, and they seem to have different perspective to this and are not guilty of the above charge.[59]

This discipleship deficit has continued to be a major concern among global Christian leaders. Many churches are full of people on Sunday, but throughout the week, the church is faced with the challenge of moving believers from being members to being disciples, which eventually shows in the way they live their lives. Christopher Wright offers this insight: "If we are the people of God, what kind of people are we supposed to be? If we preach a gospel of transformation, we need to show some evidence of what transformation looks like. So, it involves some ethical dimension. Our gospel is not just to be believed but also to be obeyed."[60] Rather than

[54] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 125.

[55] Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Partnership, 2013), 114.

[56] Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, 118–20.

[57] Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, 121–23.

[58] Gifford, *Modernity*, 18.

[59] Pastor Kumuyi started the Deeper Life Bible Church with members from all over Nigeria, with emphasis on holy living and integrity. Also, Gbile Akanni is an independent bible teacher who has done a lot of discipleship work among young people in Nigeria.

[60] Christopher J. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 30.

spend a lot of time teaching people how to claim other people's goods and blessings, it may be more profitable for them to learn contentment.

Another contributing challenge to Christianity in Nigeria is what Hiebert calls split-level Christianity: a situation where people claim to be Christians but when there is a problem, they will return to their traditional religions, thereby rendering the gospel of Christ to no effect. In another work, I noted that many of the churches are more concerned about buying more seats and constructing more buildings for the church. Churches may begin to question how they will train their members for lifelong discipleship. Gerald Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson insist that the church has suffered from "theological Anemia and Ecclesial Anemia."The native soil on which theology should be studied is the church, which has been displaced for over two hundred years. They propose that the solution to this problem is the return of the "pastor theologian."[61] Such an endeavor will help the church in Nigeria become theologically viable and poised to face day-to-day challenges from a scriptural perspective. The focus on discipleship should be reawakened in the Nigerian church. As the research proved, there is not much difference in the way the different traditions have handled the problem of corruption from a practical sense. The problem that the American sociologist Christian Smith raises about religion among young people in the United States is still very relevant to the Nigerian church: it is a shallow, self-centered religion.[62] Churches and pastors in Nigeria should begin to develop relevant discipleship materials for the context of public life and the challenges of corruption in the Nigerian society.

CORRUPTION AND THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

A Nigerian public theologian was very unapologetic about his view when he argued that the threat to the church in Nigeria is not just Islam but, much more, "the lack of Christian public integrity and witness in our society."[63] If truth be told, the public image of Christians in Nigeria today is very undesirable. Agang continues, "Christians in Nigeria are dancing on the brink of moral and ethical collapse. Many Christians who hold public office have become corrupt or immoral, betraying their public Christian testimony. They lack integrity and cannot present a strong moral ethical witness. They lack the virtue of honesty in public life."[64] Whereas this comment is painful to many Nigerians, it is very difficult to disprove, hence the

[61] Gerald Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting and Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2015).

[62] Christian Smith calls this scenario "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." See Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[63] Sunday Bobai Agang, "The Greatest Threat to the Church Isn't Islam—Its Us," *Christianity Today*, April 21, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/may/radical-islam-not-nigerian-churchs-greatest-threat.html.

[64] Agang, "Greatest Threat to the Church."

need to begin to develop a robust theology of public life for the Nigerian church. Miroslav Volf reiterates that Christians should endeavor to have an engaged faith. He further argues that believers should learn to hold in tension the practice of accommodation and separation from the world.[65] Lesslie Newbigin adds to this argument when he says that Christians proclaim the gospel by making people understand the gospel message while being witnesses in their deeds. The people of God then become what he calls the "hermeneutic of the gospel."[66] For the gospel to thrive, the combination of words and acts is not negotiable. The mission of reaching out, that the Nigerian church has been involved with for almost two centuries, will be more effective if people will live their lives in the public sphere as genuine disciples of Christ. This is another major challenge.

Faleye and Mfumbusa believe that the church has not done much to create any change in the area of corruption.[67] Abeboye and Allan Anderson are also of the view that the church has taken advantage of the needs and powerlessness of the people to offer them the prosperity gospel that Anderson claims is synonymous with business and exploitation.[68] Gifford presents the above facts in his books mentioned above. He believes that the prosperity gospel and materialism has been exported from America.[69] In contrast, Falola and Heaton are of a different view: they praised the charismatic church communities for providing for their congregations with social services, church-based schools, and health clinics. They also continued to preach miraculous healing and provisions.[70]

The approach led to helping the churches to grow financially; members pay their tithe and they can embark on projects. Gifford also emphasizes the cultural shift brought about by Pentecostalism in Nigeria; creating a more individualistic or personal decision over extended family lifestyle.[71]

THE CHALLENGE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION/CULTURE

This paper will not be complete without mentioning the lasting effect of African Traditional Religion on many African cultures even today. First

[65] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011), 85-87.

[66] Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 221–23.

[67] Oluwakayode Faleye, "Religious Corruption," 172; Mfumbusa, "Church is Growing."

[68] Olufunke Adeboye, "'Arrowhead' of Nigerian Pentecostalism: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1952–2005," *Pneuma 29* (2007): 24–58 (paper presented at the Africa Forum, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Apr. 11, 2000); Allan Anderson, "Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa."

[69] Gifford, *Christianity, Development,* 148-180.

[70] Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 221.

[71] Gifford, *African Christianity*, 346.

is the lingering effect of the belief in intermediaries in African religions; this is still affecting many in leadership today. It is still difficult for many young leaders to come directly to their mentors for guidance and learning because it is considered by some cultures as disrespectful to come directly to the "boss."

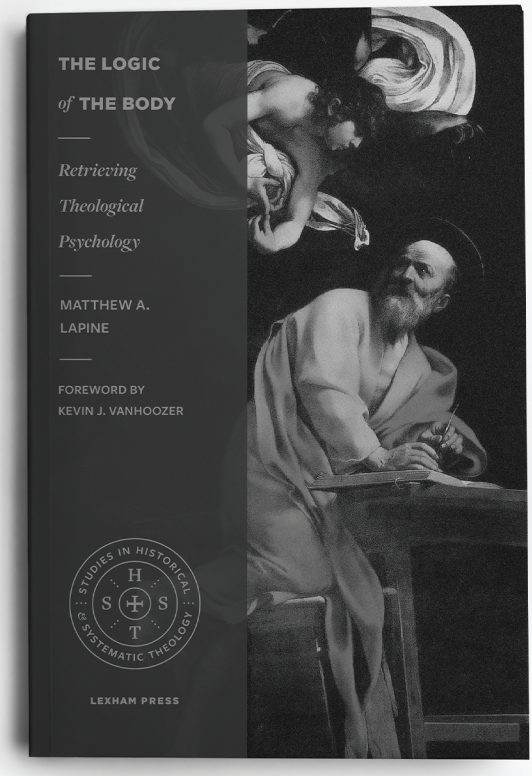
Next is "hero worship"—the attempt to treat successful leaders as heroes that do not make mistakes. This same ideology has continued to affect the implementation of servant leadership in many quarters. The senior leader is not allowed to portray any sense of vulnerability. This *"Kabiyesi"* syndrome is more pronounced among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria who are very influential to the Christian faith in Nigeria. This attitude has affected the effectiveness of mentoring in Nigeria; it therefore needs to be critically analyzed and reviewed.

CONCLUSION

African Christianity is certainly growing. The challenge has continued to be the quality of the growth. The need to raise godly leadership through the process of spiritual formation is very crucial. However, Africa must return to a part of her past to revitalize the mentoring process through the apprenticeship method.

This mentoring needs to be done in an authentic way, with a leadership that is committed to biblical servanthood and transformational leadership principles, the rejection of corruption and greater focus on biblical literacy with the goal of raising a godly, impactful new generation. I consider this as a major challenge for leaders in Africa today. The opportunity to mentor well rounded leaders is now, and this will be the hope of the Christianity of several decades to come.

"This is not only first-rate, but desperately needed." **—JP MORELAND**



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PURSUING GOD INCARNATE: REFLECTIONS ON PROSPERITY, DEPRESSION AND JESUS'S HUMANITY

B.G. WHITE[1]

In the midst of the death and destruction caused by World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned the following from a Nazi prison: "only the suffering God can help."[2] One might assume that this sentiment, forged in the fires of deep suffering by a significant thinker, would ensure that pastors and theologians alike make room in their spirituality for God incarnate—in *all* of his humanity. But following decades of prosperity our world is a decidedly different place than the one that emerged out of the trenches of Europe in the mid-twentieth century. This is borne out in Philipp Rieff's *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, where Rieff's analysis of Freudian psychology led to his prediction of a decadent age where "a wider range of people will have 'spiritual' concerns and engage in 'spiritual' pursuits. There will be more singing and more listening. People will continue to genuflect and read the Bible…but no prophet will denounce the rich attire or stop the dancing."[3] Rieff's work is prophetic for what is now the well-documented 'health, wealth, and prosperity gospel'.[4] Figures such as Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, and Paula White flood our airwaves with big smiles and even bigger pocketbooks. In *Your Best Life Now*, Osteen proclaims, "God wants us to constantly be increasing, to be rising to new heights. He wants to increase you financially, by giving you promotions, fresh ideas, and creativity."[5] Such promises and the generally upbeat vibe of prosperity preachers speak powerfully to the hopes of North America's middle class in its pursuit of good housing and greater career prospects. It would not be too much to say that if it was only the crucified Christ who was relatable for a mid-twentieth century German, it is only the resurrected

[1] B. G. White is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at The King's College in New York, New York.

[2] *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 361. In citing this phrase, I am not commenting upon nor supporting its controversial development by Jürgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God* (1973).

[3] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith After Freud* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 58-9.

[4] See e.g. Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[5] Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now* (New York: FaithWords, 2007), 5.

Christ that is palatable for many twenty-first century North Americans. The irony is that our society is now subsumed in a mental health crisis. An Osteenian gospel speaks to our hopes, but not to our reality. Specifically, our society is struggling with depression more than ever before. Some studies estimate that 20% of American adults have experienced clinical depression,[6] and approximately 7% have suffered at least one 'major' depressive episode.[7] Depression is the leading cause of disability for those aged 15-44.[8] This is to say nothing of sub-clinical depression—a darkened mood, or even sustained sadness that does not qualify as depression. Without overlooking the seriousness of clinical depression, when I use the term 'depression' in what follows I am referring to both clinical and sub-clinical cases because both exhibit a melancholy mind that struggles to know and feel hope. Such a mind is of concern for ministry leaders and, in this paper, I wish to show how harmful prosperity thinking can be for the depressed broadly speaking. More importantly, I propose a way in which thoughtful leaders can re-articulate Christian spirituality to incorporate, rather than overlook—or worse—chastise, the deprivation and weakness experienced in one's depression.

I.

Before I can fully articulate my hypothesis, however, one must appreciate that the trend of victorious spiritual formation described above has in smaller and subtler forms entered traditional circles. The 'prosperity gospel' is not a fringe phenomenon nor can it be dismissed as the gambit of an obviously wayward preacher. Even Dallas Willard's award-winning *Renovation of the Heart* proclaims that "the hindrances to our putting off the old person and putting on the new one *can be removed or mastered*... No one need live in spiritual and personal defeat."[9] While Willard rejects the god of Mammon championed by Osteen, he remains committed to a vision of formation in which overcoming one's weaknesses is the substance of Christian flourishing. This trend is also evident in Tony Campolo's *Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God* in which the author works through chapters like 'How to Be Rich and Still Be a Christian' and 'How

6 "Depression in the United States—An Update." Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ demystifying-psychiatry/201808/depression-in-the-united-states-update. Accessed on Dec. 17, 2019.

7 "Major Depression." National Institute of Mental Health. https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtml. Accessed on Dec. 17, 2019.

8 "Major Depression." *Mental Health Awareness. Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention.* https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/resources/diseases/mental.htm Accessed on Dec. 17, 2019..

9 Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 10-11. Italics are the author's.

to Care for People without Being Exploited'.[10] Campolo admirably tries to avoid spiritual extremes but, in doing so, he is abundantly clear that being an 'embarrassment' is not one of the things that Jesus would want. One wonders how Campolo would treat Paul's admission of constant anxiety (2 Cor. 11.28) or Moses's reminder that Yahweh chose Israel not because they were "more numerous [i.e. impressive]" than other nations, but because they were the least of these (Deut. 7.7). A further area of illumination is the world of Christian radio, where the K-LOVE network—with over 440 stations in 47 states—has the motto "Positive, Encouraging, K-Love." It is not uncommon to hear its stations transition between songs with the tagline "All positive, *nothing negative*."[11] As Kate Bowler recognizes in her history of the prosperity gospel, this phenomenon is more than the praise of money. It shows itself in deep-seated antipathy to weakness, vulnerability, and 'negative' outlooks on life.[12]

To be fair, the difference between prosperity preachers and more traditional Christians is often quite clear. But even the very brief survey above raises the possibility that modern Christianity—and evangelicalism in particular—has failed to cast a vision for a truly alternative spirituality. Many evangelicals rightly talk about sanctification and formation, adopting guiding motifs like growth, change, and transformation.[13] To them, Christian flourishing involves being (spiritually) strong—a conclusion that prosperity preachers also reach (with a few materialistic addendums). Of course, there is a deep biblical justification for the emphasis on strength (e.g. Jos. 1.9, Neh. 8.10, Phil. 4.13) and the need for transformation (e.g. 1 Cor. 3.1, Rom. 12.2). Yet sometimes the biblical record asserts what appears to be a more paradoxical reality. Paul can say "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12.10). Job receives a revelation only *while* he endures the loss of his children, finances, and health. These realities reach a climax when Jesus, God's definitive revelation, purchases salvation for the world on a Roman cross. Such a feat was impossible without the incarnation, where Jesus "made himself nothing" before being "exalted…to the highest place" (Phil. 2.7, 9). If even Jesus experienced the fullness of a human life (and not a particularly easy one); if he went hungry (e.g. Mk. 11.12), grew tired (e.g. Jn. 4.6), and finally died with a cry (e.g. Lk. 23.46), then it seems that much formation literature is at risk of committing a theological and pastoral disservice—especially to those with mental illness generally and depression specifically—by failing to incorporate deprivation into Christian discipleship. Such a failure is even more significant if we accept that Jesus,

[10] Tony Campolo, *Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God* (Dallas: Word Books, 1997).

[11] As heard by the author in January 2018 (italics, naturally, mine).

[12] Bowler, *Blessed*, 3-10.

[13] See e.g. Philip E. Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013); Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991).

as both God *and* man, embodies the pinnacle of human flourishing. This would suggest that we require an incarnational re-figuring of what it means to be a more mature and spiritual human being.

There have been several recent attempts at such a re-figuring. Perhaps the most famous is the career of Henri Nouwen, particularly his book *The Wounded Healer*.[14] Nouwen contends that, contrary to our impulses, a life of vulnerability enables growth in others. By showing solidarity with those who suffer, the pastor embodies Christ himself—not only in being a model for perseverance, but in showing care for the sufferer. Though profound, Nouwen's work does not offer a significant engagement with the relevant biblical texts. Furthermore, he overlooks the precise problem that I have outlined so far: not only how one comforts a sufferer, but how one articulates the *goal* of spiritual formation if our God is one who works in and through weakness. A more recent example is Andy Crouch's *Strong and Weak*.[15] This work offers a multi-faceted take on the importance of weakness in our lives—how it cultivates certain virtues (i.e. humility, perseverance) and is thus a part of true flourishing. While Crouch's book is valuable, it does not have a focus on depression and, once again, it possesses a relatively brief engagement with biblical texts. While there are other related books, especially those addressing depression from a clinical perspective, I do not rehearse them here because my focus is the distinct interface between exegesis and contemporary experiences of depression. Is there a place where these explicitly connect in Scripture? Is there a singular insight that could aid in creating an alternative spirituality to the prosperity gospel? If so, how might one articulate it?

In the following paper, I aim to answer these questions in the spirit of the early church regarding Jesus's humanity: "what has not been assumed cannot be redeemed."[16] We are acclimatized to the general sentiment of a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses—presumably including our mental illness—but what we have missed is the evidence of Jesus's *own* experience of depression and how this changes the way we think about ours. As an experimental test case, I offer Matthew 26:38, where I argue that Jesus experiences a brief depression that is signalled by the use of περίλυπος. This term is a derivative of λύπη, which—as we shall see—was one of the most feared emotions in the ancient world. I suggest that following *this* Jesus, rather than an overly spiritualized Christ, creates a vision for spiritual formation which helps the depressed to incorporate their chronic struggle into their discipleship instead of making it out to be an existential detour. To the contrary, depression can be a ground for becoming more like Christ precisely because our Lord experienced this darkness of

[14] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1979).

[15] Andy Crouch, *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2016).

[16] Gregory Nazianzus, *Ep. 101*, 32.

the human mind. This speaks to, among other things, the solidarity that God has with the depressed and the hope that we have of being raised, as Jesus was, to a new psychology. In all these things, I am simply making suggestions, many of which will not be conclusively proven. I only ask that the reader carry along, seeking to understand what I am saying and why it matters. Nevertheless, I do think—if I am given the time and space at some later date—that the recovery of the full humanity of Jesus that I am discussing here has the potential to move evangelical formation away from prosperity thinking and toward an incarnational model that can make more sense of Jesus and of ourselves.

II.

The narrative in the Garden of Gethsemane brims with symbolism. Adam and Eve fell in a primordial garden, and here the Lord takes refuge in another garden to consider a path that Adam and Eve could not choose. One garden is a place of disobedience and the desire to be as God, the other is a place of obedience where God incarnate chooses the cross. The difference could not be starker. While this typological connection alone is worthy of reflection, studies of the Gethsemane episode have also brought important insights on Jesus's betrayal, the location of the garden, and the nature of Jesus's prayers.[17] I wish to discuss his weakness, a topic that is easily overlooked given Jesus's criticism of the disciples, who sleep rather than persist in prayer. "The spirit is willing," Jesus pointedly says, "but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26.41). What interpreters fail to see is that Jesus has just dealt with his own experience of weakness, which is indicated several verses earlier. He prays to the Father: "If it is not possible for this cup to be taken away…let your will be done" (v. 42). Here Jesus feels the weight of his impending death, arguably less to do with dying itself and more to do with the position the cross will give him in relation to his Father—being utterly forsaken. Yet the truly shocking line that flows from Jesus' angst is expressed a bit earlier with a tiny word that has explosive implications. In v. 38, Jesus says, "I am deeply pained [περίλυπος], even to death."

Although it would take a proper word study to truly explore the meaning and ramifications of Jesus's use of περίλυπος, I provide here some highlights that pertain broadly to lup- words.[18] The term λύπη and its derivatives can refer to a variety of pains ranging from the physical effects of childbirth to the inward sorrow caused by a disobedient child (e.g. Gen. 3.16; Tob. 9.4). While classical usage focused on physical pains, its usage became increasingly psychological in the first century. An example from

[17] See e.g. the overview of scholarship on Matthew 26 in Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 958ff.

[18] For more discussion, though not pertaining directly to the Gethsemane account, see my Ph.D thesis: B.G. White, "Pain and Paradox: The Transformative Function of Strength in Weakness in 2 Corinthians," esp. pg. 33-55. Ph.D. Diss, Durham University, 2019.

Sirach is strikingly similar to the cry from Gethsemane: "Is it not a pain [λύπη] like that for death itself when a dear friend turns into an enemy?" (Sir. 37.2). In other words, a distinct use of λύπη relates to relational pain and heartbreak and, as such, it sometimes refers to the deepest possible pains. Sirach elsewhere says, 'Remove pain [λύπη] far from you, for it has destroyed many, and no advantage ever comes from it' (30.23). The apostle Paul likewise indicates how his heart breaks concerning the Jews' rejection of his gospel: 'I have great pain [λύπη] and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people' (Rom. 9.2). In these examples, it is clear that λυπ- words can express relational strife, causing Jesus's use of the term in the context of betrayal and forsakenness to seem quite natural.

What is most interesting about experiences of 'pain' in antiquity, however, is how problematic this emotion is taken to be. The Stoics believed that a wise person could avoid negative emotions and experience their positive counterparts, known as 'good feelings' (εὐπάθειαι). But there was no corresponding εὐπάθεια for λύπη in Stoic thought. Epictetus indicates that the wise man is never subject to 'pain' (λύπη), only the 'fool' (ἄφρων).[19] Dio Chrysostom states, 'What more abject creature is there than a man who is held in thrall to pain [ἀνδρὸς λυπουμένου]? What sight is there so shameful [αἰσχρός]?' He goes on to suggest that an individual experiencing λύπη undergoes a 'disturbance of mind' that causes a 'distorted body' and 'dejected posture'.[20] Stobaeus even asserts that λύπη causes one's soul (ψυχή) to shrink.[21] In short, an experience of λύπη was considered *irredeemable*. It ruins one's reputation and sacrifices one's soul on the altar of existential crisis. Although antiquity lacked a concept akin to the modern notion of depression, λύπη has been nominated as its closest possible equivalent.[22] It envisions some of the darkened countenance, despair, and even the social stigma of what a modern person may call 'depression'.

Of course, the question naturally arises: could the Son of God have experienced this depth of pain? We would not be the first to raise this question. In recognition of the terror associated with λύπη, Origen is concerned that Matthew the Evangelist gives too much ground to Arian doctrine in his description of Jesus's pain—no one would expect a divine being to experience λύπη![23] Notably, Origen does not argue for a revision of Matthew's account, only that it can easily be twisted toward Arian ends. Origen's concession is, nonetheless, illuminating because it shows—from the perspective of an ancient person—just how thoroughly the Matthean account wants to identify and describe Jesus's *humanity*. In other words,

[19] *Diss*. 222.6-7.

[20] *Or*. 16.1-2.

[21] *Ecl*. 2.7.10b.

[22] See e.g. William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16-17.

[23] *PG* 13, cols. 1741-42.

Jesus really is experiencing a sorrow so deep and troublesome that it is at least plausible, for our purposes, to say that this is (in modern terminology) a serious depressive episode of some sort.

While there is much more that could be discussed, not least concerning the specific sort of 'depression' that Jesus experienced and the legitimacy of applying this modern term to the ancient Gospel account, the evidence marshalled thus far is sufficient to consider what all of this may mean, if indeed I am correct in saying Jesus's humanity enables him to enter human depression. I want to focus on using my exegetical observations to outline an alternative spirituality to the prosperity gospel as it concerns the broad modern problem of depression. The implications of my analysis of Matthew 26:38 are possibly manifold and they cannot all be discussed here, but I offer at least four points of reflection which are detailed below.

1. Jesus shows that depression need not be accompanied by guilt—it can be a neutral or even morally good experience.

Although there may be occasions where depression can be attributed to the sufferer's own willpower, even in such cases there are often extenuating factors such as environment, genetics, and various biochemical actions that lie outside of the sufferer's control. The rhetoric of the prosperity gospel does little to recognize this; indeed, a life of gloom and depression is totally inconsistent with the prosperous life. 'Believe and it will go away'! While it is sometimes true that religious faith helps people weather depression, there is also evidence to the contrary.[24] In circles beyond the obvious prosperity preachers, individuals may still feel that their gloom is incompatible with their faith. This feeling can be compounded by peers or family members who shame or guilt them for their lack of joy. Such wounds can also be self-inflicted if the sufferer is overly scrupulous or unmindful of the doctrines of grace. The good news is that *even Jesus* encounters a form of depression and, because he is the perfect Son of God, one can only give (at worst) a neutral appraisal of his gloom. In fact, there are better arguments for saying his depression is morally good because—in keeping with the Hebraic tradition of lament—Jesus rightly perceives the horror of the cross and his negative emotion expresses the wrongness of death. Even if the modern depressed cannot claim this situation, they should at least be freed from the notion that their whole experience of depression is their fault. In the spiritual construction of life there will always be dark corners and alleyways for which one does not need to give account.

[24] See Raphael Bonelli et al., "Religious and Spiritual Factors in Depression: Review and Integration of the Research." *Depression Research and Treatment* (Aug 12, 2015).

2. Jesus' depression invites us to set realistic expectations for our lives.

After a survey of North America's 'officially optimistic' religious tendencies, Douglas John Hall's riveting *Lighten Our Darkness* concludes that prosperity thinking is destined for the crisis that occurs when our experience does not meet our expectations.[25] In other words, the path to spiritual maturity is setting expectations that can be reasonably met in one's life. If Jesus could not avoid dark mental places, we should expect nothing less as his followers. We are used to saying that we should 'take up our cross' and follow Jesus; now, in light of Matthew 26, we should be willing to take up our gloom and be conformed to Christ. This is not to say that one's depression is their cross *per se*, only that one should not constantly see faith as opposed to a dour state of mind. To be like Christ means, at times, to trudge through the darkness and feel the slow elapse of suffering. The expectation of future pain is an axe to the roots of pride and self-sufficiency. Nonetheless, my suggestion here is not all 'doom and gloom'. Like Jesus, we must understand that God often uses the darkness to reveal the light. We must set expectations for our lives that make room for the hope of the resurrection, but not before we have felt the sting of death—whether physical or existential.

3. Jesus does not merely sympathize with the depressed, he shows solidarity with them.

The fact of Jesus' depression—particularly its intensity and stigma in antiquity—does not merely change our expectations, it requires us—as hinted above—to re-frame the notion of being conformed to the image of Christ. Depression is not merely a neutralized sideshow in the Christian drama, it is a surprising way for believers to become bigger people, to share a bit more in Christ's sufferings (e.g. 1 Pt. 4.13). Jesus is not a distant high priest who issues executive orders behind his celestial desk. He is in the muck and mire of daily life, acquainted with the darkness. It is with the acknowledgement of Jesus' mental anguish that one can say with feeling, "Even though I walk through the valley of the deepest shadow, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23). We sometimes say that we participate in the life of God; we must learn to say that Jesus participated truly and deeply in my depression.

4. Jesus' resurrection anchors our hope for freedom, not only from 'sin' but from our present psychology.

There is much thought being given lately to the embodied nature of the new heavens and new earth, but what we might miss is the prospect of

[25] Douglas John Hall, *Lighten our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*, rev. ed. (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2011), 20-23.

having a new mind. If we are participating with Jesus, and he went from the grave to the right hand of God, then we also will go there. But to be told that we will eventually be co-heirs with Christ (e.g. Rom. 8.17) is also to be told that our depression—and every other mental disability—is redeemable. The resurrection of Jesus defies the psychological predilections of antiquity, the label of the fool, and it will continue to defy those same hard-hearted, guilt-ridden pronouncements today. The sobering truth is that much of our formation literature is written as though Jesus was never vulnerable, dead, or depressed. We must remember that we are united with Christ not only to share in ultimate redemption, we are to engage the wounds along the way: to share in his healing, to undo the trauma, and to look forward to knowing only the perfect love of God, which casts out all fear (1 Jn. 4.18).

I cannot pretend that these very brief reflections are the alternative spirituality to the prosperity gospel, let alone a spirituality at all. However, they are signposts for a different way of thinking about the *goal* of Christian spirituality. Lest all of my Jesus-talk sound like a basic call to be more like him—a rather unoriginal way to do spiritual formation—one must recall that when we say that we want to be 'like Jesus', we are often talking about ethics such as loving your neighbor, being merciful, and speaking the truth. It is rare, however, to imagine, as I have just done, that to be like Jesus is also to *embody the dynamics of power and weakness that run throughout his life* (e.g. 2 Cor. 12.7-10, 13.4; Phil. 2.6-11). Such dynamics are only possible because Jesus was fully human. Depression is not to be defined by what it is not, as though Christians make concessions for depression when our default mode should be joy. Instead, the suggestion here is that depression really is a ground for Christian flourishing, especially flourishing that looks anything like the incarnate Christ. In the New Testament, the goal of the Christian life is not fundamentally a *theosis*—that we might 'become God' as Athanasius said.[26] This doctrine is not specific enough. The goal is not to become like the unmoved mover, an implacable, divine being; rather, it is to be like "the Word [who] became flesh and dwelled among us" (Jn. 1.14). So we are to become like God, as Athanasius argued, but only in a Christological sense. Ben Blackwell rightly suggests that the New Testament teaching is not fundamentally *theosis*, but *Christosis*.[27] We are not simply climbing a divine ladder to heaven, we are also, like Christ, being thrust down to Hell.[28] Depression reminds us of our humanity, which is—in isolation—irredeemable. Yet by the power of the Spirit, we too have the divine power living in us, and it is for this reason that we can embrace depression as a friend, albeit an unwelcome one. Our depression is the Gethsemane moment in an unfolding drama that climaxes in resurrection. It cannot defeat us any more than it could have prevented Jesus's resurrection.

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[26] *De incarnatione* 54, 3.

[27] Ben Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016).

[28] Martin Luther *WA* 18:633.

By way of conclusion, the remaining question—at least, the one I will consider—is how we encapsulate these incarnational reflections in our language of spiritual formation. I propose that we *recover a sense of 'otherness' in spiritual formation.* Many biblical motifs for formation, such as growth or transformation, can nonetheless be twisted to very un-Christian ends in a culture which values appearance and strength. A recovery of 'holiness' as a formational term might be helpful. Though it is often associated with moral goodness, its fundamental meaning is to be set apart or 'other'. Likewise, our goal in becoming like Christ is to become like someone the world has not since seen and will never see again until the *eschaton*. He is an unexpected God, who gathers the depressed to himself; indeed, who joins their ranks as he stares down the cross. By way of this solidarity, he brings us to our true victory, which is to draw closer to him in our sufferings—the "God who comforts the downcast" (2 Cor. 7.6).

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THE INTEGRATED PASTOR: TOWARD AN EMBODIED AND EMBEDDED SPIRITUAL FORMATION

TODD WILSON[1]

This is partly an observation, partly a confession. I'd like to call it a disquieting observation from a middle-aged pastor. After more than two and a half decades as a Christian, and a decade and a half as a pastor, I have come to this conclusion: pastors can be godly and yet dysfunctional at the same time. They can be both holy and not whole. They can be both biblically faithful and yet psychologically maladjusted. They can be both spiritually mature and emotionally immature.

Pastors can love evangelism yet fear those of a different race or the opposite sex. They can be "prayer warriors" and "control freaks," powerful preachers and domineering spouses, faithful shepherds and disengaged or overbearing parents. They can love Jesus and be addicted to food, pornography, or pain medication.

While these are unsettling juxtapositions, they are, sadly enough, empirically verifiable. This is why we must learn to swallow the sobering truth that pastors can possess real spiritual depth and yet live lives that are riddled by psychological compulsions and emotional reactivity.

To reiterate: pastors can be both godly and dysfunctional—holy and not whole, spiritually mature and emotionally repressed, biblically faithful, and psychologically maladjusted.

I know this to be true from observation. But I also know this to be true from experience—personal experience. My own experience. I told you this was partly observation, partly confession. Now is time for the confession.

For many years of my ministry I would say that I was godly and dysfunctional. I have no doubt that if you lived with us for a week, slept on our couch, observed me throughout my day, you would come away thinking, "He's a pretty godly guy. He loves Jesus. He loves the Bible. He loves the church. He cares about his wife and children and making a difference in the world for Christ."

But if you came and lived with me in the early weeks of January 2015, you would also see that I was fairly dysfunctional. At least, that's when I came to confront the reality of it for the first time.

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I was granted a three-month sabbatical from my regular church responsibilities—a delicious season of pastoral bliss with no sermons, no meetings, no counseling sessions, no leadership decisions, no management difficulties, no long-range planning or goal setting, not even any compulsory reading or studying or writing.

To be sure, I had big plans for my sabbatical: I was going to finish one contracted book manuscript and start working on another; I was going to reread all fifteen hundred pages of Calvin's Institutes; I was going to memorize the book of James; I was going to plow through a three-foot high stack of books; and I was going to brush up on Hebrew.

When I shared these plans with my elders, one of them wryly said, "Are you going to do anything else?" Clearly, my compulsions had already gotten the better of me, but I was perhaps the only person at the table who couldn't recognize it. So I doubled down on the insanity and reassured them that all would be well and that this three-month season of ostensible rest was going to be what I called, ironically enough, a "working sabbatical."

But rather than dive right into all the work I had planned, I figured it would behoove a godly pastor like me to exercise a little self-restraint and Christian character by taking the first week to simply do nothing. It was a sabbatical, after all!

So that is what I did.

But I must confess, it didn't go well. My strategy of rest worked for about two days. By Wednesday of week one I was starting to unravel.

Perhaps you've known someone with a serious substance abuse problem, or you may have come alongside that person as he was trying to kick the addiction. It's not a pleasant experience. Without their chemical of choice people start to unravel, mentally and emotionally. They get irritable, edgy, panicked, overwhelmed with persistent cravings.

That was me by the middle of week one of my sabbatical. I was a godly pastor going through withdrawal. I was an addict who needed a hit—not of whiskey or meth but of accomplishment and achievement. Christian psychiatrist Gerald May defines addiction as "a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person's will and desire."[2] That, sadly, was me. I was irritable, edgy, panicked, overwhelmed with persistent cravings for getting things done—and I was driving my dear wife insane!

"Todd, you've got to do something about this!" she admonished.

And so I did. I knew just what to do.

I went back to work.

On Monday morning of week two of my sabbatical I returned to my normal routine: I got out of bed at 5:00 a.m. and into the pool at the YMCA by 5:30 a.m. I swam two thousand yards, showered, and got to my study at church by 7. There I read my Bible and prayed until around 8, at

[2] Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 14.

which point I transitioned to begin the day's work. I wrapped up around 5:30 p.m. and was home for dinner by 6.

And I can tell you, I felt better instantly! I felt the chemical surge of satisfaction in my brain, like I had just taken a hit of my favorite narcotic—or at least a double espresso. My irritability was gone. So too was my edginess, panic, sense of desperation. I was back to my old self—a godly pastor feeding his compulsions with a working sabbatical!

Everything was going swimmingly. But then a friend had the nerve to text me sometime during week three. His text read, "Hey man, isn't that your car in the church parking lot? Aren't you on sabbatical?"

Do you remember that scene in 2 Samuel 12:7 when the prophet Nathan says to David, "You are the man!" That was how this friend's text message struck me. A stinging rebuke. Todd, you are the man! Godly, yes, but dysfunctional, broken, perhaps even addicted. There are powerful subterranean forces at work in your life, controlling you.

A few weeks later, to my own surprise, I found myself in a therapist's office. I didn't know exactly why I was there. I had never sat with a therapist before.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"I think I'm addicted to achievement," I said somewhat sheepishly.

"Okay. Why don't you tell me a little bit about your family background," he said.

Thus began a conversation, and a therapeutic relationship, that continued for many months—one that helped me to see that I was both godly and dysfunctional. I discovered that twenty-five years of growth as a Christian had successfully added layer on layer of spiritual formation on top of some deep-seated compulsions that were still profoundly influencing my life.

THE PROBLEM WITH EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A LACK OF INTEGRATION

Godly and also dysfunctional—this is a real possibility for pastors. What do we make of this?

At the risk of oversimplification, all three stories hinge on one word: integration. Or more accurately, four words: a lack of integration. What unites each and every godly and dysfunctional pastor? A lack of integration.

Integration. From the Latin integrare, which means "to make whole." To integrate is to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. To be dis-integrated is the failure to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. So for the purpose of this conversation, integration is to bring together the different elements of the human person into a coordinate, unified whole, and to be dis-integrated is to fall short of that purpose.

It is my conviction that most forms of evangelical spirituality fail to foster integration. We prioritize doctrinal instruction and moral development. But we neglect psychological healing. We emphasize the cultivation

of character. But we overlook our deep-seated psychological compulsions, fixations, and emotional reactivity.

You might say that evangelical approaches to spiritual formation often fail to promote integration. Sadly, this means that, if left to itself, evangelical spirituality will breed not integrated but dis-integrated pastors whose ministries may sooner or later disintegrate all around them.

Dis-integration isn't a problem just for pastors. It's a condition that afflicts many Christians. We have dis-integrated pastors, but we also have dis-integrated Christians—sincere followers of Jesus who live with deep (albeit well-managed) psychological dysfunctions.

At the risk of sounding like a grumpy old man, may I say that we see evidence of dis-integrated Christians all around us.

Let me ask this question: Why is it that good Christians don't always make good human beings? They're faithful to their families, consistent in church attendance, read their Bibles and pray for the lost. But they can be, at the same time, rigid, self-righteous, xenophobic, racist, sexist, controlling, narrow minded, emotionally repressed, sexually dysfunctional, bitter, impulsive, angry. In a word, unChristian.[3]

Or why is it that non-Christians can be more Christian than Christians? Haven't you had that experience, or had someone say something like that to you? It's as though those without knowledge of the gospel can achieve a measure of psychological health and healing that outstrips even what some professing Christians have attained.

Or consider this: Why is it that evangelicals are notoriously clumsy when it comes to dealing with issues like race, sex, and gender? Could it be that all three of these issues—race, sex and gender—are body issues. They concern the body—the very thing that much of evangelical spirituality conditions us to downplay or overlook. Is it any wonder, then, that we struggle to speak thoughtfully and winsomely about these body issues when we spend so little time cultivating a spirituality that concerns our own bodies?

Where am I going with all of this? We need to rethink our approach to spiritual formation. We need an approach to spiritual formation that fosters integration—that brings together doctrinal instruction and moral development with psychological healing.

In short, I'm appealing for an approach that—by the grace of God, through the Spirit of God, grounded in the Word of God—engenders not only holiness but wholeness.

In saying this I'm sounding a note similar to the one Dallas Willard sounded several decades ago. Willard's concern was that Christians weren't attaining Christlikeness. Why not? Not because of a lack of effort, he

[3] Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

concluded. No, everywhere he looked he saw sincere Christians doing the very best they could.

Instead, according to Willard the problem is our deficient theological anthropology. He explains,

> For serious churchgoing Christians, the hindrance to true spiritual growth is not unwillingness. While they are far from perfect, no one who knows such people can fail to appreciate their willingness and goodness of heart. For my part, at least, I could no longer deny the fact. I finally decided their problem was a theological deficiency, a lack in teaching, understanding, and practical direction…As I now see it…the gospel preached and the instruction and example given these faithful ones simply do not do justice to the nature of human personality, as embodied, incarnate. And this fact has far reaching implications for the development of human health and excellence.[4]

We have a deficient theological anthropology, a failure to do justice to the true nature of the human personality, to take seriously that we are not just souls inhabiting bodies, or minds connected to brains. Rather, we are embodied and even incarnate creatures. To put it bluntly, we don't have bodies—we are bodies. Yes, we have a mind and soul too (or at least soulish capacities), but they are far better integrated with our bodies than we've been led to believe.

What, then, would a better theological vision of spiritual formation look like? It would be one that takes seriously the nature of the human person as a psychosomatic unity, that does justice to our embodied, incarnate nature, and that promotes integration of the doctrinal and moral with the psychological and even neurological.

To develop a more integrated approach to spiritual formation would require that we take at least the following three steps: (1) we will need to take the body more seriously, (2) we will need to take the brain more seriously, and (3) we will need to take interpersonal communion more seriously.

Step #1—Take the Body More Seriously

Not long ago I listened to a well-known pastor deliver a powerful message in the chapel service of a well-known seminary. The message was about how to make the most of one's seminary experience. And the pastor's approach was to focus on the essence of the Christian life, or you might say, the essence of spirituality and spiritual formation.

It was an excellent message about glorifying God with your education, delighting in God through seminary, finding joy in Greek and Hebrew syntax, developing your mind by carefully tracing the argument of great books, and so on. And this pastor spoke with characteristic passion and insight. It was moving, insightful, inspirational, challenging.

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[4] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 18 (emphasis original).

But at the end of the message the thought suddenly occurred to me: "This is a great vision of spiritual formation, but you don't need a body for any of it. An angel could just as easily embrace the content of this message as an embodied person. You don't have to be a human being to do anything he just advocated. In fact, it could have been a chapel message just for angels and archangels rather than seminarians and faculty!"

Here is something we often and easily forget. Every approach to spiritual formation presupposes some understanding of the human person—a theological anthropology.

And what is the dominant theological anthropology of evangelicalism? It is a dualism of mind-body, inner-outer, spiritual-physical—a dualistic anthropology that is, as best as I can tell, indebted to the monumental influence of the great St. Augustine.

As Christian philosopher Nancy Murphy says, "It is in fact the case that most Christians, throughout most of their history, have been dualists of one sort or another."[5] Most Christians have assumed that the person has two parts—soul or mind, on the one hand, and body, on the other; or, inner and outer, or spiritual and physical parts.

We owe this dualism, as Murphy notes, to the fourth-century bishop and theologian Augustine.

Augustine (354–430) has been the most influential teacher on these matters [of mind-body dualism] because of his legacy in both Protestant and Catholic theology and because of his importance in the development of Christian spirituality. Augustine's conception of the person is a modified Platonic view: a human being is an immortal (not eternal) soul using (not imprisoned in) a mortal body.[6]

She adds, "From Augustine to the present we have had a conception of the self that distinguishes the inner life from the outer, and spirituality has been associated largely with the inner."[7] Or as the esteemed Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues in his Source of the Self,

On the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine. Augustine's whole outlook was influenced by Plato's doctrines as they were transmitted to him through Plotinus…He could liberate himself from the last shackles of the false Manichaean view when he finally came to see God and the soul as immaterial. Henceforth, for Augustine, the Christian opposition between spirit and flesh was to be understood with the aid of the Platonic distinction between the bodily and the non-bodily.[8]

Consequently, Augustine's modified Platonic dualism merged with Paul's way of talking about flesh and s/Spirit. Western Christianity hasn't been

[5] Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37.

[6] Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 14.

[7] Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 30 (emphasis added).

[8] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127 (emphasis added).

the same since. At least, our understanding of spirituality and spiritual formation hasn't been the same. As Taylor says, "Augustine is always calling us within."[9]

Let me try to summarize it this way. Augustine's dualistic anthropology leads very naturally to a dis-integrated spirituality, an approach to spiritual formation that focuses on the mind or soul and not on the body, on the inner person and not the outer, or on the spiritual and not the physical.

But if we want to move toward a spiritual formation that promotes integration, then we need to scrutinize our dualistic anthropology. We need to ask ourselves whether it is the most biblically faithful, theologically sound way of understanding what it means to be human. Or are there not better ways to conceive of the person that are more in line with Christian commitments to embodiment?[10]

STEP #2—TAKE THE BRAIN MORE SERIOUSLY

By taking the body more seriously (step #1) we are led naturally to take a second step. We need to take the brain more seriously. Of course, we won't take the brain seriously if we don't first take the body seriously. But once we begin to appreciate the significance of our embodiment for spiritual formation, then we will be better positioned to think more specifically and concretely about what it means to take seriously this corporeal body of ours. This will lead us to take the brain more seriously, so that spiritual formation is viewed, in a very real sense, as brain formation—or brain re-formation!

And yet, how many of us think "brain" when we hear the words spiritual formation? It's like those SAT questions that ask you to identify which doesn't belong: "prayer, Bible study, fasting, and neural networks." For evangelicals the brain is hardly even a category of spiritual formation. But it should be. The reality is that the brain underwrites everything about our spiritual formation—our thoughts, our feelings, our actions. As cultural biologists Steven R. Quartz and Terrence J. Sejnowski nicely put it, "Every nuance of yourself, the fabric of your experience, ultimately arises from the machinations of your brain. The brain houses your humanity."[11] Perhaps I can put it a tad bit more provocatively: there is no spiritual formation without brain formation or re-formation.

I recently came across an illustration that drives home this very point. Let me give you an advanced warning: It's an awkward and troubling story. But its powerful and to the point. Back in 2000, a forty-year old man, a Virginia high school teacher, was arrested for making sexual advances

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[9] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.

[10] For extended reflections on this question in line with the overall direction of this essay, see Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, & the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[11] Steven R. Quartz and Terrence J. Sejnowski, *Liars, Lovers, and Heroes: What the New Brain Science Reveals About How We Become Who We Are* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 3.

toward his stepdaughter. His wife called police to come and arrest him. When the police arrived, they found he had been, for some time, collecting pornographic magazines and visiting pornographic websites. He was convicted and required to attend a mandatory twelve-step recovery program for sexual addicts.

But he failed the program, because he couldn't stop making advances at the other women in the program. So the judge was going to sentence him to jail time. But the day before his sentencing, he drove himself to an emergency room, complaining of a raging headache. Doctors did an MRI and discovered that he had an egg-sized tumor on the right frontal lobe of his brain. So they operated on him to remove the tumor. And to everyone's surprise, the lewd behavior and pedophilia went away with the removal of the tumor.

However, a year later the tumor started to grow again. And, remarkably, so too did the inappropriate sexual behavior. So the medical staff decided to operate once again. And, stunningly, when they removed the tumor for a second time, so too did the illicit sexual desires dissipate, for a second time.[12]

A fascinatingly true story that tells us something about what it means to be a human being. We are morally and spiritually dependent, so to speak, not only our bodies, but on our brains. Consider how closely linked morality and personality are in this story—how a damaged brain can bend behavior, or how an otherwise moral guy can do some really immoral things if his brain isn't working right.

My wife Katie and I have seven children, three biological and four adopted from Ethiopia. The two youngest, twin boys, we adopted when they were just six months old. The other two we adopted when they were ages six and eight. The twins are now ten, and the older two are eleven and thirteen. Having seven children is a wild ride! But having four adopted has definitely added to the adventure. We've learned a lot about parenting and families and adoption and, not least, ourselves. But we've also learned a lot about the brain. Renowned psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk has written a highly acclaimed study of trauma and healing so aptly titled The Body Keeps the Score.[13] Over the last decade of parenting four adopted children, Katie and I have learned that the body does indeed keep the score. The traumatic events in a child's life—things like abandonment, emotional or physical abuse, and neglect—often scar the body by doing things to the brain, affecting its wiring and firing and, ultimately, its integration.

Neuroscientists now tell us that brains can be scarred, that the body does keep the score—or, to be more precise, that the brain keeps the score. The brain holds onto the trauma of the past. The experience is embedded

[12] The story is told in Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, Neuroscience, *Psychology and Religion: Illusions, Delusions, and Realities About Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2009), 63-65.

[13] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

in the circuitry of the brain—perhaps not as explicit memory, the kind you can recall like looking at a photo album. But it will be stored as implicit memory, the kind you re-experience emotionally even though there may be no "memories" or visual images coming to mind.[14] So, the child who has experienced trauma in his or her life carries those memories—bears those scars—in their bodies, in their brains. And those memories, whether explicit or implicit, affect everything about that child—the child's attitudes, actions, emotions, reactions, mood, and all the rest.

But there is another layer of complexity to the situation. Human beings have developed an ingenious yet costly way of coping with trauma. We disconnect our minds from our bodies, so that we can live up in our heads, not down in our bodies, as it were. As a defense mechanism, we disconnect our minds from our bodies, so as to distance ourselves from the painful memories stored in our bodies (i.e., in our brains). In other word, we dis-integrate in order to survive.[15]

Think about the spiritual formation of a child who has suffered significant trauma. We realize that to form our children spiritually, especially our adopted children, we cannot simply put pressure on their wills to compel them to "do what Jesus would do." Nor can we simply "shepherd the child's heart" without attending to the child's brain. Instead, we have had to step back and take not just their bodies but also their brains seriously. We have had to come to terms with the fact that there will be no lasting spiritual formation without deep psychological healing—the healing of brains, new neural networks created through kindness, care, compassion.

My wife Katie and I have come to another important realization—in this fallen world we've all been traumatized in different ways and to varying degrees. We've all been roughed-up by this abusive world. Each of us has had to endure a certain kind of abuse, neglect, or trauma. All of us have had damage done to our bodies, to our brains, so that none of us is entirely whole. We've all been dis-integrated through the ravages of sin—personal, social, cosmic. For each of us, the body does keep the score.

We may not see obvious effects of trauma in our lives because we have added layer on layer of moral and spiritual development on top of our psychological brokenness in a way that effectively muffles its impact. But if we attend to our lives more carefully and probe beneath the surface, we will no doubt discover the subterranean reality of our own psychological brokenness.

What does this brokenness look like? It looks like the compulsions we cannot seem to control, even with our best moral efforts. This brokenness

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[14] See Daniel J. Siegel, Mindsight: *The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam, 2010), 145-65; Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2010), 63-87.

[15] See Siegel, *Mindsight*, especially chapter 7, "Cut Off from the Neck Down: Reconnecting the Mind and the Body," 120-44.

can look like strong involuntary urges, the fixations, the obsessions, the emotional reactivity to persons or situations that we cannot quite explain and that seem to emerge from out of nowhere. These intractable features of our lives are telltale signs that all is not well in our body, that is, with our brain.

We are familiar with that famous passage in Romans 12:2 where Scripture calls the Christian not be conformed to the pattern of this world but to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind [nous]." I wonder if healing the brain is at least part of what Scripture has in mind in this verse: the renewal of the nous—not in a dualistic sense as that which is fundamentally distinct from the body, but as the whole psychosomatic unity we call the person.

STEP #3—TAKE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNION MORE SERIOUSLY

There is a third and final step we need to take if we are going to move toward a more integrated approach to spiritual formation. We need to take more seriously interpersonal communion.[16]

When we take bodies seriously, we will take brains seriously—as the concrete focus of our embodiment. And when we take brains seriously as embodied and indeed socially embedded realities, then we will naturally take interpersonal communion seriously.

By "interpersonal communion" I mean the communion of persons, or as we sometimes say, "the meeting of minds." Perhaps we should talk about it as the "bonding of brains." It is deeply mutual, personal, reciprocal. Christian Smith defines communion as "the mutual giving of personal selves as gifts of fellowship and love for the good of each person concerned."[17] It is the experience of not just knowing another person but being known by that person.[18]

If you have a dualistic understanding of the person, then you will naturally prioritize the mind over the body. You will also inevitably put the emphasis on knowing rather than being known. In fact, "knowing rather than being known" would be a fair description of so much of evangelical spiritual formation, in which the focus is almost exclusively on learning and education and instruction.[19]

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[16] My emphasis on interpersonal communion draws on the work of Daniel Siegel's approach. He refers to as "interpersonal neurobiology," but attempts to frame it in explicitly Christian terms of communion of persons with other persons and with God. For a similar approach, see Thompson, Anatomy of the Soul.

[17] Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 68.

[18] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 11-20.

[19] Similarly, Brad S. Strawn and Warren S. Brown, "Christian Education as Embodied and Embedded Virtue Formation," in *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, ed. Mark A. Maddix and Dean G. Blevins (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2016), 87-97.

For centuries ordinary Christians have understood that profound personal and spiritual transformation happens not as much from knowing as from being known. A new generation of neuroscientists are helping us to see this more clearly.

Why is Alcoholics Anonymous far and away the most successful behavioral change program to have ever existed? Because every meeting begins the same way. "Hi, I'm Todd. I'm an alcoholic." "Hi Todd." It's a place where many people, often for the first time in their life, are known by other people for who they are. AA has discovered something that we as the church sometimes struggle to grasp—the transformative power of interpersonal communion.

Something miraculous happens when two minds, empathetically, meet one another. We know this to be true from experience. But now neuroscientists have the data to back this up. Something literally happens inside of you (i.e., your brain) when you know that you are known by someone else—new neural networks are created, new synapses fire and wire, and your brain is changed, for the better.

Psychiatrist Dan Siegel calls this the experience of "feeling felt."[20] It happens when you sense that another person has entered into your internal world and shares with you in the experience of what is going on inside of you. This is what we call empathy, which is at the heart of interpersonal communion. But it is also the ignition key to personal and spiritual transformation—being known, not just knowing. And not just by another human being, but ultimately, and most importantly, by God himself.

Christian psychiatrist Curt Thompson puts it very well: "The process of being known is the vessel in which our lives are kneaded and molded, lanced and sutured, confronted and comforted, bringing God's new creation closer to its fullness in preparation for the return of the King."[21]

CONCLUSION

When we talk about spiritual formation, we are talking about the process whereby a person moves toward maturity in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Spiritual formation is, as Paul puts it in Colossians, about becoming complete in Christ. "He is the one we proclaim," the apostle writes, "admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature [teleios] in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:28-29). We could say that the telos or goal of spiritual formation is to be teleios or complete in Christ.

The burden of this essay has been to say that we will have a very hard time getting to this telos without taking more seriously the body, the brain, and interpersonal communion. We will not become "complete in

[20] Siegel, *Mindsight*, 10-11.

[21] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 13.

Christ" without being known—not only by one another, but by our Lord and Maker himself.

And so we take heart, learn to walk by faith, lean into the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the power of God's Spirit. "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror," Scripture says, but "then we shall see face to face. Now [we] know in part; then [we] shall know fully, even as [we are] fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

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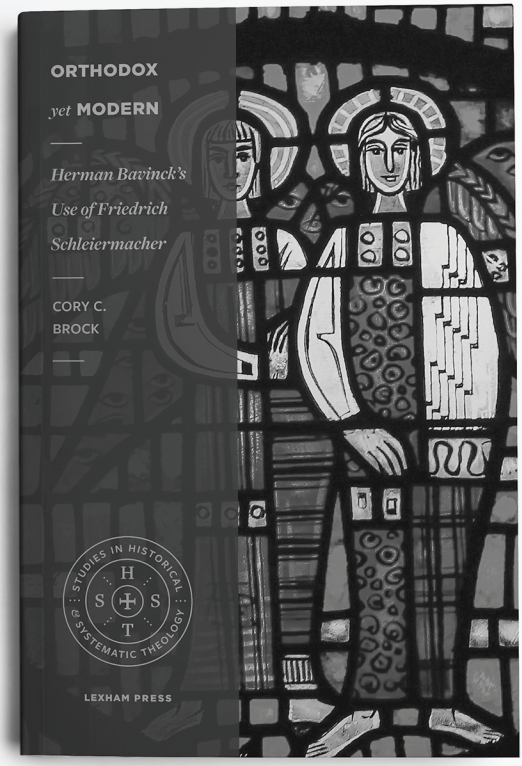

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BOOK REVIEWS

Adam Neder. *Theology as a Way of Life: On Teaching and Learning the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. Xi + 158pp. $13.29

I had a theology professor at a Reformed seminary who reminded our class, "right thinking leads to right action" (orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy). St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (variously translated "On Christian Doctrine" or "On Christian Teaching") was instructive on the role of doctrine in our faith formation, and the role of the teacher in that formative process as students are shaped towards the love of God. Whitworth University's Bruner-Welch Professor of Theology Adam Neder writes in that tradition with this easily accessible volume for teachers and students of theology alike; this means anyone and everyone who engages the study of Scripture and Christian theology must read this book for its reminder that the teaching and study of theology is not just about cognitive engagement or finely tuned discourse of subjects concerning our Creator and the mystery of the triune God, as it is about the living encounter of the Lord with us in the heart and mind of Jesus Christ. And because of that reality, the teaching and study of theology requires love, humility, and a downright intentionality that what is at stake is our discipleship to the glory of God.

Neder is a Princeton theologian, having studied with the great Barthian scholar Bruce McCormack. He deftly puts us in conversation with Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Kierkegaard, and their collective writings on the essence of the Christian faith as a life lived as faithful witness to and for the Lord who redeems and reconciles.

The first chapter on "Identity" sets out to establish the core foundation for teacher and student alike: we are children of God, redeemed and reconciled in Jesus Christ, and fellow disciples of the Lord, which means teaching – whether in a formal classroom setting at a university or seminary, in the living room of congregants' homes, in a confirmation class for teenagers, or from the pulpit – requires prayer so that we are anchored to the One who is our Teacher, namely the Spirit of the Lord. This is a necessary reminder that as teachers, we challenge students to wrestle with who the Lord is and how others have similarly grappled with the knowledge of God.

The second chapter on "knowledge" asserts that our pursuit of knowledge of God means God is knowable, and that such knowledge is grounded in the specificity of who God is in Jesus Christ. Our knowledge of God, distinguished from knowing things about God, is based on God's intentional, decisive self-revelation in Jesus Christ as known through the witness of the Bible and attested to us by the Holy Spirit. This is all to say, Neder asserts, this humble confidence and confident humility helps us to avoid, on the one hand, reticence in the face of God's mystery, or, on the other hand, that such knowledge has definite specification in the person of Jesus Christ. God's self-revelation means that all of our knowledge and how and

what the Church understands must be tested against the self-revelation of God in Christ.

The third chapter on "ethos" deals with the credibility of our witness as teachers. In other words, do we walk the talk? Circling back to the Spirit of Christ as the Teacher, we are to direct our students' to God, less on ourselves and more on the One who is the subject and object of our study. What this also means is we know and acknowledge our limitations, not having the air of "knowing everything" (even with the misnamed theological degree, Master of Divinity or Master of Theology!).

The fourth chapter on "danger" highlights the reality that because the living God is the subject of theological study and teaching, and the living Lord is the One who enables us to know God, and who in God's self knows us, the "danger" of our study and teaching is that God will surprise us at every turn, that God transforms us and conforms us to God's will, and often disrupts and upends our assumptions, our agendas, and our very lives. The "danger" is in thinking that we have so much certainty that we have God figured out, or that the journey of faith is linear. Instead, true discipleship is risky and costly.

The final chapter on "conversation" emphasizes the need for teachers and students alike to have multiple conversation partners, to be attentive to and listen carefully to God speaking through Scriptures, and to engage broadly and deeply with theologians and historians. It also means asking the right questions and encouraging students to be curious, to stand at the margins, to critique assumptions, and to walk in risky faith.

This volume and the subject matter is a gift and a call. Teaching and the subject matter are gifts because God enables, empowers, and inspires the teaching of who God is and what God desires of our lives. They are a call because, at the outset and in the end, teaching about God and encountering the living Lord calls forth a response to what is taught and learned and received: this is no less than a call to love the Lord.

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Gerald R. McDermott, Editor. *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 288 pp. $28

As is evidenced from the word "orthodox" in the title of this volume, the weight of the contributions falls in line with the reform agenda of Anglican groups such as GAFCON and ACNA, both of which have

positioned themselves as theological rivals to historical Anglican bodies, despite some porousness between the former and the latter. While traditionally minded Anglicans within the Church of England, The Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Church of Canada tend to refer to their views as "conservative" rather than "orthodox", the harder lines that have been drawn by separatist groups call for stronger language. This choice of word is unsurprising given the book is a publication of the proceedings of a 2018 conference on orthodox Anglicanism from Beeson Divinity School's Institute of Anglican Studies.

This book does provide some variation in theological commitments, however. In his introduction Gerald R. McDermott points to the difference in geography, churches, and churchmanship from which each contributor writes. He notes that "all are committed to biblical orthodoxy, particularly on the presenting issue of our day – marriage and sexuality," before describing the shared theology convictions surrounding Scripture, Christ and the Church (p. 15).

After this introduction, the first part of the book gives voice to regional perspectives on Anglicanism, including an essay on East African Anglicanism by Eliud Wabukala, a Middle Eastern perspective by Mouneer Hanna Anis, a Canadian perspective by Ephraim Radner, and a "North American" perspective by Foley Beach. Stephen F. Noll offers a brief response to all of these essays.

The second part of the book sets up different vocational views to Anglicanism, with John W. Yates III offering a view from a pastor-theologian. He is followed by a journalist's perspective from Barbara Gauthier, and a historian's perspective by Gerald Bray. Chandler Holder Jones responds briefly before the next section.

The aim of the third section is to offer different ecclesiastical perspectives on Anglicanism. Andrew C. Pearson Jr. is the token Episcopalian, with Gerald R. McDermott standing up as the Anglican. This is followed by Timothy George's take from a Baptist perspective and R.R. Reno's from a Catholic viewpoint. Ray R. Sutton of The Reformed Episcopal Church offers a summary and response.

McDermott has the final word in his conclusion on the future of Anglicanism. He suggests this will be "mostly non-white, led by the Global South, and devoted to Scripture" (p. 263). In light of these demographics McDermott suggest there will be "different ways" of selecting an archbishop and governing the Communion; GAFCON and ACNA will bear the day, he thinks.

There is no single thrust of this book, and it is difficult to sum up the wide scope of what is covered by the several essays. There is also some variation in the depth of the articles collected here. Some read more like heartfelt sermons, others like addresses to a general audience, and others have a more scholarly tone. Broadly speaking, this book will be accessible to anyone with bachelor's degree who is interested in Anglicanism.

As with any text focused on ecclesial identity, this book has the potential to merely offer an opportunity for Anglicans to pat themselves on the back because of the wonderful gift of their tradition. On the other hand, with the often discouraging and difficult realities of ministry, a thoughtful reflection on the great gifts of Anglicanism can be an encouragement from which pastors can draw strength.

I found the thoughtful reflection on the future of the church to be heartening, even if not every perspective was positive. The generally readable style of the essays also made the book pleasant to read for fifteen minutes here and there throughout the day. For a pastor, it will be easy to pick up the book in between visits and daily tasks. I really enjoyed reading the text this way, and overall found it encouraging despite some of the book's flaws.

One of these flaws was the embattled tone of some essays. Honestly, as a theologically conservative priest serving in a generally more liberal Anglican Church of Canada, I found this discouraging. The uncharitable caricatures from Beach and Noll, and the supressed disdain in Reno were off-putting. I would hope for more charity, and the assumption of good faith toward their theological opponents.

On the other hand, a note of interest to me was the various Anglican mythoi that were brought forward. Wabukala is fond of the reformed catholicism narrative, while Pearson likes the centrality of the 39 Articles of Religion. Bray sees Anglicanism as an invention of the nineteenth century, and Yates wants to tether the identity of Anglicanism to the English Reformers. Radner looks to some historical connection to the Church of England to define what is Anglican. The variation here signals to me the weak identity of Anglicanism even amongst conservatives, or "orthodox", and furthermore, their inability to cast a coherent vision. Or, a more optimistic take on this might see the various differences as evidence of Anglicanism's breadth rather than confusion. The reader can decide for herself.

On a side note, my sister-in-law caught me reading on the couch one evening. "Wow, that's a very beautiful book," she said. Kudos to Jordan Singer and Crossway for paying attention to aesthetics, for what it's worth.

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Gavin Ortlund. *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage.* Wheaton: Crossway. 2020. 163pp. $14.69

Anybody who has been in ministry for even a brief time probably has a few stories about congregants that left churches over perceived doctrinal

disputes or staff members who were let go because they could not affirm a particular phrase in an organization's statement of faith.

Doctrine divides, period; but it doesn't always have to be that way, according to Gavin Ortlund. The key to navigating difficult doctrinal disputes without division is to employ "theological triage" to evaluate and prioritize doctrines. To this end, Ortlund identifies three basic priority levels for Christian doctrine: first-, second-, and third-rank doctrines. First-rank doctrines are doctrines that are essential to the gospel itself; to compromise them is to compromise the gospel. Second-rank doctrines are important and touch upon how we understand the gospel. For that reason, it is understandable for Christians to be divided theologically over them; nevertheless, their importance ought to be subsumed to the larger unity shared in the gospel itself. Finally, third-rank doctrines are those doctrines that are important enough to register disagreement over; but, they are never important enough to justify division (p. 19).

First-rank theological doctrines are doctrines that are worth fighting over; or, to use Ortlund's idiom, they are hills worth dying on. These include the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation certainly, but also—Ortlund argues—the virgin birth and the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. To deny these doctrines is to compromise the gospel itself. And so in the face of disputes regarding these primary doctrines, pastors and theologians depend on the virtues of courage and conviction. In the case of the virgin birth, what is really at stake is the question of the authority of scripture itself. Similarly, the doctrine of justification is a primary doctrine to the extent that it prioritizes divine grace to human merit. To compromise on either of these points is to compromise the gospel itself.

Second-rank theological doctrines are "Christian doctrines that make a noticeable difference in how we understand and articulate the gospel, though their denial does not generally constitute a denial of the gospel" (p. 95). They are important because they determine what our particular Christian witness looks like and they name the specific, albeit regrettable, reasons that Christians churches remain divided with each other today. The virtues that are required to attend to secondary doctrines are wisdom and balance. The three secondary doctrines that Ortlund addresses are paedobaptism, spiritual gifts, and the role of women in ministry. To call these second-rank theological doctrines is already to acknowledge the level of controversy that comes with secondary doctrine. For some, infant baptism, speaking in tongues, or the ordination of clergy are essential expressions of their Christian faith. To say they are anything less is offensive. And yet, Ortlund argues, it must be acknowledged that Christians the world over disagree on these and many other doctrines without ceasing to be Christian. In this regard, there is a certain theological integrity to the lamentable reality of denominations.

Finally, tertiary doctrines are those doctrines that it almost never makes sense to fight over. To do so is to focus on speculative issues at the

expense of primary doctrinal concerns. The two examples that Ortlund draws our attention to are American Evangelical Christianity's obsession with the 6-day creation and the millennium. These types of doctrines tend to turn on specific interpretations of obscure passages of scripture, hold less practical import to the daily lives of Christians, and ignore the breadth of Christian history. In the face of these sorts of doctrinal disputes, pastors and theologians should develop the virtues of circumspection and restraint. Learning when not to fight is the most significant lesson a pastor-theologian can learn.

Ortlund concludes with a commendation of humility: "the divisiveness surrounding a doctrine involves not merely its content but also the attitude with which it is held. The greatest impediment to theological triage is not a lack of theological skill or savvy but a lack of humility" (p. 147). Any hope for unity amid disagreement begins with postures of humility.

Ortlund's vision of theological triage is commendable to pastors and theologians everywhere. Triage will, undoubtedly, be an art that each pastor will have to learn through practice; nevertheless, much of the advice contained in Finding the Right Hills to Die On comes from the hard-earned experiences of the author and more seasoned pastors. Careful attention to the author's basic argument will help pastor-theologians to develop a way of seeing and inhabiting the world that will engender greater faith in God and love for our neighbors. These virtues, in turn, will bear the fruit of hope for church unity and witness.

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

Why is it 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 sixteenth and nineteenth 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 Catholicism, Luther, and Zwingli. 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 some, particularly those within Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations.

[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.

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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Abraham Kuruvilla. *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019. xvii + 316 pp. $29.99.

In *A Manual for Preaching*, Abraham Kuruvilla offers an overview of how to preach, beginning with opening one's Bible and ending with the delivery of the sermon before a congregation. Kuruvilla currently serves as a senior research professor of preaching and pastoral ministry at Dallas Theological Seminary and as a practicing dermatologist. In many ways this book is a culmination of his decades of preaching and teaching experience, building on what he has previously written and only possible because of his previous practice. It is a personal and practical explanation of his understanding of what preaching is, which is presented in full in his book *A Vision of Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Baker, 2015).

In *A Vision of Preaching*, Kuruvilla defines preaching as "the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture discerned by theological exegesis, and of its application to that specific body of believers, that they may be conformed to the image of Christ, for the glory of God—all in the power of the Holy Spirit" (1). In *A Manual for Preaching*, Kuruvilla presumes

this definition and looks to help preachers put it into practice. After a brief introduction, the first chapter deals with getting ready to preach, offering instruction on choosing a book of the Bible to preach through, recognizing a pericope, identifying useful tools for sermon preparation, and structuring one's sermon preparation time.

Chapters two and three are the most significant in the book, as they form the heart of the sermon vision that Kuruvilla casts. Chapter two guides the preacher in discerning the theological thrust of their preaching texts, or how to move from the Bible to the sermon. Kuruvilla maintains that the preacher's concern with the text is to discern what the author is doing with what he is saying in each particular text. In other words, the purpose of the text, determined through the semantics of the text, is what leads to the valid application of the text. Each biblical text presents some aspect of God's ideal world, fulfilled and exemplified in Jesus Christ, and therefore each text is an invitation to participate in God's ideal world by aligning oneself with the image of Christ presented in that text. The preacher must discern this theological thrust through the text, and then serve as a guide to understanding this theology through the text.

Of course, understanding is not the end goal in preaching; being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ and inhabiting the Father's kingdom is the goal. Chapter three guides the preacher in moving from revelation to relevance, from knowing what the Bible says to how it makes a difference in today's life. Kuruvilla walks through the types and characteristics of sermon application, drawing particularly upon James K. A. Smith's work concerning the power of habits and rituals for spiritual formation. Kuruvilla helpfully points out that the primary purpose God has in placing a pastor-preacher in a particular congregation is to discern the particular application for that particular congregation, week-in and week-out. This is therefore the most important task in sermon preparation, something that no one else can do for a church. The preacher must know God and his Word, love his congregation, and walk in the Spirit for this to happen, and the preacher must spend a significant amount of time on the task of theologically-driven application, as this is the purpose of everything else in the preaching task.

Later chapters walk through the structure of the sermon, the content of the sermon, illustrations, introductions, conclusions, producing sermon manuscripts and outlines, and sermon delivery. Each chapter ends with examples of how Kuruvilla has put his principles into practice in two different sermon series, one covering the Jacob narrative in Genesis and the other covering the book of Ephesians. This is a strength of the book. Kuruvilla does not just tell preachers what they should do, he shows them how he has done it, and includes numerous personal examples of each part of the process. He also draws heavily upon his experience as a medical doctor and uses that to illustrate how he thinks through preaching. All of this is always presented with the caveat that his methods are guidelines

and not rules, as preachers will always want to tailor any guidelines for their own personal benefit.

It is the rare book that is just as helpful for beginning preachers as it is for seasoned preachers, and yet *A Manual for Preaching* is one of those rare books. Kuruvilla's primary metaphor of the preacher as a curator, unveiling the wonders of the text so that the church will understand what the biblical author is doing and how they should live it out, is a strong foundation for one's understanding of preaching. At the same time, Kuruvilla contributes to the ongoing discussion of the role of the "Big Idea" in preaching, engages contemporary sources, and offers a number of practical tips any preacher would benefit thinking through. Whether you are reading for personal benefit or in preparation for a homiletics course, it is worth your time.

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Michael Eric Dyson. *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America.* New York: St. Martin's Press. 2017. 228pp. $ 14.89.

Michael Eric Dyson's *Tears We Cannot Stop* promises to be "a sermon to White America"—a promise on which Dyson over-delivers. *Tears* is not merely a sermon; it is an entire liturgy. Whether or not it is truly *for* White America is, for the time being, an open question. Dyson's tone and rhetoric often leaves him "preaching to the choir." But even preaching to the choir has its place in the august history of homiletics. Dyson intentionally locates himself within the great American tradition of jeremiad. Thus, we are not surprised to find Dyson prodding and pleading his readers to return to the path of American holiness.

Tears is a worship service shaped around a sermonic exploration of Black existence in White America. The first part of the book includes chapters titled "Call to Worship," "Hymns of Praise," "Invocation," and "Scripture Reading." Dyson calls his audience to worship in the wake of the 2016 national election, with its subsequent racial strife. He is an evangelist for a better America. Like all great jeremiad preachers, Dyson points us backwards to draw us forwards. He tries to help us see where America went wrong to call us back to the straight and narrow. Quite simply, America went wrong when, in James Baldwin's words, we insisted on thinking of ourselves as a "white nation". Thus, the Call to Worship begins with the admonition to acknowledge the effects of America's original racial sin and to repent.

Having been called to worship, the reader is now invited to meditate on the hymns of praise of the Black community. Dyson—who later admits that his "joyful embrace of the secular dimensions of black culture has landed

[him] in trouble" (p. 69)—points the reader to "Sound of Da Police" by KRS-One and "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar as examples of music videos that remind us of the historically antagonistic relationship between police forces and the Black community. KRS-One sings about slave overseers while his music plays over video footage from Selma. Kendrick Lamar joyfully sings, "We gonna be alright" while dancing over the cityscape of Los Angeles, before he is felled by a police's bullet. The Fugees's Lauren Hill sings fearfully of the police as "the Beast" who roams the streets looking for her, and Beyonce sings about her childhood formation on a New Orleans police cruiser that is sinking in the waters of Hurricane Katrina while spray paint on a wind-damaged wall reads "Stop Shooting Us." These are hymns that express Black suffering and Black hope in the same breath. They are sung by a people who refuse to be erased.

Next, Dyson invokes the presence of the Almighty God as a witness to the humanity of Black people over and against the many experiences that suggest otherwise. God is called to act in the face of stories about Dyson's 6 year old daughter being called a "n***" at a skating rink, or Dyson's adult son, a medical doctor, fearing for his life during a traffic stop in Harlem, or most concerning, white friends and allies who wring their hands and lament while remaining largely inert. Dyson pleads with God to convict this nation and to continue to give Black people the courage to continue to tell the truth.

In perhaps his most provocative attempt to blend sacred language and secular Black culture, Dyson appeals to the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. as "Scripture Reading" for America. King, Dyson reasons, is the "most quoted black man on the planet" (p. 37). He is "the greatest American prophet" and his words are "civic Holy Writ" and "political scripture" (p. 38). But like scripture itself, King is proof-texted and whitewashed. The words he spoke to white audiences are read without consideration of the words he spoke to black audiences; his comments on race are extricated from his words about the Vietnam War or the economy. America has not outlived the relevance of King's words; he still has many important things to say for those who have ears to hear.

The central section of the book is the "Sermon", a six-chapter exhortation to White Americans to seek repentance buttressed by personal testimonies of Blackness. The sermon begins with Dyson's proclamation that whiteness is a fantasy. It only exists because we say it exists. But its continued existence threatens the very existence of America itself. For America to live, whiteness must die. The good news is that if whiteness is something we made up, we can unmake it. Unmaking whiteness, however, is hard, and it will require us to undergo a deep grieving of our attachment to the status quo. White people will have to move through the five stages of white grief: ignorance, denial, appropriation, revision, and dilution. Only after white people come to terms with the manifold ways they seek to

evade blackness, will they be able to confront the problems facing America head-on.

The examples of white evasion are particularly pernicious and deny the testimonies of Black Americans. The first is the way white people police the use of the N-word, alternating between preventing Black people from using it and/or arguing that if Black people use it then white people ought to be able to use it also. A second type of evasion involves appeals to "black-on-black" crime to mitigate Black protests of systemic racism in American police forces. The final evasion involves the police themselves. White America's presumption that police officers are always right makes it almost impossible to hold police officers accountable when they are wrong. Giving police officers the benefit of the doubt discounts the historical experience of pro-slavery and pro-Jim Crow police tactics.

The third part of the book includes sections titled, "Benediction," "Offering Plate," Prelude to Service," and "Closing Prayer", the most substantial of which is the Benediction. Here, Dyson offers his white congregants a series of practical steps they can take to repent of the negative effects of the sins of whiteness. These include suggestions like taking steps towards individual acts of reparation, like paying Black works above their quoted price or sponsoring tuition for Black students or summer campers. White readers should further educate themselves about the experience of Black Americans through reading classics in Black literature and American history. Then, they should seek to educate their friends and families. Making friends with Black people and visiting Black churches, schools, and jails are other important steps white people can take to effect real reconciliation between White and Black Americans. Finally, white people can choose to be present at protest events to change the optics that the issues being protested are not just "Black" issues, but American issues.

My initial concerns regarding Dyson's "sermon" are theological in nature. I'm worried that he is more invested in the project of America than a Christian ought to be. He wants to save America by surgically removing the cancer of white nationalism from the body politic. Theologically, I'm more interested in asking whether American Christians need to be saved from the idea of America itself. In that regard, I am disappointed to see that Dyson—a Baptist preacher by training—does not spend time addressing White Christians specifically, or even Christianity more broadly. The use of jeremiad operates uncritically to reinforce the basic assumptions of American exceptionalism even as Dyson tries to recast Black Americans within the scope of that exception. And that worries me.

Yet, I find that criticism to be underwhelming even as I write it because I know that it is a criticism that can only be made from the position of one who is privileged enough to both benefit from American exceptionalism and call it into question. And that is, at least partially, Dyson's point. We white Christians have all sorts of ways of obfuscating when we should be listening. What I hear most clearly at the heart of Dyson's sermon is a call

for white repentance. And repentance cannot begin in earnest if we listen to Black testimonies with a critical ear. For those who have ears, let them hear.

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Dane Ortlund. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 224 pp. $19.99.

After *Gentle and Lowly* was released earlier this year, I kept hearing respected pastors and theologians commend it as the book of the year, or even of a lifetime, so I knew I should probably read it. And because of my natural disposition to doubt that Christ's love is really more definitive than my sin, I knew I needed to read it.

The book is simple both in its premise and format. Starting with Jesus' own words, "I am gentle and lowly of heart" (Matt 11:29), Ortlund aims to convince sinners and sufferers that the posture of Jesus' heart toward them is one of gentle embrace. Simple, but profound.

In twenty-three short chapters, Ortlund attempts to undo "our natural expectations about who God is" and instead "let the Bible surprise us into what God says about himself" (p. 155). Each chapter focuses on a central Scripture as the subject of meditation. Ortlund combines his skill as a biblical scholar and theologian with his love for the Puritans and their writings to "[look] at the single diamond of Christ's heart from many different angles" (p. 15).

After reading the first couple of chapters, I wondered what I was missing. It was fine. Good, even. But I had a hard time letting go of my doubting tendencies so that the truths he was writing about could penetrate my heart. I think I was experiencing a little of what Ortlund describes in the book:

> "The Christian life, from one angle, is the long journey of letting our natural assumption about who God is, over many decades, fall away, being slowly replaced with God's own insistence on who he is...The fall in Genesis 3 not only sent us into condemnation and exile. The fall also entrenched in our minds dark thoughts of God, thoughts that are only dug out over multiple exposures to the gospel over many years" (p. 151).

I kept reading. I read slowly, a little at a time, spread out over many weeks. And as I continued to read, the book kept getting better and better. Or maybe my heart was softening to its message. The effect seemed to be cumulative for me.

That is the value of this book. From the pages of Scripture, combined with a wealth of Puritan reflections, Ortlund confronts our fearful hearts with "God's own insistence on who he is." The chapters provide "exposures to the gospel" that helped me dare to believe that, in the words of Puritan John Flavel, God is "much more tender of you than you are, or can be, of yourself" (p. 133).

Ortlund is theologically astute, evidenced in the way he holds together the "emotional life of God" with divine impassibility (p. 73), or seen in his discussion of God's simplicity alongside a reflection on God's heart in relation to judgment and mercy (p. 140). I appreciated the carefulness he displays, but also his desire to let Scripture challenge the assumptions we can fall into as a result of our theology, assumptions that sometimes detract from the largeness of God's heart revealed in Scripture.

Gentle and Lowly would be helpful for any Christian wanting to better understand the heart of Christ for us in our sin and suffering. I think, however, it is especially suited for pastor-theologians. We have the privilege of directing others into the heart of Christ week in and week out, and this book is full of moving reflections on Christ's great heart. I've found the truths Ortlund writes about working their way into my sermons. But more than that, I've found them working their way into my heart. Ortlund says,

> "It is one thing, as a child, to be told your father loves you. You believe him. You take him at his word. But it is another thing, unutterably more real, to be swept up in his embrace, to feel the warmth, to hear his beating heart within his chest, to instantly know the protective grip of his arms. It's one thing to know he loves you; it's another thing to feel his love. This is the glorious work of the Spirit" (p. 122).

I think this book is a means the Spirit can use to sweep us up into God's gentle embrace. If, like me, you struggle to believe that God could be gracious and compassionate toward you in your sin and weakness, read this book. If you want to better communicate the compassionate and tender heart of Jesus to your people, read this book. In one of my favorite lines (and there are many), Ortlund exhorts: "Repent of your small thoughts of God's heart. Repent and let him love you" (p. 170). This book will help you do that. I would encourage you, read this book.

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Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, xi +160pp., Hb $24.99

Grant Macaskill was appointed to the Kirby Laing Chair of New Testament Exegesis in the School of Divinity, History, and Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen in 2015. Previously, Macaskill served as Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of St Andrews, where he had completed both his doctoral and postdoctoral projects. His research engages with the New Testament as a coherent body of theological literature emerging from the diverse contexts of late Second Temple Judaism.[2]

Macaskill wrote that the "core claim of this book is that all talk of Christian moral life must begin and end with Paul's statement, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20), and must understand the work of the Holy Spirit rightly in relation to Christ's presence" (1). Macaskill explained this claim to mean "that we can never talk about the moral activity of a Christian without always, in the same breath, talking about Jesus, because the goal of our salvation is not that we become morally better versions of ourselves but that we come to inhabit and to manifest *his* moral identity" (1) (emphasis original). Thus, as Macaskill would later note, the sinner's need for "an alien righteousness" extends beyond justification to include sanctification as well. We need the righteousness of Christ to "inhabit our limbs, lips, and neuron if we are to live and think in a way that honors God, if we are to confess him rightly" (3).

In chapter 1, Macaskill provided a *status quaestionis* regarding present-day attempts to reconcile and understand justification and sanctification within the works of the apostle Paul. For those looking for a brief summary of some key works in Pauline ethics, Macaskill's first chapter is very helpful. Yet, as Macaskill himself noted, the profitability of the rest of the book does not depend upon a comprehensive understanding of the present debate among interpreters of Paul. Rather, Macaskill simply situated his contribution within the broader conversation. In sum, while Macaskill expressed gratitude for the work of other scholars, he concluded that previous attempts "do not deal adequately with the radically different concept of moral identity or agency that is at work in Paul's writings" (38).

In chapter 2, Macaskill clarified and expanded upon the idea of moral identity. His assertion is worth reproducing in full. Macaskill wrote, "Paul represents the Great Exchange that lies at the heart of the gospel, whereby Jesus bears the affliction of our condition and we enjoy the glory of his, as involving at its most basic level an exchange not merely of status but of identity. It is not *simply* that our guilt is transferred to Jesus and his

[2] Author information adapted from Dr. Macaskill's faculty profile page, https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/divinity-religious-studies/profiles/grant.macaskill

righteousness to us but that our status before God rests on a more fundamental exchange. What Jesus takes to the cross is *who we are*, our very selves with all their guilt, and what we enjoy in union with him is precisely *who he is*, his fullness with all its glory. The activity of the Spirit in sanctification, then, is intended not to bring about a better version of ourselves but to realize in us the personal moral identity of Jesus Christ. Any account of the Christian moral life, any program of discipleship, that does not begin and resolve with Paul's word, 'I no longer liver, but Christ lives in me,' is deficient and will eventually turn into a form of idolatry" (39-40). For the remainder of the book, Macaskill will return to draw upon this understanding of moral identity, tracing its relationship to baptism in chapter 3, the Lord's Supper in chapter 4, the work of the Holy Spirit in chapter 5, and Christian hope in chapter 6.

Living in Union with Christ offers a fresh and stimulating appraisal of how the believer's awareness of union with Christ shapes one's fundamental moral identity. Macaskill's efforts to tie this awareness to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are commendable. In particular, how Macaskill stressed the social memory of the believing community and its participation in the past through the Supper demonstrates a need for Christians to reevaluate the frequency and function of the ordinance in the life of the church. The same could be said of Macaskill's treatment of baptism and how it does not point to the creation of a "new self" but rather a participation in Christ. Many popular-level understandings of the ordinances among protestants would be greatly helpful by engaging Macaskill's work. Finally, likely the greatest strength of this work is found in the Christ-centered emphasis of moral transformation. Macaskill consistently reminds the reader that anything short of "I-in-Christ" and "Christ-in-me" approaches to faithful Christian living will be deficient. I believe this emphasis is not only exactly right but tragically absent in many conversations about morality in the Christian life. In my estimation, this is Macaskill's greatest contribution to the academy and the church: a renewed emphasis on Christ as my life (Colossians 3:1-4).

If I must raise a point of critique, it will come in the form of a question regarding Macaskill's vision of Christian unity. On page 70, Macaskill rightly noted that "for Paul, our unity is a function of our union with Christ, which is a union with the one God, whose oneness becomes ours. Our attempts to draw a circle around those who think like us is fundamentally wrongheaded and frankly, sinful." To be sure, Macaskill goes on to note that "this is not to say that it is wrong to pursue moral and theological agreement in the truth." He stated that we pursue such agreement "to bring the highest glory to God." Yet, I find his next statement somewhat troubling due to its lack of context. He wrote, that we do not pursue moral and theological agreement "to define who is in and who is out. I am united to the believer whose doctrine is dreadful and to the one whose life I find

abhorrent; it is precisely because they share in the oneness of Christ's body that I am compelled to speak to speak to both problems, but to do so in brotherly love and affirmation" (71). Macaskill goes on to clarify that the "sine qua non of inclusion seems to be limited to the confession 'Jesus is Lord,' which can be made only by the acting presence of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3)." To be sure, I am inclined to agree if I am allowed to flesh out what is entailed in a confession of the Lordship of Jesus, but Macaskill does not provide enough details for me to fully embrace his vision of unity without qualification. Surely there are limits to one's "dreadful doctrine" and "abhorrent living" that would cause the apostle Paul to "draw a circle" that excludes them (however temporarily) from identifying with the people of God (1 Corinthians 5:1-13, cf. Matthew 18:15-20). If Macaskill's vision of unity is to be sustained, he must deal more thoroughly with the words of Jesus and Paul that suggests there are grounds for excluding people from the believing community, even if they claim that they believe Jesus is Lord.

With this question of critique noted, I still highly recommend Macaskill's book. I hope that many pastors and students will read it and think deeply about the arguments, especially as Macaskill's points us to Christ.

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J.I. Packer, and Joel Scandrett, et al., eds. *To Be A Christian: An Anglican Catechism*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 1-160. $29.99.

The presently reviewed catechism is under the editorship of a long list of pastors and scholars from the Anglican tradition, under the general theological editorship of the late J.I. Packer, and executive editorship of Joel Scandrett. It is a project of the Committee for Catechesis of the Anglican Church in North America (see appendix 6). The present edition is a more finalized version that was approved in 2018 that had an earlier 2014 version.

The catechism is billed as having over 360 questions and answers to "instruct new believers and church members in the core beliefs and practices of the Christian faith" with "Scripture references that support each quotation and answer" (from book band). This is another catechism of a new wave of catechisms appearing from Christian publishers, which I will comment on at the end of this review.

The catechism is broken down into four sections, followed by seven appendices. First, the editors begin with the person of Christ in a section called "Beginning with Christ." In this section, there is an introduction to what a catechism is for, followed by a definition of "the gospel," and

concluding with a statement on soteriology. The second section is called "Believing in Christ." This section begins with an explanation of what a creed is and specifically the Apostles Creed. This is followed by questions on creeds in general, then questions on Holy Scripture, the three articles of the Apostles Creed, and then the sacraments. Section three is called "Belonging with Christ." In this section, questions concern prayer in general, but more specifically the Lord's Prayer, and concludes with a subsection called "A Rule of Prayer: Scripture, Prayer, and Worship" wherein the editors gather together very practical questions on these three topics for Christian living. Section four is called "Becoming like Christ." This section covers the Ten Commandments and a subsection on justification and sanctification. Finally, there are the seven appendices that take up the following topics: Prayers for Use with the Catechism, A Rite for Admission of Catechumens, The Nicene Creed, The Creed of Saint Athanasius, A Note on the Articles of Religion, Vision Paper for Catechesis, and Guiding Principles for Catechesis.

The layout of the book is very attractive and helpful. The question is in bold, the answer is regular type, and each question has Scripture references that follow in parentheses in italics. I was especially glad to see that the book is small. If it is to be used as a teaching tool, it must be portable.

The editors see this present work as part of a larger history of careful study of doctrine and catechesis that the Anglican Church has practiced for many centuries (pp. 7-9). Their hope for this work is that it be "used for courses, shorter or longer, based on groups of questions and answers… ideally to be used in the context of relationship between the catechist and the catechumen" (p. 9). The editors suggests that by following the teaching of this catechism "it will help you to become a citizen of God's kingdom and fully involved in the life and mission of his Church" (19).

I want to interact with the content of this volume critically and selectively in my following comments. Of course, catechisms are very dynamic and, I believe, contextual to a certain extent, so there is much more to be said than I can say here. But I want to begin with the ordering of the content.

Like liturgies and dogmatics, the order is important in what it says about the editors' orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This catechism begins with "the gospel." The reason given is that one must begin with a committed relationship with Jesus. This catechism starts with the anthropological and soteriological. If one turns to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), as a foil, one finds the first question to be an ethical and theological question, i.e., Q: "What is the chief end of man?" A: "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." For both catechisms, the "how do we know?" question follows. The presently reviewed catechism looks primarily to the creeds, mainly the Apostles Creed, and Scripture following in a brief subsection, in part two. The WSC moves to Scripture alone. I am not arguing here, which has more virtue, but it sheds light on assumptions.

In the current theological setting in which we presently inhabit, the definition of "the gospel" in section one is an important question. The language used in this section is helpful in that it uses common language relatable to those not brought up in church. For example, the first question is, "What is the human condition?" I thought that this is a great way to frame the Fall. The answer is equally helpful in that it frames the human condition as being "cut off from God by self-centered rebellion against him…" However, there are other questions and answers that sacrificed God-centeredness for me-centered colloquialism. For example, the question about the effects of sin is uncomfortably individualistic; "How does sin affect you?" Additionally, when defining sin, I was surprised not to see any mention of being separated from the glory of God or any mention of breaking God's law. Finally, the definition of the gospel suffered some deficiencies, namely, that it is said to offer "salvation from sin…" (p. 23) The gospel does not save from sin, *per se*, but cleanses us from sin and saves us from the wrath of God that is rightfully upon us because we broke his law.

A few passing thoughts:

1. This is definitely an Anglican catechism, which means that it will not likely be broadly used by the universal church (though I am not suggesting that some parts could not be). One can observe the nature of the catechism from how it is framed in the introduction to such aspects as seven sacraments included in section three.

2. Ordination is one of those sacraments, but among the six questions on ordination, the qualifications of those who would be ordained is not covered. Was this intentional? May it be because of sticky situations concerning gender?

3. Within answers, church fathers are quoted verbatim such as Jerome in question 32. I have not seen this before in a catechism, but I see it could be helpful in rooting these truths in the church through the ages.

Finally, why another catechism? On my shelf, I am looking at least four other catechisms, including Luther's smaller and larger, Westminster longer and shorter, Heidelberg, and the much more recent New City just to name several. The editors suggest that this is a more comprehensive teaching tool for adults than the 1662 Catechism in the English Book of Common Prayer, and attempts to be "missional" (depending on how we intend that word to be used in our landscape) in that it is a tool of both evangelism and discipleship (p.14). It seems the need was denominational at its heart, but it might be time for a close study of catechisms old and new to examine their uses, the order of material covered in the catechisms, and so on. It may appear to some that catechisms are the next frontier of publication, since now commentaries and study bibles have proliferated the market. A study may help us digest their need and use.

This book will serve well its prescribed purpose for the Anglican communion. I have noted those areas that I appreciate and some areas of challenge, but the review of this work was especially poignant for me that J.I. Packer entered glory at the time of writing this review. A monumental part of this work is that it has his fingerprints on it. I pray for its continued development and use in the church as we seek to fulfill Jesus' commandments in Matthew 28 and Acts 1:8.

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