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Foundations

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EDITORIAL

Over the past few issues we have been looking at how the Christological maxim “distinct but inseparable” provides a guiding principle for resolving some of the more knotty issues in theology. This editorial, I would like to examine how it sheds light on the relationship between justification and sanctification.

The nature of this relationship was at the forefront of soteriological debates at the time of the Reformation. The traditional Roman Catholic understanding of justification was that it has two stages. The first is the Sacrament of Baptism through which the soul is made just by the infusion of righteousness (baptismal regeneration). Later, when this is combined with dogmatic (confessional) faith in adulthood, the Christian is able to perform works of righteousness which form the basis for the second justification on the Day of Judgment (Canon XI on Justification at the Council of Trent). This two-stage view of justification with the infusion of righteousness means that there are degrees of justification which differ according to the measure of the Spirit’s distribution of grace and the co-operation of the believer. It follows that a person can never be sure that they are in a “state of grace” and assurance is a vice not a virtue. Indeed, Canon XII of the Council of Trent states: “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake... let him be anathema.” The Roman Catholic understanding of justification is based on the illegitimate intermingling of justification with regeneration and sanctification.

By contrast, the Reformers insisted that justification must be distinguished from sanctification. Justification is always forensic and declarative. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers rather than imparted; they are credited with Christ’s righteousness rather than *made* righteous. Luther famously spoke of believers being *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and a sinner) because they remain sinful and yet are credited with Christ’s “alien” righteousness. Sanctification is very different because it is renovative. It involves a subjective transformation in the sinner and results in a change in the person’s internal condition before God. Put simply, justification addresses a person’s judicial guilt while sanctification addresses their moral pollution.

According to the Reformers, Rome’s error was its failure to distinguish these two graces. By conflating them they intermingled Christ’s work with that of the believer – a very serious error indeed. Justification and sanctification must be distinguished – that was the cry of the Reformers. And yet they also insisted that the graces must not be separated. Unsurprisingly,

Rome levelled the charge of antinomianism (licentiousness) against the Reformers. In response, the seventeenth century Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin, insisted that the Reformers spoke with one voice in teaching “that the benefits of justification and sanctification are so indissolubly connected with each other that God justifies no one without equally sanctifying him and giving inherent righteousness by the creating of a new man in true righteousness and holiness” (Institutes 16.2.4). In other words, justification and sanctification are distinct, yet inseparable, graces that flow to the believer from the completed work of Christ. You cannot have justification without sanctification because both graces necessarily flow out of our faith union with Christ.

More recently, debate has raged within Reformed circles about the relationship between justification, sanctification and union with Christ. Some theologians have insisted upon the logical and temporal priority of justification over sanctification while others have insisted upon the priority of union, with justification and sanctification being co-ordinated and inseparable aspects of this union. Both camps have looked to Calvin for support.

One of the problems in the debate has been a failure to distinguish between definitive and progressive aspects of sanctification. There is no doubt that progressive sanctification (the ongoing process of becoming more holy) follows justification, both temporally and logically. As Dick Gaffin has noted, “justification is prior to sanctification in the sense that the latter, as a life-long and imperfect process, follows the former as complete and perfect from the inception of the Christian life” (*Ordained Servant*, March 2009, 106-107). But what about the inception of that process – the decisive break with the enslaving power of sin which takes place at conversion (Rom 6:1-12)? As Don Carson has noted (writing on 1 Cor 1:2), in the majority of places where the Apostle Paul speaks about sanctification, he has this positional or definitive sense in mind (*For the Love of God* [Leicester: IVP, 1998], August 27 entry). When used in this sense, it is misleading to speak about a priority of justification over sanctification because both justification and definitive sanctification flow out of our union with Christ. This is evident in 1 Cor 1:30 where Paul speaks about Christ becoming “for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption”. The good news of the gospel is that we get Jesus and, in our union with him, we get all his benefits as well including justification, sanctification and redemption. These benefits are distinct (the declarative nature of justification must never be confused with the transformative nature of sanctification) but they are inseparable. Calvin put it really well in Book III of the Institutes:

By partaking of [Christ], we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life (3.11.1).

Moving on to the content of the current issue, we have five articles spanning the areas of systematic theology, cultural apologetics and church history. On the four-hundredth anniversary of John Owen's birth we are pleased to publish an article by Benedict Bird examining Owen's understanding of the covenant of redemption. Bird compares the work of Owen with that of his contemporary, Patrick Gillespie, and argues that both regarded the covenant of redemption as the intra-Trinitarian foundation of the Covenant of Grace. Both considered the "pure decree" explanation of God's plan of salvation to be inadequate. They did, however, disagree on the covenanting capacity of Christ, the necessity of the covenant of redemption and the resulting atonement.

The second article is a two-part piece by Ted Turnau addressing the subject of Christian cultural engagement in a post-Christian context. Turnau uses the medium of a series of dialogues with imaginary interlocutors to make his case. In the first part, which is published in this issue, there are dialogues with three different characters: (i) the Knight, who represents an activist political approach to cultural change; (ii) the Gardener, who represents the Benedict Option supported by conservative writer Rod Dreher; and iii) the Member of the Loyal Opposition, who represents the posture of "faithful presence". The dialogues are creative and provocative and they challenge readers to consider how they engage with the secular post-Christian culture in which we live.

In the third article, Andrew Latimer seeks to show how David Van Drunen's reading of the covenant with Adam impacts his understanding of cultural engagement in the Christian life. He argues that, alongside the "exile paradigm" that Van Drunen emphasises, the New Testament also describes a "conquest paradigm" which is important to acknowledge. Moreover, Latimer argues that Van Drunen has failed to see how believers share in Christ's Adamic work as the cultural mandate is fulfilled in the new creation.

The final two articles address questions of evangelical identity. On the two-hundredth anniversary of J. C. Ryle's birth, Ben Rogers examines Ryle's discovery and defence of Evangelical principles. He shows how Ryle identified five key principles of Evangelical religion and sought to defend them throughout his life as the true religion of the Scriptures and of the Church of England. Sam Crossley's article looks at how discussions of evangelical identity evolved over the latter half of the twentieth century. He suggests that these changes were brought about by the Evangelical renaissance and compares the propositional approach to defining Evangelicalism adopted by Stott and Lloyd-Jones with the phenomenological approach espoused by David Bebbington. Crossley suggests that, as definitions become harder to pin down, the label "evangelical" may become obsolete.

In addition to the articles, we also feature reviews of Tim Keller's book on preaching and John Risbridger's volume on worship in the Bible Speaks Today series. I trust that you enjoy reading the journal and that it is of benefit to you in your life and ministry. As ever, we welcome both correspondence and the submission of articles.

Ralph Cunningham

June 2016

THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION ACCORDING TO JOHN OWEN AND PATRICK GILLESPIE

*Benedict Bird**

John Owen and Patrick Gillespie made profound contributions to the Reformed understanding of the “Covenant of Redemption”, or *pactum salutis*. Owen discusses it in at least sixteen of his works from 1645 onwards. Gillespie’s work, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 1677, has been described as “the most elaborate work in the English language” on the subject. The importance of the doctrine, in Owen’s view, is apparent in the Preface that he wrote to Gillespie’s work. He says “the truth herein is the very centre wherein all the lines concerning the grace of God and our own duty do meet, wherein the whole of religion doth consist.” Both authors regard the doctrine as the intra-Trinitarian foundation of the Covenant of Grace apart from which no man is saved. Both explain that God’s salvation plan was the result of the eternal counsels of the persons of the Trinity, such counsels having the features of a covenant and including Christ’s distinct personal concurrence. Other theologians have rejected the notion of an intra-Trinitarian covenant, on the basis that it contradicts the undisputed truth that God has one indivisible will, and have sought instead to explain the plan of salvation simply in terms of divine decree. Yet Owen and Gillespie regard the “pure decree” explanation as an inadequate account of the Scriptural data – and hence an inadequate account of the whole foundation of God’s covenantal dealings with his people which underpin the whole of theology. In their view, the Covenant of Redemption provides a more compelling and faithful account, and does so without dividing the indivisible Trinity. This essay explores the alignment of their thinking on this vital issue.

Introduction

John Owen (1616-1683) and Patrick Gillespie (1617-1675) were contemporaries and friends.¹ Both wrote extensively on the Covenant of

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¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, L. Stephen (Ed.), London, England: Smith, Elder & Co., 1890-1895, vols 21 & 42, <https://archive.org/stream/dictionaryofnati21stepuoft#page/n5/mode/2up>, <https://archive.org/stream/dictionarynatio37stepgoog#page/n8/mode/2up>, accessed: 21 September 2015. C. R. Trueman, *John Owen, Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 71. Not only were they born a year apart, they were also appointed a year apart by Cromwell to be heads of the universities of Oxford and Glasgow respectively. Owen was made Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University in 1651; Gillespie was made Principal of Glasgow University in 1652. In the early 1650s Owen and Gillespie worked together on a committee appointed by Cromwell advising on a new ecclesiastical settlement for Scotland.

Redemption, meaning the *ad intra*² Trinitarian pact in eternity, from which in time flowed *ad extra* the Covenant of Grace and the salvation of the elect.³ Owen tends to refer to the Covenant of Redemption as the eternal covenant, compact or counsel between the Father and the Son; but also as the “covenant of the mediator” or “covenant of the redeemer”. He discusses it in at least sixteen of his works between 1645 and his death.⁴ The first express reference to it is in his *Greater Catechism* (1645).⁵ Thereafter his most extensive treatments are in *The Death of Death* (1648),⁶ *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655),⁷ *Hebrews Exercitations 27 and 28* (1674),⁸ and *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (1677).⁹

Gillespie discusses it principally in *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1677).¹⁰ He also calls it the “covenant of suretiship”. Trueman describes this

² More precisely, *opera Dei ad intra*, and within that, *opera immanentia donec exeunt* – that is, immanent works of God before their efflux *ad extra*. See R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1985), 211.

³ The origins of the concept and terminology of the Covenant of Redemption are summarized by Muller in *Toward the Pactum Salutis: Locating The Origins Of A Concept*, *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007) 11-65, available at www.midamerica.edu/uploads/files/pdf/journal/muller18.pdf accessed 16 September 2015, and by C. R. Trueman in “The Harvest of Reformation Mythology? Patrick Gillespie and the Covenant of Redemption” in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of William Van Asselt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

⁴ Having searched in Owen’s Works for the terms “eternal counsel”, “eternal covenant”, “eternal compact”, “eternal transactions”, “compact and covenant”, “covenant of the mediator” and “covenant of the redeemer”, I find that the Covenant of Redemption is referred to in at least: *Christologia, The Glory of Christ and Greater Catechism* (Works, volume 1), *Of Communion with God* (volume 2), *Pneumatología* (volume 3), *The Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God* (volume 4), *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (volume 5), *Practical Exposition upon Psalm 130* (volume 6), *The Grace and Duty of being Spiritually Minded* (volume 7), *Sacramental Discourse 13* (volume 9), *The Death of Death and Of the Death of Christ* (volume 10), *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance* (volume 11), *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (volume 12), *Of the Divine Original of the Scriptures* (volume 16) and *Exposition of Hebrews* (each of volumes 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23). He uses the term “covenant of redemption” just twice, in *Hebrews* (volume 23, pages 240 and 475). Hereafter I will use page references in the form (23:475), referring to the 23 volumes of his Works as published by the Banner of Truth, 1967-1991.

⁵ *Two Short Catechisms wherein the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ are Unfolded and Explained*, first published in 1645, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (1:481).

⁶ *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu, Or The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, first published in 1648, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (10:163-179, 185-187). It seems from (10:428) that Owen completed the work on 25 April 1648. If so, the 22 January 1647 date given at (10:139) is presumably an Old Style date, referring to that day in 1648.

⁷ *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, first published in 1655, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (12:496-508).

⁸ *Hebrews*, volume 2, first published in 1674, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1855, (18:42-97).

⁹ *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, first published in 1677, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (5:179-196).

¹⁰ P. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened: Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace*, London: Thomas Parkhurst,

as “probably the most elaborate work in the English language on the Covenant of Redemption”.¹¹ It is said to be the second of five works setting out his covenant theology. The first, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (1661), discusses the Covenant of Grace.¹² The third, fourth and fifth volumes are said to have been completed but lost.¹³ I note, however, that this second volume as posthumously published appears to encompass much more than is advertised on its own contents page.¹⁴ Given other internal evidence that this second volume was meant to finish with chapter 6 of the published work,¹⁵ it seems to me possible that chapters 7 to 23 might belong to one or more of the “lost” volumes. These later chapters are principally concerned with Christ’s temporal role as mediator of the New Covenant (chapters 7-17); and with the various “relations that Christ sustains in the Covenant of Grace” (chapters 18-23). In any event, they do not add a great deal concerning the Covenant of Redemption that has not been expressed in the first six chapters.¹⁶

Owen’s and Gillespie’s theologies of the Covenant of Redemption are similar in many respects. The most direct evidence of this is in the preface

1677, available at <https://ia600805.us.archive.org/8/items/arkofcope00gill/arkofcope00gill.pdf>, accessed 16 September 2015. As for the title of the work, Gillespie says that Christ is the “*Ark which keepeth the tables of the Covenant, and the book of the Law and Covenant, Deut. 31:26*”, *The Ark of the Covenant*, 131. In other words, the original Ark “kept” the covenant, physically; Christ keeps the covenant, in a different sense, on behalf of his people, as their surety or guarantor.

¹¹ Trueman, *John Owen*, 83.

¹² *The Ark of the Testament Opened, Or, the Secret of the Lords Covenant Unsealed in a Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, London: R.C., 1661, available at <https://archive.org/stream/covenli00ruth#page/312/mode/2up>, accessed 16 September 2015.

¹³ Trueman, *John Owen*, 72; see also his “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 196.

¹⁴ I refer to the page preceding the Preface.

¹⁵ Further evidence that the book was intended to finish at the end of chapter 6 is on p.360, where Gillespie says “*see more particularly what we have spoken of the Mediator of the Covenant, Chap. 4*”, which in terms of content makes sense if it is referring to “chapter X” of the work as published. That in turn suggests that “chapter VII” as published should have been chapter 1 (i.e. 7 minus 6) of a distinct work. Gillespie makes two other cross-references to other chapters on pp.363 and 373, one of which the publisher has left blank, presumably as an oversight (“*we have spoken elsewhere on this subject, Chap. .*”); the other of which refers to “Chap. 18”, possibly in accordance with Gillespie’s intention or possibly not. There was evidently a degree of confusion on the part of the publisher in assembling the work – apparent also in that there are two “chapter XVIIIs”, and the page numbering jumps from 279 to 296 between those two chapters.

¹⁶ A search of the whole volume for “covenant of redemption” reveals that 139 of the 140 references are in the first 6 chapters. A search for “covenant of suretiship” reveals that 56 of the 61 references are in the first 6 chapters. These figures are approximate as the optical character reading of the scanned copy at <https://ia600805.us.archive.org/8/items/arkofcope00gill/arkofcope00gill.pdf> is imperfect. Gillespie does return to the Covenant of Redemption in the chapter entitled “Chap. XX Christ the Surety of the Covenant” on pp.368ff, but this material is largely recapitulatory.

that Owen wrote for *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* around two years after Gillespie's death. He says that "for order, method, perspicuity... and solidity of argument", Gillespie's work is better than any he has read; it is "entirely compliant with the doctrine of the gospel"; and it lacks nothing "unto what is practical."¹⁷

We therefore approach Gillespie's work expecting a large amount of common ground with Owen's writings; and this we find, but some points of difference also. I will first discuss the common ground and then move on to three issues wherein Owen and Gillespie differ, or are said to differ, or appear to differ. My aim has been to survey and briefly describe the positions of Owen and Gillespie, before interacting with some contemporary analysis of their positions. I will focus on points where it seems to me that their positions have not hitherto been adequately analysed, in particular:

- why both Owen and Gillespie regarded the Covenants of Redemption and of Grace to have been separate and distinct;
- whether they under- or over-stated the role of the Holy Spirit in the Covenant of Redemption;
- whether they were agreed on the capacity in which Christ contracts in the Covenant of Redemption;
- whether they were agreed that the atonement, pursuant to the Covenant of Redemption, was absolutely necessary if God was to save sinners without prejudice to his justice; and
- whether they regarded the Covenant of Grace, unlike the Covenant of Redemption, as "embracing a broader category than only the elect".

Common ground

1. Synopsis of the elements and purpose of the Covenant of Redemption

Owen and Gillespie agree on the essential elements of any covenant: it must have parties; a prescription of works; consent by one party to undertake the works; and a promise of reward upon completion. When these are present, a covenant is present, whether or not it is expressly so called.

Perhaps Owen's most succinct expression of the necessary elements is:

An absolutely complete covenant is a voluntary convention, pact or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage.¹⁸

¹⁷ *The Ark of the Covenant*, Preface, iv-v.

¹⁸ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, first published in 1674, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1855, (18:82).

He finds all of these things present in “that compact, covenant, convention or agreement... between the Father and the Son, for the accomplishment of the work of our redemption by the mediation of Christ.”¹⁹ In this covenant were fixed all the terms of the Covenant of Grace.²⁰ The whole purpose of this work is to manifest “the glorious properties of the divine nature” especially his wisdom, justice, grace, mercy, goodness and love.²¹ By virtue of their “distinct personal actings”, involving the Son’s voluntary undertaking of suffering (something which is not natural to God), and the willingness of the Father to accept his obedience and suretiship on behalf of the elect, Owen says that the arrangement “differeth from a pure decree”.²² It is “more than a decree, and hath the proper nature of a covenant or compact” because, with the parties’ consent, it eternally brings into being “a new habitude of will in the Father and Son towards each other that is not in them essentially... [or] naturally”.²³ He draws these conclusions from numerous Scriptures including Hebrews 2:9-16 and 10:5-9, John 17, Zechariah 6:13, Isaiah 49:5-9, Proverbs 8:22-31 and Psalm 40:7-8.²⁴

With similarly painstaking exegesis of many of the same passages of Scripture, Gillespie agrees with Owen that these elements were present in the eternal counsels of God. He identifies the elements in a daisy-chain sequence, constituting a pact between “Jehovah and Christ” (a) wherein God holds forth “commands with promises”; (b) these being “promises with conditions”; (c) which are received as “conditions with consent”; (d) followed by “consenting with performing”; with thereafter the “asking and giving” of the promised reward.²⁵ Substantively, Christ is thereby established as mediator of the New Covenant (which he will fulfil as prophet, priest and king)²⁶ and as its surety (perfectly performing every stipulation of the Covenant of Works in the stead of his people, who would fail to keep it).²⁷ All

¹⁹ *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:497), my emphasis.

²⁰ *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, (5:193).

²¹ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:90-91, 96).

²² *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:497), *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:88).

²³ *Ibid.*, (12:497). See also *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:86).

²⁴ Curiously, Muller, in *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 37, says that “*Zechariah 6:13... is not cited at all by... Owen*”. In fact Owen cites it numerous times, specifically in relation to the Covenant of Redemption, including in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:500) and *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:85). Owen says that the counsel of peace referred to in that verse is between Yahweh and the priest-king called “the Branch”, thereby providing direct support for the Covenant of Redemption. (Others understand it as being between the priest and the king – together comprising the Branch – a reading which is consistent with but less directly supportive of the Covenant of Redemption.)

²⁵ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 10-20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-28. Gillespie later subdivides these offices still further, but his categories overlap: see pp.297ff and his summary on pp.384-385. J. Beeke and M. Jones, in *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 239 say that the

of these necessary elements work together to become “the foundation of the covenant [of grace] made with us” whereby God can deal with the elect voluntarily, graciously and justly; otherwise he might simply “in justice have prosecuted the covenant of works”, to every man’s eternal condemnation.²⁸

Owen and Gillespie are therefore agreed that the Covenant of Redemption is the *eternal* foundation and cause of the *temporal* Covenant of Grace, finally expressed in the New Covenant. In eternity, Christ graciously accepted the obligations which he executed in time. As Gillespie puts it, “nothing is here transacted in time which was not from eternity concluded in the counsel of God’s will.”²⁹ These obligations included the requirement that Christ: assume the human nature of those he was to save; submit to the general law applying to all mankind; submit to the especial law of the church; and by keeping those laws where mankind failed to do so, on behalf of his elect, and by suffering the punishment due to them for their failure, save them by his perfect obedience. The Father, having assisted the Son in the performance of the work, graciously promises to accept the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the elect, such that they may justly be accounted righteous; and to reward the Son with glory.³⁰

2. *Two covenants or one?*

Owen and Gillespie are agreed that the Covenants of Redemption and of Grace are two distinct covenants. Gillespie says we must avoid “two extreams, [such] that we neither confound nor divide these two covenants.”³¹ In this they differ from a number of Puritans, including Thomas Boston, John Brown, Edmund Calamy, John Gill, Samuel Petto and also the “Antinomian wing of Puritanism”, who for different reasons regarded the

Covenant of Redemption “represents the structural parallel of the covenant of works; the second Adam succeeds where the first Adam failed.” This is not entirely accurate. The Covenant of Grace, of which the Covenant of Redemption is the foundation, is the “structural parallel” to the Covenant of Works.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-26. Here Gillespie echoes Owen in *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:86): “[God] was at liberty to have left all mankind under sin and the curse.” Gillespie gives an overview of the relationship between all of these elements in chapter 1, then considers them in detail in chapters 2-6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁰ The terms of the Covenant of Redemption, including Gillespie’s description of eight ways in which the Father covenanted to support the Son in his work, are conveniently summarized by Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 248-249.

³¹ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 113.

atemporal “establishing” covenant and the temporal “effecting” covenant as one and the same.³²

In *The Death of Death*, Owen refers to the Covenant of Redemption as God’s “eternal counsel for the setting apart of his Son incarnate” for the office of mediator, noting that “this is an act eternally established in the mind and will of God, and so not to be ranged in order with the others, which are all temporary and had their beginning in the fullness of time.”³³ Complexity alone does not prevent one agreement from dealing with different issues at different times with different parties. But in Owen’s view, we are not to consolidate these two pacts, being essentially different in kind, into one. The atemporal cannot be “ranged in order with” the temporal, though it is its “spring and fountain.”³⁴ This, for Owen, is the principal reason why the two covenants must be regarded as distinct.

Gillespie identifies eight similarities between the two covenants, nine ways in which they differ, and then a “five-fold connexion” between them.³⁵ Of the differences, Gillespie agrees with Owen that the “eternal pact” *versus* “temporal pact” distinction means that they differ in an essential “property”; and hence they must be separate covenants.³⁶ Summarising his other points of difference, Gillespie also says that (a) the parties to the Covenant of Redemption – Father and Son – are mutual sources of grace, whereas God alone is the source of grace shown to sinners in and through the Covenant of Grace;³⁷ (b) the Covenant of Redemption is made between equals and requires no mediator;³⁸ (c) the specific promises, commands and conditions are different because one is the establishing covenant, the other is the effecting covenant.³⁹ One is the “fountain”, the other is the “stream”; one is the “root”, the other is the “branch”; one is “a deed... drawn for children and heirs not yet born”, the other is the “conveyance” which in time gives effect

³² Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 238 and footnote 11. Their reference to Edmund Calamy is to Calamy the Elder (1600-1666). They explain further, at 257, that the insistence on the distinction between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace became more important with the rise of the Antinomians because it guarded against their notions of eternal justification. If the elect were justified in eternity why should they have any concern about living a law-abiding life in this world? But where the covenants are distinguished it is easier to see how salvation may be ordained in eternity, purchased at the cross and only applied to individuals in their lifetimes upon their exercise of faith – as evidenced by the living of Godly lives. See also W. Van Asselt, “Covenant Theology as Relational Theology” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, eds. K. Kapic, M. Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, 81-82).

³³ *The Death of Death*, (10:164-165), my emphasis.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, (10:165), *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, (5:191).

³⁵ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 113ff. On p.5 he says that there is a “*great affinity and connexion*” between the two covenants.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-119.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-122.

to it.⁴⁰ All of these differences argue that the two covenants must be regarded as distinct.

Trueman says that Gillespie's "central Biblical justification for arguing that the covenant of redemption exists as a separate covenant... is rooted in Biblical texts which... make no reference to [Christ's] Seed."⁴¹ This, argues Trueman, is because the Covenant of Redemption is a "personal covenant" "between two parties which is focused on their mutual obligations and benefits"; hence it is distinct from the Covenant of Grace, which is "an arrangement which has an impact upon the progeny of the parties."⁴²

However, we should note that Gillespie's distinction between "personal covenants" (concerning just the direct parties) and "real covenants" (concerning corporate or federal obligations) is just one of his nine arguments for the distinction between the two covenants.⁴³ It is debatable whether it is his "central" justification. That the Covenant of Redemption should be a "personal" covenant, as defined by Gillespie, does not itself mean that it could not also have included "real", corporate or federal obligations. At least in the context of covenants between men, there is nothing unusual about a party covenanting in several capacities. In the same agreement a party may take on "personal" obligations in one clause and corporate or fiduciary obligations (for example, regarding his sub-contractors or beneficiaries) in the next. The most fundamental of Gillespie's nine points of difference, which most compellingly necessitates two distinct covenants, is the "eternal pact" versus "temporal pact" distinction,⁴⁴ wherein he agrees with Owen.

3. *Is the Holy Spirit party to the covenant?*

Owen and Gillespie are agreed that Christ in particular must be party to the Covenant of Redemption, in a way that is not so obviously the case with the Holy Spirit, because Christ was therein appointed to roles that involved economic subordination, condescension and humiliation, notwithstanding the ontological equality of the persons of the Trinity.

Owen says that the personal nature of the works that Christ must undertake for the Father "indispensably introduceth an inequality and

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁴¹ Trueman makes the same argument in *John Owen*, 84, and in "Harvest of Reformation Mythology", 205.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See his third point, *The Ark of the Covenant*, 118-119. It is also one of Owen's arguments. He uses the same "Christ mystical" terminology in *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, (5:178, 196); and he asserts that in the Covenant of Redemption Christ "*undertakes for himself alone*", whereas in the Covenant of Grace he undertakes "*as representative of the church*", (5:191). See also *Hebrews*, (20:150).

⁴⁴ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 118.

subordination in the covenanters... however on other accounts they be equal.”⁴⁵ That follows simply and unavoidably from the Father being the prescriber of duties and the Son being the undertaker. Those passages in Scripture that speak of the subordination of the Son to the Father, such as Psalm 16:2, are “expressions [which] argue both a covenant and a subordination therein.”⁴⁶ But the status of subordination is all the clearer given the nature of the duties that he undertook. At least in human terms, no one is appointed a legal surety except with his consent.⁴⁷ Furthermore, consent to the subordination was essential for the efficacy of Christ’s work. A priest’s offering is valueless if it is given grudgingly. “His death could not have been an oblation and offering had not his will concurred.”⁴⁸ Thus the economic subordination of the Son, notwithstanding his essential equality with the Father, not only results from the Covenant of Redemption but is evidence for the necessity of a covenantal arrangement rather than a non-covenantal “pure decree”.⁴⁹

Similarly, Gillespie says that it is because Christ’s work required him “to leave the throne of glory, and come down to his footstool, there to be in disgrace” that his consent was required.⁵⁰ There was a necessity of nature for the Spirit to support the work of the Father and Son, but there was “no necessity of nature that [Christ] should make himself a sacrifice for our sins.”⁵¹ It is because the Covenant of Redemption is essentially concerned with the appointing of a divine person to the roles of mediator, surety and messenger, all of which involve unnatural condescension and economic subordination – “and this person was the Son only, not the Father, nor the Spirit” – that Gillespie considers it right to describe it as an agreement “betwixt Jehovah and the Mediator Christ.”⁵²

By focussing on the Father and the Son as parties, both Owen and Gillespie are potentially open to the criticism that they are downplaying the role of the Spirit and diminishing his involvement in a work of the Trinity *ad extra*.⁵³ So Letham says that Owen’s treatment of the Covenant of

⁴⁵ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:83).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, (18:84).

⁴⁷ Owen discusses the correspondence between *engous* (surety, Hebrews 7:22), *‘ārab* (to become a surety, Genesis 43:9) and *arrabōn* (a pledge, Ephesians 1:14) in *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, (5:182).

⁴⁸ *The Death of Death*, (10:175).

⁴⁹ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:83-85, 88, 94-95); see also Van Asselt, “Covenant Theology as Relational Theology”, 80. C.f. Muller, *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 64.

⁵⁰ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 51; and see also p.34. This covenant is not wholly distinct from the divine decrees: rather, for Gillespie, the decrees give rise to the covenant: “*God’s eternal decrees [are] antecedaneous to God’s covenant with Christ*”, 23.

⁵³ Owen often quotes with approval the maxim “*Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*”. He does so in *Pneumatologia*, first published in 1674, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland:

Redemption in *Exercitation 28* is essentially “binitarian”, and that “Amazingly the Holy Spirit receives no mention!”⁵⁴ He argues that Owen is part of a Western Church tradition that sees the Holy Spirit as “subordinated and depersonalized” to the point of being “merely the bond of love between the Father and the Son.”⁵⁵ Trueman, by contrast, commends Owen for making,

a distinctly Trinitarian advance on the works of Fisher and Bulkeley who, with their exclusive attention to the Father-Son relationship were arguably vulnerable to the accusation of developing a sub-Trinitarian foundation of the economy of salvation.⁵⁶

Trueman’s is the fair assessment. Although Owen frequently refers to the covenant as being between Father and Son, he does not omit mention of the involvement of the Holy Spirit, and certainly does not reduce him to being a “mere bond of love” between Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is not prominent or named as a contracting party in his treatment of the Covenant of Redemption; but that is fitting, since the covenant is primarily concerned with the appointment of the Son to his “new habitude or relation” to the Father, involving humiliation, “which is not natural or necessary unto them, but freely taken on them.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, in two works – including the *Exercitation* immediately preceding the one that Letham criticises – Owen expressly refers to the concurrence of the Holy Spirit in the eternal counsel of the Trinity.⁵⁸

Trueman says that Owen avoids sub-Trinitarian thinking “by describing the various roles played in the covenant of redemption by Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Of the Spirit’s role, Trueman says that “the Holy Spirit is engaged in the work of the incarnation and of Christ’s earthly ministry, his oblation

Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (3:162), and explains: “There is no such division in the external operations of God that any one of them should be the act of one person, without the concurrence of the others; and the reason of it is, because the nature of God, which is the principle of all divine operations, is one and the same, undivided in them all.”

⁵⁴ R. Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity and its Significance of Today” in *Where reason fails: Westminster Conference 2006* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2006), 19 – see <http://j.mp/LethamOnOwen>, accessed 17 September 2015. Despite this suggested weakness in Owen’s work, he nonetheless says that Owen’s treatment of the Covenant of Redemption is “by far the best... and never bettered”, 7. Much the same essay, entitled “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context”, is in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, 185ff.

⁵⁵ Letham, *Where reason fails*, 10.

⁵⁶ Trueman, *John Owen*, 86, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 201.

⁵⁷ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:88); see also *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:497).

⁵⁸ *The Death of Death*, (10:175, 178), *Hebrews Exercitation 27*, first published in 1674, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1855, (18:58, 67). C.f. Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 45.

and his resurrection.”⁵⁹ O'Donnell rightly notes that Trueman is here in danger of conflating the distinction between the Spirit's role in the Covenant of Redemption and his temporal role.⁶⁰ The Spirit's work during the incarnation does not *per se* prove that the Spirit was party to the eternal transaction. Hypothetically his work could be procured pursuant to a purely bilateral eternal compact between Father and Son.⁶¹ By way of human analogy, a prime contractor can agree to procure the work of a sub-contractor without the sub-contractor being made party to the principal-level agreement. O'Donnell therefore says that Trueman's praise of Owen is “too strong”. His conclusion is that “The most that can be said is that [Owen] neither ignores completely nor develops satisfyingly the Spirit's role in the pactum.”⁶²

In my view, O'Donnell's criticism of both Trueman and Owen is too strong. Trueman is aware that the Covenant of Redemption is “the nexus between eternity and time with respect to salvation”, thus he is willing to link closely the Spirit's temporal work with his eternal concurrence.⁶³ He is not saying that Owen's argument consists simplistically of: “the Spirit does these things in time, therefore he must be a party to the Covenant of Redemption in the same way that the Son is”.⁶⁴ Owen's position is more subtle than that. This is apparent from *Exercitation 27*, where he refers to the “peculiar, internal, personal transactions between the Father, Son and Spirit... [involving] mutual distinct actings and concurrence of the several persons in the Trinity... expressed by way of deliberation”;⁶⁵ and to the eternal compact as “a personal transaction, before the creation of the world, between the Father and the Son, acting mutually by their one Spirit, concerning the state and condition of mankind.”⁶⁶ This is consistent with it being the Father's

⁵⁹ Trueman, *John Owen*, 86-87.

⁶⁰ L. R. O'Donnell, *The Holy Spirit's Role in John Owen's "Covenant of the Mediator" Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the Pactum Salutis*, Puritan Reformed Journal 4, 1 (2012), 112-113, available at <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Puritan-Reformed-Journal-PRJ-2012.1.pdf>, accessed 16 September 2015.

⁶¹ There is a suggestion of this in *Pneumatologia*, (3:192): “The promise... was given unto the Lord Christ... in the covenant of the mediator... for herein had he the engagement of the Father that the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the sons of men, to make effectual unto their souls the whole work of his mediation.”

⁶² O'Donnell, *The Holy Spirit's Role*, 115.

⁶³ Trueman, *John Owen*, 87.

⁶⁴ P. Toon is even more broad-brush in his summary of Owen's position: “In eternity God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit covenanted to redeem the elect [in] the covenant of redemption” - *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1971), 170.

⁶⁵ *Hebrews Exercitation 27*, (18:58), my emphasis.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, (18:67), my emphasis. Here Owen is particularly drawing on his exegesis of Proverbs 8. He uses similar language in *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, where he refers to “the counsel of the Father and Son, to be made effectual by the Holy Spirit”, (5:179). See also *Hebrews*, (19:34), where he refers to the Holy Spirit as “*partaker*” with the Son in the Father's eternal wisdom and counsel.

role to prescribe duties; the Son's to consent to undertake them (those two being the principal parties); and the Spirit's role to concur in eternity and to operate instrumentally in time in Christ's conception, oblation, resurrection and exaltation and in applying his work to his people. Thus Owen is content frequently to refer to the eternal transaction as being "between the Father and Son". In doing so he is neither overlooking the Spirit's role, nor failing to recognise the essential feature of it that required it to be transactional rather than merely decretal: the willing condescension of the Son. As Tay puts it, "the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis* is instrumental and thus not directly pactional."⁶⁷ Tay regards this careful expression of the Spirit's tacit role as being consistent with "Owen's understanding of the *filioque*-based order of divine operations", in which the "order of subsistence" of the persons of the Trinity flows through into the "order of operations".⁶⁸ Thus the Spirit does not act as originator or primary undertaker of the eternal compact, but as implementer and perfecter, wherein "the Son's incarnation, mediatorial sufferings and resurrection were all made possible and actual by the work of the Spirit."⁶⁹ Owen is seeking to go only as far as Scripture permits, not to satisfy every curiosity.⁷⁰ If O'Donnell finds Owen's explanation of the Spirit's role "unsatisfying", I suspect that Owen would say that he could with propriety go no further.⁷¹

Gillespie is somewhat ambiguous about the distinction between the Spirit's role in the eternal covenant on the one hand, and in the temporal covenant on the other. Having consistently referred to the eternal covenant as having been made between Father and Son, he says nonetheless that the Spirit "undertakes to unite the humane nature to Christ, by miraculous conception... to be a Spirit of unction... to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts," and to do other applicatory works.⁷² Did he only undertake these things in time? Apparently not: it does seem that Gillespie is referring to the Covenant of Redemption at this point.⁷³ If the Holy Spirit made these undertakings in eternity, it presumably follows that Gillespie regards him as at least in some sense a party to the eternal covenant. Gillespie does not specify his position more clearly, but he appears to be a little more willing

⁶⁷ Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 46.

⁶⁸ Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 46-47; see also 31, 35, 57.

⁶⁹ C.f. Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 35, citing *The Death of Death* (10:178-179) and 31-32, where he cites *Pneumatologia*, (3:189). Letham discusses Owen's "thorough commitment to the *filioque*", *Where reason fails*, 5.

⁷⁰ C.f. Deuteronomy 29:29.

⁷¹ Akin to Calvin, who says in speaking of the Trinity: "I did not undertake to satisfy those who delight in speculative views" – *Institutes*, book I, chapter XIII, section 28.

⁷² *The Ark of the Covenant*, 173. Note that this is in Chapter IX, a chapter which is predominantly concerned with Christ's role in the Covenant of Grace; however, it does seem that Gillespie is referring to the Covenant of Redemption at this point.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 172.

than Owen to see the Spirit's involvement as "pactional" in eternity, as opposed to being merely concurring. We can at least say that Owen's view is the more internally consistent.

Before leaving this point, I note that Beeke and Jones introduce an overly anthropomorphic twist by asking whether the Spirit "was involved directly in the covenant of redemption as a negotiating partner."⁷⁴ If we try to picture the negotiation of the Covenant of Redemption as the persons of the Trinity gathered around a table, discussing who must do what to save sinners, wondering if perhaps the Holy Spirit might have been "out of the room at the time?",⁷⁵ we are overlooking the eternal and immutable simplicity of God. The Covenant of Redemption did not involve negotiation, but rather the eternal concurrence of the single divine will from the perspective of each person of the Trinity.

4. *The Savoy formulation*

It follows from what has been said so far that Owen and Gillespie would both concur with the description of the Covenant of Redemption in the Savoy Declaration. Chapter 8.1 of this says:

It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Saviour of his Church, the Heir of all things and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.⁷⁶

Owen can be taken to have approved this wording, having been involved in the drafting of the Savoy Declaration: indeed, "along with Thomas Goodwin,

⁷⁴ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 251.

⁷⁵ This is not Beeke and Jones' question: Letham uses the imagery in criticising A. A. Hodge for his "binitarian structure [which takes] on the appearance of a divine committee meeting, at which the Holy Spirit is out to lunch" - Where reason fails, 10. Letham describes Hodge's account of the Covenant of Redemption as a "graphic portrayal of the great weakness of Augustine and the West on the Holy Spirit - subordinated and depersonalized as merely the bond of love between the Father and the Son". Moreover in Letham's view it suggests that the Father and Son needed this "judicial" covenant to unite them. It is true that Hodge's account - which is addressed according to the Preface to "students taking their first lessons" - is simplistic, and says almost nothing about the role of the Spirit in the Covenant of Redemption. See *Outlines of Theology*, second edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 10, 367-72. Letham rightly acknowledges that Owen's treatment is more sophisticated, though still regarding Owen's formulation as "binitarian", as discussed above.

⁷⁶ My emphasis, indicating the words that differ from those of the Westminster Confession. Savoy, Westminster and also the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1677/1689 are helpfully set out side-by-side at www.proginosko.com/docs/wcf_sdfc_lbcf.html, accessed 9 September 2015.

[being] one of [its] principal architects.”⁷⁷ Trueman considers that the express reference to the Covenant of Redemption is “almost certainly” the result of Owen’s role in writing the Savoy document.⁷⁸ As for Gillespie, all of the elements of chapter 8.1 may be found in the first chapter of *The Ark of the Covenant*.

There is no reason to think that they would not also have concurred with the corresponding article (Chapter 8.1) in the earlier Westminster Confession. This differs only in that it lacks the wording underlined above. This is not to say that those who formulated the Westminster Confession in the mid-1640s had in mind the Covenant of Redemption, a term which was not in common use by that time. But it is to say that neither Owen nor Gillespie would have had significant objection to what they found in Chapter 8 of the Confession, which Owen was happy to adopt and expand upon in the Savoy Declaration.

Points of difference

Given Owen’s almost unreserved endorsement of Gillespie’s work in his Preface, it is perhaps surprising that his view of the Covenant of Redemption differs in a number of respects. Most of the differences are those of expression, such as Owen in his Preface tells us to expect. But one difference which I will examine *is* substantial. Another is *said* to be substantial, but in my view the difference has been over-stated. Another is real, and worthy of comment, but not a significant point of disagreement between Owen and Gillespie.

1. The capacity in which Christ contracts within the Covenant of Redemption

There is a significant difference between the opinions of Owen and Gillespie on the covenanting capacity of Christ.

I will consider Gillespie’s argument first, since it is peculiar. Essentially he says that Christ could not have been party to the Covenant of Redemption in his divine nature, as the pre-incarnate Son. God has one will and therefore “Christ God, the second person, could not constitute a party covenanting distinct from God considered essentially... Father, Son and Spirit.”⁷⁹ There must be another distinct party for there to be two wills in agreement. So Gillespie proposes that God contracted in eternity with Christ *already as God-*

⁷⁷ Trueman, *John Owen*, 108; see also p.82, and A. Thomson, *Life of Dr. Owen*, Works volume 1 (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1965), LXIX; and S. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 14.

⁷⁸ Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 200, footnote 11.

⁷⁹ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 76.

man. "Christ had a will distinct from Jehovah's will only as he was God-man: for as God, his will is one and the same with his Father's will and undistinguished from it."⁸⁰ He develops this argument by saying that "all satisfaction is taken away" if the same party proposes the work, does it and rewards it.⁸¹ Furthermore, if the work must be done on earth by the God-man, it must be the God-man who contracts with Jehovah: "In what consideration [i.e. capacity] Christ did perform the Covenant of Redemption, in the same respect he is to be considered as a party-undertaker."⁸²

Gillespie appears to have taken a seriously wrong turning at this point. If he had been speaking of the Covenant of Grace, which was made between God and Christ incarnate in time not eternity, neither Owen nor the Westminster Confession would disagree with him. But he was speaking of the Covenant of Redemption, which – as Gillespie himself says – was not entered into when Christ was man, but "long before his coming in the flesh, [because it] must needs relate to such transactions as were betwixt God and Christ in the counsel of his will from all eternity".⁸³ Christ was not the God-man until the incarnation.⁸⁴ *Per* Owen: "The same person – who before was... not man – was made flesh as man."⁸⁵ He had no pre-incarnate human soul, nor human will.⁸⁶ He covenanted to become the God-man, and to do the appointed work; it was not necessary that he should covenant *qua* God-man in order to do that. There also appears to be confusion in his thinking as to the distinct personhood of Father and Son. The Son was just as much a distinct person before the incarnation as afterwards – so Gillespie's "all satisfaction is taken away" argument is groundless.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 76, 118.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 77, my insertion in parentheses.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8. C.f. John 17:5: "before the world existed".

⁸⁴ Gillespie's argument is not supported by passages which speak prospectively of what Christ and his church would become. Ephesians 1:4 speaks of the elect having been "chosen in him before the foundation of the world". Neither this predestination language, nor that of Revelation 13:8, is to be taken as suggesting the pre-existence of the human soul.

⁸⁵ *Christologia*, first published in 1679, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (1:225).

⁸⁶ This mistaken idea was propagated by, among others, Isaac Watts in the 18th century. See for example his *The Arian invited to the Orthodox Faith*, Works, volume IX, p.212, in which he argues for "the pre-existence of Christ's human soul... [which] was formed the first of creatures before the foundation of the world, and was present with God in the beginning of all things [such that] this union between God and man [began] before the world was, in some unknown moment of God's own eternity: for when the human soul of Christ was first brought into existence it might be united in that moment to the divine nature... [Thus] his complex person had a being before the creation was formed." Gillespie does not go anywhere near as far as this, but his proposal could be seen as a first step in this direction.

⁸⁷ As Owen puts it, "the same God... satisfieth and is satisfied, in these distinct persons", *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:497).

I have not found any contemporary comment on Gillespie's opinion on this point. Beeke and Jones, Trueman, Muller and Carol Williams in her PhD thesis all give some space to his views on the parties to the Covenant of Redemption and the unity of the divine will, but none of them discusses Gillespie's opinion that Christ contracted as God-man.⁸⁸

Owen's solution to the challenge of finding two willing covenanters in a one-willed God is more compelling. As early as 1655 he explained that "the will of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is but one: but in respect of their distinct personal actings, this will is appropriated to them respectively, so that the will of the Father and the will of the Son may be considered [distinctly] in this business"⁸⁹ In other words, the one will of God has distinct applications to the distinct acts of each person of the Trinity *ad extra*. His position is the same, but more developed, in 1674. The clarity of his argument warrants an extended quotation:

Father, Son and Spirit have not distinct wills. They are one God, and God's will is one, as being an essential property of his nature... How, then, can it be said that the will of the Father and the will of the Son did concur distinctly in the making of this covenant? This difficulty may be solved [by having regard to] the distinction of the persons in the unity of the divine essence, as... they act in natural and essential acts reciprocally one towards another... And as they subsist distinctly, so they also act distinctly in those works which are of external operation. ...The will of God as to the peculiar actings of the Father is the will of the Father, and the will of God with regard unto the peculiar actings of the Son is the will of the Son; not by a distinction of sundry wills, but by the distinct application of the same will unto its distinct acts in the persons of the Father and the Son.⁹⁰

Writing with reference to Zechariah 6:13 just a couple of years before he wrote his Preface to Gillespie's work, in direct contradiction of Gillespie's opinion, Owen says: "God takes counsel with [the Son] as he was his eternal Wisdom, only with respect unto his future incarnation"; he did not do so "absolutely as he was a man, or was to be a man, for so there was not... 'counsel' between God and [Christ incarnate]."⁹¹ It was in the accomplishment of the covenant that he took on humanity, not in the formation of it.⁹²

Thus the solution to Gillespie's difficulty is not to be found in the two wills (or the human will) of the incarnate Christ, for his human will was not

⁸⁸ See Beeke and Jones, 245-248, 254-255; Trueman, *John Owen*, 72-73 and 84; Trueman, "Harvest of Reformation Mythology", 196-214; Muller, *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 62-63; C. Williams, *The Decree of Redemption is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption*, Calvin Theological Seminary PhD Thesis, 2005, 236-239, available at www.calvin.edu/library/database/dissertations/Williams_Carol_A.pdf, accessed: 29 September 2015.

⁸⁹ *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, (12:497). The "[distinctly]" is as printed in the Banner of Truth edition.

⁹⁰ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:87-88); see also (18:77).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, (18:85).

⁹² *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, (5:180).

extant or operative pre-incarnation. Nor is it to be found by drawing back into the Covenant of Redemption the God-man *as he will become* pursuant to the Covenant of Redemption. Instead, Owen's solution upholds the unity and simplicity of God, while also maintaining the possibility of the divine persons acting willingly and distinctly in relationship with each other – for example, in freely and willingly loving each other – and concurring in the proposed acts of redemption *ad extra*.⁹³ The oneness of God cannot rule out the possibility of concurrence between the three persons; nor does the certain inevitability of their concurrence, or the impossibility of disagreement, contradict the possibility or reality of that concurrence.

Both Owen and Gillespie held to the orthodox view that Christ, from the creation of man, was mediator according to both his divine and human natures.⁹⁴ Owen says plainly that prior to the incarnation, pursuant to the Covenant of Redemption, Christ was mediator only in his divine nature; whereas following the incarnation he was mediator according to both natures. Gillespie seems to agree, though there is some ambiguity in his expression: “before Christ's incarnation he was a mediator virtually and undiscernedly... (though the way of his acting in that office... transcend our understanding) but after his incarnation... then he was manifestly an actual mediator... [in that] he did visibly act that part upon earth.”⁹⁵ We see from this that the point of difference between Owen and Gillespie lies in Christ's covenanting capacity in eternity, rather than in the temporal outworking of the Covenant of Redemption.

2. *Whether the Covenant of Redemption was an absolute necessity*

A number of contemporary authors argue there is a substantial difference between the views of Owen and Gillespie on whether, if God was minded to save sinners, he must do so by means of the Covenant of Redemption and Christ's atoning work on the cross; or whether in his sovereign freedom he might do so in some other way.

By 1652, Owen was firmly settled in his view that the atonement, by means of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ and in no other way, was a conditional necessity: that is, conditional upon God's free decision to ordain the creation of all things including rational creatures, who are morally dependent on God and are capable of responding in obedience; conditional upon the giving of law to these rational creatures; and conditional upon the actual sin of these creatures. “God... necessarily punishes sin; not...

⁹³ Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 41-43.

⁹⁴ *Christologia*, (1:88); *The Ark of the Covenant*, 250ff. See also Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 44, 76-80.

⁹⁵ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 256-257.

from an absolute necessity of nature, as the Father begets the Son, but upon the suppositions before mentioned.”⁹⁶ At no time did Owen espouse a voluntarist position, as if God could do whatever he willed, unconstrained by his nature; but in 1648 he had argued that God was free (one might equally say constrained) to do what was most conducive or fitting to his glory.⁹⁷

To put it another way, using the language of Anthony Burgess,⁹⁸ one might say that in 1648 Owen regarded the necessity as constrained by “the final cause” (God’s glory) rather than the “efficient cause” (God’s natural justice), whereas from 1652 he regarded the necessity as constrained by both.⁹⁹

Gillespie distinguishes between three types of necessity. Like Owen, he denies that the atonement, pursuant to the Covenant of Redemption, was an “absolute necessity”. God was free to redeem sinners or not to redeem them: “God... might have not entered that Covenant with his Son; for it was not absolutely necessary that man should be redeemed.”¹⁰⁰ Nor was it a “natural necessity”, proceeding “as the fire burns, necessarily and naturally”, otherwise God must “either have punished all that sinned to the utmost as soon as they had sinned, or he should have shewed mercy upon all as soon as there were qualified objects for mercy, because all natural agents work to the utmost they can.”¹⁰¹ Rather, the Covenant of Redemption was a “hypothetical”

⁹⁶ *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, completed in 1652, first published in Latin in 1653 and in English in 1794, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (10:589), my emphasis.

⁹⁷ I discuss this further in another essay: *Did John Owen change his mind on the necessity of the atonement between 1648 and 1652?*, submitted to Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia on 22 May 2015. Trueman says that Owen’s 1652 position “marks a clear departure from [his] earlier voluntarist understanding of God”. Letham argues the opposite: he says that Owen if anything moved away from necessity, towards a more voluntarist position, between writing *The Death of Death* and *Hebrews Exercitation 28 - Where reason fails*, 7-9. I consider that neither accurately represents Owen’s position. In particular, he did not change his mind as dramatically as Trueman has suggested. The change was not from voluntarism (locating the necessity of vindicatory justice only in God’s will and decree) in 1648, to absolutism (regarding vindicatory justice as absolutely necessary and locating that necessity exclusively in God’s essential nature and attributes) in 1652. A better characterisation is that Owen moved from one intermediate position to another. In 1648 he was assuming that God decreed what was most conducive or fitting to his glory – see *The Death of Death* (10:205). Such a decree would necessarily be predicated upon his attributes, but would not flow as an absolute necessity from them. In 1652 he was still not arguing either for a voluntarist or an absolutist position. The necessity of vindicatory justice was not an absolute necessity flowing only from his attributes, but a conditional necessity flowing from his attributes, purpose and will.

⁹⁸ A. Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated*, London, England: T. Underhill, 1654, 105, available at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=acYTnQEACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=twopage&q&f=true, accessed 15 September 2015.

⁹⁹ C.f. Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 209.

¹⁰⁰ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 30.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

or “consequential” necessity: consequential upon God determining to make known both his justice and his mercy to men, having “creat[ed them] in a blessed but mutable state” and upon their fall into sin.¹⁰² God did not then “acquit [man] without a satisfaction to justice” because that did not accord with his “infinite wisdom”; instead he determined to redeem lost men through Christ “because [he] thought fit that it should be so.”¹⁰³ Thus far, Owen would have been in agreement, both in 1648 and subsequently.

Gillespie then asks the Burgess question: whether that consequential necessity was dictated by “the final cause” (God’s glory) or the “efficient cause” (God’s natural justice).¹⁰⁴ Certainly it was dictated by the former, he says; but was it also dictated by the latter? Gillespie is reluctant to be dogmatic on this, noting that there is a difference of opinion among the orthodox and regarding it as not “useful to dispute about the possibility of another way of taking away sin... [since God hath]... plainly pitched upon this only way: that he will not pardon sin without a price and satisfaction.”¹⁰⁵ He goes on to reject the “extream and... dangerous” and “wholly arbitrary” voluntarism of the Socinians: “[God’s] punishing sin is not merely from his will.”¹⁰⁶ But he also declines to endorse the “other extream”, which he attributes to Burgess, by which he means the view “that because justice is in some sense a natural property in God, and his punishing of sin is not meerly from his will; therefore God punisheth sin by necessity of nature, and cannot but punish it, or require satisfaction, more than he can deny his own nature, or cease to be God.”¹⁰⁷

At first sight, this second “extream” view which he is rejecting seems close to Owen’s post-1652 position. Certainly Owen, in his *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, insists that justice is a “perfection of the divine nature”, and that God punishes sin necessarily and not merely voluntarily.¹⁰⁸ Trueman goes so far as to say that Gillespie “repudiates... the position (which looks very like that of the later Owen) which regards punishment as necessary on the basis of God’s being, if sin is to be forgiven.”¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Beeke and Jones say that Gillespie “reject[ed] Owen’s position on the absolute necessity of the atonement.”¹¹⁰ But are Owen and Gillespie as far apart as Beeke, Jones and Trueman assert? There are certainly sentences in Gillespie’s work that could be quoted to support the claim; but a more detailed consideration of his argument suggests a large measure of agreement.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 32, 34.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 37. Here he refers the reader to Rutherford’s reasons for refuting the Burgess view.

¹⁰⁸ *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, (10:498).

¹⁰⁹ Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 209.

¹¹⁰ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 243, my emphasis.

Gillespie goes on to clarify what it is that he is rejecting at this point, as he seeks a middle course between “these extreams”.¹¹¹ What he is particularly rejecting is the second of the three types of necessity that he previously identified and discussed: that is, “natural necessity”, as fire burns.¹¹² He says that “God hath plainly revealed that he will not pardon sin, without a satisfaction and an atonement made, and this decree of his doth infer an hypotheticalal necessity of Christ’s dying by way of satisfaction.”¹¹³ Owen agrees.¹¹⁴ Gillespie next says that “supposing that... punitive justice be natural to God, and among his properties”, it does not follow that he must then necessarily act upon his natural justice to “punish sin as soon as ever it is committed [and] punish sin to the utmost degree of punishment... without mercy shewed to any.” That would be “natural necessity” at work. Owen says much the same.¹¹⁵ But God has a discretion: just “because ’tis natural to man to speak... he might notwithstanding never... speak, as pleaseth him.”¹¹⁶ Again, Owen agrees, using very similar language.¹¹⁷ Gillespie then distinguishes between, on the one hand, the natural properties of God that operate with “absolute necessity of nature” because they require no freely-created object to operate upon – such as his wisdom, holiness, goodness and essential justice; and, on the other, those properties that require a freely-created “object *ad extra*” in order for them to operate. In the operation of these latter properties, which include punitive justice, God has freedom. He “doth not punish sin by necessity of nature, as the fire burns; since the exercise of justice, yea, the choice of objects upon which he will exercise it, are subject to his free will and sovereignty as is manifest from Rom. 9:18, ‘Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth’.”¹¹⁸ What

¹¹¹ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 30, beginning “2. A natural necessity, when any thing floweth necessarily and merely from the principles of nature...”. We have already seen that both Owen and Gillespie reject “absolute necessity”: see footnotes 96 and 100 above.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹⁴ *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, (10:557-559).

¹¹⁵ Owen says that having determined to punish sin, God need not punish it to the utmost degree: he has a “*concomitant liberty*” as to *how* he exercises that right to punish - *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, (10:509).

¹¹⁶ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 38.

¹¹⁷ Owen says that God can speak or not speak to his creatures; but having willed to speak he must do so truthfully: *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, (10:511); also (10:507), (10:589), (10:604).

¹¹⁸ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 38. Owen may appear to differ from Gillespie in his use of the “fire” analogy. Owen says that God “necessarily... punish[es] sin... as natural and insensible fire burns the combustible matter that is applied to it”, *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, (10:554). But Owen is here using the analogy in a different sense. He is saying that all sin must necessarily be punished, either in the sinner or in Christ’s death. He is not denying the divine discretion that Gillespie is here defending. On the contrary, Owen is simultaneously saying that “*Nobody ever said that God acts without sense, or from absolute necessity and principles of nature, without any concomitant liberty*”, (10:554), my emphasis.

Gillespie is eschewing is the “natural necessity [which] excludes freedom both in the principle of action and in the act itself.”¹¹⁹ Gillespie, like Owen, believes that “in the act itself” God has a degree of freedom that the second “extream view” denies.¹²⁰ Gillespie, like Owen, denies that God is bound to punish sin *absolutely*, in the sense that he has no discretion in the creation of the objects to be punished, or in the election of some to be punished and some to receive mercy, or in the mode and manner of punishment of those he wills to punish.

The difference between Gillespie and Owen on this question is, then, more subtle than Trueman, Beeke and Jones have suggested. Returning to the Burgess question, Gillespie’s conclusion is that the constraint upon God – that is, the consequential necessity – “does mainly respect the final cause and ends which God had purposed.”¹²¹ His position is that the necessity is “mainly” constrained by the requirement that God’s glory be maximised, rather than by God’s natural justice necessarily consuming everything in its path. He leans that way because he sees a degree of freedom in the exercise of God’s natural justice that he cannot deny. Owen does not deny that degree of freedom either. Trueman overstates the difference between them in his summary of Gillespie’s conclusion by substituting the word “simply” in place of “mainly”: “for Gillespie, it is simply in terms of final causality that one can understand this necessity to operate.”¹²²

Thus it seems that both Owen and Gillespie believe that the Covenant of Redemption, and the merciful provision it makes against God’s vindictive justice, are conditional necessities, not absolute or natural necessities. They agree on what those conditions are. The difference between them is more a difference of expression than a difference of substance. Thus it is perhaps less “surprising” than Trueman suggests,¹²³ on this point, that Owen should feel able to endorse the *Ark of the Covenant* without significant reservation.

3. *A covenant just for the elect?*

The last point of difference upon which I will comment arises as a further facet of the “two or one covenant” question. Van Asselt distinguishes

¹¹⁹ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 39.

¹²⁰ For another expression of Owen’s view, see *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:86): “Let none, then, once imagine that this work of entering into covenant about the salvation of mankind was any way necessary unto God, or that it was required by virtue of any of the essential properties of his nature, so that he must have done against them in doing otherwise. God was herein absolutely free, as he was also in his making of all things out of nothing... Whatever we may afterwards assert concerning the necessity of satisfaction to be given unto his justice, upon the supposition of this covenant, yet the entering into this covenant, and consequently all that ensued thereon, is absolutely resolved into the mere will and grace of God.” – my emphasis.

¹²¹ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 39, my emphasis.

¹²² Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 209, my emphasis.

¹²³ Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 209.

between those who regarded the Covenant of Redemption as different from the Covenant of Grace, including Cocceius, Dickson and Rutherford, and those such as Boston who regarded them as “one and the same covenant.”¹²⁴ Van Asselt goes on to say that the former (“two covenants”) group regarded the Covenant of Redemption as “the eternal pact which concerns the elect” and the Covenant of Grace as “embracing a broader category than the elect only”. Van Asselt puts Owen in this group, along with Cocceius.¹²⁵ As we have seen, he is right to say that Owen (like Gillespie) regarded the two covenants as distinct. But he is probably wrong to say that Owen regarded the beneficiaries of the temporal covenant as being a “broader category” than those benefited by the eternal covenant. It seems that Owen regarded the true beneficiaries of both covenants as being the elect and only the elect. In this, there is some difference of expression, at least, between Owen and Gillespie.

Owen explains in *The Death of Death* that there is exact co-extensivity as between those who were promised to Christ as the reward for his work on earth; those for whom he died; and those for whom he intercedes. It is on the basis of “the compact and agreement that was between the Father and the Son” that he insists that “the oblation and intercession of Christ are of equal compass and extent in respect of... the persons for whom he once offered himself.”¹²⁶ On the basis of the reward promised to him in eternity, there is then a “strict connexion [between] the oblation and intercession of Jesus Christ.”¹²⁷ With reference to Jeremiah 31, he explains that there is no-one taken into the New Covenant who does not receive the full salvific effects of it.¹²⁸ He holds to the same position in his later works. The “actual efficacy of his oblation... unto the church” is established by the Covenant of Redemption.¹²⁹ His death and intercession were on behalf of the elect according to that covenant. The purpose of his intercession is to present “his offering and sacrifice for the procuring of the actual communication of the fruits thereof unto them for whom he so offered himself.”¹³⁰ Explicitly: “The

¹²⁴ Van Asselt, “Covenant Theology as Relational Theology”, 81. Dickson is said to be the first theologian to have used the term “Covenant of Redemption”, in his address to the 1638 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland – see Muller, *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 16. (He notes that Dickson’s speech can be found in the *Records of the Kirk of Scotland, containing the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies from the Year 1638 Downwards*, edited by A. Peterkin, Edinburgh: John Sutherland, 1838, vol. I, 158-159.)

¹²⁵ Van Asselt, “Covenant Theology as Relational Theology”, 82.

¹²⁶ *The Death of Death*, (10:171, 185-187). C.f. Trueman, *John Owen*, 92.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, (10:86). C.f. Tay, *Priesthood of Christ*, 48.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, (10:236-237).

¹²⁹ *Hebrews*, (18:195-196).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, (18:197). See also *Hebrews*, (22:232): the Mosaic high priest offered animal blood for the Old Covenant people, the visible church of that day; whereas Christ offers his blood for the New Covenant church, meaning the church invisible: “it is the elect people alone for whom our great high priest did offer and doth intercede.”

covenant of grace in Christ is made only with the Israel of God, the church of the elect.”¹³¹ Just as the beneficiaries of the Covenant of Redemption were specifically and only the elect, so are the beneficiaries of the Covenant of Grace. The alternative, in Trueman’s words, is to “indulge in the speculative and futile move of trying to assign a meaning to [Christ’s death] outside of the determination of the covenant structure.”¹³²

Owen is aware that some theologians argue that unregenerate members of the visible church are true members nonetheless: “Divines of all sorts do dispute [whether] hypocrites and persons unregenerate may be true members of visible churches.”¹³³ No doubt an unregenerate person may enjoy some of the benefits enjoyed by members of the Covenant of Grace – in particular “church-communion”.¹³⁴ This is enjoyed not least by children of believers, whose baptism as infants “[gives] them thereby an admission into the visible catholic church”.¹³⁵ But, contrary to Van Asselt’s suggestion, it does not appear that Owen finds any use for a “broader category” of covenant membership in the temporal covenant as opposed to the eternal.¹³⁶ The unregenerate within the visible church need not be regarded as true members of the Covenant of Grace.

In this opinion, Owen differed at least to some degree from many of his Reformed contemporaries and predecessors. But the difference can be overstated. The Westminster Directory, for example, states that the infants of believers, whether those infants are elect or not,

have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same.¹³⁷

Owen would not disagree that such infants have *some* kind of interest in the Covenant of Grace, albeit outward or external. Likewise, the Directory notes

¹³¹ *Hebrews*, (18:495).

¹³² Trueman, “Harvest of Reformation Mythology”, 203. It has been suggested that passages such as Jeremiah 31 and 2 Peter 2 can or even must be understood as supporting the proposition that non-elect people may be members of the Covenant of Grace, or at least the New Covenant, and (temporarily, not salvifically) beneficiaries of these covenants. Owen does not interpret these passages this way, nor endorse this idea. See, for example, *The Death of Death*, (10:362-4).

¹³³ *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, first published in 1689, re-published in Edinburgh, Scotland: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853, (16:18).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, (16:22).

¹³⁶ Owen does not deny that God blesses the visible church with gifts that he does not bestow upon the world in general. “[Gifts] are bestowed on the professing church to render it visible in such a way as whereby God is glorified”, but only believers, in whom God has worked saving grace, are true members of the church – *Pneumatologia*, (4:427-8).

¹³⁷ Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God: *Of Baptism* – see www.epcaw.org.uk/dpw/DPW.html#baptism, accessed 21 March 2016, my emphasis.

that the children of believers, by baptism, are only received into the visible church; as such they are to be regarded as Christians, but it is not presumed from this that they enjoy inward grace and regeneration.

Gillespie says,

it was agreed betwixt Jehovah and Christ... who should be the redeemed people... he was not Surety and undertaker for all mankind... for his undertaking is no wider nor larger than his dying, purchasing redemption, bearing iniquity, praying etc, these being of equal extent and efficacy.¹³⁸

Christ's work "is to bring the elect within the bond of the covenant [of grace]".¹³⁹ Thus far he agrees with Owen. He goes on to say that reprobates within the visible church may be regarded as being "within the covenant externally."¹⁴⁰ To the extent that he recognises this category of covenanted-reprobates we may say that he aligns with Cocceius a little more closely than does Owen. However, this is probably more a difference of expression than of substance.

Conclusion

Given Owen's Preface to Gillespie's work, we are not surprised to find a considerable measure of agreement between them – even on the question of the necessity of the Covenant of Redemption, where at first sight they appear to be quite a distance apart.

Van Asselt's explanation for the similarity of opinion is that Owen was "influenced by... Gillespie's *The Ark of the Covenant*."¹⁴¹ This seems unlikely, given the precedence of Owen's writings. It is more likely that Gillespie would have read his friend's earlier works on the subject,¹⁴² and discussed their respective views face to face.

¹³⁸ *The Ark of the Covenant*, 80.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 264, my emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁴¹ Van Asselt, "Covenant Theology as Relational Theology", 82. He ascribes the explanation to Trueman, but seems to have misread 83 of Trueman, *John Owen*. We do not know when Gillespie wrote *The Ark of the Covenant*, but it was presumably after *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (1661), and we have no reason to think Owen saw it before the 1670s, by which time his own views had been extensively set out. Equally curious is Van Asselt's assertion, also ascribed to Trueman, that "Owen developed his ideas on the pactum salutis... in a later phase of his career", 79. Neither Van Asselt nor Trueman mention Owen's reference to the Covenant of Redemption in his *Greater Catechism*, one of his earliest writings. Perhaps by "developed" Van Asselt just means that Owen wrote more extensively on the subject in later works. Muller's chronology is more accurate: he lists Owen as one of the "British writers [who wrote on the subject] slightly in advance of Cocceius" - *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 13.

¹⁴² There is one express reference to Owen in *The Ark of the Covenant* on p.406. It is in a side-note, so may or may not have been written by Gillespie himself.

But what Van Asselt goes on to say about Owen's view of the Covenant of Redemption is apposite and equally true of Gillespie's: neither saw it as "a reworking of, or an alternative to, the doctrine of the divine decrees"; rather,

the decree was taken up in a Trinitarian and covenantal language which... underscored the sincerity and faithfulness of God in his covenantal dealings with men. [It] articulated that the entire work of salvation has a Trinitarian-covenantal form at its very roots.¹⁴³

Both Owen and Gillespie give clear reasons why purely decretal language is inadequate in seeking to explain the eternal counsel of God. To speak of God's decrees is, rightly and appropriately, to speak of the one and indivisible will of God. There is one God and he has one will. But to speak *only* of decrees risks failing to speak of the personal, relational, intra-Trinitarian counsels that give rise and effect to them.¹⁴⁴ As soon as we admit of eternal concurrence and counsel within the Trinity, and contemplate the abasement that the incarnation required, the language of covenant (or compact, convention or counsel, if these other terms used by Owen and Gillespie are preferred) becomes appropriate if not unavoidable. Properly expressed in these terms, the notion of the Covenant of Redemption faithfully expresses the Scriptural data concerning the Trinitarian plan of salvation, and does so without implying any disunity or disharmony within the indivisible Trinity. On this fundamental point, and on much of its outworking, Owen and Gillespie are agreed.

The most important difference between them concerns Gillespie's ill-considered or at least ill-expressed view of the covenanting capacity of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption. Owen's view is plainly to be preferred, and so far as I am aware no-one has suggested a more compelling alternative. It is perhaps curious that Owen did not distance himself from Gillespie on this point of difference, particularly given that Owen says in his Preface that it was with "some diligence and great satisfaction" that he had perused Gillespie's work.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps he overlooked it; or perhaps he regarded it as falling within the range of "ways of explanation" that Owen describes as "not unuseful", when the

same truth, especially that which is of so great importance as what concerneth the Covenant [of Redemption], be variously handled [by different writers] according unto the measure of the gift of Christ which they have received.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Van Asselt, "Covenant Theology as Relational Theology", 82. Muller makes the same point in *Toward the Pactum Salutis*, 17.

¹⁴⁴ I do not dispute that it is possible to offer a well-formulated expression of Trinitarian decrees that conveys their tri-personal and relational nature, and hence the united, indivisible, harmonious engagement of all three persons. But the language of intra-Trinitarian counsel or covenant embodies and communicates these ideas more effectively, so long as any suggestion of Tritheism is guarded against.

¹⁴⁵ *The Ark of the Covenant*, Preface iii.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Preface iii-iv.

According to Owen, we must expect and charitably tolerate some such differences on the basis that “perfect harmony and universal agreement in all things is the priviledg only of the sacred writers who were divinely inspired.”¹⁴⁷ Certainly the difference between Owen and Gillespie on the necessity of the Covenant of Redemption and the resultant atonement falls within that “not unuseful” range; when scrutinised, it is not as substantial as Beeke, Jones and Trueman have suggested.

The interest of both Owen and Gillespie in these matters was not driven by a love of theological or philosophical conjecture, but by pastoral concerns. This is apparent from all of their writings on the subject. In Owen’s words, their common aim was to bless those “who desire to be edified in the truth that is after Godliness”, by contemplating as far as Scripture permits “the truth [that is] the very center wherein all the lines concerning the grace of God and our own duty do meet, wherein the whole of religion doth consist.”¹⁴⁸ The Covenant of Redemption is then the “well-head or the fountain of salvation, ... the immediate sacred spring and fountain of the priesthood of Christ.”¹⁴⁹ By drawing back into eternity the eternal destiny of every man, no room is left for vain notions of sin catching God unawares¹⁵⁰ and necessitating a recovery plan by way of after-thought; nor of man contributing anything to his own salvation. Thus here we find the basis for an assurance, for all who are in Christ, that was founded and guaranteed in eternity.

¹⁴⁷ *The Ark of the Covenant*, Preface iv.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface ii, vi.

¹⁴⁹ *Hebrews Exercitation 28*, (18:95).

¹⁵⁰ “God was pleased to permit the entrance of sin... Divine wisdom was no way surprised by this disaster” - *Christologia*, (1:61).

DIALOGUES CONCERNING CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT (PART ONE)

Ted Turnau *

In this two-part essay, the author addresses the subject of Christian cultural engagement in a post-Christian context. In Part One (*Foundations 70*), the author establishes that cultures of the West can be characterised as post-Christian. He then explores the issue of engagement through a series of dialogues with different characters: 1) the Knight, who represents a political approach to cultural change, 2) the Gardener, who represents the Benedict Option espoused by conservative writer Rod Dreher, and 3) the Member of the Loyal Opposition, who represents the posture of “faithful presence” espoused by sociologist James Davison Hunter. Part Two (in *Foundations 71*) gathers the various characters for a round-table discussion. After pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each, the author lays out his own approach which focuses on imaginative cultural engagement using the arts and entertainment. He explores the issue of same-sex marriage as a case study, and the reconciliation between gay activist Shane Windemeyer and American Christian businessman Dan Cathy as an example of winsome engagement in which each discovered a common humanity in the other. Our goal is a cultural engagement that is an analogue to that kind of winsome reconciliation that creates space within which estranged parties can meet, or what the author calls “planting oases”. He then briefly considers two examples of this in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, and U2’s Superbowl performance in February 2002.

Introduction: The Post-Christian World We’re Living In

This is a chapter (or maybe several) for a work in progress about the Christian imagination in a post-Christian world. It examines how we can use the imagination to engage post-Christian culture creatively and positively. What follows assumes that the reader is already convinced that it is our biblical duty and privilege to engage post-Christian culture. The real question is: How?

For those who remain unconvinced that cultural engagement is a large part of our Christian calling, here are the points I touch upon elsewhere:

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1. Jesus calls us into cultural engagement. In John 17:14, Jesus not only acknowledged that his disciples are in the world (but not of it). He called them *into* the world.
2. Though Christians are a pilgrim people, we have found our (temporary) home here in a culture we share with non-Christians. We are called to work for its good (see God's letter to the exiled Israelites in Jer. 29).
3. Christ's lordship extends to culture. Dualistic thinking that would separate culture and "spirituality", and so withdraw from culture actually undermines Jesus' claim as Lord of all creation.
4. The cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 persists because culture is the necessary context for gospel proclamation.
5. There seems to be Scriptural support for the continuation of present cultural goods in the new creation (*contra* the radical Two Kingdoms model).

If you need more detail than that (it's where the devil lives, right?), you will have to wait for the book itself (and pray for the manuscript's speedy completion).

So let us assume there is a biblical case to be made in favour of cultural engagement. Jesus called us into "the world", and if we wish to honour his lordship over all creation, we cannot be indifferent and withdrawn concerning culture. We need to be culturally engaged if we wish to bring truth and healing to the world around us. But what does engaging culture mean? Assuming that we are to bring healing and light to the world we live in, how should we do that (to the extent that we can)?

The answer to that question depends, of course, on what sort of world we are trying to change. What sort of world do we live in? How is Christianity faring in our world? It seems obvious to me that the West (North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand)¹ should be characterised as "post-Christian". And it is becoming more "post" with every passing year. Allow me to cite some statistics to back that assertion up.

A recent Pew Research Center study on the future of world religions found that the percentage of the world population that identifies as Christian will likely remain steady up until 2050 (31.4%). The centre of gravity of the Christian world, however, is moving south and west, from North America and Europe to Latin America, Africa and Asia.² In the global North and West,

¹ Australia and New Zealand, countries with deep cultural ties to the UK, tend to follow British, rather than Asian, cultural patterns. For brevity's sake, Australia and New Zealand will be considered to be part of the cultural West.

² See "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life* website, 2 April 2015, available online at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> (accessed 6 February

Christianity is predicted to continue in a slow decline. This prediction is borne out by the much-discussed recent growth of the “religious nones” (those who choose no religious affiliation). Some specifics:

- Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Americans who identified as Christian dropped from 78.4% to 70.6%, a decline of 7.8%. During the same period, the religious nones (including atheists and agnostics) grew from 16.1% to 22.8%, an increase of 6.7%. More alarming, the religious nones make up more than a third of “Millennials” (those born from 1981 to 1996).³ The future growth of the nones seems all but certain. (During this same period, non-

2016). See also Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”, 12 May 2015, available online at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/> (accessed 27 January 2016). The decline in Christian population was sharpest among Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Evangelicals remained steady or suffered only a slight decline. See also “Nones’ on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation”, *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* website, <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx#growth> (accessed 14 January 2013); and Heidi Glenn, “Losing Our Religion: The Growth of the ‘Nones’”, *National Public Radio* website, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/11/169164840/losing-our-religion-the-growth-of-the-nones?ft=1&f=1014&sc=tw> (accessed 14 January 2013).

Sociologist Rodney Stark believes that the significance of the “rise of the nones” has been overblown. He notes that during the years the nones were increasing, church attendance remained steady. He concludes that the new nones are drawn mostly from people who previously *identified* themselves with a faith, but didn’t actually practice it (e.g. they weren’t attending church, temple or synagogue). In this case, the rise of the nones is actually a period of faith-clarification. Those who weren’t truly committed to their faith simply stopped identifying with the faith they didn’t practice. See his book *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious Than Ever* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2015), cited in Arthur C. Brooks, “The Fate of American Religion”, *American Enterprise Institute*, 7 March 2016, available online at <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-fate-of-american-religion/> (accessed 10 March 2016).

So should Evangelicals breathe a sigh of relief? Not exactly. The phenomenon of identifying with a religion without attending church has been researched in Britain by sociologist Grace Davie. In Britain, since 1945, church attendance dropped, though many still identified as Christian. She calls it “believing without belonging”. But more recent demographic data from Britain (see below) shows what happens next: those who believe without belonging over time simply stop believing as well. See Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford/Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), and “Europe: The Exception that Proves the Rule?” in Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI/Washington: Eerdmans/Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999). So even if Stark is right, the rise of the religious nones indicates (perhaps a generational) weakening of religious practice in the West. It is a characteristic of a post-Christian West.

Christian religious in America grew 1.2%, probably due to immigration.)

- Between 2001 and 2011, the proportion in England and Wales who identified as Christian declined from 71.1% to 59.3%, an 11.8% drop. During the same period, those who claimed no religious affiliation grew from 14.8% to 25.1% of the population, a 10.3% increase. All other non-Christian religious faiths grew, with Muslims increasing from 3% to 4.8%.⁴
- In Australia, those who identified as Christians declined slightly from 63.9% to 61.1% (continuing the decline from 96.1% held in 1901). During the same period, the non-affiliated rose from 18.7% to 22.3%.⁵

Demographically, Christians still comprise a majority or significant minority in each area, though the numbers continue to trend steadily downward.⁶ But that is not the most important storyline. The centres of cultural power – media and entertainment companies, government, judiciary and educational institutions – either treat the Christian faith indifferently, or they are actively hostile to its claims. This has had a remarkable influence on the direction of our culture (the legalisation of gay marriage in the United States and Ireland being only the latest and most technicolour public rejection of Christian

⁴ Office for National Statistics, “Religion in England and Wales 2011: Changing Picture of Religious Affiliation over Last Decade”, available online at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html#tab-Changing-picture-of-religious-affiliation-over-last-decade> (accessed 27 January 2016).

⁵ Australia Bureau of Statistics, “2011 Census Reveals Hinduism as Fastest Growing Religion”, 21 June 2012, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/CO-61> (accessed 27 January 2016). See also idem, “1301.0 – Year Book Australia 2006: Religious Affiliation”, 24 January 2007, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/bfdda1ca506d6cfaca2570de0014496e!OpenDocument> (accessed 27 January 2016); and idem, “4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, Nov 2013: Losing My Religion?” 17 March 2014, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Nov+2013> (accessed 27 January 2016). According to the Pew Research Center, all of these trends will likely continue up to 2050 as the centre of gravity of the Christian population continues to shift south and east. See their study, “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050,” available online at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> (accessed 28 January 2016).

⁶ According to a recent *Spectator* article, the recent demographic data shows Christians in Britain to be for the first time in history a minority (44% versus 48% of “nones”). Further, if the rate of decline continues, Christianity may be extinct in Britain by 2067 (apocalyptic in tone, but unlikely). See “Britain Really Is Ceasing To Be a Christian Country”, *Spectator*, 28 May 2016, available online at <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/05/britain-really-is-ceasing-to-be-a-christian-country/> (accessed 30 May 2016).

norms).⁷ In terms of cultural tone and texture, we can speak of North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand as broadly post-Christian. In terms of overall cultural influence, to use Vermon Pierre's vivid image, Christians are like the kid who always gets chosen last on the playground for the game (if he is chosen at all). Christians are largely irrelevant to the game that's being played.⁸ Further, sociologist James Davis Hunter says that Christians in the West now face two major cultural challenges: difference (our culture now houses many incompatible perspectives on what is true and good) and dissolution (as we lose hold of common meanings, words like "goodness" and "freedom" break free from their old definitions, making cultural debate tortured, elusive, attenuated).⁹ All of the meanings we used to assume have changed. We are in, quite literally, a different world. *That* is what I mean by post-Christian culture.

I don't mention these statistics and social changes to frighten or inspire handwringing. The sky is not falling. The collapse of the Christian church is not imminent. As G. K. Chesterton famously quipped, "At least five times... the Faith has to all appearance gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died."¹⁰ Nevertheless, Christians need to be clear about the world in which they dwell today. The Western world is made up of cultures that are increasingly disenchanted with the gospel and the Christian imaginary landscape (its values, hopes, expectations and moral orientation). Christians have become, in effect, missionaries to their own cultures, "exilic disciples" to use Keller's phrase.¹¹ In short, we're not in the driver's seat of our own cultures anymore. Christians still want to make the world a better place. We want to see God's *shalom* (peace, flourishing, justice) brought to bear. We want to see truth proclaimed. We want to see broken lives and

⁷ See Hunter Baker, "Can Christians Change the World after *Obergefell*?" in Collin Hansen, ed., *Revisiting "Faithful Presence: To Change the World Five Years Later"* (Deerfield, IL: Gospel Coalition Press, 2015), e-book available online at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/revisiting-faithful-presence-to-change-the-world-five-years-later> (accessed 20 January 2016). Summarising the significance of *Obergefell* (the Supreme Court decision to legalise same-sex marriage in all 50 states), Baker says, "public Christianity in America suffered what might be its greatest defeat in the nation's history", Kindle e-book, loc. 786. We will have more to say about the gay rights debate later in this paper.

⁸ Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets", in Hansen, *Revisiting Faithful Presence*, loc. 1177.

⁹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Essay III, ch. 1, "The Challenge of Faithfulness".

¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, part II, chapter 6, available online at <http://www.worldinvisible.com/library/chesterton/everlasting/part2c6.htm> (accessed 28 January 2016). The five occasions, according to Chesterton, had to do with the Arian heresy, the Albigensians, Humanist skepticism, Voltaire, and Darwinism.

¹¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 242.

social systems healed. But now we must do so from a position of cultural disadvantage and relative powerlessness.

The response to this situation from Christians has been a proliferation of discussions about cultural engagement. Everyone agrees that the situation is dire, but they are divided on how best to respond. That is what I wish to sort through here.

I have decided to follow in the proud tradition of Plato and David Hume,¹² thinking through the options in terms of a series of dialogues with imaginary interlocutors. Unlike Plato and Hume, I am a denizen of the 20th and 21st centuries, and I tend to think cinematically. The dialogues have taken the form of a script for an imaginary film. In the film I will be conversing with three characters who represent the different major options for engagement (or disengagement) with the surrounding mainstream culture: a Knight, a Gardener, and a Member of the Loyal Opposition.

- The Knight is passionate. His *modus operandi* is to charge into the fray and, through political manoeuvring, try to power his way to cultural change. His slogan might be from Shakespeare's *Henry V*: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends!"¹³
- The Gardener is just as passionate, but has a quieter manner about her. Her *modus operandi* is to attempt an indirect route to cultural change. By withdrawing to a place of cultural seclusion, she hopes to re-establish a Christian culture, forming nurturing communities where roots can go down deep into the nourishing soil of ancient Christian traditions of belief and practice. Her slogan might be the last line from Voltaire's *Candide*: "We must cultivate our garden."
- The Member of the Loyal Opposition is a patient, even-tempered sort. His *modus operandi* is to simply be a Christian in a post-Christian world. He seeks neither to flee the mainstream culture, nor large-scale reform. Rather, he remains within mainstream cultural structures practicing "faithful presence". He is content to see incremental, gradual changes where possible. His slogan might be taken from the famous English poster from World War II: "Keep calm and carry on."

Please bear in mind that these characters are purely my inventions, foils whose main purpose is helping me articulate my critiques and sketch out my

¹² Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 3d ed. revised, translated by Henry Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), *Online Library of Liberty*, available online at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/166>; and David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1789, available online at <http://www.davidhume.org/texts/dnr.html> (both works accessed 12 March 2016).

¹³ Act III, Scene 1.

own position. Even so, I hope to faithfully present the relevant positions without caricature (which is why the dialogues are heavily footnoted). In other words, none of these characters should be made of straw.

For you visual learners, here is where I would place each character on the spectrum of cultural engagement:

Knight	Member of the Loyal Opposition	Gardener
Mission: transformative – to transform culture so that it might conform to Christ’s righteous rule.	Mission: mediating – to leaven culture with Christian influence maintaining a “faithful presence” within various cultural institutions.	Mission: conservationist – to preserve and deepen Christian tradition.
Outward-facing		Inward-facing

The dialogues will comprise Part I of this essay. For Part II, I will gather the characters for a roundtable discussion (or better, monologue) to explore what I consider to be an overlooked dimension of the discussion: engaging post-Christian culture through the imagination (especially in the arts and entertainment), or what I call “planting oases”.

Scene I: The Knight’s Dialogue

The scene opens in a tastefully furnished office somewhere in downtown Washington D.C.¹⁴ The Knight sits comfortably behind a big mahogany desk. An oriental rug covers the floor. Pictures of the Knight with various influential members of Congress and framed degrees hang on the wall. Behind the desk sits the Knight, a man in his 50s, greying at the temples, and steel-grey eyes. He is a man of no little intelligence and experience; he knows the ropes in D.C. He is a culture warrior of the Christian Right.¹⁵ In truth you

¹⁴ Here I must beg my British readers’ forgiveness. I am, for better or worse, American. I grew upon a post-Roe v. Wade America, and the Knight is for me and all-too-recognisable character in the States. But I don’t know how to write a British knight. I simply do not possess the sort of familiarity with the textures and key moments of British evangelical political activism. From what my English and Welsh friends tell me, the Knight is a far rarer bird in Britain than in the States. Sympathies tend rather toward withdrawal than tilting at legislative windmills. Please feel free to put the Knight in tweed, and in an office in Westminster somewhere near Parliament.

¹⁵ The Christian Right is a catchall term for theologically and politically conservative cultural activists. Such a perspective is more typical of American Christian political discourse. Many are of the opinion that America was historically a Christian nation that has lately been hijacked by anti-Christian forces. The goal of Christian political involvement, then, is to return the country to its Christian roots. They mobilise over sex and family issues (same-sex marriage, abortion, etc.). An influential example would be author and radio talk-show host Dr. James Dobson (of Focus on the Family), or Republican Presidential hopeful Ted Cruz.

could substitute someone from the Christian Left,¹⁶ the Neo-Kuyperians of the Center for Public Justice,¹⁷ or a Theonomist.¹⁸ For all their differences (and they are profound), these movements converge in terms of their goal and method: they each seek cultural change through primarily (or even solely) political means. This political approach seeks to build a grassroots movement, believing that if only they can get enough ordinary Christians to get involved, change will happen.

But cultural change is more complicated than that, as we shall see.

Turnau: Thanks for seeing me. I can't help but notice, Sir Knight, how thick your armour and how sharp your lance.

Knight: A wise guy, eh? You can clearly see I'm wearing a 3-piece suit.

Turnau: I mean metaphorically. In terms of cultural stance, aggression and so on.

Knight: What of it? I'm on a mission.

Turnau: A quest?

Knight: (*Rolls eyes.*) If you insist.

Turnau: And what is your quest?

Knight: To reclaim this country for Jesus Christ and his reign. We need to turn this country around. This is God's country, but we don't live by his standards. We're going to hell in a handbasket. Or as Solomon put it, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). This nation has become an object of reproach. Gay marriage is only the latest piece of evidence that things need to be turned around. Someone has to shore up the tottering foundation, like Ezekiel said: "I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the

¹⁶ The Christian Left is like the Christian Right except they tend to be less nationalistic, and more liberal, both theologically and politically. The movement coalesced in response to and to counter the Christian Right. The Christian Left mobilises over issues of social justice and environmental policy. An influential example would be Rev. James Wallis, whose books include *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005).

¹⁷ The Center for Public Justice is an institute that seeks to establish God's justice in a way that includes the various beliefs and practices of all citizens (a position called "principled pluralism"). The CPJ seeks the common good by reframing Christian political commitments in publically accessible and persuasive terms. See James W. Skillen's *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994). See also <http://www.cpublicjustice.org/public/page/content/homepage> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁸ Theonomists, or Christian Reconstructionists, want to bring God's rule over culture to bear in the most direct way possible, even making Mosaic legislation into the law of the land (no reframing principled pluralism here!). See for example Greg L. Bahnsen's *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Powder Springs, GA/Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision/Covenant Media Press, 2008).

land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one" (22:30).
I'm one of those standing in the gap.

Turnau: For this Christian country?

Knight: Yes. You don't sound so convinced of it yourself.

Turnau: Well, I've been living in Europe for almost 17 years, and in that context, really strong nationalism generally doesn't go good places.

Knight: Are you calling me proto-fascist, or something?

Turnau: Nothing so extreme, I assure you. But the fact remains, nationalism as an identity fits Christians ill.

Knight: Why's that? What's wrong with loving your country?

Turnau: Not a thing. Except that Christian love transcends country.

Knight: I don't see the conflict. This is a country founded on Christian principles that has drifted from its roots. I'd love to see spread around the world the kinds of freedoms that we've known (but that are fast disappearing here).

Turnau: No, I totally agree. I love religious liberty. But I think Christians can get confused in their love of country versus love of God.

Knight: How do you mean?

Turnau: Let me tell you a story. When I was a seminary student, I worked for about six years in a Korean church as a youth minister. They were lovely people. They loved God, and they loved their native Korea. While I was there, something strange and wonderful happened: kids started bringing their friends from the neighbourhood or school to our Friday evening meetings. And these kids weren't Korean. A white kid showed up. Then a black kid. Then a mixed race Hispanic /Thai kid showed up. I thought it was great, but some of the old ladies in the church didn't like seeing kids like that in our church. They went and complained to the pastor.

Knight: What did he say?

Turnau: He said (and I'll always be grateful for this), "This is a Christian church first, and a Korean church second." These different kids were to be welcomed, not expelled.

Knight: So what are you trying to say? How does that apply to a Christian's good and proper love of country?

Turnau: I guess I'm trying to say two interconnected things: 1. It's easy for well-meaning Christians to buy into a nation-first type of Christianity that tends to be self-protective and unwelcoming to outsiders, whereas Christianity has always been about welcoming the outsider (at least if Jesus' model is to be followed). 2. Once somebody entrusts his or her life to Christ, the relationship to nation is attenuated. Our first loyalty is to King Jesus. He certainly calls us to be good citizens, to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matt. 22:15-22). But he also destroyed the "wall of

hostility” that divides nations and ethnicities, creating a new, unified people in himself (Eph. 2:14-16). “In Christ” is our real country, a home deeper than our homeland. And it holds people from every nation. That’s our first love.

God and country don’t often fit into a neat, seamless package. They didn’t for the early Christians, and they don’t for us. And we get into trouble when we start investing our nation with semi-messianic powers, as if reclaiming the country would make everything all right again. There’s always going to be a tension between God and country, and it’s worth thinking about. Otherwise, we end up demonising our opponents, or excluding people, like those old Korean ladies did. Just like Jesus *didn’t*. Nationalism is potent stuff, and I’m dismayed when I see Christians fall too readily under its sway.

Knight: Just for the sake of argument, let’s pretend I’m not a xenophobe or a racist. Let’s just say that I love my country, but I recognise that my love for God rightfully claims priority. Let’s say for argument’s sake that I still deeply love my country and want to fight for it, to make its laws just, to love the poor, to protect the unborn, to work for the good of all America’s citizens. I’m still going to insist that Christian laws are the best basis on which to do it.

Turnau: That certainly sounds encouraging, if you can do it in a way that respects other beliefs and understands that we are a minority within a democratically plural society. So how goes the fight?

Knight: (*Sighs.*) Not so great, lately. We’ve had a lot of defeats lately, and things are getting dire, especially in terms of our constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. But I’m sure it’ll turn around. These things have a way of doing that. The pendulum swings both ways, you know. I’m just trusting in God to give us the victory we need to save this culture. Psalm 91:1, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Turnau: Are you sure it’s not a problem of strategy? You’re not rethinking your approach?

Knight: A little, perhaps. After all, we’re not in the heady days of the Moral Majority, so we don’t have the influence we once had. But it’s still my conviction that there are a lot of good Christian people and like-minded conservatives who, if motivated, could help roll back the advances that the so-called progressives have made recently. We just need to stick to what worked: introducing legislation, calling congressmen to account, fighting to get the right people appointed for judicial nominations... that sort of thing.

Turnau: Has this approach *ever* succeeded?

Knight: (*Casts him a sharp glance.*) Absolutely. Look at history. Think of the Reagan Revolution! The Republican Party made overtures to Evangelical leaders like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Jim Dobson, who in turn mobilised their supporters and helped get Reagan elected in 1980, and then again in 1984. During that time, federal funding for abortions was cut, and that saved who knows how many unborn lives. Family values became front and centre of the national agenda. Love us or hate us, you couldn't ignore us. Those were the days of non-alcoholic wine and roses, my friend.

Turnau: I'd agree that Christians got a lot done. But did it stick? And did we come away unchanged? It seems to me that that alliance with the Republicans changed the character, the flavour of Evangelical commitment over the years.

Knight: What do you mean?

Turnau: (*Beat. Continues cautiously.*) Well, it's always struck me as curious that so many theologically conservative Christians often automatically support conservative political positions, as if the two naturally went together.

Knight: Don't they? We're all about individual moral responsibility, which fits naturally into a pro-entrepreneurial, pro-traditional family agenda.

Turnau: Perhaps, but there are other positions that feel pretty unnatural biblically. Pro-gun Christians? Anti-environmental protection Christians? Anti-immigration (or even anti-refugee) Christians? It feels as if American Evangelicals have drunk Republican Kool-Aid and it's changed their DNA.¹⁹

Knight: Evangelicals (and the Fundamentalists before them) have always been a fairly culturally conservative bunch. A lot of that has to do with a suspicion of government interference, keeping big government small and out of our lives.

Turnau: True, but consider an even wider historical perspective. Consider the roots of American Evangelicalism in the First and Second Great Awakenings.²⁰ Spiritual revival produced an amazing array of what we today would call "progressive" social justice and social reform movements, things such as: shortening the workweek, anti-child-labour legislation, rescuing women out of prostitution, stuff like

¹⁹ Of course, this argument cuts both ways on the political spectrum. Christians who pin their hopes on the political left often find themselves supporting biblically questionable positions such as abortion-on-demand and same-sex marriage. In the quest for political influence, Christians will face compromises, and over time those compromises will begin to feel like home... things we support simply because we do not want to see "the other guys" win.

²⁰ The first and second Great Awakenings (American religious revivals) occurred in the mid-18th century, and late 18th into mid-19th century respectively.

that.²¹ And a lot of that included government initiatives. Christians haven't always been against governmental involvement.

Knight: But you're leaving part of the story out, aren't you? A lot of those social reforms were lobbied for in the early 20th century by the Social Gospel movement, liberal theologians who had no use for evangelism. Those aren't *my* religious predecessors. They are the great-grandfathers of the political liberals of today. Are you saying we should walk in *their* footsteps?

Turnau: Not necessarily. I've got some real concerns about the theological liberalism bound up with the Social Gospel movement. But it just seems odd that people who care so much about sharing the gospel are at the same time so indifferent (or even hostile) to ideas concerning racial justice, or justice for the poor. Once upon a time, it wasn't like that.²² Concern for evangelism and social justice weren't always seen as mutually exclusive. Of course, not all of that can be laid at the feet of the Republican Party – the polarisation between theological conservatives and the Social Gospel happened way before the 1980s. My point is simply that since the 1980s, Evangelicalism and Republicanism have come to mirror each other in uncomfortable ways. And that points to a larger lesson to be learned...

Knight: Which is?

Turnau: When Christians cosy up to the halls of power, whether liberal or conservative, they will end up looking and acting like their political benefactors. Just like dogs end up looking like their masters.

Knight: (*Deadpan.*) Nice. You just called us dogs.

Turnau: Just a metaphor. Again. But that's not the worst of it.

Knight: Worse than being a dog?

Turnau: Sure. When Christians seek cultural change primarily through power politics, you invite a backlash movement against those changes. Politics is an inherently coercive strategy for changing culture. Even if you gather a majority, your programme of reforms force the minority into the cultural patterns you choose. And that inevitably creates resentment against that coercive majority, and a backlash.

Knight: (*Fixes him with a hard stare.*) Do you have any proof of this?

²¹ See Richard F. Lovelace, "The Spiritual Roots of Christian Social Concern", in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

²² The historical record of racial justice issues among biblically-minded Christians has been mixed, to say the least. Highlights would include William Wilberforce's lifelong effort to ban the slave trade in Britain. Lowlights would have to include the quietism concerning slavery of the Puritans during the First Great Awakening, and even slavery-justifying 19th century theology from the pens of otherwise orthodox Presbyterian theologians such as Robert Lewis Dabney and James Henley Thornwell.

Turnau: Sure. Look at the rise of the “religious nones” among Millennials. It’s no secret that it’s due in large part because of their resentment and rejection of their parents’ politics.²³ This resentment may also be behind the way young people have been transforming Christianity into “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”, a watered down, more tolerant, “nicer” version of Christianity in which God remains a fuzzy distant being who only wants you to be a better you.²⁴ Resentment probably also explains the popularity of the New Atheism in the U.S., as well as the rapid rise of a new sexual orthodoxy.²⁵ We are now reaping the harvest of resentment against the Reagan-Bush years.

Knight: But coercion can’t be helped! That’s the nature of politics. Besides, it’s not as if *we* were the aggressors. The culture shifted away from *us*, and now we’re the ones being coerced! There’s a lot of resentment among conservatives nowadays.

Turnau: I don’t deny that, when given the chance, liberals have used political muscle to shift culture and policy in directions they desired. Predictably, their recent successes have created resentment among conservatives.²⁶ The difference is that social liberals have *also* invested in elite universities, mainstream media and entertainment companies – the core cultural institutions that shape the collective imagination (what I call the “imaginary landscape”) – in a way that conservatives did not.²⁷ That makes a huge difference, because it sets the stage for a long-term cultural change. The grassroots

²³ The increase started in the 1990s, soon after the Reagan Revolution and during the Presidency of George W. Bush. Harvard Professor of Public Policy Robert Putnam attributes the rise to political disaffection: “These were the kids who were coming of age in the America of the culture wars, in the America in which religion publicly became associated with a particular brand of politics...” Quoted in Heidi Glenn, “Losing Our Religion: The Growth of the ‘Nones’”, *National Public Radio* website, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/11/169164840/losing-our-religion-the-growth-of-the-nones?ft=1&f=1014&sc=tw> (accessed 14 January 2013).

²⁴ See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁵ For those wishing to understand the new sexual-moral orthodoxy, a good place to start is Alastair Roberts’ “Five Principles of the New Sexual Morality”, *The Gospel Coalition* website, 15 August 2014, available online at <http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-principles-of-the-new-sexual-morality/> (accessed 17 September 2014).

²⁶ This resentment may help us understand the rise of Donald Trump within the Republican Party.

²⁷ It is true that Christians also invested into institutions, but they were mostly subcultural investments that made little impact on mainstream culture. And even then, the amount of giving to specifically cultural initiatives (leadership, innovation, the arts) was dwarfed by the amount given to similar initiatives by secular foundations. For a comparison of secular versus evangelical cultural investment, see James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Essay I, chapter 6, “The Cultural Economy of American Christianity”, esp. 81-84.

revolution of the 1980s never swayed those at the centres of cultural power, so the changes it brought about soon faded. Its real legacy is the resentment it engendered among those élites who truly shape the culture.²⁸

Knight: (*Pounds desk, startling Turnau.*) But we have to do something! We need to be involved in our culture. Think of the world we're leaving our kids. We can't just let it all go to hell!

Turnau: (*Collects himself. Placating, but sincere.*) Look, I admire your passion and conviction, the way you call people to be intentionally engaged in culture. I truly do. You look at the world and want it to be better, and you're throwing yourself into the fray. There's no quit in you, that's for sure. However, maybe we ought to step back and draw some lessons from history. The failure of the Reagan legacy is only the last chapter in a saga that has been going on for centuries.

Knight: (*Begrudgingly.*) I'm not sure I am willing to admit that the Reagan years were in vain, but what is this historical "saga" you're talking about?

Turnau: I'm saying that you can see a similar pattern elsewhere. The Great Awakening took place in New England, and now it's one of the regions of America most resistant to the gospel. Look at the Netherlands. The Christian influence there reached its height in the early 20th century when the brilliant theologian/educator/statesman Abraham Kuyper became Prime Minister. But where is the Christian influence now? Holland has some of the most liberal narcotics laws in the world. England was once considered a Christian nation, but it too experienced a gradual, but serious, erosion of the faith after World War II that continues to this day. In fact, the erosion of the Christian faith institutionally and in the hearts and minds of the people has been the story of the last few centuries in the West generally.

Knight: But why? In each case, they were doing the best they could. Each of these countries was founded on Christian principles. Why shouldn't they try to move them back in line with those principles, even using politics to do it?

Turnau: (*Takes a deep breath and settles into "teacher mode".*) The problem lies in the nature of political power itself and its effect on the collective imagination, especially when the church is involved. Whenever the church gets too close to the political powers that be, it is always the church that gets burned in the long run. At least that's

²⁸ Sociologist James Davison Hunter has argued persuasively that cultural change emanates from the centres of cultural power, the élites, rather than from grassroots movements. See *To Change the World*, Essay I, chapter 4, "An Alternative View of Cultural Change in Eleven Propositions".

the lesson I draw from sociologist David Martin and his study of the different patterns of secularisation.²⁹ Secularisation took different routes in the West according to the various patterns of church-state relationships. Where church and state were highly integrated so that the church was a virtual tool for state policy (for example, in Catholic countries such as France in the 17th and 18th centuries), the reaction was eventually a violent anti-clericalism: "Strangle the last king with the entrails of the last priest!" Where church and state ties were looser, but still substantial (for example, in the state supported Protestant churches of Britain and Northern Europe) secularisation was experienced as a gradual decline of social legitimacy. The church lives on, but comes to be seen as more and more socially irrelevant. And in America, where there was a separation of church and state, and the various denominations were left to fend for themselves on the model of an open marketplace (as in the United States), religion fared rather better. Secularisation arrived rather later, and took hold mostly among the cultured élites. So the more the church got intertwined with state power, the more pronounced was the secularisation that followed. And you could tack on the Reagan and Bush years, and the secularist backlash that followed, as an example of more of the same.

Knight: So you're saying the drift to secularisation was inevitable *and* our fault?

Turnau: No, of course not. The causes of secularisation are varied and complicated. But there is a lesson to be learned from the story Martin tells.

Knight: (*Patiently, knowing that Turnau won't stop until his punch line.*) Which is?

Turnau: That the health of religion in the long-term is inversely proportional to the amount of integration between state and church. More integration and state support for the church in the long term produces, paradoxically, a weaker, more socially marginalised church.

²⁹ David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). Martin has amended and nuanced his theory over the years, especially given the historical realities of the fall of Communism and the resurgence of radical religion in the 1980s. See for example his later *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005). A helpful summary can be found in his article "What I Really Said about Secularisation", *Dialogue* 46, 2 (Summer 2007): 139-52. Still, his insights about the link between religion and politics and their contribution to secularisation remain valid, and have inspired other authors. See for example David Lyon, *The Steeple's Shadow: On the Myths and Realities of Secularization* (London/Grand Rapids: SPCK/Eerdmans, 1985) and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Knight: (*Blinks.*) That doesn't make sense. Why would *more* political influence *weaken* the church's political influence later on?

Turnau: Because that short-term cultural influence doesn't come for free. It must be paid for in the loss of long-term social legitimacy. The church cannot be seen as a friend to the powerless when it dwells habitually in the halls of power. So it loses the right to speak prophetically to power on behalf of the powerless.

And here is the corollary that is pertinent for us: Wherever Christians have sought to impose their will on society through political coercion, even in subtle ways, they always end up paying for it in the currency of the loss of respect of the next generation. The picture of a politically powerful church is etched with resentment in the collective imagination of its children. This has been the story of the rapid or gradual decline of Christian fervour in Europe, and more recently, in North America as well. When a Christian faith-inspired social order is politically imposed on a society, it simply inoculates the next generation against the Christian faith. And that inoculation is difficult to overcome.

Knight: (*Shifts uncomfortably in his upholstered desk chair, ready to change the subject.*) Nevertheless, we can and must present arguments that should carry the day. OK, so maybe the day of Christian America and appealing to the Bible has passed. But God has implanted a solid sense of natural law in people (Rom. 2:14-15), so that they know what is right. We can make our case based on that, even in as thoroughly a secular society as ours is becoming. We just need to communicate our points more elegantly, more powerfully, and eventually, truth shall prevail.

Turnau: (*Eyes narrow.*) I'm not so sure it is that straightforward. Culture is, among other things, an interpretive project. It's a way of collectively understanding the world around us. And as our culture fragments and drifts in a more inoculated, disenchanted, post-Christian direction, the way we interpret things like "natural" or "marriage" or "family" or "human rights" or "freedom" or "justice" are going to become more and more fragmented and post-Christian too. Surely you've felt that in the debates you've been involved with.

Knight: Well, yeah, but I'm not convinced we should give up on natural law. There are some things that are simply part of the natural created order.

Turnau: (*Leans forward.*) Yes, but to be a persuasive part of the debate, those things must be *understood* as natural and right. We assume that "natural" means "neutral", but it doesn't. "Nature" for Christians is always *God's* nature, interpreted according to his standards (that is, biblically). If the people we are debating (and our audience) don't

accept God's lordship over nature, and his authority over natural standards, they are unlikely to accept biblical standards of what counts as natural. Isn't that what Romans 1:18-25 is all about: suppressing the knowledge of God? Natural law *isn't* self-evident to fallen people who compulsively distort nature's revelation about God and all reality.³⁰ Bottom line: members of both sides of cultural debates no longer agree upon definitions that we used to. These definitions ("natural", "marriage" and so on) are embedded in specific traditions and have meaning only within those traditions.³¹ In this sense, the collective imagination is the cradle of "natural". If your interlocutor's imaginary landscape is no longer recognisably Christian, appealing to natural law is simply a way of talking past each other.

Knight: So what are you saying? If we give up on natural law dialogue, what's left? Admit we no longer speak a shared language, so we should just withdraw from politics and admit defeat?

Turnau: Not exactly, but I am suggesting that culture-war-politics-as-usual isn't working. We need to reassess our position, and widen our approach. Christians (especially strongly nationalistic Christians) have often seen themselves as Conquistadors who are interested in reclaiming the land, bringing the country to heel (and not to heal).³² We get territorial and pugnacious. We come off as bullies. Perhaps we need to stop thinking of ourselves as a moral majority and understand our role as what Russell Moore calls the "prophetic minority".³³ There is a better way than bullying and trying to reconquer a mythically once-Christian land.³⁴ A better option would be to speak about what's important to us, ground our messages in Scripture, and seek to be part of the broader cultural conversation

³⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), cited in James K. A. Smith, "Beyond 'Creation' and Natural Law: An Evangelical Public Theology", *Comment* 26 March, 2015, available online at <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/4432/beyond-creation-and-natural-law-an-evangelical-public-theology/> (accessed 9 February 2016).

³¹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

³² I acknowledge that the pun only comes across in written form. If this film ever were made, you'd have to turn on the subtitles to catch it.

³³ See his excellent and nuanced book on cultural engagement, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015).

³⁴ Though some of the Founders were Christian, many (Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin being the most famous) were also Deists hostile to Christian orthodoxy. Further, America's "Christian" past is rife with injustices such as slavery, Jim Crow, laws that favoured robber baron industrialists, genocide and forced relocation of Native Americans. America's past is only very, very imperfectly Christian.

for the good of all (after all, we have the gospel-wisdom of God to share).

Knight: As if anyone will listen to us without some kind of political leverage...

Turnau: They might, if we demonstrate our goodwill in compassionate and creative ways. But relying on politics alone is a non-starter.

Knight: Why so? It's the way things get done. Politics is the most expedient way to bring change.

Turnau: Most direct, maybe. Most viscerally satisfying, for sure. But, as I said, it's not the most successful way to bring long-term cultural change. When you rely on politics alone, you overlook something important: the context within which politics takes place.

Knight: Which is?

Turnau: The cultural imagination. Politics alone never really impacts the imaginary landscape upon which politics rests, in which political action is rooted. Gregory Wolfe, editor of *Image* (a Christian arts journal), put it this way:

But the urgent need at the moment is to recognize that we cannot reduce culture and its various modes of discourse to nothing more than a political battleground. The political institutions of a society grow up out of a rich cultural life, and not the other way around. As its etymology indicates, the word culture is a metaphor for organic growth. Reducing culture to politics is like constantly spraying insecticide and never watering or fertilizing the soil.³⁵

It feels very much as if Christians need to shift their focus to prepping the soil, that imaginary landscape that allows or resists political change.

Knight: Well, that sounds like what an art journal editor *would* say. But that's not where the action is. That's not how you change things.

Turnau: But unless you do that patient cultural work, if all you do is focus on politics, you end up making the Christian faith look like just another political interest group. Except that this one wants to control everyone else's private lives. Non-Christians look at Christians and they see us as aggressive, coercive, and uninterested in the common

³⁵ Gregory Wolfe, "Why I Am a Conscientious Objector in the Culture Wars", in *Intruding upon the Timeless: Meditations on Art, Faith, and Mystery* (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2003). More recently, artist Makoto Fujimura has written about the need to shift from a "culture war" perspective (culture as a battleground, a struggle over cultural direction and meanings) to a "culture care" perspective (where we collectively and generously create beauty for the common good). Fujimura's project aims at changing the metaphor for understanding culture "from a territory that is to be fought over to a garden that is to be nurtured". See his *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life*, 2d. ed. (New York: Fujimura Institute/International Arts Movement, 2015), cited in Julie Silander, "From Culture Wars to Culture Care", *Story Warren*, 29 June, 2015, available online at <http://www.storywarren.com/culture-war-or-culture-care/> (accessed 12 March 2016).

good.³⁶ Because Christians have ignored the resentment they themselves have created, we are now largely seen as Grinches, more defined by what we are against than what we are for. Maybe it is time for Christian culture warriors to tone it down somewhat.

Knight: (*Incredulous.*) Tone it down? Do you even realise what's going on? Christians are being persecuted as our freedoms are being undermined, even the freedom of speech. The rights of Christians are being trampled underfoot. What you're suggesting sounds defeatist and disastrous. You're saying we should abandon politics and just let the culture drift where it may, without struggle, without contest.

Turnau: I'm not suggesting that we just give up and give in. We are still called as witnesses, a prophetic voice. But we do need to adapt to our current situation. We're no longer a moral majority. We are now on the margins looking in, as the cultural logic of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (however you choose to define it)" plays itself out. We need to realise that we're in a post-Christian society. Christians have become missionaries to our own cultures, and it is time for us to give up on dreams of empire. Instead, we need to work for the common good and loving our neighbour. And we need to prepare ourselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for some harassment (not persecution – I'd reserve that word for places where Christians really are under attack, like Syria).

Understanding our current situation means modifying our tone to be more winsome than aggressive. We need people to understand that we're not seeking to enslave them or spoil the fun. Rather, we're trying to heal brokenness and bring light for the common good. As it is, Sir Knight, not a lot of non-Christians would consider Christians to be a gentle people, but that's what we need to be. It's what we've *always* needed to be. And thankfully, there are already some public representatives of the faith who are measured, nuanced, and gentle in their tone (Tim Keller and Russell Moore come immediately to mind).

³⁶ This deep distrust of the Christian Right manifests itself in the blogosphere such as *Religious Right Watch* (<http://www.religiousrightwatch.com/>) and *People for the American Way's Right Wing Watch* (<http://www.rightwingwatch.org/>) as well as in the success of popular books with titles like *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2006). The author, Chris Hedges, is a journalist for the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, and the *Christian Science Monitor* who has taught at elite institutions such as Columbia, Princeton, and New York University. Another example, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), written by *New Yorker* staff writer and best-selling author, Jane Mayer. In other words, these critiques are being made at the centres of cultural influence.

Knight: But politics is a rough-and-tumble sport, not for sissies. You give an inch, they'll walk on you for a mile.

Turnau: Nevertheless, we need to conduct ourselves politically in such a way that our opponents understand that we love them. I mean, if Jesus commanded us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48), doesn't that apply to politics as well? But that's not the tone I hear coming from many Christian culture warriors. We need to love and work for the good of those we consider our opponents. And it is going to take great patience on our part.

Knight: OK, so we should love those across the aisle from us. Is that going to get it done? Will that bring the victory we seek?

Turnau: Well, it depends on how you define victory. If you see victory in terms of a zero-sum game where we win and they lose, then probably not. But if you see victory in terms of prophetic witness for the common good as the truth is spoken in love, then yes (though I'm sure not all prophets – like Jeremiah – feel like victors at the time; it may be prophetic witness through tears). But that's the kind of politics we need to strive for: loving, truthful witness rather than dominion over our enemies.

Knight: (*Shrugs and shakes head.*) I don't know. That just sounds so incredibly naïve. Politics doesn't work like that. And it still sounds defeatist, like lowering the bar and saying, "Well, just get your message across."

Turnau: (*Hands outstretched.*) From our current position within post-Christian culture, I'm not sure that anything more is possible, or even desirable. But when I'm talking about witness, I'm not just talking about political witness, though that's a part of it. If we want to be salt and light in this culture, we need to diversify our efforts. Political debate done in a loving way is an important part of Christian cultural witness, but only part. Though it's often the most visible part, it is perhaps not the most important. We have neglected our broader cultural witness in favour of the solely political. For us, public witness has become reduced to politics.³⁷ In the meantime we have neglected the imaginary landscape, letting it develop in ways that are inimical to a Christian social order, and even some Christian virtues.³⁸ No amount of culture warring will fix that. It's like tilting at windmills.

Look, I am definitely not saying "Give up on politics". Democracy grants us a political voice, at least thus far, and we should use it. But

³⁷ Hunter, Essay II, "Rethinking Power", esp. pp. 103, 169.

³⁸ Even post-Christian cultures treasure virtues such as forgiveness and mercy, but it is harder to be pious, chaste, or truly loving (because love sometimes compels us to say things that make others uncomfortable).

I would insist that it is time to adjust our politics to the reality that we are a minority and we cannot simply push our agendas through. And even if we could, given the amount of resentment we've generated, is it a good idea? Perhaps it is time to restrict ourselves to a political language that cultivates civility, compassion, and the common good, rather than a political language that resonates with themes of dominion and conquering the land. And it is high time to tend to the slow, careful work of tending the imaginary landscape rather than taking political shortcuts.

Knight: (*Ruminating, reflecting.*) Well, I'm not ready to give up the battle just yet, but it's worth thinking about.

Turnau: While you're thinking about it, let me sum up my critiques.

(*Turns to camera.*) While there is much to admire in the Knight's quest – its intentionality and passion, for instance – there are some deep problems in relying on politics alone to bring change in culture:

- It can inspire a nationalism that confuses our loyalties to God with loyalty to country.
- Christians can compromise to retain political influence, which subtly changes the character of the faith (just as dogs grow to resemble their masters).
- Politics is inescapably coercive. If you force new cultural patterns upon the unwilling, there will inevitably be a backlash. The church ends up paying for its short-term influence in the currency of long-term loss of social legitimacy. We end up inoculating the next generation against the gospel.
- Natural law doesn't provide the neutral ground for debate we hope for. Terms like "natural", "family," and "human rights" become redefined against the backdrop of a new imaginary landscape.
- We must come to grips with our current cultural position and serve as loving prophetic witnesses who speak truth to power, as well as do the patient cultural work that provides the necessary context for political engagement.

Knight: Stop breaking the fourth wall, weirdo.

Scene II: The Gardener's Dialogue

The scene opens on a bright spring day in the walled garden of a monastery. Dark clouds loom on the horizon. The Gardener is a genteel woman in her 60s with a kindly face, perhaps from the Cotswolds or Swansea. She is

dressed in work clothes, tending to her plants while Turnau sits on a stone bench about three feet away. She is a member of the Benedict Option.³⁹ But truly, she could be a stand-in for garden variety (pun intended) Pietism,⁴⁰ neo-Anabaptism,⁴¹ or the New Monasticism.⁴² Despite their differences (less profound than with the Knight), these movements share a goal and method: withdraw from mainstream culture so that they can form strong and distinctive spiritual communities that will preserve Christian belief and practice. These communities will serve as incubators, a positive model for others in the world. In other words, the world will change (perhaps) when the church succeeds at being truly and deeply the church.⁴³ Christian cultural influence happens (if at all) primarily through setting a good example by

³⁹ The term was coined by *American Conservative* editor Rod Dreher. For a good introduction to the Benedict Option, see Rod Dreher, "Benedict Option as a Way of Life", *American Conservative*, 27 September 2015, available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-way-of-life/> and "Benedict Option FAQ", *American Conservative*, 6 October 2015, available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-faq/>. The Benedict Option has become a popular minority opinion regarding cultural engagement in the U.S. after the Supreme Court's same-sex marriage ruling, *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, in 2014. A recent survey revealed that 37% of those polled believed it was "very important" to form stronger links with others who share our religious beliefs rather than to work for social change. See Dreher, "Shocking Numbers for the Benedict Option", available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/shocking-numbers-benedict-option-poll-37-percent/>. The Benedict Option has its fair share of critics, and Dreher has responded to them here: "Critics of the Benedict Option", *American Conservative*, 8 July 2015, available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/critics-of-the-benedict-option/> (all 4 articles accessed 1 February 2016).

⁴⁰ Pietism has its roots in German Lutheranism of the 18th and 19th centuries, but as a cultural attitude it has spread far and wide. In general, Pietism sees Christian faithfulness largely in terms of a mild isolation from surrounding culture. Too much connection with the surrounding culture is perceived to undermine personal holiness. Rather, Pietism seeks to emphasise the "spiritual" (Bible study, prayer, devotional life, etc.) as opposed to the cultural.

⁴¹ James Davison Hunter gives a good overview of this approach in Essay II, chapter 5, "The Neo-Anabaptists", in *To Change the World*. See also Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006).

⁴² On the New Monasticism, see James K. A. Smith in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 209-11.

⁴³ The much-discussed Reformed or Radical Two Kingdoms Theology (R2K) would *not* be part of the Gardener's group. R2K theologians share an interest in the church, but they do not believe that influencing the surrounding culture should be of interest to the ordinary Christian. They assume such a radical discontinuity between the old and new creations that nothing in current culture is much worth saving or reforming. For a good overview to Radical Two Kingdom theology, see David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), as well as Keith Mathison's insightful review of it in "2K or Not 2K? That is the Question: A Review of David VanDrunen's *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*", Ligonier Ministries website, 9 December 2010, available online at http://www.ligonier.org/blog/2k-or-not-2k-question-review-david-vandruncens-living-gods-two-kingdoms/-_edn16 (accessed 1 February 2016). See also David T. Koyzis, "Two Kingdoms and Cultural Obedience", *Comment* website, 1 March 2010, available online at <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/2020/two-kingdoms-and-cultural-obedience/> (accessed 1 February 2016).

living a decent, moral life inculcated through intentional Christian community, and through personal evangelism.

But can cultural change transpire through a strategy of withdrawal from culture? We shall see.

Turnau: Nice crop of catechumens you have there.

Gardener: (*Not looking up.*) They're dahlias.

Turnau: Oh. Well, (*sings*) "Hello, dahlia!"

Gardener: (*Irritated, but still not looking up.*) Is there something I can help you with?

Turnau: Yeah. I'm wondering what you're doing in here, while the Knight and others are hard at work jousting with opponents... in Christian love.

Gardener: (*Looks up for the first time and fixes him with a hard stare.*) You don't understand, do you? The battle's over and the enemy has taken the field. It is now time for a strategic withdrawal.⁴⁴ It is time to regroup. The barbarians are at the gate. Time to do as St. Benedict did when Rome became utterly corrupted: go out to the forest, pray, build communities and preserve what we have got left in the hope that someday things will turn around.⁴⁵ For now, we need to do what we can to preserve Christian culture to pass it on to the next generation. We lose hope of any good influence on a culture like this if we lose our Christian distinctiveness. "If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything

⁴⁴ See Rod Dreher, "The Accidental Benedict Option", *The American Conservative*, 19 April 2015, available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/accidental-benedict-option/> (accessed 13 February 2016). Dreher defines the Benedict Option (and the nature of strategic withdrawal) this way:

What I call the Benedict Option is this: a limited, strategic withdrawal of Christians from the mainstream of American popular culture, for the sake of shoring up our understanding of what the church is, and what we must do to be the church. We must do this because the strongly anti-Christian nature of contemporary popular culture occludes the meaning of the Gospel, and hides from us the kinds of habits and practices we need to engage in to be truly faithful to what we have been given. As Jonathan Wilson has pointed out about the New Monasticism movement (a form of the Benedict Option), the church must do this not to hide away as a pure remnant — the church would be unfaithful to Christ if it did so — but to *strengthen* itself to be the church for the world.

The extent of this withdrawal is often debated between supporters and critics of the Benedict Option. Dreher has repeatedly denied that he seeks to be isolationist (see for example "Critics"). But months later, Dreher will write something that sounds blatantly isolationist, such as his piece entitled "Head for Higher Ground" in the *American Conservative* (21 January 2016, available online at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/head-for-higher-ground/>) that ends with the line "If you aren't going to head for higher ground, whatever that might mean, then you and your Christian neighbours had better start building an ark. Don't panic. *Prepare.*" Suffice it to say that Dreher calls for withdrawal of some significant sort from the structures and works of mainstream culture.

⁴⁵ See Dreher, "FAQ".

except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Matt. 5:13). We're fast becoming something good only for stepping on.

Turnau: How do you know? What led you to this depressing conclusion?

Gardener: Well, look around you. As you say, the culture (especially popular culture) is clearly post-Christian, antagonistic to Christian concerns. And just look at the effect it's had. Just look at this next generation of so-called Christians.

Turnau: What about them?

Gardener: They've lost their flavour. They've transformed traditional Christianity into that bland, inoffensive, tasteless *mélange* that sociologist Christian Smith calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism". It's naught but a feel-good religion of niceness designed to affirm the self.⁴⁶

Turnau: Yeah, I was talking about MTD with the Knight. Know him?

Gardener: Good-hearted fellow. I can't take the way he wraps the cross in the flag, though. I'm better off in here, away from that ruckus.

Turnau: Well, you're not going to get an argument from me about conflating the gospel and nationalism. And I don't think you're wrong about the kinds of Christians too many churches produce: bland, ineffectual, about an inch deep in their Christian life and knowledge. What's your solution?

Gardener: (*Intensely.*) Intentional communities; places where families and friends can disconnect from the surrounding culture and deepen their faith roots through better teaching and relearning age-old Christian habits and practices. We need places where we can start retraining our passions and imaginations to pursue God and holiness like we should. You know: Christian spiritual disciplines and the like.

Turnau: (*Cautious, probing.*) And *must* we disconnect from the surrounding culture to do that?

Gardener: Certainly, at least in part. The very structures of modernity are like acid to the faith, or aphids on the roses. It weakens it, fades it, sucks the life right out of it, and renders faith mute, a trivial private concern of the heart that has no impact on public life.⁴⁷ The ordinary Christian has no choice but to buckle under to that cultural pressure, or withdraw and regroup. We need to build ourselves "plausibility

⁴⁶ See Smith and Lundquist.

⁴⁷ For an entertaining and informative primer on how modern life drives religion towards privatisation, see Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), especially chapters (or "memoranda") 3 through 5. Guinness, a student of sociologist of religion Peter Berger, imaginatively unpacks many of Berger's insights regarding modernity's subversion of religious faith.

structures”, places where being and living like a Christian makes sense.⁴⁸ This culture is not that place.

Turnau: What about outreach? What about the church’s mission to reach the lost?

Gardener: (*Patiently; she’s heard this objection before.*) Well, we’re not going to up and abandon evangelism.⁴⁹ But do consider: what is evangelism, really? Is it just passing on a few words? Or is it an introduction to a spiritual relationship with God, a way of life, an ongoing pursuit of holiness? By living in intentional communities the way Christians are supposed to live, by deepening our roots, by telling the real story of our faith to ourselves *first*, we are able to reach out to others better. In the words of church historian Robert Louis Wilken (*reads from a magazine lying in the flowerbed*):

Nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture, because in recent generations this culture has become dangerously thin. At this moment in the Church’s history in this country (and in the West more generally) it is less urgent to convince the alternative culture in which we live of the truth of Christ than it is for the Church to tell itself its own story and to nurture its own life, the culture of the city of God, the Christian republic. This is not going to happen without a rebirth of moral and spiritual discipline and a resolute effort on the part of Christians to comprehend and to defend the remnants of Christian culture.⁵⁰

That’s why I think when we talk in church about “missions”, we need to focus first on the *real* mission of the church. In the words of Rod Dreher, “[The Benedict Option] needs to be mission-minded, and that mission has to be the search for holiness, which is to say, to find unity with God. All the evangelizing and good works done by the congregations must be subordinate to the prime love, which is of God.”⁵¹

Turnau: (*Pauses a moment, considering.*) What you say makes a lot of sense, but I’m not convinced that cutting ourselves off from the culture is the way to go. Am I allowed to agree and disagree at the same time?

Gardener: Do continue.

Turnau: Okay, so for one thing, I too am pretty disappointed with the thinness of Christian knowledge and commitment I see nowadays. I think Christian Smith is right on the money with the MTD thing. And

⁴⁸ See Peter Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), esp. chapter 2, “Religion and World Maintenance”.

⁴⁹ See Dreher, “FAQ,” especially the sections “Isn’t this a violation of the Great Commission”, and “Update 12/28”.

⁵⁰ See Dreher, “Critics.” The quote comes from Robert Louis Wilken, “The Church as Culture”, *First Things*, April 2004, available online at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/04/the-church-as-culture> (accessed 1 February 2016).

⁵¹ Dreher, “Accidental”.

it's not just teens, but adults, too. And who's to blame? Parents, maybe. Churches, certainly. Too many do a pretty poor job teaching their people in depth, teaching them how to live the faith out in everyday life and in their communities, teaching parents how to catechise their kids, how to pray together, that sort of stuff. So as it is, there's very little resistance to the drift of the culture overall. You're absolutely right about that.

Gardener: (*Waiting for the other shoe to drop.*) But you don't think withdrawal is the answer because... you think popular culture's not to blame?

Turnau: No, no. I think popular culture often functions as a sort of combo-package secular/pagan catechesis and sentimental education that helps us feel what life is like in a world where God is dead or irrelevant.

Gardener: (*Eyebrows raised.*) Oh, so you agree with me, then?

Turnau: Not exactly. For one thing, I don't think that's *all* popular culture is. It's certainly a parade of false idols, but it's also a parade of common grace. *And* because popular culture makes up multiple worlds of meaning in which our non-Christian friends live, breathe, want, hope, we ought to understand it. If we want to reach them, we need to familiarise ourselves with the works that open up vistas for them, worlds of meaning that shape their imaginations. We need to learn to speak the language of these worlds.⁵²

Gardener: But only at the cost of spiritual compromise, correct? Only at the risk of undermining our own faith, and the faith of our children.

Turnau: Really? See, here's where I disagree with you. I'm not convinced Christians have to choose between intentional community and engagement with the culture (especially arts and entertainment) around us. In fact, done right, engagement with culture can bring out God's glory more fully because we learn to see common grace in culture for what it is: God's glory shining through his gifts to us. And we learn to see our culture's idols for what they are: systemic distortions of God's blessings, twisted gospels. And when the gospel is contrasted with the darkness and distortion of non-Christian counterfeits, it helps us see the real thing in bright relief, like a portrait of grace in chiaroscuro.⁵³

Gardener: Now *I'm* the one who's not convinced. It sounds like you're playing word games. It sounds like a convoluted distortion of worship. And I

⁵² On popular cultural works and how they project worlds of meaning, see Turnau, *Popologetics*, and Turnau, "Popular Cultural 'Worlds' as Alternative Religions", *Christian Scholars Review* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 323-45.

⁵³ Chiaroscuro is a drawing technique where the artist uses light and shadow to bring out the figure more dramatically.

think it will result in a generation mollified and transfixed by shiny false gods, their eyes drawn away from the true God.

Turnau: Not at all. Informed, critical engagement with non-Christian culture helps us see God's glory more clearly.⁵⁴ As we see excellence, beauty and goodness in non-Christian culture (and it *does* exist), we have occasion to thank God who sheds his gifts abroad (Jas. 1:17). As we see the deceptive evil of the idols it promotes, the gospel shines by comparison. This way of seeing all of life – even stuff made in rebellion against God – is utterly biblical. Consider Isaiah's idol polemic in chapter 44:9-20 (and, really, throughout chapters 40-48). Isaiah underscores God's wisdom and power by mocking idols, showing how weird it is to bow down to a carved image made from the same piece of wood you used to cook bread an hour earlier. Consider Ezekiel's lament for Tyre in chapter 27, how he lists and laments all of the good that will be lost with Tyre's fall... because these things *are* good, and it *is* a loss. There's goodness to be mourned, but also he calls out the idols by showing how Tyre's idolatrous worship (of those very goods, among other things) has brought about the city's inevitable downfall. Consider Paul's drawing on truths *and* errors found in Greco-Roman culture in his speech in Athens in Acts 17. He's not just practising good communication; he's drawing on the insights of the non-Christian culture around him.

Gardener: But who actually does this? Most Christians I know who still consume that stuff just sit there and watch, oblivious.

Turnau: You're right. The key is not to consume mindlessly, but rather to consume critically, reflectively, submitting every insight and delight to God. Such reflection is what separates idol worship from the worship of the living God. As Isaiah says in 44:19: "no one stops to think".⁵⁵ Cultural engagement is precisely a call to "stop and think" about the culture around us. It is the practice of Christian obedience in cultural consumption (and, as we shall see, cultural creation). Done correctly, it should lead us into deeper worship.

Gardener: Still sounds suspiciously like a rationalisation to me.

Turnau: Not a rationalisation: cultural apologetics, and gratitude for the cultural gifts God has given us that help us enjoy him better.⁵⁶ I've

⁵⁴ See Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), ch. 4 (esp. 74-76), and 313-15.

⁵⁵ See Dan Strange, "Not Ashamed! The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology," *Themelios* 36.2 (2011): 258, available online at http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/journal-issues/36.2/Themelios_36.2.pdf#page=61 (accessed 4 February 2016).

⁵⁶ See Joe Rigney, *The Things of Earth: Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). Rigney does seem reticent to classify popular culture as one of those gifts, however.

written about an apologetical approach to popular culture, and I find it quite liberating.⁵⁷ It's been my experience that watching/listening /playing in the fields of popular culture with my kids gave us plenty of opportunities to talk about what's true and right and good.⁵⁸

Gardener: But doesn't such exposure change you and your children sub-consciously? Isn't it a type of spiritual deformation of which you are unaware? Isn't it a kind of worship that form desires that run counter to what God desires?⁵⁹ Is critical reflection really enough?

Turnau: No, I concede that by itself, it's not. Our imaginations and desires need to be reformed in true, intentional Christian worship. But that doesn't mean withdrawal is the answer.

Look, I think you're fundamentally right. The church needs to tell its own story, and tell it well. And I agree: living out the Christian story in our marriages, families and friendships can have a profound impact on non-Christian friends.⁶⁰ But sometimes that story is told best when confronted with alternative stories, in contrast to those stories. We need to train Christians how to do that. Most churches do a really lousy job teaching their people how to engage culture in a way that is critical, nuanced, and insightful. If they do anything, they teach them how to hate non-Christian culture (*especially* popular culture) as the enemy, and that just succeeds at putting up a wall between us and the people we're trying to reach.

Gardener: (*Shakes her head.*) But it's a question of priorities. Evangelicals are so keen on being missional that they forget that the *main* mission needs to be our *own* pursuit of God, holiness, and right worship.

Turnau: Is it? Don't misunderstand: I'm absolutely for discipleship, pursuing a deeper walk with God, pursuing holiness. But does the Bible *ever* present our pursuit of God and outreach to others as competitors, or that one needs to be subordinated to the other?

Gardener: (*Eyes narrowed.*) What do you mean? The Bible is clear: we must pursue holiness first. David says in Psalm 24:3, "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has cleans hands and a pure heart." The author of Hebrews says in

⁵⁷ See Turnau, *Popologetics*, esp. chs. 10 and 11.

⁵⁸ See Ted Turnau, E. Stephen Burnett and Jared Moore, *Engage: Gospel-Centered Parenting in a Popular Cultural World*, forthcoming.

⁵⁹ See, for example, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), especially part I, "Desiring, Imaginative Animals: We Are What We Love".

⁶⁰ For some beautiful examples of this with regard to the issue of same-sex marriage (from a Catholic perspective), see Wesley Hill, "Thoughts on the 'Benedict Option' and the Dazzled Pagan Eye", *Spiritual Friendships: Musings on God, Sexuality, and Relationships*, 27 June 2015, available online at <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2015/06/27/the-benedict-option-and-the-dazzled-pagan-eye/> (accessed 15 February 2016).

12:14, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness *without which no one will see the Lord*.” Peter says the same in 1 Peter 1:15-16: “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Holiness is the *sine qua non* for the Christian. God accepts no one without it.

Turnau: Absolutely. But where does that holiness come from? The Bible talks about us pursuing holiness, but it *also* talks about our holiness as something *we already possess in Christ*. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul talks about the church as those who have *already* been “washed, sanctified [made holy] and justified” in Christ by the Spirit of God. Ephesians 5:25 talks about Christ who has already sanctified his church through the washing of the word. Titus 2:14 talks about Jesus “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works”. We are called to pursue good works and live a holy life precisely because we have *already* been purified, set apart as holy, by God in Christ, because of Christ’s atoning work.

Theologian John Murray called this “definitive sanctification”, the holiness we already possess truly and absolutely in Christ.⁶¹ It doesn’t remove from us the obligation to live lives of obedience to God, but it does *completely* change our motivation for holy living. We pursue holiness out of gratitude to the one who has *already* adopted, cleansed, and embraced us as his beloved children. So all this talk of pursuing God as if we didn’t already have him (or rather, as if he didn’t already have us) in Christ undercuts what the Bible says, and it produces an unholy anxiety in believers. It morphs God into a strict cosmic headmaster, “You kids better measure up or I’ll expel you so fast...”⁶² But the Bible is clear: we pursue God in the security of the knowledge that he has pursued and found us first in Christ. That’s the gospel.

Granted that this is *not* something all Christians agree on, but it is something about which that most traditions coming out of the Reformation concur.⁶³ Holiness is something we strive for in

⁶¹ See John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification” in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, PA/Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991). See also his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955). For a helpful short article on sanctification, and its perpetual incompleteness this side of glory, see Mark Galli, “Real Transformation Happens When?” *Christianity Today*, 29 May 2014, available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/may-web-only/real-transformation-happens-when.html> (accessed 15 February 2015).

⁶² Think of Principal Snyder from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

⁶³ Despite Dreher’s attempts to make the Benedict Option ecumenical, his insistence that the prime mission of the community should be the “search for holiness” may reveal a reliance on

practice, but it is also simultaneously something we already possess perfectly in Christ. The goal of the Christian life, then, is to bring glory to God by striving to live out who we really are in Christ, relying on the power of the Spirit.

Gardener: OK, interesting theological digression. But what's the point? And how is this relevant to what we're talking about: the real mission of the church?

Turnau: This understanding of holiness is absolutely relevant here. It's the promise of a sanctifying, sovereign grace that makes all the difference. If you *already* have the holiness God requires (in Christ), then there is absolutely no competition between your everyday pursuit of holiness and reaching out to love others (and cultural engagement as lessons in how to understand their world).

Gardener: But doesn't the surrounding culture still undermine that *pursuit* of everyday holiness? Can you really be holy watching *Jessica Jones*, even if you do it for all the right reasons? I've heard about that show and all of the sex scenes and so on. Cultural engagement is just not worth it. You end up polluting yourself.

Turnau: Well, first, *Jessica Jones* is a pretty awesome show. And second, there's nothing saying that you can't skip forward through the sexy schmexy stuff. But, to your point: sure, why can't a Christian benefit from a show like that? I'm learning tons about what the non-Christian world (or at least one Marvel-inspired segment of the non-Christian world) thinks about heroism, moral debt, true goodness, mercy, vengeance, gender roles, friendship, and so much more! The main character moves throughout the show with this heaviness, this guilt and burden. What if she really understood the gospel? How would it change her attitude towards life, her self-hatred and self-

peculiarly Eastern Orthodox theology in which the Spirit is not given by grace, but rather must be earned and acquired through sacrament, prayer and good works. The 19th century Russian Orthodox elder St. Seraphim of Sarov put it this way:

Prayer, fasting, vigils, and all other Christian practices, however good they may be in themselves, certainly do not constitute the aim of our Christian life: they are but the indispensable means of attaining that aim. *For the true aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.* As for fasts, vigils, prayer, and almsgiving, and other good works done in the name of Christ, they are only the means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. Note well that it is only good works done in the name of Christ that bring us the fruits of the Spirit. (*On the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*, cited in Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997 [1963]), 230.

In other words, the Holy Spirit isn't given to Christians by grace, earned by Christ's sacrificial work. He must be *acquired*, earned through our own disciplined efforts in fasts, vigils, prayer, almsgiving, etc. They are the ticket that grants us access into the saving presence of the Holy Spirit.

destructive behaviours? It makes me appreciate the gospel all the more.

Further, I don't believe engaging (and even enjoying) non-Christian culture necessarily jeopardises holiness. And it certainly doesn't jeopardise our salvation, as some might think. Pastor/author Mike Cospers wrote a really good book on popular culture, and toward the beginning, he says (*whips out his copy and flips quickly through the pages*):

It's the promise of grace that propels us out into the world without the fear of the Church Lady. While our stories [from TV and movies] are indeed shaping our hearts and imaginations, they cannot do any permanent damage to those who are in Christ. In other words, you're not going to watch a movie that will steal your soul; the world can't really hurt you. Instead, you can take comfort in knowing that you're forever secure in the hands of Jesus.⁶⁴

No doubt navigating popular culture and pursuing holiness is tricky. I think the key lies in being honest and wise about the strengths and weaknesses of your own heart (and listening to them), as well as being critically aware and gospel-grounded deeply enough to see through the culture's deceptions, the Emperor's New Clothes promises of the mainstream culture. And a big part of gospel grounding is knowing our holiness in Christ, that God embraces us and invites us to deeper intimacy, rather than setting the bar so high that only the very holy, the marathon runners of religion (monks, priests, saints, missionaries) can truly know him.

So in sum, I think there's some confusion surrounding the issue of Christian holiness. Walling ourselves off from mainstream culture isn't the way to go about it, at least if we want to obey Jesus. As he said in John 17:14-19, his disciples are called to go *into* the world. We're called to our cultures. Our true holiness is to be found in engaging, not withdrawing.⁶⁵

Gardener: I'm not altogether convinced. Seems like a person should always set the pursuit of God through holiness *over* outreach to others. Loving God still trumps all other loves.

Turnau: But what I've read in the Bible (and in my experience) shows that love for God and love for others are not in competition. Neither

⁶⁴ Mike Cospers, *The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), Kindle edition, loc. 672-675. The Church Lady is a character played by *Saturday Night Live's* Dana Carvey lampooning nosey, judgmental, suspicious Christians.

⁶⁵ For a helpful treatment of this passage and its application to culture, see Arturo Azurdia, *Connected Christianity: Engaging Culture without Compromise* (Fearn, Scotland/Bridgend, Wales: Christian Focus/Bryntirion Press, 2009).

“trumps” the other. Rather, they go hand-in-hand, or not at all. In 1 John 4:7-12, John writes that true love for God is expressed *through* true love for others. They dovetail into one another: if you love others, God’s love is in you. If you’re not loving others, you’re not loving God. And *that* is the very definition of Christian holiness: loving engagement, not withdrawal. Christian holiness that is established by grace alone (and not by our diligent practice of ascetic disciplines)⁶⁶ will necessarily flow outward to others.

The character of gospel holiness is one of generously pouring ourselves into the lives of those around, just as Christ generously poured out his life for us and served us so that we might become “the righteousness of God” (see Phil. 2:4-8, 2 Cor. 5:21). Far from being in competition, pursuing holiness and love for God *requires* love and service to others. 1 John 4 is quite clear: any holiness that does not express itself in love for other human beings is a sham holiness, a sham love for God. You cannot have one without the other. The love of God is properly expressed *through* the love of others, even others in the world.⁶⁷

Gardener: You think we’re a bunch of hypocrites and Pharisees?

Turnau: I didn’t say that, but I think legalism and pride can be a temptation for even the best intentional communities. And the only sure antidote is the gospel, an understanding that even our holiness is by grace alone. It comes from “God who works in us”, according to Paul in Philippians 2:13. Therefore, contact with non-Christians or their culture is no threat. In fact, it helps us understand them and love them better through word and deed, as good ambassadors should (2

⁶⁶ See Dreher, “Accidental”. Second on his list of characteristics of Benedict Option communities: “Second, it should be disciplined, and ascetically oriented, because asceticism trains the passions.” Practical advice, surely, but cf. Colossians 2:23 where Paul comments on ascetic rules: “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” What separates helpful spiritual disciplines from useless ascetic practices is the gospel, which grounds our holiness. If that is not understood, ascetic practice leads either to Pharisaical pride (for rule keepers) or self-loathing (for those who fail to live up to the rules). See Tim Keller, “Religion and the Gospel”, in *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008).

⁶⁷ Some Christians who favour cultural withdrawal may point to verses such as 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be misled: bad company ruins good morals.” But if Paul means for the Corinthians not to associate with non-Christians, he is contradicting what he himself said ten chapters earlier (5:9-10), and he is issuing a command out of keeping with the model Jesus himself laid down. Jesus had a disturbing tendency to hang out with disreputable, worldly characters (see Matt. 9:10-17). It is helpful to bear in mind that Paul is speaking here about false teachers *in the church*, not bad characters in the world. The ones who really had the potential to undermine the gospel and dash Christian hopes of resurrection were not non-Christians, but false brothers.

Cor. 5:20). In this way, engagement with the surrounding culture, even popular culture, flows from a holy love of God and people.

Gardener: I still think you're putting kids at risk. Why not wait until they are older, responsible adults, before exposing them to that stuff?

Turnau: Because trying to protecting children by erecting a hermetically-sealed subculture simply doesn't work. Shrink-wrapping our kids doesn't lead to their holiness. I read a pretty heart-breaking blog post from a young woman who was raised Evangelical Christian and has since abandoned the faith. She examines the Benedict Option and says, "Hey, that's nothing new. That's how I was raised: strong church, good teaching in the gospel, home-school co-ops. But it didn't work."⁶⁸

Gardener: Why not?

Turnau: Because by the time she reached college-age, she had been so shielded from non-Christian culture and ideas, she had no idea how to interact with non-Christians. And worse, once she did, she found that her community had only ever told her half the story when it came to things like evolution, gay marriage, and other things. When she actually met a nice, committed gay couple, or evolutionists who had answers for the arguments she'd been taught, she walked away from her parents' faith. Sheltering our youth doesn't work because you can't shelter them forever.

Gardener: This proves nothing. Some Christian kids walk away from the faith no matter what their parents or communities do.

Turnau: True, and I wouldn't want to deny that it happens, nor the pain of parents and kids in that position to whom it happens. But given the choice between sheltering and training, I'll choose training every time. Why would I want to pass up opportunities to walk through tough issues, *real* issues, with my kids? *That's* how the wisdom of the Christian story gets passed down from generation to generation. If intentional community can do *that*, then I think it's on the right track. If it keeps parents and churches from doing that, then I think the community is squandering God-given opportunities and shirking God-given responsibilities. I want to be part of raising up a generation of ambassadors and artists who are culture-savvy people-lovers.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Libby Anne, "I Grew Up in the Benedict Option. Here's Why It Didn't Work." *Love, Joy, Feminism*, 1 October 2015, available online at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/lovejoyfeminism/2015/10/i-grew-up-in-the-benedict-option-heres-why-it-didnt-work.html> (accessed 15 February 2016).

⁶⁹ See Turnau, Burnett and Moore, "The Chief End of Gospel-Centered Parenting", in *Engage*.

Gardener: But you can't spend that kind of time *and* be intentional about community. You've got to unplug from one to be fully plugged-in to the other.

Turnau: I'm not convinced. There are many ways of doing intentional community that deepen the knowledge and practice of the Christian faith, and they don't all call for becoming disengaged from culture. Many churches have developed small group ministries, or retreats for communal bonding. The Wednesday night prayer meetings or Bible studies that are traditional in many Protestant churches for additional prayer or teaching do the same thing. The opportunities for regular hospitality, Sabbath rest, and forming friendships are endless. Christians can cultivate intentional community in all sorts of ways: a regular one-on-one coffee meeting, a mid-week small group meeting, a movie discussion night, support groups for those struggling with addiction, a theology-on-tap meeting at the pub, a mothers with toddlers play group, a group focused on feeding and sheltering the poor in their community.⁷⁰ My wife and I used to have a standing date every Thursday night with our church's children's minister to watch *The Simpsons* when it first came out so we could talk about the theological themes in it. It built our friendship, and also engaged culture. So like I said before, I am in no way against being intentional about the way we do church and build communities. But we don't have to build walls to keep culture out.

Gardener: (*Brows furrow.*) Wouldn't all this cultural engagement end up watering down the gospel itself? That's what I'm seeing in the Evangelical church: some bearded hipster in jeans behind the pulpit making movie references, all in the name of "relevance", "contextualisation" and "seeker-sensitivity".⁷¹ We'd be better off just sticking to the Bible and our traditions. Let non-Christians learn *our* culture if they want to be part of us!

Turnau: Well, I certainly agree that we need to preserve the integrity of the biblical gospel. But if we completely ignore issues of contextualisation, we'll end up just talking to ourselves (which is a lot of what goes on nowadays anyway). Besides, you can't really

⁷⁰ I particularly like James Smith's example of "Wednesday Night Wine" meetings (though I imagine some of my Baptist friends might not). See *Desiring the Kingdom*, 212. For more inspiration for intentional community-building within the Christian tradition, see Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010 [1997]), and Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, "Christian Practices and Congregational Education in Faith", in Michael Warren, ed., *Churches: The Local Church and the Structures of Change* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press of Oregon Catholic Press, 2000).

⁷¹ Dreher himself thinks that seeker-sensitivity is a major problem in the American church. It is cultural accommodation that undermines Christian culture. See Dreher, "Accidental", and "Way of Life".

avoid doing contextualisation. If you're not intentional about it, it's not that you're not doing it; you're just committing to doing it badly. Even if you want to "stick to the Bible", you must realise that your Bible is *already* contextualised. It brings a Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek book into the context of the English language. I mean, just try going to your neighbour and sharing the gospel (excuse me, το ευαγγέλιον) in Koine Greek and see how far you get.

Gardener: Translation is one thing, contextualisation is another.

Turnau: (*Slips again into teacher-mode.*) Is it? If we live in among people for whom Christian categories – sin, God, salvation, righteousness – are rapidly becoming empty or confusing, aren't we really talking about issues of translation? ⁷² The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argued (persuasively, I believe) that any act of communication involves multiple "horizons" (expectations, conceptual categories, assumptions, desires, hopes, fears): the horizon of the speaker, and the horizon of the listener. In order for real understanding to take place, the gap between these horizons must be overcome by what he called a "fusion of horizons".⁷³ This fusion *is* a translation; connect the circuit between the horizons, and meaningful communication has occurred. If it doesn't, people simply talk past each other (which happens quite a lot). You can tell someone is paying attention to these horizons when he or she asks, "Wait. What did you mean by that?" It is something that happens constantly in biblical exegesis. And it needs to be considered when sharing the gospel.

That's why pastor Tim Keller (someone who knows a thing or two about communicating spiritual truths to secular, post-Christian people) defines contextualisation this way:

Contextualization is not – as is often argued – "giving people what they want to hear". Rather, it is giving people *the Bible's answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking *in language and forms* they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them.⁷⁴

⁷² On contextualisation as translation, see Mike Ovey, "Putting 'Contextualisation' in Context", *Oak Hill College* blog, available online at http://oakhill2.ablette.net/blog/entry/putting_contextualisation_in_context/, and Graham Shearer, "Beavers, Magpies, and Contextualization", *Pelos* Tumblr blog, 29 January 2016, available online at <http://gishearer.tumblr.com/post/138272640801/beavers-magpies-contextualisation> (both accessed 16 February 2016).

⁷³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992 [1960]), 306.

⁷⁴ Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), part 3, "Gospel Contextualization", 89. The book is one of the better guides for contextualisation available. The master of contextualisation is Harvie Conn,

Contextualisation means looking for bridges, connections, places where the static that hinders communication can be overcome, all so that the gospel message registers faithfully in the conscious mind of the non-Christian. And it *can* happen without undermining the integrity of the gospel. Contextualisation is essential to Christian faithfulness in a post-Christian age, in a culture where the Christian vocabulary and categories have largely been lost. It means spending a lot of time with people who are strangers to the faith to learn their language.⁷⁵ Talking to a footballer in the Midlands isn't going to be quite the same as talking to a taxi driver in London. Talking to a banker in Birmingham isn't going to be quite the same as talking to a movie producer in Los Angeles. We don't typically think about our *own* culture in terms of missionary outreach and translation of the gospel, but we should, for that is the situation we find ourselves in with the post-Christian West. The gap in terms of assumptions between Christians and non-Christians is wider than we realise. So spending time with people *outside* our Christian communities is vital if we're going to get a handle on how to speak their language. That's our missionary fieldwork, if you will.

But good contextualisation also means listening to the culture, especially to its arts and popular culture. We need to listen carefully, charitably, critically, listening for what resonates with the gospel, and what grates against it, how things mean in these works. I think a healthy Christian life in this day and age is going to have to learn how to relate to both worlds – intentional community and post-Christian culture – in dialectical tension, even shuttling back and forth between them.

Gardener: Like a spiritual ping-pong ball, darting here and there, never at rest? No thank-you. I prefer rest, quite, solitude, stillness. This is where I find God. You can't find him in the maelstrom out there. (*Glances up at the approaching storm.*)

Turnau: I don't know that I'd call it a ping-pong game, and I certainly don't want to deny Christians seasons of stillness. But otherwise, why not

late professor of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary. See his *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Dialogue* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), and his 20 lecture online course, "Contextual Theology", *WTS Resources* website, available online at <http://www.wts.edu/resources/media.html?paramType=search&keywords=contextual&speaker=70&ScrBook=&ScrChap=&ScrVerse=&ScrVerseEnd=&year=1984&srch=search> (accessed 16 February 2016).

⁷⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, chapter 10, "Active Contextualization".

acknowledge that we are called to live simultaneously in two worlds? We Christians live in eschatological tension, between the old and new creation. God hasn't brought the old world to an end yet, and there are still people there who need us. And there are still God-given blessings to be received from the culture out there. So, no, I don't think it's a good idea to sever ties. We need to keep a foot in both worlds, and be intentional about our faith as well. It's a stretch to be sure, but that's what's needed to worship God and love others in a post-Christian culture. At least until the Lord comes back.

Gardener: And you really think Christians can change the world – or, as you prefer, the imaginary landscape – that way?

Turnau: Perhaps. In small ways, and over the long-term. Unless God does something bigger and faster than we could anticipate. That would be fantastic. But if not, then we should be prepared for some slow, steady work ahead of us.

Gardener: And we couldn't accomplish the same thing over the long-term by just focusing on our own communities, being good models for those around us, and evangelising our neighbours that way? Won't that alone do the job?⁷⁶

Turnau: Not really. Of course evangelism and being a godly model is necessary for witness to individuals. But if we wish to truly influence the world around us as God wants us to, we need to look beyond individual witness, beyond our lives within our own communities. Culture is more than a collection of individuals. Sin distorts the lives of individuals through guilt and relational dysfunction, but it also distorts whole cultural fields through structural corruptions such as racism, economic injustice, and biased representations in media.⁷⁷ Cultural sin patterns are more than a collection of individual sin-patterns. These warped patterns resonate throughout a society in ways that can wreak havoc in obvious and subtle ways (as your modernity-as-acid metaphor implies). And where the effects of sin are pervasive and super-individual, we should expect the effects of redemption to be just as pervasive. Redemption is not just individual freedom from guilt, but cultural healing from corruption.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See Dreher, "FAQ".

⁷⁷ By "corruption" I mean not just financial corruption (bribes, etc.), but the culture-wide effects of sin. See Greg Thompson, "The Church in our Time: Nurturing Congregations of Faithful Presence", New City Commons white paper, October 2011, available online at http://denverinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/The-Church-In-Our-Time-A-New-City-Commons-White-Paper_4.pdf (accessed 28 January 2016), 15-16. The whole essay is very helpful and worth reading.

⁷⁸ See Thompson, 17-21.

Bottom line: Personal holiness, one-on-one evangelism, inner-church community building; these are all essential. But they are not the whole mission of the church. We miss addressing that collective level if we just focus on our own communities, turning our eyes inward, so to speak. I think the imaginative life of the whole society has to be part of that conversation.

Gardener: (*Looking up at the dark clouds looming.*) The future just looks so unpromising at the moment. It feels so hopeless, as if our best efforts would be just a drop in the bucket, and at the risk of our own cultural survival.

Turnau: Has it ever been otherwise, really? Complete redemption and reformation doesn't happen in our lives or cultures. That shouldn't stop us from trying to engage with our culture in redemptive and healing ways.⁷⁹ Things may not change drastically or overnight. But given the reality of a God who acts in the world by his Spirit, we can anticipate substantial change. We have hope. We cannot give in to councils of despair. Thinking about and acting for cultural and social change ought to be squarely on the Christian agenda, despite our own declining cultural influence. In short, we ought to be thinking about sin and redemption not just on the individual level, but in their effects on cultural/imaginative/social structures as well.

My fear is that if folks like you turn inward, that changes the character of the faith itself. It stops being so much about loving people (that is, people unlike us), and starts becoming all about protecting us and ours. I'm not convinced that Christ was really that into self-protection. He was more into self-giving, and trusting his Father for the results. If we are faithful in living and giving out into the culture boldly, I don't think that Christianity is in much danger of evaporating. The more realistic fear is that it might wither and decay from within.

Gardener: So your vision isn't an either/or, either strengthen our communities or engage culturally. You're more a both/and kind of guy.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Some Christians (particularly Radical Two Kingdom theologians) object to the language of "redemptive" cultural engagement. They see it as a pre-empting of God's redemptive activity, as if our cultural efforts add something to our salvation (see Van Drunen, 56-58). No one, at least in the Reformed camp, argues this. Rather, it is in light of our already accomplished redemption (by grace alone) that we move out into the hurting world to bring (reflected) light and (mediated) healing. We are not the source of the redemption and healing; we merely attempt to be faithful with the resources given us (namely, our time, energy, creativity, and hope in light of the gospel).

⁸⁰ I appreciate Alan Jacob's comments on the Benedict Option that it is not primarily about withdrawal but about intentionality of institutional, relational and spiritual formation. This intentionality about formation (what he calls *Bildung*) may necessitate certain kinds of withdrawal, but that will differ from person to person. See "Withdrawals and Commitments",

Turnau: When I can be. So that's why I said at the beginning of our talk that I agree and disagree. I agree that the church needs to do a better job at teaching, training, and mentoring Christians of this generation and the next. And I agree that pursuing intentional community and deep relationships among Christians must be part of the equation. I just don't think that we need to disengage from the mainstream culture (even popular culture) to preserve our own Christian identities. Rather:

- When we critically engage our culture, the Christian story comes more clearly into focus so that we can worship God better.
- When we understand our holiness as a gift of grace, when we understand ourselves secure in God's love, our Christian calling to love is strengthened. We can live out the holy love that we *already have* in Christ for the benefit of others.
- When we understand that the two great loves – love for God and love for others – are not in competition, but rather they dovetail into each other, it frees us. We can move out into the lives around us, engaging culture to help us learn how to love others more wisely, gaining insight into how to be a healing presence in our wider communities.
- When we understand contextualisation not as a threat to the gospel, but as a necessary part of sharing the gospel, the necessity of cultural engagement comes into focus as a part and parcel of good contextualisation.
- When we understand that sin and redemption apply not just to individuals, but to larger cultural and imaginative structures as well, it becomes clear that we need to do more than evangelise and be godly examples. We need to focus on broader structures as well, including the imaginary landscape that shapes the cultural conversations going on.

Gardener: What? You're not going to do the breaking-the-fourth-wall thing?

Turnau: Nah. It weirded out the Knight, so I decided not to.

Gardener: Yeah, it *did* seem a little self-consciously meta; something Abed Nadir would do.

Turnau: Wait. If you're supposed to be unplugged from popular culture, how do you know *Community*?

Gardener: (*Concentrates pointedly on weeding her dahlias while whistling an ancient Gregorian chant*).

Scene III: The Member of the Loyal Opposition's Dialogue

The scene opens in a rather plain, shared office in an élite international publishing house located in New York or London. They sell serious fiction and issue-oriented non-fiction, not paperback bestsellers. We find the Member of the Loyal Opposition⁸¹ (hereafter MLO) squirreled away in a rather plain office. A fluorescent bulb buzzes softly from a recessed ceiling light fixture. The only decoration on the walls is his degree from a well-respected university, and a family portrait of him, his lovely wife, and his adorable twin moppets. The MLO himself is preoccupied reading galleys. He seems a bit harassed. After all, he's in the middle of a busy day.

The MLO works in publishing, but he could be a young, tenure-track academic at another fine university, a junior associate at a prestigious law firm, a member of the public relations staff for an arts centre or metropolitan orchestra. In short, he's the type who is going places (but hasn't arrived yet) in culturally influential institutions.

MLO: (*Looks up, notices Turnau for the first time.*) Hello. Can I help you? (*Remembers suddenly.*) Is it time for our chat already?

Turnau: What are you doing here? I thought you'd be in the halls of Parliament or something?

MLO: It's *your* metaphor.

Turnau: So it is. OK, then, what's your deal?

MLO: Just as you see. I am trying to keep my head down and do my job to the best of my ability. I would prefer to stay centred on God, and if I can perchance make a difference in some small way, all the better.

Turnau: That doesn't sound very ambitious.

MLO: (*Frustrated, defensive.*) Oh yes? And what's the alternative? Consider how things have turned out when all the "ambitious" Christians take the reins. Have they changed for the better? I'd say not! As a social sector, Christians have become defined by our politics, our judgmental spirit, our censoriousness. We have thinned a rich and

⁸¹ In parliamentary systems of government, a member of the loyal opposition is a member of Parliament who seeks to work within the current system (controlled at the moment by another political party) even as he opposes the ruling party's initiatives. Here it is a metaphor for someone in a position of a cultural minority who is yet willing to work *within* the majority culture to attempt change from within.

complex cultural matrix down to these political battles.⁸² Or we have played turtle and hidden away in our little pietistic holy huddles while the world goes serenely to hell.⁸³

Turnau: Sounds like you've been talking to the Knight and the Gardener.

MLO: Look, they are *good people*. But as far as strategies for how one is to be a Christian within a post-Christian culture, well, they are sadly misinformed. Though I do think much of what the Gardener said makes sense.

Turnau: Which parts?

MLO: How real Christian spirituality is eroded under the conditions of late modernity, and the need for spiritual formation, building up Christianity as a distinct culture, the need for intentional community.⁸⁴ That sort of thing.

Turnau: So what do you disagree with her about?

MLO: I disagree with withdrawal from the surrounding culture, even "strategically". We need to stay involved, keep our heads in the game. But without illusions, you know? We're not going to bring massive changes into our culture, especially not with politics.

Turnau: Tell me, then, what's your alternative?

MLO: Two words: "faithful presence". We Christians have overreached in the past. We thought we could change the world. Alas, we cannot, or at least, not as we had hoped. Rather, we need to recognise God's faithful presence – incarnationally – to us in Christ. And by way of response, we should seek to be faithfully present first to God, then to each other, and to the world in whatever sphere of influence God has placed us. In this way, Christians practice a sort of incarnation, bringing God's blessing to bear in small, incremental ways in all sectors of mainstream culture, working for the common good.⁸⁵ Just as Jeremiah told the exiles in chapter 29: pray and work for the

⁸² Hunter, 105, "Politics subsumes the public so much so that they become conflated. And so instead of the political realm being seen as one part of public life, all of public life tends to be reduced to the political".

⁸³ Hunter, Essay II, ch. 5 on the Neo-Anabaptists, and 218-19 on the cultural paradigm of "purity from".

⁸⁴ Hunter, 226-230.

⁸⁵ Sociologist James Davison Hunter coined this phrase as an alternative to the typical American Christian stances toward post-Christian culture: "defensive against" (typical of the Christian Right; an angry, combative attitude which resists anti-Christian shifts in culture), "relevant to" (typical of the Christian left; an accommodating attitude towards the prevailing culture, seeker-sensitive, etc.), and "purity from" (typical of the neo-Anabaptists; an attitude of opting out of mainstream culture, seeking instead to build a purely Christian enclave, a separate existence). See Hunter, 213-19. "Faithful presence" is Hunter's alternative wherein the Christian seeks to be quietly faithful to God within whatever niche he or she has found in mainstream culture. See Hunter, Essay III, ch. 4, "Toward a Theology of Faithful Presence".

prosperity of the city to which God has carried you.⁸⁶ We need to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) where we are, the way Jesus wanted us to be. And if in being faithful and committed to the common good we cause good to happen within post-Christian culture, so much the better!

Turnau: (*Gently mocking.*) Soooooooo, I can't help but notice that you're a galley slave...

MLO: (*Pointedly.*) At an *internationally known publishing house!* This place produces works that routinely have a massive cultural impact. Our books reach cultural élites and thus shape the culture around us. Granted, I am not a captain of industry... yet. But I bring light where I can by practising faithful presence where I am.

Turnau: So working here gives you opportunities to share the gospel? Is that what you're talking about?

MLO: Yes, of course. But that's only part of what I mean by being salt and light. By being a Christian within this industry, I can perhaps change things for the better in other ways. Cultural change happens through élite institutions and networks.⁸⁷ I have a certain area of responsibility and leadership, however small, and I can be faithful there. Cultural influence is "scalable", you know.

Turnau: What do you mean?

MLO: It scales according to position and location within the culture. It's not just for the big guns. Faithfulness in the little things can be as important in impacting a culture as being a captain of an industry.⁸⁸ Right now, I'm just keeping my head down, being faithful where I am, working for the flourishing of everyone.

Turnau: Can't argue with the idea of being faithful to God and loving others where you are. But... doesn't it bother you that a lot of those books, maybe *all* of them, argue for perspectives that are diametrically opposed to the Christian vision of what is good and true and real?

MLO: That's not under my control. I'm just called to be excellent in what I do. Hopefully, if I excel at what I do, they'll call me upstairs where I can wield more influence over decisions of what to publish. Will I be faced with compromises along the way? Sure, but that's the price of admission, isn't it?

Turnau: I don't know. I think I'd be pretty uncomfortable being part of a project like "How to Succeed in the Abortion Business in 10 Easy Steps!"

⁸⁶ Hunter, 276-79.

⁸⁷ Hunter, 40-45.

⁸⁸ See Thompson, 42.

MLO: Don't exaggerate. We don't get many outrageously ugly titles like that. Mostly our authors present interesting arguments which, while not necessarily Christian, are well worth engaging.

Turnau: But when you do get the odd objectionable title...?

MLO: Well, I don't really have the wiggle-room to opt out, you know? I signed a contract. I'm a part of this business. I've promised to do my job faithfully, or I'll be made redundant, and there goes my chance for cultural impact. That's really the choice, isn't it? Either be part of what's going on in the culture (and so have a chance at being salt and light), or turn away from it and so seal your own exclusion (and lose any chance at being salt and light). I'd rather wrestle with these issues than sequester myself in some safe space where I will have no impact whatsoever. Or I guess I could choose to shout at those in the culture from the margins, hoping people will just change their minds.

In short, I would rather struggle and take my chances trying to be faithful within the power centres of mainstream culture than opting for having an easier time in a subcultural institution that has only marginal impact, like a Christian publishing house.⁸⁹ And if I do a good job here, I'll rise up the ranks and my influence here will increase.

Turnau: As will the pressures to compromise, right? You only ever have so much leverage to work for change, what titles will or won't get published. The higher you go, the more you'll be tempted to conform to the prevailing corporate culture to maintain your position.⁹⁰

MLO: Well, it's not as if I must face temptation alone. I've got my church behind me. I've got friends there who also work in publishing. They keep me accountable and help me navigate the grey areas. We bounce ideas off each other. It's a great support network.⁹¹ And through it all, I know I'm at least working towards the common good.

Turnau: Are you? You keep talking about the "common good" and "flourishing". Aren't these terms very much up-for-grabs? Can we even define the common good in a post-Christian world?⁹²

⁸⁹ See Hunter Essay I, ch. 6, "The Cultural Economy of American Christianity".

⁹⁰ See Greg Forster, "To Love the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of *To Change the World*," in Collin Hansen, ed., *Revisiting Faithful Presence: To Change the World Five Years Later* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), e-book, esp. loc. 503-595.

⁹¹ See Thompson, 37-43.

⁹² On this point, see Robert Joustra, "Whose Religion? Which Flourishing?" *Comment*, 17 February 2016, available online at <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/4792/whose-religion-which-flourishing/> (accessed 11 March 2016).

MLO: I get your point. In a fragmented society, common definitions and cultural meanings become slippery and open to debate. James Davison Hunter calls it “dissolution”.⁹³ People lose faith that words can truly represent reality, so common meanings fall apart.

Turnau: What he doesn’t mention is that things don’t just fall apart, but things fall together again into new patterns. Stories and cultural motifs shape the collective imagination, and that causes dissolved meanings to re-coagulate, if you will, to come together into new, distinctively post-Christian ways.⁹⁴ Think of an oil slick in a puddle on the sidewalk. Throw in a rock, and the slick breaks into smaller bits. But before long, they move towards each other and, gloop!, they’re back into a single slick, though perhaps in a different shape. The same happens with meanings within culture: they don’t stay perpetually scattered and fragmented. Under the influence of networks of narratives, songs, attitudes, images, styles, and so on, meanings come together and solidify into new shapes as well.

So when we start using crucial words like “common good”, “natural”, “freedom”, “flourishing”, “healing”, “wholeness” and “human rights” Christians don’t just have to navigate the dissolution of old definitions. They also have to contend with new post-Christian definitions as well. Things have not only fallen apart, but they’re coming together again in a way that leaves Christians on the outside. That’s why I’m so interested in popular culture.

MLO: Wait, what? Your train of thought just jumped the tracks for me.

Turnau: I think popular stories, images, songs, games – what we call “popular culture” – form networks of human significance that can become a major force in shaping the collective imagination, and so steering social meanings.

MLO: Are you kidding? New electronic media and popular culture have done nothing but trivialise our lives together. Are you seriously asking me to take this collocation of the bizarre and foolish as worthy of careful consideration? Things like X-Men and superheroes, Thomas the Tank Engine, Harry Potter, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Bart Simpson? These are works that simply will not sustain analysis. They are

⁹³ Hunter, 205-10.

⁹⁴ Hunter asserts that post-Christian dissolution means we can fill words with any meanings we choose, leaving us with “the capacity to question everything but little ability to affirm anything beyond our own personal whims and possessive interests”, (206). I disagree. Popular narratives in film, television, song and game, allow that fragmentation to coalesce into new specific patterns that indeed affirm and provide solidity to new meanings, even if those new meanings often leave more traditional Christian meanings out of the conversation.

subpar offerings in a world that worships mere entertainment, making the world ever more banal.⁹⁵

Turnau: Not banal: the world becomes re-storied along different paths, *including* paths of entertainment. Entertainment at its best (or worst, depending on your perspective) elicits a quasi-worshipful response.⁹⁶ It's a powerful and fascinating thing. Don't sell it short. I mean, look at us! We *are* having this discussion in an imaginary movie script. Entertainment doesn't *have* to be trivial. Furthermore, you can find a surprising amount of depth both in the works themselves, and in the imaginative investments the fans commit to those works. It may just be that "The geek will inherit the earth."

MLO: Intriguing (I am studiously ignoring your pun), but it seems obvious to me that what happens in the *élite* circles of cultural power – the fine arts, academia, research institutes – has a more decisive impact over the long term.

Turnau: I won't deny the influence of *élite* culture. But my point is that contemporary popular culture has the curious property of being both widespread *and* *élite*. These cultural pieces have a sort of grassroots appeal, but they profoundly influence the cultural conversation even among people at the very top. In so doing, they shape the imaginary landscape of the whole culture. In that sense, Hollywood and other centres of popular cultural production *are* *élite* institutions, at least in terms of cultural influence.

MLO: You'll have to make that case. I'm still of the opinion that it is largely trivial.

Turnau: I will a bit later. But there's one other thing that bothers me about this "faithful presence" strategy.

MLO: (*Sighs, knowing what's coming.*) What's that?

Turnau: It just seems really passive. It feels a bit like raising the white flag.

MLO: But it's *not* surrender, not really. We may have to surrender our dreams of empire and sweeping reforms, but we continue to seek incremental changes, small improvements that please God by working faithfully for the common good.

Turnau: But is that enough when anti-Christian sentiment has grown to this extent? Did you remember that story back from 2001 in Bournemouth? A street preacher was attacked by a crowd simply for carrying a sign that some felt was intolerant ("Jesus Gives Peace, Jesus is Alive, Stop Immorality, Stop Homosexuality, Stop Lesbianism, Jesus is Lord"). They beat him, threw dirt on him, and

⁹⁵ Hunter is consistently dismissive of popular culture (part of his emphasis on *élitism*, perhaps?). See Hunter, 90, 208-11.

⁹⁶ See Turnau, *Popologetics*, 74-76.

when the police arrived, they arrested the street preacher for inciting violence under the Public Order Act 1986.⁹⁷ The courts seem more and more stacked with judges who have a certain distaste for Christians, at least in the UK. Doesn't someone need to speak out?

MLO: But if we just carry placards and shout, we automatically are shown to the exit from any cultural sphere that matters. I know I'd lose my job.

Turnau: Well, maybe it doesn't fall just on you, but on your pastor, your councillor, the lawyers in your church, Christians working in arts and entertainment, and so on. Maybe just practicing faithful presence for the common good (a common good that no one is quite sure how to define) isn't enough.

MLO: What do you propose, and how does it not end with Christians either being so obnoxious and triumphalist that we end up undermining our own cultural influence, or so defeatist that we throw in the towel and retreat into our walled gardens?

Gardener: (*Off camera.*) Hey!

Turnau: (*Ignores her.*) Pastor Vernon Pierre wrote a really thoughtful piece in which he said we need more than faithful presence; we need "faithful *prophetic* presence".⁹⁸ We need to do more than keep relatively mum as we level grind⁹⁹ our way inch-by-inch into positions of influence by working quietly for the common good. Pierre looks to figures from the Bible as well as the American Civil Rights movement to give us a model of how a culturally marginalised minority can possibly change things over time. Faithful presence is necessary, but so is speaking up prophetically against the current system.

He describes three levels of faithful prophetic presence, three types of prophets: "Court prophets" are those who have attained places of cultural influence, like you're trying to do in this publishing house. Consider Nathan, Isaiah or Daniel, in the Bible, and those who networked within the system to end racial discrimination in the Civil

⁹⁷ See Paul Diamond, "England's Repressive Tolerance", *First Things*, December 2012, available online at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/12/englands-repressive-tolerance> (accessed 27 February 2016).

⁹⁸ The following paragraphs are derived from Vernon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets", in *Revisiting Faithful Presence*, and his interview with Collin Hansen, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets: An Interview with Vernon Pierre", *The Gospel Coalition*, 17 November 2015, available online at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faithful-presence-needs-prophets> (accessed 27 February 2016).

⁹⁹ "Level grinding" is a term used in discussing video role-playing games. It means to tediously repeat actions over and over in order to gain skill, experience points, money or items to get your character to the next level. See "Level Grinding", *TV Tropes* website, available online at <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LevelGrinding> (accessed 27 February 2016).

Rights movement. Court prophets sometimes have to compromise to stay “in court”. After all, Daniel and his friends learned the language and the culture of pagans. Their job was to give wise advice to the very king who had attacked and deported their people. They actively supported the system that oppressed them – that’s a *huge* compromise, some would even say treason. As you said, that’s the price of admission. Nevertheless, they were faithful to God within those positions. And sometimes, when their superiors crossed a line, Daniel and company had to take a stand. For current-day court prophets, taking a stand while working within the system runs the risk of being shown the door. Daniel risked the Lion’s Den, and his friends risked the fiery furnace; part of the gig.

“Wilderness prophets” (John the Baptist, Martin Luther King) speak from outside positions of power. They can be more direct and provocative. But like the court prophets, their outspokenness carries with it a great deal of risk. It cost John his head, and King was gunned down. But King’s voice was heard because he drew deeply from the Bible as he addressed the conscience of the American people for their good, as well as the good of African-Americans. He didn’t represent a special interest group, and he never took a bitter or angry tone. He spoke as one who loved even those who opposed him, but without letting them off the hook. He was, as Pierre says, “aggressively gracious” rather than Pharisaically judgmental.

Finally, “exile prophets” (Ezekiel, and in the Civil Rights movement, Pierre mentions James Baldwin)¹⁰⁰ are those prophets who speak mostly to the community in exile. Ezekiel’s job was not to confront the mainstream cultural powers-that-be. Rather, he was called to stir the marginalised people up to faithfulness, to love, and to wisdom in a difficult time.

MLO: Hmmmm. So you have in mind something more, erm, *pointed* than simply being faithful to God and working for the common good where we are.

Turnau: Pointed, *and* generative (as Fujimura defines it).¹⁰¹ Not just argumentative, but something self-giving, generous of spirit, embracing and vulnerable. Something that opens a path to conversation and reconciliation.

As important as faithful practice is, there are times when we need to intentionally speak up prophetically, imaginatively, for the common good (as God defines it, biblically) whether in court, in the

¹⁰⁰ Pierre, “Interview”.

¹⁰¹ See Makoto Fujimura, *On Becoming Generative: An Introduction to Culture Care* (New York: Fujimura Institute/International Arts Movement, 2013).

wilderness, or in exile. These three levels of prophetic witness could come through any number of media: direct verbal address (speeches, interviews, sermons), but also more indirect and creative ways as well (song, image, story, film, game). Because we believe in God's common grace, that God is still active in the world restraining sin, preserving truth and goodness, allowing beauty to take root and flower, we are still called to bring our faith to bear on what we do in the cultural arena. The cultural mandate as a prophetic witness still stands.¹⁰² Our faithful presence within culture should be marked with a "holy impatience" to see the flourishing of Kingdom *shalom* spread throughout culture through our cultural works,¹⁰³ even as we take the long view, our sight stretching to future generations.¹⁰⁴

MLO: Sounds risky. It's seems as though it would be awfully easy to fall into triumphalism once again. What's the end-game?

Turnau: Not theocracy, certainly. But certainly a society in which our cultural idolatries and self-destructive tendencies are softened, blunted. Culturally-active believers should serve as leaven to lighten things for everyone. Perhaps all these prophetic elements could work together to change the cultural narrative somewhat, or at least add a new leitmotif, a new voice to the conversation. And that could have a marked impact on restructuring the imaginary landscape.

MLO: I'll have to think more on this.

Turnau: Well, do it in the next scene. This shoot's on a tight schedule.

[End Part One – Begin Intermission Music].

¹⁰² See Vincent Baconte, "Beyond 'Faithful Presence': Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Common Grace and Cultural Development", *Journal of Markets and Morality* 16 (Spring 2013): 202.

¹⁰³ Baconte, 202-03.

¹⁰⁴ Fujimura, *On Becoming Generational*, loc. 117ff.

IS THE ADAMIC WORK OF CHRIST SHARED WITH THE BELIEVER? A CRITIQUE OF VAN DRUNEN

*Andrew Latimer**

One of the ongoing debates in Reformed theology is how Christians are to engage with the wider culture. David Van Drunen's book "Living in God's two Kingdoms" provides a clear presentation of a two kingdoms approach to cultural engagement and is written to challenge the "vision that the redemptive transformation of culture is central to the Christian life". This article aims to show how Van Drunen's misreading of the covenant with Adam sets him on the wrong course, and leads to conclusions which are at odds with the New Testament's description of the Christian life. He fails to see that alongside an "exile paradigm" for believers in this age, the New Testament also describes a "conquest paradigm", and he misses how the New Testament teaches that in Christ believers share in Christ's Adamic work.

One of the ongoing debates in reformed theology is how Christians are to engage with the wider culture. David Van Drunen's book "Living in God's Two Kingdoms" provides a clear presentation of a two kingdoms approach to cultural engagement and is written to challenge the "vision that the redemptive transformation of culture is central to the Christian life".¹

The book is written with a strong covenantal framework, and self-consciously "embraces the heritage of Augustine and the Reformation and seeks to develop and strengthen it further".² In particular, his argument rests on his particular readings of the Adamic and Noahic covenants, as he explains: "A key aspect of my biblical-theological case for the two kingdoms is my interpretation of... Paul's Two Adams paradigm and the Noahic covenant".³ Garry Williams has provided a persuasive critique of his interpretation of the Noahic covenant, and I will seek to do the same with respect to his interpretation of the Covenant of Nature with Adam.⁴

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¹ David Van Drunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 17.

² Van Drunen, *Living*, 14.

³ David Van Drunen, "What Exactly Is the Issue? A Response to Kingdoms Apart", *OPC*, available online at http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=354, (accessed 21 October 2015).

⁴ Garry Williams, "Noah in Covenant Theology", *John Owen Centre*, <http://www.johnowencentre.org/sites/default/files/audio/Conference2013-GarryWilliams-Part1.mp3>, (accessed 21 April 2016).

I will argue that it is Van Drunen's misreading of the covenant with Adam which sets him on the wrong course, and which then leads to conclusions which are at odds with the New Testament's description of the Christian life.

*1. The cultural mandate is not so tied to Adam's probation
that its purpose is now obsolete*

For Van Drunen, the cultural mandate given to humanity in Gen 1:26-28 is so tied to Adam's probation in Genesis 2 that it cannot have a place in a post-fall world, except as the task which Christ needs to accomplish on our behalf.

He believes that obeying the mandate only had significance as a means of winning eternal life, and once that was no longer an option for fallen human beings, the mandate is obsolete for believers: "However much fallen human beings may strive to pick up the baton from Adam and pursue the tasks of culture with an eye to an eternal prize, the quest is futile."⁵

Whilst the probation in Genesis 2 is clearly given within the context of humanity's charge to fill and subdue the earth, it is mistaken to think that the mandate is given solely for the purpose of the probation for a number of reasons.

1. The text in Genesis 1-2 separates the mandate from the probation

It is significant that Genesis 1 and 2 are presented as two separate accounts, rather than being conflated into one story. In Genesis 1, God deals with humanity in a general sense, addressing male and female together, and he issues a mandate which is not localised to a particular person or place. In Genesis 2 however, the alternative is true. God deals with a particular man, Adam, in a particular place, Eden, and issues a command which could only apply to that particular context. The placing of the cultural mandate in such a prominent place at the beginning of the Genesis account distinguishes it from the probation as having a wider, over-arching significance.

2. The reissuing of the mandate in Genesis 9 indicates its continuing relevance

Having distinguished the mandate and the probation in Genesis 1 and 2, the author then distinguishes them further as the narrative continues by reissuing the mandate, albeit in a modified form, in Genesis 9. As a reader it is a natural response to wonder what continues and what has changed since Adam's rebellion, and so it is reassuring when the text explains that man's image persists (Gen 9:6), as does his responsibility to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1).

⁵ Van Drunen, *Living*, 46.

Van Drunen agrees that “these verses reflect the original cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26-28”, but he argues that the responsibilities are very different from Adam’s original mandate since there are “no special acts of religious devotion, such as faith, prayer, or worship... [they] do not require people to function as priests... [and they never indicate] that they can attain life in the world-to-come through obedience.”⁶

This is precisely what we would expect, however, given that, as I have shown, these differences reflect the distinctions in the original structure of Genesis 1-2.

Interestingly, to the extent that Van Drunen agrees that Genesis 9 reissues the mandate in Genesis 1, he opens up an unwelcome conclusion for his system because, by arguing that “the Noahic covenant embraces the human race in common”⁷ rather than only God’s people, he inadvertently allows even unredeemed humanity to become “little Adams”. This is a point developed at length in Williams’ paper.⁸

3. God’s purpose in redemption follows the pattern introduced in the cultural mandate

David Clines in “The Theme of the Pentateuch” describes how the pattern of Genesis 1 lays the blueprint for God’s purposes of redemption declared in Genesis 12 and worked out in the rest of the Pentateuch and beyond: “The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfillment of the promise to, or blessing of, the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is... an affirmation of the primal intentions for humanity.”⁹ He shows in detail how the elements of offspring, relationship, land, and the blessing of the world, which begin in Genesis 1, form the scarlet thread through the subsequent history, and provide the impetus which keeps the story moving to its conclusion. This indicates that, far from being obsolete, the cultural mandate standing at the gates of the Bible provides the shape of all that follows.

This is confirmed by the way the writer to the Hebrews takes the pattern of dominion in Genesis 1:26-28, described poetically in Psalm 8:6, and explains that this is the outcome achieved by Christ’s salvation (Heb 2:6-9). This is saying more than Van Drunen’s argument that the cultural mandate has an enduring purpose beyond the fall as the task which Christ needs to accomplish on our behalf; it is describing the Genesis 1 pattern as the goal to which redemption takes us. Whilst this point does not necessitate that the

⁶ Van Drunen, *Living*, 79.

⁷ Van Drunen, *Living*, 80.

⁸ Williams, *Noah*.

⁹ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 30.

cultural mandate is still binding, it still counters Van Drunen's argument that it is obsolete.

4. Christ's recapitulation of Adam's probation does not involve fulfilling the cultural mandate and therefore cannot exhaust it

Van Drunen correctly asserts that "Redemption... consists in the Lord Jesus Christ himself fulfilling Adam's original task once and for all, on our behalf."¹⁰ When, however, we consider the question of "How did Christ accomplish Adam's original task?" it is striking that Jesus did not personally fill the earth with his descendants or exercise his dominion over all creatures during his earthly ministry. Rather, he resisted Satan's temptations to disobey God, recapitulating the pattern of Genesis 2, not that of Genesis 1. Once again we see a distinction in these aspects of Adam's calling: the probation, which is obsolete for fallen humanity and only to be repeated by Christ, and the cultural mandate, which is of enduring significance.

5. The cultural mandate is linked to bearing God's image and therefore persists beyond the fall

Genesis 1:26 clearly connects image-bearing to the cultural mandate: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion...'. As Van Drunen rightly observes: "Exercising dominion was not something tacked on to image-bearing: to exercise dominion is part of the very nature of bearing the image."¹¹

It is striking then that, as has already been noted, human beings continue to bear God's image in some sense beyond the fall.¹² The New Testament speaks about a process whereby New Covenant believers are "being renewed in knowledge after the image of [their] Creator",¹³ which assumes that the image had been marred and needs restoring. And the process of restoration is connected to believers "beholding the glory of the Lord" as they gaze on Christ in the gospel,¹⁴ and are thereby "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another".¹⁵

Given that exercising dominion is part of the nature of bearing the image, it follows that as believers are renewed in the image of their Creator, they are called and enabled to exercise wise, righteous, and holy dominion over this world.

¹⁰ Van Drunen, *Living*, 26.

¹¹ Van Drunen, *Living*, 39.

¹² Gen 9:6.

¹³ Col 3:10.

¹⁴ 2 Cor 4:4.

¹⁵ 2 Cor 3:18.

This framework of a marred and renewed image in fallen humans, corresponding to a marred and renewed ability to exercise godly dominion, is useful in addressing the question of who is commissioned to carry out the modified cultural mandate of Genesis 9. For Van Drunen, the commission “embraces the human race in common”,¹⁶ which as we have seen inadvertently opens the way for even unredeemed humanity to become “little Adams”, whereas others argue that Noah is commissioned, not as the head of humanity, but as the head of the church, and therefore that only believers may be “little Adams”. The difficulty with this second position is the evidence in the text for the covenant being both universal-common (e.g. “all flesh” language and hints of unbreakability) and yet also particular-redemptive (e.g. “offspring” language and Noah as a type of Christ). A way of understanding the Noahic covenant must be found which incorporates both of these strands. Williams uses the example of the animals as creatures who are explicitly parties to the covenant and yet are necessarily passive and partial, since they cannot consent and share in its full benefits in the same way as humans, to provide a way of understanding how unredeemed humanity can be parties in a passive and partial sense. For Williams “[the animals’] example opens the way for us to understand how every human being can be in this covenant and yet it can still be at its heart a redemptive covenant.”

The image framework provides further help in explaining how the cultural mandate may still be relevant for all humanity (just as all humanity continues to bear God’s image), but is only effectively exercised by Christ, and by extension those who are in him (since he is the true image of God, and they are being renewed in that image).

6. The cultural mandate continues into the new creation

Van Drunen rightly points to “rest” as being a major paradigm for understanding the nature of the eternal state,¹⁷ but it is not the only paradigm. “Exercising dominion” is also a significant picture of what eternal life will involve.

In Jesus’ parables, the master of the household sets his faithful servants over all his possessions,¹⁸ and the king rewards his faithful servants with authority to rule over many cities.¹⁹ And as Paul reminds Timothy “if we endure, we will also reign with him”.²⁰ Since the exercise of dominion is something which endures even into the new creation, it is clear that the

¹⁶ Van Drunen, *Living*, 79.

¹⁷ Van Drunen, *Living*, 40.

¹⁸ Matt 24:47.

¹⁹ Luke 19:17.

²⁰ 2 Tim 2:12.

cultural mandate, far from becoming obsolete for believers after the fall, is a pattern which is set to endure for endless ages.

Historical context

It is worth at this stage considering the historical tradition from which the two kingdoms theology springs. Van Drunen argues at length for the Reformed underpinnings of this position,²¹ and this is the subject of some debate.²² All agree that this theology can be clearly seen in Luther's distinction of "two kingdoms".²³ When Van Drunen argues that the whole purpose of the cultural mandate is to provide a probationary test for Adam, and later for Christ, it is worth noting that this outlook is most at home within a Lutheran framework which assumes that God's commands serve principally to reveal our sin and describe Christ's perfection, rather than the additional purpose of providing direction for the believer. Van Drunen himself certainly believes in a Reformed view of the law – that believers should obey God's commands out of gratitude for their salvation – but I would still argue that the two kingdoms system fits most naturally within a Lutheran view of God's law since it assumes that the purposes of the cultural mandate are exhausted in exposing Adam's sin and describing Christ's obedience.

Having considered and challenged Van Drunen's particular interpretation of the Covenant of Nature, we will consider how this interpretation works its way out in a particular understanding of the New Testament believer's engagement with the wider culture.

II. Alongside an "exile paradigm" for believers in this age, the New Testament also describes a "conquest paradigm"

For Van Drunen, where an Adamic paradigm persists it is for Christ alone to fulfill,²⁴ and therefore the only New Testament paradigm for understanding the Christian's identity can be that of exile and sojourning, not that of conquest or rule:

"The Christian life is one of waiting, but what is our identity in this world while we wait?... By using the terms "exile" and "dispersion" Peter informs Christians that their identity is similar to

²¹ See especially David Van Drunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) chapters 2-6.

²² See for example Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed. *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).

²³ See for example John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 945.

²⁴ Van Drunen, *Living*, 26.

that of the Old Testament Israelites who were driven from their land and lived far from home, many of them in Babylon.²⁵

For Van Drunen, then, the conquest paradigm has no fulfillment in this present age:

As the conquest of the Promised Land marked the end of Israel's days of sojourning in the wilderness and began their possession of a land that offered a foretaste of heaven, so the day of judgment will mark the end of Christians' sojourning in this world and begin their possession of heaven itself.²⁶

Although the connection between the conquest and the cultural mandate may not be immediately obvious, the two ideas are linked in the book of Joshua, and in their outworking in the New Testament.

For example in Joshua 18:1, when the people of Israel finally assemble at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting, the whole first half of the book is summarised in the statement "The land lay subdued before them." And as Gordon McConville notes:

This high point in the drama of Israel's progress... contains a reminiscence of the creation command to the first humans to "subdue the earth" (Gen 1:28). This is because the phrase "the land subdued before them" uses precisely the same terms as in the creation command. Israel's possession of Canaan, therefore, together with its presence before God in worship, has a significance far beyond itself, for it stands as a symbol and promise of the human fulfillment of its mandate to "subdue the earth", namely to bring it to that ordering and completion that God's creative purpose intended for it.²⁷

Another connection between the conquest and the cultural mandate can be seen in the imagery of God putting all things under his people's feet. When the Psalmist summarises Adam's dominion in Psalm 8:6 he writes, "You have put all things under his feet." This imagery is literally fulfilled in Joshua 10 when Joshua summons his men to put their feet on the necks of the defeated kings who stood against them, as a way of building his men's faith that "thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight". In a similar way the LORD promises Joshua that "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you."²⁸

In these and other ways the book of Joshua connects the conquest to the fulfillment of Adam's cultural mandate. And so it is significant that Van

²⁵ Van Drunen, *Living*, 73.

²⁶ Van Drunen, *Living*, 90 fn6.

²⁷ J. Gordon McConville and Stephen N. Williams, *Joshua* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 75.

²⁸ Josh 1:3.

Drunen argues that the conquest paradigm finds its fulfillment only in the age to come, and not in this present age.²⁹

When we turn to the New Testament, however, we do find evidence of the conquest paradigm in the present age.

1. Inheritance language is used in connection to world evangelisation

The inheritance (נַחֲלָה, *nachalah*) of the land is the big theme of the book of Joshua. The land was considered both to need conquering, and also to be part of an enduring inheritance given by God to the people (Josh 11:23).

This promise of inheritance is expanded in Psalm 2:8, where we learn that the Messiah's inheritance will include even the ends of the earth. And when the New Testament describes how this Psalm finds its fulfillment, it is often in the context of the nations being brought into submission to Christ through the advance of the gospel.

For example in Romans 1, even though Paul doesn't directly quote Psalm 2, he defines the gospel using language drawn from it. It is the gospel,

promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

Elsewhere, in Acts 13:33, when Paul uses this logic of the resurrection proving Jesus' identity as the Messianic Son, he quotes directly from Psalm 2.

And then in Romans 1, having defined the gospel in Psalm 2 terms, Paul goes directly on to explain that he has "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations". Again, although there is not a direct quote from Psalm 2, the logic flows out of that Psalm: once the Son has been declared, the LORD will make the nations his heritage (נַחֲלָה, *nachalah*), and this is fulfilled by Paul bringing about the obedience of faith among all the nations.

Another example of where "inheritance" language from Psalm 2 is connected to world evangelisation is in Acts 4. The Jerusalem church quote the psalm in their prayer, and show their understanding that the world's opposition to the Messiah predicted there was fulfilled firstly in Jesus' execution, and, in a derivative sense, in the church being threatened not to speak in the name of Jesus. And in drawing these parallels, the logic of their prayer seems to be that "just as you promised to defy the world's opposition by appointing your Son as King in Psalm 2, and just as you fulfilled that promise by raising Jesus to be Lord of all, so now continue to defy the world's opposition as you 'look upon their threats and grant to your servants

²⁹ Van Drunen, *Living*, 90 fn6.

to continue to speak your word with all boldness”.³⁰ Once again the pattern of Psalm 2, where the Messiah is granted the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession is fulfilled in the advance of the gospel.

2. Joshua imagery is used in connection to world evangelisation

Another way we see the “conquest paradigm” evident in the New Testament is in the general use of Joshua imagery in connection to world evangelisation. Two examples of this are in Matthew 10 and 28.

In Matthew 10, Jesus calls his apostles to go and preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10:7). And as Peter Leithart notes, the chapter is full of allusions to the conquest of the land:

Jesus treats the mission of the twelve as a quasi-military operation... To fulfill their mission, the Twelve need to act with courage, trusting their Father and fearing God rather than man (10:28-29). Jesus announces that he has come to bring a “sword” rather than peace (10:34), and demands a total commitment from his disciples, including a willingness to die for his sake (10:37-39). In exhorting his disciples “Do not fear”, Jesus is repeating the words of Moses and Joshua to Israel before the conquest (Num 14:9; 21:34; Deut 1:21; 3:32; 31:8; Josh 8:1; 10:8, 25). The discourse anticipates that some will receive the Twelve, and promises that those who do will, like Rahab, receive a reward (10:40-42).³¹

Another example of Joshua imagery in connection to world evangelisation is in Matthew 28. In the Great Commission there are multiple allusions to the commissioning of Joshua in Deuteronomy 32 and Joshua 1. Just as Joshua is commanded to “Go”,³² so the disciples are commanded to “Go”.³³ Just as there is an emphasis on Joshua being careful to observe *all* the law,³⁴ so there is an emphasis on the disciples teaching the nations to observe *all* that Jesus has commanded them.³⁵ Just as Joshua’s commission is sandwiched between two assurances of the Lord’s presence with him,³⁶ so the disciples are assured that Jesus will be with them always to the end of the age.³⁷

As William Davies and Dale Allison comment:

Just as Moses, at the close of his life, commissioned Joshua both to go into the land peopled by foreign nations and to observe all the commandments in the law, and then further promised his

³⁰ Acts 4:29.

³¹ Peter J. Leithart, *The Four: A Survey of the Gospels* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2010), 125.

³² Josh 1:2.

³³ Matt 28:19.

³⁴ Josh 1:7.

³⁵ Matt 28:20.

³⁶ Josh 1:5, 9.

³⁷ Matt 28:20.

successor God's abiding presence, so similarly Jesus: at the end of his earthly ministry he told his disciples to go into all the world and to teach the observance of all the commandments of the new Moses, and then further promised his abiding presence.³⁸

We have seen how the New Testament draws on the conquest paradigm to describe aspects of the life of believers in the present age, and given the connection between Adam's dominion and Joshua's conquest, this is further evidence against Van Drunen's thesis that the cultural mandate is no longer relevant for New Testament believers.

III. The New Testament teaches that in Christ believers share in Christ's Adamic work

One of the driving forces of Van Drunen's whole argument is his desire to preserve the uniqueness of Christ's office as the last Adam: "Because Jesus has fulfilled the first Adam's commission, those who belong to Christ by faith are no longer given that commission... We are not little Adams."³⁹ Whilst the New Testament does indeed highlight Jesus' uniqueness as the last Adam, it also teaches that those in Christ share in Christ's Adamic work.

1. Christ is the Adamic Image-bearer, and believers are image-bearers in him

Colossians 1:13-15 shows that as the beloved Son, Jesus bears God's image in a unique way. Christ therefore fulfills all that Adam pointed to as the image-bearer, but it is striking that even though Christ is the image-bearer *par excellence*, this is a reality which he shares with those in him. Colossians goes on to explain that for those who are in Christ, they are "being renewed in knowledge after the image of [their] creator".⁴⁰

2. Christ is the Adamic Serpent-crusher, and believers are serpent-crushers in him

According to Genesis 2:15 Adam is to "work" and "take care of" the garden. As Bruce Waltke explains:

Elsewhere in the Pentateuch this expression describes the activity only of priests. The latter term entails guarding the garden against Satan's encroachment (see 3:1-5). As priest and guardians of the garden, Adam and Eve should have driven out the serpent; instead it drives them out.⁴¹

³⁸ William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew Vol. 3* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 1988), 680.

³⁹ Van Drunen, *Living*, 28.

⁴⁰ Col 3:10.

⁴¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 87.

After Adam's failure, God promises one who will crush Satan's head (Gen 3:15). Unlike Adam, Jesus resists Satan's attacks, and through his death defeats the devil.⁴² Although Jesus is the unique Serpent-crusher who defeated Satan, it is striking that Paul writes to the Roman Christians who are being infiltrated by divisive false teachers: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."⁴³ As Christopher Ash comments:

He reassures them (v. 20a) that "the God of peace" (the God who gives harmony to the church when it is threatened by division) "will soon crush Satan under your feet"... Note that (a) God crushes Satan, but (b) he does it "under your feet". That is to say, the instrument God uses to crush Satan is the church of Christ, who are "in Christ" the corporate fulfillment of the "seed of the woman".⁴⁴

So even though Jesus is the unique Serpent-Crusher, believers are serpent-crushers in him.

In Luke 10:17-19 the seventy-two return from the mission on which Jesus had sent them saying,

'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' And [Jesus] said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.'

Bock comments:

the allusion may go back to Gen 3:15, where it says that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head. The picture is of crushing these creatures and thereby defeating the hostility they represent. The disciples are reasserting humanity's vice-regent role in creation. When it comes to evil, the disciples can overcome anything that opposes them, for Christ's authority overcomes the enemies' power.⁴⁵

This passage illustrates well that Christ is the unique Serpent-crusher, the One in whose name even the demons are subject, and yet this is clearly an authority which Jesus shares with his disciples.

3. Christ is the Adamic Ruler, and believers are rulers in him

In Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, Paul wants his readers to appreciate how God has used the same power which raised Jesus from the dead to benefit them also. When Paul says that God has "put all things under [Jesus'] feet" in 1:22 he is quoting Psalm 8, which celebrates Adam's original appointment as Ruler over the world. As Frank Thielman summarises:

⁴² Heb 2:14.

⁴³ Rom 16:20.

⁴⁴ Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans Vol. 2* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 258.

⁴⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53 Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1008.

God has not simply conquered Christ's cosmic enemies through raising him from the dead and exalting him to his royal right hand; he also has subjected all creation to him. This subjection of all things to Christ, moreover, is for the benefit of the church which is Christ's body (1:22-23), and which, as Paul later will say, "was raised and seated together with Christ in the heavenly places" (2:6). In other words, the hegemony that God intended for humanity to have over all creation is in the process of coming to pass through the Messiah's kingly rule over all things.⁴⁶

It is in this context that Paul explains that believers "are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:10). The end-point of Christ being raised as the last Adam and believers being raised in him is that they should now fulfill God's original purpose for humanity and be active in good works.

Paul quotes Psalm 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:27 as well to show that Jesus is the one who brings to fulfillment God's original intentions for humanity. When he says, "God has put all things in subjection under his feet", he interprets "all things" to include death (15:26). And then in light of death's defeat, the chapter ends with the application that the Corinthians should "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain" (15:58). Since Adam's rebellion, death has been victorious and work has been cursed with futility.⁴⁷ Now that Christ is raised as the last Adam, those who are in him have the victory over death, and have the prospect of non-futile labour.⁴⁸ This is an indication of how Christ's Adamic rule enables believers also to be involved in some kind of Adamic rule in him.

In summary, even though Christ is the Image-bearer, Serpent-Crusher, and Adamic Ruler *par excellence*, he shares these roles with those in him.

IV. The New Testament indicates that believers' sharing in Christ's Adamic work does not diminish Christ's glory but enhances it

A major concern of Van Drunen's in arguing that Christ's Adamic work must not be shared with believers is that he is seeking to protect Christ's uniqueness, and to ensure that his glory is not shared:

If Christ is the last Adam, then we are not new Adams. To understand our own cultural work as picking up and finishing Adam's original task is, however unwittingly, to compromise the sufficiency of Christ's work.⁴⁹

The New Testament, however, indicates that believers' sharing in Christ's Adamic work does not diminish Christ's glory but rather enhances it. This is

⁴⁶ G. K. Beale, and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), 816.

⁴⁷ Gen 3:18-19.

⁴⁸ 1 Cor 15:57-58.

⁴⁹ Van Drunen, *Living*, 50.

evident from the fact that the New Testament consistently speaks of believers sharing Christ's reign, and also that Christ is glorified in the glorification of believers.

1. Believers will share Christ's reign

Multiple Bible writers clearly attest to believers sharing Christ's reign.⁵⁰ One striking example is Jesus' letter to the Church at Thyatira, recorded in Revelation 2:26-27, which clearly alludes to the Messiah's unique rule over the nations in Psalm 2 being shared with Jesus' followers:

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

Much as we might find such an idea shocking, it is not so to the biblical authors.

2. Christ is glorified in the glorification of believers

Similarly, there are many references to believers being glorified, but this is never a threat to Christ's glory but rather magnifies it. The key to this dynamic seems to be the believers' union with Christ. As Jesus explains in his prayer in John 17:10: "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified *in them*".⁵¹ Or as Paul explains in 2 Thessalonians 1:12 that he is praying for his readers "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified *in you*, and you *in him*, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵²

Examples could be multiplied, but the point is clear that believers sharing Christ's Adamic work, far from diminishing his glory, will actually serve to enhance it as he is seen as the One whose glory is so great that it overflows to those who are in him.

Conclusion

I have shown that Van Drunen misinterprets the covenant with Adam by tying the cultural mandate so closely to Adam's probation that its purpose is now obsolete. This sets him on the wrong course and leads to conclusions which are at odds with the New Testament's description of the Christian life. He fails to see that alongside an "exile paradigm" for believers in this age, the

⁵⁰ E.g. Matt 19:28; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4 etc.

⁵¹ Emphasis mine.

⁵² Emphasis mine.

New Testament also describes a “conquest paradigm”, and he misses how the New Testament teaches that in Christ believers share in Christ’s Adamic work which magnifies Christ’s glory.

It is worth reflecting at this stage on the question of what exactly the believer’s work as a “little Adam” involves.

From Ephesians and Colossians a case can be made for a wide definition of what the Adamic work of the believer may involve. The descriptions of “good works” in Ephesians 2:10, and of “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator” in Colossians 3:10, can certainly be construed quite generally, but in each case the expressions must be qualified by what follows. In both cases the ethical injunctions are outlined especially in terms of pursuing godly virtues and godly behaviour in the various relationships of life, and the works extend into all areas of life. The Colossian believers are instructed that “whatever you do... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”, and “whatever you do, work heartily...”.⁵³ Similarly, the Ephesian believers are told that “whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord”.⁵⁴ In both letters it is expected that these Adamic works will be apparent in all areas of life.⁵⁵

If we consider what the Adamic works of the believer may involve from the other texts, the emphasis falls especially on building up the church. When we consider what the non-futile “labour in the Lord” in 1 Corinthians is, the rest of the chapter, and indeed the rest of the letter, point to that which builds up the church. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 the church is referred to as “God’s building”, and a contrast is drawn between the type of ministry which endures and that which will be burned up. In chapter 14 the church is repeatedly called to pursue those things which most build up the fellowship, and the logic of chapter 15 is that the resurrection ensures that “labour in the Lord” is not futile and so it must follow that that kind of labour is whatever contributes to people enjoying resurrection life. This category is broader than simply gospel proclamation because they are told that “love builds up” (8:1), and the example in 10:23 of a behaviour which “builds up” involves respecting a weaker brother’s conscience. Even so, the Adamic work still seems to be defined quite narrowly as whatever contributes to the building up of the church.

Romans 16 and Luke 10 are also in the context of building up the church. In the former the accent is on protecting faithful ministry in the church, and

⁵³ Col 3:17, 23.

⁵⁴ Eph 6:8.

⁵⁵ Commentators have noted a connection between the Ephesian and Colossian epistles in their parallel sections on the “Spirit-filled” (Eph 5:18-21), or “Word-indwelt” life (Col 3:16-7). A similar fruitful comparison could be drawn in their parallel descriptions of fulfilling the Adamic calling.

in the latter the accent is on the kingdom extending as individuals are set free from the tyranny of evil and receive the good news.

Van Drunen is rightly concerned to protect the spirituality of the church. As he explains: "The kingdom of God proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is not built through politics, commerce, music, or sports."⁵⁶ However, a close interaction with what the New Testament teaches the Adamic work of the believer actually involves will serve to protect the spirituality of the Church without recourse to Van Drunen's system.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Van Drunen, *Living*, 26.

⁵⁷ Williams points to other Reformed distinctions which serve to protect the spirituality of the Church, including the distinctions between the church as an institution and as an organism; between individual Christians and the corporate church; between presbyteral and diaconal functions; and between the church's care for its members and Christians' care for their neighbours. (Williams, *Noah*, 31).

RYLE AND EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

Ben Rogers^{*}

This article examines J. C. Ryle's understanding of Evangelical identity. More specifically, it examines his discovery, definition, and defence of Evangelical principles. He was convinced that Evangelical religion, which is characterised by five distinguishing principles, was the religion of the Scriptures, the Thirty-nine Articles, the English Reformers, the leading Pre-Laudian divines, and the leaders of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. This conviction was born out of his own conversion and reinforced by his study of the Bible and church history, and it led him to become an outspoken advocate of Evangelical principles and an apologist for the Evangelical cause.

This year (May 10, to be exact) marks the 200th anniversary of the birth J. C. Ryle, the First Bishop of Liverpool, and evangelicals of various denominational stripes will be commemorating his life and legacy. Few Victorian evangelicals and even fewer Victorian bishops have enjoyed such enduring popularity. His tracts continue to be printed and distributed. His commentaries on the gospels remain popular with pastors and laymen alike. His biographical sketches are still read and appreciated. *Holiness* has become a modern spiritual classic. *Practical Religion*, *Old Paths*, and *Thoughts for Young Men* are regularly studied in small groups and in Sunday Schools. Even his short preaching manual, *Simplicity in Preaching*, continues to be required reading in some evangelical seminaries.

The focus of this article is not on Ryle's popularity, but his understanding of Evangelical identity.¹ It will be shown that Ryle believed that Evangelical religion is the religion of Scripture and the Church of England. This conviction was born out of his own conversion, reinforced by his study of the Bible and church history, and led him to become an outspoken advocate and defender of the Evangelical cause. This article is divided into four parts. In the first part, Ryle's conversion and its implications will be discussed. In the second part, the contributions of his study of English church history to

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¹The term "Evangelical" will be used throughout to refer to the Evangelical party in the Church of England or evangelical *Anglicans*.

his understanding of Evangelical identity will be examined. In part three, his definition of Evangelical religion will be explained. In part four, his defence of Evangelical principles against new threats will be considered.

Becoming an Evangelical: The Conversion of J. C. Ryle

Few Victorians were less likely to become an Evangelical clergyman than J. C. Ryle. Though his grandfather was a committed evangelical Christian and an intimate friend of John Wesley, his father did not share his grandfather's concern for spiritual matters. As a result, he was raised in a wealthy but unspiritual home. Family prayers were almost never said. Religious instruction was nearly non-existent. The Sabbath was not kept. They had no religious friends or relatives to speak to them about their souls or bring them religious literature to read. And he was taught to regard Evangelicals as "well-meaning, extravagant, fanatical enthusiasts, who carried things a great deal too far in religion".²

The family regularly attended Christ's Church, which was one of only two parish churches in Macclesfield. For a brief period both churches had Evangelical incumbents, which was unusual for the time.³ They were not, however, succeeded by Evangelical clergymen. Ryle described the incumbents of St. Michael's and Christ's Church of his childhood as "wretched high and dry sticks of the old school", and later remarked, "I can truly say that I passed through childhood and boyhood without hearing a single sermon likely to do good to my soul".⁴

The spiritual instruction he received at school hardly made up for what was lacking at home. He was sent to the Rev. John Jackson's preparatory school at the age of eight, where he received a good grounding in Greek and Latin and a solid foundation for future academic success. However, from a moral and spiritual point of view, his three and a half years under Rev. Jackson was a complete failure. The school was poorly managed, bullying was commonplace, religious instruction was non-existent, and the moral condition of the school was absolutely deplorable. He later recalled,

As to the religion at the private school there was literally none at all, and I really think we were nothing better than little devils. I can find no other words to express my recollection of our utter ungodliness and boyish immorality.⁵

² J. C. Ryle, *A Self-Portrait*, ed. Peter Toon (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1975), 37.

³ The Rev. Charles Row, the incumbent of St. Michael's, had an evangelical conversion late in life. The Rev. David Simpson, the minister of Christ's Church from 1779-1799, was an outspoken evangelical, popular preacher, and energetic pastor. He regularly allowed John Wesley to preach in his pulpit.

⁴ Ryle, *A Self-Portrait*, 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

From a spiritual point of view, the next six and a half years at Eton were not much better. Though Eton was originally founded to combat heresy and provide a clerical education for the middle class, it was doing neither when Ryle arrived in January of 1828. Most of his classmates were the sons of noblemen, aristocrats, or the rich and well-connected, and religion was given no place in the curriculum and positively discouraged by the headmaster, Dr. John Keate. For example, Keate forbade John Bird Sumner, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, from speaking to his pupils about God while serving as an Assistant-master at Eton from 1802 to 1817. And instead of hearing “prayers” read by the Headmaster on Sunday afternoon, the boys received a short lecture on “prose”, which consisted of nothing more than a discourse on abstract morality and a preview of the next week’s Latin theme. Eton historian Henry Maxwell Lyte writes, “It seems incredible that there should ever have been an entire absence of religious teaching at the greatest school in Christian England; yet such, from all accounts, must have been the case.”⁶ Until the Duke of Newcastle founded a scholarship to promote the study of divinity in 1829, there was no official incentive to study religion whatsoever.

Ryle entered Christ Church, Oxford in 1834 as the first of the *Tracts for the Times* were being published by the leaders of the Oxford Movement. E. B. Pusey, one of the movement’s principle leaders, was the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Christ Church. Ryle, however, was immune to the religious excitement that was sweeping through the university. He was indifferent to both Tractarianism⁷ and Evangelicalism. He notes in his autobiography that that there were a good number of Evangelical men at Oxford at the time, but their preaching was “very defective”. He does, however, speak positively of the preaching of Edward Denison and Walter Hamilton at St. Peter’s in the East, who were sympathetic to evangelicalism at this point in their ministries.⁸ Ryle also wrestled with scepticism for a time – a fact which he omits in his autobiography – but was delivered from it by reading George Stanley Faber’s *The Difficulties of Infidelity*.⁹ For the most part, he was

⁶ H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *A History of Eton College 1440-1875* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1877), 361.

⁷ Tractarianism had little influence in Christ Church. J. H. Newman complained to H. W. Wilberforce that “Christ Church alone is immobile”. Oriel, Trinity and Exeter were the Tractarian strongholds. See P. B. Nockles, “Lost Causes and... Impossible Loyalties: The Oxford Movement and the University”, in *Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 1*, vol. 6 of *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007), 232.

⁸ Hamilton later became an Anglo-Catholic.

⁹ Years later he recalled, “I can remember the days when I tried hard to be an unbeliever, because religion crossed my path, and I did not like its holy requirements. I was delivered from that pit, I believe, by the grace of God leading me to... Faber’s *Difficulties of Infidelity*. I read that book, and felt that it could not be answered.” J. C. Ryle, *Unbelief a Marvel* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1880), 17.

generally indifferent to religion during his time at Oxford until midsummer of 1837.

That year Ryle underwent an evangelical conversion. He described it as a gradual process as opposed to a “sudden immediate change”.¹⁰ The discussion of his conversion in his autobiography is far from exhaustive, but he mentions a number of turning points that are worth noting. The first was the quest for academic honours at Eton and Oxford, which played an unintentional, but pivotal, role in his spiritual pilgrimage. In his last years at Eton he competed for the newly established Newcastle Scholarship. In addition to demonstrating proficiency in Greek and Latin, those competing for one of three £50 grants had to submit three papers: one on the Gospels, one on Acts, and one on general divinity and church history. Preparing for this examination exposed him to dogmatic Christianity for the first time, and he later traced the beginning of his first clear doctrinal views back to a study of the Thirty-nine Articles in preparation for this exam.¹¹ Something similar happened at Oxford as well. The new examination statute of 1800, which introduced the concept of honours degrees, required that every candidate demonstrate knowledge of the Gospels in Greek, the Thirty-nine Articles, and Bishop Butler’s *Analogy* or William Paley’s *Natural Theology*. He was also examined on the Prayer-book, church history and tradition, the Fathers, the Creeds, Augustine, and Pelagius. Through his pursuit of first-class honours at Oxford, he unintentionally, and perhaps to some degree unwillingly, received a substantial theological education.

The second was a rebuke from a friend. While out hunting with a group of friends about a year after leaving Eton, he swore in the presence of a friend, who rebuked him sharply for it. The rebuke pricked his conscience and made a deep and lasting impression on him.¹² It made him consider the sinfulness of sin, and it was the first time someone ever told him to think, repent, and pray.

The third was the Evangelical ministry of a newly opened church in Macclesfield – St. George’s in Sutton. The newly appointed Bishop of Chester, the evangelical John Bird Sumner, appointed an Evangelical clergyman, the Rev. William Wales, to be its first minister. He was succeeded by another Evangelical in 1834, the Rev. John Burnet. According to Ryle, the “gospel was really preached” by these men, and they introduced “a new kind of religion” into the Church of England in that part of Cheshire.¹³ He attended St.

¹⁰ Ryle, *A Self-Portrait*, 38.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Who Is the True Churchman? Or, the Thirty-Nine Articles Examined* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1872), 38.

¹² He later said that this rebuke “was one of the first things that I can remember that made a kind of religious impression upon my soul”. Ryle, *A Self-Portrait*, 39.

¹³ Ryle, *A Self-Portrait*, 39.

George's with his family while home on holiday, and its evangelical ministry began to "set him thinking about religion".

The fourth was the conversion of Harry Arkwright, his first cousin. He was converted while preparing for ordination with Rev. Burnet of St. George's. Ryle was struck by the "great change" that took place in Harry's character and opinions. Shortly thereafter, Ryle's sister, Susan, "took up Mr. Burnet's opinions" and was converted as well. As a result, evangelical religion became the subject of many family conversations, and he began to think more deeply about it.

The fifth was a severe illness that struck in the middle of the summer of 1837 as he was preparing for his exams. He was confined to his bed for days and was brought "very low for some time". During this "very curious crisis", he began to read the Bible and pray for the first time. He later credited these new habits with helping him go through his exams "very coolly and quietly".¹⁴

The final event was hearing a lesson from the second chapter of Ephesians read one Sunday morning. Around the time of his examinations, John Charles attended a church in Oxford feeling somewhat depressed and discouraged. The reader of the lesson made some lengthy pauses when he came to verse 8: "By grace – are ye saved – through faith – and that, not of yourselves – it is the gift of God." This unusual and emphatic reading of Ephesians 2:8 made a tremendous impact on him and led to his own evangelical conversion. By year's end, J. C. Ryle was "fairly launched as a Christian".

Ryle left Oxford with first class honours and new evangelical convictions, but he had no intention of entering the ministry of the Church of England. He moved to London in 1838 to read the law at Lincoln's Inn but returned home six months later due to illness. He was preparing for a career in politics when his father's bankruptcy ruined the family, ended his political career before it started, and forced him into ministry in 1841.

Before moving on, it is worth asking what impact Ryle's evangelical conversion had on his understanding of Evangelical identity. It should be noted that nearly all of the contributing factors were connected to the ministry of the Church of England. Anglican institutions, churches, ministers, authors, the liturgy, and, above all, the Articles were instrumental in producing the "great change" of 1837. Therefore, it is not surprising that he concluded that evangelical principles were perfectly compatible with "church" principles. In fact, he would later argue that they were precisely what the founders and formularies of the Church of England intended her ministers to teach.

¹⁴ Ibid., 40.

This conclusion had monumental consequences for Ryle's ministerial outlook. Abandoning the Church for chapel was never an option. As long as the Articles and the Prayer-book remained unaltered, Evangelicals held an impregnable position. He never countenanced secession, encouraged others to do so, or sympathised with those who did. When the Church of England was *rightly* administered, it was the best Protestant and evangelical church on earth. And he laboured as a minister, author, controversialist, party leader, church reformer, and bishop to make sure that it lived up to its promise.

Discovering Roots: Ryle's Historical Search for Evangelical Identity

J. C. Ryle was a life-long lover of history, especially church history. It offered guidance in the form of examples, which he needed in his earliest years of ministry. For example, George Whitefield's sermons helped him find his voice as a preacher, Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* encouraged him to make regular pastoral visiting a normal part of his ministerial programme, and John Wesley's organisational genius completely altered his attitude toward institutional church reform. It also helped him mature as a theologian, spiritual advisor, and controversialist. Readers who are familiar with his works, especially *Knots Untied*, *Holiness*, or *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John*, are undoubtedly accustomed to seeing numerous references to the works of the English Reformers, Puritans, and Church formularies.

In addition to being personally valuable and pastorally useful, the study of English church history helped shape his understanding of Evangelical identity in significant ways. His historical interests centred on three eras: the English Reformation of the sixteenth century, English Puritanism of the seventeenth century, and the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. His study of each of these important periods of church history made a unique contribution to his understanding of what it meant to be an Evangelical churchman.

Ryle's primary interest in the English Reformation, as it relates to Evangelical identity, was the theology of the Reformers. He argued that the Reformers were the "genuine prototypes and predecessors of... the Evangelical School".¹⁵ And to prove that the doctrine of the sixteenth century Reformers was "identical [to]" and "in complete harmony" with nineteenth century Evangelical churchmen, he compared their teaching on some of the

¹⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Facts and Men: Being Pages from English Church History between 1553 and 1683* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1882), xx.

most controversial issues of the day.¹⁶ Both affirmed *sola scriptura* and justification by faith alone; both insisted that good works and personal holiness necessarily spring from true faith and are the only sure evidence of conversion; both denied that the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*; both rejected the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Supper and the notion that the Supper is a sacrifice, the table is an altar, and the minister is a sacrificing priest; both regarded the use of lighted candles, Eucharistic vestments, and superstitious gestures and postures as Romish ceremonial; both abhorred the practice of habitual private confession; both maintained that episcopacy is of the *bene esse* but not the *esse* of a true church; both taught that the Church of Rome has erred in both doctrine and practice; and both taught that repentance, faith, holiness, justification, conversion, union with Christ, and the indwelling of the Spirit are the principal things in religion, and though church membership and reception of the sacraments are important, they are of secondary importance. The point of this comparison was not simply to prove affinity, but to answer the charge of novelty. The study of the theology of the Reformers demonstrates that the distinctive opinions of the Evangelical school were not a modern invention but those of the founders of the Church of England. "Whatever good there may be in other schools of thought", Ryle writes, "it is certain that no men can show a better title to be called 'Successors of the Reformers' than the members of the Evangelical school."¹⁷

The theology of the Reformers also answered the charge of inconsistency or downright dishonesty. For many High Churchmen, Ritualists, and Dissenters, evangelical principles were simply incompatible with "church" views in general, and critical passages in the Prayer-book in particular. One of the most famous examples of this is Charles Spurgeon's infamous sermon on *Baptismal Regeneration*, in which he questioned the integrity of Evangelical clergymen who denied baptismal regeneration and yet remained in a Church "which teaches that doctrine in the plainest of terms".¹⁸ For Ryle, the theology of the Reformers was decisive: The Articles, which are "in general tone, temper, spirit, intention, and meaning, eminently Protestant and eminently Evangelical",¹⁹ were the Church's confession of faith and test of true churchmanship. Therefore, the controversial Prayer-book statements on baptismal regeneration, habitual confession, and Eucharistic vestments must be interpreted in light of the Articles and the evangelical Protestantism of

¹⁶ See Ryle, *Facts and Men*, xxiii-xxvi.

¹⁷ Ryle, *Facts and Men*, xxvii.

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "Baptismal Regeneration" in vol. 10 of *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1969), 316.

¹⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Who Is the True Churchman? Or, the Thirty-Nine Articles Examined* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1872), 36.

its author. In short, the theology of the Reformers provided Evangelicals with a hermeneutical lens, as sense of internal consistency, and an answer to critics who questioned the sincerity of their attachment to “church” principles.

In addition to the English Reformation of the sixteenth century, Ryle was also deeply interested in English Puritanism of the seventeenth century. He described himself as “a thorough lover of Puritan theology”,²⁰ and his own theology, preaching, pastoral work, spirituality, writing style and reforming agenda all bear the Puritan stamp. In terms of Evangelical identity, his interest in the Puritans was twofold: First, they formed an important link in the line of Evangelical succession that stretched back from the nineteenth to the sixteenth century. He praised their “outspoken Protestantism”, and loved their “clear, sharply cut, distinct Evangelicalism”.²¹ They alone kept the lamp of pure, evangelical religion burning in England during the reign of the Stuarts.²² They were not enemies of the monarchy, nor of the Church of England, nor were they ignorant, fanatical, dissenters. In fact, he believed they did more to “elevate the national character of any class of Englishmen that ever lived”.²³ So why were they so maligned and hated in the nineteenth century? For the same reasons that Evangelicals were: their outspoken Protestantism and Evangelicalism. He explains:

Against Popery in every shape and form they were always protesting. Against sacramental justification, formalism, ceremonialism, baptismal regeneration, mystical views of the Lord’s Supper, they were always lifting up a warning voice. No wonder that Ritualists, Tractarians, Romanisers, and their companions, loathe the very name of the Puritans, and labour in every way to damage their authority.²⁴

Ryle loved them for the very reason they were hated, welcomed the charge of “Puritan”, promoted their works, and published laudatory biographies of Richard Baxter, Samuel Ward, Thomas Manton, and William Gurnall.

Second, Ryle was interested in the Puritan era for polemical purposes. If Evangelicals were the heirs of the Puritans, High Churchmen and Ritualists were heirs of William Laud. Laud and his sympathisers were not Roman Catholic, but they did everything in their power to “High-Churchmanise” and “un-Protestantise” the Church of England.²⁵ They opposed Calvinism and made it odious, they exalted the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper at the expense of the preaching, they made extravagant claims of the Episcopal office, they introduced histrionic ceremonial into the Divine service, and they persecuted and harassed their opponents. The consequences of this policy

²⁰ Ryle, *Facts and Men*, 196.

²¹ J. C. Ryle, *Bishops and Clergy of Other Days* (London: William Hunt & Company, 1868), xxi.

²² J. C. Ryle, *Baxter and His Times* (London: G. Barclay, 1853), 36.

²³ Ryle, *Bishops and Clergy*, xix.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Archbishop Laud and His Times* (London: Hatchards, 1869), 22-23.

were disastrous. The clergy became less Protestant, the middle and lower classes became alienated from the Church, and the Church of England was temporarily destroyed. In sum, “wittingly or unwittingly, meaningly or unmeaningly, intentionally or unintentionally, Laud did more to harm the Church of England than any churchman that ever lived”.²⁶ The results of the un-Protestantising policy of the anti-Puritan William Laud reminds the Church of what can happen when it abandons the Protestant and Evangelical principles of the Reformation.

The third era of English church history that interested Ryle was the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. The leaders of the Revival formed another important link in the Evangelical succession, but that was not what interested him most with respect to Evangelical identity. He was interested, primarily, in two related questions: what were the means God used to rescue English Christianity, and who were the men he used to do it? The means God used was “the preaching of the great leading principles of the Protestant Reformation”.²⁷ The men God used were a handful of Evangelical clergymen of the Church of England.

Both of these answers were deeply instructive. They confirmed the abiding value of Protestant and evangelical principles, and they underscored the importance of *preaching* them. The men themselves – George Whitefield, John Wesley, William Grimshaw, William Romaine, Daniel Rowland, John Berridge, Henry Venn, Walker of Truro, James Hervey, Augustus Toplady, and Fletcher of Madeley – were examples of what Evangelical clergymen ought to be and ought to do. And they offered a prescription for the present:

I answer boldly that the true remedy for all the evils of our day is the same remedy that proved effectual a hundred years ago – the same pure unadulterated doctrine that the men of whom I have been writing used to preach, and the same kind of preachers. I am bold to say that we want nothing new – no new systems, no new school of teaching, no new theology, no new ceremonial, no new gospel. We want nothing but the old truths rightly preached and rightly brought home to consciences, minds, and wills. The evangelical system of theology revived England a hundred years ago, and I have faith to believe that it could revive it again.²⁸

Defining Evangelical Identity: The Distinctive Principles of Evangelical Religion

On 27 November 1867, Ryle delivered a lecture entitled, *Evangelical Religion: What It Is, and What It Is Not*, to the London Church Association.²⁹ It was the

²⁶ Ryle, *Archbishop Laud and His Times*, 4.

²⁷ Ryle, *Lessons From English Church History*, 28.

²⁸ J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century; Or, England A Hundred Years Ago* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1869), 428.

²⁹ The London Church Association was founded in 1865 to “uphold the Doctrines, Principles, and Order of the United Church of England and Ireland, and to counteract the efforts now being

fruit of an intensive two-year study on the works of the “Fathers of the Evangelical school”,³⁰ which included the English Reformers, Puritans and leaders of the Evangelical Revival. He set out to answer the question: does Evangelical religion have distinctive principles, and if so, what are they? He answered the question affirmatively and set forth his findings in this famous lecture.

Evangelical religion, according to Ryle, is characterised by five distinctive principles. The first is the “absolute supremacy it assigns to Holy Scripture, as the alone rule of faith and practice, the alone test of truth, the alone judge of controversy”.³¹ He explains,

Its theory is that man is required to believe nothing, as necessary to salvation, which is not read in God’s Word written, or can be proved thereby. It totally denies that there is any other guide for man’s soul, co-equal or co-ordinate with the Bible. It refuses to listen to such arguments as “the Church says so”, – “the Fathers say so”, – “primitive antiquity says so”, – “Catholic tradition says so”, – “the Councils say so”, – “the ancient liturgies say so”, – “the Prayer book says so”, – “the universal conscience of mankind says so”, – “the verifying light within says so”, – unless it can be shown that what is said is in harmony with Scripture.³²

The second distinctive principle of Evangelical religion is “the depth and prominence it assigns to the doctrine of human sinfulness and corruption”.³³ He explains,

Its theory is that in consequence of Adam’s fall, all men are as far as possible gone from original righteousness, and are of their own natures inclined to evil. They are not only in a miserable, pitiable, and bankrupt condition, but in a state of guilt, imminent danger, and condemnation

made to pervert her teaching on essential points of the Christian faith, or assimilate her Services to those of the Church of Rome, and further to encourage concerted action for the advancement and progress of Spiritual Religion.”

To effect these objects, the Church Association published tracts, sponsored lectures and held meetings. Nearly one hundred local chapters were opened throughout the country; its membership quickly grew to nearly 10,000, and the *Church Association Monthly Intelligencer* was widely read. However, it quickly became known primarily for its legal actions, which earned the nickname “Persecution Society Limited”.

Ryle was deeply involved with the Church Association from its founding. He wrote a number of tracts on its behalf; he delivered lectures on church history; he frequently spoke at regional and national meetings; his name appeared regularly in the *Church Association Monthly Intelligencer*; he became a vice-president in 1870. He also labored to make the Church Association the basis of a league of Protestant and Evangelical Churchmen.

³⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Evangelical Religion: What It Is, and What It Is Not* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1867), 5.

³¹ Ryle, *Evangelical Religion*, 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

before God. They are not only at enmity with their Maker, and have no title to heaven, but they have no will to serve their Maker, no love to their Maker, and no meetness for heaven.³⁴

The third distinctive principle of Evangelical religion is “the paramount importance it attaches to the work and office of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the nature of the salvation which He has wrought out for man”.³⁵ He explains,

Its theory is that the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, has by His life, death, and resurrection, as our Representative and Substitute, obtained a complete salvation for sinners, and a redemption from the guilt, power, and consequences of sin, and that all who believe on Him are, even while they live, completely forgiven and justified from all things, – are reckoned completely righteous before God, – are interested in Christ and all His benefits.³⁶

The fourth distinctive principle of Evangelical religion is “the high place which it assigns to the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man”.³⁷ He explains,

Its theory is that the root and foundation of all vital Christianity in any one, is a work of grace in the heart, and that until there is real experimental business within a man, his religion is a mere husk, and shell, and name, and form, and can neither comfort nor save. We maintain that the things which need most to be pressed on men’s attention are those mighty works of the Holy Spirit, inward repentance, inward faith, inward hope, inward hatred of sin, and inward love to God’s law. And we say that to tell men to take comfort in their baptism or Church-membership, when these all-important graces are unknown, is not merely a mistake, but positive cruelty.³⁸

The fifth distinctive principle of Evangelical religion is “the importance which it attaches to the outward and visible work of the Holy Ghost in the life of man”.³⁹ He explains,

Its theory is that the true grace of God is a thing that will always make itself manifest in the conduct, behaviour, tastes, ways, choices, and habits of him who has it. It is not a *dormant* thing, that can be within a man and not show itself without. The heavenly seed is “not corruptible, but incorruptible”. It is a seed which is distinctly said to “remain” in every one that is born of God. Where the Spirit is, He will always make His presence known.⁴⁰

Ryle happily acknowledged that Evangelicals were not the only churchmen to believe these doctrines. What made them unique, however, was the stress they placed on them. To Evangelicals, these truths were the “first, foremost, chief, and principal things in Christianity”.⁴¹ In short, they belonged to the very essence of the Christian gospel.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

³⁶ Ibid., 8.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

As the title of the work suggests, Ryle was interested in doing more than just explaining what Evangelical religion was; he also wanted to explain what it was not, and so in the second part of his lecture he addressed a number of popular misrepresentations. The first is the charge that Evangelicals despised “learning, research, or the wisdom of days gone by”.⁴² He pointed out that theological giants such as Ridley, Jewell, Usher, Lightfoot, Davenant, Hall, Whittaker, Willett, Reynolds, Leighton, Owen, Baxter, Manton, Poole, Hervey, Romaine, Toplady, and Dean Goode were all men of great learning, all made significant contributions to theological scholarship, and were all Evangelical men. Furthermore, he noted that no school had done more for the exposition and interpretation of Scripture than the Evangelical body and given the world more commentaries. “In thorough appreciation of anything that throws light on God’s Word we give place to none.”⁴³ It is simply unfair and untrue to charge Evangelicals with despising learning because they refused to place any uninspired writings on a level with the Scripture.

Second, Evangelicals did not “undervalue the Church, or think lightly of its privileges”.⁴⁴ Though Evangelicals were considered by many to be loosely attached to the Church at best, he insisted that “in sincere and loyal attachment to the Church of England we give place to none”.⁴⁵ They valued its form of government, its Articles, its Prayer-book, the Liturgy, and its establishment. And they proved their loyalty to the Church during the various disestablishment crises.⁴⁶ Though they refused to exalt the Church above Christ or equate membership in the Church of England with membership in the Church of Christ, they were, in fact, faithful and devoted churchmen.

Third, Evangelicals did not “undervalue the Christian Ministry”.⁴⁷ The opposite was true. They regarded it to be an honourable office and generally necessary for the carrying on the work of the gospel. Ministers were preachers of God’s Word, God’s ambassadors, God’s messengers, God’s servants, God’s shepherds, God’s stewards, God’s overseers, and labourers in God’s vineyard. However, they refused to admit that ministers are sacrificing priests, mediators between God and man, lords of men’s consciences, or private confessors. By rejecting a sacerdotal view of ministry, they were not minimising the importance of the ministry in the least.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁶ For more on Ryle’s defence of the establishment see my dissertation “J. C. Ryle: An Intellectual Biography” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 177-207.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 22.

Fourth, Evangelicals did not “undervalue the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper”.⁴⁸ They honoured them as holy ordinances appointed by Christ and blessed means of grace, which have a wholesome effect on all who use them “rightly, worthily, and with faith”. However, they denied that the sacraments convey grace *ex opere operato*. They rejected the doctrine of baptismal regeneration as unbiblical. And they protested against the notion that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice, the table is an altar, and that there is a real, corporeal presence of Christ in the elements.

Finally, Evangelicals did not “undervalue Christian holiness and self-denial”.⁴⁹ Evangelicals were as concerned as any to promote the spiritual life. “We give place to none in exalting humility, charity, meekness, gentleness, temperance, purity, self-denial, good works, and separation from the world.”⁵⁰ No one promoted prayer, Bible-reading, family worship, Sabbath-keeping, and private communion with God more strenuously than they did. However, they refused to call everything “holy” in religion, and did not encourage ostentatious Lent observance, keeping ecclesiastical fasts and saints’ days, frequent communion, joining houses of mercy, doing penance, going to confession, wearing peculiar dress, frequent gestures, and other forms of holiness not taught in God’s Word.

Ryle provided an excellent summary of what Evangelicalism was not, when he said,

We give all lawful honour to learning, the Church, the ministry, the Sacraments, Episcopacy, the Prayer-book, Church ornament, unity, and holiness; but we firmly decline to give them more honour than we find given to them in God’s Word.⁵¹

Defending Evangelicalism: Principles Worth Contending For

In *Evangelical Religion*, Ryle did more than simply describe the distinctive principles of evangelicalism: he summoned Evangelicals to defend them. Promoting true religion by refuting false teaching was a normal part of his ministerial programme, as his earliest writings can attest. At least in theory, the same should have been true of every clergyman who vowed *ex anima* to be “ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God’s Word” at ordination. However, the exhortation to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” took on a new sense of urgency in the 1860s and 1870s as three new

⁴⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁵¹ Ibid., 26-27.

theological movements – ritualism, neologianism, and Keswick spirituality – began to undermine essential elements of the evangelical gospel.

The most dangerous of these new movements was ritualism. This was a movement within the Church of England to restore the forgotten worship of the Catholic Church into the Divine service. Eucharistic vestments, high ceremonial, the adoption of the eastward position in the celebration of Holy Communion, and other forms of ornamentation began to be introduced into parish worship in the early 1850s. But ritualists were concerned with more than aesthetic expression; in addition to beautifying worship, these ritualistic innovations gave expression to Catholic truths which had been lost since the Reformation.

For Ryle, ritualism was nothing less than an overt attempt to un-Protestantise and un-evangelicalise the Church of England and bring it closer to Rome in doctrine and practice. His extensive critique of ritualism goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be noted, at least in passing, that he opposed it with every means available to him, addressed every aspect of the controversy in writing, attempted to unite all Protestant churchmen against it, and in the process became “the most effective of all controversialists on the Low Church side”.⁵² Though ritualistic novelties and the Catholic truth that lay behind them represented a challenge to all of the distinctive principles of Evangelical religion, most of the differences between the two parties could be traced back to one issue – the rule of faith.

What had ultimate authority over the doctrine and practice of the Church? For Evangelicals that authority was the Bible alone. For ritualists, the Scriptures interpreted by the Primitive Church were coordinate sources of authority. Ryle opposed the ritualist rule of faith for two primary reasons: First and foremost, it was not taught in the Bible. For example, when Jesus was asked a question about where to find eternal life in Luke 10.25-28, he referred the inquirer to the Scriptures, not to the Jewish Church or to the traditions of the elders.⁵³ This established both a principle and precedent. According to the New Testament, “the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, [is] the rule of faith and practice... [it] is the only rule, and measure, and gauge of religious truth”.⁵⁴ The Scriptures themselves support the Evangelical position.

Secondly, the doctrine of *sola scriptura* was enshrined in the Church’s confession of faith, the Thirty-nine Articles. Ryle believed the teaching of the

⁵² George Russell, *A Short History of the Evangelical Movement* (London: A. R. Mowbray and Company, 1915), 119.

⁵³ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of St. Luke*, vol. 1 (London: William Hunt and Company, 1858), 371. See also *How Readest Thou?* (Ipswich: Hunt and Son, 1852).

⁵⁴ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 1:271-72.

Sixth Article is identical to the evangelical position.⁵⁵ In fact, he borrowed the language of this article to explain this evangelical distinctive in *Evangelical Religion*. He finds support in other Articles as well. The Eight Article says that the Creeds ought to be believed and received because their teaching “may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture”. The Twentieth Article declares that it is unlawful for the Church to “ordain anything contrary to God’s Word written”. The Twenty-first Article connects the authority of General Councils to their faithfulness to Holy Scripture. The Twenty-second and the Twenty-eighth Articles condemn certain Roman doctrines and practices because they are “repugnant to the Word of God”. And the Thirty-fourth Article allows the Church to change traditions and ceremonies, “so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word”.⁵⁶ According to Ryle, this is abundant proof that the Bible, and the Bible only, is the rule of faith in the Church of England. In short, the Church formularies as well as the Scriptures support the Evangelical position.

Just as the ritualist movement was gaining steam, a series of monumental works were published that unsettled the faith of many Englishmen. The first of these was *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859. Darwin was not the first to call into question the historicity of Genesis 1 or to propound a doctrine of evolution; he simply expanded the concept by arguing that life on earth evolved over generations through a process of natural selection. Though he did not discuss the religious implications of his theories, many of his militant supporters, such as T. H. Huxley and the X Club, were more than willing to do so. Thanks to their efforts Darwin became a symbol for the incompatibility of science and religion.

In addition to new scientific theories, biblical criticism began to undermine popular faith in the Bible. In 1860 *Essays and Reviews* was published by seven eminent liberal churchmen. These essays did not mark a significant advancement in critical method; their importance lies in the fact that six of the seven contributors were clergymen of the Church of England, and they were willing to openly question traditional orthodox views. Shortly after the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, the Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso, published his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, and the first instalment of *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. Colenso advocated a low view of inspiration, denied eternal punishment, judged parts of the Pentateuch to be unhistorical, asserted that the essential truths of the Bible did not depend on the historical truth of its narratives, and

⁵⁵ “Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite to salvation.”

⁵⁶ Ryle, *Church Principles and Church Comprehensiveness* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1879), 22. See also “The Thirty-nine Articles” in *Knots Untied: Being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion* (London: William Hunt and Company, 18??), 82-82.

declared that Anglican doctrine must be broadened to appeal to intelligent men. These conclusions shocked the nation.

Colenso, along with the essayists, were attempting to restate the Christian faith in light of new scientific and historical thought. They sought to bridge a perceived gap between Christian doctrine and the views of educated Englishmen. Evangelicals pejoratively referred to this enterprise as “neology”, and considered these “new views” to be nothing more than old expressions of rationalism, scepticism, and infidelity in new garb.

If publishing is a reliable indicator of his level of concern, Ryle was far more worried about ritualism than neology. And, it is worth noting, that his attitude toward new scientific discoveries was remarkably positive,⁵⁷ which serves as a reminder that there is a moderate and progressive streak in Ryle which often goes unnoticed and unappreciated. He realised, however, that some “new views” either explicitly or implicitly threatened the distinctive principles of evangelicals, and so he offered a popular and pastoral rebuttal.

Ryle was zealous to defend the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration for a number of reasons and did so on a number of occasions.⁵⁸ He appealed to internal and external evidence, church history, its timeless relevance, the effect it has had on mankind, and the practical consequences of denying it. He was also keen to point out that an uninspired or partially-inspired Bible undermines the cornerstone of Evangelical religion – the absolute supremacy of Scripture. A flawed Bible cannot serve as the sole rule of faith and practice, test of truth, and judge of controversy.

The subject of the higher criticism of the Old Testament was a separate but related issue. It is difficult to overstate the intensity of Ryle’s hatred of the “new views” of the Old Testament; it was comparable only to the most overtly Romish novelties of the Ritualists. Chief among his many objections to biblical criticism were its blasphemous Christological implications. To suggest that Christ was ignorant about the true authorship and historicity of the Pentateuch, for example, calls into question his authority as a teacher, the fullness of his divinity, and his sufficiency as a Saviour. Though new theories of *kenosis* attempted to rescue Christ from the implications of ignorance, Ryle was unmoved. Old Testament criticism was a direct assault on the person and work of Christ and an affront to his honour and glory.

He also addressed “new views” regarding the eternity of punishment. Some were denying eternal punishing altogether and affirming a form of

⁵⁷ “I shall always hail the annual discoveries of physical science with a hearty welcome. For the continual progress of its students by experiment and observation, and for the annual accumulation of facts, I am deeply thankful.” J. C. Ryle, *What Canst Thou Know?* (Stirling: Drummond’s Tract Depot, 1884), 12-13.

⁵⁸ See “Preface” to *Moses or Zulu?* (1863); *Inspiration: Its Reality and Nature* (1877); *Whose Word is This?* (1877); *The Oracles of God* (1881); *Is All Scripture Inspired? An Attempt to Answer the Question* (1891).

universal reconciliation. Others argued for a form of conditional immortality in which the misery of the impenitent comes to an end after a finite period of suffering. Ryle rejected both eschatological novelties for Scriptural, theological, historical, liturgical, and pastoral reasons. Once again, his chief concerns about the denial of eternal punishment touch on the essentials of the evangelical gospel. Why did Christ suffer and die if men can be saved without him? Why is the Spirit's work necessary if men may enter into heaven without being born again? Why should men be urged to repent and believe if a sinner may be converted after death? Why pursue holiness if men may live in sin and escape eternal perdition? He was especially concerned about the impact of these "new views" on the second Evangelical distinctive – the doctrine of sin. No amount of misery could satisfy that breach of God's law for which the blood of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, was needed to provide atonement. "It is the blood, and not the length of time that alone exhausts the sinfulness of sin."⁵⁹

In the mid-1870s Ryle became involved in a third major controversy: Keswick spirituality. In 1858 William Edwin Boardman, an itinerant Presbyterian minister, published *The Higher Christian Life*, which urged Christians to embrace a superior form of spiritual life immediately, by faith. A second conversion experience, full salvation, and deliverance from sin, is offered to all Christians on the sole condition of full trust in Jesus. Boardman's book generated interest and criticism on both sides of the Atlantic, but his impact as an author and speaker was limited. A husband and wife ministry team from Philadelphia would spread and popularise his gospel of sanctification by faith.

Robert Pearsall Smith, a Quaker glass manufacturer from Philadelphia, and his wife, Hannah Whitall Smith, received the second blessing of entire sanctification at a Methodist camp meeting in 1867. Shortly thereafter the Smiths began writing of their experience and travelling around the eastern United States proclaiming immediate and complete victory over sin by faith, not by works or effort. Robert was a persuasive platform speaker, but his wife made an even greater impact than he did. Her personal piety was genuine, her gifts for biblical exposition were evident, and she became a popular author. Her book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, is considered to be the most influential book of all in the origins of Keswick spirituality. The Smiths arrived in England in 1873. They carried letters of introduction and were soon meeting with clergymen and influential laymen in private gatherings to promote holiness through faith. These meetings led to a series of conventions that ultimately gave birth to the Keswick Convention.

Many evangelicals were suspicious of the new holiness teaching, none more so than J. C. Ryle. He published his own response in 1877 under the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 74.

following title *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, which he enlarged in 1879. It proved to be one of the most extensive critiques of early Keswick spirituality and one of Ryle's most popular and enduring works.

Keswick spirituality, though espoused exclusively by evangelicals, was inconsistent with nearly every Evangelical distinctive. Their doctrine of sin was unbiblically low. Without rejecting original sin, they practically redefined it to include only voluntary or known sin. This, in turn, led to an unbiblically high view of perfection. Though they did not teach absolute sinless perfection, they came dangerously close to it, promising deliverance from all known sin and full, unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God by believing and resting in God's promises alone. Here the Keswick teachers confound justification with sanctification. Though justification is by faith alone, sanctification requires work, effort, and exertion, not merely a "resting faith". Furthermore, the Keswick division of the Christian life into three distinct phases – the unconverted unbeliever, the converted but struggling believer, and the consecrated and victorious believer – lacked Scriptural warrant, revealed an inadequate understanding of conversion, and minimised the gradual and progressive nature of sanctification. For Ryle, Keswick spirituality was incompatible with evangelical principles.

Conclusion

J. C. Ryle devoted a considerable amount of time to discovering, defining and defending the distinctive principles of Evangelical religion from his conversion in 1837 until the end of his life in 1900. He was convinced they were the teaching of both the Scripture and the Church of England. His conversion and study of the Bible and English church history led him to this conclusion, and he devoted his life to promoting and defending Evangelical religion as a minister, author, party leader, church reformer and bishop.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DEFINITION OF EVANGELICALISM

*Samuel Crossley**

The second half of the twentieth century saw a spike in discussions pertaining to Evangelical identity. During these discussions the term “Evangelical” came to be used with greater intensity and was deployed in an increasingly technical manner. This phenomenon was in no small part due to the Evangelical renaissance, where New and Conservative Evangelicals came to global prominence. This paper examines the two distinct approaches to defining an Evangelical that were used in this period, with particular reference to the propositional approach of John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the phenomenological approach of David Bebbington. The paper finishes by considering the merit of these two approaches in the present day.

A Calvinist is identified as such by the doctrine she believes; an Evangelical not so.¹

The polarising effect that such a statement will have among Evangelicals is testament to the division that exists between those seeking to define Evangelicalism. To some this statement is anathema, for it is absurd to define an Evangelical without primary reference to their theological convictions; to others the relative unimportance of doctrine compared to other historical and social factors makes such a statement perfectly agreeable. This is the division that exists and it is one that is causing considerable confusion and consternation amongst those seeking to be clear-headed about their perceived Evangelical identity. Are Evangelicals primarily recognisable by the doctrinal propositions to which they actively subscribe, or by observable and phenomenological traits which they may or may not consciously determine?

The division described did not occur in a vacuum but developed in the latter half of the twentieth century. During that time the term “Evangelical” underwent an intensification of use and was subject to increased scrutiny and technicality of deployment. The spike in discussions surrounding the term occurred in what Alister McGrath calls, “an Evangelical renaissance in the West”.² D. W. Bebbington, a key figure in the evolving process of Evangelical definition, identifies the character of this period:

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¹ Stephen R. Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrine: Basis for Unity or Cause for Division?”, *SBET* 30.1 (2012): 63.

² Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 27.

The post-war Evangelical renaissance was a movement among those of firmly orthodox belief. Although the most striking resurgence of the traditionalists was in the Church of England, there were similar developments in other existing denominations and in new church groupings. Those with attitudes to the Bible that had come to be labelled conservative in the interwar period gained greater prominence.³

Brian Stanley divides the Evangelical renaissance of this period into three stages. Stage one runs from the mid-1940s with a move by certain leaders to establish a centre ground between modernist and fundamentalist positions. Stage two spans the “long 1960s” (1958-1974) and is where a consensus of Conservative Evangelicals in Britain and New Evangelicals in North America establish and maintain a leading influence. Stage three from the mid-1970s to the present, represents a diffusion of styles and divergent trajectories within the movement, leading to loss of consensus.⁴

The definition of Evangelicalism will not be settled here. Rather by examining how the term “Evangelical” has intensified in use and become increasingly specific and technical in deployment, it is hoped that it will be better understood. Indeed it seems doubtful that a definitive definition of Evangelicalism can be reached. If Stanley is correct in identifying the present time as one of decline in consensus and divergence in understanding, then the definitions offered are only going to be more difficult to present as either representative or normative and enforceable. This point is illustrated by the vast quantity of academic and popular writing on the subject of Evangelicalism. Furthermore, beyond this sizeable written debate is an unquantifiable bulk of formal discussion through seminars, sermon series and organisational websites, as well as informal discussion and opinions of ministers, clergy, para-church leaders and lay people. The possibility of defining an Evangelical will be revisited in the conclusion, but first the process of intensification of the term’s use and increased technicality of its deployment must be considered.

The propositional approach

Kenneth J. Stewart analyses the 1971 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary to demonstrate that,

Of the term “evangelical” the O.E.D. indicates that it is a term which “since the Reformation has been adopted as a designation of certain theological parties who have claimed that the doctrines on which they lay especial stress constitute the gospel.” By 1619 the term can be used in

³ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), 250.

⁴ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2013), 27-8. For convenience, Evangelical renaissance is used throughout the paper to denote this period.

combination with others, such as “the Reformed evangelical religion”. In the eighteenth century, the term was “applied to that school of Protestants which maintains that the essence of the gospel consists in the doctrine of salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ”.⁵

The brief linguistic study that Stewart gives outlines the propositional approach to defining an Evangelical. The approach states that the term can be traced back at least to the Reformation and is defined by gospel beliefs with particular emphasis on justification by faith. The term “Evangelical” has, then, an historical precedent but in his study Stewart does not find a use of the term “Evangelicalism” until it appears as a dismissive aside in 1831. It is important to note that in his search for a linguistic argument, Stewart finds only general references to Evangelicals. The deployment of the term is not particularly technical or specific and, though applied to numerous groups, there is no single Evangelicalism. Rather Stewart states:

I do not advocate a sclerotic insistence that Evangelicalism is not subject to change... I do advocate that we be more prepared than formerly to speak about Evangelicalisms, i.e. varying expressions or manifestations of the evangelical faith in different centuries or eras as well as diverse cultures.⁶

This propositional approach dominated stages one and two of the Evangelical renaissance. This can be best shown through a study of two vital Conservative Evangelical leaders: John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Albeit with differences between them, these two leaders present a vision of an Evangelical movement which is defined by doctrinal propositions. Though Lloyd-Jones has important things to bring to a study of this period, the clearest voice and Conservative Evangelicalism’s most prominent leader was Stott. Stott’s importance is hard to overstate and Derek J. Tidball has said: “much of the revival of Evangelicalism can be traced to Stott’s influence”.⁷ It is important to recognise that there were several factors to his great influence. Two of them were the student group Inter-Varsity Fellowship (IVF) and the evangelist Billy Graham. They show how “Evangelical” came to be used in a more intensified and technical manner through the first two stages of the Evangelical renaissance.

1. Inter-Varsity

Alister Chapman recognises the vital place of Cambridge University in Stott’s formation and in particular his involvement in the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU). The illustrious Evangelical history of

⁵ Kenneth J. Stewart, “Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington’s Thesis,” *EQ* 77.2 (2005): 152-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷ Derek J. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of Today’s Movements* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 50.

CICCU predates Stott's arrival and Bebbington cites the organisation that it would lead to, IVF, as perhaps the most significant factor in the advance of Conservative Evangelicalism.⁸ CICCU was founded in 1877 after an undergraduate mission lead by clergyman Sholto Douglas. In the following decades similar missions to Oxford and new emerging universities expanded the student work, leading to various agencies being established before the Student Christian Movement (SCM) emerged in 1905. The new movement encouraged missionary endeavour, but its greatest strength would also become its weakness: "the pressing needs of the missionary field could make doctrinal differences seem comparatively unimportant."⁹ Martin Wellings identifies the factors which led to SCM's doctrinal broadening:

The pressures of modern thought, growing diversity in practise in public worship, different emphases in theology, varying attitudes to biblical criticism and opposing strategies for the assimilation of scientific knowledge imposed a considerable strain upon the Evangelical school. In the first three decades of the twentieth century that strain led to fragmentation.¹⁰

The missionary impulse and the desire of SCM to broaden its appeal and be more theologically accommodating, led to a breakaway by the more conservatively-minded CICCU. It disaffiliated from SCM in 1910 and with several likeminded Christian Unions eventually formed IVF in 1928. Seeking to be doctrinally clear and learning its lesson from SCM, "IVF took steps to avoid any broadening of its platform by creating a firmly evangelical basis of faith to be subscribed to by all officeholders."¹¹ The doctrinal basis of IVF (now Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship [UCCF]), remains to this day an important document for Evangelicals. Those who drafted the original statement in 1924 sought to be faithful to the values of mission and interdenominational cooperation. Reflective of this, the main theological sources were the Thirty-nine Articles and the Westminster Confession of Faith, yet consisted only of those perceived fundamental truths of Christianity, which ran to eight points.¹²

This is the Evangelical thought world that Stott entered as an undergraduate. The values of IVF clearly remained with Stott as Chapman acknowledges in his assessment of Stott's view of the Church of England:

⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 259.

⁹ Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism and Theological Liberalism, 1890-1930* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 275.

¹⁰ Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled*, 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹² See, Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 109-114. The doctrinal basis is found in Appendix 2 on p.359.

Stott loved the music, the liturgy, and the theology of the Church of England but, like Eric Nash, he loved it most because he believed it was “the best boat to fish from”... He longed to see people converted, and saw the Church of England as the most likely means for that to happen.¹³

Chapman considers IVF a highly formative influence upon Stott. Indeed his relation to the student body would be ongoing through his entire ministry. IVF then can be considered doubly important in the Evangelical renaissance; firstly, for its clear stance upon doctrine and commitment to mission in the early twentieth century; and secondly for acting as a training ground for the movement’s key leader, as well as numerous others.

2. Billy Graham

The second factor in the Evangelical renaissance was Billy Graham, who held numerous crusades in Britain from 1954 onwards:

Graham mounted a twelve week crusade at Harringay... which was attended by over 2 million people and recorded 36,431 responses. He returned again to Glasgow and Wembley Stadium the next year as well as conducting a mission to Cambridge University... Subsequent visits in 1966, 1967, 1984, and 1991 may have had less media impact, and less sensational results, but saw Graham, and the Evangelicalism he represented, becoming increasingly acceptable.¹⁴

For all this popularity, Graham’s appeal was not universal and though in America he was considered a New Evangelical, his perceived fundamentalist approach in Britain won him various detractors. In 1956 the Bishop of Durham, Michael Ramsey, accused Graham of being both a menace and a heretic.¹⁵ It was, however, this polarising effect that helped raise the Conservative Evangelical profile.

By declining to support (Graham), many liberals eliminated themselves from the mainstream of Evangelical life in Britain. To those who supported him, a category extending beyond the conservative Evangelicals but having them as its core, he administered a powerful tonic.¹⁶

Graham is perhaps the person who most linked the New and Conservative Evangelicals together. These self-styled New Evangelicals emerged in the wake of the fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s. In this sense the New Evangelicals learnt much from Gresham Machen: “The intellectual renaissance beginning with the rise of neo-evangelicalism in the 1950s was inspired in part by Machen’s example.”¹⁷ Through various theological colleges, associations

¹³ Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79-80.

¹⁴ Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?*, 50.

¹⁵ Stanley, *Global Diffusion*, 42.

¹⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 259.

¹⁷ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 183.

and publishing organs the New Evangelicals sought to move beyond the obscurantism of Fundamentalism and borrow the social concerns of Liberalism, forging a new middle way between the two. *Christianity Today*, the New Evangelical newspaper sought,

...to plant the evangelical flag in the middle of the road, taking a conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems. It would combine the best in liberalism and the best in fundamentalism without compromising theologically.¹⁸

Stott was a key partner of Graham in Britain. Indeed, it was this partnership which led to perhaps the single greatest achievement of the Conservative and New Evangelicals: the Lausanne Convention of 1974.

The Lausanne Convention was a remarkable achievement. Hosting some 2,700 participants from over 150 nations, it was convened by the desire of Graham to “unite all Evangelicals in the common task of the total evangelisation of the world.”¹⁹ Chaired by Stott, it showed Evangelicalism to be not just a Western, but a global, force. As such, *Time* magazine commented on the gathering as, “a formidable forum, possibly the widest-ranging meeting of Christians ever held”.²⁰ The Lausanne Covenant was the result of this first convention, outlining the doctrinal commitments of the group and seeking to define what Evangelical theology was, with Stott acting as its chief architect. The Covenant is an example of a globally-representative definition of Evangelical doctrine, consisting of fifteen theological propositions and pledges of commitment to evangelism and social action. The Covenant was conceived as a centrepiece of Evangelical unity and activism.²¹

The achievement of the Lausanne Convention demonstrates the global mass appeal of the term “Evangelical”. The partnership of Stott and Graham, as they themselves represented the Evangelical renaissance in their respective countries, surely both demonstrates and explains the spike in interest in the terminology in the later twentieth century. Indeed, such are the heights that the New and Conservative Evangelicals reached, it may lead one to question whether the discussions around Evangelical identity were in fact simply caused by them. If Harold Ockenga, who coined the New (or Neo) Evangelical name, had chosen another term, perhaps we would be discussing that instead. Whether this is a valid question or not is discussed with reference to D. G. Hart in the conclusion.

¹⁸ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 158.

¹⁹ “About the Lausanne Movement”, n.p. [cited 27 September 2013]. Online: <http://www.lausanne.org/en/about.html>.

²⁰ J. D. Douglas, “Lausanne Covenant”, *EDT* 173-4.

²¹ See John Stott, “LOP 3: The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary”, n.p. [cited 27 September 2013]. Online: <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/69-lop-3.html>.

Regardless of this, 1974 can be seen as the pinnacle year of the Evangelical renaissance. It also gives significant credence to the assertion made, that the term Evangelical underwent an intensification of use in this period. To demonstrate the claim that the term also came to be used with increased precision and technicality, the definitions given by Stott and Lloyd-Jones can be examined.

3. John Stott's definition of an Evangelical

Stott's *Evangelical Truth* is perhaps his clearest and most definitive definition of an Evangelical. Given the influence which Stott had amongst Conservative Evangelicals, his definition is as close as one may hope to find of an official definition of the Evangelical renaissance. For Stott, one is first a Christian, second an Evangelical and third an Anglican or equivalent.²² Such a position demonstrates the importance Stott placed in the Evangelical identity over and above a confessional or denominational identity. This also means that a specific and elaborate definition is required. To this end, Stott begins with three disclaimers of Evangelical identity aimed at combatting misnomers. Firstly, he states that Evangelicalism is not a recent innovation, but the faith of the apostles. Secondly, it is not a departure from Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, for Stott the Evangelicalism that he belonged to is the faith articulated in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. Such orthodoxy can be traced back through Billy Graham, George Whitefield and John Wesley, the Puritans, John Wycliffe and Augustine to the New Testament. Thirdly, Stott is at pains to differentiate Evangelicalism from the Fundamentalism of the early twentieth century and does this through ten observations, which show a clear affinity with the New Evangelicals.²³

Stott then identifies the "tribes" of Evangelicalism and what tenets these have in common. Identifying commonalities in a six-fold definition offered by Packer²⁴ and Bebbington's fourfold definition (see below), Stott decides on just three unifying biblical propositions:

In seeking to define what it means to be an Evangelical, it is inevitable that we begin with the gospel. For both our theology (Evangelicalism) and our activity (evangelism) derive their meaning and their importance from the good news (the evangel).... It would therefore, in my view, be a valuable clarification if we were to limit our evangelical priorities to three, namely the revealing initiative of God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming

²² John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: a Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2003), 7.

²³ Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 16-22.

²⁴ Packer's six-fold definition outlined: the supremacy of Scripture; the majesty of Jesus Christ; the lordship of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of conversion; the priority of evangelism; the importance of fellowship. J.I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1978), 15-23; quoted in Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 26-7.

ministry of God the Holy Spirit. All other evangelical essentials will then find an appropriate place somewhere under this threefold or Trinitarian rubric.²⁵

Stott devotes a chapter to unfolding this threefold rubric and applying it to the activities of Evangelicals, showing their emphasis on the Word, the cross and the Spirit. Under "Revelation", Stott deals with the distinction between special and general revelation; the progressive unfolding of God's revelation through history; illumination and the need for personal revelation; the authority, perspicuity, sufficiency and inerrancy of Scripture. Stott concludes,

"Evangelical people are first and foremost Bible people, affirming the great truths of revelation, inspiration and authority. We have a higher view of Scripture than anyone else in the church."²⁶

Stott's chapter on the cross places the death and resurrection of Christ at centre of the Christian faith. For Stott the cross is the basis of a human being's acceptance before God by means of penal substitution; the cross is the Christian's justification bringing both forgiveness and renewal; and it is the pattern of discipleship.²⁷

Thirdly, Stott discusses Evangelical identity with reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is outlined in terms of regeneration with particular reference to the new birth, assurance and holiness. Stott argues that Evangelicals should have a high view of the church. He makes a differentiation between the visible and invisible church and emphasises the church's purity and charisma. He considers the nature of Christian mission with particular reference to the place of social action, the miraculous and revival.

This exposition of a Trinitarian basis for Evangelicalism ends with various pleas for integrity, stability, truth, unity and endurance. Pleading for unity, Stott gives twelve categories he considered *adiaphora*, that is to say areas of legitimate disagreement. These are: the sacraments, church governance, worship style, charismatic gifts, the role of women, ecumenism, Old Testament prophecy, the extent of sanctification, the relationship between church and state, what constitutes mission, and eschatology.²⁸ It is a positive and inclusive note encouraging all Evangelicals to embrace the centrality of the gospel and work out their differences.

²⁵ Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 28-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-1.

4. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones' definition of an Evangelical*

Lloyd-Jones deserves more space than he is given in this paper. Though his influence upon the Evangelical renaissance was not what Stott's was, it was none the less significant and remains so in certain quarters. Lloyd-Jones was central to Conservative Evangelical ascendancy, starting and supporting various Evangelical organisations. Most notably he served as General Secretary to IVF where, for a time, he was considered informally to be the group's chief theologian during stage one of the Evangelical renaissance.²⁹ As became clear in his definition of an Evangelical, Lloyd-Jones was increasingly perturbed by what he saw as Conservative Evangelicals accommodating the Ecumenical Movement. Unlike Stott, Lloyd-Jones was not a supporter of Graham and his crusades. In this sense then, it was by his own volition that Lloyd-Jones was peripheral to Conservative Evangelicalism by the end of stage two of the Evangelical renaissance.

Lloyd-Jones gave three addresses to the 1971 International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) annual conference.³⁰ The manner of his beginning demonstrates that Lloyd-Jones saw something of a crisis amongst Conservative and New Evangelicals: a shift in position which had seen numerous Evangelical institutions become liberalised. He cites the Free University of Amsterdam, the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church and the Christian Reformed Church (both in America) as examples. Against the backdrop of these "fallen" institutions, Lloyd-Jones' first address focuses on how one may begin to recover an Evangelical identity. He outlines the twin dangers of being so narrow that one causes schism and so broad that one becomes an ecumenist. Lloyd-Jones singles Graham out for criticism, along with certain Evangelicals who were promoting the supposed orthodoxy of Karl Barth, and others who were championing the deist, Malcolm Muggeridge, for evangelistic purposes.

Lloyd-Jones begins his second address in an unexpected manner: "I am concerned to define an evangelical in a way which goes beyond statements of belief."³¹ As we will see, that is not because Lloyd-Jones believed Evangelicals were non-doctrinal, but rather wished to guard against a dead orthodoxy. The address then proceeds to focus on the characteristics of an Evangelical. Four guiding principles are provided: preservation of the gospel through submitting oneself to the authority of Scripture; learning from, though not being tied to, history; stating not just what one is for but also what one is against; and not adding to or subtracting from Scripture, with particular

²⁹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 261.

³⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "What is an Evangelical?" in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 299.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

reference to Roman Catholic doctrine. With these guiding principles in mind, Lloyd-Jones outlines characteristics which he believes “are almost as important as the particular doctrines to which (an Evangelical) subscribes”.³² An Evangelical is entirely subservient to the Bible. Here Lloyd-Jones importantly identifies, as Stott did, that being Evangelical is the most important Christian identity marker:

The next thing about the evangelical is that he uses this term as a prefix and not as a suffix. Here again, I think this is something that is going to be increasingly important in the years to come. What I mean by that is that the first thing about the man is that he is evangelical. The particular denomination to which he belongs is secondary; it is not primary. In other words, there is all the difference in the world between talking about an evangelical Baptist and a Baptist evangelical. I am contending that our man is evangelical first. He may be a Baptist, he may be a Presbyterian, he may be Episcopalian, but he is primarily, first and foremost, evangelical.³³

Such an Evangelical is always watchful for error; distrustful of reason and philosophy’s contribution to theological thought; and avoids the trappings of academia. An Evangelical takes a low view of the sacraments; a critical view of history; is always ready to act on their beliefs; they keep their religion simple and untainted by needless tradition and are always concerned about the doctrine of the church. Lastly, of particular concern should be the emphasis placed upon the new birth, interest in revival and concern for evangelism.

Reserved for Lloyd-Jones’ final address are those doctrinal propositions which mark an Evangelical. There are similarities to Stott in choice of doctrine and the differentiation between primary and secondary importance. Lloyd-Jones, however, takes the opportunity to note again the dangers of relativising doctrine in the manner that he felt had been done by those advocating the Ecumenical Movement of his time. For Lloyd-Jones the foundational truths are: Scripture as the supreme and sole authority; the rejection of evolutionary theory; the fall of man; the rejection of the concept of a state or territorial church; a correct understanding of the sacraments. As Stott does, Lloyd-Jones ends with a call to generosity in secondary matters, including predestination and election, the mode and subjects of baptism, church polity, eschatology and spiritual gifts.

5. Conclusion

Though there are clear differences between these two Conservative Evangelical leaders, they display important similarities. Firstly, the belief that a Christian should identify as an Evangelical before their denominational marker. That is to say, that there is an understanding of the

³² Ibid., 322.

³³ Ibid., 322

Christian faith which is distinctly Evangelical. Such a stance shows a firmness of belief in the Evangelical label. The intensified use of the Evangelical term is understandable when it is considered of utmost importance. If one considers oneself first a Baptist or Presbyterian, then the greatest concern will be to define those terms. Neither Stott nor Lloyd-Jones sought to define their denominational identity with anywhere as much vigour as they did their Evangelical identity. Both sought increased precision in defining the term, which is understandable when one considers the times. Both men, though reflecting the thought world of stage two of the Evangelical renaissance, were writing in stage three, where Evangelical identity had become less homogenous and more diffuse in belief and practice. Both authors pleaded for a return to what they saw as widely believed by Evangelicals in previous decades. As Evangelical belief and practice became less unified, Stott and Lloyd-Jones both articulated more specific and technical definitions. The Evangelical renaissance of the later twentieth century can thus be shown to have both intensified the use of the term Evangelical through its popular appeal and, particularly as the renaissance petered out, led to increased specificity in definition. As the new millennium beckoned the intensity and technicality of the use of Evangelical was only to become greater.

The phenomenological approach

Innocuous as David Bebbington's 1989 study *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* seemed, it would come to herald a landmark in defining Evangelical identity. Timothy Larsen highlights the importance of the study:

Bebbington's four Pillars of Evangelicalism have no rival anywhere near as influential or popular and are unlikely to be replaced by an alternative structure any time soon... in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, David Bebbington made as significant and substantial a contribution to scholarship as the author of a book could ever hope for, in the ambitious way that he related church history to other forms of history and wider cultural developments. Along the way, he also happened to provide us with the standard definition of evangelicalism.³⁴

Larsen identifies two important points: the influence and popularity of Bebbington's study and the innovative nature of it as it related church history to other historical phenomena. That this definition has become the consensus in the twenty-first century is indicated by its adoption by *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (CCET). CCET defines an evangelical as:

³⁴ Timothy Larsen, "The Reception Given Evangelicalism in Modern Britain since its Publication in 1989", in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 29.

1. An orthodox Protestant
2. One who stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield;
3. One who has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice;
4. One who stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross;
5. One who stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others, including the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people.³⁵

The fact that the CCET exists is testament to both an intensification of use and the increased technicality, even beyond that of the Conservative Evangelicals. D. G. Hart observes this trend anecdotally:

Between 1980 and 2000, a tsunami of studies on Evangelicalism in the United States deluged the field of American religious history. One way of measuring this historiographical storm's devastation is by looking at reference works – placid places that seem impervious to surging waters and powerful currents. As irksome as bibliographical guides may be, the ones covering American religion tell a remarkable tale. For instance, in what had been an industry standard when this writer entered graduate school in 1983, Ernest R. Sandeen and Frederick Hale's *American Religion and Philosophy* (1978), an annotated bibliography on American church history, Evangelicalism created barely a ripple. In the subject index, Evangelicalism did not appear (Evangelical did so only in the name of specific denominations), and in the title index, only four books or articles begin with the e-word... But within fifteen years, the flood of historical literature on Evangelicalism had become so large that bibliographers could fill two volumes with books and articles on Evangelicalism.³⁶

Very quickly then, intensification of use and the increased technicality of the definition can be demonstrated. Leonard Sweet surveys the historians responsible for the wave of American studies on Evangelicalism around the time of Bebbington's seminal study. He terms them: "observer-participants... forcing evangelicalism to see itself as heir of its own past."³⁷ Observer participants are those who "participate in the daily life of the people under study."³⁸ This is to say that they themselves are Evangelicals and, more specifically, second-generation New Evangelicals, continuing the project of those they are heirs to and implicated in the research that they produce. In this group Sweet includes Joel Carpenter, Nathan Hatch, George Marsden, Mark

³⁵ Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

³⁶ D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 35-6.

³⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, "Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: The New Evangelical Historiography", *JAAR* LVI/3 (1988): 403. See also Douglas A. Sweeney, "The Essential Dialectic: the Historiography of the Early Neo-Evangelical Movement and the Observer-Participant Dilemma", *Church History* 60 (1991): 70-84.

³⁸ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: for Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 2nd ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2001), 200.

Noll, Harry Stout and Grant Wacker as the most prominent contributors. From a British perspective, David Bebbington must surely be added for it is without doubt that his fourfold definition of an Evangelical has become the default for academics and increasingly so for church leaders and laypeople.

1. David Bebbington's definition of Evangelicalism

Larsen shows that, though they were largely ignored when Bebbington's work was first published, his quadrilateral of evangelical priorities has come to define his work and is easily the most widely discussed aspect of his study.³⁹ The quadrilateral consists of conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism, which for the most part can be observed at other points in Christian history, but only observed together in the transatlantic revivals of the early eighteenth century in such a way that they constituted Evangelicalism. Bebbington details conversionism as where "preachers urged their hearers to turn away from sins in repentance and to Christ in faith".⁴⁰ Activism he describes by quoting Jonathan Edwards to the effect that, "persons after their own conversion, have commonly expressed an exceeding great desire for conversion of others. Some have thought that they should be willing to die for the conversion of any soul."⁴¹ Biblicism is a devotion to the Bible as the source of spiritual truth.⁴² Finally, crucicentrism is the understanding that the doctrine of the cross is the focus of the gospel.⁴³ Mohler calls this approach "phenomenological" because this "definition of Evangelicalism is rooted in observation. It is descriptive rather than normative."⁴⁴ The approach stands in contrast to the propositional approach taken by Stott and Lloyd-Jones. Indeed, consider the instance of an IVF campus meeting. The doctrinal basis is not considered to be descriptive of the group that the meetings would generally attract, but required as normative belief of those leading and, by inference, attending.

Bebbington's approach is, then, phenomenological and leads to a definite era demarcating the beginning of Evangelicalism. Though Bebbington finds certain continuity with the Reformation and Puritan eras, the year 1735 and the conversions of Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland are the beginning of Evangelicalism in his study. After conversion experiences these men began "travelling South Wales, gathering large audiences and preaching the

³⁹ Larsen, "Reception Given", 25.

⁴⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴⁴ R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Confessional Evangelicalism", in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Colin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 73.

arresting message that salvation could be known now".⁴⁵ Harris, having been refused Anglican ordination several times for "enthusiasm", became the founder of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism.⁴⁶ Shortly after, George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers had similar conversion experiences. While at the University of Oxford, Whitefield was converted from the rough ways of an innkeeper's son when, in his own words: "a ray of Divine light... instantaneously darted upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know I was a new creature".⁴⁷ Whitefield joined the "Holy Club" which was led by John Wesley.⁴⁸ Wesley, the later founder of Methodism, was an Anglican priest. Both he and his brother Charles underwent conversion experiences at a Moravian society formed by Peter Böhler in London in 1738:

(John Wesley) said that his "heart felt strangely warmed" and that he felt "an assurance that Christ had died for me". He then adopted the Moravian practise of claiming that he was now a Christian, "justified by faith alone", whereas before he had been trusting in his own righteousness.⁴⁹

Renowned respectively for their preaching and organisational skills, Whitefield and Wesley became two of the most influential men in the phenomenon of the transatlantic revivals or Great Awakening. The phenomenon was not limited to Britain, but was found sporadically in other parts of Europe and most notably in the American Colonies. The Congregational minister Jonathan Edwards became a significant apologist and theologian of the revivals, and together with Whitefield and the Wesleys he is considered foremost in the "eighteenth-century Revival, a quickening of spiritual tempo in Britain and beyond".⁵⁰

As is certainly evident in the case of the Wesleys, Bebbington points to the influence of continental pietism as an important and distinctively Evangelical demarcation. Charles Wesley came into contact with Lutheran pietists in 1731 and read the works of Philip Jakob Spener "urging the need for repentance, the new birth, putting faith into practice and close fellowship among true believers".⁵¹ As his conversion experience indicates, John Wesley was also to be profoundly influenced by these principles and practices. Bebbington notes: "Pietism had already achieved in Lutheranism a great deal of what (Whitefield and Wesley) were to undertake in the English-speaking

⁴⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 20.

⁴⁶ Geraint Tudur, "Howell Harris", *BDE* 290-92.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Frank Lambert, "George Whitefield", *BDE* 716.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 716-8.

⁴⁹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley", *BDE* 713.

⁵⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

world.”⁵² Pietism had its foundation in the German Lutheran Church and the innovations of Spener (1635-1705), a Lutheran minister. Earlier in that century Germany had experienced the devastating effects of the Thirty Years War (1618-48) which, given its religious origins, left a weariness upon the German people. The church became marked by a formalism and insincerity among church leaders.⁵³ In a 1675 preface to a publication of Johann Arndt’s sermons, Spener outlined his Pious Wishes (*Pia Desideria*), as a proposed antidote to spiritual decline in the German church:

Spener criticised nobles and princes for exercising unauthorised control of the church, ministers for substituting cold doctrine in place of warm faith, and lay people for disregarding proper Christian behaviour.⁵⁴

Though Spener pointed back to Luther and the Reformation, he altered the teaching of the Reformers along his own lines – for instance stressing the importance of new birth in salvation, rather than the Reformers’ emphasis on justification. He also focussed upon the personal and individual aspects of faith at the expense of the Reformers’ greater stress upon churchly piety. During Spener’s time in Dresden (1686-91) he met August Hermann Francke, with whom he founded Halle University which was to become “the centre for Protestantism’s most ambitious missionary endeavours to that time”.⁵⁵ Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (associate of both Francke and Spener) was head of the Moravian Church and was an influence on Wesley when they came into contact on a missionary trip to Georgia.⁵⁶ Given these influences it is the opinion of Richard Turnbull that there is a Reformed foundation to the eighteenth century revivals, however they reflect “the arrival of pietistic encounter into reformed theology.”⁵⁷

The history outlined above is not remarkable in and of itself. What makes Bebbington’s study stand out is the contention that Evangelicalism was an expression of the Enlightenment. For Bebbington, Evangelicalism’s “emergence was... an expression of the age of reason”.⁵⁸ That is to say that in this period of history, the revivals represented not a rejection of the Enlightenment, but a christianising of it. This flies in the face of Lloyd-Jones’ assertion that Whitefield and the Wesleys rejected the philosophy of their day.⁵⁹ Bebbington gives various reasons for his assertion but here it can only be briefly illustrated by looking at John Wesley’s ministry. Wesley drew out the

⁵² Ibid., 39.

⁵³ Mark A. Noll, “Pietism”, *EDT* 924-6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 924.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 925.

⁵⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 40.

⁵⁷ Richard Turnbull, *Anglican and Evangelical?* (London: Continuum, 2007), 78.

⁵⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 53.

⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones, “Evangelical”, 324-7.

implications of his thought and use of logic in putting his point across, such that he could say: "it is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion."⁶⁰ To think that the revival movement was "devoted to resisting the Enlightenment's march of mind" would be totally misguided.⁶¹ Indeed, Bebbington asserts that Wesley was a man of his time and embraced the philosophical position of the Enlightenment for the advancement of the Christian faith. More Enlightenment principles can be identified in Wesley's pragmatic approach to ministry (particularly field preaching), the desire for the education of the masses, humanitarianism, social conscience and political tolerance.⁶²

2. Conclusion

By the twenty-first century there is clearly an intensification in the use of the term Evangelical as a defining Christian marker. The technicality of the term has been shown to have developed from a vague usage merely pertaining to the gospel, to a specific propositional understanding and finally to an even more specific phenomenological definition. Various authors are right to point out the innovative nature of the Bebbington thesis and its adaption of the way in which Evangelicals are defined. But perhaps more attention should also be paid to the way in which New and Conservative Evangelicals also intensified and refined the term. This paper cannot settle whether a propositional or phenomenological approach constitutes a more or less accurate definition. It is however hoped, that by demonstrating the evolving nature of the definition of Evangelicalism, that the discussion may at least be held with clearer terms in mind. To further facilitate such discussions, the final section of this paper turns to issues around the contemporary use of the two approaches.

Contemporary usage of the propositional and phenomenological approaches

It is helpful to be reminded of the quotation used at the introduction to this paper: *A Calvinist is identified as such by the doctrine she believes; an Evangelical not so.*⁶³ The responses to this statement will be either positive

⁶⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65-9.

⁶³ Stephen R. Holmes, "Evangelical Doctrine: Basis for Unity or Cause for Division?", *SBET* 30.1 (2012), 63.

or negative depending on whether a propositional or phenomenological approach is preferred.

1. Contemporary usage of the propositional approach

There is obvious appeal for church and para-church leaders to advocate a propositional definition of Evangelicalism – to stand, for instance, behind the UCCF doctrinal basis or the Evangelical Alliance’s statement of faith, seeking to promote what should be normative of all Evangelicals. In broad agreement with the insistence of Conservative Evangelicals throughout the twentieth century to the present day, the crucial position of doctrine in any Christian movement has to be affirmed. When one is seeking to sustain a contemporary Evangelical organisation or fellowship, any approach which fails to be doctrinal is highly problematic. Insistence that the Evangelical movement or institution could be shaped by shared priorities over and above shared doctrine is, in effect, to relativise the content of belief. The content of John’s Gospel, for instance, is “...written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Such a statement is inescapably concerned with defining those who follow Christ as those who believe. Such belief however, leads one to be specific about those beliefs, which will be expressed in propositions. Experience of course is vital to belief, for one cannot believe unbeknownst to oneself. Yet the promotion of experience and the implication of belief in activism, above the articles of belief themselves, is to confuse the relative importance of each part of belief and its implications. To believe in anything, one must be clear on what is being believed. When seeking to shape a contemporary movement through definition, an Evangelical must be primarily doctrinal if they are to be Christian at all.

However, a propositional approach is difficult to argue if one wants to be inclusive. A real problem for Evangelicals wishing to be propositional, is that those who deny certain key propositions do not in any measurable way become less outwardly Evangelical. The impulse of some to fence Evangelicalism through propositions is a grand ideal, but it is difficult in reality. In recent years Rob Bell has served as an example of this, though he is by no means alone. Suspicions were raised as to the Evangelical nature of Bell’s theology, and the publication of *Love Wins* confirmed these suspicions for some. Stephen Holmes summarises:

Prior to the publication, a promotional video had been posted on YouTube, generating concerned and dismissive responses from several Evangelical leaders associated with a recently-founded organisation known, rather grandly perhaps, as The Gospel Coalition. These responses suggested that one committed to the doctrines Bell would expound in his (not-yet

published) book could no longer be considered Evangelical. The pithiest – but characteristic – response was John Piper’s now-famous comment on Twitter, “Farewell Rob Bell”.⁶⁴

For an organisation such as The Gospel Coalition to respond with such force demonstrates its desire to place Bell firmly outside of their boundaries (though Bell had no association with the Coalition). Yet were they successful? Whether Bell is still an Evangelical depends on whom you ask. From the phenomenological or sociological perspective he probably is an Evangelical, given his publishing deals, conference speaking and retained popularity. Rather than walking away from Evangelicalism, Bell has in reality led parts of the movement to a more liberal theological position. Holmes serves as a theological advisor to the UK Evangelical Alliance (EAUK) and is supportive of Bell in the article quoted above. Indeed on the EAUK website, Derek Tidball concludes his review of *Love Wins*: “those who wish to criticise this book need to earn the right to do so by being as passionate about sharing Christ’s love as Bell himself is”.⁶⁵ Regardless of the perceived piety of Bell, it is clear in *Love Wins* that Bell opens the door to a universalist theological position. This deserves the strongest criticism possible. EAUK go some way in doing this by stating their outright rejection of universalism and grave misgivings about second chance repentance and restitutionism.⁶⁶ But the organisation does not seem to place Bell outside of the bounds of Evangelicalism. The general director of EAUK, Steve Clifford comments:

Rob Bell is a valued brother in Christ and has felt it important to raise publicly some difficult areas of Christian theology that many people feel uncomfortable with. The issues he raises reflect genuine but complex questions that Christian theologians have wrestled with over centuries. We hope that Christians who disagree with Rob will nevertheless model how good debate should be conducted.

The press release then points to the organisation’s set of principles which relate “to how evangelicals should conduct their relationships with each other”.⁶⁷ Such a response demonstrates at the very least a sympathy with Bell and a level of tolerance of his theological position. Those defining Evangelical through propositions will be glad of EAUK’s theological reassurances, but may be concerned that the organisation still considers the issues that Bell raises to be debated within the realm of Evangelicalism. Though a clear doctrinal position is established by EAUK in its response to *Love Wins*, the organisation’s willingness to engender discussions between Evangelicals which may or may not lead some to agree with Bell’s

⁶⁴ Stephen Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrine”, 55-6.

⁶⁵ Derek Tidball, review of Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, n.p. [cited 1 November 2013]. Online: <http://www.eauk.org/culture/reviews/love-wins-review.cfm>.

⁶⁶ “Review of Love Wins,” n.p. [cited 11 May 2016]. Online: <http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/media/press-releases/review-of-love-wins.cfm>.

⁶⁷ “Review of Love Wins,” n.p.

arguments, makes the boundaries of Evangelicalism unclear. Indeed, the response of EAUK demonstrates the difficulty of balancing doctrine with representation in defining an Evangelical.

A second notable issue for those seeking a propositional approach is the manner in which the phenomenological definition has undercut it. In a time when the standard definition of Evangelicalism is observational, those using the categories of the Conservative Evangelicals find their narrative absorbed into a broader descriptor of which they are not entirely comfortable. An example of this can be found in the exchange between Robert Letham and Donald Macleod conducted in *Evangelical Quarterly*. Letham uses the standard academic definition (i.e. Bebbington) and challenges the notion whereby Evangelicals, "consider as axiomatic that theirs is the quintessential expression of the Christian faith".⁶⁸ Macleod does not accept the academic definition used by Letham and points to a succession of Scottish Evangelicals who for him are defining, before coming to the Church of Scotland polemicist Hugh Miller:

Evangelical stalwarts such as Chalmers were direct successors of Erskine, Henderson, Rutherford, Melville and Knox; and beyond that, of the apostles... Evangelicalism was simply "pure, efficient, unmodified Christianity". The idea that he represented a movement whose pedigree extended no further back than the 18th century would have filled Miller with horror."⁶⁹

In response Letham summarises his criticism of Macleod's definition:

(I)t is too wide in its lack of historical demarcation. (Macleod) appears to regard every preacher and teacher of the *evangelion* through history as an Evangelical... According to the common definition I adopt, Macleod finds himself penned in with sheep not to his liking. He wants to understand evangelicalism in terms of what it should be in his eyes rather than what it is.⁷⁰

This final observation perhaps touches on a vital point: does a propositional approach describe what Evangelicals actually believe in the third stage of the Evangelical renaissance? Studies such as those by Wells and Carson demonstrate that even those once considered at the core of the Conservative and New Evangelicalism are not unanimous in doctrine or practice.⁷¹ If there is not a set of propositions which can comprehensively contain the meaning of Evangelical, then perhaps that suggests a propositional approach is not viable. The generous categories offered by the phenomenological approach means that those wishing to define Evangelicalism propositionally find they are now merely conservatives in a movement of which they are not typical and cannot control.

⁶⁸ Robert Letham and Donald Macleod, "Is Evangelicalism Christian?", *EQ* 67:1 (1995): 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 33

⁷¹ See David F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) and D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 443-89.

2. Contemporary usage of the phenomenological approach

Holmes' basic assertion as to the non-doctrinal nature of Evangelicalism is reasonable when considered in terms of the current prevailing definition. The Bebbington thesis uses observational categories, thereby making one an Evangelical by a set of largely non-doctrinal factors. Given the overwhelming contemporary popularity of the Bebbington thesis, Holmes is then well within his rights to claim Evangelicalism is not primarily doctrinal. Indeed, as far as what is historically descriptive, there is little doubt that the Bebbington thesis has much to offer and broadly speaking gives helpful categories for understanding what characteristics constitute an Evangelical. Yet what makes for a good historical tool is not necessarily as helpful in the contemporary church. This is where Holmes' assertion of the non-primacy of doctrine for an Evangelical becomes highly problematic. A large question hangs over Holmes' use of Bebbington's thesis for the contemporary church: what person calling themselves Christian or what Christian movement has not primarily been identifiable by what they believe? Holmes states: *"Evangelical doctrine is Missional doctrine, through-and-through, and that which does not serve the cause of mission is, necessarily, not important in a truly Evangelical theology."*⁷²

This presents difficulties in that it takes a historically descriptive principle and makes it into a normative principle for the contemporary church. What is descriptive of an Evangelical historically, does not necessarily mean that it is an acceptable position in the present. Because a historic movement has a tradition of shaping theological reflection around a controlling hermeneutic of mission is not to say that this tradition deserves such a position of esteem. Indeed, this is Letham's point when asking "Is Evangelicalism Christian?" Letham compares the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and Westminster Confession of Faith with the emphases of Evangelicalism. He concludes:

All three creeds declare that all things, human beings centrally included, exist for the glory of the triune God. They assert that Christianity is a churchly faith, confessed corporately, together, in the context of the holy, apostolic, catholic church and in connection with the ministry of the sacraments. Evangelicalism, in contrast, is essentially man-centred. Human spiritual experience, in regeneration and sanctification, is dominant.⁷³

Making historic observations from a time period is one thing, as indeed, is agreeing with the innovative conclusions drawn by recent historic endeavours. However the promotion of those characteristics as normative in the contemporary church is quite another matter. Holmes is not alone in his use of Bebbington as a normative template for contemporary Evangelicalism.

⁷² Ibid., 65

⁷³ Letham and Macleod, "Evangelicalism", 12.

The contributions of John G. Stackhouse and Roger E. Olsen to *The Spectrum on Evangelicalism* likewise use Bebbington's quadrilateral of priorities as their template.⁷⁴ Such an approach allows for a far broader categorisation of theological opinions than the other contributor, Albert Mohler, who advocates the propositional definition.⁷⁵ The example of Open Theism is used by Mohler, placing it outside of the bounds of Evangelicalism, whereas Stackhouse and Olsen locate it within. That Open Theism represents an aberrant doctrine of God and his sovereignty is demonstrated elsewhere.⁷⁶ A designation such as "Evangelical" should be able mark out error, however Stackhouse and Olsen demonstrate that the phenomenological approach fails on this crucial point. Instead of defending against error, the definition is so broad and unsuited to use in the church that it condones and even encourages it.

A final consideration is that though the strength of Bebbington's quadrilateral is bringing together disparate groups under a single banner, its generous categories may still not be enough. Carl Trueman notes:

it seems the Bebbington quadrilateral is increasingly less useful in understanding evangelicalism today, whatever strengths the definition may retain for historical analysis. Nowadays, evangelicalism is so diverse that its identity cannot be discovered in shared doctrine or experience, apart from what little can be stated about it negatively (as in, Evangelicals are not catholic and not mainline).⁷⁷

3. A cynical approach

It has been suggested by Hart and Sweet in particular, that because the observer-participant historiographers belonged to the same thought world created by the New Evangelicals – as it were breathing the same air – that even though they sought a different definition, they belong to the same project. The New Evangelicals created a new movement in North American Protestantism which they labelled "Evangelical" and propositionally defined. The New Evangelicals worked hard to avoid the obscurantism of their Fundamentalist forebears and remain in the mainstream of American culture. For Hart the historiographers belong to the New Evangelical movement and assume its categories as they go about their historical work.

⁷⁴ See John G. Stackhouse Jr., "Generic Evangelicalism" and Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicalism" both in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Colin Hansen, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 116-206.

⁷⁵ Albert Mohler, "Confessional", 86-96.

⁷⁶ See Michael S. Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and the Reformed Theological Method", *JETS* 45/2 (2002), 317-41; Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?", *JETS* 45/2 (2002), 191-212. For a broader overview of the theological debates within contemporary Evangelicalism see Gerald McDermott, "Evangelicals Divided", *First Things*, no. 212 (April 2011): 45-50.

⁷⁷ Carl Trueman, *The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 37.

Hart sees this particularly in the way the historiographers produce work shaped more by current secular academic interests than a churchly faith. Seeing then the desire for mainstream popularity laced through both New Evangelicals and the next generation of historiographers, Hart sees one as the product of the other. Their particular realm being that of academic history, the historiographers have sought to emulate their forebears in their own sphere and conceived an historically-focused definition of Evangelicalism. Thereby the New Evangelicals inadvertently created their own phenomenological history by the example they set to the next generation. It is through the application of this logic that Hart claims: “Evangelicalism is a fantasy”⁷⁸ — not at all a longstanding tradition, but devised by New and Conservative Evangelicals as theologically conservative, and given historic backbone by the historiographers who followed. To Hart’s mind the definitions are not in competition: one is merely the embellishment of another’s invention. The label can therefore be abandoned without much concern.

Conclusion

For good or ill the designation “Evangelical” is very deeply rooted in people’s minds, denominations and para-church organisations. The attempt to abandon the word seems unrealistic, given the level to which people are invested in it. What Hart’s observation does support, however, is the main argument of this paper, that it was during the second half of the twentieth century that the term Evangelical evolved. It did not necessarily change in substance initially, but ultimately did so through intensified use, and increased specificity and technicality of deployment. Whether the two definitions are worthy of use by church and para-church leaders is an ongoing discussion. However, as those considering themselves Evangelicals become more disparate in theology and practice, it may only become more difficult to ascribe any particularly distinctive doctrinal or observational points of reference that hold them together. Whether this renders the terms obsolete for the present time is then a very real question.

⁷⁸ Hart, *Deconstructing*, 31.

BOOK REVIEWS

The message of worship

John Risbridger, IVP, 2015, 293pp, £12.99

It is wonderful that the Lord has given John Risbridger the energy and commitment to give us such a full and rich resource on a subject that is often at best misunderstood, and at worst used by Satan to divide the body of Christ.

“The invitation to worship God is the highest privilege of human beings, a privilege squandered by human rebellion but gloriously restored to us through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.” Risbridger’s aim is to “allow Scripture to speak, in the hope that the question, ‘what kind of worship do we like?’ is gradually replaced by the better question: ‘what kind of worship is it that God seeks?’” Risbridger definitely lets the Bible speak – each chapter takes a passage of Scripture as a control and springboard into deepening the understanding of the nature and breadth of worship. As the Word of God both constructs and drives his argument, he defines worship as a response to God’s revelation of himself in the Word, “empowered by the Holy Spirit, which finds expression in every aspect of human life and experience”. It was encouraging to see the biblical conviction stated over and over again that the Word and Spirit work in perfect tandem to drive the truths about God into hard hearts and heads, to produce whole-life transformation. Having defined worship in this way, Risbridger focuses more on congregational worship rather than on the worship of the individual believer, with the purpose of “reducing the heat and increasing the light in our well-worn debates”.

From the very start of the book, looking at Psalm 8, the shape of authentic worship is outlined – revelation, leading to adoration and action. He then invites us to study scriptures that demonstrate this pattern – so we see that as God reveals himself first through the types and shadows of the Old Testament, and then ultimately through the reality of the salvation won through Christ, we are brought out of rebellion into a life of worship – serving our Saviour and his body, the Church, in view of God’s great mercy.

Actually, Risbridger takes us further by reminding us that we are not just brought into worship *by* Christ, but that we are incorporated *into* the perfect worshipper – Christ himself, being the only one whose perfect worship makes our service of God possible. This is a great book for drawing the heart to the beauty and majesty of Jesus, and I am humbled by the care with which Risbridger has worked so diligently and with obvious personal devotion in the Scriptures to emphasise the privilege of being a Christian worshipper.

I was also encouraged by the focus on the importance of making the Word of God clear and intelligible in the Christian gathering. This is because

we are told over and over again that it is the Word of God which provides the driving force in our meetings. At the same time Risbridger is keen to impress upon the hearers of that Word the need for a deep transformational response of fruitfulness seen in obedience and service through building the body of Christ. He picks his way carefully and responsibly through the minefield of 1 Corinthians 12-14, so that even if one disagrees with his conclusions about the valid use of spiritual gifts in the gathering, one would not feel second-class. Yet there is also a robust challenge to those who might seek to elevate some gifts above others.

There is a healthy emphasis on the corporate nature of our engagement with God, reminding worshippers of their responsibility to be a part of a body, which needs to function as a whole: "Public prayer is not a performance to which we merely listen in; it is an engagement with God in which we participate." Again, the author seeks to make the intelligibility of the Word of God central to our corporate worship.

Lastly, Risbridger encourages not just transformation, but a deep emotional engagement with a personal Saviour. From Hebrews 10, after registering concern about the trend for the "idea of worship to be reduced to the pursuit of intimate communion with God", he warns against an overreaction against this, saying that,

to draw near to God is to engage with the holiness of his presence, the richness of his grace, the greatness of his power and the fullness of his love. Without such an expectation our churches are little more than religious clubs; with it they become supernatural communities of grace.

It is a timely warning to those who sit with loose complacency to the Word of God when the Spirit brings it to our hearts.

I only noticed a few things which could have been clearer (especially for a lowly church musician). Having (hopefully) convinced the reader that the Spirit and Word work together in revealing the person and nature of God, producing a response of faith and obedience, I wondered if the less discerning reader would come away thinking that the Spirit is more tightly linked with the response than the revelation. For instance, in the chapter on John 4, we are told that if the Holy Spirit is present in our worship (because we worship in spirit and in truth), then we should anticipate surprises in worship, because "the wind blows where it pleases". However, this verse (John 3:8) seems to be more about who is born again, rather than surprises that may happen in a Christian meeting. The real surprise is that the Spirit (like the Word of God in John 5:24) is bringing life to people like the Samaritan woman.

Finally, a question: In the third section of the book that focuses on the Holy Spirit (Part 3: Worship and the life of the Holy Spirit), much is written about the response of believers in a gathering. Risbridger is as clear as in the rest of the book that the authentic response driven by the Spirit is the

transformation of mind and life such that the believer proclaims “Jesus is Lord”. However, whenever an *emotional* response is linked closely to the Holy Spirit, my worry is always for the person of tender conscience who doubts the presence of the Holy Spirit if no emotional response is forthcoming. Also, many keep looking to their inner selves rather than the Word of God to “encounter the powerful, transforming presence of the Holy Spirit”. I think this is because they think that the Word “out there” does the revelation bit, and the Spirit “in here” does the response bit. My question, therefore, is this: if the Word and the Spirit work in tandem to open ears to the voice of God, then should not our response be driven equally by the Spirit and the Word together? I think Risbridger says this (interestingly, this section of the book concludes with studies on four emotion-rich psalms which do not mention the Holy Spirit at all) but greater clarity on this matter would have been helpful.

However, I do not want to make excuses for those who are simply comfortable letting the beauty of grace remain hidden inside a grumpy exterior! The gospel is wonderful; Risbridger is right to encourage us to cheer up!

Some last thoughts: When I was asked to review this book, I spoke to lots of my church musician friends who have much greater theological weight than I, in order to give me a couple of shortcuts! This is how the conversations have gone:

“Have you got John Risbridger’s book on worship?”

“Yes, I’ve got it but I haven’t read it” ... “Yes, I’ve got it but I’ve only read the first couple of chapters” ... “Yes, but I’m only half way through” ...

In short, I have not met anyone else who has read the book all the way through! I am a church musician and, to some extent, a Bible teacher, but the book took me five months to read. It is not light reading. The best way to get the most out of a book is to write a review! The book is an excellent reference book on the subject of worship, which encourages deep study of the various biblical texts (helped by a study guide at the back). Church musicians would do well to take the book and use it for personal study, to remind themselves of the Word and Spirit-centred ministry we are involved in, whilst also rediscovering the importance of elements we can often miss in our songs – for example, lament and proclamation. The pastor would benefit from this book as a challenge to re-evaluate his thinking on the corporate nature of the Christian gathering, whilst sharpening him up on some aspects, like the Lord’s Supper and the place and nature of prophecy. Either way, buy the book... and more importantly, read it!

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Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Scepticism

Timothy Keller, Hodder, 2015, 320pp, £16.99

If it is to be just, every book review must assess the book according to what the author has intended to produce. Tim Keller makes his aims for this work plain a number of times. He has tried to discern “the important broad contours of what the preaching task entails today” (p.212); it is not a manual but a manifesto (p.213). In other words, in this book what he is effectively doing most of the time is bringing his well-known overall vision of Christian ministry and life to bear on the specific task of preaching. It is important to note this, if the book is to be assessed fairly. This means that often what he says comes as no particular surprise to those who already know his work well. I do not at all mean this as a criticism, since a writer always does the reader a service when he spells out his thoughts and pushes them through with consistency.

However he cannot resist, as he happily admits, including as a lengthy appendix a summary how-to manual on “Writing an Expository Message”. I will start here, so as to be able to end the review on a much more appreciative note, since it is in this section that I had most concerns. (It is worth the reader noting that, especially with this appendix, there are some lengthy endnotes which ought not to be missed as they include important background material for, and examples of, points made in the main text.) Of course much here is good. Keller has read widely on preaching (as on seemingly everything else!), and outlines a wise four-step approach to writing expository messages that deliberately expresses a consensus of existing respected literature on the topic. Any preacher would give his preaching a searching health-check by examining his preaching and preparation in light of this.

Now to my concerns: First, it seems to me that in some worked examples he applies an uncontroversial principle about how to move from text to sermon in a possibly unbalanced way. He states that the preacher has a responsibility both to the truth and to the people to whom he is preaching (p.221). The real questions arise, of course, in the practical interaction of these two responsibilities. To my mind the outlines he offers of different sermons to different audiences from John 2.1-11 (pp.299-300) end up shaping the core content of the sermon in ways which downplay what has previously been identified as the central theme(s) of the text.

Second, backing up a little in the process of preparation, it seems to me that he applies an otherwise insightful “gospel grid” in ways that flatten the text somewhat. He outlines what he calls a “deep gospel pattern” that he says sits in the background of every sermon he preaches. Every preacher has such a pattern in operation, of course, and the right first step is to do what Keller does and acknowledge it. His pattern identifies what the text says about five

issues, in this order: what we face; what we must do; why we cannot do it; how Jesus did it; how we should live now (p.231). A strong law/gospel structure is obviously at work here. With certain texts, this grid will of course allow a greater richness of teaching and application to emerge than often does in contemporary evangelical preaching (e.g. it will regularly focus attention on Christ's salvific active obedience, along with the passive). Keller sees the great virtue of this grid as leading the preacher away from moralism and towards the presentation of Christ first of all, and moral exhortation only in light of Christ – and that is indeed a good thing. However he offers as a key example of its application an outline of a sermon on Genesis 22 (pp.233-34). There are good things in the outline, but some elements which seem to be rather central in the text (e.g. God as the one who provides) do not figure in the outline, and I wonder if this is because the standard “deep pattern” he is employing squeezes them out.

That is an appendix, however, and not the bulk of the book. In the rest, Keller sets out very lucidly what he is primarily about, and much here is excellent. The first major section focuses on “serving the Word”. The argument develops as follows:

(1) Expository preaching should be the main diet of a church's preaching ministry. This is good stuff that is standard for many (although, I realise, not all), with some worries expressed about how a good principle can be mishandled through over-application.

(2) It is Christ and the gospel of grace, and not Christ's benefits in the abstract (such as forgiveness), which (who!) must be preached. For my money there is excellent material here that could enrich much evangelical preaching, which curiously often holds out Christ's benefits without his person.

(3) We should aim to preach the finished work of Christ from every text, and that will lead to the sharpest application. This is a fine chapter, I think, with some stimulating examples of reading different Scriptures carefully in light of Christ.

The second major section focuses on “reaching the people”. Keller is mostly on familiar territory here, sometimes summarising and sometimes applying specifically to preaching things he is well known for having written and taught previously. His key points are:

(1) In preaching, Christ must be contextualised in every culture. One small quibble here: his examples are always insightful, but are mostly drawn from his wide and learned reading. Many preachers who lack some combination of the time, inclination, academic ability (and congregations who can cope with such things and match him in this) could feel rather disempowered by it all. Perhaps worse, they might try to copy him and stumble badly. Some everyday-ish examples of such contextualisation would have made this chapter more useful to more preachers.

(2) Preaching must engage with our culture's most basic narratives, and must do so in two ways: affirming them where possible (because in the West they have Christian roots), and revealing where they fall short.

(3) Preaching must not only set forth the truth but, in Jonathan Edwards' words, must aim to give "a sensible idea or apprehension of it" (p.165). Indeed Keller goes so far as to say that "the main purpose of preaching" is to make the truths of the gospel seem real to people (p.164). I found this to be one of the best chapters in the book. Too much preaching that rightly aims to be expository either does not know how to do this while also being expository, or imagines that, having seen the expository light, it can dispense with this aim altogether. Keller builds strongly on Edwards to argue against that tendency.

A final shorter main section follows, on "Preaching and the Spirit". I found this to be the most personally challenging to me as a preacher. He urges that preachers must seek to be themselves formed by the Holy Spirit through the Word, before they can be the vehicle for such action by the Spirit for others. There is a focus here on the person of the preacher which was central in Lloyd-Jones' writing (although somewhat idiosyncratically, perhaps), but which has not been as central to other influential evangelical writing on preaching as it should have been. Keller helps restore the matter here (although whether the point is as clearly driven by 1 Cor 2:4 as he thinks is a topic I will leave for now).

He ends with a challenge to ask ourselves what the "subtext" of our preaching is. I found this short section to be explosive – and the one stand-out part where I was presented with a (to me) entirely new thought. What does our preaching communicate "between the lines"? he asks. Is it, "aren't we great for believing what we do?" Is it, "aren't I great for preaching like this?" Is it, with more of a training focus, "isn't this truth great?" Or is it, as it should be, "isn't Christ great?" (pp.201-204). Of course we would all immediately insist that our own preaching falls into the latter category, but I think that Keller has provided here a very sharp set of analytical questions which can give, if applied with humility, a very sober take on what we are actually about below the surface in our preaching.

So, to whom will this book do most good?

No one should think it is the first thing to give to a trainee preacher to get them schooled in good exposition. Keller clearly does not intend it to be that. Nor, I would add, would I encourage someone to read it who had lost sight of the rigorous disciplines of text-work necessary for expository preaching, since it may (of course against Keller's intentions) serve to take their eye further off that ball. However, for the preacher who is pressing on reasonably well with those disciplines, but whose capacities in other areas have either fallen away or never caught up – deeply Christocentric interpretation, profound "under the skin" application that really bites into

our culture, habits of life and practice that make preaching more than merely teaching – there is much excellent material here, set out with great clarity and persuasiveness.

Tim Ward

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