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How Preachers Hear the Word: Doctrine, Doxology, and Devotion in the Process of Preaching

by Cameron James Pollock[1]

Where Are the Worship Leaders?

The title of this introduction may lead you to think of music. The fact that many Christians often think of the term *worship leader* in terms of music and not in terms of preaching points to a current problem in orthodox American Christianity.[2] We rarely consider the sermon, or the preacher, as leading in worship. But if "the heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the word of God," then we need to consider what is wrong with the prevailing modern mindset toward preaching.[3]

I am convinced that preaching will never be viewed as worship in the pew if it is not first viewed as worship in the pulpit. The late homiletics professor Haddon Robinson often said, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew."[4] We usually take this insight to mean preachers should give themselves to the process of expositional preaching through careful exegesis and study, through unfolding what the text says, and Robinson would agree.[5]

But Robinson did not stop there. He proceeded to describe how the act of expositional preaching takes place, and second only to faithful exposition is the fact that "the concept is applied to the expositor."[6] The truth must first affect the preacher's heart before he can faithfully apply it to his congregation. This is where Robinson reproduced and popularized Phillips Brooks's famous dictum, "Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching."[7] The Word of God must be poured over the preacher, flowing in and through his life, for it to become a living, vibrant message. The preacher must first hear the Word and worship.

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[1] A graduate of BJU Seminary, Cameron Pollock serves as lead pastor of Community Baptist Church in Greer, SC. This article is condensed from his Doctor of Ministry applied research project at Westminster Theological Seminary (2026).

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Expository Preaching: Center of Christian Worship," in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2011), 107–9.

[3] Ibid. See also question and answer 155 in the Larger Catechism of *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851).

[4] Steve Mathewson, "Prince among Preachers: My Tribute to Haddon Robinson (1931–2017)," The Gospel Coalition, accessed July 27, 2017, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/prince-among-preachers-my-tribute-to-haddon-robinson/.

[5] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 20–25.

[6] Ibid., 25–27.

[7] Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Edinburgh: Turnbull & Spears, 1871), 9.

What Does It Mean to "Hear the Word"?

When I use the verb "hear," I am not simply describing a passive use of one of the natural senses. Instead, I mean "hearing" in the fullest biblical sense of the Hebrew word שׁמע, which often carries the connotation of hearing with attentiveness, understanding, and the intent to obey.[8] In fact, the term itself is often translated simply as "obey" in modern translations. "To hear is to obey," the old saying goes, and this is the kind of hearing our Lord called for in the phrase, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35) in line with the prophets (cf. Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2).[9] Commenting on this phrase in Luke 8:8, Joel B. Green concludes,

> That genuine "hearing" is the principal theme of this narrative section is evident from the melody that weaves its way through the sometimes disparate material: "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (v 8); "so that . . . listening they may not understand" (v 10); "those who hear" (in various forms, vv 12, 13, 14, 15); "pay attention to how you listen" (v 18); and "those who hear the word of God" (v 21). Throughout this section, Jesus' point is not only to counsel "hearing" but also to specify the nature of "appropriate" (and "inappropriate") hearing. For this purpose, a number of qualifiers are used, especially: hear + "believe" (vv 12–13), hear + "choked" (v 14), hear + produce fruit (vv 14–15), hear + hold fast . . . with patience (v 15), and hear plus do (v 21). *In all of these cases, hearing is associated with response, accentuating the necessity of acting on the basis of and consistent with what is "heard."*[10]

Therefore, while this study inevitably touches on the act of preaching to others, it is primarily concerned with the responsibility of the preacher to give diligent attention to the Word of God in his sermon preparation and delivery, to understand its implications for his personal life, and to live accordingly. Then, and only then, do we find our grounds to preach to others. "How dare we speak if God has not spoken? By ourselves we have nothing to say. . . . Once we are persuaded that God has spoken, however, then we too must speak. A compulsion rests upon us. Nothing and nobody will be able to silence us."[11]

Three Themes for How Preachers Hear the Word

How can we truly grasp what it means to hear the Word? Does Scripture give any direction in organizing a biblical theology of how preachers hear the Word? It does. It begins with *doctrine,* climaxes in *doxology,* and results in *devotion.* The macrostructure of many of Paul's major epistles in the NT reflects this theological template for my study. These major epistles call for an understanding

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[8] *HALOT*, s.v. "שׁמע"; BDB, s.v. "שׁמע."

[9] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 432. Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[10] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 322–23 (emphasis added).

[11] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (1982; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 94–96.

of the Word by beginning with right doctrine (Rom 1–11; Eph 1–3; Phil 1); they call for worship over the Word by climaxing in doxologies of praise (Rom 11:33–36; Eph 3:14–21; Phil 2:1–11); and they call for a response to the Word of utmost devotion (Rom 12–16; Eph 4–6; Phil 2:12ff). This NT-derived pattern provides a useful biblical-theological framework for preaching.[12] True worship over the Word leads to transformed preachers who seek to apply the Word and live by it.

Doctrine, Doxology, and Devotion in Ezra's Life

For a biblical example, let us consider how this pattern proves true in the life of Ezra. Ezra the priest is a prime example of how doctrine, doxology, and devotion should function in a preacher's life.[13]

Consider Ezra's Context

Ezra preached an impactful sermon to the third wave of exiles who returned to Jerusalem in 445 BC (Neh 8). [14] But long before Ezra preached this sermon, God was at work preparing his servant to be an instrument of spiritual revival. Thirteen years before the sermon, "this Ezra went up from Babylonia" to Jerusalem with the second wave of exiles in 458 (Ezra 7:6a).[15] This return was the second

[12] For the purposes of this paper, I am not focusing on doctrinal concepts related to sermon preparation and hermeneutics that inform proper exegesis. They are assumed as a proper foundation for doctrine in this study (see standard works on hermeneutics, sermon construction, and homiletics).

[13] In the biblical-theological portion of my broader project, I prove that the priestly role of Jesus Christ can legitimately be applied to the role of the modern-day preacher who preaches in Christ's stead. Of course, the parallels are not direct, but there is a biblical-theological basis for using Ezra's example to call preachers to commit to doctrine, doxology, and devotion as they hear the Word. For more fruitful connections along these lines, see David C. Deuel, "An Old Testament Pattern for Expository Preaching," *Masters Seminary Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 125–38.

[14] The scholarly discussion regarding the dates of Ezra's and Nehemiah's return is extensive and long-standing. H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah, Volume 16,* WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), xxxix–xliv. Williamson supports the idea that Ezra came to Jerusalem in 458 BC and then ministered for only one year with no overlap with Nehemiah. Over and against his proposal that Ezra and Nehemiah had no overlap, see Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), 146–58; Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 42–46; F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 5–9; Derek W. H. Thomas, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R), 110–11, 201–2. In the final analysis, I agree with Fensham: "Although admittedly certain problems remain with the traditional view, it is by far the more satisfactory solution because the text as transmitted is kept intact and the sequence of the different chapters is accepted as a reliable guide to the chronology" (9). For the purposes of this paper, then, we will assume the traditional view that Ezra returned in 458 with the second wave of exiles and that Nehemiah returned with the third wave in 445 under the reign of Artaxerxes I (464–423). Williamson, xlviii, 275–76. Williamson himself points out that those who differ on chronology can still agree that the most important element is the literary structure of the book and its intended message.

[15] Commentators are divided on the authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah. Some suggest that an unknown compiler later assembled accounts by Ezra and Nehemiah. Williamson, xxiii–xxxv. Fensham suggests that Ezra and Nehemiah were combined by the Chronicler to form a united whole with Chronicles, an idea Williamson emphatically rejects. Fensham, 1–4; Williamson, xxxiii. Still others suggest that Nehemiah, but more likely Ezra, may have compiled the final form. See Kidner, 136–39; Breneman, 37–41. It seems probable that Ezra compiled the final arrangement of the books, but one cannot be dogmatic.

wave of "everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5b).

Consider Ezra's Challenge

Ezra's arrival was an extremely important moment, for the spiritual needs were great in Israel. Though by this point the temple had been rebuilt, the narrative makes clear the Israelites had begun falling back into the sinful ways of their predecessors through mixed marriages with foreign nations (Ezra 9:1–4). As the covenant people of God who were called to maintain national holiness and personal purity, this compromise threatened to reintroduce the idol worship that had caused the nation to go into exile in the first place. "This was a crucial point in the history of the Jewish people. Unchecked assimilation would have meant the end of the community."[16] Ezra had a burden for his people to know God through his law and love him by obeying it.[17]

> The Jews in Jerusalem were neglecting the Scriptures. A new generation, whose grandparents and great-grandparents had built the second temple, now occupied the city. These fifth-century Jews were in need of a preacher, someone who would proclaim the Word of God with personal application to the conscience. They were in need of relearning the gravity of sin, and this they could do only by being reacquainted with the demands of God's law—in all its particulars. They did not need someone to salve their consciences with smooth words, and lull them to sleep in the assurance that all was well. They needed someone who could put the "fear of God" into their souls and awaken them to the peril of presumptive religion. And for this urgent task, God raised up Ezra.[18]

Consider Ezra's Qualifications

Ezra's particular role as an official in the service of the Persian king Artaxerxes I enabled him to serve a dual role as representative for the king and a priestly teacher for God's people. The significance of this role should not be underestimated—the extended genealogical introduction in Ezra 7:1–4 sets us up to expect a priest of considerable qualifications and importance, "and indeed it was he, more than any other man, who stamped Israel with its lasting character as a people of the book."[19] "More than that, he appears in this book almost as a second Moses: a lawgiver and teacher establishing the contours of 'one nation under God.'"[20]

This "second Moses" role of Ezra becomes immediately apparent in the narrative, for we are told, "He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given" (Ezra 7:6b). The Hebrew word מָהִיר carries the connotation of "quick," and reflects the skill, ease, and clarity with

[16] Breneman, 52.

[17] Thomas, 112.

[18] Thomas, 113.

[19] Kidner, 62.

[20] Thomas, 115.

which a scribe well-versed in the law could navigate complicated theological truths in the text.[21] This kind of theological deftness was only possible through years of diligent study and commitment (as will be seen in v. 10). Many have considered Ezra "the founder of the Jewish exegesis on the method of the *midrash halakha*. *He was thus an interpreter par excellence.*"[22] And yet, with all Ezra's skill and credentials, both priestly and political, the text points the reader away from Ezra and toward "the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given" (Ezra 7:6b). This shift in focus is intentional, reflecting the disposition and humility of a scribe, or interpreter, whose task was not to present his own ideas, but to faithfully unfold the Word of the Lord. This term *LORD,* יְהוָה, is the personal name of God in his covenantal relationship with his people Israel. It marks Ezra as a servant of Yahweh and a faithful interpreter of the law of Moses.

Consider Ezra's Opportunity

The Lord was now at work to care for his covenant people, as Ezra 7:6c makes clear: "and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him." This final phrase, "for the hand of the LORD his God was on him," strikes a crucial theme that runs through the heart of Ezra and Nehemiah—the sovereignty of God in the salvation of his people (see Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18). God clearly shows his power over the foreign kings of the earth by moving the hearts of both Cyrus and Artaxerxes to allow the people to return.[23]

Yet the cosmic theme of God's sovereignty, as stunning as it is, is not the climax of this narrative. Instead, the cosmic dimension prepares the reader for the personal theme of God's sovereignty expressed in the life of one faithful servant—Ezra.

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[21] What is the "the Book of the Law of Moses" referred to here and throughout Ezra and Nehemiah? Commentators generally outline four different views, though three of these views are driven by the revisionist tendencies of skeptical liberal scholarship that fail to accept the meaning of the text at face value. Conservative scholars point out that a straightforward reading of the text leads us to believe Ezra read and taught from the Pentateuch. See especially Kidner, who comments on the revisionist approach, "To accept this view is to conclude, however charitably one may express it, that Ezra committed a pious fraud that day, passing off his improved version as the original which had been called for; not only 'mending the oracles of God' but reading aloud their repeated warnings (Dt. 4:2; 12:32) against doing such a thing." Kidner, 104 (cf. 158–64). For further discussion, see Deuel, 131n18; Breneman, 47–48; Williamson, xxxxvii–xxxix, 92.

[22] Fensham, 99. According to Breneman, Ezra also served as a precursor to scribes of the NT (127–28).

[23] Breneman traces the theme to its fullest. "It was God who was responsible for the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1, 'The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus'). He also secured the permission for construction to continue (Ezra 5:5, 'The eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews'; 6:14, 'They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel'; and 6:22, 'The Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria') and for Ezra and his group to come to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:27, 'The God of our fathers, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the Lord'). He even protected them on the way (Ezra 8:22, 'The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him'). It was God who secured Nehemiah's appointment as governor (Neh 2:8, 'Because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests') and guided in all the details of the construction of the wall (Neh 4:14, 'Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome,' and 4:20, 'Our God will fight for us!'). God frustrated the plans of the Jews' enemies and preserved this community. Just as we find throughout the prophetic books and the whole Bible, the author of Ezra-Nehemiah interpreted history in terms of God's actions" (50–51).

Consider Ezra's Commitment

It is significant that the story waits to reveal the full extent of Ezra's dedication until now. This passage is far more than a stereotypical description of Ezra's role as a scribe.[24] Verses 9–10 of chapter 7 pick up the theme of God's sovereignty and apply it to Ezra and his Word-centered ministry in particular: "For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, *for the good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel*" (emphasis added). The connection between verse 6 and verses 9–10 must not be missed:

> The Bible clearly states that the king permitted Ezra to go assist his people in their homeland and even gave him the qualified help and needed financial support "because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him" (Ezra 7:6). But God's hand was upon Ezra singularly, "because (כִּי [*kî*]) Ezra had set his heart to study the law of YHWH, to practice, and to teach statute and ordinance in Israel" (7:10).[25]

The Lord poured out his cosmic blessing upon his covenant people by means of the Word-centered ministry of a faithful man of God, Ezra the priest. The Hebrew word לֵבָב reflects the totality of one's being and demonstrates Ezra's wholehearted dedication to the Word of God.

> The Hebrew text of Ezra 7:10 begins with an emphatic explanation of why God's hand was upon Ezra: "*For* [i.e., *because*] Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord." God prospered the initiative *because* it was a good one. Ezra, like David, had a heart after God. His love was for God's Word and God's ways, not his own. He did not "go west" because he believed there would be a better life there. His ambition was not for personal gain and financial improvement; he wanted to see the Lord's people return to a way of life that gave God honor. His focus was the glory of God.
>
> The very expression "set his heart" is full of the most intense meaning. It is rendered "devoted" in some translations, a perfectly adequate translation, but it fails to bring to the surface that the issue involves "the heart" and therefore the core of one's being. This was not merely an intellectual exercise in national reform, a political campaign to bring a better way of life to the citizens of Jerusalem. Ezra had a heart for God and a mind for truth.[26]

In other words, Ezra was not just committed to sound doctrine. He was committed to doxology—to worshipping God as he studied the text and gave God the glory he deserved. The two are inseparably connected and feed one another—one cannot truly know God without being compelled to worship

[24] A suggestion of Williamson, who comments, "Thus the expression has evidently become stereotyped as a term of approval for a scribe in whatever capacity he functioned (cf. McKane, *Prophets,* 29–36), and it is intended as such here too" (92).

[25] Deuel, 130. Fensham also comments, "The conjunction *kî* connects this verse to the immediately preceding phrase, 'for the favor of his God was with him.' The favor of God was with him because he set his heart on the study of the law, etc" (101).

[26] Thomas, 117.

him. Doctrine, doxology, and devotion are not isolated qualities in preaching but interlocking pieces that mutually strengthen each other. I compare them to the "threefold cord . . . not quickly broken" in Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. Doctrine, doxology, and devotion are the preacher's friends that strengthen his ministry and make it effective. While an overemphasis or exclusion of one or more elements can lead to ministry neglect or even harm, the proper balance of all three greatly strengthens a preacher's ministry.

So it was that the doctrine and doxology in Ezra's life led him to devotion, to living out his faith in God. Verse 10 of chapter 7 tells us, "Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it." Commentators are united in observing Ezra's unique ability to exposit the law of Moses and apply it to the contemporary problems of his day. Where did such insight come from? Undoubtedly from the Word of God as he studied it, but, more than that, his insight came from his commitment to obey the Word of God.[27] By experience in living out the law Ezra was prepared "to teach [the LORD's] statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10b).[28] The end goal was the successful transmission of the Word of God to the people, so that they too might comprehend the truth, worship God, and obey him. The path to this faithful delivery ran straight through the heart and life of the preacher. And though these three elements function like a threefold cord to mutually strengthen each other, this passage makes clear that they still follow a logical and necessary sequence.

> He is a model reformer in that what he taught he had first lived, and what he lived had first made sure of in the Scriptures. With study, conduct and teaching put deliberately in this right order, each of these was able to function properly at its best: study was saved from unreality, conduct from uncertainty, and teaching from insincerity and shallowness. [29]

From this foundation of doctrine, doxology, and devotion in the life of Ezra, the story of the returned exiles blossoms into blessing. The Lord had prepared a man of God to preach.[30]

Doctrine, Doxology, and Devotion from the Past to the Present

In addition to Ezra's life and preaching, I also have studied church history from the Patristics through the time of the Reformation through the lens of doctrine, doxology, and devotion.[31] Church

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[27] "But it is not only a question of study—he also practiced the law. It was not a dead letter, but a living reality to him (cf. also Jas. 1:22)." Fensham, 101.

[28] The terms "statutes and rules" are used "to refer to all the requirements of God's law." Breneman, 130.

[29] Kidner, 62. Breneman puts it this way: "Study, observe (obey), then teach is the correct order. God's revelation has for its purpose the ordering of his people's lives. There are no easy solutions or quick recipes to solve life's problems. God needs men and women who will devote their lives to this ministry. These three aspects of ministry are interdependent. One called by God to teach must also study and obey" (130).

[30] While Ezra's life provides a fitting, brief introduction to how to use this three-fold grid, Ezra's sermon in Nehemiah 8 provides a much deeper, substantial opportunity to exposit these themes. I make a fuller exposition of Ezra's sermon in my applied research project.

[31] Hughes Oliphant Old's authoritative work on the history of preaching served as my guide for finding original and secondary sources. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church,* 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2010). I consulted primarily volumes 1–4.

history has much to teach us here through its stunning real-life examples and its often-overlooked biblical emphases. For example, if we go back far enough in church history, we discover the devotion of preachers was more akin to the musical meditations of David than the cranial musings of academia. Ephrem of Nisibis (306–73), in the earliest days of the church, gave himself to meditating on Scripture.[32] Ephrem was a poet and musician, and like David he turned his biblical meditations into songs. Indeed, he even turned his songs into sermons![33] From Ephrem flowed a solid stream of preachers who meditated on the Word in poetry and song: Romanos the Melode (fl. ca. 540),[34] Peter Damian (1007–1072),[35] Martin Luther (1483–1646), and Philip Nicolai (1556–1608),[36] to name a few.

Some modern preachers also have much to offer us. After independently arriving at the three categories of doctrine, doxology, and devotion from my own study, I was pleased to discover that both Joel Beeke and John Piper had arrived at strikingly similar conclusions in their own works. While other prominent preachers focus on one or more of these elements, Beeke and Piper capture all three succinctly and in the same order.

Beeke puts it this way: "Biblical preaching must combine doctrinal, experiential, and practical elements."[37] A close reading of Beeke reveals these three elements closely resemble the categories of doctrine, doxology, and devotion in preaching. He quotes John Clayton, John Goode, and Thomas Scott for support and then later reveals Spurgeon as his original source.

> When Charles H. Spurgeon preached his first sermon in the Metropolitan Tabernacle (March 25, 1861), he chose as his text Acts 5:42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Spurgeon said: "It appears that the one subject upon which men preached in the apostolic age was *Jesus Christ*. . . . I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ." Would this stricture limit

[32] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 249–68.

[33] Ibid., 249.

[34] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 3: The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 7–20. Romanos was a preacher and musician who composed hymnic sermons, much like Ephrem, and came from the same city of Nisibis. See Romanos, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, trans. Marjorie Carpenter, 2 vols. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1970).

[35] Old, *The Medieval Church*, 226–37. Though I am on the whole dissatisfied with the ascetic thrust of his ministry, it is interesting to note that Damian, as a poet and hymnwriter, was one of the few individuals in this generation of church history who was also known as an effective preacher.

[36] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4: The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 372.

[37] Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 32.

> preachers? No, Spurgeon said, for Christ is the most comprehensive of subjects: "If a man be found a preacher of Christ, he is doctrinal, experimental [experiential], and practical."[38]

While Beeke's definition of experiential preaching is quite expansive and therefore hard to grasp in one sentence, he narrows it down to this key definition. "Even more simply, we could say that the Reformed experiential preacher receives God's Word into his heart and then preaches it to the minds, hearts, and lives of his people."[39] In this way, Beeke echoes our call to embrace doctrine, doxology, and devotion in preaching.

Similarly, in *Expository Exultation* Piper states, "I conclude that the ultimate goal of all biblical truth, and therefore every text, is that God be glorified by our *seeing* and *savoring* and *showing* him as the greatest beauty and treasure in the universe."[40] This statement is a summary of the overarching thrust of Piper's book, which focuses on the fact that preaching is, at its heart, an act of worship. It is not hard to understand how Piper's "*seeing"* relates to doctrine, his "*savoring"* relates to doxology, and his "*showing"* relates to devotion. Though stated from different vantage points, a careful reading of both authors reveals that Beeke and Piper are striking at the same core themes of preaching.

It is clear, then, that church history and biblically faithful modern preachers only serve to strengthen my premise. As preachers feed the flock, God intends to feed preachers through doctrine, doxology, and devotion in their sermon preparation, delivery, and response. Let us consider a few final insights from the biblical data, church history, and modern preachers that enable preachers to better hear the Word in the process of preaching.

Grounded for Sermon Preparation

The intense demands and unique temptations of pastoral ministry will never pass away. It is of the essence, then, that pastors be equipped with as many tools as possible to address every kind of demand they may face. They need help to bear the weight of ministry well. Though I do not have the space to share the results here, in my research project I construct a comprehensive biblical theology from Genesis to Revelation of how preachers hear the Word. If preachers are to rightly hear the Word and preach it, they must understand that a biblical theology of pastoral preaching rests firmly on a Trinitarian, Christ-centered foundation. Based on my study, I define preaching this way: *Holy Spirit-empowered preaching takes place when the Spirit of God works through the man of God as that man reveals, worships, and responds to the Son of God by heralding the Word of God.* This definition of preaching and the biblical-theological doctrine conveyed in this study will equip preachers to navigate skillfully and efficiently the rich texts of the word of God like Ezra the scribe.[41]

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[38] Beeke, 401.

[39] Ibid., 41.

[40] John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 208.

[41] Appendix A of my project provides the teaching outlines I developed and used to relate these doctrinal truths. I taught three separate cohorts of pastors and gathered feedback from each cohort to evaluate and refine the material. Also, Appendix C provides outlines of two sermons I preached on the life and preaching of Ezra from the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

For sharpening sermon-preparation skills, I believe the benefit of preaching cohorts cannot be underestimated. I have recently had the opportunity to attend a Charles Simeon Trust preaching seminar and found it immensely helpful for my own preaching-preparation process. The practice of getting feedback from fellow gifted preachers of the Word is biblical, time-tested, and sharpens our ability to hear the Word (Eph 4:1–16; 2 Tim 2:1–2).[42]

We rightfully devote much time to equipping preachers with the proper tools for exegesis and study. However, in our popcorn-paced culture, we must also help preachers embrace the importance of biblical reflection and meditation in the study. Sermons must be slow-cooked. This project prompted me to alter my sermon preparation process in one key way. After finishing my Sunday morning sermon by Thursday, I meditate on it over the weekend and prayerfully review my completed sermon manuscript on Saturday evening. This approach has been suggested by several preachers, and it allows me to carefully review my sermon without distraction and make any necessary changes. Then, on Sunday morning, I can give myself to dedicated prayer over the Word. This simple change has paid considerable dividends in enabling me to hear the Word better in sermon preparation.

Zealous in Sermon Delivery

The main burden of this project is for preachers to understand and believe that preaching is an act of worship. Preachers are hungering for a theology that gives purpose to their preaching and infuses it with energy and zeal to the glory of God. They also need the encouragement and hope that this study provides for their preaching ministries; they want to believe that God can use their fledgling sermons to work his grace in their hearers and in themselves.

One great benefit of this study for the act of preaching, then, is how it strengthens the preacher's faith to believe in the Spirit's power to reveal Christ in preaching.[43] Preachers can lay hold of Christ by faith in a few practical ways. First, church history shows us how preachers can utilize a service order (or liturgy) to meditate on the Word they are about to preach.[44] Second, they can make careful,

[42] The Reformers saw this connection as well and, given their commitment to doctrine and doxology, gave themselves to training other men of God who could rightly divide the word of truth. Zwingli and Bullinger established "the first theological seminary of Reformed Protestantism . . . called the Prophezei, signaling the continuity between the Christian preacher and the ancient prophet." Beeke, 105. William Perkins observes that while ministers bear authority, they must recognize that "the power ministers of the gospel have comes directly from God and is above their own. So they themselves, as individuals, must submit to the powerful word of ministers, to be taught by it, and to be reconciled by means of it. They must learn to respect it, for even although it is a man who speaks, it is still the word of God." *The Art of Prophesying and The Calling of the Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 125.

[43] Preaching Christ clearly from the Word is exactly what the Holy Spirit delights to empower and bless, for the Spirit's work is to reveal Christ in the Word (Rom 8:9; John 16:13–14; Eph 3:16–19). "What does the Holy Spirit like best in a preacher? The Spirit most delights in the preaching of Christ." Beeke, 63–64.

[44] There are many examples of this practice from church history. In his series on the Psalms, Augustine interwove his preaching with the psalm-singing of the liturgy to mutually enhance the focus and intelligibility of the worship. Old, *The Patristic Age*, 358–60. The importance of preaching in the worship of the liturgy is also elevated in *The Directory for Public Worship of God*. In 1644 the Westminster Assembly in London crafted this liturgical manual to replace the Book of Common Prayer as their guide for worship. "Though the directory covers fifteen topics, more than a tenth of its substance is devoted to 'the Preaching of the Word.' Only the pastoral prayer before the sermon receives more attention, and that section consists of a lengthy sample prayer." Beeke, 192.

intentional use of the prayer of illumination before the sermon and the prayer of response after the sermon.[45] Third, hardly a sermon goes by when I do not practice a modified version of John Piper's APTAT paradigm for preaching. Piper uses this acronym meaning "Admit, Pray, Trust, Act, Thank" to help him prepare his heart in worship just before he steps into the pulpit to preach.[46] The high point of this process is the middle "T" for "Trust," when Piper seeks by faith to cling to a specific promise of God to him through his Word.

> This step is decisive. *Trust.* This is the link with Galatians 3:5 that we examined in chapter 6. . . . God supplies the Spirit and works miracles through our preaching by our "hearing with faith." The Spirit comes through our hearing one of God's blood-bought promises of help, and believing it. At this point, I think many of us miss out on the fullness of God's blessing by defaulting to vague generalities. Instead of focusing on very concrete, particular promises, we don't focus on any promise at all. We think generally about God's goodness or power. There is nothing wrong with this, but I think God is offering us something better. At least this has proven true for me.[47]

In this third step, Piper highlights the specific promises he meditates on from various passages of Scripture. I would suggest preachers adapt Piper's approach by making the central verse or verses of the text at hand the focus of the preacher's faith. By this method, the preacher makes his sermon text his source of meditation. My personal preaching process and spiritual growth have been transformed greatly as I have applied this adapted form of Piper's method to my own preaching.

Challenged to Sermon Response

Ezra's life and preaching ministry provide a sterling example of how growth in biblical application takes place. True wisdom is gleaned as the pastor seeks to simply obey the Word, like Ezra. Insight into biblical application cannot be had any other way, which is why seasoned, faithful pastors often have some of the best sermon applications. Ezra's life provides a good model and encouragement to preachers to look for every opportunity to obey and apply the Word. It is through obedience that application becomes plain.

Richard Baxter (1615–91) was a pastor in Kidderminster, England, who planned to preach to his fellow pastors in the county of Worcestershire on December 4, 1655.[48] Baxter was unable to attend due to ill health, but he set his sermon to writing and published his address under the title *The Reformed*

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[45] This twin emphasis on the importance of preaching and the prayer before the sermon is not by accident. The prayers of illumination and response before and after the sermon, more than any other element of the liturgy, elevated the importance of preaching in the worship of the church. Old draws this out especially from the Strasbourg liturgy. *The Age of the Reformation*, 79–80.

[46] Piper, 109–19; cf. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 50–53.

[47] Piper, *Expository Exultation*, 112.

[48] For historical information about Baxter, especially in relation to *The Reformed Pastor*, see the foreword by Chad Van Dixhoorn and the introduction by Tim Cooper in Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, updated and abridged ed., ed. Tim Cooper (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 9–30. For my primary source research I consulted Richard Baxter and William Orme, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter* (London: James Duncan, 1830), 14:45.

Pastor in 1656. Acts 20:28 was the key text from which Baxter called on his fellow ministers to "take heed" to themselves.

Baxter underscores a truth that I also highlight in my biblical theology of preaching. God's normal means of blessing his people is through faithful preachers of the Word. This is what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15–16, "Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." It may be a terrifying prospect, but pastors must realize their own personal faithfulness has a direct impact on their public fruitfulness. We simply cannot buy the lie that we can be one person in the pulpit and another person in our private lives and get away with it. Though ultimately God is sovereign to produce all the fruit we bear in ministry, we are still responsible.

How to Help Preachers Keep Hearing the Word

I would like to propose that we conduct more research into this highly fruitful field of study. For example, I did not have the space to consider how preachers heard the Word in church history after the time of the Reformation up to just before the modern era (1600s–1950s). Such a study would furnish more intriguing examples and unique insights into how preachers hear the Word.

Over the course of the study, I also realized just how deeply ingrained the theological themes and language of this research are embedded in the Bible. The Shema in Deuteronomy 6, Paul's sermon to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, and his exhortations regarding preaching in 1 Corinthians 2 and 1 Timothy 4 are crucial texts for understanding the place of doctrine, doxology, and devotion in preaching.[49] Whole sermon series could be produced on "How Preachers Hear the Word" from the lives of the prophets, then the priests, and then the kings of the OT. And, of course, further practical and pastoral insights could be refined and developed to help preachers grow in their own preaching process.

Conclusion

In light of the above considerations, I am making a sincere plea that we give more attention to this topic using the biblical framework of "Doctrine, Doxology, and Devotion." Preachers today need to hear the Word. This is the insight captured in a poem by George Herbert titled, "The Windows."[50] Herbert compares the preacher to stained-glass windows in a church. When God's light shines in and through weak and fallible preachers like brittle glass, the preacher's beauty compels and draws people

[49] No one makes a better case for the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching from 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 than D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In 1969 Lloyd-Jones gave a famous series of lectures on preaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The climax of his series was his final lecture on this passage, titled "'Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power.'" See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

[50] I am indebted to Dr. Bruce Rose, division chair of English Language and Literature in the College of Arts and Science at Bob Jones University for drawing my attention to this poem. I am using the updated edition from the Poetry Foundation. "The Windows," Poetry Foundation, accessed April 22, 2025, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50695/the-windows-56d22df68ff95.

to Christ. But when the preacher is not devoted to Christ in "doctrine and life," the Word preached appears "waterish, bleak, and thin."

Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?
He is a brittle crazy glass;
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal[51] in glass thy story,
Making thy life to shine within
The holy preachers, then the light and glory
More reverend grows, and more doth win;
Which else shows waterish, bleak, and thin.

Doctrine and life, colors and light, in one
When they combine and mingle, bring
A strong regard and awe; but speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the ear, not conscience, ring.

May the church be blessed as Christ himself speaks through preachers who hear the Word in doctrine, doxology, and devotion by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.

[51] The word "anneal" refers to the heating and cooling process through which glass is softened and made less brittle.

The Theological Method of J. H. Bavinck

by Timothy Reid[1]

Ideally, theological work accurately represents the doctrine of God's Word, increases our knowledge of God, and results in authentic spiritual ministry. When one thinks of the robust Dutch Reformed tradition, significant systematic theologies that articulate the propositional truth of God's Word typically come to mind. But an examination of the theological method of a relatively unknown missionary theologian will illustrate the value of theological precision aided by a life of informed gospel ministry.

This article examines the life, work, and theological method of Reformed missiologist J. H. Bavinck through an evangelical perspective, focusing on the defining features of his theological method. A comprehensive analysis of his background and context is readily accessible thanks to the work of P. J. Visser.[2] Visser's work allows a modern audience to find comparable circumstances to import relevant insights into church health, missiology, and exegesis. This paper selectively sketches the most pertinent biographical information relevant to Bavinck's method, including his life, ministry, and written works; sketches his distinctive theological conclusions; describes the primary characteristics of his method; and then offers an evaluation of methodology.

Biographical Sketch

Johan Herman Bavinck was a Dutch Reformed missionary, missiologist, and teacher whose published works rarely left the continental circles of Reformed theology, unlike his better-known uncle, the systematic theologian Herman Bavinck. J. H. Bavinck's most prominent works surfaced during the 1950s and eventually reached some American audiences in the late 50s and 60s.[3] Recently, a spotlight has returned to Bavinck, in part because more of his works have been translated into English and because P. J. Visser's seminal biography has engaged a contemporary audience with his life, ministry, and writings.

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[2] Paul Jan Visser, *Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World: The Life and Thought of a Reformed Pioneer Missiologist,* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

[3] J. H. Bavinck will be referred to simply as Bavinck. His uncle will be referred to as Herman Bavinck.

A Reformed Theological Heritage

Bavinck was born to a family known for pietistic preachers in the Dutch Reformed tradition.[4] His grandfather boldly left the Dutch Reformed Church on his own, alone, following the *Alt-Reformierte Kirche's* secession.[5] This division of churches, led by Abraham Kuyper, prioritized a personal experience of faith and a profound devotion to the primacy of the local church.[6] Bavinck's family produced many preachers and academics, including his uncle Herman Bavinck and his father, who served a humble village church as pastor. His family's academic heritage no doubt steered him toward higher learning and teaching early on. Two vital characteristics found throughout the family and deposited to J. H. Bavinck were honesty and a congenial modesty, which would impact his ministry, relationships, and, indeed, his theological method.[7]

The urgency of a pious and authentic spiritual life never left Bavinck. Visser traces this lasting priority to his final period of life and work in an environment that was growing increasingly secularized and rationalistic.[8] Bavinck believed profoundly that missions and church work operate from an individual's personal encounter with Jesus Christ. True to his Reformed heritage, he believed the church's way forward was a return to understanding God in the person of Jesus Christ.[9] His theological background and particular church upbringing would result in commitment to local-church priority and devotion to spiritual authenticity, which prominently surface in his writings.

Academic Pursuits

Bavinck's earliest university study in the 1910s focused on psychology. Through seminary, Bavinck eagerly studied Augustine and Calvin, and he majored in medieval monasticism, all the while focusing on psychology and the humanities.[10] When he took up postdoctoral work, he returned to psychology at a time when Freudian influence was revolutionizing how the academic world understood anthropology and the human mind. His dissertation pioneered the analysis of a religious component of human psychology by examining how one's affective filter affects information retention and

[4] J. van den Berg, "The Legacy of Johan Herman Bavinck," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 4 (1983): 171.

[5] Visser, 3. As a sixteen-year-old, his grandfather left his village alone, separating from his church, village, and family on grounds of doctrinal and spiritual conviction.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 5, 13–15. Visser cites testimonies from peers and family friends who recalled that Bavinck's grandfather was repeatedly reluctant to take promotions or influential positions in academia and ministry, and that his gentle demeanor did not lead him to promote himself ambitiously. These traits are evident in Bavinck's father and Bavinck himself. See also van den Berg, 171.

[8] Visser, 15, 71.

[9] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions,* trans. David H. Freeman (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), xvii.

[10] Visser, 18. Bavinck's doctoral thesis studied the medieval monasticism of Heinrich Von Sumo, which providentially prepared him for wrestling with mysticism and spirituality. This led to his insight into the anthropological realities of eastern religions (Islam, Buddhism, and Animism) in his ministry context.

learning.[11] This emphasis on the unity of the sensory with the cognitive undoubtedly surfaces in his interdisciplinary theological method.[12]

Some surmise that Bavinck would have been destined for a professorship in psychology, and he may have been following such leads until his ministry calling interrupted that pursuit and pulled him away from higher education for a time.[13] Yet both fields of human psychology and mysticism/spiritual phenomenology would serve Bavinck well, preparing him for the ministry calling to which he would devote the next two decades of life.

Ministry Experience

In 1919 Bavinck accepted the pastorate of an expatriate church in the Dutch colony of Indonesian Sumatra.[14] Though not initially strictly mission work, his leadership helped the expatriate church grow beyond a Dutch population, and the congregation tripled in size, including many Chinese and Javanese.[15] Bavinck's pastoral heart, keen understanding of culture and social interaction, and appetite for learning contributed to a flourishing ministry. After a furlough back in the Netherlands, where he continued to write and teach, Bavinck returned to Indonesia as a missionary and focused on cross-cultural ministry among the Javanese. Bavinck became respected for his diligent effort to learn the language and culture and to teach the Word of God effectively, especially to the younger generation.[16] This period of his life made a great impact on him and provided the experience from which he would teach and write about religion and missiology.

Bavinck's earnest desire to connect theology to praxis correlates with his extensive experience as pastor, disciple-maker, and missionary teacher. A lengthy period of cross-cultural ministry demanded effective communication and the art of using universal concepts. Many attested to his acuity in communicating to diverse audiences with simplicity and a congeniality that endeared him to students and parishioners.[17] Though the Second World War brought his overseas ministry to an abrupt end, his lasting influence among the Javanese in Indonesia is well attested.[18] A career of ministry provided

[11] Visser, 18.

[12] An "interdisciplinary" method of theology is a recent term referring to the synthesis of different scientific disciplines that inform one another for the final product of theology. To some degree, this is true of all theological method because one cannot communicate without some measure of language acquisition or understand the Scriptures' narrative without some time spent in the discipline of history, for example. For a concise summary of the method, see Telford C. Work, "Interdisciplinary Theology: Framers and Painters," in *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018). Though Bavinck predates this formal definition of interdisciplinary method, like many theologians he demonstrated a form of it without referring to this categorization.

[13] Berg, 172.

[14] Visser, 19.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 30.

[17] Visser, 35. Bavinck learned the significance of the number *five* in Javanese culture. He especially discipled young men and formed groups of five that met regularly for prayer, encouragement, and accountability. These groups outlasted Bavinck's presence in Indonesia and continued even through times of war, and many from these hardy groups became pastors or ministry leaders for the Javanese.

[18] Berg, 172.

him with formidable experience to put missiology and psychological theory to the test and critically evaluate many theological traditions of the day.

Significant Theological Influences

Even a cursory survey of Bavinck's writings indicates both the theological family heritage he hailed from and the rich theological environment that shaped his thinking. Bavinck's uncle, Herman Bavinck, had a significant impact on his development of dogmatic theology. Uncle Herman also served as a methodological predecessor and a source from which Bavinck would theologize, though sometimes in ways that differed. Although he rarely wrote what would be considered dogmatic theology, his theology of missions also reflected engagement with the ideas of Karl Barth, which were popular at the time. Barth, Schleiermacher, and Kant were among the most influential figures in Bavinck's context.[19] He incorporated their ideas but also cited them more often in areas of disagreement.

Bavinck's writings in missiology often engaged in dialogue with Gisbertus Voetius and Gustav Warneck, leading missiologists who clearly influenced his missiological principles.[20] They also served as discussion partners with whom he would differ.[21] Hendrik Kraemer was likely the most significant influence in Bavinck's ministry life. They met when Bavinck was a student, but they interacted primarily as ministry partners when Bavinck pastored in Sumatra.[22] Their encounters exposed him to Kraemer's revolutionary missiological writings and to the circles in which Kraemer worked (he was slightly more ecumenical than Bavinck at the time). Kraemer's belief, "To be church is to be missionary, and to be missionary is to be church," permeates Bavinck's writings.[23] Besides his impact on Bavinck's missiology and ministry practice, Kraemer was likely the most influential figure in Bavinck's transformation from a more pragmatic anthropological approach (primarily utilizing psychological principles) to an earnest biblical approach that emphasized the foundations of Scripture.

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[19] Visser, 87–88. His most significant critique of Barth regards Barth's denial of a connection between general revelation and religious consciousness.

[20] Voetius was the "first Protestant to develop a comprehensive theology of mission" and a significant force for the Reformed tradition. Gideon van der Watt, "Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Some Perspectives on His Influence on Developments in the South African Dutch Reformed Church's Missiology and Mission Practice," *In Skriflig* 53, no. 3 (2019): 1–9. Warneck was a German missiologist whom Bavinck appreciated but critiqued more often than he agreed with in his works, primarily regarding the foundation of missions. Visser, 92–93.

[21] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 58, 63. Bavinck believed in an ecclesiastical-centric model of missions and critiques Warneck for creating a "circle within a circle," putting missions in the hands of parachurch ministries and the work of a few elites. He further critiques Warneck for creating a "double-foundation" for missions by depending on both the glory of God and the "longing of the heathen." As for Voetius, Bavinck mostly appreciated his work and merely inverted the order of priority given to his three goals of missions. See J. H. Bavinck, *The J.H. Bavinck Reader,* ed. John Bolt, James Bratt, and Paul Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 77.

[22] Visser, 31, 89. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House, 1938) significantly influenced Bavinck's conviction that Scripture can and ought to inform a Christian doctrine of religious consciousness.

[23] Visser, 98. See also Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 124.

Key Contributions to Theology

To understand how Bavinck constructed theology, one must first observe the boundaries of the different topics within which Bavinck primarily worked. A life that included missions, seminary training, church leadership, psychological study, and theological dogmatics yielded a diverse array of fields and sources for his theology. Bavinck's later published works demonstrate a penchant for weaving these topics together into a theological model that held them in tension, not disparately. Bavinck contributed to and even pioneered a fusion of several significant theological themes, resulting in an internally coherent theological model.

Survey of Published Academic Works

Bavinck's published works reflect the trajectory of his career. His early writings demonstrate his involvement in psychology, with an anthropological emphasis. His first significant book, *Personality and Worldview*, published in 1928, is an ambitious attempt to merge two hotly debated topics at the time.[24] Written before his missionary experience in Indonesia, this work represents a foundational step for Bavinck's method and thought processes.

The next significant work, *Christ and Eastern Mysticism*, completed during his interim between periods of overseas ministry, is a seminal work for the study of religions and also contains some of his most important exegetical work.[25] Written from the perspective of a committed evangelical missionary, it should not be classified as "comparative religions," though its academic rigor and style fit into that field. While more thoroughly theological and biblical works followed his missionary experience, this book still served as a launchpad for one of the most significant topics Bavinck would undertake: a biblical understanding of religious consciousness, or how Christians ought to relate to other religions. Although Bavinck focused on several chief topics, this one was perhaps the most neglected in evangelical circles, making it the most in need of a clear guide.

Bavinck returned to the Netherlands shortly before WWII and never returned overseas. During his postwar academic career, he produced most of his influential works, which more directly apply biblical exegesis to anthropology, worldview, and other religions. Perhaps his best-known culmination of theology and missiology is his seminal *Introduction to the Science of Missions,* intended as a handbook on the theory, foundation, and principles of missionary work. His books, *The Church Between the Temple and Mosque* and also *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World,* are mature explications of his biblical and scientific study of religious human experience.[26] These books offer the most direct insight into his theological method from text to application since he never wrote commentaries or explicitly exegetical works. Other notable works include *Between the Beginning and the End*, a thorough treatment of his theology of the Kingdom of God, and *Riddle of Life*, an

[24] J. H. Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023).

[25] This work is included in Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*.

[26] J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship Between Christianity and Other Religions,* ed. Daniel Strange (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2023). J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1948).

evangelistic tract for a Dutch audience.[27] Bavinck wrote many journals and other more minor works related to the topics above that were never translated into English.

Religious Consciousness and General Revelation

Bavinck's most academically rigorous work, in terms of research and phenomenological analysis, is in the field of religious consciousness. It is no surprise, given his commitment as a missionary bent on mobilizing the church for missions, that he states that religious consciousness, or the study of other religions, is the most important topic for the church to address to remain faithful to its pledge to the Great Commission.[28] To understand religious consciousness biblically, Bavinck often pursues the subject of general revelation, a topic that current tradition had not satisfactorily addressed for him.

Bavinck's chief works in religious consciousness, *Christ and Eastern Mysticism,* and *Between Temple and Mosque* aim to provide a thorough anthropology for the church to be faithful to truth and to the task of effective missions. When Bavinck writes on non-Christian religions, he does so with an expertise in understanding culture and societal value systems.[29] He is also well-versed in modern anthropology with a keen understanding of the human soul in psychology.[30] Yet his primary contribution to a robust biblical theology of religious consciousness comes primarily from biblical exegesis, honed over time. He embraces a biblical anthropology, concluding that man is wholly a rebel, a sinner, frightened of God, and spends his life resisting his Maker, and that the phenomenology of religion is incomplete without acknowledging man's rebellion against God.[31] An anthropology thoroughly rooted in theology would be a fresh departure from the leading secular, rationalist, and empiricist ideas of the day.

For Bavinck, viewing non-Christian religions from God's perspective begins with God's personal self-revelation to man. He resists the tendency of the doctrine of general revelation to become thoroughly rationalistic and risk humanism, permitting man to arrive at truth solely through his own intellect.[32]

> If we wish to use the expression, "general revelation," we must not do so in the sense that one can logically conclude God's existence from it. This may be possible, but it only leads to a philosophical notion of God as the first cause. But that is not the biblical idea of general revelation.[33]

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[27] J. H. Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End: A Radical Kingdom Vision*, trans. Bert Hielema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). J. H. Bavinck, *The Riddle of Life*, trans. Bert Hielema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[28] Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World,* 81.

[29] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 247–72. This keen ability to understand social value systems is evidenced throughout his handbook.

[30] Visser, 12.

[31] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 126.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Bavinck, *Temple and Mosque*, 124.

He believes the Scriptures depict general revelation from God's perspective as a divine concern for all humans, both collectively and individually, and that it cannot be "understood in a merely intellectual way," lest the divine origin and sovereignty of general revelation be lost or minimized.[34] Accordingly, Bavinck frames general revelation as a divine initiative that draws humanity toward God rather than a neutral data field for philosophical inference.

If general revelation was thought of as a dialogue, humanism (and Christian perspectives influenced by it) had assumed man was in a conversation with himself. Bavinck counters that it is foremost a conversation from God to man, then man's response to God. "It is clear that God busies Himself and wishes to busy Himself with each and every member of the human family."[35] The missionary, therefore, does not bring God into the life of one who has never encountered him, but speaks as a witness to the God who has already been addressing that person.

Throughout his works, Bavinck does not precisely identify what is and is not special or general revelation. He acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing general revelation from overlap with special revelation in Scripture. He considers instances such as Job 33:14–18, where it is clear that God reveals himself in dreams, and Matthew 2, where the star of Bethlehem reveals God, as examples of overlap between special revelation and general, or natural, means. However, he still maintains a clear distinction between the two and often emphasizes that knowledge of redemption is exclusive to special revelation. Though the two overlap and share a divine origin, only the discovery of Christ in God's Word can offer salvation to man.

Bavinck's definition of general revelation certainly includes human conscience, history, and nature—in short, the totality of human existence. But he still provides a correction, offering a relational, less abstract understanding of general revelation. For Bavinck, general revelation is not special revelation, nor exclusively rationality, but an ontological reality.[36] With this position, he departed from many in the reformed tradition, including his friend and colleague Kraemer, by grounding general revelation in the character and being of God, a position he defends from Genesis 1.[37] This was a refreshing reprieve and a somewhat bold stance for a Reformed missiologist in a theological world enamored with Kantian existentialism and Barth's indistinct positions on revelation.

Lastly, Bavinck addresses whether God works through non-Christian religions. In his day, many held that unreached peoples possessed an innate, universal desire for Jesus Christ—a view that blurs the distinction between general and special revelation and, in practice, diminishes the missionary mandate.[38] Bavinck counters, "No continuity exists between the gospel and human religious consciousness, although definite continuity does exist between the gospel and what lies behind human

[34] J. H. Bavinck, "The Problem of Adaptation and Communication," *International Review of Mission* 45, no. 179 (1956): 307.

[35] J. H. Bavinck, *Religies en Wereldbeschouwingen in Onze Tijd (Religions and Worldviews in Our Days)*, trans. Paul Visser (Groningen: Wolters, 1958), 136. See also Bavinck, *Temple and Mosque,* 126–27.

[36] Visser, 129.

[37] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader,* 101–7.

[38] The methodology section below elaborates on this discussion from Haggai 2:7.

religious consciousness, namely God's general revelation."[39] General revelation, he argues, is God's ongoing dialogue with humanity, enabling even pagans to perceive something of God's character. Yet this perception stops short of salvation, for redemption can be known only through special revelation. As he puts it, "It is only where the light of God's grace has begun to shine that the heart becomes restless and the heathen begin to ask after the great son of David."[40] Thus, Bavinck insists that general revelation prepares but never replaces the need for the gospel.

The Foundation of Missions

The most successfully circulated of Bavinck's published works, *Introduction to the Science of Missions (SOM),* likely contains the pinnacle of Bavinck's contribution to theology with the subject of missiology. While several of his books reveal his missionary heart, only *SOM* explicitly presents a comprehensive account of the foundation, theory, and application of missions as a science. Missiology was often relegated to extrabiblical applications and treated as optional or exclusive to a privileged few. Bavinck's textbook would attempt to validate missions theory as a science as valuable as biblical exegesis, practical theology, or church history.

Bavinck's perception of missions as a science is most explicitly evident in a schematic he envisioned for higher education, which placed missions theory within an interdisciplinary education. "What could possibly be scientific about missions? The idea of missions is an integral part of the saving revelation of Christ. The two cannot be separated."[41] First, he divides the science of missions into three components: theory, history, and "elenctics" or practical application (see below). Next, the discipline cannot be treated as a subset of another discipline, such as church history, but must be treated as an independent discipline that is necessarily interwoven with the sciences of biblical exegesis, church history, practical theology, and dogmatics (primarily soteriology).[42] Bavinck views any model of theology that was not fundamentally integrated with missions as insufficient.

A chief characteristic of Bavinck's theory of missions is a clear directive to conduct missions from a biblical foundation. Bavinck acknowledges that *missions* is an extrabiblical term; nevertheless, it is an inseparable command of dogmatic theology and a concept embedded in biblical theology.[43] Scriptural foundations keep missions authored by God, not by man or his needs. Bavinck's foundation of missions entails a biblical-theological survey of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. From this foundation, he builds toward a comprehensive theology of missions with biblical missiological principles and then applies them to church life.

Because missions is rooted in Scripture, Bavinck maintains that it is the responsibility of the whole church for all time. Throughout *SOM*, he repeats the principle of whole-church participation in

[39] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*, 297.

[40] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 64.

[41] Ibid., xxviii.

[42] Ibid., xviii–xxi.

[43] Ibid., xii.

missions, making it a science of the entire church rather than an academic ancillary.[44] Observers have hailed Bavinck's pointed effort to make theology as biblically grounded as possible and to surrender other things to do so.[45] This method assured readers that his work was not a disguised attempt to advance a pragmatic missionary objective.

Elenctics

For Bavinck, the theory of dogmatics and missions must always be demonstrably felt theology. Bavinck uses the term *elenctics* to describe the scientific process of soteriology. The term comes from the Greek word ἐλέγχω, meaning "to bring shame," but many had interpreted its use in the NT solely in relation to reproof through preaching.[46] Bavinck expands on its sense to include a Christian's deeds and behavior, which would validate the message preached and convict unbelievers of the Bible's message of salvation.[47] Under the umbrella of elenctics, he then connects religious consciousness, general revelation, and special revelation as these pertain to evangelizing unbelievers. Elenctics, then, from a Christian perspective, is a necessary science of the conviction of sin for effectively and correctly obeying the command to disciple the nations.

Bavinck supplies his nuanced doctrine of elenctics as a correction to an exclusively rationalistic apologetic. He critiques his predecessors Voetius, a significant pioneer of Reformed missiology, and Abraham Kuyper, whom he says approach the task of missions exclusively through reason, seeking to destroy pagan ideas from an apologetic position.[48] Bavinck seeks to correct this method by noting the personal and relational nature of the gospel, the role of the Holy Spirit, and relational missionary outreach.[49] He notes, as he does with the topic of general revelation, that evangelization is more than a mere intellectual exercise.[50] The chapter on elenctics in *SOM* illustrates, from history and experience, how an imbalance toward proclamation without attention to the more relational and visible witness

[44] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 46–48, 61.

[45] W. A. McIlwaine, "An Introduction to the Science of Missions," *WTJ* 23, no. 2 (1961): 225.

[46] John 16:8: "And when he is come, he will reprove (ἐλέγχω) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I rebuke (ἐλέγχω) and chasten." Francis Turretin is an example of a theologian who used this same word, *elenctics,* but exclusively in a rationally apologetic sense where propositional truth corrects the error of the sinner. No one has yet linked any influence from Turretin to Bavinck in any perceptible way. Bavinck then is original in his use of the term, always aiming for a broader sense of conviction that includes both word and deed. See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997).

[47] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 222. Expanding on John 16:8, Bavinck emphasizes that elenctics, the conviction of sin, is entirely accomplished by the Holy Spirit and not through human effort. He provides an example of an effective non-verbal presentation of truth to demonstrate that conviction of sin includes both general and special revelation.

[48] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 224–25

[49] Ibid., 150. "Preaching must thus be an encounter, an encounter not with a part of a person, not only with his reason, or his poetic feeling, but an encounter with the entire person, with the whole man, as he exists in this world, as he is in flight from God, as he plays a role in that tremendous drama that is enacted between God and the rebellious human heart." See also Ibid., 222.

[50] Ibid., 135. "Your own life, in which God's grace has performed and patiently continues to perform a wonderful work against the unruliness of your own heart, itself constitutes a basis for your elenctic efforts." Ibid., 230.

of Christians resulted in poor outcomes.[51] Bavinck believes that the proclamation of truth in the Scriptures is never separated from the authentic testimony of deeds; thus biblical soteriology must give proper attention to both the preaching and living example of the gospel in the process of conviction.

Analysis of Theological Method

Bavinck's contributions are as diverse as his interests and pursuits. His audience was rarely the academic world at large but rather the church and the Christian academy. Likely because of his identity as a missionary rather than a systematic theologian, he never precisely lays out his theological method. This is not to say he never acknowledges his presuppositions, but he does so organically and not systematically.

Presuppositions and Prolegomena

Bavinck's works center on the topics described in the last section. His writings are characteristically practical and were written for a church audience more than an academic one. Consequently, Bavinck does not systematically state a theological summary of prolegomena. Bavinck generally acknowledges his presuppositions and Reformed theological inheritance but is unafraid to subject some of those positions to critique.[52] A survey of his writings reveals both stated and unstated working presuppositions.

Bavinck rejects any illusion of pure objectivity, recognizing the futility of total neutrality, which some theologians feigned. In exegesis, he recognizes that one must continuously operate with a sensitivity toward error and miscalculation, no matter how confident one is with interpretation. "When I take a text from the *Book of Proverbs* or from one of the prophets, I am permanently in danger of misunderstanding its real meaning."[53] Bavinck's keen awareness of fallen human nature translates into his academic posture and presuppositions.[54] Because man is sinfully flawed, no one, himself included, should assert total objectivity.

Bavinck contends that faith in the reality of God would provide the truest account of the human condition and the reality of the universe. Science cannot operate free of opinions, values, and choices, so theology should not be disqualified from scientific endeavors; however, science also cannot govern our perception of reality.[55] Bavinck defends this position of faith from critique and rejects any attempt to study religion as nothing more than a historical phenomenon.[56] Though he challenges an exclusively rationalistic and empirical approach, he also profusely uses these approaches as valid, God-given

[51] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 121–41, 221–66.

[52] Visser, 92. Bavinck expressly departs from the Synod of Middleburg regarding principles of missiology.

[53] Bavinck, "Adaptation and Communication," 311.

[54] Bavinck, *Temple and Mosque*, 327. See also Johan H. Bavinck, *Faith and Its Difficulties*, trans. William B. Eerdmans Sr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 44. "Man in his self-judgment and opinion can never arrive at the full objective truth."

[55] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 58.

[56] Ibid., 234.

instruments for aiding the discovery of biblical truth. Empiricism and rationality are not to be rejected, but neither should they govern one's method.[57] This allows him to rest on biblically informed foundations and to have confidence that the most profound questions of life are indeed answerable.

Bavinck does not expound on the biblical concept of *imago dei*, but this theological concept undergirds an oft-repeated theme of man as a holistic creature. He warns that the soul, mind, and physical aspects of man cannot be separated or any part minimized without erroneous consequences.[58] "With one person, that will work more strongly in his intellectual functions, with another in the emotional or practical functions, according to the balance found in that personality, but the need is common to all."[59] Bavinck's theological model operates from an underlying assumption that the Bible clearly demonstrates that God reaches man in his totality, intellect, and being.

His understanding of religious consciousness rests on the firm belief that man is inherently and wholly a religious-spiritual being. He qualifies this proposition, recognizing the appearance that religion was not universal in a quickly secularizing Europe, where atheism was on the rise. And yet he contends that even those self-professed atheists are choosing a religion of their own making.[60] Bavinck stands by his positions that "man stands in an I-Thou relationship, a conversational relationship, and he can only live in this relationship."[61] Bavinck recognizes that man is a complex and diverse being in many respects, but he defies secular anthropology by declaring that man has a universal religious nature as a bedrock presupposition.

Reflecting his academic humility, Bavinck regularly warns against assumptions of Western superiority or cultural universality.[62] Still, he often refers to an Eastern-Western cultural dichotomy.[63] Modern scholars have critiqued Bavinck for this perspective as an imperfect generalization, but this critique is likely unnecessary. Bavinck lived in a time when many still assumed some cultures to be unrelated to one another, and colonial attitudes asserted dominance over other worldviews.[64] Though he operates from a Western point of view, he acknowledges its limitations and adopts a posture of

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[57] J. H. Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith* (Kampen: Kok, 1949), 110.

[58] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*, 107.

[59] Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview,* 53.

[60] Ibid., 42.

[61] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith*, 168.

[62] Visser, 38, 63. Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 102–3.

[63] Today, the cultural schematic of East versus West, such as in Hofstede's Dimensions, remains debated and is often critiqued. Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001). Yet it is still widely used in anthropological circles. If one strikes a balance between generalization and exception, it is a helpful diagnostic for measuring cultural values in worldviews in both anthropological and theological domains. See Richard E. Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2003).

[64] A contemporary of Bavinck was Joseph Needham, the famous scientist who categorically dismantled the ignorant view of China as undeveloped and unscientific. Simon Winchester, *The Man Who Loved China: The Fantastic Story of the Eccentric Scientist Who Unlocked the Mysteries of the Middle Kingdom* (New York: Harper, 2008). See also Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for a history of Orientalism in the West, which was essentially an array of uninformed expectations in a quickly globalizing world.

openness when discussing cross-cultural applications of theory and ideas.[65] Bavinck's commitment to the universal nature and condition of man demonstrates that this generalized dichotomy was neither overstated nor held too rigidly, showing that cultural exegesis includes both common and unique traits.

Bavinck understands that everyone operates from some conditioned preunderstanding, that humans are flawed, and that rationalization is an incomplete methodology. He uses these reasons to support the need to ground one's theology in the starting point of theology: God's ontological being and self-revelation.[66] Bavinck does not attempt to philosophize or reach that conclusion through empirical or rational means but settles on the Bible's revelation of God's being as man's only hope for true understanding.[67] He regularly asserts the priority of deriving principles and truth from Scripture first so that all other sciences are subservient to the authority of Scripture.[68] Bavinck's theological method begins only with the canon of Scripture.

Use of Scripture in Theological Method

Bavinck's own testimony and record accord with a position that sought to return missiology and church theology to a wholly biblical basis. Bavinck rejects any missiological principles dependent on secularized and humanistic rationality. He had become dissatisfied with secular anthropology that failed to account for man's natural rebellious bent for sin, empirically proven by the devastating war that enveloped the world, and that he experienced in his interaction with false religions.[69] Humanism, unlike the Bible, failed to account for man's complex psychology and personality.[70] Bavinck's answer is a return to the Bible as a foundation for anthropology, non-Christian religion, and missions.

Bavinck was a teacher, missionary, and evangelist. He never wrote a Bible commentary nor published many sermons. Yet examples of his exegesis appear throughout his work, especially in his handbook of missions (*SOM)* and his works on religious consciousness. Bavinck does not simply profess a biblical approach; he regularly refers to Scripture in constructing his model of theology, whether in the foundations of theory or in the application of principles.[71] As with his theological method, he does not systematically explain his process for arriving at conclusions; instead, an analysis must examine the breadth of the samples and sketch how he handles several key aspects of the exegetical discipline.

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[65] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 210–11, 301–3.

[66] Visser, 58.

[67] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 5. See also Bavinck, *Faith and Its Difficulties*, 46.

[68] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 81.

[69] Bavinck, "Communication and Adaptation," 311.

[70] Bavinck, *Faith and Its Difficulties*, 14. "God does not tell us in His Book that there are two kinds of human beings. There is only one kind. . . . 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer. 17:9).'" Ibid., 46.

[71] Chapter 5 of Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, on the foundation of missions includes at least thirty-four specific Bible references from over a dozen books in both the Old and New Testaments.

Unity of the Scriptures

Bavinck's presupposition of Scripture's unity is evident first in what might be called an argument from silence. Unlike some of his conversation partners such as Schweitzer and Schleiermacher, Bavinck assumes the authenticity and genuine authorship of the NT as in his synthesis of Acts 17 and Romans 1.[72] Elsewhere, he regularly assumes Pauline authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy and again correlates theological findings of those passages with Pauline thought in Romans or 1 and 2 Corinthians.[73] Bavinck consistently relates one biblical text to another without noting any discontinuity between them or concern about contradiction.

Next, when analyzing the phenomena of culture, human nature, and behavior, he begins in Genesis 3. He understands its narrative to be programmatic for the rest of Scripture and, indeed, for universal human nature. He concludes, based on the events of that passage, that its effects extend to the rest of redemption history and thus are not isolated as a myth or unrelated narrative.[74] In fact, he states, "The New Testament detached from the Old is completely unintelligible to many."[75] Hence, Bavinck views this pivotal passage as relevant and binding for the rest of the canon because the entire Bible is unified as the Word of God.

Progressive Redemption History

When establishing a whole-Bible foundation for missions, *SOM* provides a neatly arranged survey of the Scriptures, divided into OT foundations, OT prophets, Gospels, Acts, and epistles. This strongly indicates Bavinck constructed theology from this schema, which generally arranges the canonical books by their genre and position within redemption history. His exegesis is sensitive to how each canonical section contributes differently to missions and the present-day believer's application. It is no surprise that his Reformed perspective views the covenantal progression through a Christological lens, maintaining that all fulfillment of promises is found in Jesus the Messiah.[76] From this foundation in redemptive history, he establishes the divine imperative of missions.

A thorough understanding of progressive revelation becomes clear early in his introduction to missions. He mentions commonly accepted theories about the apostolic office and, to define his terms, clarifies that the office of apostle is closed.[77] For him, Matthew 28:19–20 shows that the apostles' calling was passed on to the church rather than dying out with them. He purposefully gives the Gospels and Acts the most attention in his foundation for missions because of their pivotal place in redemption history. Bavinck clearly formulates theological conclusions with sensitivity to the different periods of biblical history.

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[72] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith,* 123–24.

[73] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 66, 93.

[74] Bavinck, "Communication and Adaptation," 308.

[75] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 143.

[76] Ibid., 33, 59.

[77] Ibid., xvi.

Bavinck briefly addresses the relevance of the OT to NT mission. His warrant for including it in construction for theological missiology is the theme of the nations in redemption, which he sees as partially fulfilled in the Gospels and progressively more so in the NT.[78] It is not immediately clear how he differentiates the prophets from the rest of the OT books. Still, he plainly states they do not significantly contribute to NT mission.[79] Yet, he does not hesitate to cite prophetic books profusely and use them as support in various levels of theological construction. Though Bavinck operates with a scheme for when to link and apply OT prophets with NT texts, his rationale is unclear and leaves unanswered questions about the details of his exegetical rationale.

Later, we will discuss his proposed interpretive center. But it bears mentioning that, at the outset of laying the foundation for missions, he points to the covenant as the unifying concept between the Old and New Testaments. "The work of missions is possible only within the concept of a covenant."[80] Thus, the Gospels and, to some degree, Acts are treated in ways that focus on their Messianic fulfillment of salvation promises. On the Gospels, he states, "Such indications indicate plainly that the notion of missions did not appear with great clarity in the beginning of the gospels, because at that time there lay a veil of mystery over the life of Jesus."[81] Bavinck states the church is now in an interim age between the installation of the kingdom and its future consummation. This Christocentric theme, with Jesus as Messiah, is critical to the development of Bavinck's OT prefiguration of NT missiology and its theological applications across all of Bavinck's works.

Bavinck's missions handbook further discusses the changes from the Gospels to NT theology. He links Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8, and Matthew 21:43, suggesting that a new era for the NT believer has begun.[82] He states that other passages of Scripture, in conjunction with these, "Give the impressions that since the rejection of Christ by official Israel . . . Israel has lost any special claim. The kingdom must be given to 'a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:43).'"[83] From here he concludes that Acts indicates Israel was given a special temporary priority. These theological conclusions about the redemptive narrative are vital for establishing missions as the primary goal for the NT believer, as well as establishing a principle for when the narratives in the Gospels and Acts are normative or descriptive. Bavinck's understanding of the progression of the redemptive narrative establishes a foundation from which he will *principlize* for NT mission.[84]

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[78] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 33.

[79] Ibid., 22. "One can hardly speak of the promise of missions within the framework of the Old Testament. It is more glorious than that."

[80] Ibid., 14.

[81] Ibid., 34.

[82] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 70.

[83] Ibid., 34.

[84] The word *principlize* is used here based on its sense in Gary T. Meadors, ed., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

Biblical Theology

Bavinck mostly predated the height of the biblical theology movement and its emphasis as an exegetical discipline.[85] He makes no mention of the discipline, nor does he take efforts to delineate his exegetical method or compare it to others'.[86] The bulk of Bavinck's utilization of Scripture supports application and synthesized principles rather than initial exegesis or biblical-theological analysis. Still, a complete analysis of Bavinck's use of Scripture is needed to determine whether he gives each book and biblical author an independent voice before theological synthesis throughout his methodology.

Bavinck establishes the parameters for his biblical foundation of missions, explicitly stating, "For from the first page to the last, the Bible has the whole world in view, and its divine plan of salvation is unfolded as pertaining to the whole world."[87] Each section of his foundation-building consults an entire biblical section. Though he does not display the entirety of his exegetical findings, it is implied that the whole of the Gospels, of Acts, etc., are consulted, and a theological synthesis is performed. Consequently, after citing various Scriptures from the epistles, he can say, "Missionary work is thus anchored in divine activity."[88] Though not explicitly stated, Bavinck's biblical theology is founded on a comprehensive survey of the biblical books before systematic synthesis.

Bavinck's use of biblical theology will also be evident in his engagement with cross-canonical themes.[89] In *SOM*, he traces the theme of love in the epistles and the Gospels separately, then connects them in their application to the NT believer.[90] Bavinck accurately identifies that "the glory of Jehovah, not the need of the heathen, is the overruling motif" of OT redemption history. Indeed, Bavinck combats other scholars' tendencies to take NT mission texts and synthesize theology back into the OT. For example, he notes in the OT that the nations are drawn to Israel, and Israel is not sent, a pattern that ought not be directly applied to the NT. Similarly, he discerns that prophetic passages predicting the coming of nations are not to be seen as directly fulfilled in the church age, but as visions of ultimate fulfillment in the final age beyond the present one. "One can hardly, therefore, speak of the promise of missions within the framework of the Old Testament. It is more glorious than that."[91]

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[85] D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 91. Carson suggests that the biblical theology movement did not die in the 60s; it simply changed and evolved into various emphases still today.

[86] Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 368. DeRouchie defines biblical theology as "a way of analyzing and synthesizing what the Bible reveals about God and his relations with the world that makes organic salvation-historical and literary-canonical connections with the whole of Scripture on its own terms, especially with respect to how the Old and New Testaments progress, integrate, and climax in Christ." Because this overlaps with what was covered in the above section on redemption history, this section will focus primarily on the biblical themes Bavinck engages.

[87] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 11.

[88] Ibid., 43.

[89] Some definitions of biblical theology do not include cross-canonical biblical themes but place them at a higher level of theological synthesis. I include them here because these themes present the best opportunity to discuss Bavinck's guarding of individual sections and books of Scripture from synthesis prior to systematic theology.

[90] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 46.

[91] Ibid., 15.

Again, he places the NT church and the NT authors in an interim age so as not to conflate these prophecies with NT mission.

Original Languages and Mechanics of Exegesis

Bavinck offers enough discussion of the Scriptures to observe patterns of how he studies and interprets individual passages. He regularly engages in the original languages and performs word studies throughout his exegesis.[92] In his examination of biblical themes such as "world," "kingdom," and "creation," he conducts word studies to trace each theme.[93] These lexical studies often serve as the basis for his linking of Scripture with Scripture, as in the case of Genesis 1:1 serving as the necessary basis for the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20.[94] This aspect of exegesis keeps Bavinck's consequent theological construction tied to the text of Scripture. Though he often engages in historical theological dialogue, it is textual exegesis and not others' theological constructions or conclusions that provide the final authority of Bavinck's theological construction.

The final level of theological construction and the last step of exegesis is application. One key to responsibly moving from text to application is what many call a *principlizing* approach.[95] When handling NT narrative, Bavinck resists merely copying missionary methods from Scripture and instead extracts principles. He posits that rigidly using Paul's descriptive actions as prescriptive is "foolish and absurd. It is impossible to follow the chosen method by Paul in his day and world. Nor can the gospel be preached in the manner of Paul used on the Areopagus."[96] He flatly rejects a wholesale imitation of all biblical narrative. Yet he does not hesitate to appeal regularly to significant narrative passages such as Acts 17 for principles and foundational theologizing for missions.

When formulating missiological principles, Bavinck frequently draws on implications.[97] He draws rather broad implications, such as when he deduces from 1 Timothy 4:14 and a general impression from the NT that the missionary activity of the early church included many men and women who held no office other than that of a believer.[98] From an even wider perspective, Bavinck examines general revelation and the self-disclosure of God. "This self-disclosure of God seems to bear the character of a very serious appeal to man."[99] From this, he reasons that general revelation cannot merely be intellectual, but personal in nature as well.

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[92] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 46; idem, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith*, 123.

[93] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 12, 44.

[94] Ibid., 12, 66.

[95] See Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s chapter, "A Principlizing Model" in Meadors, *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, 18–44. See also Al Wolters' reflection, which suggests that all exegetes must use some variation of a principlizing method. Ibid., 279.

[96] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 80.

[97] By "implications" I mean conclusions derived from logic, understanding of communication, context, and synthesis that go beyond the information in a surface reading. Bavinck's theological conclusions informed by Scripture go beyond mere proof-texting by dwelling on the passages' whole-context meaning.

[98] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 40.

[99] Bavinck, "Adaptation and Communication," 307.

Bavinck also draws conclusions from more exegetically specific implications. Though not explicitly stated in Scripture, he cites several verses addressing false teachers that, together, imply that the young church feared the emergence of impostors. From this implication, he deduces principles of missiological caution.[100] Later, the expression "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15) "is so striking because by clearly referring to Isaiah 52:7 ('the feet of him that bringeth good tidings'), the entire congregation is here described as the bearer of good tidings."[101] He links this to 1 Peter 2:9, noting that the entire church is included; therefore, he deduces that mission includes the participation of the whole church. He sees this principle again in the epistles, where Paul addresses whole congregations (Phil 1:27; Eph 5:16; Col 4:5–6), implying that mission, like all NT commands, is not to be left to an exclusive few.[102] The importance of this exegetical principle, which is founded on an unstated implication from Scripture, is evident as he uses the principle of collective responsibility as a basis for the doctrine of elenctics from which he will further build on general revelation, soteriology, and even the working of the Holy Spirit.

Use of Extrabiblical Sources

Although Bavinck acknowledges presuppositions and makes efforts to communicate in a way open to correction, he nowhere delineates a systematic rubric detailing how his different sources relate or interact with one another. It bears examining how he integrates the different primary sciences he draws from in constructing his theological model.

Psychology

Though Bavinck does not define the term *psychology,* he most often ties it closely to the biblical concept of the soul.[103] On a personal level, his interest in psychology appears to be motivated by a genuine care and desire to understand human souls.

> It is precisely insight into the structure of the soul that can awaken in us that tender admiration for the soul's Grand Maker. At every point, there is a road leading from psychology to theology. Augustine puts it in a nutshell: *Deum et animam scire cupio*, God and my soul I desire to know. Few things in this world are more splendid than being allowed, with faith in God in the heart, to penetrate the depths of the soul.[104]

Bavinck's experience and previous doctoral work in psychology provided ample instructional wisdom to draw from in constructing his theology.

A keen understanding of human behavior and personality can enrich every stage of theological model construction. Bavinck's analysis of Romans 1 illustrates how he uses psychological terminology

[100] Bavinck, "Adaptation and Communication," 307.

[101] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 47.

[102] Ibid., 48.

[103] Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview,* 25.

[104] J. H. Bavinck, *Inleiding in de Zielkunde*, forward, 1926, quoted in Visser, 22.

in his exegesis of this passage to emphasize the relational nature of man.[105] Bavinck notes that Paul clearly does not merely have the intellectual content of the gospel in mind in Romans 1, honing in on the phrase "made to look" (ὁμοίωμα) as it pertains to identity and self-image.[106] Bavinck uses the contemporary psychological concept of "repression and substitution" to describe the human rebellion Paul is tracing.[107] The phrases "suppress the truth by their wickedness" and "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" in Romans 1 correspond precisely to how Bavinck experienced and understood the human behavior of repression and substitution, as pioneered by Freud.[108] This process of regression, as described in the Bible, became the basis of Bavinck's biblical theology of religious consciousness.

Visser notes that Bavinck captures the spirit of Paul's original intent in Romans 1 to use novel individualistic terminology, a break from the communal religious identity most people of the ancient world would have shared.[109] Similarly, in Luke 15:17 Bavinck likens the prodigal's "came to himself" to a shattering of a "pseudo stronghold," or a construction of self-identity, that leads him to his true identity as the son of the prodigal's father.[110] Bavinck shows how Scripture narrates man finding authentic security in a right relationship with God as false identities are shattered. In this way, Bavinck is contextualizing theology, staying true to the text's meaning while using modern categories to communicate it.

Bavinck's use of psychology, like his dialogue with theological counterparts, ultimately remains subject to biblical authority.[111] Put another way, his commitment to biblical authority shapes his methodology and created a distinctly theological psychology. When Bavinck speaks frequently about man's "deepest motives," "his essence," and anxiety in the "depths" of man, he is employing psychological concepts within a biblical discussion informed by the anthropology and principles of the biblical authors, not Freud, Skinner, or the like.[112] Genesis 2–3 and Romans 1 inform his worldview of the nature of man, leading him to reject any humanistic psychology not subject to Scripture's authority. In writing about the process of conversion, he reminds us that it is "a work of God beyond all psychological investigation."[113] Bavinck freely utilizes the science of psychology within the boundaries of what it could investigate.

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[105] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith*, 123, 127, 163, 167–68.

[106] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*, 242.

[107] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith,* 148. Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader,* 242.

[108] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith,* 122. Visser, 144–50.

[109] Ibid., 147.

[110] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 123.

[111] Ibid., 81. "It is impossible that psychology and ethnology should speak the last and decisive word with respect to the missionary approach. Other sciences can indeed render a most valuable service . . . but the principles of the missionary approach must still be derived from Scripture."

[112] Ibid., 123. "It is impossible to disentangle the threads of human life from the inside. We now approach the borders of all psychology. Psychology can unravel a few threads from the entangled whole. It can open our eyes to the ties and knots that keep the whole captive, but it can never uncover and lay bare the deepest and most basic grounds." Bavinck, *Faith and Its Difficulties,* 44.

[113] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 108–9.

History and Experience

Bavinck's works exhibit prolific use of historical sources throughout his exegesis and theological construction. To begin with, Scripture's accounting of history is assumed to be reliable, trustworthy, and factual. In his handbook on missions, the author begins with a survey of missions history, from Acts to Revelation. For Bavinck, church history begins in Acts, and its connection to nonbiblical church history is organic and inseparable.[114] For Bavinck, the foundation of all lived human history is the redemption history connected from the Bible to human experience.

Beyond using Scripture for historical information, Bavinck often cites biblical narratives as historical precedents for church practice, both for what is best and imitable and for mistakes to avoid. He also frequently cites examples from church history to urge the present church to shape its application of missions principles. In *SOM*, he cites Matthew 10 as evidence that the early church was "afraid of impostors." He then connects this conclusion to examples from eighteenth-century missions history to corroborate and illustrate it.[115] History is used primarily to furnish illustrations and examples in a didactic sense, showing what works and what does not in applying missiological principles.

Even more subtly, Bavinck draws implications from the NT by relying on contextual and cultural data. He concludes that Paul's actions, laboring alongside women and showing mercy to the slave Onesimus, are counter-cultural events that set a precedent for his principles of elenctics.[116] These conclusions can only be made based on extrabiblical historical information (which he unfortunately rarely, if ever, cites) that informs Bavinck of the significance of the original text.

Bavinck is aware of historical bias and the challenges of modern interpretation of ancient history. In *SOM*, he digests several perspectives on church and missions history that he considers open to error and various biases.[117] Bavinck's specialty in comparative religions engages him with a then ever-growing body of literature in the history of religions. Though he draws from the study of religions, he is also keen to point out its limitations and its tendency toward humanism.[118] Bavinck is unsatisfied with much of the continental research at the time, which, to him, does not match the lived religious experience of his context in Asia in particular but also his position on a universal human need for religion.[119] For Bavinck, the history-of-religions approach ignores the personal experience of religion and, in his estimation, is an incomplete science.[120] A genuine science of religion, therefore, must hold historical investigation and lived religious experience together rather than privileging one at the expense of the other.

For Bavinck, history is where the theory and principles taught are actualized and thus available for scientific inquiry. Without history, principles are vague and bodiless, and acquire shape only within

[114] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 81.

[115] Ibid., 98.

[116] Ibid., 93.

[117] Ibid., 277, 282. He offers the example of the teaching that certain races of humanity be excluded from the task of mission as founded on a false teaching of Scripture and a faulty view of history.

[118] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*, 66, 121.

[119] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 234.

[120] Bavinck, "Adaptation and Communication," 310.

the shared experiences of human history.[121] Bavinck regularly shares from a trove of missionary experiences, both personal and historical, throughout the section of his handbook on formulating principles for missions.[122] Yet, as Price points out, "Bavinck gives us some guidance from his missionary experience but does not try to legislate for us."[123] History and experience are tools to draw from, but they never dictate the direction or foundation of Bavinck's theological model of missions.

Bavinck is not satisfied with mere empirical facts of history alone. Citing Acts 17:28 and Psalms 33:13, he states that the purpose of history must not be lost. "The history of mankind is more than just a long account of what man has done, created, and invented; its deepest mystery is the story of God's concern with man and man's response to God's revelation."[124] For Bavinck, the history of missions can be adequately assessed only from the perspective of Scripture because ultimately all of human history will find its end and completion in the finality of redemption history.[125]

Distinctives of Bavinck's Theological Method

It would be superficial to label Bavinck only as either Reformed, missiological, or biblical. These labels are helpful but hardly descriptive enough to characterize his method or capture the nuance of his positions. The following descriptors, while not exhaustive either, identify some of the most instructive aspects of his theological method.

Diverse

Bavinck utilizes diverse theological sources, choosing to communicate the application of theology to a church audience beyond his own denomination.[126] This does not necessarily imply cooperation with or mixing non-evangelical views with evangelical ones. For this, the context of Bavinck's Reformed background and his position as a missionary must be taken into consideration. Many in his circles, such as his uncle Herman, the Reformed dogmatician, would hold Reformed positions narrowly with the same frequency and urgency as essential doctrines. It was not unusual for many to unapologetically take a strong stance on predestination in discussions of soteriology.[127] Since he was a

[121] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 280–81.

[122] Visser, 149.

[123] F. W. Price, "An Introduction to the Science of Missions," *Interpretation* 15, no. 3 (1961): 347.

[124] Bavinck, *Religious Consciousness and the Christian Faith*, 174. See also Bavinck, *Faith and Its Difficulties,* 56. Bavinck always saw a theological dimension to the entire history of the world, both biblical and extrabiblical.

[125] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 156, 280–81.

[126] One might even use the term *ecumenical* for such diversity. This term often carries a negative connotation associated with compromise of doctrine, but here it would be used in a much more subdued sense. Theologians could tend to write only to their base audience, but missiologists such as Bavinck's mentor Kraemer and Bavinck wrote in a way that intentionally sought evangelical audiences beyond their immediate denominational circles.

[127] A pertinent example is Bavinck's analysis of Romans 1:20. Compared to Kuyper, Calvin, and Herman Bavinck, he took a much softer interpretation of the preposition εἰς as a phrase of result instead of purpose. Visser proposes that this is an intentional avoidance of the doctrine of predestination, where Bavinck wished to focus on the doctrine of general revelation. Visser, 131.

missionary, it is not unrealistic to expect that Bavinck's views would be broader than those of his home church and that he would seek to communicate them to a broader audience.

Bavinck often cites the likes of Kraemer and others outside his typical Reformed theological orbit. At other times, it is obvious that Bavinck is willing to speak to a broader audience, being sensitive to what would likely have been taken for granted in his Reformed home church. "All of this is what Christian theology intends when in contrast with the doctrine of emanation it posits the conviction that the world has been created 'out of nothing.' To think that all puzzles have been solved by this would be foolhardy, for the concept of creation is extremely difficult to comprehend."[128] Bavinck maintains his Reformed roots but is not afraid to push back against certain propositions and to integrate a broader range of theological expertise.

Bavinck's theological construction does not aim solely to include a broad evangelical audience but, by its tone and selection of content, is non-confrontational. His model of theology is characterized by humility and openness, as seen in his acknowledgment of presuppositions and his earnest effort to contextualize effectively. Bavinck is attuned to the danger of unexamined presuppositions and gently reminds, "The danger of such a schema is always that you quickly think you now know how things are, that you imagine yourself to have understood life in dry and arid terms." Again, "The more deeply we think about the reality of life of the soul, the more we end up with puzzles. May all shallow rationalism be far from us."[129] Bavinck's humble upbringing comes through his method of scholarship and theology.

Developmental

Though all theologians experience some degree of shift, adaptation, or growth over time, Bavinck's writings show notable development after his time as a pastor-missionary in Indonesia. Several factors likely contributed to this, including his extensive learning from Hendrik Kraemer, whom he observed in cross-cultural ministry. Influenced significantly by Kraemer, Bavinck recognizes a pressing need amid waning enthusiasm for missions and theology in his home church.[130] This experience moves him to an approach that prioritizes a return to a whole-Bible foundation to guide science, systematic theology, and practical application.

Second, time in ministry focused on evangelization and discipleship for new believers requires thoroughly biblical and practical approaches, which likely leads Bavinck to recenter some of his earlier emphases. Many note a significantly more theological and biblically prolific writing in his later years with a somewhat subdued emphasis on psychology.[131] Bavinck's context at large includes an increasingly secular academy, a denomination losing zeal and missionary involvement, and the devastation of WWII, which cast despair on many hopes and radically altered global interactions

[128] Bavinck, *Temple and Mosque,* 327.

[129] Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview*, 58.

[130] Visser, 18.

[131] Ibid., 144.

among societies once intermingled. When Bavinck retired from missionary service at the beginning of the war, he made it clear that such carnage demanded a return to biblical solutions.

Cross-cultural ministry also likely sharpened and honed his communicative ability. The encounters with Eastern religions and worldviews, so vastly different from the Western audiences he had written to, likely contributed to his ecumenical and approachable manner. The book *Riddle of Life*, written shortly before the war, is a convicting evangelistic treatise that appeals to empirical and rational challenges from beginning to end. Bavinck's exclusive use of this more Western approach disappears from virtually all subsequent writings, indicating a maturation that considered a more universal, relational, and contextual rationale. Though rational thought and empirical evidence are always valid considerations in Bavinck's writing, his method of theology shows a significant shift toward prioritizing Scripture as the final authority of all theology.

Integrative

A consistently demonstrable characteristic of Bavinck's theological method is his integration of multiple disciplines. His life's work reflects his experience and expertise in anthropology, theology, missions, cross-cultural communication, and psychology. These works prove valuable across several fields as he often seamlessly weaves them together in each book. For example, Bavinck's university course "Contemporary Man" in the 1950s sought to analyze modern man in his time, with the aim of preaching the gospel more effectively and exercising pastoral care.[132] This reflects his ambition to methodically and scientifically integrate homiletics, exegesis, and contextualization of the gospel with the praxis of missiology.

To illustrate how Bavinck integrates separate disciplines in his theological construction, it seems best to dissect his treatment of Haggai 2:7 in relation to Bavinck's most apparent departure from Herman Bavinck, Voetius, and others in his Reformed circles. Bavinck reexamines the phrase "the desire of all nations," which many took to refer to the nations' desire for Christ and taught missionaries to seek cultural inroads to untapped Christological desires in non-Christian religions.[133] Bavinck thoroughly contradicts such an idea, declaring that the "redeemers and saviours about whom heathendom dreams are not types of what Christ is and would be, but they are saviours conjured by the fancy of men."[134] Bavinck's integrative approach critiques previous assumptions utilizing a multidisciplinary approach through history, experience, exegesis, and psychology.

First to note in Bavinck's exegesis is his use of history, most often citing Calvin. For this passage, he relates the history of Bible translation from the Vulgate and then uses Calvin's methodology to call into question the interpretive assumption of hidden Christology in non-Christian religions.[135] Next,

[132] Visser, 71.

[133] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 63. Thomas Aquinas, for example, taught a *principium internum*, an inner rule of religion that existed within man's rationality. This became standard teaching regarding humanity's anthropological makeup. Bavinck regularly dismantled then refined this idea on the basis that it is simply not found in Scripture. See Visser 136–44 for a summary.

[134] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 136.

[135] Visser, 86.

he cites his own experience and expertise in cultural anthropology concluding that empirical analysis will not reveal hidden Christology in the unreached.[136] Further, a thorough cross-canonical synthesis brings Acts 17, Genesis 3, and especially Bavinck's study of Romans 1 into the discussion.[137] The premise that Christology can be found in human religions appears to contradict what these passages reveal about the nature and position of natural man.[138] Lastly, we see Bavinck's reevaluation of Haggai 2:7 under lexical exegesis in the original languages. Extrabiblical cultural and literary studies suggest a different rendering of "the desire of all nations."[139] Though Bavinck does not normally demonstrate all these steps when utilizing Scripture, his example of Haggai 2:7 shows clear integration of many disciplines in what we can call the interdisciplinary approach.

As Bavinck integrates those findings with the employment of all the various sources mentioned, he can confidently assert that not only his uncle's interpretation of Haggai 2:7 (and the implied meaning of the fourth verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel") but also a major premise of Herman Bavinck's missiology and religious consciousness is misinformed and needs rebuilding. This test case demonstrates how Bavinck's extensive work overseas in Eastern religion and culture, along with his psychological insight, gave him valuable insights into often-overlooked nuances of the biblical text.

Dialectical

Bavinck rarely discusses dialectics as a theological method. Rather, dialectical thinking is more like a supporting theme that crops up in Bavinck's work, enabling him to address paradox and assert confidence in God's Word while holding two seeming contradictions in tension. One of the most significant of those tensions Bavinck works in is religious consciousness: "We have to be aware of the fact that every non-Christian religion is a common response to the unceasing activity of God in revelation. Therefore, every religion is in what we call a dialectical situation. God's work is behind it and in it, but, at the same time, it is man who is trying to evade Him."[140] A balanced method that approaches general revelation can rest in the complex nuance of both/and rather than either/or.

In exegetical quandaries, a dialectical approach synthesizes conclusions from across biblical theology. For example, it is a paradox that allows Bavinck to uphold the statement in Acts 17:23 that man "does not know" with his conclusions from Romans 1, where man is judged for his knowledge of God.[141] Bavinck coins the phrase about man that he is "a knower who does not know, a perceiver

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[136] J. H. Bavinck, *Inleiding in de Zielkunde* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1935), 203. "Life is different and the world is different. God is different and I too am different."

[137] Though Bavinck never names his own method as such, we can appropriately use the term *biblical theology* to describe his thematic approach.

[138] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 62–63.

[139] Bavinck views several related passages in their broader context and concludes they are all describing a specific time when the Messiah reveals himself to the Gentile nations. This observation erases the supports previously used to defend the Haggai 2:7 interpretation of an anthropological inner desire for God. Lastly, he points to several Bible translations that recognize the change from "the desire of all nations" to "treasures of all people," which Bavinck states refers to the gifts brought to Jerusalem at that time and not universally applied to Gentiles.

[140] Bavinck, "Adaptation and Communication," 312. Idem, *Science of Missions*, 244.

[141] Bavinck, *The Bavinck Reader*, 241–44.

who does not perceive."[142] Bavinck uses a similar balance to expound on the dialectical nature of the kingdom in its "already-not-yet" stage. Generally speaking, a dialectical mode of thinking allows Bavinck the patience to hold up complex theological ideas in tension.

Evaluation of Bavinck's Method

This paper has noted Bavinck's diverse contributions in the fields of psychology, anthropology, missiology, and non-Christian religions. It has also attempted to summarize the most significant distinctives of his method seen throughout the fields mentioned above. We have traced some comparisons between Bavinck and his peers, especially those in his immediate circle, such as Herman Bavinck, from whom he distanced himself slightly. Commentary and evaluation will now be limited to two separate areas under the umbrella of Bavinck's methodology. First, we will ask whether Bavinck's methodology and positions place him within either of the labels *contextual* or *missional* theological construction.[143] Second, we will examine how his choice of theological theme upholds his theological model.

Contextualization and Missional Approach

In his contribution to the multiview series, *Evangelical Theological Method,* Stanley Porter outlines five evangelical views of methodology, including the contextual approach, a methodology that ultimately affords human contexts the authority in providing theological categories.[144] Bavinck, well before this time, similarly emphasizes the importance of context for the effective communication of the gospel and for the interpretation of Scripture.[145] The Word, he says, did not become a "discourse," or "argument," but it became flesh. Along the lines of his emphasis on elenctics, where mission theory meets praxis, he expresses at length what might be considered a contextual approach:

> What we have just said is taught on every page of Scripture. God never speaks in the abstract, but he always addresses himself to real people. When God speaks to Abraham, he does not give utterance to a vague universal statement but to a concrete message directed to Abraham, in the particular circumstances in which he lived. And when God spoke through Moses to Pharaoh, his word was completely different, since it was directed to a completely different person. Jesus spoke in a different way to the Pharisees than to his converted disciples; Paul addressed himself differently to Festus than to the crowd at Lystra. The revelation of God does not hang in a vacuum, it is not an abstract universal truth that descended upon us, but God's revelation entered into our history.

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[142] Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 67.

[143] Porter and Studebaker, 24–26.

[144] Ibid., 99. Represented by Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, "Contextual Theology: God in Human Context" (93–115). Ezigbo contends that all theology is human construct and so all contexts must be authoritative. Though still orthodox in doctrine, this perspective ultimately makes human contexts the arbiter of at least some truth.

[145] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 82. "The first question that I ought to ask is: to whom am I bringing the gospel? It is perfectly clear that I speak to a child differently than I speak to an adult, that I tell a child a Bible story differently than to an adult."

> It took form and "dwelt among us." Those of us who would preach the Word of God to others cannot do otherwise than give the fullest recognition to the people to whom we address ourselves. We are ministers of Jesus Christ and the servant is not above his master.[146]

The above exposition not only demonstrates Bavinck's commitment to effective communication but also tips his hand in favor of the view that theology must inherently be conditioned by context.

Bavinck's statements strongly suggest an affinity with several points of contextual theology: that all theology must be conditioned by its context and that every culture will inevitably understand doctrines in terms of its own context.[147] He recognizes that no language was inherently "ready-made" for the gospel and would require some measure of retailoring.[148] Bavinck's missions methodology gives insightful advice to be sensitive to the cultural norms of Eastern contexts and to look favorably on sincere attempts of unbelievers to understand foreign concepts in their context.

> A strange, perhaps heretical-sounding expression by an Asian Christian can be the symptom of earnest, independent searching and reflection. It might be born from a genuine need to understand God's Word and to reflect on it from a person's typically eastern spiritual approach. In that case, it would be entirely wrong if we bluntly and insensitively objected to it. What is most important in such situations is that a genuine desire exists to be led by God's Word and to bow before the majesty of what that Word conveys to us. If that desire is present, I believe that we may endeavor to lead such people further down the road of true knowledge with complete confidence and discernment. And then we can also cherish the expectation that Christ's Spirit will gradually lead the churches of Asia more deeply into the truth of God's Word. At this time, then, I do not want first of all to assess the formulations of these eastern Christians critically or to weigh their orthodoxy for you. I will not trouble you by indicating whether they risk the danger of Patripassianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, or some other–ism. Our only concern this afternoon is to reckon with what grip these people have on the gospel and how they have been captivated by the adoration of Christ. [149]

Bavinck's theological method demonstrates a commitment to contextualizing the essential doctrines of the gospel, which depends on the target context.

So far, Bavinck's commitment to contextualization is hardly contradictory to either of the five views on the spectrum of contextualization. The crux of the debate concerning contextualization regards whether the gospel includes permanent, universal, and transcultural truths about God that are not determined by subjective human contexts.[150] In this light, one simply asks, "Does Bavinck believe

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[146] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 83.

[147] Ibid., 122, 132. "Any tending to rigidity, any static schematization is detrimental to mission. A place must always be left for variation."

[148] Ibid., 140.

[149] Bavinck, *Temple and Mosque*, 124.

[150] Porter and Studebaker, 105. "Theological universals will not suppress theological particulars."

the gospel must be altered to be understood and adapted to the diverse cultures he entered?" His perspective on non-Christian religions answered this already by concluding that non-Christian religions are in error and that confrontational repentance is a necessary element of contextualization.[151] "The gods of heathen worship are not God, but the product of human imagination. There is no direct uninterrupted path from the darkness of paganism to the light of the gospel."[152] To think that Bavinck in any way suggests gospel truth is flexible over time or in different contexts is to deny his entire work in the field of religious consciousness. Bavinck's position would align with contemporary contextual models that preserve an unalterable universal theology that is not directed by human context.

Later, Stanley observes that the contextualization approach especially values theology in contexts beyond a Western perspective.[153] On this point and others, the contextual label ought to fit Bavinck's sympathy for contextualized communication. Still, if a contextual approach fails to recognize an unchanging center of Christian faith across contexts, it is certainly uncharacteristic of Bavinck.[154]

> Our argument may begin with the ideas of our audience, it may be modest, friendly, polite, and cautious, but it may never omit the call to repentance. This is the truth in the expression that our point of contact exists in an antithesis. In other words, if those whom we would convert have already been busy with God, in the sense that God has done something with them, and they have done something with God, then the missionary can only call such people to abandon the old and accept what has been made new in Christ Jesus.[155]

Bavinck advocates a missional style of proclamation, supported by deeds of witness and contextualized to the circumstances. Yet he consistently returns to the conviction that objective scriptural truth means that confrontation of sin, repentance, and the preaching of Jesus as Savior cannot be removed or altered in gospel presentations.

Central Theological Motif

The kingdom of God serves as Bavinck's theological center, as evidenced by his frequent use of it as a rubric that unifies his biblical themes of mission, religion, and anthropology.[156] He states that the coming and extension of God's kingdom is the single purpose of God's glory, the church, and the conversion of sinners.[157] The kingdom of God is the backbone for Bavinck's understanding of redemption history, and so it upholds his interpretation of the Gospels and Acts regarding mission. Earlier, when addressing the question of where mission begins, Bavinck roots it firmly in the glory of

[151] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 137.

[152] Ibid., 136.

[153] Porter and Studebaker, 214. Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 133.

[154] Ibid., 149. "All gospel preaching, whether direct or polemic, must in one way or the other retain the character of what the Germans call an *auseinandersetzung*, a confrontation."

[155] Ibid., 138.

[156] Ibid., 157. "Mission work is concerned with the Gospel of the Kingdom."

[157] Ibid., 155.

God rather than in human need or compassion.[158] For him, the kingdom of God is what holds these two elements together—both necessary, yet ordered so that the glory of God remains primary.[159] In this way, the kingdom functions not merely as a theme in his writings but as the governing framework through which Bavinck holds mission, revelation, and human need in coherent theological balance.

The theology of the kingdom is not only an academic center; it is worth noting how his theology enters daily ministry life. Bavinck believes that, in light of his doctrine of elenctics, a comprehensive approach to the mission field was "unavoidable."[160] For Bavinck, this would mean that a missionary living as a Christian in a foreign context would see the needs of the people and, because of their innate "theocratic tendency" of wanting to see the perfect eschatological kingdom of God manifest in their lives and the lives of those around them, would be moved to meet them in some way.[161] By virtue of their presence and life in their midst, Christian servants are part of God's general revelation of his goodness and provision to a rebellious and sinful humankind. Put simply, Bavinck connects the pervasive biblical-theological theme of the kingdom as an overarching reality that the Christian would not only understand and know but also live out.

Since he was a missionary and missiologist, it would be tempting to put Bavinck under the "missional theology" tag.[162] Though Bavinck's theology of missions aligns with many biblical and pragmatic conclusions of missional theology, it is still subject to a higher priority. He sees the mission of God as subject to the glory of God; therefore, missions is subject to the kingdom of God. "The goal of our lives is not individual salvation, but rather becoming part of the wider context of the kingdom of God, where all things are again unified under the one and only all-wise will of him who lives and rules forever."[163] Accordingly, unlike many expressions of contemporary missional theology, Bavinck refuses to detach mission from the overarching dogmatic framework of God's glory and kingdom.

Conclusion

J. H. Bavinck's theological method stands as a testament to the enduring value of an integrative, biblically grounded, and contextually sensitive approach to theology and missiology. His life and work reveal a scholar deeply committed to the priority of Scripture while holding together the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and theology. Bavinck's insistence on the holistic nature of human beings provides a robust framework for addressing the complexities of religious consciousness, mission, and cross-cultural engagement. His method, marked by humility, openness to correction, and a dialectical posture toward paradox, offers a model for theologians and practitioners seeking to be faithful to Scripture and understand complex humanity beyond superficial propositions.

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[158] Bavinck, *Science of Missions,* 28.

[159] Ibid., 156.

[160] Ibid., 91.

[161] Bavinck, *Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World*, 37.

[162] Porter and Studebaker, 52–53. The missional theological approach is a distinctive theological method which sees the mission of God's people as an all-encompassing theme of Scripture, the purpose of theology, and the arbiter of theological method.

[163] Bavinck, *Beginning and End*, 35.

Bavinck is still relatively unknown. His priority for the local church, however, should make his writings extremely beneficial to missiologists and theologians today. His multidisciplinary life and work remain valuable in a theological world that has not lost interest in an interdisciplinary theological method. Though Bavinck lived during a tumultuous and rapidly changing time, he maintained a balance between contextualization and the unchanging truths of the gospel by rooting his missiological vision in the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom. In a theological landscape often marked by polarization and fragmentation, Bavinck's method offers a compelling vision for a theology that is diverse, developmental, integrative, and ultimately centered on the mission of God in the world.

John Foxe: Reporting and Shaping the History of the Reformation

by Mark Sidwell[1]

"Anybody can make history," said Oscar Wilde. "Only a great man can write it." That bit of tongue-in-cheek wit highlights an important truth: writers of history shape not only their work but also their audience. A good case in point is John Foxe, the historian, martyrologist, and some would say hagiographer who had an outsized impact on how English-speaking Protestants viewed the Reformation. His magnum opus, the *Acts and Monuments* (often better known in abridgements as "Foxe's Book of Martyrs") became one of the most influential products of the Protestant Reformation.[2] John Foxe did not simply chronicle the events of the Reformation; he acted as an agent to establish the Protestant position and worldview in the minds of his readers.[3]

The New Protestant Historiography

Arguments about the Bible and its theology were, of course, central to Protestant-Catholic conflicts, but arguments over history played a significant role as well.[4] Catholics thought an unanswerable question was that which a priest in Rome asked English diplomat Sir Henry Wotton: "Where was your religion to be found before Luther?" Wotton typified Protestant responses by replying, "My religion was to be found then, where yours is not to be found now, in the written Word of God."[5]

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[2] In a fashion typical of the sixteenth century, the full title of Foxe's work was *Acts and Monuments of the Latter and Perilous Days, Touching Matters of the Church, Wherein are Comprehended and Described the Great Persecutions & Horrible Troubles, that Have Been Wrought and Practiced by the Romish Prelates, Specially in this Realm of England and Scotland, from the Peace of Our Lord a Thousand, unto the Time Now Present.*

[3] This article uses Foxe's final 1583 edition of his work as found in the online edition, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online,* hereafter abbreviated *TAMO* 1583 (Sheffield, UK: HRI Online Publications, 2011), accessed July 13, 2026, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/. The spelling has generally been modernized. Among the best of the many abridgements are *Foxe's Book of Martyrs,* ed. G. A. Williamson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives*, Oxford World's Classics, ed. John N. King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[4] Although the major reformers did not write on history *per se,* their arguments reflected certain assumptions about history. See John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), and W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin's Interpretation of the Reformation," *EQ* 29, no. 1 (1957): 4–22. On the approach of English historians, see Glanmor Williams, *Reformation Views of Church History,* Ecumenical Studies in History (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1970), which includes a chapter on Foxe, 46–62.

[5] Izaak Walton, "The Life of Sir Henry Wotton," in *The Lives of Dr. John Donne; Sir Henry Wotton; Mr. Richard Hooker; Mr. George Herbert; and Dr. Robert Sanderson* (York: Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, 1796), 165–66, accessed July

Catholics used historical arguments to trace their church back through historical succession to the apostles while the reformers replied with arguments based on the Bible. Such an approach was consistent with the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura,* the authority of Scripture alone above all other authorities, including history. A common approach among Reformed leaders, classically laid out by Martin Bucer (1491–1551), the reformer of Strasbourg, was to identify what he saw as three biblical marks of the true church: the gospel rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and church discipline rightly practiced.[6]

Nonetheless, because Protestants believed a true look at history would vindicate their position, they also wrote historical apologetics. The preeminent example was a pioneer work under the general editorship of German Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–75) published in successive volumes from 1559 to 1574. Titled *Ecclesiastica Historia,* but commonly known as the *Magdeburg Centuries* (because it was published in the city of Magdeburg and followed a century-by-century organization), this massive work attempted to trace the history of the true church in opposition to Rome.[7] The effect of the *Magdeburg Centuries* and other such works was to create an interpretive grid in which every pre-Reformation opponent of Rome became in some sense a Protestant, despite whatever other views he or she might have held.

A more direct forerunner to Foxe was English writer John Bale (1495–1563), who published various attacks on Rome and gathered materials (e.g., the story of the martyr Anne Askew) for what he hoped would be a new Protestant history of England. Though his death ended the project, Bale inspired Foxe, and many of Bale's materials found their way into Foxe's history.[8] In addition, his

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13, 2026, https://archive.org/stream/izaakwaltonslive00walt#page/n7/mode/2up. As one modern writer puts it, to Protestants the "answer was, of course—in the Acts of the Apostles," in "the most primitive churches as established by Christ and the Apostles." David Daniell, "Tyndale and Foxe," in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective,* ed. David Loades (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 24.

[6] See Martin Bucer, "De Regno Christi," in *Melanchthon and Bucer,* ed. Wilhelm Pauck, vol. 19 in the Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 232–47. For secondary literature, see Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville, MO: Northeast Missouri State University, 1994), and Robert M. Kingdom, "Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Marks of the True Church," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History,* ed. E. Forrester Church and Timothy George (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 198–214. An example of this approach is article 29 of the Belgic Confession: "The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin." Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3:419–20. The three marks are also found in John Knox's First Scots Confession (1560), art. 18; see Schaff, *Creeds,* 3:461–62. It is worth noting that one of Foxe's earliest publications, from the reign of Edward VI, was on the question of discipline in the Church of England. See Catharine Davies and Jane Facey, "A Reformation Dilemma: John Foxe and the Problem of Discipline," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39, no. 1 (1988): 37–65.

[7] The single best source on the *Magdeburg Centuries* is Ronald Ernst Diener, "The Magdeburg Centuries: A Bibliothecal and Historiographical Analysis" (ThD dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, 2004), a massive study of the background, approach, and contents of the work. Much briefer but nonetheless succinct evaluations of the place of the *Centuries* in Christian historiography are found in Ferdinand Christian Baur, *On the Writing of Church History,* ed. and trans. Peter C. Hodgson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 79–105, and Robert L. Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (1971; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2025), 104–13.

[8] See Leslie P. Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976). See also chapter 3 of Williams, *Reformation Views of Church History,* 33–45.

writings on the theory of history, particularly his use of the Book of Revelation, foreshadowed Foxe's approach.[9]

Life of Foxe

Foxe's own life was one of physical and intellectual pilgrimage.[10] Born in 1517, Foxe became a student and fellow at Oxford (1534–45) but felt compelled to leave because his strong Protestant convictions were out of step with the current leadership. He served as a tutor for several years, and during the reign of King Edward VI he met John Bale and wrote his first works in support of the Reformation. The accession of the Catholic Queen Mary, however, forced Foxe like many other Protestants to flee to the continent as a "Marian exile." He lived in Frankfurt, Strasbourg, and Basel, working for a time with the exiled Scottish reformer John Knox.[11] Foxe also published a proto-edition of what would become the *Acts and Monuments* and eked out a living as a poorly paid proofreader. Following the death of Mary, Foxe returned to England in 1559. He published the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments* in 1563 and devoted much of the rest of his life to revising and expanding this work, publishing four editions (the last three in 1570, 1576, and 1583) in which he corrected mistakes he had discovered in previous editions and nearly doubling the length of his work between the first and second editions. Foxe died in 1587.

Movable-type printing was a major weapon in the Protestant arsenal against Rome. Johannes Gutenberg's development of this new "information superhighway" in the fifteenth century was a technological revolution comparable to the development of the Internet in the late twentieth century. It was not simply the posting but the publishing of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses that spread Luther's name and ideas across Europe. Foxe believed the invention of printing was providential, so that "by this one argument of printing, the bishop of Rome might understand the counsel and purpose of the Lord to work against him." Foxe wrote "that almost how many printing presses there be in the world so many blockhouses there be against the high castle of St. Angelo. So that either the pope must abolish knowledge and printing, or printing at length will root him out."[12]

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[9] See *John Bale's "The Image of Both Churches,"* ed. Gretchen E. Minton (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013). For a summary of the interpretation of Revelation as a guide to history in medieval and early Reformation times as well as Bale's use of this approach, see Fairfield, 61–85.

[10] Most books on Foxe concentrate on his writing more than his biography. For the life of Foxe, see the first part of J. F. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (1940; repr., New York: Octagon Books, 1970). For a convenient overview of his life, see Tom Freeman, "John Foxe: A Biography," *TAMO,* Essays, accessed July 13, 2026, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/index.php?realm=more&type=essay. Also consult Thomas Freeman, "John Foxe" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 695–709, as well as the full chronology in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives,* xlix–lviii. The notes in this article will highlight the many useful sources on Foxe's work, but a very good, concise evaluation of Foxe's contribution as a historian is Donald T. Williams, "John Foxe," in *Historians of the Christian Tradition,* ed. Michael Bauman and Martin I. Klauber (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 117–38.

[11] For details of Foxe's time with Knox, see Mozley, 44–46.

[12] *TAMO* 1583, 732.

The Plan of Foxe's Work

Although the *Magdeburg Centuries* have never been translated from Latin into English, readers can discover the gist of the Centuriators' approach in the work of Foxe. He relied on the *Centuries* as one of his resources in writing the *Acts and Monuments,* particularly for matters from earlier centuries beyond England. In both general approach and its details, the *Centuries* provided Foxe a valuable guide. But the *Centuries* covered only to 1298, and Foxe brought the story up to his own time. Foxe not only popularized this approach to history in English but also expanded the chronological scope.

Although his work has often been called a martyrology and is often called "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" in abridgements, Foxe intended to write a history.[13] The *Acts and Monuments* was rooted in the tradition and literature of Protestant martyrology, to which Foxe himself contributed during his continental exile,[14] but his approach was broader. More than just a martyrology, Foxe's book encompassed the history of the entire church, "the whole state and course of the Church in general."[15] Foxe may be said to have written a comprehensive history although with a strong emphasis on martyrdom. He recounted his story in part by reproducing numerous original documents. In fact, the "monuments" referred to in his title are not only testimonies of the martyrs but also documents, which are so numerous that they make Foxe's work read at times like a historical sourcebook.

What were these documents? Mark Breitenberg notes that "nearly every form of written document known to the Renaissance appears somewhere in Foxe's collection," including declarations from the crown, acts of Parliament, legal proceedings, sermons, accounts of ecclesiastical visitations, records of the investigation of alleged heretics, and speeches. Church registers were a major source, and likewise letters, some written to Foxe personally.[16] For some martyrs such as John Rogers and Anne Askew, Foxe had first-person narratives by the martyrs themselves that had been smuggled out of prison. Despite his diligence, Foxe tended to be overly trusting of his sources. Mozley says that when Foxe came across incredible details "in the printed books of the continental historians or in the manuscripts of his English informants, he swallow[ed] them without difficulty."[17]

Foxe set his theme early in the work by applying the words of Christ from Matthew 16:18, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Foxe drew three points from this verse, first "that Christ will have a Church in this world," second "that the same Church should mightily be impugned" by "the world"

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[13] The first abridged edition came out in 1589, only six years after Foxe's final edition and two years after his death. See Margaret Aston and Elizabeth Ingram, "The Iconography of the *Acts and Monuments*," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation,* ed. David Loades (Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar, 1997). 78.

[14] See Alec Ryrie, "The Unsteady Beginnings of English Protestant Martyrology," in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective,* 52–53. Thomas S. Freeman and David Scott Gehring, "Martyrologists Without Boundaries: The Collaboration of John Foxe and Heinrich Pantaleon," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69, no. 4 (2018): 746–67, discusses different martyrologists contemporary with Foxe, noting how Foxe used them, particularly the work of Heinrich Pantaleon for continental martyrs.

[15] *TAMO* 1583, 24.

[16] Mark Breitenberg, "The Flesh Made Word: Foxe's 'Acts and Monuments,'" *Renaissance and Reformation* 13, no. 4 (1989), 387.

[17] Mozley, 163–64.

and the "powers of all hell," and third "that the same Church . . . should continue." Foxe saw in history the validation of all three points, so that "the whole course of the Church to this day, may seem nothing else but a verifying of the said Prophecy." In particular the church's triumph in persecution showed "how the said Church all this notwithstanding hath yet endured & holden his own."[18]

In this passage Foxe displayed the guiding ideas not only of his own work but also of Protestant historiography in general, emphasizing both the perpetuity and the persecution of the church. Also implicit was another key notion, the idea of the remnant. This theme of the remnant recurs in the OT in reference to the preservation of Israel (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 19:29–31; Ezra 9:7–9; Isa 10:20–22; Jer 23:3–4). Paul applies the concept to the Jews from the story of Elijah in 2 Kings 19 (Rom 11:1–5), concluding, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Protestant historians applied this idea of the remnant to Christians, arguing that the perpetuity of the church meant that there must always be true believers in every age no matter how dark the circumstances might be. As Foxe himself wrote, "In Christ's time who would have thought, but the congregations and Counsels of the Pharisees had been the right church: and yet had Christ another Church in earth besides that, which albeit it was not so manifest in the sight of the world, yet was it the only true Church in the sight of God."[19]

Foxe divided the history of the church into five periods, each with a distinctive character. The first three hundred years of the church from the time of Christ and the apostles was "the suffering time of the Church" under Roman persecution. Then followed three hundred years of "flourishing." Next came three hundred years of "declining or backsliding," followed by four hundred years of the "time of Antichrist and loosing of Satan," typified by Popes Gregory VII (1073–85) and Innocent III (1198–1216), to the time of Wycliffe and Huss. Fifth and last was an era of reformation stretching from 1300 to Foxe's own day, and "how long shall continue more, the Lord and governor of all times, he only knows."[20] Within this broad framework he identified other important epochs. In line with his historicist interpretation of Revelation (discussed below), he reckoned the millennium from the "ceasing of persecution" under Constantine resulting in the "flourishing" he described. The loosing of Satan appears to overlap with the thousand years.[21] Likewise, following a common scheme of interpretation, Foxe numbered the Roman persecutions of Christians at ten.[22]

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[18] *TAMO* 1583, 24.

[19] Ibid., 11.

[20] Ibid., 24.

[21] Ibid., 24. Foxe revised his dates in different editions. Royal notes how Foxe reckoned the end of the millennium as 1000 in the first edition and 1294 in the second edition. Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation: History, Radicalism, and John Foxe Politics,* Politics, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2020), 28. In contrast to many dissenters and Protestants who criticized the church-state alliance based on Constantine's policies (e.g., the Waldensians, Anabaptists, etc.), Foxe viewed the "godly Constantine" as a hero and deliverer. *TAMO* 1583, 57.

[22] The concept of ten Roman persecutions goes back at least to the time of Augustine (*City of God* 18.52). Foxe, like many writers, credits the number ten to Eusebius. The idea apparently does not come from Eusebius, however. See "Persecutions of Christians," *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature,* ed. John McClintock and James Strong (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), 7:965. Schaff dates the interpretation to the fifth century. Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity,* vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980),

The Nature of Foxe's Work

One can liken Foxe's work to hagiography, the writing of saints' lives, if that label is qualified. Foxe was more scrupulous in his sources than medieval hagiography. As Daniell says, "Foxe's colossal volumes are Protestant saints' lives with documentation."[23] Kathrin Reist points out that Foxe actually included a calendar of saints in his first and fourth editions, and she also theorizes that writings about the saints such as the ones Foxe preserved took the place of Catholic relics in recalling and memorializing them.[24] In general Foxe replaced Catholic hagiography with edifying history, replacing Catholic miracles with "providences" of the working of God. Like hagiography, but following his own pattern, Foxe tended to use hagiographic conventions in language and structure, such as martyrs not feeling pain or their giving formulaic responses at the time of execution.

As a Christian historian, Foxe adopted a theological framework based on what he saw as biblical patterns. One reason Foxe stressed suffering and martyrdom was that he saw persecution as a sign of the true church according to the Bible (cf. John 15:20; Gal 4:29; 2 Tim 3:12). As with many Christian historians, particularly in the precritical era, Foxe's views on biblical prophecy affected his approach to history. His scheme of history derived partly from the apocalyptic portions of the Bible such as Daniel and especially the Book of Revelation.[25] One can see the imagery from Revelation even on the title page of his work, which portrays several scenes from that book (see figure 1). Foxe held a historicist, as opposed to a futurist, view of prophecy, that is, he did not think prophecy related to events future to him but that it rather described events of the past in symbolic form,[26] calling Revelation "a Prophetical history of the Church."[27] For instance, he thought the two witnesses described in Revelation 11:3–5 were John Huss and Jerome of Prague.[28] As mentioned earlier, he viewed Constantine and the founding of Christendom as the beginning of a thousand-year millennium (based on Rev 20:2–7) that stretched to John Wycliffe. This period saw blessings and the spread of the gospel, seen in the establishment of Christian states. In line with this passage, Foxe thought the era of Wycliffe occurred during a loosing of Satan, as seen in the corruption of and persecution by the papacy. One writer suggests that this tendency in Foxe deepened over time, with a growth of anxiety

33–34. Among the Scripture "proofs" for numbering the persecutions as ten are the ten plagues on Egypt, the ten days of persecution prophesied for the church at Smyrna (Rev 2:10), and the ten horns of the beast (Rev 17:12).

[23] David Daniell, "Tyndale and Foxe," in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective,* 24. "Colossal" is a fair description. In the last printed complete edition (printed mid-nineteenth century and reprinted in 1965), the work ran to eight hefty two-column volumes.

[24] Kathrin Reist, "Writing the Relic, Fetishising the Written: John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments,*" *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 12, no. 2–3 (2010): 294–95, 297–98.

[25] At the time of his death he left an uncompleted commentary on Revelation, which his family published posthumously. See Mozley, 113–14. As mentioned earlier, Foxe's predecessor John Bale also wrote a book on Revelation, which likely influenced Foxe, treating the book as a symbolic history of the church.

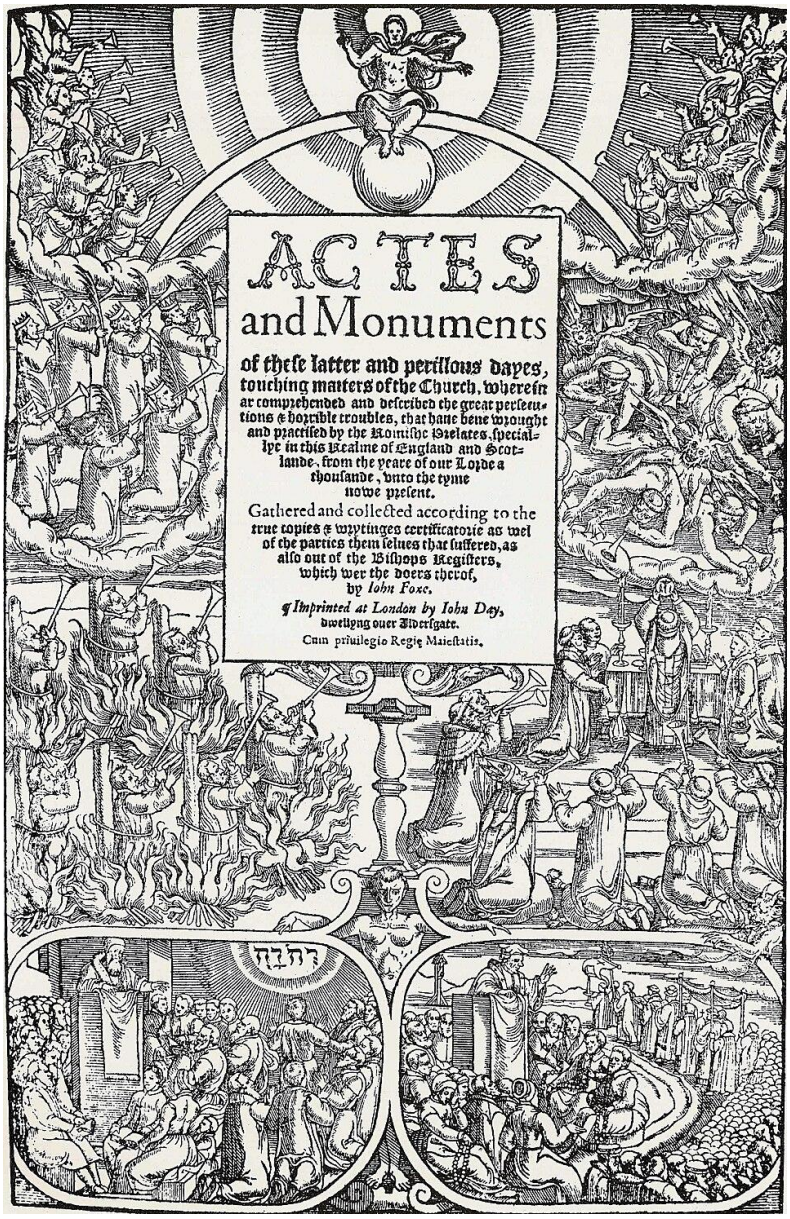
[26] Andrew Penny, "John Foxe, the *Acts and Monuments* and the Development of Prophetic Interpretation," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation,* 257–62.

[27] *TAMO* 1583, 18.

[28] Thomas Fudge, "Jan Hus as the Apocalyptic Witness in John Foxe's History," *Communio Viatorum* 56, no. 2 (2014): 161–62.

and pessimism from the first to the second edition of the *Acts and Monuments,* from "prophetic" to "apocalyptic," because the Elizabethan era did not prove as glorious as many Protestants had hoped.[29] Other parts of the Bible influenced him as well, such as the Book of Acts. Foxe often used biblical parallels in structuring his accounts, as in how he shaped the story of Tyndale after the model of Acts.[30]

Figure 1. Title Page of *Acts and Monuments*



[29] Tom Betteridge, "From Prophetic to Apocalyptic: John Foxe and the Writing of History," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation,* 213–18.

[30] David Daniell, "Tyndale and Foxe," in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective,* 18–19, 24–25. He notes on page 19, e.g., the parallels between the death of Tyndale and his dying declaration and the account of Stephen's death in Acts 7:59–60.

Another influence that Foxe freely admitted was the early church historian Eusebius (c. 260–339), who provided not only source material but also a pattern for writing. Foxe followed the broad Christian tradition of a linear approach, found in Eusebius and particularly in Augustine, in seeing a progressive direction and purpose in history.[31] Specifically, "Foxe found in Eusebius a model for historical writing that foregrounds the dramatic role of martyrs while also emphasizing the stable textual documentation provided by the written record of ecclesiastical history."[32] In structure, the two works were parallel in highlighting the persecutions of Diocletian and Queen Mary followed by the relief and blessing of Constantine and Queen Elizabeth, respectively.[33] A key difference between the writers was Eusebius's focus on the history of the true church while Foxe recounted the story of two churches (false and true), a difference illustrated by Eusebius's hesitations about the Book of Revelation and Foxe's extensive use of that book as a model.[34]

The Scope of Foxe's History

It is significant that Foxe wrote *church* history and thereby differed from much of the historical work done in his own day and previously. As Collinson notes, Foxe's history was not simply "past politics," the accounts of rulers and wars as was common with histories dating back to the beginning of the discipline such as Herodotus's history of the Persian Wars and Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. Foxe recognized the different character of his approach: "For doubtless such as these [martyrs] are more worthy of honour than hundred Alexanders, Hectors, Scipios and warlike Iulies [Julius Caesars]."[35] Rather Foxe offered "a kind of social history, history from the wrong side of the tracks."[36] Foxe wrote about common people, about theology and religion, in other words, about topics uncommon in most histories of the time. Admitting that other historians focused on "matters of policy, and rejoice to behold therein the variable events of worldly affairs, the Stratagems of valiant captains, the terror of foughten fields, the sacking of Cities, the hurly-burly of Realms and people," Foxe asked "how much more then is it meet for Christians to conserve in remembrance the lives, Acts and doings, not of bloody warriors, but of mild and constant Martyrs of Christ, which serve not so much to delight the ear, as to garnish the life, to frame it with examples of great profit, and to encourage men to all kinds of Christian godliness?"[37]

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[31] Patrick Collinson, "John Foxe as Historian," *TAMO,* Essays, accessed July 13, 2026, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/index.php?realm=more&gototype=&type=essay&book=essay3.

[32] Gretchen E. Minton, "'The Same Cause and Like Quarell': Eusebius, John Foxe, and the Evolution of Ecclesiastical History," *Church History* 71, no. 4 (2002): 718.

[33] Minton, "The Same Cause," 722.

[34] Ibid., 740–41. Eusebius devoted a large part of his history to answering heresy, but he did not give heresy the status of an institution, as Foxe did with the Catholic Church.

[35] *TAMO* 1583, 15.

[36] Collinson, "John Foxe as Historian."

[37] *TAMO* 1583, 15. In this emphasis, Foxe may be again following the model of Eusebius, who contrasted his work with histories of physical wars to "make indelible the wars fought for the peace of the soul and the man who battled courageously in such wars for truth rather than country, piety rather than family." *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1. Eusebius, *The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary,* ed. and trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

In his version of social history, writing about commoners rather than just elites, Foxe anticipated later developments in historical writing. As Hickerson notes, there are elements of modern women's history in his writing, because he described the martyrdom of independent-minded women who did not fit contemporary paradigms of femininity.[38] Bainton points out that Foxe "tells us more about the women of the Reformation in England than does any other source."[39]

Foxe's scope extended beyond church history in other ways as well. By focusing so much on his homeland, for example, Foxe may be said to have provided a comprehensive history of England. Foxe took English history back to the legend of Joseph of Arimathea introducing Christianity to the British Isles and organized much of his narrative in the Middle Ages around English monarchs.[40] William Haller takes this emphasis even further, arguing that Foxe popularized the idea that God had nourished England as he did Israel to preserve and defend his truth. England and particularly the Church of England served as bastions of the Protestant cause. Haller says that Foxe fostered an English consciousness of the nation as the New Israel.[41]

Controversies over Foxe's History

Foxe's enormous influence led to intense scrutiny of his work. There has been no shortage of critics since the time of the initial publication of the *Acts and Monuments*. Catholics, of course, contested the work from the beginning,[42] but other writers indicted Foxe on more purely historical grounds. As Collinson notes, "If not the father of lies, Foxe was thought to be the master of inventions."[43] A particularly influential critic was S. R. Maitland, who was the first to launch an attack from the perspective of a professional historian. In the nineteenth century, Maitland wrote a devastating series

[38] Megan L. Hickerson, "Gospelling Sisters 'Goinge up and downe': John Foxe and Disorderly Women," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no. 4 (2004): 1035–51. She illustrates how Foxe included "disorderly women," such as Anne Askew and Alice Dryver, although she argues that Foxe presented them as submissive to their "heavenly spouse" in order to dampen any controversy over their behavior.

[39] Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), 211. See chapter 12, "John Foxe and the Women Martyrs," 211–29, which provides a survey and summary of not only Foxe's accounts of women martyrs but also other women significant to the Reformation. Ellen Macek, "The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in *The Book of Martyrs,*" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 1 (1988): 62–80, provides a good enumeration and analysis of Foxe's portrayals of female martyrs, but her main focus is how these women experienced feminist empowerment and found ways to reimagine God in a manner more acceptable to feminist sensibilities.

[40] Thomas S. Freeman, "'The Reik of Maister Patrik Hammyltoun': John Foxe, John Winram, and the Martyrs of the Scottish Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 1 (1996): 43–60, also discusses how Foxe reported on Scottish martyrs, even though he never visited Scotland, and was an important contributor to Scottish history and martyrology.

[41] William Haller, *The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Haller's ideas have provoked discussion, but not all interpreters agree with his analysis. He does, however, unquestionably demonstrate the emphasis that Foxe placed on English history.

[42] See, e.g., William Eusebius Andrews, *A Critical and Historical Review of Fox's Book of Martyrs, Shewing the Inaccuracies, Falsehoods, and Misrepresentations in that Work of Deception* (1824; repr., N.p.: Kessenger, n.d.). Mozley, 175–80, describes the work of two Catholic critics nearly contemporary to Foxe, Nicolas Harpsfield and Robert Parsons.

[43] Collinson, "John Foxe as Historian."

of studies accusing Foxe not only of bias but also of shoddy historical research and writing.[44] J. F. Mozley in *John Foxe and His Book* (1940) restored Foxe's reputation, admitting Foxe's bias but demonstrating both the accuracy and care Foxe took in his work as well as the weaknesses of some of Maitland's arguments. Furthermore, Mozley noted that many of Maitland's valid criticisms reflected the editions of Foxe available in the nineteenth century, not the original work. Later editors had altered Foxe, introducing some of the errors that Maitland and other critics objected to.[45]

Foxe was unquestionably partisan, but he was never a deliberate falsifier.[46] Foxe wrote, "I protest to you . . . and to all the world there is never a lie in all my book."[47] However, some of his narratives of early church history are certainly based on legendary sources and probably undependable, although he reported his sources faithfully. It is with Wycliffe, the Lollards, and particularly his own times (especially events in England) that Foxe becomes more reliable. As Bauer notes, Foxe's historical value is almost entirely limited to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[48] For this period, as mentioned earlier, Foxe was able to use records and personal reminiscences he had gathered and scrutinized, such as official ecclesiastical records. After working through some of the source material still available in order to double-check Foxe's work, Bauer concludes, "An impartial investigation of the *Acts and Monuments* leads one to the conclusion that in his martyrologies Foxe has given a fairly accurate description of a horrible episode in the history of civilization."[49]

Still, Foxe made errors. The very size of his endeavor virtually guaranteed Foxe would make mistakes. He admitted his limitations but pleaded the pressures of his task: "But here partly I hear what you will say: I should have taken more leisure and done it better. I grant and confess my fault, such is my vice. I can not sit all the day . . . fining and mincing my letters."[50]

Foxe's emphasis on violence, both in the text and in the often gruesome woodcuts that illustrated his history, added to the controversy over his work. The violence portrayed in Foxe's work resulted from his theological views, not his personal taste. The very violence of the accounts points to the

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[44] See, e.g., S. R. Maitland, *Twelve Letters on Fox's Acts and Monuments, Originally Published in the British Magazine, During the Years 1837 & 1838* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841), accessed July 13, 2026, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t8rb7mk4x&seq=7. For an evaluation of Maitland's criticisms, see David Loades, "The Maitland Controversy," *TAMO,* Essays, accessed July 15, 2026, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/index.php?realm=more&gototype=&type=essay&book=essay11. Loades concludes about Maitland, "Foxe's most damaging nineteenth century critic thus deserves to be treated with genuine, but limited, respect."

[45] David Loades, "Introduction," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation,* 10. The standard published version from the nineteenth century, which is also the basis of many modern reprints, was not a critical text but instead contained editorial insertions and deletions. It was this situation that inspired the compiling of the modern Internet edition.

[46] "Foxe never made anything up." Collinson, "John Foxe as Historian."

[47] *TAMO* 1583, 607.

[48] Walter Bauer, "Foxe's Martyrs," *Church History* 3, no. 4 (1934): 250.

[49] Bauer, 266.

[50] *TAMO* 1583, 604. Mozley, 152–74, devotes a chapter to Foxe's "Method" in which he acknowledges inaccuracies in the historian's work, although often with some exculpation. To cite one case study, in his study of heresy trials John Fines adds an appendix comparing Foxe's account of persecution in Coventry with more recently discovered records. He notes various errors of detail in Foxe but recognizes the overall accuracy in the account. John Fines, "Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1511–12," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14, no. 2 (1963): 173–74.

historic oppression of the true church by the false. The violence is "not for the love of gore" but is rather evidence of the "testimony to the truth of the one and the diabolical falsity of the other." Williams notes, "For Foxe, then, the blood of the martyrs is not only the seed of the church but also its sign."[51] Personally, Foxe was much more irenic than his reputation as a martyrologist might suggest. In a letter to Queen Elizabeth, Foxe said he abhorred bloodshed and violence so that "I can scarce pass the shambles where beasts are slaughtered, but that my mind secretly recoils with a feeling of pain."[52] He opposed execution for heresy, and if the government mandated execution, then it should be by a more merciful means than burning.[53]

Historians are no better than their sources. Foxe wrote according to the sources he had available. For the pre-Reformation centuries he used whatever came to hand, often secondary works. Even a supporter such as Mozley admits, "From our point of view his stories of the pre-Wycliffe ages and of the continental reformers of the sixteenth century count for little or nothing. They have no first-hand value; they are simply based on previous writers whose works are open to us."[54]

Foxe as Historian of the Reformation

The question of Foxe's sources nonetheless demonstrates a strength of his work: his pioneer efforts as a historian of the Reformation. For his own age Foxe had numerous sources of good quality so that his history provided the first comprehensive history of the English Reformation. Although many modern historians dispute his interpretations and conclusions and question many details, they still have to reckon with Foxe as their starting point, the position which they must either dissent from or agree with. Foxe, for example, argued that Wycliffe was the beginning of the English Reformation,[55] following John Bale's description of Wycliffe as the "morning star."[56] Often writers use the imagery of the morning star to liken Wycliffe to Venus as it rises over the horizon before dawn to anticipate the coming of day. So Wycliffe presaged the Reformation by his teachings and actions, such as translating the Bible into English.[57] Bale took the image specifically from Ecclesiasticus 50:6–7 in the Apocrypha, which calls Simon the high priest, son of Onias, the morning star. Foxe used this same imagery, saying of Wycliffe that during an era of "lamentable ignorance and darkness," Wycliffe "stepped forth like a valiant champion, unto whom it may justly be applied that is spoken in the book called Ecclesiasticus of one Simon the son of Onias. Even as the morning star being in the midst of a cloud, & as the Moone being full in her course, and as the bright beams of the Sunne, so doeth he shine and glister in

[51] Williams, *Historians of the Christian Tradition,* 130.

[52] Quoted in Mozley, 87.

[53] See John Thomas McNeill, "John Foxe: Historiographer, Disciplinarian, Tolerationist," *Church History* 43, no. 2 (1974): 222–23.

[54] Mozley, 152. He does note that one might justify the publication of these secondary accounts at the time because the works were inaccessible to English audiences (153).

[55] See Austin C. Dobbins, "Foxe, Wicliff, and the Church of England," *Review & Expositor* 52, no. 1 (1955): 63–83.

[56] Margaret Aston, "John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation," *Past & Present* no. 30 (April 1965): 24–25.

[57] See, e.g., Stephen Nichols, "The Morning Star of the Reformation," Ligonier Ministries, accessed July 13, 2026, https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/morning-star-reformation.

the temple and Church of God."[58] In fact, in his initial plan and the earliest editions of his work Foxe used Wycliffe as the starting point of his history and only later expanded his reach to the early church.[59]

Foxe likewise promoted the idea that the Lollards, Wycliffe's followers, were not only forerunners of the Reformation but also a bridge to the Reformation. On a basic level Foxe assembled the story of the Lollards into a coherent narrative that fit into his overall scheme of church history. Moreover, as Susan Royal argues, Foxe redeemed the Lollard reputation from rebels to "models" and "spiritual forebears."[60]

One can see the effects of Foxe's rehabilitation of the Lollards in his treatment of Sir John Oldcastle (Lord Cobham), one of the few nobles who backed the Lollard cause. Oldcastle had served both Henry IV and Henry V, but his Lollard views led to his arrest by Henry V. After escaping, Oldcastle led a rebellion against the king, which in turn led to his execution. In Foxe's telling, however, Oldcastle's death resulted not from treason but from his religious views.[61] So widespread did this revised account of Oldcastle become that it led to trouble for William Shakespeare. In the original version of his play *Henry IV (Part 1),* Shakespeare had taken the name of Oldcastle from one of his sources and made him the scapegrace, carousing companion of Prince Hal. Identifying a hero of the faith with such a character led to protest, so Shakespeare changed the character's name to Sir John Falstaff.[62] Shakespeare even added an epilogue to *Henry IV (Part 2)* in which the narrator says that in any sequels "for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr and this is not the man."[63]

In the Reformation era itself, Foxe preserved and propagated the story of Bible translator William Tyndale, whom Foxe called "the Apostle of England in this our latter age."[64] Foxe's account demonstrates how he was more than a martyrologist, for he provided a full biographical sketch of Tyndale.[65] For example, Foxe included Tyndale's famous reply to a cleric who said the pope's laws were more important than God's: "'I defy the Pope and all his laws': and further added, that if God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the

[58] *TAMO* 1583, 448. G. H. W. Parker says that apparently the first to identify Wycliffe clearly as the "morning star *of the Reformation*" was historian of the Puritans Daniel Neal (1678–1743). Parker nonetheless acknowledges Foxe's earlier usage (and implicitly, Bale's). G. H. W. Parker, *The Morning Star: Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 56fn.

[59] Mozley, 118–19.

[60] Susan Royal, *Lollards in the English Reformation,* 4. Royal makes even more extensive claims of the impact of Foxe in that he preserved "radical" ideas in his presentation of Lollards, ideas that later fed English nonconformity and fueled theological divisions and controversies.

[61] *TAMO* 1583, 581–609.

[62] See John Julius Norwich, *Shakespeare's Kings: The Great Plays and the History of England in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 139–40.

[63] *Henry IV (Part 2),* Epilogue.

[64] *TAMO* 1583, 1099.

[65] Mozley, 169–74, gives a full description of the development of Foxe's portrayal of Tyndale, describing the sources Foxe used and the revisions he made with each edition. Foxe's main account of Tyndale's career is found in *TAMO* 1583, 1099–1106.

Scripture, then he did."[66] Likewise, Foxe wittily recounts the story of selling Tyndale's New Testaments to the bishop of London. An early printing of the testaments contained numerous errors that Tyndale wanted to correct, but he lacked the funds for a new edition. In stepped merchant Augustine Packington who arranged to sell the defective testaments to the bishop, who wanted to burn them. As a result, Foxe reported, "the Bishop of London had the books, Packington had the thanks, and Tindall had the money."[67] Without Foxe we probably would remember the contribution of Tyndale's translation work but would perhaps be less likely to recall him as a Protestant hero.[68]

Foxe's work also had a larger impact on historical understanding. King says, "Foxe was notable not so much for his truthfulness, but for his masterly ability to construct powerful myths."[69] "Myth" here does not mean fiction but rather an account that creates a larger symbolism for interpreting events. In this sense a myth is a framework that shapes how an individual or a group thinks about something and creates a shared sense of history.[70] Foxe was likely responsible for the reputation of Mary Tudor as "Bloody Mary," although he never used the potentially offensive adjective "bloody" for her as he did for her henchmen.[71] Through his portrayal of Mary's reign particularly, he created fear and revulsion toward the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, he helped promote the idea of Elizabeth as "Good Queen Bess" the agent of the Protestant deliverance, rallying English support to her reign.

With his story-telling skills, Foxe wove into the narrative of Reformation history many now familiar accounts and incidents. In perhaps the most famous of his accounts of the Marian martyrs, he recorded Bishop Hugh Latimer saying to his fellow martyr Nicholas Ridley before their execution, "Be of good comfort master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as (I trust) shall never be put out."[72] There is also the memorable portrayal of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer at his execution thrusting first into the fire the hand that had previously signed a recantation of his faith. The dramatic impact of such scenes is hard to match.

Not to be overlooked are the woodcuts that illustrated the *Acts and Monuments.* Numbering over one hundred, the woodcuts underscored Foxe's theme of the suffering of the true church, communicating Foxe's message even to the illiterate.[73] Graphically, they reinforced the narrative, as in

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[66] *TAMO* 1583, 1100.

[67] Ibid., 1043.

[68] Mozley reports that he accepted the predominantly negative views of Foxe's work current in his own day until he began to investigate the life of William Tyndale. He found Foxe far more trustworthy about Tyndale than he had been led to believe, and the experience sparked his research into Foxe's work (Mozley, v). This incident resembles the experience of William Ramsay, who accepted critical views of Luke and the Book of Acts until his own researches convinced him of the dependability of Luke. See William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (1911; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 35–52.

[69] John N. King, "Introduction," in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives,* xxvi.

[70] See the discussion in C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics,* ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 63–67.

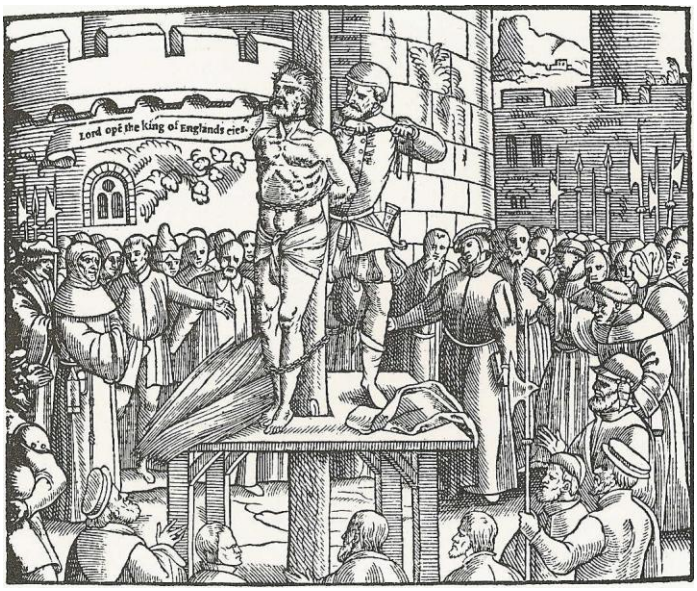
[71] Haller, 187, in fact argues that he provided the first comprehensive factual and interpretive history of Mary's reign.

[72] *TAMO* 1583, 1794.

[73] See O. T. Hargrave, "Tools for Bloody Mary's Victims: The Iconography of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51, no. 1 (1982): 7–21.

the portrayal of William Tyndale at the stake uttering his final words: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes" (see figure 2). When English-speaking homes kept versions of Foxe's works (often alongside the King James Version of the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*), the woodcuts taught children his lessons before they could comprehend the text, even serving as a form of entertainment in that pre-electronics age. Sir Francis Drake, for example, filled in the time on his circumnavigation of the world by coloring in the woodcuts.[74]

Figure 2. The Execution of William Tyndale



Conclusion

The impact of Foxe's work was profound, and the book was widely read. Parry relates the story of how Francis Drake read sections of the *Acts and Monuments* to his crew before unleashing them to plunder Spanish possessions as just retribution for Catholic atrocities.[75] With several explanations and qualifications, Collinson is able to conclude that Foxe was "surely the greatest English historian of his age."[76] Sometimes he was guilty of fierce partisanship, but in this he was no worse than most of his contemporaries, both Protestant and Catholic. As Bauer says, "Foxe has plenty of shortcomings, but no honest critic can blame him for having to make the best of circumstances beyond his own control."[77] Whatever his failures, John Foxe created the standard accepted view of the English Reformation and the Church of Rome among English-speaking Protestants.

[74] Hargrave, 10.

[75] Glyn Parry, "Elect Church or Elect Nation? The Reception of the *Acts and Monuments,*" in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective,* 174.

[76] Collinson, "John Foxe as Historian."

[77] Bauer, 259.

Writing in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 2004, Thomas Freeman suggests that the increased availability of materials on Foxe in the late twentieth century could foster a renaissance of Foxe studies,[78] and the publication of a complete critical edition of the *Acts and Monuments* online would be one obvious expression of such a revival. Modern readers will discern evident shortcomings of Foxe's history. Its daunting size and the dullness that sometimes results by the repetitious narrative, aggravated by the extensive quotations from documents, reduce its readability. Perhaps in the long run it is better that Foxe is known so much by abridgements that are easier to read.[79] But one cannot escape the impact that the *Acts and Monuments* has had historically. It is a rare work that not only recounts the past (in this case, often in excruciating detail) but also shapes our understanding of history. As Donald Williams says, "John Foxe made history simply by writing it."[80]

[78] Thomas Freeman, "John Foxe," *DNB,* 708.

[79] One problem with abridgements, however, is that they may skew the reader's perspective on Foxe, as some abridgements tend to highlight the more sensational aspects of Foxe's narrative. A carefully edited version, such as John King's *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives,* avoids many such pitfalls.

[80] Williams, *Historians of the Christian Tradition,* 117.

Speculations from the Garden: Narrative Reticence and Theological Overreach in Interpretations of Genesis 3:1–6

by Greg Stiekes[1]

Biblical theology (BT) depends upon careful inductive exegesis. As a methodology, BT arrives at theological observations based on the historical development and thematic reading of the text.[2] But this does not mean that BT is a superficial overview of progressive revelation. Rather, good BT requires a deliberate, careful reading of the text in its grammatical, historical, literary, and theological context.[3] To underscore this thesis, this paper seeks to demonstrate that if the spadework underlying BT in any biblical text is misguided, it can lead to faulty emphases in our theological conclusions.

The case study for this assertion will be the fall of Eve narrative of Genesis 3. We will begin by noting the literary nature of OT narrative and the requirements it places on the reader. Next, we will analyze two common readings of the fall of Eve—that Eve misrepresented the command of God in conversation with the serpent, and that Adam was at Eve's side for the duration of the temptation. In this main section of the paper, I hope to demonstrate that speculation at these two points in the narrative can result—and in some cases has resulted—in theological overreach in biblical theologies of marriage and gender roles. Finally, the paper's conclusion will briefly analyze how the Apostle Paul himself makes use of the same narrative, modeling helpful restraint as an example for our own work in BT.

Reticence in Biblical Narrative

God chose to communicate his word through literary genres. Therefore, if it is our aim to rightly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), we must appreciate the genre of the biblical text under consideration. Interpreters, however, may exercise genre sensitivity more readily when reading, say, poetry and prophecy as opposed to narrative. Biblical narrative appears comparatively straightforward, familiar—an accessible account of people and events. But this appearance can be deceiving. The conventions of biblical narrative differ in important respects from those to which readers shaped by modern Western narrative—particularly the novel—have become accustomed. As Robert Alter explains,

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[2] Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 23. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 3, who explains how systematic theology builds on the results of biblical theology.

[3] Millard J. Erickson reminds us that biblical theology is the "raw material" of systematic theology, requiring it to be "faithful to the teachings of the Bible." *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 26.

> Biblical narrative offers us . . . nothing in the way of minute analysis of motive or detailed rendering of mental processes; whatever indications we may be vouchsafed of feeling, attitude, or intention are rather minimal; and we are given only the barest hints about the physical appearance, the tics and gestures, the dress and implements of the characters, the material milieu in which they enact their destinies. In short, all the indicators of nuanced individuality to which the Western literary tradition has accustomed us—preeminently in the novel, but ultimately going back to the Greek epics and romances—would appear to be absent from the Bible.[4]

Jerome Walsh further distinguishes between the chronological events presumed by the narrative (the actual "story" behind the text) and the manner in which those events are recounted (the "narration"). These two are not identical.[5] The narrator's selection, arrangement, pacing, and presentation of events affect how readers perceive the story and its significance.[6] Biblical narrative, for example, is sometimes dischronological. Authors are often more interested in arranging events for theological emphases than in preserving strict chronological sequence.[7]

For our analysis of Genesis 3:1–6, however, we must acknowledge what Alter refers to as the biblical narrator's *reticence.*[8] Narrative reticence is a selective withholding of explanatory, psychological, and circumstantial information. Readers must infer meaning from the words and actions that are narrated, even while recognizing that some questions remain permanently unanswered. A character's appearance, precise movements, feelings, motivations, personality, and even physical traits are usually not communicated directly, if at all.[9]

The most frequent reticence technique, according to Walsh, is the presence of "gaps and ambiguities" in the narrative—"gaps of fact, gaps of motivation, and gaps of continuity."[10] Meir Sternberg may explain the genre best when he describes biblical narrative as a carefully controlled "system of gaps."[11] The narrator supplies certain facts, temporarily withholds others, and leaves still others permanently unresolved.

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[4] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Basic, 2011), 138.

[5] Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 20–21.

[6] Ibid., 67–68.

[7] Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Narrative Books: The Israel Story* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2023), 27.

[8] Alter, 138.

[9] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983; repr., Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27–30, 38. Berlin compares two narratives that contain Bathsheba. In the story of David's adultery (2 Samuel 11–12), Bathsheba is treated as noncharacter, incidental to the plot. Her feelings and motives are never mentioned. But in the story of Bathsheba and Abishag (1 Kings 1–2), Bathsheba becomes a full-blown character, seen mainly through the dialogue. Alter, 140, says, "Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character's comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations."

[10] Walsh, 81.

[11] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 228.

Such reticence inevitably gives rise to what Sternberg calls "gap-filling" on the part of the reader. "This gap-filling," says Sternberg, "ranges from simple linkages of elements, which the reader performs automatically, to intricate networks that are figured out consciously, laboriously, hesitantly, and with constant modifications in the light of additional information disclosed in later stages of the reading."[12] Much of this gap-filling occurs almost involuntarily. Readers connect successive actions, imagine physical settings, infer motives, and supply unreported transitions without necessarily recognizing that they have done so. Moreover, this means that readers will fill in the gaps differently. As Walsh observes, "The narrator supplies the reader with the potential for many variant stories; it is ultimately the reader who determines which of those variants to actualize."[13] Walsh's description of the reader's encounter brings us to the crux of the interpretive issue. Because the narrative does not specify every detail, readers will inevitably form mental representations of the events that differ at precisely those points where the narrator has remained silent. This means that when they read the story, readers will imagine, or "actualize" the narrative events in their own way.[14] Such reconstructions must therefore be disciplined by the explicit statements of the text and by its literary, historical, and theological contexts. The interpreter must also distinguish carefully between what the text states, what it reasonably implies, what it merely permits, and what it leaves unknown.

With this in mind, we turn to the narrative reticence at work in Genesis 3:1–6 (ESV).

> [1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

When reading this account, we form a mental picture of the scene. Our minds supply spatial relationships, gestures, expressions, pauses, and movements that the narrator does not describe. These details may arise from a preexisting mental image shaped by sermons, children's literature, or centuries of Western religious art. Many influential depictions of Genesis 3 show a naked Adam and Eve standing together beneath the tree, often with an apple in Eve's hand and a serpent coiled around one of its branches. It is therefore understandable that readers might actualize the narrative in this familiar form. The question, however, is whether the text itself establishes that scene.

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[12] Sternberg, 228.

[13] Walsh, 81.

[14] When Walsh speaks of "actualizing" a variation of the story, he is drawing upon the language of reader-oriented literary theory. In other words, a narrative is not experienced until a reader mentally constructs the world that the author has presented.

Consider the narrative gaps. Where did the serpent come from? How did it have the gift of speech? Why was it opposed to God's command? The account offers no answers.

Where did the serpent's conversation with the woman take place? It actually makes little sense that the serpent was coiled in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Based on her own words, Eve knows that she was not supposed to go near that tree. She also describes the tree as being "in the midst of the garden" (3:3). Why would she have to point out where the tree was located if she had been standing beneath it? The fact is, we are not told where this conversation took place.

How did Eve know that the tree was off-limits? God instructed Adam about the tree before Eve was created (Gen 2:16–18). Did God give Eve the information personally? Did Adam tell her?

How much time passed between Eve's conversation with the serpent and her disobedience in eating the fruit? Did she reach for the fruit soon after the serpent stopped speaking? Did she have to go into the middle of the garden to find the tree and did she spend much time contemplating the idea of eating it? Hours? Days?

What was Adam's location during the conversation? Was the woman entirely alone? Was Adam nearby for all or part of the exchange? Did he join her only later? Verse 6 says that she gave the fruit to "her husband with her" (לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ), but the precise narrative force of this expression must be established rather than assumed. Also, what did Eve say to Adam to convince him to eat it? For when God confronts them after their sin, he says to Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (Gen 3:17). Yet we have no details of this conversation.

What Genesis 3:1–6 actually tells us, then, is comparatively restrained, and we must therefore exegete with care. Some additional conclusions may constitute necessary or well-grounded inferences; others may be plausible reconstructions that the text neither confirms nor excludes; still others may amount to unsupported speculation. The crucial methodological point is that these categories must not be confused—especially when the reconstruction of an unreported detail is made to bear theological weight.

Inferences and Speculations in Genesis 3:1–6

As the point of departure for this section, we turn to the Charles Simeon Trust resources for homiletical training.[15] In their "First Principles" course, Lesson 1, David Helm teaches the core exegetical standard he calls "staying on the line." If the Word of God is a straight line, he says, our exegesis must stay on that line. We must not go above the line by adding to the Word, nor should we

[15] The Charles Simeon Trust is named for the faithful Anglican pastor and commentator, Charles Simeon (1759–1836), who persevered in a difficult ministry for over fifty years in Cambridge, England. Founded in Chicago by David Helm, R. Kent Hughes, and Jon Dennis, the Charles Simeon Trust is an effective ministry that seeks to train pastors and teachers to exposit the Word of God faithfully and carefully. Their website states: "The Charles Simeon Trust was founded to promote the growth of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world by training up the next generation of biblical expositors. We accomplish this single focus through three initiatives: Workshops, online training, and the Chicago Course on Preaching. Each aims to increase the confidence and ability of pastors and Bible teachers to rightly handle God's Word. We want each person to be convinced that God's Word is powerful and eager to teach it to their people" (simeontrust.org/about).

go below the line by subtracting from the Word.[16] The emphasis of this lesson is an excellent charge to uphold the sufficiency of the Scriptures.

As his centerpiece biblical example, however, Helm takes his students to Genesis 3. There he demonstrates that Eve "goes above the line" by legalistically adding to God's command (Gen 3:3; cf. 2:16–17). Eve does so, he points out, when she adds the phrase, "neither shall you touch it." On the other hand, the serpent "goes below the line" when he denies the truth of God's command and negates the punishment for disobedience (Gen 3:4–5). Meanwhile, says Helm, Adam was there the whole time, because Genesis 3:6 says, "She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." Furthermore, because Adam had received the command from God about the tree (and Eve did not), it was Adam's responsibility to speak up and defend the truth—to "hold the line." But Adam abdicates his responsibility.

Yet is this the way the author of Genesis 3 intends for us to actualize the narrative? Is Helm making a proper inference, or is he drawing conclusions from speculation? It is not difficult to see that the serpent definitely goes below the line, for that is the point of the dialogue in Genesis 3:1b–5. But beyond that observation, the irony should not be lost on us that if there is no explicit evidence in the text that Eve goes above the line and that Adam is not holding the line, Helm's illustration risks moving above the very line he commends interpreters to follow. We will therefore explore these two claims in turn, that Eve added to the Word of God and that Adam stood there silently, abdicating his role.

Does Eve Go Off the Line?

In many interpretations of Genesis 3, Eve has been criticized for mishandling her defense of God's goodness and his command. We will look briefly at the shape of these accusations, how they impact biblical theology, and the arguments offered in their support.

There are two common criticisms regarding the last part of Eve's answer to the serpent at the end of Genesis 3:3, "Neither shall you touch it, lest you die." The first criticism is that Eve, in the words of Helm, goes "above the line." Eve adds to the Word of God, since God never said one could not touch the fruit (cf. Gen 2:16–17). Thus, Eve invents her own version of God's command.[17] Several explanations are offered for the addition. Eve is eager to make her point that they are not allowed to eat the fruit.[18] Eve is drawing her own logical conclusion.[19] Eve is trying to "set a law for herself," like a fence around the tree to make sure she never goes near it.[20] Fretheim believes that the additional

[16] This video lesson is free on the Simeon Trust website: https://simeontrust.org/lessons/staying-on-the-line.

[17] John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 204.

[18] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 23.

[19] Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 69.

[20] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* rev. ed., trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 88; and Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary,* TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 72. As noted above, Helm takes this same approach, charging Eve with legalism.

phrase shows Eve's anxiety about death. "She exaggerates because she wants to avoid death at all costs."[21]

Beyond these simpler explanations, others say that Eve's additional words show that she has acquiesced to the serpent's position. Gordon Wenham says, "[T]he woman has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent's attitude. The creator's generosity is not being given its full due, and he is being painted as a little harsh and repressive, forbidding the tree even to be touched."[22]

The second common criticism of Eve's response to the serpent centers on her phrase, "lest you die" (Gen 3:3). This would actually be an example of Eve going "below the line." In the original command, God tells Adam in no uncertain terms that if he ever ate from the tree, he would "surely die" (Gen 2:17).[23] But Eve appears to soften the punishment by failing to say it like God said it. John Walton is concerned that Eve has "blurred an important nuance" by not speaking in definite terms about the penalty of death.[24] In fact, Martin Luther was quite stern about Eve on this point. In his commentary on Genesis, Luther asserted that Eve's failure to relate the punishment as God had "proves that she had turned aside from faith to unbelief." He wrote, "The devil had effectually persuaded her to think that God surely was not so cruel an one as to kill her for merely tasting a fruit! Hence the heart of Eve was now filled with the poison of Satan."[25]

Other major commentators are either silent on the matter of Eve's answer to the serpent or they remain ambivalent. John Collins writes,

> The woman reveals herself through her speech. A major interpretive problem is her reply in Genesis 3:3, where she has "added" the restriction "neither shall you touch it." Is this innocent or is it playing into the hands of the serpent's question of verse 1? I do not know if we will ever be able to know; this may in fact be an intentional "gap." It is also possible to detect a slight deflection of her commitment in her final phrase of verse 3, "lest you die." Does this dilute the solemn warning of 2:17? Again, it is hard to be sure.[26]

Interpreting Eve's response as a distortion of God's word, however, has consequences beyond the exegesis of Genesis 3:2–3. Once her paraphrase is characterized as an addition to, subtraction from, or weakening of the divine command, the first woman's only recorded theological statement becomes evidence of defective spiritual judgment. Eve is then portrayed not simply as one who was eventually deceived by the serpent but as an unreliable interpreter of revelation before she ever eats the fruit. This reconstruction can exert considerable influence upon biblical theologies of gender roles. Eve's supposed mishandling of the command may be used to suggest that women are unusually vulnerable

[21] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible,* ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:360.

[22] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 73.

[23] The Hebrew idiom is actually מוֹת תָּמוּת or "dying you shall die."

[24] Walton, 204.

[25] Martin Luther, *The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis,* trans. Henry Cole, Luther Still Speaking (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1858), 207.

[26] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006), 172.

to theological error and should not be teaching others, even though the NT encourages them to have some teaching roles (Titus 2:3–5; Acts 18:24–26; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15). Thomas Schreiner rightly warns that such reasoning can imply that women are "ontologically and intellectually inferior" to men and thereby call into question the goodness of God's creation.[27]

But should Eve be censured for her response to the serpent? For going off the line? Consider these observations. First, there is no indication in the narrative that Eve says anything wrong. The narrator never explicitly indicates that Eve's wording is erroneous, never faults her for failing to reproduce the command verbatim, and never presents her response as the beginning of her deception. Rather, it is the serpent alone about whom the reader is warned (Gen 3:1a). When we compare the serpent's words to God's words, we can track his perverse cunning:

Genesis 2:16–17 (God)	**Genesis 3:1b (The Serpent)**
And the LORD God commanded the man, saying,	Did God actually say,
"From every tree of the garden, מִכֹּל עֵץ־הַגָּן	"You shall not eat לֹא תֹאכְלוּ
you may surely eat אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל	from any tree in the garden"? מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגָּן
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." לֹא תֹאכַל	

In the original command, God prefaces the prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil within his generous permission. He tells Adam literally, "From every tree of the garden, eating you may eat."[28] As illustrated above, however, the serpent subtly conflates God's gracious gift with the prohibition itself: literally, "*Not* you shall eat of any tree of the garden." With a deviously placed לֹא "no" or "not", the generous blessing מִכֹּל עֵץ "from *every* tree" becomes, with no change in the Hebrew consonants, a grudging injunction against eating "from *any* tree."[29] Furthermore, the serpent also moves the words מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגָּן "from every/any tree of the garden" from the beginning of the sentence,

[27] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 238.

[28] The Semitic idiom represented by an imperfect verb preceded by an infinitive absolute (e.g., אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל, "eating, you may eat") in order to intensify the action or express affirmation ("you may *surely* or *freely* eat") is well known. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 584–86.

[29] Georg Fischer, *Die Anfänge der Bibel: Studien zu Genesis und Exodus,* SBAB 49 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2011), 40, says that the serpent twisted God's permission in Genesis 2:16 into its opposite.

as God spoke them (Gen 2:16), to the end of the sentence, further weakening the impression of God's liberality.[30]

By contrast, the woman's response substantially preserves the shape of God's command in a way that is remarkably consistent with the way he originally presented it:

Genesis 2:16–17 (God)	**Genesis 3:2b–3 (Eve)**
"Of every tree of the garden, מִכֹּל עֵץ־הַגָּן	"Of the fruit of the trees of the garden מִפְּרִי עֵץ־הַגָּן
you may surely eat אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל	we may eat. נֹאכֵל
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע	But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגָּן
you shall not eat from it לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ	God said, 'You shall not eat of it, אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:	neither shall you touch it lest you die.'" לֹא תִגְּעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן־תְּמֻתוּן:

Here we can observe several differences between the words of Eve and the words of God—so many, in fact, that we must wonder whether they are simply stylistic.[31] So how far are these differences to be pressed? Does the narrator really want us to come away with the idea that Eve adds to or distorts God's command? Or could he intend for us to observe that she is staying true to God's command, earnestly expressing her intention to obediently avoid that particular tree at all costs?[32] For example, does Eve's use of "lest you die" (פֶּן־תְּמֻתוּן) really weaken God's warning? The Hebrew פֶּן does not necessarily express doubt about whether an outcome will occur. It is less emphatic than "dying you shall die" (מוֹת תָּמוּת) but does not by itself demonstrate that Eve regarded death as less likely.[33] Again, nothing

[30] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26,* NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 235.

[31] R. W. L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?," *JTS* 39, no. 1 (1988): 6–7, confesses the difficulty of knowing exactly what these variations mean, whether they are strictly stylistic.

[32] I concur with the nineteenth-century scholar, James Murphy, who lays no blame upon Eve for her response. Murphy writes, "The woman gives the natural and distinct answer of unaffected sincerity to this suggestion. The deviations from the strict letter of the law are nothing more than the free and earnest expressions of her feelings. The expression, 'neither shall ye touch it,' merely implies that they were not to meddle with it, as a forbidden thing." James G. Murphy, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, Barnes' Notes (1873; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 114.

[33] BDB, s.v. "פֶּן"; *HALOT,* s.v. "פֶּן." See, for example, the use of פֶּן in Genesis 3:22, where God says, "Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—"; and Exodus 20:19, where the people cried out to Moses in fear, "Do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

in the narrative suggests that Eve should be blamed here. The differences between Eve's formulation and God's command are available for literary comparison, but the narrator supplies no explicit evaluation that turns those differences into moral or theological defects.

Second, the literary feature of reticent gaps in the narrative should caution us against drawing conclusions from information we are not given. We do not know how Eve came by her knowledge of the command. The narrative does not report how the command was communicated to Eve, and differences between Genesis 2:16–17 and 3:2–3 cannot securely establish either the source of her wording or her moral condition reflected in it. Theologies should not be built upon an uncensured instance of reported speech.

Third, by what hermeneutical principle does the interpreter expect Eve to give a word-for-word rendition of God's command in the first place? We do not hold anyone else to this standard when they report previous dialogue in narrative.[34] That is not the way OT narrative works. In the case of the serpent, the narrator clues in the reader that his words must be weighed carefully (Gen 3:1a). But same is not true of Eve. In fact, it is we ourselves who may be in danger of overanalyzing the text and coming away believing something God has not said.

Does Adam Fail to Hold the Line?

Compared to the criticism of Eve's response to the serpent, there is far more discussion about Adam's alleged present-but-silent posture during the whole conversation, in both scholarly and popular literature. Again, we will look at the reasons for the accusation, how it has influenced biblical theology, and what we can say in response.

Several interpreters believe that Adam was standing with Eve or at least standing within hearing distance during the temptation.[35] As Kathleen O'Connor explains, Eve gives the fruit "to the man 'who was with her' all along, 'and he ate' (Gen 3:6)."[36] Everett Fox translates Genesis 3:6, "and gave also to her husband *beside her*,"[37] and Fretheim views Adam as a "silent partner" with Eve during the whole conversation.[38]

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[34] Contrast, for example, Abraham's servant repeating Abraham's instructions (Gen 24:3–8 and 37–41); or Abraham's servant recounting his conversation with Rebekah (Gen 24:17–23 and 45–47); or Joseph's brothers reporting his words to Jacob (Gen 42:7–20 and 30–34); or Moses' recollection of God's words concerning the golden calf (Exod 32:7–10 and Deut 9:12–14); or Joshua's condensing of Moses' command (Num 32:20–24/Deut 3:18–20 and Josh 1:13–15). Also consider all of the ways the words of Jesus differ between the writers of the Gospels, or how Luke changes the details of Paul's conversion with each telling (Acts 9:4–6, 22:7–10, 26:14–18). We never hold dialogue to the standard of exact wording unless the narrator clues the reader in that careful attention must be given, as in the case of the serpent.

[35] For examples, see Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 170; John E. Hartley, *Genesis,* NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 67; Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2–3*, JSOTSupp 208 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 47–48; and W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis,* Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 45.

[36] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Genesis 1–25A,* Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2018), 63.

[37] Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 21 (emphasis added).

[38] Fretheim, 360.

Several reasons are offered for this view. For one, after the author places Adam and Eve in close unity at the end of Genesis 2, there is no mention of their being separated before the serpent speaks in the opening verse of Genesis 3.[39] For another, the serpent addresses Eve using second-person plurals (e.g., "You [pl.] will not surely die"), while Eve answers with first-person and second-person plurals (e.g., "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden") as if Adam is standing with her the whole time.[40] But by far the most significant textual evidence for this view is the statement in Genesis 3:6b, "[S]he also gave some to her husband *who was with her*" (עִמָּהּ).[41] If indeed Adam stands mutely by during the serpent's conversation with Eve, then her part in the fall does not appear to weigh as heavily on her shoulders, since her husband was doing nothing, equally complicit, equally being led astray.[42] In fact, Julie Parker represents a popular view among some interpreters who believe that Eve is "deeply maligned" and overburdened with the guilt of the fall in part because commentators and especially modern translations of Genesis 3:6 ignore the presence of Adam in Eve's confrontation with the serpent.[43]

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[39] Jean M. Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress," *JAAR* 44 (1976): 646; Elizabeth A. McCabe, "Answers to Unresolved Questions: A Close Look at Eve and Adam in Genesis 2–3," in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 12.

[40] Coleson, *Genesis,* 117. McCabe, "Answers," 10–11; Higgins, "Myth of Eve," 646. Higgins cites other evidence too; the most significant is the wording of Genesis 3:7, "Then the eyes of both were opened." She comments, "Since, strictly speaking, Eve's eyes should have been opened at the moment 'she took and she ate,' this verse (together with the variant versions mentioned in the preceding point) may be a trace of an earlier story in which man and woman are tempted, take and eat together. But there is no way we can be sure of this." This concession, "there is no way we can be sure," actually characterizes her entire discussion on the question of Adam's presence with Eve, and she finally concludes, "It is impossible to say for certain."

[41] Several Hebrew grammars traditionally translate וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ with "she gave also to her husband (who was) with her," taking עִמָּהּ as a prepositional phrase modifying the noun, אִישׁ. See, for example, Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1947), 400 (§132a), "à son mari (qui était) avec elle"; Wilhelm Gesenius, et al., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (1910; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 427 (§131t), "unto her husband with her (= her husband who was with her)"; Ludwig Koehler, "וּשְׁאָר יָשׁוּב und der nackte Relativsatz," *VT* 3 (1953): 84–85, "ihrem Mann, der bei ihr war"; and Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax,* 74, "her husband (who was) with her."

[42] Towner, *Genesis,* 45, believes that painters as far back as the Renaissance have depicted Adam's passivity under the same tree as Eve who is taking action. Likewise, Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 113, criticizes Adam for his inactive role. Trible says, "Throughout this scene the man has remained silent; he does not speak for obedience. His presence is passive and bland. The contrast that he offers to the woman is not strength or resolve but weakness. No patriarchal figure making decisions for his family, he follows his woman without question or comment."

[43] Julie Faith Parker, "Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of עמה in Genesis 3:6b," *JBL* 132 (2013): 729–47. Parker makes the latest and most thorough case for the view that Adam was with Eve during the conversation with the serpent, citing several Hebrew grammarians for support. However, her essay is mainly a criticism of translations that have failed to bring out that Adam was "with" Eve, especially those which fail to translate עִמָּהּ altogether, ostensibly encouraging the view that Eve bears most of the blame in the Fall. E.g., the NEB (1970) translates the sentence, "She also gave her husband some and he ate it"; the RSV (1952): "She also gave some to her husband, and he ate." Parker suggests that the Latin Vulgate, which fails to translate the Hebrew preposition in Genesis 3:6b, betrays Jerome's strong feelings against women (see pp. 736–37). She also critiques in some detail the translation committees for the RSV and the NJPS translation of the Tanakh, both of which do not mention that Adam is with Eve in Genesis 3:6 (see pp. 742–47). To her point, there are several major commentators that appear to pass over the entire question of Adam's presence with Eve, including Atkinson, Alter, and Steinmann.

Many authors writing a biblical theology of marriage and gender roles draw upon the supposed silence of Adam, thus shifting the focus of the narrative from the climax of eating the fruit and thus sinning against God to the blunder of Adam leading up to the Fall. For example, Raymond Ortlund asserts the following:

> Mark well what the text says and what it does not say. The text does not say, ". . . she took some and ate it. Her husband, who was with her, also took some and ate it." What actually happened is full of meaning. Eve usurped Adam's headship and led the way into sin. And Adam, who (it seems) had stood by passively, allowing the deception to progress without decisive intervention—Adam, for his part, abandoned his post as head. Eve was deceived; Adam forsook his responsibility. Both were wrong and together they pulled the human race down into sin and death.
>
> Isn't it striking that we fell upon an occasion of sex role reversal? Are we to repeat this confusion forever? Are we to institutionalize it in evangelicalism in the name of the God who condemned it in the beginning?[44]

The striking problem with Ortlund's progression of events is not so much theological as it is methodological. He begins with a legitimate textual observation (they both ate), moves toward a plausible inference (Adam stood by passively), then turns a speculative reconstruction into a theological observation as a polemic against egalitarianism. His overreach begins when he says, "Eve usurped Adam's headship and led the way into sin," implying that Eve assumed Adam's authority while he was likely standing there. If this is true, then Adam heard everything the serpent said, could have intervened, but allowed his wife to be deceived. Thus, Ortlund reasons, Adam "abandoned his post as head," while Eve took over. This observation leads Ortlund to make a major theological leap. "Isn't it striking," he says, "that we fell upon an occasion of sex role reversal?" With this, he has rewritten the Fall not as Eve acts first, then Adam follows her into sin; but as Eve exercises male authority, Adam assumes the female role, and humanity falls through sex role reversal. This progression has precarious implications for a theology of marriage and gender roles because the inference is taken from the key moment when humanity fell. Carried to its logical conclusion, would this not caution us that the wisdom and counsel of women should be seen as subversive and that a man must always speak up and insist on his way about things? Does this mean that a wife influencing her husband will always constitute role-reversal? I doubt that Ortlund would concur. So, while he is correct that Adam bears a distinctive responsibility and that the creation narrative establishes roles between men and women, Ortlund builds his view of the fall on a narrative gap that allows him to recast Adam not as the keeper of the garden but as a passive eyewitness to the temptation.

An even clearer example of narrative overreach comes from a popular 1990s book by Larry Crabb titled *The Silence of Adam.* In Crabb's treatment, the interpretation of a silent, passive Adam becomes programmatic. Crabb builds a tenuous case for his belief that Adam was at Eve's side for the entire

[44] Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism,* rev. ed., ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 144.

temptation.[45] He then reasons that Adam was "a silent man, a passive man . . . physically present but emotionally absent."[46] Ultimately, Adam's silence in Crabb's reconstruction is the central reason God punished him. "He never reminded [Eve] of God's word. He never called her to a larger vision. He did not join his wife in battling wits with the serpent. . . . Adam disobeyed by failing to speak with the serpent and with his wife. He was absent and passive. His silence was symbolic of his refusal to be involved with Eve. And God punished Adam for his silence."[47] The problem is that God does not say Adam was silent, nor that he failed to confront the serpent, nor that he was emotionally absent. Crabb is building a theology of how men should behave toward their wives. He rightly encourages godly obedience and moral courage. But he is building his theology on gaps in a reticent narrative, not on the clear statements of Scripture.

Moreover, when weighing the evidence, it is far from clear that Adam is standing with Eve while she speaks with the serpent, or even overhears their conversation.[48] The introduction of the new information at the beginning of Genesis 3:1 indicates a fresh scene in the narrative and does not demand that Adam still be present with Eve any more than does the shared use of plurals in Eve's conversation with the serpent. In fact, Wenham demonstrates that the preposition עִם could be a reference merely to Adam's association with Eve in following her example in the eating of the fruit.[49] There is also the matter of the waw-consecutive imperfect verbs that begins the clause, "and she gave also to her husband" (Gen 3:6b). The waw-consecutive represents a sequential development in the narrative, advancing from her eating to her giving but supplies no indication of Adam's location during the preceding dialogue.[50] So, even if the translation, "her husband [who was] with her" (לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ)

[45] Larry Crabb, Don Hudson, and Al Andrews, *The Silence of Adam: Becoming Men of Courage in a World of Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 90. "There are four reasons why we believe Adam was present at the temptation: (1) his silence fits the immediate context in Genesis 1–3; (2) Genesis 3:6 says he was there; (3) the style of the entire account recorded in Genesis 3:1–7 suggests Eve turned immediately to Adam and gave him the fruit; and (4) other men in Genesis lived out this age-old problem of Adam's silence, suggesting that his silence became a pattern in his male descendants." It is not expedient to respond to these reasons, as they are built largely on conjecture, with the only linguistic argument being that Genesis 3:6 says Adam was "with her" when she ate the fruit. Arguments against the presence of Adam during the temptation will be offered below.

[46] Ibid., 91.

[47] Ibid., 97.

[48] The weakness of the view that the presence of עִמָּהּ necessarily means Adam was "with Eve" in Genesis 3:6 is illustrated by David E. S. Stein, "A Rejoinder Concerning Genesis 3:6 and the NJPS Translation," *JBL* 134 (2015): 51–52, who takes only four brief paragraphs to dismantle Parker's entire argument (see note 43 above). Stein answers, (1) There is hardly a motivation among the NJPS translators to downplay Adam's culpability; (2) Eve's eating and sharing with Adam are two separate acts in the Hebrew text, and could have just as easily happened at a different time and place; (3) the NJPS is not a formal equivalence translation; and (4) misogynistic interpretations will occur no matter what the translation, if people desire to read the text in this way.

[49] Wenham, Genesis, 75–76. Also, Cassuto demonstrates from the MT that expressions such as "with her" or "with him" "occur as a rule when a person is said to associate himself in a given action with someone who leads him." E.g., "You shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you" (Gen 6:18; cf. Gen 7:7; 13:1). There is no reference to the time they went into the ark as individuals. The preposition indicates that they were together as a family unit, not that they had to move in unison. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,* trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 1:14.

[50] See the discussion on the use of the waw in Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax,* 523–25.

is most accurate, the language does not demand that Adam be with Eve for the conversation with the serpent.[51] Furthermore, when they must answer to God in the aftermath of their sin, Adam reports only the conversation with his wife (3:17), while Eve reports her conversation with the serpent (3:13b). This observation may suggest that two separate, private conversations are assumed by the narrator, but once again he is not forthcoming on this much-debated detail.

The Innocence of the Prelapsarian Couple

The original innocence of Adam and Eve—their prelapsarian state in which they were both *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare*—is a final factor that has not yet been taken into account. In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (4.2),

> After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

In writing about Adam and Eve's state of innocence, Thomas Aquinas explained, "[O]ur sensual appetite, wherein the passions reside, is not entirely subject to reason; hence at times our passions forestall and hinder reason's judgment; at other times they follow reason's judgment, accordingly as the sensual appetite obeys reason to some extent. *But in the state of innocence the inferior appetite was wholly subject to reason:* so that in that state the passions of the soul existed only as consequent upon the judgment of reason."[52] Later, Calvin expressed a similar understanding when he wrote,

> The integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker. And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the

[51] The fact is that the author simply does not give enough details for the reader to know exactly how every event in the narrative unfolds. As mentioned earlier, artwork representing the fall typically depicts Eve and the serpent, sometimes with Adam, under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the author never even says that this is where the conversation takes place. In fact, if Eve believes that even touching the fruit would cause her to die, she may have been nowhere near the tree when the serpent approached her. The account in Genesis 3:6, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food," etc., may indicate that Eve went to see the tree after her conversation with the serpent and had time to contemplate her new knowledge before she took of the fruit and ate. Likewise, the author simply does not say where Adam was during this time, whether near or far away; only that he was with Eve when she gave him (some of) the fruit, and he also ate.

[52] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* vol. 1 (Dinslaken: anboco, 2016), I, q. 95, art. 2 (emphasis added).

> mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.[53]

Nevertheless, a theme that often appears in the writing of those who believe Eve added to God's Word or that Adam abdicated his role is the idea that the woman and the man sinned before the Fall. In the examples above, Eve is seen as a legalist, one whose heart immediately acquiesces to the serpent's words or who does not truly believe God will punish her. Luther even accuses Eve of unbelief. Adam fares far worse. He has failed as a husband and a leader, refusing to nurture and protect his wife, watching idly as the serpent has his way with Eve and, finally, submitting to his wife's leadership and joining in her sin.

The first couple's state of innocence does not resolve the narrative gaps. It cannot prove that every word of Eve's response was faultless, nor can it establish that Adam was absent during her conversation with the serpent. Adam and Eve were upright but mutable, capable of transgression. Their original integrity does, however, raise the evidentiary threshold for assigning moral failure before the narrative itself identifies transgression. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve possessed no indwelling corruption or inclination toward evil. Consequently, charges that Eve had already become legalistic, unbelieving, or spiritually unreliable—or that Adam had already failed morally as a husband by silently permitting the serpent's deception—should not be inferred from details the narrator does not report. In truth, Adam and Eve's prelapsarian innocence renders these accusations much more difficult to believe.

Moreover, accusations against Adam and Eve that are not grounded in the narrative risk contradicting Scripture concerning the locus of the sin of the Fall. According to the Genesis 3 narrative, the first sin was not a lack of faith, carelessness in handling God's command, or failure as a husband. The first sin was eating the forbidden fruit.

Conclusion

Narrative gaps of fact, motivation, and continuity are a feature of the reticence of biblical stories. The reader should be aware of them. But they should never be used to construct a biblical theology. Our biblical theologies should be founded upon clear statements in and unambiguous inferences from God's Word. We should remember that the "Scriptures themselves set the standard for what biblical theology is and how it ought to be done." [54]

The apostle Paul offers us insight into this methodology. In his own use of the Creation and Fall narratives, he models due restraint. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 he grounds his argument only in what Genesis states or strongly implies. "[12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve; [14] and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." To support his prohibition in verse 12, Paul draws on three truths from Genesis 2 and 3. Adam was formed before Eve (Gen 2:7,

[53] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1:235.

[54] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 3.

21–22); Eve was deceived (Gen 3:13); and Adam was not deceived. This last truth is not stated verbatim in Genesis, but Paul draws it from the narrative as an authoritative inference, not a conjecture supplied from one of its gaps. In Genesis 3:12, Adam claims, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." But in 3:13, Eve explains, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Thus, the narration itself says only Eve was deceived.

Likewise, Paul appeals to the fall-of-Eve narrative in 2 Corinthians 11:3 when he says, "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." This statement gives us insight into Paul's view of the fall of Eve. The serpent's "cunning" comes directly from Genesis 3:1a, and Eve's deception from 3:13. As Paul then draws the parallel with the Corinthians, he implies that Eve herself was also "led astray from her devotion" to God. This implication is also a strong and defensible inference from the narrative.

What Paul does not do is appeal to Eve's alleged mishandling of God's command, or to Adam's supposed silence during the serpent's conversation, or to imagined internal motives and unreported events. He builds theology from what the text reveals, not from what it leaves unsaid.

Because biblical theology seeks to trace the progressive revelation of God's purposes through Scripture, it necessarily depends upon sound exegesis of individual texts. Theological synthesis can rise no higher than the exegetical foundation upon which it is built. When interpreters import assumptions into a narrative, infer details not supplied by the text, or mistake possibility for certainty, those conclusions often become incorporated into broader theological systems. We must exercise similar wisdom and scholarly restraint, lest speculative readings of particular passages exert a disproportionate influence on biblical theology as a whole.

Gorman, Michael J. *Paul and John in Harmony: A Theological and Historical Exploration.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2026. 182pp. + 28pp. (back matter).

Paul and John have influenced Christian theology more than any other writers. In recent years, scholars have begun to delve into the relationship between the writings of these two men. Michael J. Gorman enters the discussion with this volume. His concern is not primarily to identify common sources of their writings; rather, he seeks to discuss key theological similarities between Paul and John. In chapter 1, Gorman surveys the state of the scholarly discussion on the Johannine-Pauline relationship. He comments on the significant absence of scholarly discussion on the relationship between John and Paul's theology until the last five years. In contrast to the majority of scholars who believe that John derived his teaching from Paul, Gorman seeks to argue for the alternative view that Paul derived his teaching from John: "I contend that *John is not a Pauline Gospel; rather, Paul is a Johannine theologian*" (16).

Gorman points out several challenges in comparing the theology of two bodies of literature: (1) choosing what to compare—upholding similarities and differences; (2) being necessarily selective (not comprehensive) for the purpose of comparison; (3) categorizing the items being compared; (4) being careful not to determine the results in advance; and (5) measuring the degree of similarity (or difference). These considerations are helpful for a study like Gorman's. Gorman acknowledges that Paul and John generally use different genres; John, however, uses a letter to explain the gospel, and Paul provides Christological narratives in various places as the groundwork for his teaching in his letters. Finally, Gorman notes three possible explanations for similarities between John and Paul: (1) they independently develop their teaching based on the same early Christian teaching and traditions; (2) one of them influences the other in their theology; or (3) Pauline and Johannine teaching and writings influence each other. Gorman use chapters 2 through 5 to discuss literary and theological similarities. Chapter 6 considers the issue of influence.

Chapter 2 compares two key passages to show their similarity in Christology and in their implications for discipleship: Philippians 2:6–11 and John 13:1–20. Gorman argues that these stories "have significant linguistic, structural, and theological features in common" (17). Gorman suggests that Philippians 2:6–11 may be considered Paul's "master story" because the key terms, grammar, and themes permeate the rest of Paul's letters. It is the overarching story of Christ's work that has direct implications for the lives of believers. Gorman then argues that John 13:1–20, the foot-washing passage, is a "good candidate for the role of the Johannine master story" (19). The account captures the key themes of John's Gospel, and it carries implications for the Christian life. Gorman finds numerous key words and themes common to both passages that help demonstrate the similarities. They both emphasize Jesus as both "high" and "low," highlighting his relationship with the Father. Both focus on his acts of self-sacrificial love. This self-sacrificial love becomes paradigmatic for Jesus' followers.

Gorman presents five theses to defend the idea that these passages share the same theological features. First, each text presents a story of Christology/soteriology as well as discipleship/spirituality. Second, each text is a story about God, incarnation, and divine self-revelation. Both Paul and John

emphasize Jesus' identity as God, which serves as the presupposition for what follows. Gorman highlights that Paul explicitly states Jesus' identity as God and that he humbled himself *because of* (not in spite of) his deity. Gorman looks to John's Gospel as a whole to provide the background for Jesus' identity as God (John 1:1–18; 5:17; 8:28). He, however, seems to overlook John 13:3 as a strong support for this within the immediate context of the foot-washing account. Third, each text presents a slave narrative—Christ's humility and self-enslavement, followed by exaltation. They both present a clear descent and ascent. Paul joins Isaiah's servant of the Lord with the Lord himself; the suffering servant becomes exalted Lord. Fourth, both texts present a story of sacrificial missional love that becomes a paradigm for the disciples. Finally, each text presents a paradoxical story of Christ's free choice and his obedience. Paul highlights Jesus' emptying and humbling *himself;* Paul also points out that this self-humbling culminates in his obedience to the point of his death on the cross. John presents Jesus' decision to humble himself to serve the disciples. To account for Jesus' obedience, Gorman refers to other passages in John that emphasize Christ's obedience to the Father (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 10:17–18; 15:12–14). Based on the evidence in chapter 2, the passages in Philippians 2 and John 13 do reveal significant similarities. Gorman closes with an assertion that "these profound similarities almost certainly cannot be coincidental" (59).

In chapter 3, Gorman asks whether Paul and John reveal other profound similarities. Whereas chapter 2 focuses on Christology, chapter 3 shifts to spirituality, focusing on the language of union with Christ and oneness in Paul and John. Gorman compares the teaching in John 15 and 1 John with Paul's teaching on unity in Christ. The topic of oneness with Christ, or participation with Christ, is generally recognized as a key concept in Pauline and Johannine theology; however, the similarities between John and Paul on this topic have been under-explored. John and Paul use "locative language" and "residential rhetoric" to describe this oneness/participation with Christ. This is a "mutual indwelling" or a "reciprocal residence," which is often referred to as *perichoresis*. This chapter focuses on metaphorical terms for location, residence, and mutual indwelling found in both John and Paul.

Gorman first examines the locative language in John's Gospel, beginning with John 15:1–11. This passage uses "abide" ten times (in Greek) and "in" fifteen times. First John also overflows with terminology for "abiding." The fact that "abiding" is scattered throughout this letter "demonstrates how central to Johannine spirituality it is" (74). Gorman then discusses locative language in Paul's letters. Paul uses "in" prominently, but he does not speak of "abiding" using John's terminology. Paul does use terms related to "dwelling" (*oikeō* and *enoikeō*) some fourteen times. Paul's comments about the Spirit dwelling in believers (1 Cor 3:16) bear a striking similarity to John's comments about the Spirit abiding with and in believers (John 14:17). Paul uses this language primarily in reference to location, participation, and transformation. Any discussion of being "in Christ" must entail submission to the "dominion" of Christ. For Paul, not only are believers in Christ, but Christ is in believers. In Romans 8 in particular, Paul seems to see some overlap between the indwelling of Christ and that of the Spirit. It is clear, then, that Paul and John share certain key concepts related to participation with Christ. Gorman builds on these observations in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion of locative language from chapter 3. Gorman presents four aspects of the spiritual relationship conveyed by this locative terminology: (1) mutual, (2) identity-

framing, (3) Trinitarian, and (4) active and transformational. First, in both John and Paul the indwelling is mutual. In John 15 and in several passages in 1 John, Jesus and believers abide in each other, though the emphasis is on believers abiding in Jesus. Paul also presents a similar mutuality with the emphasis on believers being in Christ. Some scholars, though, such as Richard Bauckham, do not see a connection between John's mutual indwelling and Paul's "being in Christ." Gorman devotes several pages to refuting Bauckham's view (92–94). Gorman argues that for Paul, mutual indwelling includes both intimacy and power. It is difficult to see, though, how "power" would be an element of *mutual* indwelling. This seems to imply that believers in Christ communicate power to Christ.

Gorman presents "identity" as the second aspect of locative language. Abiding in Jesus is central to the identity of the disciples. This identity is prominent in John 15 with Jesus' image of himself as the vine and his disciples as the branches. Additionally, Jesus' prayer in John 17 emphasizes Jesus' being "in them" (17:26). Therefore, "Jesus in us is our core identity" (98). For Paul, being "in Christ" is "the most basic identity of believers" (99), and the indwelling is mutual. The third aspect of locative language is Trinitarian. Those who are in Christ are also in the Father and in the Spirit (John 17:20–23; 14:17; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:11). For both John and Paul, participation and fellowship in Christ constitute participation in the Spirit. In order to uphold the unity of the Trinity, Gorman comments, "Theologically speaking we may appropriate the work of inhabitation to the Spirit, rather than the Father, but there is only one God who inhabits and who is inhabited. Paul's perichoretic spirituality is Trinitarian" (112). It would be inappropriate to think of one being in Christ and in the Spirit but not also in the Father.

The final aspect of locative language is its impact on active, transformational character. John and Paul both present a moral and missional spirituality. Spirituality is no mere private, internal mystical experience; it entails a mission to the world. Gorman refers to this as "missional theosis." Abiding in the vine results in bearing fruit. This fruit-bearing is itself transformative as "it is actually in bearing fruit that the disciples become disciples; in doing so, they will become what they already are" (116). Similarly, for Paul, the concept of Christ in the believer (Gal 2:20) "must lead to the Christian moral life" (119). For both Paul and John, bearing fruit is a key outcome of mutual indwelling. Gorman concludes that though there are minor differences between Paul and John, "the depth and breadth of the significant likenesses is impressive" (126).

Chapter 5, titled "Prequels and Sequels," discusses three primary topics: (1) the Father's double sending of the Son and Spirit, (2) the act of believing "into" Christ, and (3) the life-giving activity of God. First, Gorman examines the "backstory of the incarnation" (i.e., the prequel), which is the sending of the Son. Both Paul and John speak of the Father's saving purpose in sending the Son in coordination with the Son's incarnation and death. Both authors include a corresponding sending of the Spirit. In a sense, the sending of the Spirit is the sequel to the incarnation. Gorman comments that many assume that John and Paul are merely drawing on early Christian tradition in these formulaic texts. For Gorman, though, the problem is that no such formulaic tradition exists outside of Paul and John (137). Though other NT writers speak of the sending of the Son, no others use the specific formulas both Paul and John use; they are "distinctively Johannine and Pauline" (138).

Gorman then discusses believing "into" Christ as the prequel to the locative/residential concept of being "in Christ." For Paul, faith is the means by which a person moves into Christ (e.g., Phil 1:29; Gal 2:16). The majority of such Pauline passages use the preposition *eis*, though it is often translated as "in" rather than "into." Galatians 2:16 is prominent here as believing *into* Christ results in a status of being *in Christ*. John's emphasis on believing "into" (*eis*) Christ is well known. This indicates that believing is more than merely trusting; rather, it is "a dedication of one's life" to Jesus (147). This is similar to the Pauline emphasis found in passages such as Galatians 2:16. Both John and Paul use similar prepositional patterns for key concepts. Humans are enslaved *in* sin and walking *in* darkness. When they come to Christ, they believe *into* Christ. In the new life, they abide *in* Jesus, and they walk *in* the light/the truth/newness of life. Among NT authors, Paul and John alone present this full pattern culminating in being *in* Christ as a result of believing *into* Christ.

Gorman closes the chapter with one final sequel. Both Paul and John use the term *zōopoieō* for God's giving of life to people. For both authors, this divine activity involves each person of the Trinity; also, both authors present this giving of life as both a present and future reality.

Chapter 6, Gorman's final chapter, initially reviews his previous findings, concluding that Paul and John are in harmony in "some quite striking ways" (158). The chapter is mostly dedicated to a discussion of which writer influenced the other. Gorman's overall argument in the previous five chapters is not dependent on the outcome of the question in chapter 6. Most scholars hold to one of two theories. The first theory is that Paul and John drew on the same early Christian traditions, but they did not originally influence each other. These traditions were either rooted in OT teaching or they were "in the air" in early Christianity. One key problem with this view is that scholars have not been able to find a shared tradition. The alternative theory is that either Paul or John influenced the other. The more popular view among scholars is that Paul influenced John; John's Gospel therefore would be a "Pauline Gospel." A third theory is that John and Paul mutually influenced each other, but Gorman cites no scholarly argumentation for this view.

Gorman's argument in this chapter, though, is that Paul is a Johannine theologian. For Gorman, fundamentally, it is "easier to imagine" Paul using concepts from John's Gospel and applying them in different contexts than it is to imagine John taking Pauline concepts and building them into his narrative of Jesus in his Gospel. For example, would John really have taken Paul's language about "mutual abiding" and then added it to the lips of Jesus in one discourse? Gorman argues that Johannine tradition or even an early version of John's Gospel may have influenced Paul's letters.

Gorman's unique contribution in this chapter, though, is a "brief" and "preliminary" argument that John's Gospel was written at an earlier date than is generally assumed among scholars. Gorman presents eight arguments to support this view. First, he believes that Paul must have been familiar with John 13–17, since he shares many of the same words and themes that John does in this section. So what else could Paul have read from this Gospel? John 13–17 would not have been written as an independent unit without speaking of Jesus' ministry and subsequent death and resurrection. "It is therefore likely that Paul knew the Gospel as a whole" (170). Therefore, John's Gospel must have been completed before AD 50. Second, Gorman addresses the typical arguments for a late dating of John's Gospel, concluding that there is no evidence to support the view. Third, Gorman sees no "historical,

literary, or theological reason to say that John's Christology *must* follow Paul's" (173). The typical argument is that John's "high Christology" implies that John's Gospel must have been written later than the other NT writings. But why is this a necessary conclusion? Fourth, there is no compelling reason to date John in the 60s; it could well have been written in the 40s. Fifth, Gorman supports the idea of an early date (before 50) for all four Gospels, which would explain Paul's awareness of all four Gospels.

Paul and John in Harmony provides some helpful contributions to the discussion of the relationship between Johannine and Pauline theology. Many of the positive contributions are highlighted above. Gorman makes excellent use of Scripture to support his arguments, particularly when summarizing the themes common to Paul and John. The content in chapters 2 through 5 provides the most meat on which to chew. The striking similarities between John 13 and Philippians 2:5-11 are noteworthy and are overlooked elsewhere. The presentation on union with Christ and believing "into" Christ in chapters 3 and 4 was also well done. The discussion in chapter 5 on prequels and sequels was creative and convincing. Though Gorman's argument in chapter 6 lacks meaningful evidence, he acknowledges this and is careful to distinguish between arguments supported by evidence and those that are not. As a prolific Pauline scholar, Gorman does cater a bit to less conservative scholarship. Throughout the book, he regularly differentiates between the disputed and undisputed letters of Paul. He also identifies the author of 1 John as "whoever it may be" (178).

Gorman argues that John influenced Paul. Though Gorman presents a number of similarities shared by Paul and John, he fails to provide any actual evidence that one influenced the other. Gorman appears to be at risk of parallelomania, arguing that because there are shared characteristics one must have originated from the other. The only "evidence" is that in certain portions of their writings, Paul and John refer to the same themes and occasionally use the same words. It would, however, seem odd if their content did not overlap at certain points. Gorman's argument is also strongly dependent on identifying John 13 as John's "master story," a proposition that seems questionable. Gorman later refers to Paul's obvious awareness of John 13–17, based on Paul's supposed usage of John 13 in composing Philippians 2 as well as Paul's "in Christ" language reflecting John's "abiding" language in John 15. This reasoning is circular.

Gorman (along with other scholars) gives insufficient consideration to the possibility that Paul and John did not influence each other. Yet Gorman has provided no evidence for one depending on or influencing the other. John certainly learned much from the Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry, and then the Holy Spirit taught John much more (John 16:12–15). At the same time, Paul was an expert OT scholar prior to his conversion, and he subsequently received revelation directly from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12–18). Given these facts, why would one author need to borrow from or learn from the other? Certainly, Paul and John knew each other (Gal 2:9–10), and they would almost certainly have discussed many of the ideas about which they wrote. Without having any evidence to the contrary, though, it seems best to say that both Paul and John were influenced by Jesus Christ and were separately carried along by the Spirit to produce their God-breathed writings. The million-dollar question is, "Why does it matter who influenced whom?" Gorman does not quite answer this question.

In the end, Gorman's work is a helpful introduction to some similarities between Pauline and Johannine theology; any evidence that one primarily influenced the other, though, is lacking.

Jonathan M. Cheek
Independent Contributor

Trueman, Carl R. *The Desecration of Man: How the Rejection of God Degrades Our Humanity.* New York: Sentinel, 2026. 256pp.

The ability to translate and synthesize scholarly research into digestible prose that the average church member can appreciate is a rare skill. Even more impressive is scholarly ability complemented by a pastoral concern for the average church member. Cultural commentary is valuable but hard. Contemporary life can be complex and confusing, and it is often not easy to say how a Christian should think about the rapid, seemingly chaotic changes in Western culture over the last century. Carl Trueman has written several books in the last few years that aid the church's understanding of modern life. The theme in each one is a different answer to the question, "What happened to Christian culture?" Specifically, he attempts to explain how contemporary Western society has lost its Christian norms around sexuality, which is perhaps the most visible evidence of a post-Christian ethos.

Trueman's newest book, *The Desecration of Man*, adds a new step to the analysis. The previous books are a kind of intellectual history that excavate the ideological assumptions that escaped the academy into the rest of society. The new book describes the *effects* of this transformation, specifically on modern understanding of human life. The book is thus an essay in theological anthropology. The Christian view is that "human beings are created by God with a given set of dependencies and obligations, limits, and ends. We are rational, dependent, limited, teleological beings" (12). Man is made in the image of God. What happens, then, when this claim is rejected?

The first thing that happens is a loss of meaning and purpose. And quickly thereafter comes a loss of defensible social norms. Trueman frames the discussion with Fredrich Nietzsche's parable of the madman. Nietzsche describes a scene in which a crazy-sounding prophet arrives and announces the death of God. The parable is sometimes taken as evidence of Nietzsche's atheism, but this interpretation misunderstands his point. It is less that God is dead than that the *idea* of God is no longer effective in modern life. The madman is not *causing* the death of God; he is saying that religion no longer has any power over society. The people think they can just continue as normal. But they are wrong. With no God, they now become responsible for everything, not just their obedience and worship to him. They must make for themselves their own moral codes and their own purposes. This is an enormous task, one better suited to divinity. At first it is thrilling. But it becomes unavoidable and oppressive toil. We might more accurately say that the madman is foretelling the effects of practical atheism in the Christian West. Though the effects will come later, they will come, and the costs will be very great.

Trueman reports on the costs about 150 years later. And they have been great. By giving up the theological understanding of human nature, modern society has been forced to find an alternative. Initially this change feels like freedom. Humans no longer feel bound by divine rules or design; they get to choose for themselves. But what Nietzsche saw, and what Trueman documents, is that freedom can become a great burden. We are able to "make our own meaning," but then we also must do so, even if we don't want to. We have to find some other conceptual framework to understand ourselves. We might decide that we are just animals, greater perhaps than others, but not essentially different. We might see ourselves as commodities, like any other marketable good, so that we can buy and sell

ourselves and each other. We might use our technology to try to change our natures, or at least the social expression of our natures, so that others will recognize us for who we are "on the inside."

These alternative human natures are evidence of what Trueman calls "desecration." Here Trueman responds to a different account of modern life that has some currency in Christian circles. The problem in modern life, the claim goes, is that it is "disenchanted." Everything is "scientific," measurable, engineered, mechanical, and bureaucratic. The solution is to find elements of human existence that resist this tendency, such as art or spirituality. Trueman maintains that the disenchantment thesis is fine, so far as it goes, but that it does not go far enough (20). The real problem is that the sacred nature of human life no longer matters. When we no longer understand mankind with reference to God's purpose and work, we not only misunderstand human beings, but we also attack human nature itself.

This destructive tendency manifests in some specific contemporary contexts. In human sexuality, first the culture tears down the cultural boundaries around sexual activity and thus removes purpose and meaning from it. Sexuality is just personal expression, rather than participation in the ongoing life of the human family. Second, contemporary technology removes the natural consequences of ungoverned sexual activity. Ironically, contemporary culture says both that sexual feelings are the most important feelings and that sex is nothing more than the feelings. Contemporary technology permits intentionally separating sexuality and procreation, which in turn makes childbearing an achievement and children a commodity. Childbearing becomes "mechanized" in the sense that it is an engineered procedure aimed at a defined outcome. But as with other manufactured goods, the mechanical process affects the significance of the action. Reproductive technologies can seem praiseworthy in isolation, but when they become commonplace, they don't mean the same thing. Ordinary human procreation is special in part because it cannot be controlled. Making it into an engineered procedure changes its role in structuring human relationships by making it a form of self-expression with no necessary link to procreation.

The other end of life gets confused too. On the one hand, death remains a fearful enemy. But on the other hand, when life has little meaning, there is less reason to avoid death. The sixth chapter of the book discusses modern confusion about death, but in several respects it is the weakest in the book. There are some great one-line comments, but overall the treatment seems insufficiently Christian. Though there are allusions to Christian teaching, there is no discussion of the Resurrection. Trueman disagrees with Sir Roger Scruton about the way in which death structures life. But it isn't clear that Trueman has understood Scruton's point. Scruton argues that an activity must come to an end in order to be what it is. Thus death is part of what gives meaning to a life, by bringing its activities to a terminus, even if not a completion. Scruton doesn't need to say that death is *good*; he needs only to say that activities without endings are *different*. This observation should have Christian resonance, for it would help explain how life in the new creation could be different. Activities there will not be forced to end and thus may take on a new character.

Chapter 7 is the strength of the book. Three aspects of Christian worship—creed, cult, and code—resist the desecration of man by uniting the three final ends—the true, the beautiful, and the good. Together, the three practices, and their corresponding goods, structure a human life and mutually support each other as means of restoring the sacredness of mankind. If the basic problem in late

modernity is that the image of God no longer informs human self-understanding, then the Christian religion restores that understanding by constantly rehearsing its truth and significance.

Nevertheless, the book as a whole is not Trueman's best. It often feels like several shorter articles that have been forced together, with some excellent citations of influential thinkers to sustain interest and momentum. It can be repetitive and shallow in its analysis. Someone who has read his earlier books will find little original thought here, particularly before the final chapter.

Perhaps most damagingly, the "desecration" thesis seems to never really be defended. Early in the book Trueman says that "[desecration] implies the intentional abuse or destruction of something holy, something of more than ordinary significance" (14). Unfortunately, this definition is not very illuminating (if it is even a definition). It requires a further definition of "holy" (and perhaps also of "ordinary"). Yet "holy" cannot just mean "that which ought not be destroyed or abused." To use it to define desecration risks a vicious circle. The argument seems to be that *something* is special about humans—call it "the image of God"—but what this specialness consists in, and why it matters, is less clear. Though Trueman attempts to say *how* desecration happens, he says much less about *what it is*.

Indeed, one might wonder if in certain respects the problem in modern life is not that humans have lost their sacredness but that they have made too much of it. Human beings worship themselves rather than God. Society will have something sacred—if not God, then something inferior. Thus, to say that the problem in modern life is the desecration of man may misdiagnose the problem. For example, it is true that modern life has badly misunderstood the significance of sex. But it would also be incorrect to say that Christianity regards sex as sacred in the sense of being *holy*. Sex is *good* and special in certain respects. It is a gift from God that contributes to the ends for which he made mankind. But in a sense, sex is very secular—so secular that marriage will not persist into the new creation. Thus, the opposite of sacred cannot be "secular." To say that it is the opposite of "profane" is just to restate the claim.

It is telling, perhaps, that Trueman's title is most directly stated in a block quotation around halfway through the book. The quotation refers to "artfully desecrating the sacred," and it appears in a quoted defense of drag-queen story hour (93). Though the quotation clearly illustrates the deep perversity of modern sexual politics, it is curious that it is taken to be a good explanation. A theorist of drag is not obviously well-suited to understand accurately the nature of the sacred. Indeed, as Trueman points out elsewhere, emphasizing the transgressiveness is part of the goal, and thus it is in the interest of the transgressors to overstate the sacredness so as to amplify the transgression. The actual effect is a caricature that is neither funny nor subtle.

It is clear that modern society is valorizing rejections of human physicality. Nietzsche was prescient in this aspect at least. Indeed, Trueman could have added examples, such as the prominent ways in which people abuse their own body through neglect or obsession with appearance, the attempts to live indefinitely through increasingly arcane medical therapies, the stated ambition among some technologists to hybridize or replace humans with computers, and so on. The moral judgments in the book are on target. The final chapter's emphasis on the ways in which the Christian gospel critiques the foolishness of the world is excellent. But the overall effect is somewhat less than the sum of its

parts. Christians who need somewhere to start may find this book helpful, but it should be a gateway to deeper study rather than a final word on the topic.

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Hensley, Drew. *Invisible Grief: An Honest Conversation on the Pain and Loss of Unrealized Hopes, Dreams, and Good Desires*. Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2026. 187pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 9pp. (back matter).

As Drew Hensley and his wife experienced the pain of childlessness, Drew began to envision a book that would address human sorrow in one of its overlooked dimensions—*invisible grief*. By *invisible grief* he means "a deep-seated reminder of what has never been and may never be" (1) and "the death of hopes, dreams, and desires" (3). Hensley's work speaks to a specific niche: good desires that God has not met. Many sorrows stem from the loss of something or someone already existing (health, family, friends, job), and many unrealized hopes, dreams, and wishes are indistinguishable from what the Scriptures call *lusts*. That is, the reason for our grief is that we want something God has not given, and we are upset that our wishes remain unfulfilled. Hensley would have us navigate away from these to consider how we ought to respond to God-given desires that remain unfulfilled.

Hensley weaves a plausible narrative of three acts: "what we lay down" (chs. 1–3), "what we pick up" (chs. 4–7) and "how we move forward" (chs. 8–9). The author describes first how he attempted to outrun his grief via alcohol, denial, and laughter (deflection), but he found these merely postponed, complicated, and exaggerated the grief that he felt. Next, he answers four lies that society (or Satan) uses to confuse believers about their sorrow. These include: "Bad things don't happen to good Christians" (31), "I'm being punished" (33), "Time heals all wounds" (36), and "the fallacy of relative privation" (42), in which one denies the significance of one form of suffering in light of more severe suffering elsewhere. As he develops how these lies have taken hold in our culture, Hensley exposes and rejects the prosperity gospel as false doctrine, and he calls it predatorial, selfish, humanistic, and cruel. He also properly differentiates punishment and discipline (35)—observing that God does use discipline frequently with his children, but he does not punish them because of Christ's suffering on their behalf. Hensley concludes this section by addressing one of the most destructive thoughts that we must set aside: *God doesn't care*. Hensley shows just how easily a good desire can become a demand—dethroning God by insisting on the supreme and necessary worth of someone or something other than God's own person. The human mind transmutes *God did not give me what I wanted* into *God does not care* with astonishing ease.

In the second section of *Invisible Grief*, Hensley assures the reader that "it's okay to not be okay." This is one of the more scripturally laden sections in which the experiences of David (Pss 10, 13, 22, 31) and Jesus exhibit the sorrows of the soul that can attend a faithful life. Chapter 5 argues that grief is a gift that leads us to new understanding (82), "new appreciation" (83), and even "new abilities" (84). Grasping the identity-shaping effect of specific griefs, Hensley focuses chapter 6 on the necessity of having our identity grounded on and shaped by the Scriptures generally and the gospel specifically. Because sorrow can occupy so much of people's conscious thoughts, they may adopt a false identity.

> In a world marred by the unexpected, where dreams can slip through our fingers like sand and good desires seem to wither on the vine, it's easy to let our pain and losses become the lens through which we see our entire lives. These experiences, while deeply formative, threaten to redefine us if we let them take center stage. We take on new primary names: "barren, single, disabled, orphan,

> broken, helpless, hopeless." Even though these names are liars (and they definitely are), with chronic grief these false identifiers can grow larger and larger. (94)

The final chapter in this section addresses the reality that God can use pain to bring about a constructive end, but the chapter disappoints in its truncated theology. Hensley distances God from suffering, sorrow, pain, and loss to such an extent that he merely "allows" the curse and "allows" the misery, pain, and deformity in this world (113). But this theological stance both personifies the curse and fails to solve what Hensley feels it does. A God who "allows" all this calamity (when he has the power to stop it if he wished to do so) is no more absolved than the God who intended calamity and misery to exist under the curse and who actively ordered it to be so (alternately, there is an active force in the universe that is powerful enough to override the divine will). Thus, one who follows Hensley's logic must resort either to Rabbi Kushiner's powerless deity or a cruel one (since Hensley has defined agency in calamity as cruel). In this respect, Hensley's formulation in this chapter is doctrinally weak. A better solution stems from Scripture. Amos 3:6 demonstrates that God explicitly takes credit for calamity while rejecting that his agency in doing so is cruel. Sinners deserve nothing but misery and judgment; so, there is no cruelty in God to ordain and establish the curse in all of its effects.

Section three proposes two primary mechanisms by which to carry invisible grief without faltering—community and joy. Hensley wisely does not promise resolution in this life. Pain does not always go away. Sorrows do not always dim. But those who withdraw from community are cutting themselves off from one of God's means of care. People don't always say "the right thing at the right time." They sometimes offer poor, careless, or hurtful advice. But God ordained that other believers should be a "conduit of grace" when we are hurting (149). Finally, the last chapter entertains the fact that since we are complex beings, we can retain both grief and joy at the same time. That is, the fact that we sorrow is not adequate cause to give up hope and joy.

There are several points at which *Invisible Grief* could offer the reader a clearer presentation. First, although it claims to address a unique kind of grief that attends unmet expectations, hopes, and dreams, the book's counsel applies equally to other forms of grief. In other words, it is difficult to differentiate a thoughtful Christian response to visible as opposed to invisible griefs. If recognition of the *existence* of invisible griefs is the goal, this outcome was achieved. If a distinct plan of action stemming from such recognition is the goal, *Invisible Grief* falls short. Second, as noted previously, it is hard to distinguish these "invisible griefs" from simple desires, lusts, demands, and wants. The Scriptures show us how to deal with our desires—especially those that conflict with God's apparent will for our lives. The reader might expect Hensley to address more extensively the fact that a high proportion of our unmet desires are simply sinful—either in the object sought or in the devotion of the heart to that object. Third, the author's extensive referencing of CCM and secular psychotherapies exhibits an integrationist approach to life that seems to accept the world's opinions on matters of the soul. This blunts the value of *Invisible Griefs* as a blueprint for a distinctly Christian response to soul care. Finally, the author occasionally over-realizes his applications. For instance, in citing Jeremiah 29:11 as immediately applicable to his reader, he is taking a promise given to Israel (and only to Israel given the explicitness of the seventy-year captivity) and treating it as written to the church (160).

Invisible Grief effectively draws the reader to consider unmet desires and expectations. Because we are spiritual beings who can consider not only what *is* but what *could* and *ought* to be, unrealized hopes are genuine sources of sorrow in a fallen world. And the solution to invisible grief is the same as it is for visible grief—the grace of God in the present and the hope of eternal life in the future, and both of these come through Christ.

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McKnight, Scot, and Adrienne Gibson. *Traumatized Church: What Paul's Relationship with the Corinthian Church Teaches Us About Helping Those Who Are Hurting*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2026. 236pp. + 15pp. (front matter) + 11pp. (back matter).

In *Traumatized Church*, NT professor Scot McKnight teams up with licensed professional counselor Adrienne Gibson to address psychological trauma (Gibson) and to examine the apostle Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth through the lens of a trauma-informed reading. The authors subdivide the book into four sections: Trauma Informed, Trauma Sensitive, Trauma Safe, and Trauma Healthy. The first three chapters define trauma—"an event or an experience that overwhelms our capacity to cope" (1)—express its subjectivity or perception-orientation (11), assert that it is embodied physiologically (16), reify its effects (17), expand diverse human conflicts into trauma (20), and express the four responses (fight, flight, freeze, or fawn) to threats (36).

Chapters 4 through 8 encourage the reader to become "trauma sensitive" via active listening to an injured person's story, claims, and explanations. Here the authors acknowledge that many church conflicts stem from a quest for power (50–51), that unjust accusations may exist (51), and that the perpetrator may invert (and subvert) victim-perpetrator roles (52). Chapter 5 articulates key charges that the Corinthian rebels leveled against the apostle Paul. They called him fickle (68), duplicitous (70), inadequate in appearance (71), mediocre (77), incapable as an orator (79), preferential (80), and surpassed by others (82). Chapters 6 and 7 reconstruct Paul's responses to these charges and claim that Paul gives all the hallmarks of being traumatized (88). Chapter 8 encourages readers to affirm their own anger and trauma as a first step toward healing.

The third section of the book, Trauma Safe, urges churches to create safe spaces for traumatized individuals. Some of the recommendations in chapter 9 (especially those regarding physical safety) are highly practical in heightening our alertness to actual threats. Chapters 10 through 14 advocate a combination of social-secular shibboleths (boundaries, trust and transparency, mutuality, empowerment, and cultural awareness) and common moral sense. The aspects of these chapters that address normal virtuous interactions are eminently useful, but the authors treat sound moral judgment and practice as if they are discoveries of modern secular-trauma theory. A biblically informed church will already be growing in a healthy practice of mutual love and edification without the help of trauma theory. The final one-chapter section advocates oddly secular ways to beat trauma: "enjoy your hobbies" (224), "get a therapist" (225), "find at least one sage" (226), "support groups" (227), and "friends" (227). If these are the mechanisms that a Christian audience should use to address trauma, the Scriptures in general and Paul in particular appear to be sorely lacking. Gibson and McKnight reject the sufficiency of Scripture to address the soul needs of humanity.

As a general informational read, *Traumatized Church* will remind the conscientious reader that suffering is everywhere in a fallen world. It has numerous shapes, durations, and intensities. And it intersects the human heart in varied ways. McKnight and Gibson urge us not to be glib, indifferent, or oblivious toward trauma. The better we understand the kinds of sorrows and fears that people carry (attunement), the better we will represent the grace of God in the church.

While audience responses to *Traumatized Church* are sure to differ, all should recognize several areas open to dispute. The authors take an integrationist approach. The book advocates an entirely secular psychological view of trauma and trauma counseling (4). Gibson appears to subscribe to Bessel van der Kolk's popular but unproven and unscientific "the-body-keeps-score" theory of trauma (12).[1] The consequence is that the book turns innocent interactions into violent traumatizations, insulates the sinful hearts of self-proclaimed traumatized individuals from biblical critique, and generally panders to the victim culture of modern America. Because of this integrationist psychological mindset, the authors reify trauma as an active force that has power to produce automatic outcomes in a person's life that the individual is powerless to resist (32). This removes a person's heart responses (will, emotions, beliefs) from the equation and absolves him of guilt for what the Scriptures call sin. God's Word appeals to heart change—most often in terms of growth of faith—as the primary means of moving through and past trauma, but this is nearly entirely lacking from *Traumatized Church*.

By casting trauma in entirely subjective terms (the personalized experience of the individual), the authors extend trauma beyond physical events (such as car wrecks, the death of a child, divorce, and sexual assault) to every conceivable emotional, social, spiritual, or physical injury whatsoever (real or imagined, warranted or unwarranted, trivial or severe, brief or extended). These do not constitute the same class of events. Many "traumatized" people need to confront reality. They are sinning by actively responding with fear, anxiety, or depression to the *ordinary* suffering that is prevalent in a fallen world. The fact that their responses are sinful does not make the event itself more painful or the church's responsibility to rebuke, encourage, and comfort any different. The book offers no realistic biblical solutions for the traumatized individual or for the church that is trying to guide him toward spiritual healing. Instead, it urges the church to walk on eggshells and to abet the spiritual and emotional immaturity of its members. Thus, trauma-informed counseling turns the therapist into an enabler. Trauma-informed psychotherapies often do real violence to those who have experienced real trauma by lumping them together with self-absorbed individuals who view any personal reversal or misfortune as "trauma."

Several fallacies weaken the book's main argument that Paul exhibits the signs of personal trauma in his interactions with Corinth. First, since Paul was never *overwhelmed* in his capacity to cope, by definition he was not traumatized. Did he experience severe stress that made him despair even of life? Absolutely. Did he "cope" by the grace and power of God? Undoubtedly. *Traumatized Church* improperly conflates severe stress with a psychologized definition of *trauma*. (Disclaimer: Setting aside the psychologized definition of *trauma*, I would be happy to agree that Paul's experiences both with the Corinthian church and throughout the rest of his missionary endeavors were traumatic in the more general dictionary sense. After all, he spent twenty-four hours clinging to flotsam from a shipwreck! [2 Cor 11:25].) Second, the authors speculate on the text of Scripture and then base further claims on that speculation. For instance, the claim that Paul (possibly, plausibly, probably) fled Corinth due to trauma and took refuge in Ephesus because it was safe is purely speculative. Nothing in Acts (or the

[1] Gibson's privately owned counseling center advocates secular psychotherapies including CBT, EMDR, Mindfulness, Person-Centered, Attachment, and other non-Christian theories but is strangely silent on biblical authority for soul care. See her website, https://www.valorcounselingaz.com/services-1.

letters to Corinth) imply that Paul's leaving Corinth was due to stress. Additionally, given that he fought with beasts at Ephesus (ironically mentioned in 1 Cor 15:32), it is apparent that Ephesus was not a "safe space" for Paul.

The reader will also want to observe two other shortcomings. First, *Traumatized Church* flows with a sustained undercurrent of anti-conservatism. While the authors repeatedly praise women pastors, who are *explicitly* excluded from the pastoral office by Scripture (23, 54, 59, 61, 76), they find the energy to verbally abuse conservative Christians gratuitously and needlessly (109), and they explicitly affirm DEI—slanderously claiming its existence in Scripture (206). In fact, after scanning the book carefully one might conclude that the only specific targets of their attacks (outside of generic traumatizers) are conservative Christians (an interesting juxtaposition given that DEI widely advocates and encourages three actual, violent traumatizers in atheistic Marxism, sexual perversion, and racial injustice). This reversal is ironic given their mentioning of DARVO (deny, attack, reverse victim and offender) in the context of trauma.

The second major shortcoming is an inadequate view of Scripture. While it is true that the narrative portions of Scripture do not always depict imitable examples or what *should* have happened in a particular case, the source material for this book is the Corinthian correspondence. McKnight claims that the apostle Paul is full of "nastiness and defensiveness and avoidance" in his letters to Corinth (13; cf. 38, 41–42). If true, then these letters are hardly authoritative Scripture. The statement that we should "have trauma therapists reading over our shoulders and whispering in our ears if we want to hear accurately what Paul says to the Corinthians" is infelicitous at best and wholly inadequate if actually intended the way it reads (134). It presumes the necessity of postmodern secular pseudosciences for a proper understanding of God's Word. And concluding that "forming trauma-healthy churches is at the root of grace-shaped and Spirit-formed transformation of character" seems to replace the actual gospel, the Holy Spirit, and biblical virtues with a secular pseudo virtue (219).

The portrayal of Paul as suffering from PTSD suffers two major defects (13). First, there was no "post"-ness to the strain he was under when he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians. Second, there is a complete absence of a disorder. To be disordered, Paul would need to be *inappropriately overreacting* to *non-threatening* situations after the actual threat was long resolved. Instead, Paul was actively addressing a combination of doctrinal and practical threats to the church itself. That is, Paul is clearly less offended by the Corinthians' disposition toward him (except as it affected their view of his apostleship and, thereby, authority to convey God's Word to them) and far more concerned by their moral and spiritual chaos. This is probably a minor quibble, but it may indicate that the authors have become so interested in finding evidence to justify a theory that false equivalences have slipped into their analysis.

Traumatized Church is likely to have the greatest impact on evangelical churches who tend toward integrationist views of counseling or on pastors and counselors who have not previously considered the pervasiveness and depth of sorrow that is represented in the pew every Sunday and their own responsibility to act mercifully in response to that sorrow. All should be aware that the church is full of hurting people. All should understand that we can *cause* that hurt, *feel* that hurt, and *help* that hurt. However, the pervasive integration of secular psychology throughout the book invalidates it as a serious

work for those who accept the orthodox doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in all matters regarding soul care.

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Naselli, Andrew David. *How to Write a Paper: Five Steps to Writing a Theological or Literary Research Paper*. Lake Elmo, MN: Build & Fight, 2026. 127pp. + 10pp. (front matter).

A well-written theological paper is a goal worth pursuing for the virtues cultivated, the understanding achieved, and the theological shaping experienced. The rewards of this exercise, however, are greatly diminished if the aim is unclear, the means are unfamiliar, or the execution poor. All too commonly, one or more of these critical weaknesses attends the paper-writing experience of a theological student.

In *How to Write a Paper*, Andrew Naselli (Professor of Systematic Theology and NT for Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis; lead pastor of Christ the King Church in Stillwater, Minnesota; and prolific author, most recently co-authoring an update of the classic guide *Exegetical Fallacies* with D. A. Carson) brings to bear extensive experience in theological education and theological writing to provide accessible and actionable guidance for the endeavor of writing a theological research paper. This guidance is intended not only to significantly strengthen the final *product*, but also to improve a student's formative experience of the *process*.

After an introductory chapter, Naselli pursues these aims by breaking down the task of paper-writing into five key steps, each step occupying one chapter.

Chapter 1, "Six Introductory Questions," explains who the book is for (students, especially college and graduate school students), how it should be used (to save students and their teachers much grief by helping students know what to do to produce quality papers), why the author wrote it (to help students learn to write better and think better and to create papers that are a delight to read), why the book focuses on a *theological* or *literary* research paper (these are the types of research paper that students write at the author's school and these differ from other types of papers), what benefits attend working hard at writing a research paper (writing and thinking more clearly and deeply, communicating more clearly and concisely, more fairly evaluating opposing arguments, better affirming what is good and refuting what is not, better influencing others, better cultivating self-control, more faithfully stewarding God-given skills), and what steps are involved in writing a quality theological or literary research paper (understand the assignments, plan ahead, choose your approach, research and write, and revise). This chapter achieves its main value in articulating compelling reasons to invest in the worthwhile process of writing well. It also provides helpful up-front clarity regarding who will most likely find the rest of the book helpful and why.

Chapter 2, "Step 1. Understand the Assignment," directs students to orient their attention to the key requirements of their assignment (topic, word count, and format), to enter the assignment with a mindset geared toward making an academic argument as distinguished from preaching a sermon, and to ask clarifying questions up-front, as needed. Naselli also distinguishes five types of theological papers, which, as an instructor, I find to be helpful distinctions I aspire to be clearer about in future assignment instructions.

Chapter 3, "Step 2. Plan Ahead," exhorts the reader to "prepare far in advance so that you complete your research paper well before the deadline." That type of advice is easy to dismiss in the whirlwind

of real life (especially for busy students), so this practical and motivational chapter consists mostly of seven fairly persuasive arguments for this practice (you'll have to pick up the book to get those).

In chapter 4, "Step 3. Choose Your Approach," Naselli helpfully distinguishes between proving a thesis (deductive approach) and exploring a problem (inductive approach). Telling students *to do* so does not mean they will know *how* to do it—so thankfully, the rest of the chapter provides clarity on the difference between the two. Helpful charts distinguish between *proving a thesis and exploring a problem*, distinguish between *sample deductive theses and inductive research questions*, and contrast *strengths and weaknesses of both approaches*. Achieving this kind of methodological clarity is important; the concepts this chapter covers are critical to getting students productively started down the right path early in the writing process.

Chapter 5, "Step 4. Research and Write," is the heart of the book and the longest chapter. In it, Naselli treats the research and writing process in six components: (1) *Research* (with nine tips), (2) *Organize the Paper* (with four tips), (3) *Develop a Coherent Argument* (with nine tips), (4) *Interact with Contrary Views* (with four tips), (5) *Write Clearly and Concisely* (with seven rules), and (6) *Use Proper Grammar, Syntax, and Format* (with twenty-four rules). Leveraging significant skill gained from world-class training (Naselli credits Layton Talbert and D. A. Carson for teaching him to research and write), prolific professional writing, and extensive experience as a professor of theology, Naselli clearly presents these six components and fifty-seven rules/tips in a chapter worth more than the price of the book.

In chapter 6, "Step 5. Polish the Cannonball," Naselli briefly advances two strategies for the revision process: (1) "Solicit feedback" and (2) "Read your paper aloud to help you refine how you argue and to improve your grammar and style." This crucial step may deserve more development and specificity than was given in the short space devoted to it. However, I believe much of the detailed material students need to be successful in this endeavor is included in chapter 5 (especially in the thirty-one rules provided under components five and six in that chapter). I plan to point this out to students so that they know how to use the rest of the book to give this final step the detailed attention and emphasis it deserves in their personal writing process.

Five substantial appendices augment the value of the book in practical ways. Appendix A deals with plagiarism. Appendix B is a timely, winsome take on the use of artificial intelligence, providing policy wording and explanations the author uses with his own students. Appendix C provides a sample grading rubric. Appendix D provides helpful productivity advice for students (this topic isn't out of place, either, as it essentially expands on chapter 3, "Plan Ahead," by giving detailed advice on how to wisely steward time for research and writing ahead of the last-minute crunch). Appendix E provides two detailed examples of the research and writing process from the author's own recent projects. I found this final inclusion particularly helpful, in that it helped me visualize how to better tackle professional research and writing projects with organization and intentionality.

How to Write a Paper is a practical, accessible, skillfully crafted how-to. In places (for instance, in some asides or footnotes) the book comes across as a bit more informal or personal than I might have expected, but Naselli was clear from the outset that this book was written first with his own students and his own classroom in mind. I am grateful to be welcomed into that space to reap the benefit of

what he has skillfully put together for them. This book's clarity, practicality, and manageable length combine with actionable, specific exhortation to make it a genuinely helpful resource for students pursuing research and writing excellence.

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Schreiner, Patrick. *The Four Senses of Scripture: Learning from Ancient Ways of Reading the Bible.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2026. 234pp. + 31pp. (front matter) + 24pp. (back matter).

Patrick Schreiner is son of famed NT scholar and professor Thomas R. Schreiner. Patrick presently serves as professor of NT and biblical theology and is the director of the residency PhD program at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), which has one of the largest PhD in theology enrollments in the world.

The Four Senses of Scripture is a volume dedicated to the "retrieval" of the *quadriga* (14–15). The *quadriga* is a hermeneutic that employs four elements: the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. The thesis is explicitly stated: "The fourfold approach to interpretation offers a more comprehensive way of reading Scripture than the dominant modern academic approaches do" (7; cf. 229). As a "retrieval" work, the aim is that readers would engage with and follow the hermeneutical model exemplified by Christian medieval interpretation.

Schreiner unpacks his volume in three parts. Part 1 assimilates readers to the need, content, and central hermeneutical influence on the structure of the *quadriga*. Part 2 defines each element of the *quadriga*, shows how it is interconnected with the other elements, and describes its import for biblical study. Part 3 defends the approach in response to objections. Two appendices follow.

Schreiner demonstrates an excellent familiarity with ancient and current literature on the topic. It is especially apparent in the section that briefly traces the history of typology (208). The book is in many ways a reflection of the boom in evangelical academics to push the utilization of so-called ancient hermeneutical methods of interpretation. Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) has come to be the most popular attempt. The *quadriga* (fourfold sense) is a subgenre of TIS. In 2010 Schreiner's alma mater made TIS the focus of its summer edition in volume 14 of *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* (*SBJT*). Schreiner's work may be viewed as an extension of that stream of thought.

Several inconsistencies are apparent throughout the volume, leading to the conclusion that Schreiner does not prove his thesis. Through a few questionable uses of early church history in chapter 2, Schreiner assumes the antiquity of the *quadriga* and uses it as support for his criticism of an exclusive "grammatical-historical" method. He implies that the "singular" grammatical-historical method is not ancient but the evangelical child of "the historical-critical school" (12). Thus, it is a method that is not truly Christian. He identifies it as lacking "a historical pedigree that goes beyond the last 150 years" (12). He again does not attempt to prove his assertion. The recent scholarship of Paul Hartog in *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio (El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023) provides evidence contrary to Schreiner's claim. It was published the same year he began writing his book.

A third critique is Schreiner's consistent undermining of (or at least double-talk around) the centrality and necessity of the grammatical-historical hermeneutic: "To reject allegory wholesale is to reject Paul's labeling of his own interpretive practices" (17). He later writes, "The literal sense can stand on its own" (33). Yet his overarching conclusion throughout the volume is that the literal sense cannot stand on its own.

Space prohibits discussion of semiotics in chapter 3. Its purpose is to furnish the reader with the worldview of the medieval mind. In this chapter Schreiner intends to enable readers to make more of biblical metaphors and correlations than are present in the biblical text. Thus, he defends the Platonic character of medieval thinking and argues for what he calls a "participatory" reading of Scripture (199–200).

Chapter 4 is devoted to defining "the literal sense" from a *quadriga*-driven hermeneutic. The central thrust is to view Scripture as a bifurcation between human and divine authorship. The result is that the human author may have intended one meaning when writing a passage, but God ultimately had multiple. Schreiner's view of divine and human authorship is a rejection of the received laws of language and the univocal nature of Scripture. Scripture speaks from a unitary voice because all the words of Scripture are God's words, providing the locus of meaning from within individual passages.

The most serious critique of this volume is its support for "the allegorical sense" (91). Allegorism permeates most of the book. Chapter 5 is devoted to it. Schreiner defines *allegory* as "the Christological sense of Scripture, where we perceive the deeper meaning of the words in conjunction with authorial intent" (92). Schreiner engages in a conflation of terms to an alarming degree in this chapter and throughout the volume in support of the use of the allegorical sense. The terms *typological, allegorical, spiritual, figural,* and *symbolic* are transmuted to mean the same thing (see 31, 92, 96, 97, 117, 118). Schreiner empathizes with identifying allegory as a "Christianized-Platonic sense" and "biblical alchemy" (92).

Schreiner is convinced that the allegorical sense is essential for a faithful hermeneutic: "If any of the four senses is divorced from the others, we starve, pervert, and corrupt meaning" (12). In other words, he essentially asserts that those who do *not* include the allegorical sense in their hermeneutic are irresponsible with Scripture.

All of his demands for the inclusion of an allegorical approach to Scripture come to bear in the exegetical discussions within both chapter 5 and the remaining chapters in part 2. Christ is identified as "the key to the Scriptures" (108). This assertion is made, not as a theological reality that shapes every facet of the canon, but as a reality that supposedly transforms linguistics and grammar from more of a science to more of an art (104).

By identifying Christ in this way Schreiner argues that "Joshua's conquest" is "the victory of Christ" (108). Does this mean that Christ's victory is incomplete as Joshua's was? The queen of Sheba's visit means the same thing as Ephesians 3:6. David and Goliath is not about God's sovereignty (1 Sam 17:47), but about "spiritual combat" (144).

Schreiner's major exegetical failure is his claim that Paul understands the two women of Galatians 4:24 "allegorically" (114): "Paul says these things are to be taken allegorically" (142). Scripture offers no evidence that Paul interpreted allegorically. Schreiner escapes dealing with the lexical issue by opening the preceding paragraph with the assertion, "Semantics aside" (114). He ignores the fact that the active form of the verb can mean "to interpret allegorically," but the passive form means "to be expressed by way of allegory" (MGS, s.v. "ἀλληγορέω"). Paul uses the passive form and thus conveys that he was not interpreting the Genesis account in an allegorical manner but spoke illustratively.

Schreiner then stresses his point: "Paul explicitly names this reading allegory, revealing that our modern definition of typology falls short of capturing what he actually does" (116).

While there is much to commend this volume's explanation of the other three so-called senses, which amount to interpretation and application, one could rightly contend that it is essentially a manual on "how to allegorize Scripture." Schreiner's allegorical approach intentionally permeates the entire volume. Its final chapter is a response to those who oppose allegorizing Scripture. He ultimately concludes that to allegorize Scripture accurately one must learn "to distinguish 'biblical' allegory from 'unbiblical' allegory" (206), since it becomes apparent that the approach is not related to the received laws of language.

Scholars will likely ask the question about guardrails for employing an allegorical reading that prevent an interpreter from venturing into meanings opposite the text. Schreiner's initial answer is: "It is hard to quantify how far is too far" (217). He is convinced that it is unwise "to define allegory on lexicography alone" (213). He even argues that "one ought to be wary of too quickly running to Christological readings" (217). Ultimately, he concludes that "allegory is . . noticing how everything is connected in some way to the Son" (221). Thus, for Schreiner, it seems that all interpretations are right interpretations as long as they find their way to Christ.

Schreiner contends that he is doing something genuinely different, though his reading of Scripture is genetically related to common typological approaches. In this, he is partially correct. He is advocating for something different. His reintroduction of the *quadriga* aims to make something out of the text of Scripture that it does not mean. Such is the most common definition of allegorical interpretation.

This volume is a mid-level academic work. It is probably most useful for a class covering current trends in biblical interpretation. It is not a book that will be useful for modeling a consistent or reliable hermeneutical method. As interesting and novel as the *quadriga* might seem to many Bible readers, the system is loaded with so many qualifications (e.g., its inherent subjectivity) that users of this method will most likely experience a paralysis by analysis when seeking the central meaning of a passage.

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Fisher, Jeffrey A., and Martin I. Klauber, eds. *Pastoral Care in the Protestant Tradition: Essays in Honor of Scott M. Manetsch.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2026. 237pp.

The Reformation dramatically changed much in the life of the church and in the lives of individual Christians. The doctrinal framework of justification by faith alone with the resulting adjustment of the place of sanctification (i.e., as the fruit of justification) contributed to a new understanding of the Christian life, as did the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. The authority of Scripture alone, as the formal principle of the Reformation, gave shape to how one should pursue and evaluate the Christian life. The influence of such ideas are the theme of this book.

This work collects essays that treat the Reformation's impact on pastoral care, or as it was traditionally known, the "care of souls." The book is a festschrift for Scott Manetsch of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609,* Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The contributors to this volume set out to explore and develop the ideas Manetsch examined in his larger work. The result is a revealing and sometimes intriguing series of studies. The epigraph for the book, a quotation from John Calvin on Titus 1:9, aptly captures the spirit of the anthology: "The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves."

The book divides into two parts: descriptions of pastoral care in Reformation Europe and the use and application of Scripture in pastoral care in that era. The contributors are a capable group of scholars whose work is uniformly of high quality. Each essay provides some enlightenment on the main topic.

What did pastoral care consist of in the thinking of the Reformers? Amy Nelson Burnett offers part of the answer when she points out how, among the Reformed of Switzerland and central Europe, pastoral care relied on preaching, catechization, and church discipline. Catechization was in fact a special concern in other traditions as well, as Andre Gazal shows in his discussion of pastoral care among Anglicans. Other means of care the authors describe include visitation of the sick and more broadly home visitation in general.

The second part of the book explores how clergy of the Reformation era and their heirs used the Scripture in their pastoral care. Richard Muller examines, for instance, how Matthew Henry used the Book of Psalms for pastoral care. Jeffrey Fisher notes the Reformed use of Isaiah 40–66 as a source of comfort, a most appropriate application of that section of Scripture in line with its theological purpose. Fisher argues that among the Reformed the preaching and teaching of Scripture was a fundamental element of pastoral care in addition to traditional means such as home visitation and church discipline. He cites as evidence the Heidelberg Catechism, a doctrinal work noted for its devotional warmth in laying out the essentials of theology.

One essay that stands out for its unusual approach is Todd Hains on Luther's preaching on Christ's temptation. He shows how Luther shifted from the custom of teaching the passage in preparation for Lent to an exercise of pastoral care for his congregation. Hains's method in this essay catches the

reader's attention by not just describing what Luther did. Instead, he relates how Luther unfolded this passage to the hearer, using Luther's own words along with his own summary.

Criticisms of the book are few and mild. It would have been helpful to have an index, for example, including a Scripture index. But it is difficult to fault what is actually present in the work. The value of the study is not just historical information but the subject's application to the needs of the modern church. The subject of pastoral care enriches fields such as biblical counseling, although the two are not synonymous. Not all contemporary practitioners of pastoral care follow the framework of the biblical-counseling model, and some who practice biblical counseling are not pastors. Still the Protestant heritage of pastoral care from the Reformation provides patterns for the modern church to study and profit from.

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