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Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry. Its particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical ecumenism. It has been published by Affinity (formerly The British Evangelical Council) from its inception as a print journal. It became a digital journal in April 2011.

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EDITORIAL

The Westminster divines wrote the following concerning the perspicuity of Scripture:

> All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.[1]

The genius in their work is in preserving the authority and perspicuity of Scripture, while at the same time making a distinction between what modern theologians have termed primary and secondary issues.

There are some issues pertaining to salvation upon which Scripture is abundantly clear – the divinity of the Son, his bodily resurrection, and his physical return to judge the living and the dead, for example. The person who denies such things must necessarily be denying the inspiration, authority and perspicuity of Scripture. Such a person ought to be called unorthodox and a heretic.

There are other issues however, which do not pertain directly to salvation, which are less clear. Citing Peter's comments on Paul's writings (2 Pet 3:16) the Confession acknowledges that some issues are not "alike clear unto all". Historically such issues have included the proper subjects of baptism and the appropriate form of church government. More recently, most evangelicals have also included among secondary issues the age of the earth and the gifts of the Spirit. Most evangelical Christians are happy to affirm that though we may disagree on such issues we are still within the fold of historic orthodox Christianity.

While secondary differences can be hard to resolve, and often lead to more heat than light, the Confession's understanding can lead us forward in charity and humility. As Baxter concluded in his Preface to *The True and Only Way of Concord*: "in the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, liberty; in all things charity".[2]

A charitable orthodoxy enables theologians (and journals) to permit hermeneutical exploration. This is not the same as to permit post-modern "free-play" with the text; to the contrary, it takes us back to a place of *sola Scriptura*. Too often our definitions of orthodoxy owe more to historical confessions than the authority of Scripture. Too often Christians in their

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[1] WCF 1.7.

[2] Richard Baxter, *The True and Only Way of Concord of all the Christian Churches* (London: 1686).

uncharitable opposition over secondary issues demonstrate that their ultimate authority is not the word of God, but their own preferred theological confession. Confessions are useful summaries of faith, but are not infallible, and therefore theologians must be given liberty, under the authority of Scripture, to explore what the Scripture says on any given issue.

A charitable orthodoxy also fosters fellowship and respect. I might not agree with my brother or sister on their eschatology, but I recognise that they too are saved by grace, gifted by the Spirit, and enabled to contribute to discussions that seek to honour the name of Jesus and advance his cause. Liberty and charity are about more than a grudging recognition of the other; it is a place from which texts are read and ideas exchanged. It is a posture that respects the infinite worth of another, and their place and purpose in the Kingdom. As Vanhoozer and Treier note in a recent work, this sort of "operational catholicity" requires intentional effort, but is "vital for doing fully evangelical theology, for hearing and mirroring the apostolic Word".[3] If Jesus is "not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters" (Heb 2:11) then nor should I be.

Finally, a charitable orthodoxy calls us to humility. We must recognise that we are not omniscient and infallible beings. There will be many things we do not know or have got wrong. We are saved by grace, not perfect theology. We are saved despite our erroneous thinking about many things. Praise be to God! Those things about which Scripture is clear we hold with a closed fist, contending for the faith and guarding against the wolves. But the things which are not alike clear unto all we must hold with an open hand, in an awareness that I might just be wrong on this one! I will be charitable toward those with whom I disagree, seeking to understand the best case of their argument in the best terms arising out of the best motives. I will not impugn malice or dishonesty. I will open a Bible with them face-to face, and I will pray with them, and for them, and ask them to do the same for me.

A theological journal should always be a place where brothers and sisters are permitted to contribute regardless of their positions on secondary issues. It should be a safe space for ideas to be offered, without fear of reprisal or unfair and unfounded accusation. Theology is about the glorification of God. It is about exploring more of what it means to know God and be known by God. Proper theology does not simply say "yes and amen" to the infallible reasoning of Christendom past – it says "yes, and but, what about…". That is not heresy, but the faithful discharge of a call to "search the Scriptures" and to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

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[3] Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (London: Apollos, 2016), 38-39.

With this is mind the opening article in this edition addresses just some of these issues, as Jim Murkett considers the ecclesiological implications of perspicuity. In his article he argues, "there are numerous significant ways that the perspicuity of Scripture, particularly as it is outlined within the Westminster Confession of Faith, informs how we conceive of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic". His close examination of the doctrine leads him to draw out some important practical conclusions for our conception of church today.

The second article, by James Midwinter, conducts a textual analysis of Jude 5 considering the question "who led the Israelites out of Egypt?" His consideration of the history of interpretation, combined with careful reflection of the evidence of the manuscripts presents a persuasive and compelling case, with important implications for our theology and preaching.

Third, Dr. David Kirk considers the place of the created world within the eschatological purposes of God. In considering Jeremiah's book of consolation (Jer 30-33), Kirk argues that the creator's purpose is renewal, not annhilation. The intertwining of covenant and creation demonstrates God's perpetual commitment to his *kosmos.* This has significant implications for discipleship and mission today.

In the fourth article Heather Major makes a case for a more robust and considered contextual theology – that is theology that takes seriously location and experience; and theology that is lived not just discussed. She traces the implications for discipleship and mission using her own research as an example.

Fifth, Stephen Kneale considers the question of cultural assumption and urges us to think more carefully about cultural values. He takes as examples things like dress or time-keeping and notes the ways in which different class groups can "baptise" their own culture as biblical and dismiss another, without critically reflecting on the often-mixed nature of our culture-class experience.

In the final article of this edition Ian Shaw conducts a historical analysis of the ministry of George Müller, accessing previously unseen historical materials. Shaw also provides theological reflection on what he terms the "practical theology" of Müller.

It is my hope and prayer that you find these articles stimulating, provocative, and useful to your own ministries.

Martin Salter
November 2018

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Jim Murkett[*]

It is important for us to consider the interconnections between our doctrine of Scripture and our ecclesiology because the ontology of Scripture is always to be related to Scripture's teleology. Recognising this allows us to rightly locate our doctrine of Scripture dogmatically within the economy of God's activity rather than inadvertently reducing Scripture to being solely a matter of theological prolegomena. This paper will attempt to examine the ecclesiological implications of the perspicuity of Scripture. To achieve this, the statement concerning the clarity of Scripture in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is, firstly, examined in some detail from three complementary angles – that of the content of Scripture (recognising that not all things in Scripture are equally clear), the readers of Scripture (recognising that there are things inherent within the reader of Scripture that will advance or hinder its inherent clarity) and the reading of Scripture (recognising that the approach to reading and the context in which that reading occurs are crucial factors that impact its clarity). These complementary perspectives usefully illuminate the teaching of the Confession on the clarity of Scripture and provide the basis for an exploration of their implications on ecclesiology. These implications are, secondly, set out through adopting the classical four-fold attributes of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. A clear Scripture leads us to expect a certain kind of one-ness in the church, sheds significant light on the nature and the progressive sanctification of the church, helps us think rightly about our catholicity in the church, and is foundational in enabling the church to be apostolic throughout her history. Seeing these implications ensures we think rightly about Scripture and the church and the organic and inseparable connection between them.

Considering the impact of perspicuity on ecclesiology is important for three reasons. Firstly, it allows us to examine the connections between the ontology and teleology of Scripture. It is noteworthy that Paul connects the ontology of Scripture – "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16)[1] – with the teleology of Scripture –"[it is] profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16). There is an organic and inseparable connection between what Scripture *is* and what Scripture *aims at*. Thus, considering the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture[2] – which is, amongst other things, a statement concerning its ontology – should encourage the exploration of the doctrine of the church, since the formation and building up of the church is part of Scripture's teleology.

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[*] Jim Murkett leads the work of UCCF: The Christian Unions in the Midlands and is part of Kenilworth Community Church, a new FIEC church plant.

[1] ESV. All Scripture citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[2] Throughout this essay these terms will be used interchangeably.

Secondly – and flowing from the first reason – considering this question is important as it ensures that we connect the doctrine of Scripture with the doctrine of God and situate it within his economy.[3] As Thompson reminds us: "[the perspicuity of Scripture] says something about God... what we say about the Bible has important implications for our understanding of God and his purposes..."[4] Examining the connections between Scripture's perspicuity and the doctrine of the church will mean that we do not treat the clarity of Scripture in an abstract or mechanical way, but rather that we see this as an aspect of the work of a holy God who through his holy word acts to form a holy people. If this does not happen then we run the risk that, in Ward's words, "the doctrine of Scripture can begin to look like a preface or an appendix to the central doctrines of the Christian faith... as such it can seem easily dispensable... it can turn out to be a doctrine that seems impoverished and thin, lacking deep roots in the rich glories of the character and actions of God himself."[5] Thus, the conclusions we reach about the perspicuity of Scripture will shed light on the nature of God's work *for* and *in* his church. This essay will model how we must not separate Scripture from the active and ongoing work of God in his world and for his church.

Thirdly, considering this question is important as it provides further evidence for the suitability of adopting an ancillary ecclesial analogy of Scripture. Traditionally, the doctrine of Scripture has been examined using an incarnational analogy.[6] This analogy has normally been employed to defend the concept of inerrancy by arguing that just as Christ had a human and a divine nature yet was without sin, so it is possible for Scripture to be both a human and a divine product without necessarily containing error. It is helpfully summed up in Article II of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Interpretation:

We affirm that as Christ is God and Man in one Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language. We deny that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in his humiliation, entails sin.[7]

However, Castelo and Wall are among a number of voices highlighting some of the weaknesses inherent in the incarnational analogy.[8] In summary, their

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[3] Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 16.

[4] Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture,* NSBT 21 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 54.

[5] Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the living and active word of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 16.

[6] See the survey and summary of the use of this analogy in Work, *Living and Active,* 15-27.

[7] Quoted in James I. Packer, *God has Spoken,* Hodder Christian Essentials (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 152.

contention is that an appeal to the incarnational analogy has "a penchant for misreading Chalcedon, but it also creates in the process a number of category confusions with regard to Scripture's ontology and ends."[9] They argue that "this 'ecclesial analogy' is more helpful in accounting for the nature of Scripture as a means of grace that serves its readers in directing them to the transforming and life-giving work of the triune God."[10] Castelo and Wall slightly overstate their case, but at the very least this ecclesial model can and should supplement the traditional incarnational analogy. The ecclesial analogy of Scripture allows the nature of the church to inform us about the nature of Scripture. Specifically, from the properties of the church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic… it follows logically that the material properties of Scripture… are of a piece with the church".[11] Considering this essay question will underline the interconnectedness of Scripture and church and allow us to see that the connections between Scripture and church run the other way as well in a complementary account to Castelo and Wall's. It will enable us to see the ways the nature of Scripture illuminates the nature of the church.

This essay will argue that in several important ways the perspicuity of Scripture informs our doctrine of the church – especially in what it means for the church to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In order to examine this we will first consider the perspicuity of Scripture – through an exposition of the doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Reformed tradition associated with it – and then proceed to highlight the ways this doctrine informs the doctrine of the church.

I.   The Perspicuity of Scripture Considered

The Westminster Confession of Faith's chapter on Scripture has, rightly, been described as "the most thorough statement of classic Reformed Protestantism on the subject of Scripture and possibly the finest to date from any source".[12] This description ensures that considering the perspicuity of Scripture as it is set out in the Confession will be a worthwhile and representative task which is beneficial in forming a contemporary doctrine of Scripture. To attempt to discern the Confession's relevance for us today is

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[8] Daniel Castelo and Robert W. Wall, "Scripture and the Church: A Précis for an Alternative Analogy", *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5.2 (2011): 198-203.

[9] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 199.

[10] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 198.

[11] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 206.

[12] Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its theology in historical context*, The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 120.

not to suggest that it was crafted in isolation or in an ahistorical vacuum[13]. Recent scholarship has shown the connections between the creators of the Confession and the Continental Reformed as well as their debt to, amongst other sources, the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles and Archbishop Ussher's Irish Articles.[14] Further, it is clear that those who wrote the Confession were in debt to such figures as William Whitaker who had contended earlier for the perspicuity of Scripture against the Roman Catholic position.[15] It is vital that we do not read the Confession in an arbitrary and unhistorical way. It was framed in light of contemporary debates – most noticeably between the Reformed and the Roman Catholics on one side and the Antinomians on the other[16]. However, that does not mean that it is so tied to its historical period that is can serve no didactic or edificatory function today. It simply means that it must be interpreted on its own historical terms before it can be made to speak today. With this in mind, we turn to the Confession's statement about the perspicuity of Scripture:

> All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.[17]

It is worth noting that "in the 1640s, Rome still maintained that Scripture must be interpreted only by the church authorities".[18] This was simply the continuation of the official position expressed at the Council of Trent which warned against the individual interpretation of Scripture "contrary to that sense which holy mother church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds".[19] This historical context clearly influenced the Confession's statement of the perspicuity of Scripture – just as it had with earlier writings on the clarity of Scripture in discussion with Roman Catholic polemic. To aid our consideration of perspicuity as expressed in the Confession, it will be helpful to examine its teaching deploying three broad categories that are represented in this statement.[20]

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[13] J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 60.

[14] Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, 62-83 and Fesko, *Theology of the Westminster Standards*, 60.

[15] Wayne Spear, "The Westminster Confession of Faith and Holy Scripture", in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly,* ed. John L. Carson, and David W. Hall (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 88-89.

[16] Letham, *Westminster Assembly,* 119.

[17] WCF 1.7.

[18] Letham, *Westminster Assembly,* 142.

[19] *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* trans. Reverend H. J. Schroeder (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1978), 18-19.

[20] One is tempted to suggest a triad along the lines of John Frame's thought here with the content of Scripture being the normative perspective, the readers of Scripture being the

1.   The Content of Scripture[21]

The Confession makes a distinction with regard to the content of Scripture and its perspicuity. It acknowledges that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves".[22] It recognises that not all matters in Scripture are equally clear. There are mysteries, hard to understand elements and parts that yield their teaching only after much prayerful effort and study. After all, affirming that the Scriptures are perspicuous is not to suggest that they are simple.[23] At this point the Confession appeals to 2 Peter 3:16 where the apostle Peter acknowledges that "there are some things… that are hard to understand" in Paul's epistles. However, this should not be taken too far to argue that Scripture is in large measure opaque. While "it is likely that [Peter] does have to work on understanding some of what Paul says… his concern is not with people like himself who are well instructed in the faith but with "ignorant and unstable" people…"[24] Further, it seems that "our author appears to be attributing guilt to these people… [as] being uninstructed can be… the result of refusing instruction… [and is] an active process."[25] They deliberately and maliciously distort Paul's teaching – even if that teaching does have elements that are hard to understand in it. It is not thus the Scriptures fault that these people misunderstand and twist its meaning and message.[26] When examining the implications of 2 Peter 3:16 for the perspicuity of Scripture it must be noted that:

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existential perspective and the reading of Scripture being the situational perspective on the perspicuity of Scripture.

[21] This would broadly correlate with Luther's view of the "external" clarity of Scripture. This "external perspicuity… [means that] nothing whatsoever is left obscure or ambiguous, but all that is in the Scripture is through the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the whole world", Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* trans. J. I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957), 74.

[22] WCF 1.7.

[23] G. I. Williamson. *The Westminster Confession of Faith for study classes* (Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 1964), 13.

[24] Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006)*,* 304.

[25] Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 305. See similar comments in Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 340 who writes "the problem of the false teachers is not the difficulty of interpreting the message that God gave Paul. Rather, the heretics have distorted his teaching".

[26] This is similar to the charge that Jesus often levels against his opponents – and occasionally against his disciples – that they should have understood more about his person and work than they did on the basis of the pre-existing Old Testament revelation. For further comments on this see Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture", *Themelios*, 34.3 (2009): 292 where he comments that "the *blame for misunderstanding* any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Scriptures themselves, but *on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written*."

It is one thing for *dysnoēta* ("things hard to be understood") to be in the Scriptures, another for *anoēta* ("unintelligible"), which cannot be understood however diligently one studies. Peter says the former… not the latter. It is one thing to say that there are "some things hard to be understood"… which we concede; another that all are so… which we deny. It is one thing for them to be hard to be understood… in Paul's manner of delivering the epistles, which we deny; another in the things delivered, which Peter intimates… it is one thing to be hard to be understood… by the unlearned and unstable, who by their unbelief and wickedness wrest them to their own destruction (which we hold with Peter); another that they are hard to be understood… by believers who humbly seek the aid of the Holy Spirit in searching them.[27]

So, while not everything in Scripture is equally clear, "those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that… [everyone] may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." [28] In speaking of "those things… necessary… for salvation" the Confession is not suggesting that there are elements of Scripture's teaching that are entirely *unrelated* to salvation leading to a conception of salvation that is truncated or diminished[29]. Rather, it recognises that although everything in Scripture is integrally related to everything else – so that, from one perspective, everything is a matter of salvation in that it explains what it means to live under God's Lordship – one can be saved without fully grasping or perceiving these connections.[30] It posits that there is an irreducible core gospel content that can be understood clearly from the Scriptures without recourse to an authoritative human interpreter.

2.   The Readers of Scripture[31]

The Westminster Confession clearly acknowledges that there are things inherent within the readers of Scripture that further or hinder its perspicuity. It states that "all things in Scripture are not… alike clear unto all".[32] A person's individual capacity will impact how clear they find the Scripture to be.[33] This could refer to things such as intellect, exposure to

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[27] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* vol. 1, *First Through Tenth Topics,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans George Musgrave Giger (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 146.

[28] WCF, 1.7.

[29] John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship,* vol. 4, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 203-204.

[30] Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1845; repr., Inverness: Christian Focus, 1974), 18.

[31] This would broadly correlate with Luther's statement on the "internal clarity" of Scripture. This "internal perspicuity… [means] that nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures… the Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture", Luther, *Bondage*, 73-74.

[32] WCF 1.7.

[33] B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield,* vol. 6, *The Westminster Assembly and its work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1991), 233.

sound teaching and personal spiritual maturity.[34] There is no indication here that Scripture will be equally clear to all people irrespective of personality and spiritual receptivity.

However, for those who humbly seek God in the Scripture they are clear "not only to the learned, but the unlearned".[35] The Confession acknowledges the implications of intellect on the understanding of Scripture but it emphatically rejects the idea that intellectual capacity is ultimately determinative of understanding.[36] Regardless of whether a person is "learned" or "unlearned", the Scriptures can be understood clearly. This is explained as achieving a "sufficient understanding of them."[37] This is not to be understood as an autonomous achievement.[38] Rather, it is always dependent on the ministry of the Holy Spirit within God's economy.[39] There is no suggestion that a "sufficient understanding" is at the same time an exhaustive understanding.[40] At this point, the Confession appeals to Psalm 119:105 which refer to the Scriptures as "a lamp to [one's] feet and a light to [one's] path". Whitaker is surely correct when he writes, in contrast to the Roman Catholic position, that Scripture is,

called a lamp, because it hath in itself a light and brightness wherewith it illuminates others, unless they be absolutely blind, or wilfully turn away their eyes from this light... the comparison... of scripture to a lamp is to be understood to mean that we are thereby illuminated, who by nature are plunged into darkness, and see and understand nothing of what is pleasing to God. A lamp hath light in itself, whether men look upon that light or not: so also the scripture is clear and perspicuous, whether men be illuminated by it, or receive from it no light whatever.[41]

3.   The Reading of Scripture

The Confession also refers to the reading of Scripture when it speaks about the importance of the "due use of the ordinary means"[42] as part of the

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[34] Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," 298. See also the examination of the way that differences in people and their condition impacts perspicuity in Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London: Griffin, 1646), 163-164, accessed 12 February, 2016, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xlk7AQAAMAAJ.

[35] WCF 1.7.

[36] Frame, *Word of God,* 203.

[37] WCF 1.7.

[38] Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith,* 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 88.

[39] R. A. Finlayson, *Reformed Theological Writings* (Inverness: Christian Focus, 1996), 238.

[40] Letham, *Westminster Assembly,* 143.

[41] William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton* (1588; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 383-384. This idea connects with my earlier contention that it is fitting to speak about the perspicuity *of Scripture* as something that exists in and of itself, albeit in conjunction with, and dependent on, the ongoing ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

[42] WCF 1.7.

process of understanding the clear Scripture. It is through and by these "ordinary means"[43] that understanding comes. These means would include prayerful supplication for God to grant true understanding of the matters addressed, reading within the communion of saints both past and present and giving due attention to the other means of grace that are available. So, although reading is an individual activity it is also a corporate one. However, the most obvious "means" referred to includes the careful, attentive, repeated reading of Scripture. There is no suggestion in the Confession that understanding is easy, immediate or superficial. Rather, a humble and committed willingness to read the Scriptures is essential to find them clear and perspicuous.[44] This makes sense of the oft commented on exhortation of Jesus that Christians should "search the Scriptures" (John 5:39).

In summary, the understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture as set out in the Westminster Confession is biblical, nuanced and able to integrate the objective and subjective elements under consideration. Having considered the perspicuity of Scripture as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, we now turn to identify some of the ways that this doctrine informs our doctrine of the church.

II. How Perspicuity Informs the Doctrine of the Church

In order to highlight the ways perspicuity informs the doctrine of the church it will be helpful to recall the four classical marks or attributes of the church noted in the Nicene Creed as "one, holy, catholic, apostolic". We will adopt this schema as a framework to breakup our analysis. Before we turn to these connections, however, it is important to note that the basic question we face when considering the perspicuity of Scripture – to whom is it clear? – ensures that we consider the church. After all, Scripture is *not* clear to "those who are perishing… [because] the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:3-4).[45] This means that "the gospel… is plain to believers"[46] but not to unbelievers. This, of course, does not mean that an unbeliever can understand *nothing* of the Bible at the level of grammatical comprehension, but rather that he cannot have "a spiritual understanding"[47] of the content that is bound up with salvation. This fits well with the nature of Scripture as

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[43] WCF 1.7.

[44] Webster comments that "[the notions of Scripture being perspicuous] do not eliminate the necessity of reading, making exegesis a purely 'pneumatic' activity which bypasses the processes by which written materials are appropriated". John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch,* Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93.

[45] See also this dynamic in Isaiah 6:8-13 and Mark 4:10-20.

[46] Turretin, *Institutes*, 145.

[47] Larry D. Pettegrew, "The Perspicuity of Scripture", *TMSJ* 15.2 (Fall 2004): 215.

a covenantal document, which itself strongly suggests its clarity, since such "a testament, contract, covenant or edict of a king… ought to be perspicuous and not obscure".[48] In summary, we must affirm that there is a "selective"[49] clarity to Scripture. So, considering the perspicuity of Scripture demands that we accept the reality of this fundamental antithesis between people to whom it is clear and those to whom it is not. It is to a further examination of the community formed by those who clearly hear the Scriptures that we now turn.

1.   The Oneness of the Church

The confession of the "oneness" of the church "marks out the material uniqueness of a particular community's public life in the world".[50] In other words, it captures the truth that each Christian experiences "theological and moral agreements with other Christians".[51] Thus, this confession expresses the deep and profound unity that binds Christians together within the one church of God through a shared receipt of God's Spirit. It is built on the conviction that "the Church is one, as there is, and can be but one body of Christ".[52] In several ways, the perspicuity of Scripture informs our understanding of this oneness.

Firstly, affirming the perspicuity of Scripture undergirds rather than imperils this oneness. Whilst this doctrine affirms the spiritual propriety of each and every believer searching the Scriptures individually, it also recognises that the Scripture is heard most clearly within the company and fellowship of God's people.[53] A right hearing is not absolutely dependent on this – as in the Roman Catholic teaching concerning the *magisterium* – but is nonetheless best achieved within this context. Perspicuity should not be pressed in artificial ways to encourage an individualistic approach to Scripture. This is the potentially unhelpful move that Hodge makes when he introduces the category of "private judgment" into his explication of the concept.[54] The Westminster Confession's reference to "a due use of ordinary means"[55] necessarily entails the settled teaching ministry of the church. In fact, the perspicuity of Scripture actually underpins the practice of biblical preaching. As Ward insightfully comments: "expository biblical preaching… assumes rather than denies the clarity of Scripture. An expository preacher

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[48] Turretin, *Institutes*, 145.

[49] Frame, *Word of God,* 205.

[50] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 206.

[51] *Ibid.,* 207.

[52] Charles Hodge, *The Church and its Polity* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1879), 21.

[53] Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The God who is the Holy Trinity* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2008), 17.

[54] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (London: James Clarke, 1960), 106.

[55] WCF 1.7.

takes it that his sermon can be judged as either a faithful or an unfaithful exposition of Scripture by his hearers, as they discern for themselves whether his teaching is or is not warranted by his biblical text".[56] Without a clear and perspicuous Scripture then it becomes impossible for anyone to weigh and evaluate a person's teaching which would make it impossible to fulfil the command to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). In addition, the perspicuity of Scripture also entails the communal interaction with the church past and present as a key element in hearing the clear Scripture. A true understanding of the doctrine does not imperil the church's oneness but rather undergirds it.

Secondly, God has left one word for his one people. Since this is the case, we would expect this one communication to be clear. As God's purpose in giving his word is for the growth and stability of the church, it would be perplexing if God – the ultimate effective communicator[57] – had spoken an unclear word to his one people. As Whitaker reminds us: "God does not mock us when he bids us read the scriptures; but he would have us read the scriptures in order that we may know and understand them." [58] A commitment to the perspicuity of Scripture informs our expectation of how God communicates to his people. However, it reminds us that we need all of this one word, for "Scripture interprets itself; the obscure texts are explained by the plain ones, and the fundamental ideas of Scripture as a whole serve to clarify the parts".[59] This principle was formalised as the "analogy of faith". Therefore, the one clear word which is not to be divided or have one part set against another, illuminates the oneness of the church which is likewise not to be divided.

Thirdly, perspicuity informs the nature of the oneness the church confesses. This is particularly relevant in light of the reality of many disagreements in the church over doctrine and practice. Does this division not render the belief in the perspicuity of Scripture at best redundant and at worst downright naive? We do not believe so. In attempting to refute this charge, we must note that the "*unanimity* of biblical interpretation through history is quite remarkable".[60] In addition, a nuanced concept of perspicuity recognises that "some of our differences in interpretation arise from the inherent richness and polyphonic voices of the human authors of

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[56] Ward, *Words of Life*, 121. This dynamic can be seen when the Bereans examine Paul's teaching in Acts 17:11 "to see if these things were so". It is noteworthy that Luke gives his authorial approval of this practice by describing the Bereans as being "noble" as a result of their behaviour.

[57] Thompson, *Clear and Present Word,* 60-65.

[58] Whitaker, *Disputation,* 392.

[59] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* vol. 1, *Prolegomena,* ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 480.

[60] Ward, *Words of Life,* 122.

Scripture".[61] A correct view of perspicuity also permits the potential in the human reader to misunderstand or distort the meaning of Scripture – which doubtless has been at the root of some disagreements within the church. Yet, contrary to what might be expected, one of the significant implications of the perspicuity of Scripture is that the church will *not* always agree on everything. That would be to push the concept of clarity too far, for the doctrine maintains that the matters addressed may be difficult even if they are clearly expressed. Thus, Leigh can comment "the Scriptures teacheth that there is one God in three persons, the words are plain and easy; every man understands them; but the mystery contained in those words passeth the reach of man".[62] So, Scripture can be clear even while profound mysteries remain over which believers may disagree. Rightly understood, the perspicuity of Scripture yields the implication that the church should be making some progress to full agreement, but it is illegitimate to posit that this will be achieved before the eschaton. The Westminster Confession recognises that perspicuity secures the clarity of the central matters of salvation which vast number of churches hold in common. However, the oneness of the church has always been understand as an eschatological confession, as a statement of what is true but not yet fully realised. So, perspicuity is compatible with this in that much in Scripture is clear, but not all. It may be that we should even conceive of perspicuity as an eschatological concept. Due to the oneness of the church being an eschatological confession it is perfectly acceptable to confess the perspicuity of Scripture yet also the necessity of a churchly hearing of the Scripture and a recognition that difficulties will always remain in hearing the clear voice of God in them. In these ways the perspicuity of Scripture informs our conception of the oneness of the church.

2.   The Holiness of the Church

The holiness of the church has been defined as "the unfolding sanctification of its membership as the concrete effect of its calling and empowerment by the triune God… [in addition to] its purity practices… with the effect of its being set apart for worship of and witness to a holy God".[63] This is especially connected to the third person of the Trinity for "where the Spirit of God is, there is holiness. If, therefore, the Spirit dwells in the Church, the Church must be holy".[64] The perspicuity of Scripture informs this holiness in several important ways.

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[61] Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 196.

[62] Leigh, *Treatise,* 162.

[63] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 207-208.

[64] Hodge, *Church*, 17-18.

Firstly, it is an ethical doctrine.[65] Rightly understood, it removes excuses for failing to hear and obey the Scriptures. The clear Scripture can and should be read by every Christian for profit and edification. A person will not be able to excuse their moral failure or lack of holiness by appealing to the dark and confusing subject matter of Scripture. At the very least, the clear teaching of Scripture concerning those things that we need to know as essential to salvation ensures that it is possible for humble readers of Scripture to be holy in that sense. Further, this ethical thrust to perspicuity reminds us that "whatever is needful for the preaching of the church and the teaching of its fundamental doctrines is somewhere stated clearly and plainly".[66] This ethical approach to the perspicuity of Scripture grounds the conviction that the church has been bequeathed with all she needs in the Scriptures.

Secondly, perspicuity also indicates something significant about the nature of this holiness – that it is progressive. Due to the presence of indwelling sin – individually and corporately – the church will always tend to mishear, disobey and wrongly constitute God's word: "the church is not only *fallible*; it is *prone* to misinterpret God's Word apart from the constant faithfulness of the Spirit's illuminating grace".[67] Thus it is crucial for God to bestow a clear word to his church that is growing in holiness but has not yet fully attained this. This clarity is essential if Scripture is to achieve all that God intends for it in light of the ongoing struggle of the church with its sinfulness.

Thirdly, the best defenders of perspicuity have always integrated their explanations for the remaining presence of the difficult parts of Scripture with the process of sanctification. Thus, Turretin can insist that God has included certain hard to understand elements in Scripture, "on purpose to excite the study of believers and increase their diligence; to humble the pride of man and to remove from them the contempt which might arise from too great plainness".[68] Further, Whitaker explains the obscurities in Scripture as:

God would have us to be constant in prayer, and hath scattered many obscurities up and down through the scriptures, in order that we should seek his help in interpreting them and discovering their true meaning… he wished thereby to excite our diligence in reading, meditating upon, searching and comparing the scriptures… he designed to prevent our losing interest in them… God… would have our interest kept up by difficulties… God willed to have that truth, so sublime, so heavenly, sought and found with so much labour, the more esteemed by us on that account… God wished by these means to subdue our pride and arrogance, and to expose our ignorance… God willed that the sacred mysteries of his word should be opened freely to pure and holy minds, not exposed to dogs and swine… God designed to call off our minds from the pursuit of external things and our daily occupations, and transfer them to the study of the

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[65] Frame, *Word of God,* 206.

[66] Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 325.

[67] Horton, *Christian Faith,* 196.

[68] Turretin, *Institutes*, 143.

scriptures… God designed thus to accustom us to a certain internal purity and sanctity of thought and feeling… God willed that in his church some should be teachers, and some disciples; some more learned, to give instruction; other less skilful, to receive it; so as that the honour of the sacred scriptures and the divinely instituted ministry might, in this manner, be maintained.[69]

These difficulties are permitted by God to remain in Scripture to aid the progressive sanctification of the church. They are permitted so that we would seek after him in the pursuit of understanding.

Fourthly, the fact that the Scriptures are clear is foundational to how they are to be used to aid the church's corporate holiness. The pattern we see in Ephesians 4:11-16 is that the risen and ascended Christ gives individuals who can share, teach and explain the Scriptures to his church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (4:12). As noted earlier, this word-based ministry includes activities such as preaching which presuppose the perspicuity of Scripture. However, as a result of the equipping of the saints they learn to "[speak] the truth in love" (4:15) to others in the church so that the church "[grows] up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (4:15). This reference to "the truth" is best taken to refer to the truth of the gospel – the perspicuous word – that each Christian is to share and remind every other Christian. When this happens the church "builds itself up in love" (4:16) which is another way of talking about its growth and progress in holiness. Thus, the perspicuity of Scripture enables and underpins the "truth speaking" ministry to which every Christian believer is called to play a part. This ministry of the clear word from every member of the body is integral to the health and holiness of the church.

Fifthly, given the ongoing spiritual battle in which believers are engaged[70] which would interrupt and hinder the church's growth in holiness, God has left his church a clear word so that they would be protected from the malignant influence of Satan. Thus, for the pastoral support of believers it is imperative that the Scriptures are perspicuous. Whitaker comments, "the people should not be deprived of these arms by which they are to be protected against Satan. Now the Scriptures are such arms: therefore the scriptures should not be taken away from the people; for taken away they are, if the people be prevented from reading them".[71] For the church's protection against Satan and its growth in holiness, it is essential that the Scriptures be clear – and therefore open and available to all.

Sixthly, the perspicuity of Scripture reminds us that the holiness of the church is an eschatological confession. The church will not always grasp the full interconnectedness of Scripture which would be necessary to ensure full holiness of thought, action and attitude. The church will not always manage

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[69] Whitaker, *Disputation,* 365-366.
[70] Ephesians 6:10-20.
[71] Whitaker, *Disputation,* 237.

to hear and obey the clear Scripture. This does not undermine its perspicuity in any way. Rather, it situates it within an eschatological horizon – not least within the eschatological holiness of the church that has long been confessed. In these ways perspicuity informs the holiness of the church.

3. The Catholicity of the Church

The catholicity of the church "reflects the observation of its global reach and also the inclusiveness of its network of redeemed-but-diverse members".[72] This is a subset of the church's oneness: "The Church is one, because it embraces all the people of God".[73] The perspicuity of Scripture informs this catholicity in several important ways.

Firstly, it was needed to ground catholicity in a meaningful sense. This is the original context for the Reformation and Post-Reformation debates with the Roman Catholic Church about the clarity of Scripture. The connection between Scripture and church resolved into the question whether all of the Scriptures were for all of God's people. The Roman Catholic Church denied this whereas the Reformed position, without overthrowing churchly order, answered this question more positively. Scripture is for all of God's people and can be read by them profitably. It is right and fitting that the Scriptures are read by all – even if "a due use of the ordinary means"[74] grounds this reading within the context of formal church ministry and preaching. The perspicuity of Scripture ensures the catholicity of the church – inasmuch as it approves the practice of universal reading of the Scriptures among God's people and overthrows the necessity of authorised, human structures to arbitrate the meaning of the Scriptures for us.

Secondly, perspicuity encourages the *individual*, but never an *individualistic* reading of Scripture.[75] A nuanced understanding of the doctrine will always insist upon the importance of reading communally and historically; communally, as it must happen in fellowship with the people of God as they are currently identified; historically, as this reading must take place in the light of the creeds, confessions and exegetical traditions of the previous generations of Christians. So, rightly defined, the perspicuity of Scripture connects at significant points with the catholicity of the church – a catholicity that exists as a spatial-temporal category.

Thirdly, the perspicuity of Scripture secures the necessity of Scripture for all of God's people while also recognising that it is not equally necessary to all. The necessity of access to the clear Scripture is in some sense person-

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[72] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 208.

[73] Hodge, *Church,* 25.

[74] WCF 1.7.

[75] Berkouwer, G. C. *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture*, trans. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 272.

specific. So, Leigh can comment: "neither is it required that all things be understood of all men; the knowledge of more places is necessary in a Minister, than in a Trades-man and Husband-man, yet it is an infallible Rule to every one in his Vocation."[76] This connects with the idea that the clarity of Scripture is an ethical doctrine and can be summarised in the statement that "Scripture is always clear enough for us to carry out our present responsibilities before God".[77]

Fourthly, since Scripture is clear is should be read by all God's people – and this inevitably entails the need for translation of the Scriptures into languages that can be understood by *all* God's people. Again, the polemical contest with Rome threw this issue into sharp relief as revealed in the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on the Vulgate as the sole, authorised Bible version. So, the perspicuity of Scripture which entails the need for it to be translated into different languages and dialects gives ample testimony to, and secures in some degree, the catholicity of the church as it is made up of diverse people from different backgrounds. Since there currently remains a great need for the translation of the Bible into languages and dialects, we remember that the catholicity of the church is also an eschatological confession that will not be realised until the clear Scriptures are proclaimed to every tribe, tongue, nation and language under heaven. In these ways the perspicuity of Scripture informs the catholicity of the church.

4.   The Apostolicity of the Church

The apostolicity of the church reminds us that "the church is of and by the apostles; it is their witness of the incarnate Word of life that is the plumb-line of Christian proclamation and the criterion of the community's *koinonia* with God and God's Son (1 John 1:1-5)"[78] This is another way of expressing the "historical unity of the Church... [which] is now what it was in the days of the apostles".[79] The perspicuity of Scripture informs this apostolicity in several important ways.

Firstly, it enables the church to be apostolic through the generations. The New Testament presents the church as "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). In this image, the NT apostles and prophets[80] are the foundation on

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[76] Leigh, *Treatise*, 163-164.

[77] Frame, *Word of God*, 207.

[78] Castelo and Wall, "Scripture and the Church", 209.

[79] Hodge, *Church,* 27.

[80] It seems most natural to take this reference as referring to NT prophets rather than Old Testament ones. This better fits the reference to prophets receiving the revelation of the "mystery" of the Gentile inclusion into the one people of God. We are explicitly told that this revelation "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). This would seem to rule out the possibility

which the church is built as they are the unique, inspired, authoritative recipients of divine revelation and commission from Christ. Thus, the church is truly apostolic when it adheres to the apostolic word. This apostolic word is one that Christ predicted his apostles would commit to writing and that would continue to govern life in his church.[81] This apostolicity can best be achieved and guaranteed through a clear word rather than one that is ambiguous. The church's apostolicity – its faithfulness to the apostolic word – would be imperilled if the Scripture that the apostles left the church was unclear in the central matters of salvation. Thus, the perspicuity of Scripture grounds the possibility that the church through all the ages and generations can truly be apostolic as it has access to the clear foundational word that Christ, by his Spirit, caused his apostles to write for posterity.

Secondly, perspicuity safeguards the church from heresy – and therefore from losing its apostolic status. In the original polemic against Rome, the Reformed took issue with the argument that the best safeguard against heresy was to stop the people reading the Scriptures as in their unlearned state they would twist and distort their true meaning. In contrast, Whitaker insists: "it is much better that the scriptures should be read, and that, from the scriptures read and understood, heresies should be condemned and overthrown, than that they should not be read at all; and that by such means the rise of heresies should be prevented".[82] The fact that the Scriptures are clear encourages rather than inhibits the reading of them by all Christians as a safeguard against heresy and error.

Thirdly, perspicuity also indicates that the apostolicity of the church is an eschatological concept. It preserves the truth that sometimes the church will fail to be truly apostolic because it fails to read the Scriptures in humble dependence on the Spirit and in conversation with the church through the ages. It ensures that the church continues to seek to be as apostolic as it can before the eschaton, working hard to hear the clear word, knowing that sometimes that clarity is "hard won".[83] The perspicuity of Scripture rightly acknowledges that "some things in them [that is, Paul's letters] are hard to understand".[84] Nevertheless, there is no indication that it is impossible for the church in every generation to be apostolic – even if that apostolicity is

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that it could be referring to Old Testament prophets. For further argument in support of taking this to refer to New Testament prophets see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 399-403; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 153-154 and Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 214-216.

[81] John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15.

[82] Whitaker, *Disputation,* 231.

[83] Thompson, *Clear and Present Word*, 102.

[84] 2 Peter 3:16.

never fully attained until the consummation. In these ways the perspicuity of Scripture informs the apostolicity of the church.

III. Conclusion

The perspicuity of Scripture is an important contemporary doctrine,[85] not least because it throws light on our doctrine of the church. This essay has argued that there are numerous significant ways that the perspicuity of Scripture, particularly as it is outlined within the Westminster Confession of Faith, informs how we conceive of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is as it should be as the *ontology* of Scripture must be joined with the *teleology* of Scripture. Noting the ways that the perspicuity of Scripture informs the doctrine of the church means that we keep the form and function of Scripture together, that we pay attention to Scripture's work within God's economy, that we locate our doctrine of Scripture, not merely as part of the theological prolegomena, but as an integral aspect within the salvific and redemptive work of the Triune God.[86] Ultimately, our conviction is that the perspicuous word is always read in "the presence of its ultimate author"[87] – God himself. This essay has attempted to follow, in part, Work's desire that "the full range of Christian theological and practical categories, not just the ones most directly related to texts, can and should inform any adequate Christian doctrine and practice of Scripture".[88] Further theological thinking in this area could profitably examine in what ways the other classical attributes of Scripture – its authority, necessity and sufficiency – may inform our doctrine of the church. For example, how Scripture's authority grounds our understanding of the church as a creature of the word under the gracious rule of the Triune God, how Scripture's necessity ensures that we conceive of the church as always in need of divine instruction supremely found within Holy Scripture, how the sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that the church has no recourse to appeal to ignorance of God's expectations and desires for his people. However, this stands beyond the remit of this current essay so must be left to others to pursue. This essay has profitably begun to open up such discussions by arguing that in numerous and significant ways the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture informs our doctrine of the church. This is a much-needed connection today.

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[85] See the helpful analysis of the contemporary relevance of this doctrine in Thompson, *Clear and Present Word,* 30-45.

[86] Work, *Living and Active,* 8.

[87] Thompson, *Clear and Present Word,* 77.

[88] Work, *Living and Active,* 8.

WHO LED THE ISRAELITES OUT OF EGYPT? AN EXAMINATION OF JUDE 5

James Midwinter[*]

Prior to the publication of the English Standard Version, the majority of English Bibles translated Jude 5 in a manner similar to the New American Standard Bible: "Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that *the Lord*, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe." The ESV has translated Jude 5 to specify that Jesus himself led the people out of Egypt.

This paper will work through the context of Jude and examine some of the manuscript evidence and ancient writings that will help us understand the issues involved with this textual variant. We will seek to explain how the variant between the manuscripts can best be explained, and that there are reasonable grounds for accepting the ESV's translation that ascribes the Old Testament Exodus to Jesus Himself.

Not only does this remind us that the early church viewed Jesus as the divine Second Person of the Trinity; it is also hugely encouraging to us personally. If our reading of Jude 5 is correct, the Exodus was not merely a typological foreshadowing of Christ's future redemption. In addition to that, it was a physical deliverance personally accomplished by the pre-incarnate Christ, whose ministry in pioneering redemption and rescuing sinners from their bondage spans human history.

I.   Introduction

It is one of the most common Sunday school questions: "Who led the Israelites out of Egypt?" To anyone with some background in the stories of the Old Testament, the answer is very simple: "God!"

Until you get to Jude. One of the least read books in the whole Bible contains one of the most surprising statements about the greatest act of salvation in Jewish history.

Prior to the ESV's publication, the majority of English Bibles translated Jude 5 in a manner similar to the New American Standard Bible: "Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that *the Lord*, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe" (emphasis added). A handful of translations included a footnote to highlight that some manuscripts read Ἰησοῦς – (*Iēsoûs*, "Jesus") – instead of [ὁ] κύριος – ([*ho*] *kurios*, "[the] Lord") – but none included the former reading in the main body of their translation.

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None, until the ESV. And so, whilst the underlying text-critical work remains unchanged during the circa. nineteen centuries since Jude wrote his brief letter, ever since the widespread use of the ESV, the English-speaking world has been prompted to reconsider who led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Articles about textual variants rarely raise an eyebrow of interest beyond academia! But if the ESV's translation is correct, Jude 5 enlarges our understanding of how Jesus has been leading his people out of bondage – be it physically from Exodus, or spiritually from sin – throughout history, in ways that should make the heart of every believer rejoice.

II. Methodology

To understand this textual variant, we will begin by placing Jude 5 within its immediate context, before analysing the external, manuscript evidence and determining how the testimony of ancient writings should inform our understanding of what Jude originally wrote. We will then consider various aspects of internal evidence and assess the various arguments commonly made against the Ἰησοῦς reading, which we will contend do not present insurmountable objections to it. That work will help us apply Jude 5 by understanding two wonderful implications: firstly, the high Christology that Jude attests; and secondly, the unique redemptive-historical perspective Jude 5 affords us on the pre-incarnate redemptive ministry of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

III. Placing Jude 5 in Context

Given the lack of familiarity with this epistle, a brief summary of the immediate context is in order. Presuming the long-standing evangelical conviction that Jude was written by Judah, the human brother of both our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle James (Jude 1), the purpose for his writing is clearly set out in Jude 3: "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints". But as David Helm explains, this "contending for the faith" is not presented in a vacuum:

Verse 4 supports the theme by contributing the occasion for the letter with the little word "for". Thus, the call to contend is rooted in Jude's conviction that the faith is being challenged by opponents he only will call "certain people" (vv. 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, 19).[1]

Although we cannot be sure about the precise nature of the opposition presented by these τινες ἄνθρωποι (*tines anthrōpoi*, "certain people"), Jude is clear – in verses 5-19 – about the severity of the judgment that would befall

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[1] David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings* (PTW; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 279.

them and everyone who neglected the "once for all delivered" faith and followed them in their perversion and heresy. In broad terms, Jude uses illustrations from both the Old Testament and his own contemporary literature to prove that apostasy and rebellion are always punished. We see this in three historical events – "the apostasy of the wilderness rebels, the autonomy of some angelic creatures, and the immorality of some ancient cities"[2] – and three Old Testament examples of individuals who departed from and challenged the faith, thereby bringing judgment upon themselves: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. The main body of Jude is therefore simultaneously a message of encouragement and a terrifying warning: encouragement in the fact that, as Helm helpfully reminds us, "challenges to the faith have always been present and that God has always met them with divine judgment"; and an alarming warning when we remember the inescapable danger we would face if we departed from the faith.

Jude 5 therefore marks the beginning of a battle cry to Jude's readers – then and now – to remember.[3] This clarion call is infrequent and unfamiliar in our day and generation. As John Benton observes, "We are the children of an era which sees 'progress' as good and the past as obsolete. Such an atmosphere stifles inner reflection and breeds social and historical amnesia."[4] In stark contrast, God's Word consistently calls us to remember. And here in Jude (as elsewhere in Scripture), the concern is not merely one of mental recall: as Benton explains, "Jude is concerned that they have forgotten the true significance of these stories. It is not simply the facts they need to grasp, but the meaning."[5] In other words, Jude 5 is a wake-up call to not only remember, but to change our lives in accordance with that vivid memory.

Within this broader context, Jude 5 fleshes out the first of three Old Testament examples of the judgment that Jude warns of in verse 4: *viz.*, that although the Jews were rescued out of Egypt, those within the physically-redeemed community who did not personally believe were destroyed.[6] But this raises the central question for our purposes: who saved the people from Egypt – the Lord, Jesus, or God?[7] To begin to answer this question, we must examine the testimony of the manuscript evidence.

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[2] *Ibid.*, 280.

[3] Or be reminded of, Ὑπομνῆσαι (*hupomnEsai*). Although the English is cumbersome, the King James Version helpfully captures the aorist active infinitive when it translates the opening phrase, Ὑπομνῆσαι δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι – "I will therefore put you in remembrance".

[4] John Benton, *Slandering the Angels: The Message of Jude* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1999), 64.

[5] *Ibid.*, 64-65.

[6] See Num 14:26-35; 26:63-65; cf. Heb 3:17-19.

[7] A number of commentators who conclude that the original text of Jude 5 included the [*ho*] *Kyrios* reading spend time considering whether this reading should be interpreted to refer to our Lord Jesus Christ, effectively bringing the Second Person of the Trinity back into the text as the subject of Jude 5 through the back door. By way of example, Bauckham concludes that "it

IV. Examining the External Evidence

1. Reviewing the Manuscript Evidence

Whilst the subject matter of the textual variant in Jude 5 is interesting in its own right, the complexity of the testimony of the extant manuscripts makes its study even more fascinating – for those who enjoy such study! Richard Bauckham and Philipp Bartholomä have helpfully consolidated the data, for those who are keen to review the primary sources.[8]

From the perspective of the external evidence, the [*ho*] *theos* ("God") reading is significantly the least-attested option, and can be excluded from the list of potentially authentic writings.

Although the [*ho*] *kurios*, ("[the] Lord") reading finds its greatest support in the Byzantine text, the external evidence leans – though perhaps not irrefutably so – in favour of the *Iēsoûs* ("Jesus") reading. In addition to being found in two early (i.e. fourth/fifth century) and important Alexandrian uncials (A and B), together with a large number of significant minuscules, its Patristic heritage extends all the way back to the second and third centuries with Justin Martyr and Origen – over a century before the first extant Patristic witness for [*ho*] *kurios*.[9] It is also attested by the largest number of

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may be that, in view of Jude's general usage, he has used κύριος here of Jesus, not so much because he is concerned to explain the preexistent activity of Christ, but rather because in his typological application of these OT events to the present it is the Lord Jesus who has saved his people the church and will be the Judge of apostates" – Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 49.

Intriguing though this interpretative approach may be, we will focus our attention on deciding between the alternative readings themselves, rather than how they could subsequently be interpreted.

[8] See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*; and Philipp F. Bartholomä, "Did Jesus save the people out of Egypt? A Re-examination of a Textual Problem in Jude 5", *Novum Testamentum* 50/2 (2008).

[9] The apparent sparsity of Patristic citations of Jude 5 in particular should not surprise us – for the entire epistle is not as frequently attested as other New Testament books. Part of the reason for this, as Michael Kruger explains, is the brevity of letter: "Jude is particularly small – containing only 602 words – which makes the lack of extant evidence for the book less surprising" – Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 270; cf. Peter Davids, *II Peter and Jude: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (BHGNT; Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), n3, 8.

However, it is also likely that Jude's more difficult journey into the New Testament canon played a part in its fewer citations. Although Jude is included in the Muratorian Canon (~ 170 A.D.), it endured a period of skepticism during the third and fourth centuries. It would be considerably beyond the scope of our paper to engage with this debate in detail. For our purposes, it is sufficient to discern the understandable reasons for the apparently infrequent citation of Jude's epistle in Patristic writings – because of both its size and the canonical questions that were raised in connection with the book during the first few centuries of the New Testament church.

early versions – including the Vulgate, Coptic, Ethiopic and some manuscripts of the Armenian.

Additionally, as Bartholomä helpfully highlights, "In addition to being earlier, *Iēsoûs* ("Jesus") is also more geographically widespread" – spanning from Egypt/North Africa to western areas of the Roman Empire.[10] Though not ultimately definitive in itself, Bartholomä contends that this geographical diversity "is yet another strong argument for the primacy of the [*Iēsoûs*] reading."[11]

2.   Considering the Testimony of Two Church Fathers

Before turning to consider the internal evidence, we should hear the contributions of two important Patristics. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr states that Jesus is "the one who led your fathers out of Egypt".[12]

Even more intriguing is Bede's observation, who follows the *Iēsoûs* reading and then provides a rationale to which we will return in due course:

[Jude] is referring not to Jesus the son of Nun but to our Lord, showing first that he did not have his beginning at his birth from the holy virgin, as the heretics have wished [to assert], but existed as the eternal God for the salvation of all believers… For in Egypt he first so saved the humble who cried out to him from their affliction that he might afterward bring low the proud who murmured against him in the desert.[13]

In light of the external evidence, we can now turn to consider how the internal evidence should inform our understanding of what Jude originally wrote.

V.   Investigating the Internal Evidence

To examine how the internal evidence should inform our analysis of Jude 5, we will address two discrete issues: transcriptional probability and intrinsic probability. The first issue seeks to understand how the variant can be accounted for within the scribal copying process. The second question

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[10] Bartholomä, "Did Jesus save the people out of Egypt?", 149.

[11] *Ibid.*, 149. Whilst our analysis of the external evidence does not definitively address the issue, Bruce Metzger's assessment succinctly captures the testimony of the manuscript data: "Critical principles seem to require the adoption of Ἰησοῦς, which admittedly is the best attested reading among Greek and versional witnesses" – Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Edmonds, Washington: UBS, 2007), 657.

[12] Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 120.3, cited in Charles Landon, *A Text-Critical Study of the Epistle of Jude* (JSNTSS; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 71.

[13] Quoted in Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 65. Although Bede refers to "Lord", the context clearly confirms that he considered Jude to be referring to the Lord Jesus.

focuses upon whether there is an intrinsic or innate reason that would favour either reading.

1. Transcriptional Probability – Unintentional Change

As Bartholomä helpfully explains, "Because all three variants were written as *nomina sacra,* the tendency has been to account for the different readings by *unintentional change*" (emphasis his).[14] This approach certainly reflects the majority decision of the UBS Committee. In giving the [*ho*] *kurios* reading a D decision – "indicating that the Committee had great difficulty in arriving at a decision"[15] – as Metzger recounts, a majority of the Committee explained the origin of the *Iēsoûs* reading "in terms of transcriptional oversight (KC being taken for IC)."[16]

Both *nomina sacra* have a vertical stroke in common, and so accidental error could explain the origin of the variant in different manuscripts. However, there are a number of reasons for thinking that the variant is due to an intentional scribal change, and not a mere oversight – which perhaps better explains the variant's subsequent survival.

2. Transcriptional Probability – Intentional Change

The possibility of intentional scribal change directs our attention to some of the foundational principles of textual criticism. In seeking to determine which of a number of textual variants represents the original reading, two overarching maxims must be borne in mind: firstly (and generally speaking), the more difficult reading is to be preferred;[17] and secondly, the reading which best explains the origin of the other readings has the best claim to originality.

No one disputes the fact that the *Iēsoûs* reading is the most difficult. The problem is whether the reading is – in Metzger's words – "difficult to the point of impossibility".[18]

The question of which reading – *Iēsoûs* or [*ho*] *kurios* – best explains the origin of the other readings is highly contested.[19] Bauckham, for instance,

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[14] Bartholomä,"Did Jesus save the people out of Egypt?," 149.

[15] J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Jude* (Dallas, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1999), 22.

[16] Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 657.

[17] Particularly, as Metzger points out, "when the sense appears on the surface to be erroneous but on more mature consideration proves to be correct" – Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 12-13.

[18] Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 657.

[19] Given its limited external testimony, and the fact that it is the least likely to explain the origin of the other predominant readings, we will not consider the [*ὀ] θεός* reading separately here.

considers the [*ho*] *kurios* reading to be the most satisfactory in this regard, and explains the emendation by pointing to the Joshua-Jesus typology that became popular during the second century.[20] F. F. Bruce argues the complete reverse: "indeed the variety of other readings can best be explained as substitutes for 'Jesus'". [21]

Reminding ourselves that esteemed Bible scholars have disagreed over this issue should make us approach the question with humility. However, insofar as we can determine, we would submit that the *Iēsoûs* reading best explains the origin of the other readings. The story of יהוה's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt is the single greatest event of redemptive-history in the Old Testament. No first-century Jew or subsequent scribe would have either forgotten the divine architect behind their liberation from bondage, or considered that יהוה's involvement required any clarification by way of correction to the text of Jude 5.

Therefore, if Jude 5 had originally contained the [*ho*] *kurios* reading, one can only imagine that a scribe would change that reference from the Greek translation of יהוה to *Iēsoûs* by mistake. More likely – we would contend – is the reality that Jude originally ascribed the leadership of the Jewish exodus from Egypt to Jesus Christ himself using the proper noun *Iēsoûs.* This analysis accords with Metzger's minority report to the UBS Committee:

Struck by the strange and unparalleled mention of Jesus in a statement about the redemption out of Egypt (yet compare Paul's reference to Χριστός (*christos*) in 1 Cor 10:14), copyists would have substituted (ὁ) κύριος [[*ho*] *kurios*] or ὁ θεός [*ho theos*].[22]

In such case, whilst we could empathise with the concern that lay behind their emendations, the scribes of old should not have allowed their surprise at the pre-incarnate ministry of Christ's redemption to give way to amending the text.

3.   Intrinsic Probability – Arguments Within Jude

Having considered the issues pertaining to transcriptional probability, we can direct our attention towards the question of intrinsic probability: are there any intrinsic or innate reasons that would favour either reading?

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[20] See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 43; cf. Landon, *A Text-Critical Study of the Epistle of Jude*, 73.

[21] F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 35-36.

[22] Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Green New Testament*, 657. This conclusion explains why subsequent Greek editions have included the *Iēsoûs* reading in the main body of their text: see Barbara Aland *et al.* (eds.), *Novum Testament Graece* (28th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), and Dirk Jongkind and Peter J. Williams (eds.), The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

Certainly the most problematic intrinsic evidence against the *Iēsoûs* reading is the fact that Jude does not refer to our Lord Jesus Christ by the name *Iēsoûs* anywhere else in his epistle. Although our Saviour is explicitly referenced six times in this brief letter (excluding verse 5), Jude uses other titles for Jesus (see verses 1, 4, 17, 21 and 25). This evidence cannot be denied. But is it sufficient to categorically refute the possibility that Jude would refer to our Lord Jesus Christ with the simple noun, *Iēsoûs*, in verse 5? We would argue that such a question cannot be answered until two further issues have been taken in consideration: firstly, the brevity of the epistle; and secondly, the unique literary qualities that Jude employs in his albeit short letter.

Firstly, given the small sample size of Jude's extant writings – his epistle consists of just over six hundred words in Greek – we cannot presume that this letter exhaustively represents Jude's vocabulary preferences. Indeed, Bauckham concedes this very principle whilst defending the [*ho*] *kurios*] reading: "Does Jude use κύριος consistently of Jesus? The evidence may not be sufficient to decide this."[23] Certainly Jude's references to Jesus throughout his epistle are noteworthy; but given the limited sample from which to draw linguistic conclusions, arguments for the [*ho*] *kurios* reading based primarily upon the absence of a second, stand-alone reference to *Iēsoûs* are inconclusive at best.

Secondly, one of the fascinating insights that has emerged in recent scholarship is the recognition that, despite its brevity, Jude's epistle represents a high watermark in Greek rhetoric and composition.[24] As Bauckham observes, "The short letter of Jude contains perhaps the most elaborate and carefully composed piece of formal exegesis in the style of the Qumran pesharim to be found in the NT, though it has only recently recognised as such."[25] One of the specific qualities that merits these accolades is the high number of *hapax legomena* contained in Jude's letter. As Bauckham observes, there are fourteen words in this brief epistle that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament.[26] These linguistic contributions to the canon need to be seen in perspective, as not every one of these unique words is as significant as others.[27] However, as Bauckham rightly concludes,

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[23] Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 49.

[24] For many commentators, this very linguistic ability gives them pause to at least consider whether it is feasible that Jude, the human brother of Jesus, could have written this epistle. By way of example, see *ibid.*, 15.

[25] Bauckham, "James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude", 303.

[26] See his list in Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 6.

[27] Bauckham's cautionary approach is exemplary: "Of course, some discrimination is needed in assessing the significance of this list: some words are relatively common words which other NT writers happen not to use; some are rather specialised words which Jude's subject matter requires; some are cognate with words which are found elsewhere in the NT and are characteristic of biblical Greek; some are rare" – *ibid.*, 6.

"More important than the statistic is Jude's evident ability to vary his vocabulary and choose effective and appropriate words and expressions from good literary, even poetic, Greek."[28]

And in addition to his *hapax legomena*, Jude's literary composition is also highly regarded: "Close exegesis soon reveals great economy of expression. Single words, phrases, and images are chosen for the associations they carry, and scriptural allusions and catchword connections increase the depth of meaning."[29]

In light of Jude's exemplary literary qualities, the *prima facie* objection to a unique reference to *Iēsoûs* in verse 5 appears less problematic. Not only does this reference immediately follow the Lordship citation of verse 4 – which certainly provides Jude with a referent point from which to utilise a more succinct proper noun in verse 5 – but seen in the broader context of Jude's ability and willingness to employ his linguistic abilities in novel expressions and configurations throughout his epistle, it is entirely possible that he would have been comfortable writing *Iēsoûs* in Jude 5.

4.   Intrinsic Probability – Arguments Beyond Jude

One final component of intrinsic probability needs to be considered: do any of the other New Testament writers similarly ascribe any Old Testament events to Jesus that the MT attributes to God/יהוה? The *Iēsoûs* reading in verse 5 would certainly be unique in Scripture in attesting that Jesus (as the Second Person of the Trinity) led the Israelites out of Egypt – but do any other writers suggest that the pre-incarnate Christ was actively and personally involved throughout the Old Testament era?

The most obvious candidates in the New Testament canon are found in 1 Cor 10:4 and 10:9, where Paul states that Christ was personally present with Israel in the wilderness – symbolically/typologically as the Rock (10:4), and personally as the one whom the Israelites put to the test before they were destroyed by serpents (10:9). Furthermore, as Thomas Schreiner explains,

New Testament writers identify Jesus Christ with texts that refer to Yahweh in the Old Testament. John said that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus Christ (John 12:41), referring to the throne room vision of Isaiah 6. Isaiah said every knee will bow to Yahweh and confess allegiance to him (Isa 45:23), but Paul related this to Jesus Christ (Phil 2:10-11).[30]

Some would contend that this whole concept is a product of over-zealous believers at the genesis of the New Testament era. J. N. D. Kelly, for instance,

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[28] *Ibid.*, 6.

[29] *Ibid.*, 6-7.

[30] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC 37; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 444.

argues that the *Iēsoûs* reading in Jude 5 can be explained by "the eagerness of Christian writers even in the apostolic age to recognise the pre-existent Christ as active in OT events (John 12:41; 1 Cor 10:4 etc.)."[31]

However, a less critical approach established upon an evangelical commitment to the inspiration of Scripture need not attempt to explain away these references. Although relatively few in number, their presence throughout the New Testament canon cannot be denied, and the most natural and faithful approach to understanding them is by recognising the pre-incarnate ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, although no other New Testament passage explicitly ascribes the Exodus to his salvific ministry, as this sampling of Scriptures shows, "it is not surprising that Jude could attribute the destruction of Israel, the angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah to Jesus Christ".[32]

VI. Reflecting Upon the Evidence

As we have seen – and, indeed, would expect in circumstances relating to a disputed textual variant – there are aspects to the external and internal evidence that, taken on their own, could support either a *Iēsoûs* or [*ho*] *kurios* reading. However, as we work through the data carefully and systematically, we believe that the cumulative argument presented in the manuscript, transcriptional and intrinsic evidence supports the *Iēsoûs* reading. If this reading is correct, it has two incredibly important implications for us.

1. Jude's Early Testimony to a High Christology

On the basis of the foregoing presentation, Jude 5 presents an unsurpassably high Christology. We have already touched upon the unparalleled importance of the Exodus event – both in the redemptive-history of Israel, and in the typological significance of that rescue in light of and preparation for the future salvation that Jesus Christ would accomplish for his people who otherwise remained in bondage to sin (cf. John 8:31-36; Rom 6:12-23; Gal 5:1; Heb 2:15).[33] As we have seen, the pages of the Old Testament consistently testify that the Exodus was accomplished by the mighty hand of יהוה (see Num 14:26-35; 26:63-65).

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[31] J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 255.

[32] Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 444.

[33] This idea is the central premise to Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson's recent work – *Echoes of Exodus* – which makes a brief reference to Jesus' deliverance from Egypt – Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), 145.

Familiar though we are with the doctrine of the lordship of Christ and the typological component to the Exodus, we would do well to reflect afresh upon the reality that Jude – a Jewish Christian who had been raised not only to understand the history of his people, but to fear the God of the first commandment (Ex 20:3), which is itself prefaced with a reminder of יהוה's great deliverance – here ascribes the glory and worship-inducing rescue to Jesus Christ. As Curtis Giese explains: "While the OT ascribes that act of judgment to Yahweh, Jude identifies the actor by name as 'Jesus'. He thereby asserts a high Christology and confesses the divinity of Jesus."[34] The implications of this Christology are significant.

The scholarly debate concerning when Jude was written is extensive and shows no sign of reaching a universal consensus. One of the key components to that debate relates to the significant overlap between 2 Peter and Jude,[35] and whether one copied from the other or both relied upon a common source. The theory that both epistles were based upon a common, third source can be easily dismissed,[36] but the determination of priority between the two epistles is a more involved discussion. Most commentators presume that Jude was written first,[37] and therefore assign an early date to it. Whilst we would suggest that there are reasonable grounds for advocating that Peter was written first and Jude incorporated much of Peter's material in his epistle, the grounds for that conclusion would require significant argumentation.

However, whether we consider Jude to have been written first or second, the dating implications are relatively minor: either Jude was written in the 50s A.D. or – if Petrine priority is accepted – in the 80s A.D. In either case, the glorious Christology Jude affirms with the pre-incarnate salvific ministry of Jesus in the Exodus is established decades before the end of the first century, dispelling all critical and liberal suggestions that a high Christology was engineered and enforced by the established church centuries later.

2.   Jude's Insight into Jesus' Pre-Incarnate Salvific Ministry

The second astonishing implication concerns the unique insight Jude gives us into the trans-testament ministry of redemption that our Lord and Saviour

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[34] Curtis P. Giese, *2 Peter and Jude* (CC; St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing, 2012), 265.

[35] Of the 25 verses in Jude, 19 have a strong parallel in 2 Peter.

[36] Peter Davids' succinct explanation is most instructive: "the vast majority of scholars argue for the dependence of 2 Peter on Jude because (1) introducing a third work that has disappeared without a trace is a council of despair, (2) Jude shows no traces of 2 Pet 1 or of the last half of 2 Pet 3, which is unlikely if it was abstracted from that work, and (3) Jude and 2 Pet 2-3 take up the same topics in the same order (with only one reversal of order), often using some of the same language, which rules out total independence" – Peter Davids, "The Catholic Epistles as a Canonical Janus: A New Testament Glimpse into Old and New Testament Canon Formation", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19/3 (2009) n32, 414.

[37] See, by way of example, Davids, *II Peter and Jude*, xviii.

has undertaken on behalf of his people. In recent years, the resurgence of a redemptive-historical understanding of salvation has instilled in many evangelicals an appreciation for the typological component to the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Indeed, given the dominating theme of God's rescue of his people from Egypt throughout the Old Testament, "It is not surprising... that Christians took over this model as a way of teaching about the cross and the salvation Jesus Christ accomplished there. Jesus himself taught us to do that, calling his death an 'exodus' (Luke 9:31)."[38]

But Jude 5, understood in light of our foregoing analysis, takes us one glorious step further. The Exodus was not merely a typological foretaste of Christ's future redemption. Rather, it was a physical deliverance personally accomplished by the pre-incarnate Christ, whose ministry in pioneering redemption (cf. Heb 12:2) and rescuing sinners from their bondage spans human history.

VII. Conclusion

Although textual criticism may not be considered a natural seedbed in which to embolden and excite our comprehension of our Saviour's trans-testamental work of redemption, Jude 5 is a glorious example of a passage that does precisely that. Working systematically through the external and internal evidence, we contend that the cumulative weight of the data supports the *Iēsoûs* reading of Jude 5, and therefore substantiates the ESV's translation: "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe."

Within the immediate context of Jude's epistle, the salutary warning must not go unnoticed – or, indeed, unheeded. As Giese rightly warns us,

The demise of the unfaithful generation became an ongoing warning for all who distrust God and reject his gifts (Ps 95:10-11; 1 Cor 10:1-13; Heb 3:16-4:2). Those who pervert God's grace in Christ and reject his lordship will certainly share the same fate."[39]

Lest we be caught up in the contemporary imbalance that focuses solely upon Jesus' role in salvation, Jude 5 affirms not only that Jesus is, and has always been, the Saviour of his people – but also that he is and has always been the Judge, who will bring judgment upon those who reject the "once for all delivered" faith.

But if this analysis of Jude 5 is correct, it also requires us to recalibrate our systematic and redemptive-historical framework to take account of the

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[38] Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming* (BST; ed. John R. W. Stott; Downers Grove, Illinois; Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 183-184.

[39] Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 265.

reality that our pre-incarnate Saviour personally led the Israelites out of Egypt. Seen in light of this redemptive-historical perspective that spans the testaments of Scripture, Jude's oft-quoted benediction assumes a yet deeper level of meaning and glory – for it has always been our Lord Jesus Christ who has personally led his people out of slavery and who will personally present us blameless in the throne room of God.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

WORLD WITHOUT END: COVENANT AND CREATION IN THE BOOK OF CONSOLATION AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

*David R Kirk**

This article presents a limited exercise in biblical theology, examining the question of the place of the created world in the eschatological purposes of God. The text in initial focus is the Book of Consolation in Jeremiah. Its covenantal contours are briefly examined: Abrahamic, David, Mosaic, and most importantly Noahic. A consideration of the Noahic tradition is then part of an exploration of the content of the well-known "new covenant" passage in Jeremiah 31. The hymn found here, and its associated oath, express Yahweh's dual commitments to creation and to humanity, commitments that are theologically rooted in the covenant with Noah and every living creature. Echoes of this covenant tradition are traced in other Old Testament texts expressing Yahweh's perpetual commitment to the world (Pss 93, 96). Seeming "counter-testimony" – which appears to express a transient or annihilated world – is also considered (Ps 102). The intertwined commitments of Yahweh to the world and to humanity are traced to their root in Genesis 1 and 2. This same intertwining of commitments is then explored in two well-known New Testament texts: John 3:16 and Romans 8:20-23. The eschatological perspective of a redeemed humanity as part of a redeemed cosmos is revealed in both of these texts, in continuity with the traditions explored in the Old Testament. The article concludes that these texts convey the idea of the perpetuity of creation. There are also concluding suggestions regarding two major implications of the doctrine of the perpetuity of the cosmos. First, implications for the doctrine of human resurrection; and, second, implications for the life of the church in discipleship and mission.

I.   Introduction

What is the place of the created world within the eschatological purposes of God? What is the destiny of the cosmos? When it comes to answering these questions, it is striking that Christian theology has produced such divergent views:

At first sight it is astonishing that ideas about the *consummatio mundi*, the consummation of the world, should range so widely, from the total *annihilation* of the world according to orthodox Lutheranism, its total *transformation* according to patristic and Calvinist tradition, to the world's glorious *deification*, the view of Orthodox theology.[1]

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[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 267–68, emphasis original.

As Moltmann notes, it was Lutheran theology that especially embraced the idea that the world is to be annihilated.[2] However, the idea is present more broadly within the strands of Protestant theology, and specifically within Evangelicalism. This is probably through the influence of the Pietist tradition, which was a major influence in the birth of modern evangelicalism.[3] Whilst the Calvinist tradition has not been untouched by the idea, it has expounded the view that the cosmos is not to be annihilated at all; rather, it is to be renewed.[4]

In this article, I want to examine one of the hermeneutical foundations for concluding that the Creator's purpose is the renewal, rather than the annihilation, of the world. The specific testimony which we will consider is a useful window through which to enter into considering the broader hermeneutical base from which we must approach New Testament texts on the destiny of the cosmos. Once we have explored this, we will then briefly reflect on two of these New Testament texts. This limited exercise will hopefully provide some helpful reflection on the hermeneutical issues at hand.

II. Covenant and Creation in The Book of Consolation

The window through which we enter into this exploration is found in the well-known Book of Consolation in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Whatever the editorial background to the book, the canonical form of Jeremiah weaves together images of judgment and images of salvation, messages of destruction and messages of hope. The Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33) falls into the latter category.[5] The first section (30:1-31:40), mainly in the form of verse rather than prose, conveys promises of deliverance from captivity for the exiled people of God. The language is of return, of restoration, healing and rebuilding. Tears are turned to joy; there is grace,

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[2] On this, see also Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Lexington: Eerdmans, 1996), 280.

[3] The influence of Pietism on the Calvinist tradition is memorably critiqued by Herman Bavinck in his Kampen address in 1888 (Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church", *Calvin Theological Journal* 27.2 (1992): 220–51). For a brief treatment of the influence of Lutheranism and Pietism on Evangelicalism in Britain, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 38–39.

[4] Calvin writes in his commentary on John 12, "[A]lthough Christ had already begun to set up the kingdom of God, it was his death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state and the complete restoration of the world (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 5.42). Calvin's view is that God in Christ purposes to renovate the whole creation. See David W. Hall and Dr Peter A. Lillback, eds., *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2008), 461.

[5] I here follow the limits for the Book set out in J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 551.

mercy and redemption for the faithless. The rubric of this section is unstintingly covenantal:[6]

> I will restore the fortunes of *my people*, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to *the land that I gave to their fathers* (Jeremiah 30:3)
> And you shall be *my people*, and I will be *your God*." (Jeremiah 30:22)
> "At that time, declares the LORD, *I will be the God of* all the clans of Israel, and they shall be *my people*." (Jeremiah 31:1)

There are obviously deep resonances here with the Abrahamic covenant: "my people" and "your/their/our God" is repeated language in the section.[7]

In the second section (32:1-33:26) the covenantal language continues, initially with a focus on the land, but then becoming strongly Davidic in character, David being mentioned five times in chapter 33.[8] Verse 17 contains a very strong echo of 2 Samuel 7:12-16: "For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 33:17).

Of course, amongst all these covenantal resonances in the Book of Consolation, Moses remains in the shadows. There is just one positive echo of the Covenant of the Law in the Book: "the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever" (Jeremiah 33:18). Rather, it is the "new covenant" of Chapter 31, a covenant *unlike* the covenant with Moses, which instead rises to prominence:

> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:32).

This unique Old Testament reference to a new covenant has been well-discussed.[9] Here, we simply notice something important: an attendant resonance of yet another covenant. In the oath that follows the prophecy of the new covenant, we find an echo of the Noahic covenant of Genesis 9.

III. This Fixed Order: Creation and Covenant

The foretelling of the days of the New Covenant are immediately followed by a poetic passage expressing Yahweh's covenant commitment to his people:

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[6] Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[7] In the ESV, "my people" five times, "your/their/our God" eight times, translating varying Hebrew possessive constructions.

[8] David also appears briefly in the first section (30:9).

[9] Pamela Scalise surely captures the thoughts of many interpreters treading this well-worn path: "Can anything new be said about 31:31-34?" (Gerald Keown, Pamela Scalise and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC 27 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 130).

Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the LORD of hosts is his name: "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever." (Jeremiah 31:35-36)

This passage comprises two elements. First, a hymn declaring Yahweh's faithful *giving* (*nāṯan*) of the sun, moon and stars, and his sovereign control over the chaotic forces at work in the world, particularly the sea. Second, the hymn is followed by a divinely spoken oath. Two features are noteworthy: (i) the hymn and (especially) the oath express Yahweh's commitment to the cosmos, and (ii) the oath fundamentally expresses Yahweh's commitment to his people Israel.[10]

1.   *Yahweh's Commitment to Creation*

The content of the hymn is built upon the creation tradition of Genesis 1. References both to the heavenly lights (in conjunction with *nāṯan*), and to Yahweh's sovereignty over the waters, find their anchors in the creation account.[11] Yahweh is a gracious giver – his providence maintains the lights for day and for night.[12] Yet it is in the oath itself that the idea of Yahweh's commitment to creation comes to the fore. The pattern of lights for day and for night is described in 31:35 using the Hebrew *ḥuqqîm*, variously translated as "fixed order", "decrees", "ordinances", "statutes" or, well-captured by Allen, "these regular features".[13] The regular rhythms of day and night, the movements of sun, moon and stars, are statutes established by Yahweh.[14] Both hymn and oath speak to the commitment of Yahweh to his creation.

It is the permanence of these regular features that constitutes the ground for the oath regarding Yahweh's relationship with Israel. We will return to this interplay shortly. First, we can notice that Yahweh's commitment to the created world is a motif repeated in the Book of Consolation. In the last section, which as we have seen is orientated toward the Davidic covenant, we find the "fixed order" of chapter 31 cast explicitly as a covenant:

Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David

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[10] Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 136. Allen notes the common pattern of the conjunction of participial hymn, creation and oath (Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 358.). See Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 136.

[11] Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 582.

[12] Scalise notes the import of the participial form of the verb here, portraying ongoing divine maintenance (Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 136).

[13] Allen, *Jeremiah*, 358. In terms of translations of *ḥuqqîm*, ESV and NASB have: "fixed order"; NIV: "decrees"; KJV: "ordinances"; Scalise: "statutes".

[14] Literally, "if these statutes should be removed" (Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 582).

my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers (Jeremiah 33:20-21).

Here again we see Yahweh's covenant with the cosmos expressed – and again this is used to underline Yahweh's commitment to the Davidic covenant.[15] The explicit description of a covenant (*bᵉrît*) with the cosmos evokes another pentateuchal tradition, that of Noah. In the aftermath of the flood, as the soothing aroma of Noah's sacrifice rises to him, Yahweh reflects poetically:

> I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.
> While the earth remains,
> Seedtime and harvest,
> And cold and heat,
> And summer and winter,
> And day and night
> Shall not cease (Genesis 8:21-22 NASB)

This sentiment then finds concrete expression in the covenant of Genesis 9. In connecting this material to Jeremiah 33, we must note that the Noahic covenant is not merely established with Noah, but with his offspring, and "with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth" (Gen 9:9-10) in perpetuity. It is a cosmic covenant that holds true for all future generations (9:12). Its comprehensive scope is seen in its summary characterisation as a covenant between God and "the earth" (9:13), and between God and every kind of living creature on the earth (9:16). The promissory content of the covenant repeats the sentiments of 8:22 – the destruction of the earth just enacted will not be repeated: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." (Genesis 9:11)

Some interpreters have detected a provisional character to the Noahic covenant, particularly linked to the phrase "all the days of the earth" (8:22).[16] However, a conclusion that this indicates the "mortality" of the earth would need a surer evidential base. When we look elsewhere in the Old Testament we find echoes of this same tradition which express Yahweh's perpetual commitment to his world. For example, in Psalm 93 we find:

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[15] We can note in passing that there is a powerful weight of sarcasm in this text, in the service of underlining Yahweh's maintenance of his covenants with covenant-breakers. Allen writes, "The arcing between cosmic time on the one hand and crown and cult on the other in terms of covenant supplies an argument for the permanence of the latter two. The divine covenant with time is one that Israel cannot break!" (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 378).

[16] For example, Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 191.

The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. (Psalm 93:1)

The tradition also appears in similar form in Psalm 96:10 (and in the parallel in 1 Chronicles 16:30). Certainly, there *are* a small number of texts in the prophets and the writings that seem to speak of the transient nature of the earth. Psalm 102:25-26 stands out:

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away (Psalm 102:25-26).

It might seem difficult to reconcile this to the theology represented by The Book of Consolation. If the statement in this psalm does refer to the end of the cosmos it would, as John Goldingay notes, be absolutely unique in the Old Testament. Therefore, the verbs here are best read as hypothetical, as the *yiqtol* form allows: "They may perish, but you would stand. All of them could wear out like clothes; like a garment you could make them pass on."[17]

The text then becomes not only an affirmation of the eternity of Yahweh, but also an affirmation of his providence towards the work of his hands. Other Old Testament texts might also, at first glance, seem to describe cosmic destruction. Jeremiah 4 provides one of the clearest examples:

I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger (Jeremiah 4:23-26).

Does this text speak of cosmic annihilation? It is a long reach to such a conclusion. Much closer to hand is the explanation that God's judgment, whether upon Israel or upon the nations, is often depicted in cosmic terms as a kind of de-creation, a collapsing of the regular features of God's providential commitment to his world.[18] This feature of prophetic texts seems to be the root of some of the imagery in the apocalyptic tradition.

In dealing with texts like this, we need to remain cognisant of the wider Old Testament theology of God's commitment to his creation and of the hermeneutical foundation which this provides. In judgment oracles, the context often indicates that hyperbolic language of cosmic de-creation is being employed in the service of something more limited than the

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[17] John Goldingay, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:160.
[18] Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 229–30.

annihilation of the entire cosmos. In fact, in the particular instance above, the text makes this clear: "The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end" (Jeremiah 4:27).

It is the question of a "full end" that is the cogent question for Christian interpretation of these texts, and for a Christian eschatology of creation. Walter Brueggemann, in an important section of his *Old Testament Theology*, reminds us that for all of the texts delineating Yahweh's judgment in terms of the destabilising and nullification of creation, there are qualifications rooted in Yahweh's commitment to his world, including in the flood narrative, or here in Jeremiah 4.[19] Yahweh judges a world to which he is committed, and his judgment serves his purposes for salvation. This perspective helps us to understand why in Psalm 96 (which, as we have noted, speaks clearly of this commitment) the sky, the earth, the sea and all its creatures, the fields and all life in them, and the trees of the forest all rejoice at the prospect of the Lord's coming in judgment (Psalm 96:11-13).

2.   Yahweh's Commitment to Humanity

To return to the oaths of the Book of Consolation, these important texts add a certain hermeneutical weight to the issues discussed above. What is striking about the oaths is the explicit intertwining of Yahweh's commitment to the cosmos, and his commitment to Israel and the Davidic Kingdom. As Allen writes concerning the new covenant oath: "In both parts of the oracle Yahweh's work in the world of nature is used to explore the covenant relationship and to guarantee its validity".[20]

If we are to argue that Yahweh's commitment to the cosmos is limited, bounded by time, temporary, then these oaths push us to the same conclusion in regard to Yahweh's salvific commitment to his people. Put like that, the stakes are particularly high. Some traditions might take a parochial view of Yahweh's commitment to Israel (31:36), that it is a limited commitment to a political state of affairs.[21] However, against this possibility (especially within the Reformed tradition) is the whole new covenant context of this oath and its reception in the New Testament (whether in the Upper Room, or in the book of Hebrews). The writer to the Hebrews

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[19] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 543–49.

[20] Allen, *Jeremiah*, 358.

[21] As Mackay notes, the use of the Hebrew *gôy*, rather than *'am*, might suggest a political entity and therefore allow an interpretation relating to a Jewish state. However, as he rightly concludes, this would be an illegitimate limitation on the oath (John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah Volume 2 (Chapters 21-52)* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 240). The use of *gôy* carries the sense of the population of a land – hence its usual translation as "nation" rather than "people", and is appropriately fulfilled, in terms of biblical theology, in the NT vision of resurrection life in the eternal kingdom of God on earth.

certainly finds no difficulty in the language of Israel and Judah in Jeremiah 31, and Paul's redemptive-historical approach to the controversy in Galatia (and his argument in Romans 11) demonstrates the continuity between Israel and the church in his thought. The fulfilment of Jeremiah's new covenant in Jesus Christ for both Jew and Gentile precisely demonstrates God's perpetual, eternal salvific commitment to his people.

So, to re-emphasise and reflect the implications of these oaths: if Yahweh's providential commitment to his world is perpetual, so is his salvific commitment to his people, and *vice versa*. Thompson rightly notes that the oath of 31:35-36 is cast as an *argumentum ad absurdum*: God's commitment to creation will not cease, and hence neither will his commitment to his people. [22] Interpreters tend to emphasise the covenant bond between Yahweh and his people.[23] Allen summarises:

> Yahweh's control of sky and ocean in the production of light for the world and of storms at sea… exhibits a divine constancy that may logically be predicated of the same God's covenant relationship with Israel.[24]

Whilst this is undoubtedly where the balance of emphasis ought to lie, there is something more; the permanence of God's commitment to his creation ought also to be emphasised here. The covenant commitments of Yahweh to both humanity (through his election of Israel) *and* creation are intertwined, implying that the destinies of humanity and creation are also intertwined.[25]

As we have seen, this intertwining is a feature of the Noahic covenant, made with humanity, with every living creature and with the earth. The theological root of this phenomenon of intertwined commitments and destinies is buried deep in Genesis 1 and 2, where humanity's identity is firmly intertwined with the created world. Adam is made from the "*ădāmāh*, from the same stuff as the earth (Gen 2:7). Human beings are created as the image of God, a role that places them in intimate relationship with the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, herding animals and creeping things, and the

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[22] Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 582. Brueggemann writes: "God's guarantee of Israel 'all the days' is as assured as the fixed order of creation, which is utterly assured", (Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 127).

[23] For example, Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 136: "[T]hese two verses… give assurance of the permanence of Israel's future relationship with the Lord… [J]ust as day and night have continued after the flood because of God's promise." There is no reference to the permanence of God's commitment to the creation. Other commentators place the emphasis similarly, which certainly reflects the centre of gravity of the passage, but neglects an important emphasis.

[24] Allen, *Jeremiah*, 358.

[25] In this way these verses move beyond Jeremiah 32:17, where it is the divine power exercised in creation that is the basis for Jeremiah's faith in God's total sovereignty ("nothing is too difficult for you!").

earth (Gen 1:26-28). As the derived tradition of Psalm 8 states explicitly, it is this relationship that constitutes the glory of human beings, their designated role within God's world (Ps 8:5-8). This intertwining surfaces elsewhere, for example, in Haggai's vision of covenant renewal both for people and for the creation (Hosea 2:18-23), and in the testimony of Psalm 115:16. So, it ought not to surprise us that in Jeremiah 31:35-36 Yahweh's commitment to humanity is intertwined with his commitment to the creation. It also ought not to surprise us that we encounter this same feature in the eschatology of the New Testament.

IV. The Perpetuity of the Cosmos in the New Testament

Where do these intertwined commitments of God to human beings and to the cosmos surface in the New Testament? Perhaps in more places than might be imagined, but it is not within the scope of this exercise to look at all of the relevant passages.[26]

We could begin by considering the most well-known verse in the New Testament: John 3:16. Here in this verse we find the same phenomenon seen in the Book of Consolation – God's eternal promises both to his world and to humanity. What is the world that God loves? Is it merely the "world of men", the human world, as Bultmann concluded?[27] The Greek κόσμος can sometimes carry this nuance. Interpreters have repeatedly parsed the usage of κόσμος in the Johannine literature: positive, negative and neutral; creation, human world and human world in darkness.[28] However, the unifying idea is that it is the earth, God's earth, and not heaven, which is the scene of human life in rebellion, and of God's redemption. Some have argued that there is a tension between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel. Rather, the force of the opening stanzas of the gospel must be felt throughout: the God who is Redeemer is the God who is Creator. In 1:10, the κόσμος is made through the Word (a restatement of 1:3 where "all things" came into being through him). The κόσμος here is the created world – the earth and everything in it. The Word became flesh, and came to the world created through him, but it (in a personification of the world that captures the fundamental importance here of its human inhabitants) did not know him. John 3:16 is then only properly

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[26] For an exploration of the New Testament's eschatology of creation, see J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

[27] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 54.

[28] See the discussions in Stephen C. Barton, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism", in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 10–12; John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 206–8; C. Marvin Pate, *The Writings of John: A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 49; Dwight Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80–85.

comprehensible if it is the love of God for the world that he has made that leads to the giving of the Son: "God's love for the world... makes sense against the backdrop of the world belonging to God as God's creation."[29] God's purpose is *not* to condemn the κόσμος – he is eternally committed to it – but to save it (3:17): "[I]n the Fourth Gospel the dualism of God and world is not absolute: the world was not only created by God, but is also the object of his love and salvation."[30] God as Redeemer is fundamentally the redeemer of creation.

Alongside this commitment to the cosmos in 3:16 we have the clear statement of God's commitment to humanity in Jesus Christ. *Whoever* believes in him will live eternally despite the judgment of God on a humanity which has embraced the darkness. What we find here in John 3:16, then, is the intertwining of the eternal destinies of both humanity and the creation.[31]

This link is most clearly seen in Romans 8. Paul's choice of metaphor in 8:21 is revealing: the whole of creation is in slavery.[32] In evocative language, Paul personifies every part of the cosmos as groaning together (συστενάζω), awaiting its freedom from slavery.[33] It is noteworthy that Paul casts the focus of creation's yearning as humanity itself. The eager longing (ἀποκαραδοκία) is for the revealing of the sons of God. This revelation is not so much an uncovering of identity (the creation yearning to know who amongst the human race are genuinely God's people) but rather an uncovering of the final character of humanity in the eschatological age (the creation yearning to experience its inhabiting by human beings as God's fully-transformed children).[34] As Paul's thought here is unpacked, the intertwining of God's purposes for humanity and cosmos is revealed: the freedom to be experienced by the creation is an incorporation into the freedom of human beings as God's children.[35] Like an oppressed populace breathing a sigh of relief at the transition from tyranny to liberty, the created world will be released into the freedom that comes from the final transformation of justified men and women. The final eschatological character of humanity (which Paul here refers to as glory, in an echo of Psalm 8:5) does not merely represent freedom for humanity itself – freedom from law, sin and death.

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[29] See Miroslav Volf, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism", in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 23–24. The quote is from p.24. *Contra,* e.g. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 207.

[30] Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 81.

[31] For a similar Johannine conjunction, see Rev 5:10.

[32] This is prominent in Hoekema's argument against the annihilation of the cosmos (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 280). Of course, the orbit of κτίσις has long been argued, but most commentators agree that the non-human creation is in view. See Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 513–14.

[33] Cf. Ps 65:12-13; Isa 24:4; Jer 4:28; 12:4.

[34] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC 38A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 470.

[35] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 258.

The realisation of this freedom brings a consequential freedom for creation, one for which it yearns. Here Paul's thought draws close to that of the psalmist in Psalm 96.

This intertwining of God's purposes for humanity and the cosmos is also seen in Paul's language of redemption, which appears explicitly in 8:23, where he refers to the resurrection of the dead using the phrase "the redemption of our bodies" ($τὴν\ ἀπολύτρωσιν\ τοῦ\ σώματος\ ἡμῶν$).[36] The New Testament language of redemption finds its background in manumission, the setting free of a slave by means of the payment of a ransom; a slave is restored to freedom through this redemption. This is the language employed for the restoration of the human body. It is also explicitly the language employed for the restoration of creation: it will be set free from its slavery. So, both humanity and the cosmos receive redemption: "creation is to be redeemed, not redeemed from… [R]esurrection life is to be part of a complete creation."[37] Both of them are set free. Their futures are intertwined in the purposes of God in Jesus Christ. Of course, human beings are very much a part of the cosmos, and the redemption of the human body is merely one part, but a uniquely important part, of the redemption of the physical world.

So, we see in Romans 8 the linking of the destinies of humanity and the world. Again, this ought not to surprise us, given the theology of Genesis 1 and 2, which is so important for Paul, with its resounding portrait of humanity as the image of God, and of the first humans with the earth as their home and task: "In his vision of the restored cosmos, in conjunction with a restored, glorified humanity, Paul has painted an eschatological portrait that ties together profoundly Jewish hopes around the resurrected, crucified one."[38] This is why these New Testament passages reflect the outlook of the oaths of the Book of Consolation.

V. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the intertwining of humanity and the creation in God's salvific purposes, as seen in The Book of Consolation, is foundational in Old Testament theology. The outlook of the New Testament follows suit, not at all teaching the annihilation of the cosmos. If the hermeneutical trajectory of the Old Testament is followed, passages such as 2 Peter 3:3-13, which are

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[36] The recurrent adoption/sonship language links the yearning of creation to the resurrection of the body: the creation yearns for the revealing of the sons of God (8:19); the resurrection is cast as the realisation of the adoption as sons (8:23). This realisation can be seen to parallel "the glory of the children of God" (8:21).

[37] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 471.

[38] J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 139.

often seen as describing the annihilation of the cosmos, are resolved much more satisfactorily in accordance with the prophetic vision of the Old Testament.[39] This tradition of interpretation has a long history. To take one example, it is strongly the view of Irenaeus, who writes:

It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous...[40]

And,

For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated... but "the fashion of the world passeth away"; that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them.[41]

The implications of the biblical vision of the redemption of the cosmos, and the intertwining of the eternal destinies of humanity and the earth, are significant. First, it precipitates an attendant recovery of the doctrine of resurrection. It is unfortunate that Christian theology has so often lost sight of the importance of this. In recent years, in no small part due to the work of N. T. Wright, it has experienced something of a recovery. However, there are still many churches where, functionally if not confessionally, resurrection is an unfamiliar doctrine and the gospel that is preached is essentially one of a heavenly home for God's people. There are no biblical grounds for conceiving of our eternal home as such, but a solid theological basis for concluding that it is on earth – a state realised eschatologically through resurrection from the dead.

Second, there are implications for the life of the Church in discipleship and mission. When eternal life is envisaged as something separate from the earth, when Christians believe that the goal of salvation is to live in another, unearthly realm, then most of life in the present age will seem to be utterly irrelevant. However, where Christians believe that, according to God's creative purpose, being truly human is fundamentally to do with functioning as his image in his world, then every aspect of life lived in this age is made meaningful. Whether we live on earth in this age, or in the age to come – whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do – we live life on earth to the glory of God. There is a glorious and liberating motivation in seeking, however imperfectly, to live the life of the eternal Kingdom on earth in the here-and-now. Suddenly, all of life is relevant to salvation, and to glorifying God, and this outlook imbues a powerful dynamic to discipleship.

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[39] Again, since we cannot examine further NT texts here, I would point readers to Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.

[40] *Against Heresies*, 5.32.

[41] *Against Heresies*, 5.36.

There are implications, too, for the Church's mission in the world. Proclaiming a gospel of disembodied, ethereal salvation rather than one of the redemption of creation will not yield the fruit it ought to. George Caird pointed out almost fifty years ago that an otherworldly gospel does not speak to the genuine human experiences of unbelievers:

Too often evangelical Christianity has treated the souls of men as brands plucked from the burning and the world in general as a grim vale of soul-making. It has been content to see the splendour of the created universe... as nothing more than the expendable backdrop for the drama of redemption. One of the reasons why men of our generation have turned against conventional Christianity is that they think it involves writing off the solid joys of this present life for the doubtful acquisition of some less substantial treasure... the whole point of the resurrection of the body is that the life of the world to come is to be lived on a renewed earth... Everything of real worth in the old heaven and earth... will find a place in the eternal order.[42]

The answer to Caird's cogent insight is present within the Calvinist tradition, and to embrace it is to recover the grand cosmic vision, not only of the scriptures, but also of Calvin. Eduard Thurneyson's evocative description goes some way towards grasping this redemptive vision:

The world into which we shall enter in the Parousia of Jesus Christ is therefore not another world; it is this world, this heaven, this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people, that will be the scene of redemption. At present they are battlefields, full of the strife and sorrow of the not yet accomplished consummation; then they will be fields of victory, fields of harvest where out of seed that was sown with tears the everlasting sheaves will be reaped and brought home.[43]

The Lord God, in and through Jesus Christ, remains committed to his covenant people, and he remains committed to his cosmos, our home – to day and night, to times and seasons. The oath of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy points us not only to our redemption, but to that of the cosmos in the Lord's glorious and expansive salvation. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, World Without End. Amen.

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[42] George Caird, "The Christological Basis of Christian Hope", in Caird et al., *The Christian Hope* (London: SPCK, 1970), 22-24.

[43] Eduard Thurneysen, "Christus und seine Zukunft", in G. Merz and C. Kaiser, eds., *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Munich, 1931), 209. Translation in J. A. Shep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 218-9, cited in Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 281.

CONTEXT IS KEY: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN BIBLICAL STUDIES, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND MISSIOLOGY

Heather J Major[*]

"Context" is one of the keys to understanding meaning in all aspects of life. As human beings we live in particular times and places, adapting to our situations and circumstances on a daily basis. Context is also important in understanding and communicating our faith as Christians. This article draws threads of conversation together from biblical studies, ethnography, practical theology and missiology to illustrate the importance of context in ministry and mission. It is shaped by my personal journey as a theologian, academic and Christian, incorporating personal reflections with summaries of significant developments in contextual theology. By sharing some of my story, highlighting the importance of context across theological disciplines and life experiences, I argue that it is important to be intentionally contextual in thinking about theology and engaging in ministry and mission. This includes reflecting on the ways we perceive and interpret experiences and biblical texts. However, it goes beyond reflection and into action, inviting participation from local people. This is particularly important in local church ministry and mission. The opportunities for contextual theology are as diverse and exciting as the situations and circumstances of human life. This is one of many conversations about the possibilities.

"Context, context, context!" This is the resounding call echoing through my academic education, life experience and personal reflection, from my early theological training as a child of the manse to my university studies in general sciences, history, theology, biblical studies and, most recently, practical theology and mission. At each step along the way I encountered divisions between specialisations and studied a range of methods and approaches. There was little scope for inter-disciplinary dialogue alongside completing assessments, which were designed around particular expect-ations for evaluation. In biological sciences I was encouraged to pursue meticulous detail in carrying out dissections and maintain objectivity in describing findings that were consistent with the dominant narrative of evolutionary theory without referencing "religious mythology". In intro-

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ductory anthropology and sociology modules I was encouraged to consider gender, age and culture in shaping human experience. In history my attention was directed towards dates and events, facts recorded by historians and archaeologists, often with very little consideration of the lived experience of the people involved or the perspective and bias of the recorder, although one of my professors actively reminded his students of the need to recognise authorial bias.

Even in the broad field of theology there are different perspectives and methods. In studying for a theology degree one can take modules in biblical languages, biblical studies, church history, church law, dogmatics, ecclesiology, hermeneutics, homiletics, liturgy, missiology, patristics, Pauline theology, religious ethics, systematic theology and youth work, to name a few. In biblical studies alone, there are a range of approaches from historical-critical interpretation and redaction criticism, to reception history and ideological criticisms such as feminist or ecological readings. As I progressed through my academic theological journey I learned the skills and applied the methods, striving to maintain the status quo and staying within disciplinary boundaries, but through it all I heard the steady drumbeat of "context, context, context".

In 2016 I began a PhD in practical theology with a specific focus on Rural Parish Churches in Scotland, incorporating social science methodology with theological reflection and exploring the importance of studying context on practical and academic levels. This article is part of the process and is, by its very nature, representative of a work in progress. It will focus on practical Christian life and ministry, drawing on different uses of "context" in three overlapping fields of theology – biblical studies, practical theology and missiology – and integrating tools from social sciences. In this article I will incorporate examples from my life and academic experiences as a Christian, theology student and researcher by way of encouraging others to actively engage with the discussion of context in relation to ministry and mission. If all theology is contextual,[1] then we should be intentional about being contextual.

1. Putting Context in Context

While the term "context" has become widely used in common parlance, it can be helpful to stop and think about its origins and definition. This is particularly important for a conversation about being intentionally contextual. In the oldest reference to "context" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*circa* 1475), it is defined as the construction or weaving together

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[1] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

of a text, which has come to mean the connected structure or coherence within a text or discourse that shapes the meaning of individual parts.[2] The *Oxford Living Dictionary* expands this definition to include circumstances and settings for events and ideas, placing the term and associated concept within the realm of lived experience where what happens before, during and after have an impact on meaning.[3] The adjective "contextual" and verb "context-ualise" are relatively modern, appearing in 1834 and 1934 respectively, as "context" becomes an integral part of interpreting meaning.

The role and importance of context in interpretation has significant implications in theology, arts and social sciences. As the definition of "context" is expanded from written texts to include lived human experience, it challenges preconceptions and inherited traditions of interpretation and translation. All aspects of life and forms of communication can be scrutinised through the lens of context, at the same time as the lens itself is being examined. Examining "context" becomes a search for meaning in specific times, places and situations, while contextualisation involves communicating thoughts or ideas in ways which can be understood in a specific time, place or situation.

Those who are familiar with the language of hermeneutics will hear echoes of Schleiermacher in the interaction between understanding and being understood. Examining specific contexts can provide insight into meaning that enable general understanding, while general knowledge may provide insight into specific contexts. Meaning can be translated between times, situations, places, people, etc. provided that careful consideration is given to both the original context *and* the new context. One interprets the other, and vice versa in an ongoing hermeneutic loop or spiral.

I.   *Context in Biblical Studies*

My academic theological training prior to beginning my PhD was heavily weighted towards Biblical Studies, primarily Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, and I spent much of my time working on Hebrew and Greek. I was constantly confronted by the difficulties of translation, not only of words and phrases but also idiomatic constructs. I was challenged to be exegetical rather than eisegetical, being careful to avoid reading my ideas and preconceptions into the text. At the same time, I had a responsibility to translate sentences and verses into clear, comprehensible English, which involved interpretation.

I was required to consider the importance of my hermeneutic lens and frame of reference. What would I choose to prioritise in translation and exegesis? Would it be the author's intention, so far as it could be implied

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[2] OED "context" http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40207.
[3] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/context.

from the immediate and related textual, cultural and historical evidence? Would it be the text, focusing on genre, style, specific words and phrases and finding the nearest literal equivalent that made sense of the sentence, paragraph, chapter and book? Or would it be the reader and audience's cultural context, translating the *meaning* of idiomatic phrases and cultural illustrations?

In Biblical Studies arguably the two most important areas to consider when faced with the question "what is the context?" are historical/cultural and literary or textual context. Both provide important information and have their own challenges. Textual context is relatively simple to identify in a complete text such as *BHS*[4] or *NA28*[5] where there is a clear relationship between words, paragraphs and chapters, but becomes more complicated with fragmentary texts. Even in "complete" texts it is necessary to evaluate the presuppositions of traditional interpretation and examine textual variants. Historical/cultural context requires more investigation, relying on extra-biblical sources and historians, such as Josephus, and archaeological evidence. There may also be indicators within the text itself which provide a framework for such investigation.

While a biblical scholar may be primarily focused on the text, he or she must also be aware of the inherited tradition of interpretation. During my Honours degree I wrote a paper on Job 42:1-6. In verse 6 there are two verbs that appear together without an object, traditionally translated as "despise" and "repent". There is no object in Hebrew, but most English translations add one, either "myself" or "my words", offering an interpretation of the verse that implies Job's repentance for having spoken rashly. While this may be the accepted and orthodox interpretation of the verse, the two verbs in conjunction with each other can also be translated and interpreted idiomatically as "take comfort" with no sense of repentance. This difference drastically changes the theological interpretation of the verse and Job's attitude before God. I understood the argument for the more difficult and ambiguous translation, and noted it in my paper, but I opted for maintaining the status quo in my translation because it was uncomfortable to consider the implications of deviating from interpretive tradition. Although this is an imperfect illustration, it does highlight the influence of cultural and religious context in biblical translation and interpretation.

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[4] A. Alt et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia =: Torah, nevi'im u-ketuvim*, Ed. funditus renovata, ed. 5. emendata, Studienausg (Stuttgart: Dt. Bibelges, 1997).

[5] Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th revised edition, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

II.   Context and the Prodigal Son

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the importance of interpretive context is by using a familiar and deceptively simple story known to many as the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). To start, let us consider the text. The parable is the third story in a series about "lost" things. All three are a direct response to the Pharisees' complaint about Jesus eating with sinners (Luke 15:2). The heading which appears in most English translations is not present in Greek and the story very simply introduced by the phrase "and he [Jesus] said" as a continuation from the previous story about the widow's coin (Luke 15:8-10). The narrative is fairly straightforward and significantly more developed than the previous two parables but is open to a variety of interpretations.

The interpreter or reader may choose to focus on any one of the characters or events in the story. For example, the younger son and the father. I grew up hearing the story of the "prodigal" in Sunday school. It is about a son who demands his inheritance from his father, makes really bad life choices with his money, realises his mistake when his life goes horribly wrong, feels guilty about it and returns to his father to beg his forgiveness, which is freely granted. His father throws a party to welcome him back home and his older brother gets upset about it. A straightforward story of sin, repentance and forgiveness.

Years later I had a missionary housemate who shared her perspective on the story based on the broad range of interpretations she heard in different countries throughout the world. The most striking was her story of cultures which prize family honour and respect towards elders. They were horrified at the shameful action of the younger son in demanding his inheritance. In shaming his father so badly he deserved to be disowned and sent away with nothing, and they were shocked by the father's behaviour, first in granting the son's demand and then in running to greet that same son and honouring him by bringing him back into the home to celebrate his return. They felt that the elder son was justified in his anger at his father's expectation that he would welcome back his "brother" in spite of the shame brought on the family by his actions, but were appalled at the shameful way in which this son spoke to his father, demonstrating his lack of respect and resentment, in contrast to the younger son's humility.

My interpretive lens was clouded by my familiarity with the culture of Western Canada, leading me to see the prodigal son as an impatient and impetuous young man who failed to manage his money well, not a young man who was shamefully rebellious, casting aside family ties and demanding his half of the estate as though his father were dead. I assumed the story was meant to be about sinners and their relationship with God and did not really spend much time considering the elder brother, who was just a side

character. My cultural bias towards independence, expressed in encouraging young people to leave home and pursue their own adventures and ambitions blinded me to the larger societal implications of the story. Where I saw individual sin, guilt and forgiveness as the dominant emphasis, my housemate's friends and fellow missionaries interpreted the story through a lens of communal and family shame and honour.

III. Reflection and Reflexivity as Tools

As mentioned above, being intentionally contextual requires reflection and reflexivity. By this I mean two different, but related, acts.[6] Reflection can be summarised as examining a situation or experience in detail, considering the various people and actions involved and the minutiae of what happened in order to better understand it. As a simple example, writing the previous paragraphs required me to reflect on my conversation with my former housemate, reminding myself of the words, expressions and phrases she used in describing her experiences. Reflexivity, on the other hand, challenges the practitioner, in this case me, to articulate and evaluate my biases, preconceptions, attitudes and resulting actions with the express purpose of identifying my limits and transforming my behaviour. In this case, opening my eyes to the limitations of my Western Canadian heritage and encouraging me to question my assumptions about the parable, which, in turn, challenged my approach to reading the Bible.[7]

Although there is a strong tradition of both reflection and reflexivity within theology, my current field of research in rural parish churches incorporates contributions from social sciences and qualitative research where reflective practice is of paramount importance. In qualitative based research, such as ethnography or phenomenology, the researcher is required to examine all aspects of a cultural group and/or experience, providing what Clifford Geertz typified as a "thick description" that can be analysed and

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[6] What follows is a simplistic summary of a complex field that lies beyond the scope of this paper. For more developed discussion of these terms and accompanying practices, there are many options, such as Gillie Bolton, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*, 5th edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018); Kim Etherington, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research* (London; Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004); Elaine L. Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflections: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

[7] There is a move towards confronting Western bias in biblical interpretation with the publication of books such as Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: Grand Rapids, Mich: WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), and E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012).

interpreted.[8] Every little detail should be recorded as a contributing factor which conveys meaning of some form. This creates a "context" based in lived human experience and, in turn, a lens for interpreting history and culture. For example, the following extract from my research journal after a Remembrance service:

> I met ----- after the service. ----- is a church member who attends for Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas and Easter and was surprised to see me, a young person, in the service. ----- introduced me as "a student who is doing some survey work on the rural churches in the area", which is not quite accurate. I explained that it was a bit more complicated than that as I was specifically looking at two case study churches: ----- and -----. -----'s reaction when I named ------ started with a tiny pause, a quirk of the eyebrow, a short "Oh?" and repetition of the name of the village with a wry glance before a second pause and a "Well...". I responded in kind with a raised eyebrow, a slight backward movement of my head, lowering my chin and turning my head to the side saying, "Yes... why?", while I thought, "Ah, tread carefully here, there is something ---- knows about the village." ----, standing on my other side, looked at ---- and said, "Aren't you a ---- [person]?" ----- looked affronted saying, "No! Our farm was nearer -----, but I *knew* them. Good luck to you!"

Geertz' focus on description and interpretation is a foundational element of modern ethnography and phenomenology.[9] In both disciplines there is a common element of writing that moves beyond superficial reporting of "he said..., she said..., they did..." into interpretation. The witness (researcher) is responsible for asking questions that invite reflection and is, in turn, required to reflect on their own assumptions. The external experience and context are important, but the process of examining these elements leads the researcher and participants to consider their interpretation of the situation. It becomes a question of hermeneutics and a call to attentiveness and intentionality. This call echoes through contextual theology, where culture, experience, tradition and scripture overlap with each other.

On the face of it, the description above appears to have little significance, as the average reader does not possess the necessary contextual knowledge to interpret the clues. It is also a truncated excerpt from a longer conversation and journal entry. Alongside other journal entries and accounts of conversations or encounters the statements themselves become more significant. In this case it was not the first time I had experienced such a response to naming this village. As I continued to investigate I discovered a regional prejudice about the village and the people who lived in it. My reflections about it reminded me of Nathanael's question in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" I began to question the external and

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[8] Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture", *Interpretation of Cultures,* 3-30.

[9] Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*, Developing Qualitative Inquiry, volume 13 (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2014).

internal narratives and associated influence on a sense of value and worth that might result in a mindset of decline and self-deprecation. As I looked at the church in ----- I wondered whether the pattern of decline was more complicated than simple "hot" (spiritual growth or revival) or "cold" (socio-economic or societal trends) explanations. If so, how could it be uncovered, articulated and addressed in ways that were sensitive, meaningful and contextually appropriate?

IV. An Unexamined Life?

In the previous sections I have attempted to demonstrate the importance of context and perspective in interpreting meaning. By sharing examples from my own life and experience I have drawn attention to the need to be reflective and reflexive. Human life is complicated and messy as people constantly adapt to changing relationships, circumstances and situations, but we rarely stop long enough to examine *why* and *how* we behave in certain ways. Socrates is credited with saying, "an unexamined life is not worth living", which has led to numerous adaptations of the sentiment for different groups and situations – contextualisation in action – among which is the phrase "an unexamined faith is not worth having/believing". One might also ask whether an unexamined faith is worth sharing with others.

V. Taking Context Seriously and Changing Perceptions

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am working on a PhD in practical theology. I am currently engaged in immersive autoethnographic fieldwork in the Scottish Borders, exploring the challenges and opportunities facing two case study churches in rural areas. I was recruited as a PhD researcher to move into the area and immerse myself in the local context, participating in the life and activities of the churches and surrounding communities. I was encouraged to engage relationally with local people, asking questions and reflecting on what I saw and experienced. The primary goal of the studentship as defined by the presbytery was encouraging and facilitating the growth and development of initiatives that would be appropriate for each church. As I prepared for the two and a half years of fieldwork I read widely on accepted research methodologies and found myself wrestling with the need to balance academic reading and writing with daily lived experience and reflection.

I experienced a form of culture shock when I started my fieldwork, which was quickly complicated by the knowledge that I had a very different set of expectations and biases which had been shaped by my life experience and education. I could no longer assume that my understanding of theological

terms or concepts, such as "church," would necessarily be the same as those I was interacting with in the local area. I was encouraged by examples of others who had similar experiences, such as Leonora Tubbs Tisdale who writes about the "culture shock of preaching" in a rural parish and the resulting shift in her approach as she began developing a local theology around "exegeting" the congregation.[10] As she engaged in parish visiting she began asking questions and drawing on qualitative social science methodologies to begin shaping a concept of her parish. She was seeking a way forward in ministry that was biblically, doctrinally and theologically sound *and* contextually relevant. Through the process she learned that "wise pastors do not craft local theology in isolation, but do so in conversation with the wisdom of the church through the ages."[11]

I began engaging with scholars who take local and contextual theology seriously, such as Stephen Bevans, Helen Cameron, Laurie Green, Leanora Tubbs Tisdale, Frances Ward, Pete Ward, Samuel Wells and others.[12] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat's *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* proved to be an invaluable guide in navigating the tension between social scientific methodology and theological sensitivity, resisting the temptation to secularise my research and forget about God in attempting to answer a research question and construct a thesis.[13] Instead of narrowing my focus into a specific method or interpretive paradigm, I found that the dialogue between my lived experience and my academic reading broadened my perspective and began to challenge my preconceptions. As my context

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[10] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[11] Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 97.

[12] This is a small selection of the books and articles which I found useful. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002); Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology*, Completely revised and updated ed (London ; New York: Mowbray, 2009); James F. Hopewell and Barbara G. Wheeler, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (SCM, 1988); Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012); John Reader, *Local Theology* (London: SPCK, 1994); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 10th ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2002); Frances Ward, "The Messiness of Studying Congregations Using Ethnographic Methods", in *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context*, ed. Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 125–37; Peter Ward, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography with Humility", *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*, 2016, 1–17; Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Ministry: Being with the Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2017); Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Mission: Being with the World* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2018).

[13] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006).

changed, I found that my concept of what constitutes "theology" began to change as I examined it more closely and explored the possibilities.[14]

VI.   Bevans and the Contextual Imperative

Professor Stephen Bevans is among the foremost proponents of contextual theology, arguing that there is no such thing as an "objective" theology, and therefore all theology is contextual.[15] Bevans is thoroughly committed to the importance of understanding and communicating Christian faith in relation to specific contexts as a "theological imperative". He bases his claim on a selection of external and internal factors. In his opinion the external elements of history, geography, culture, socio-political change and intellectual development serve to highlight the importance of the internal factors in Christian faith which support the necessity of being intentionally contextual in approaching theology. Chief among these is the incarnation of Christ and the scandal of particularity, closely followed by God's ongoing presence and revelation in the daily life of men and women, the relational nature of Christian faith and, finally, the Trinity as a "dynamic, relational community of persons, whose very nature it is to be present and active in the world".[16]

Bevans' offers six models of contextual theology – translation, anthropo-logical, praxis, synthetic, transcendental and countercultural. The Translational model is possibly the most familiar in practice, routinely demonstrated in sermons which start with Christian scripture and tradition, seeking to "translate" the core tenets of Christian faith and identity into any given culture or context. The practitioner, who may be anyone confident in their faith, takes the gospel and inserts it in the language and customs of the local context, like Paul preaching about the unknown god in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). In contrast, the Anthropological model starts with cultural or sociological study and seeks to find God's revelation in human experience and specific contextual situations. Scripture and tradition are viewed through the lens of present experience and recognised as culturally informed by their local contexts. This model seeks to articulate a specific, local and personal belief indigenous to the cultural context rather than imposing an external system of belief.

The Praxis model is an active model, whereby participants are encouraged to take Christian action in culturally and contextually appropriate ways. Both reflection and action are encouraged, analysing the

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[14] One particularly challenging book is the collection of essays and responses found in *The End of Theology*. Jason S. Sexton and Paul Weston, eds., *The End of Theology: Shaping Theology for the Sake of Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016).

[15] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

[16] *Ibid.,* 15.

local context and engaging with the Bible and Christian tradition. God is understood to be at work in history and in partnership with those who act in accordance with God's will and purpose. The Synthetic, or dialogical, model brings together elements of the other models in Bevans' book, seeking to balance the value of scripture and tradition with the importance of context and cultural uniqueness. This model involves humility and openness to learn from others and explore new things in creative ways. Cultural context and influence can be good, bad or neutral in relation to exploring and articulating Christian faith.

The Transcendental model is a departure from the rest of the models in Bevans' book, focusing on the experience of the "authentic subject" who recognises the overarching contextual nature of all theology, seeking deeper understanding as a theologian rather than a formalised articulation or communication of theology. Bevans suggests that this model might be best explored creatively by artists as a means of inspiring others to engage in similar theological reflection.

Finally, the Countercultural model which takes all the aspects of context seriously and examines them closely through the lens of scripture and Christian tradition. The emphasis of this model is on encounter and engagement between cultural context and the Christian community. This model follows a progression from accepting scripture and tradition as the hermeneutic lens for viewing present experience to interpreting and challenging experience, culture, society and socio-political change. This model has strong roots in prophetic tradition.

As I read through *Models of Contextual Theology* I found many elements that could be applied practically in a situation of ministry or mission. Although I am wary of neat and tidy boxes or models when it comes to working with people, I find that Bevans' models are useful tools as I examine the practicalities of my research and life. As Bevans argues in his opening chapters, Christianity is inherently contextual. The same could be said of human life. Everything I do is shaped by my context in one way or another, but I can be intentional about examining my presuppositions and biases, making choices about the value I place on different aspects.

While these models are most commonly discussed in relation to the study of practical theology, missiology or World Christianity, some of the components and themes Bevans incorporates in each model are also found in approaches to biblical studies and social sciences. Each of Bevans' models has its strengths and weaknesses, which lie far beyond the scope of this article, and the models themselves should be examined and adapted for specific circumstances and contexts. Bevans himself acknowledges this and offers his suggestions concerning situations in which each approach might

be appropriate.[17] For example, he advocates the countercultural model of contextual theology, as modelled by Lesslie Newbigin, for Western countries such as the United Kingdom because of its critical approach to cultural context and its rootedness in Scripture and tradition. While I would agree on some levels, I am wary of the potential of dismissing the importance of context and experience. It would be easy to become anticultural and isolationist rather than maintaining a position of humility in missional engagement with those in our churches and communities.

VII.   So What? Why is Contextual Theology Important?

Earlier I referenced the appropriation of Socrates' statement concerning unexamined faith and hinted that failure to examine one's faith could prevent sharing it. Although it may seem to be a stretch, my research to date indicates a trend whereby many who regularly attend church services lack confidence in their knowledge of Christian faith, scripture and tradition. They are uncomfortable with conversations about such things as spiritual development, discipleship, pastoral care and mission. To complicate matters, many fail to see, or have never been shown, a corresponding relationship between their understanding of Christian faith and their everyday lives in their local communities.

I agree with Bevans' definition of contextualisation as "the preferred term to describe the theology that takes human experience, social location, culture, and cultural change seriously"[18] and his appeal for a theology that is lived rather than simply discussed. In my view, a church, minister, missionary or Christian who fails to practice and express their faith contextually is unable to effectively evangelise. As any minister or missionary knows, the task of engaging with people is complicated. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to communicating the gospel or living out one's faith. The "*what*" may be clear with an agreed biblical text and translation, and there may be a particular ideological or theological identity that is accepted within a mission organisation or denomination, but that does not mean every person understands it in the same way. Decisions must be made about *how* to communicate, and this involves contextual awareness.

Training in contextual theology and cross-cultural or inter-cultural dialogue is often a foundation of missionary training but is rarely addressed towards ministers working in their own countries. As a result, many are left unsure of their way, having been taught to construct biblically sound exegetical sermons or how to carry out pastoral visitations and counselling sessions, rather than how to communicate their faith with those who do not

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[17] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 139-140.

[18] As opposed to *indigenisation* or *inculturation*. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 27.

share the same worldview or values. Bridging the gap between their theological training and the practical realities of ministry and mission is a problem for many ministers.

One of the great benefits of the move towards contextual theology is the invitation for everyone to be involved. It is accessible because it is directly related to lived experience. By encouraging "ordinary" Christians to examine their faith and engage with their local context, these approaches can help address the deeply ingrained cultural mindset within many UK churches that sees the educated minister or missionary as *the* "theologian" and therefore the only one who is capable of speaking about God and the Bible. Others who possess a certain amount of theological knowledge, in the traditional sense of learning "theology" through study or reading, are commonly viewed with respect and invited to contribute in leading discussions or Bible studies, while the so-called "ordinary" Christians feel self-conscious about expressing their opinion or understanding. One woman who shared her experience with me explained that she "didn't know all the right words" and thought no one would want to listen to her. She assumed I would know the "right answers" as a "trained theologian" with two degrees and a wealth of experience in churches as a child of the manse and lifelong Christian.

This concept of the theological élite supresses rather than encourages involvement of lay people, the everyday Christians and church members. This type of theological exclusivism is directly challenged by those who take contextual theology seriously. The call to involve local people in seeking to understand how to communicate theological truths is echoed in the work of Laurie Green, Samuel Wells, Helen Cameron, and many others.[19] Each is committed to the integrity of the gospel, while recognising the need to be grounded in the local context and working with local people.

This is the foundation for Laurie Green's development of a practical God-study – "theo-logy" – which brings together the practical elements of action and reflection, like that of Bevans' Praxis model. In his book, *Let's Do Theology*, Green advocates a contextual theology which is based on a hermeneutic spiral.[20] His approach to "doing theology" with groups of people brings together many of the terms and concepts I've already discussed and involves four key elements:[21]

1) Experience – identifying a key moment or situation and sharing initial thoughts and emotions coming from that concrete contextual experience;[22]

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[19] Wells, *Incarnational Ministry*; Wells, *Incarnational Mission*, Cameron, et al., *Talking about God in Practice*.

[20] Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology*, Rev. and updated ed. (London; New York: Mowbray, 2009).

[21] Green, *Let's Do Theology.*

[22] As seen above in the discussion of Geertz' "thick description".

2) Exploration – where the group gathers more information and asks questions about the situation and the underlying historical, geographical, social, economic, cultural and religious implications;

3) Reflection – bringing the first two stages into dialogue with "the great wealth of Christian history, teaching and faith",[23] using the bible and faith traditions to illuminate the situation, and vice versa, by identifying similarities and differences, seeking God's presence and guidance in going forward;

4) Response – A suitable action(s) based in faithful reflection and desire for transformation according to God's guidance.

While I am not convinced that Green's "Doing Theology Spiral" is *the* approach for all groups, I do agree that there is a need for bringing both action and reflection together in "doing theology" for everyday mission and ministry in the United Kingdom. Each of Green's four elements corresponds on some level to the rest of the discussion in this article.

There is an urgency for those engaging in mission and ministry to examine their preconceptions and explore the opportunities to learn from each other. While I hesitate to place human experience and cultural context at the forefront of theology, I am confronted by the reality that my lived experience and the insights of my research have shaped, and continue to shape, my theological reflection. I am both a biblical theologian and a practical theologian. I am constantly questioning and examining "context" in ways which derive from my experience and academic training. It is complicated and messy, but it is also a place for humility and dependence on the sovereignty of God.

VIII.   Conclusion

Throughout this article I have attempted to provide evidence and examples of the importance of intentional contextual engagement. It is a conversation and an exploration of key concepts. By starting with a definition of "context" I introduced the idea of the search for meaning and the interpretive loop. My academic education and training in biblical studies offered a foundation and example of the importance of context in determining meaning and interpretation which has influenced my development as a theologian.

The example of interpretive tradition affecting translation in Job demonstrated the uncomfortable nature of challenging status quo, while the extended discussion of cultural interpretations of the prodigal son illustrated the importance of evaluating preconceptions and biases. The discussion of the importance of reflection and reflexivity and creating "thick" descriptions

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[23] Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 80.

which can be interpreted and analysed in greater depth demonstrated the wealth of meaning present in human interactions and events. A summary of my current research demonstrates the complexity and need for contextual approaches, while Bevans' six models illustrate the range of possibilities.

The shift in theological study towards incorporating human experience and culture as a basis for interpretation is both liberating and intimidating. On the one hand, it is possible to discuss the historical cultural setting and modern contextual interpretations of a passage of scripture and discover a richness in the passage that may not be immediately apparent in the text, as in the story of the prodigal son. On the other, it becomes possible to argue the validity of any interpretation of meaning with reference to context and perspective, prioritising those views which agree with our preconceptions or biases.

In asking the question "So what?", I considered the implications of contextualisation for church members and for clergy. I suggested that a key challenge facing the future of church is a lack of confidence among members and a lack of teaching or training about theological reflection. I argued that contextual theology offers an invitation and an opportunity to challenge culturally-ingrained perceptions of theological élitism and finished with Laurie Green's "Doing Theology Spiral".

As my part of this conversation ends here, I reflect on the many things that could still be said; on the possibilities for local parish ministries that are relational and contextual; on the opportunities for mission that come because I happen to stop for a conversation with my neighbour. One of the joys of studying contextual theology is found in its infinite variety because life and relationships are always changing, reflecting the wonder and beauty of God's vast creation and endless imagination. The drumbeat continues: "context, context, context".

ASSUMPTIONS WITHOUT REFLECTION: ASSESSING CULTURAL VALUES IN LIGHT OF BIBLICAL VALUES

Stephen Kneale[*]

It is commonplace for majority culture values to pass into local church culture without much biblical or critical assessment. The equation of cultural values with biblical norms can have the knock-on effect of limiting minority culture representation, both at leadership level and within the church at large. With a particular focus on the question of class, this paper will explore some indicative examples, provide biblical analysis of these cultural value judgments and offer some suggestions as to how we might overcome our cultural biases to increase representation of minority cultures within the church.

Basing the cultural values on a summary of Ruby Payne's characteristics of generational poverty by Tim Chester, this paper will consider the issues of speech, time, dress and social interaction from working- and middle-class perspectives. It will consider how these things play out in the local church context and how they can affect the way in which the majority culture views minorities, particularly in respect to their suitability for leadership roles.

I. Historical Context

In a recent article for *Foundations*, Jon Putt made the following frank admission:

> I have been a member of various churches and visited more, and although they have been partly diverse, ethnically and socio-economically, the dominant culture has been middle class. Some of those churches, despite their best efforts, did not reflect the diversity of their local contexts. If local churches are to be beacons of light to which all are attracted, this is at least regrettable.[1]

Jon is absolutely right in his assessment. The 2015 *Talking Jesus* research commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance, Church of England and HOPE found that 81% of practising Christians hold a university degree or higher.[2] This contrasts with the 2011 Census figures that show only 27% of people in

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[1] Jon Putt, "Culture, Class and Ethnicity: A Theological Exploration", *Foundations*, No. 74, Spring 2018, 29.

[2] Chine Macdonald, "The UK Church and the Problem with Class", *Evangelical Alliance*, 19 February 2016, accessed at http://www.eauk.org/culture/friday-night-theology/the-uk-church -and-the-problem-with-class.cfm

England and Wales holds a university degree.[3] With such a disproportionate number of graduates in our congregations, it is not all that surprising that we find the prevailing culture in our churches matches the middle-class professional culture from which the overwhelming majority of our people are drawn.

Jon is wrong that this was also the case historically. Robert Wearmouth points out that, during the Great Awakening,

Methodism gained its greatest successes among the socially distressed and ostracised among the labouring masses… the higher classes were barely touched by Methodist influence, but the working men and women were profoundly affected.[4]

David Bebbington also notes that, in the mid- to late-eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, working-class skilled labourers were disproportionately attracted to Nonconformist churches. He states,

whereas artisans constituted some 23 per cent of society at large, they composed 59 per cent of Evangelical Nonconformist congregations. The Secession churches of Glasgow made a parallel appeal to the skilled men of the city.[5]

Tim Chester notes, "both unskilled labourers *and the middle classes* were underrepresented in Nonconformist ranks" (my emphasis added).[6] It is also notable that the 1859-60 second Evangelical Awakening in Britain, The 1904-5 Welsh Revival and the subsequent 1921 East Anglian Revival all revolved around the working classes.[7] It is somewhat surprising that Jon references these very pages to make his point when, it would appear, Bebbington is saying quite the opposite. It is these figures that prompt Tim Chester to say of the overwhelmingly middle-class makeup of the modern church, "it was not always like this".[8]

The point here is that Evangelicalism in Britain was, historically, centred among the working classes. It has shifted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, instead, increasingly drawn its constituents from the middle classes who now dominate the movement such that the working classes are vastly underrepresented.

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[3] Office for National Statistics (2011), "2011 Census: Key Statistics for England and Wales, March 2011", accessed at https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/people inwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/keystatisticsandquickstatisticsforlocalauthor itiesintheunitedkingdom/2013-12-04#qualifications

[4] Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 263.

[5] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 111.

[6] Tim Chester, *Unreached: Growing Churches in Working Class and Deprived Communities*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 11.

[7] *Ibid.*, 116-7, 193, 257.

[8] Tim Chester, *Op Cit.*, (2012), 10.

My purpose here is not to point out this state of affairs. Nor am I going to offer a breakdown of all the ways and means we have got to this point. Instead, my focus will be on one issue that perpetuates the lack of working-class representation in our churches, namely, the dominant middle-class culture of our churches; specifically, the way in which middle-class values are often assumed to be biblical without much reflection on Scripture.

II. Cultural Characteristics

In his article, Jon Putt moved us toward a theology of class and considered some of the issues that might cause a non-middle-class person to stay away from a church with a middle-class culture. In this article, I want to focus upon the cultural values of the working classes that are often rejected by the middle classes, less for biblical reasons and more due to assumed values of their own.

Mez McConnell states, when faced with people converting from a culture that is different to our own, "we must begin to disentangle what the Bible says from our personal cultural preferences".[9] For those who convert in deprived communities, or from working-class backgrounds, what behaviours are sinful and which are merely cultural? For example, Mez argues:

Smoking is stupid, but I am not sure it is always a sin. Look at any picture of a seminary faculty from the 1940s; almost every professor will be holding a cigarette. But many middle-class people will condemn those who waste their money on cigarettes, all the while indulging a $100-a-month Starbucks habit.[10]

Tim Chester offers nine common characteristics of working class and deprived areas.[11] Ruby Payne – though writing into the North American context – outlines twenty key characteristics among those who have experienced generational poverty that resonate with the situation in the UK.[12] Tim Chester has summarised Payne's view of key cultural features in the following table:[13]

	Poverty	Middle Class	Wealth
Possessions	People	Things	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees
Money	To be used, spent	To be managed	To be conserved, invested

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[9] Mez McConnell & Mike McKinley, *Church in Hard Places*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2016), 169.

[10] *Ibid.*, 169.

[11] Chester (2012), *Op Cit.,* 46-50.

[12] Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, (Aha! Process, 2005), 51-53.

[13] Chester (2012), *Op Cit.*, 54-56.

Personality	Is for entertainment. Sense of humour is highly valued	Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued	Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued
Social Emphasis	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion
Food	Key question: did you have enough? Quantity important	Key question: did you like it? Quality important	Key question: was it presented well? Presentation important
Clothing	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class	Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important
Time	Present most important. Decisions made for the moment, based on feelings or survival	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications	Traditions and history most important. Decisions made on basis of tradition & decorum
Education	Valued and revered as abstract, but not as reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
Destiny	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance	Believes in choice. Can change future by good choices now	Noblesse oblige
Language	Casual register. Language is about survival	Formal register. Language is about negotiation	Formal register. Language is about networking
Family Structure	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who had money
Worldview	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of national setting	Sees world in terms of international view
Love	Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked	Love and acceptance conditional, and based largely on achievement	Love and acceptance conditional, & related to social standing & connections
Driving Forces	Survival, relationships, entertainment	Work, achievement	Financial, political, social connections
Humour	About people and sex	About situations	About social faux pas

Each of the things listed is a cultural outworking of the given issues. Given the different cultural outlooks between the classes, some of these things will inevitably carry over into our church culture when it is dominated by any one class.

1. Speech

In a recent paper delivered at the Affinity Council, I gave the following example:

A middle-class man and working-class man both a hear a sermon and think it boring. The middle-class man makes some vaguely positive comment and the working-class man wonders why he is lying. The working-class man says it was boring and the middle-class man thinks he's

rude. This is just one example of how we can talk past each other's cultures. But when the majority culture is middle class, most people in the church – not least the middle-class elders – think the working-class man is rude, so who is going to make that guy an elder? He's too blunt. He's insensitive. He's not careful how he speaks. Never mind that, biblically, he might be entirely qualified for the role; according to the dominant middle-class culture, he is deemed unfit.[14]

Likewise, Mez McConnell has argued:

In the schemes [Scottish council estates] we value straight talking; it is a sign of respect in our relationships. Middle-class people tend to place higher value on not giving offence; it's how they communicate they care about the relationship. As a result, one side looks rude and aggressive to the other, whereas the other looks wishy-washy and superficial... many housing scheme converts are overlooked for leadership because they can appear gauche, rude and aggressive in comparison to their middle-class brothers and sisters.[15]

This is echoed by Duncan Forbes – Pastor at New Life Church, Roehampton – who comments,

In my culture it is acceptable (to a point) to talk in very black-and-white terms. My previous pastor once told me that I didn't respect him. I was surprised because I really did. But he found the way I talked to him uncomfortable.[16]

It bears saying that the Bible does have things to say about the way we speak to one another. We are cautioned to "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt" (Col 4:6) and to "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up" (Eph 4:29). There are cautions from James about the tongue (1:19, 26; 3:1-12). That is not to mention the multitude of Proverbs on this issue (cf. Pro 15:1-4; 16:24; 17:28; 18:20f; 21:23 *et al*). The Lord himself was clear, "on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Mat 12:36).

The question here is whether the working-class tendency to bluntness and directness is a contravention of any of these commands. I would suggest that it is possible to be a "straight talker" without being ungracious. Likewise, we must ask whether the middle-class tendency to not offend in the things we say leads to an indirectness that amounts to dishonesty. Again, it is possible to be gentle and gracious in our speech without being dishonest. The problem comes when a dominant culture is looking at a minority and defining graciousness, corrupting talk and taming one's tongue in the same way as the culture from which they emanate would define them.

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[14] Stephen M. Kneale, "Resourcing and planting churches in deprived communities", Talk delivered to Affinity Council, London, 18 September 2018.

[15] McConnell & McKinley (2016), *Op Cit,* 163-4.

[16] Chester (2012), *Op Cit.*, 68.

2.   Noise

One of the characteristics outlined by Ruby Payne is the reality of background noise. She notes that in working-class homes the TV is almost always on, regardless of the circumstances, and conversation is usually participatory with more than one person talking at a time.[17] Many middle-class people struggle with this tendency. For them, it is right and proper to devote our full attention (as they perceive it) to a conversation and this is manifested by removing all distractions and focusing on the person speaking. The problem comes when we look for scriptural warrant for that position. There simply isn't anything in scripture that insists upon it. What we are left with is a cultural understanding of what amounts to respect and listening. These things may be considered rude in a middle-class culture but, in working-class culture, it is simply part of welcoming an individual into family life.

3.   Time

Let us consider the difference between the working- and middle-class approaches to time. The working classes tend to keep non-diarised schedules. They live in the "now" and prefer spontaneity. It is my (personal) view that if somebody makes an appointment and then breaks it, this is a contravention of James' and Jesus' commands to let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no" (cf. Mat 5:37; Jam 5:12). However, there is nothing biblically mandated about scheduling appointments. Indeed, there is something quite right, as Tim Chester puts it, about your allegiance being "to the people you are with, not to the clock".[18] By contrast, whilst there is nothing wrong with seeking to schedule meetings, there can be something quite sinful in our attitude to relationships when we merely want to "fit people in". It can speak to our schedule being of more value than the person we are meeting. Jesus' command, "just as I have loved you, you are to love one another" (Joh 13:34) and his comments on the value of people (cf. Mat 10:31) have real implications for allowing our diaries to dictate our time more than perhaps that of the need of the people before us.

4.   Dress

One of the common examples to crop up during discussion of class difference is how people tend to dress. Consider how Jon Putt described the culturally middle-class church: "There was a preponderance of chinos, shirts and

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[17] Payne (2005), *Op Cit.,* 51.
[18] Chester (2012), *Op Cit.*, 51.

jumpers, many of them branded 'Fat Face' or 'White Stuff'."[19] Some, rightly, push back that it would be false – cringeworthy even – if a middle-aged pastor decides to dress in such a way as to make himself "relevant" but that inevitably made him inauthentic. This is legitimate point – nobody wants inauthenticity. In my church in Oldham, we have people who come in blazers and loafers and those who come in jeans and t-shirts and no one individual doing either thing is going to put an unnecessary barrier between the church and the working-class locals we are seeking to reach. The issue comes, not when one or two are like this, but when the entire congregation is dressing, speaking and behaving in ways that are utterly alien to anybody outside the four walls of the building. It is this systemic middle-class culture that I think Jon Putt was outlining at the beginning of his article.

Sometimes this desire to dress a particular way stems from a "Sunday best" tradition. That, of itself, can stem from a faulty theology of "coming into God's presence". "Do we not want to wear our very best when we come into God's presence?", the argument goes. But God is present with his people all the time. His special presence dwelling in the temple, a sign of his covenant faithfulness to his people, is now fulfilled in the hearts of all believers. It is this reality that causes Paul to say we are "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 3:16f; 6:19f; cf. Eph 2:22). Consistency would push us to continually be in our "Sunday best" because we are continually in the presence of God. Indeed, James positively instructs us not to judge people by the clothes that they wear (Jam 2:1-9). What is more, the man whom Jesus said was the very greatest born of a woman (Mat 11:11) was viewed as wearing very odd clothes indeed (cf. Mat 3:4). This seemed not to matter to the Lord. The point is made starkly when God's appointed man in the OT – King David – is not immediately accepted by the prophet Samuel. The Lord speaks to Samuel and says, "the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1Sa 16:17). This surely has direct application for how we judge what people wear.

Unfortunately, many middle-class church cultures send the implicit message to those who dress, speak and behave differently – albeit not unbiblically – that this is not a place for them. Even if we do manage to attract some working-class people, the same message may inadvertently be sent by the church leadership: Only those who speak and dress the right way may lead meetings, preach or, one day, become elders in the church. It is specifically for this reason I reject the Homogenous Unit Principle of church growth and echo Putt's case for "churches that are diverse and reflect the areas in which they exist".[20] Our congregations and our leadership teams

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[19] Putt (2018), *Op Cit.*, 28.
[20] Putt (2019), *Op Cit.*, 38.

ought to reflect the diversity of our local area, even in the way our people dress, speak and behave.

As you can imagine, the issues of cultural difference are legion; time and space do not permit us to consider them all. However, rather than assume our cultural values are biblical, we ought to treat our assumptions with a level of suspicion. We need to continually bring the question back to what the Bible says about any given issue. Does scripture necessarily insist on the things that we simply take for granted? We must work hard to separate what we assume because it is cultural and what we believe because it is biblical. We must recognise this is all the harder when we ourselves have been raised in the church, especially so if we have always remained within one particular cultural expression of it.

III. Making Room for Cultural Diversity

To recap, the Evangelical church in the UK is overwhelmingly middle class and such people dominate the culture of our local churches. The cultural preferences and approach to church life in most of British Evangelicalism is centred around middle-class expressions of Evangelical belief. As a result of those inbuilt assumptions, cultural outsiders – specifically the working classes – feel they are entering an alien world and are either overtly or unconsciously required to assimilate or forever remain on the margins. But if the Evangelical church is overwhelmingly middle class its congregations will inevitably reflect the majority culture of the people within the camp. So how can we make room for cultural diversity when we are, by and large, a monocultural movement?

1.   Admit the Problem

First, and perhaps most obviously, we have to admit there is a problem. The brute figures speak for themselves – we are largely missing the working classes in the Evangelical church. If we are serious about the estate of the lost, it bears asking why one group of people are almost invisible in our churches. This may lead us to consider serious questions such as where we have planted churches, who we are sending to theological colleges, why we have sent them and where they are likely to go once they graduate. Indeed, we might ask whether theological colleges are perpetuating this situation and whether we ought to be sending people there at all. We may need to consider questions about *how* we express ourselves in church. Is everything we do demanded by the biblical data or is a lot of it cultural? If the latter, is it at least possible that these things are keeping certain demographics out of our churches?

2.   Multicultural Leadership

Second, we may have to be more intentional about seeking to raise up multicultural leadership teams. We will have to go back to the eldership criteria laid out in scripture and be sure that we are not expecting behaviour and attitudes from potential elders that are not required by the Lord. As Mez McConnell encourages, "Look at that diamond in the rough, that person in your congregation who seems like he or she is not even close to leadership material. Invest some time in them, and God might just surprise you."[21] There may well be working class people within your congregation whom you have overlooked for, albeit unconscious, cultural reasons.

3.   Planting in Working Class Areas

Third, we will have to be more intentional about planting and revitalising churches in working class areas. We can't do much about the overwhelming middle-class makeup of Evangelicalism as it is; that is just what we are! But we can be more intentional about encouraging our middle-class constituents to move to areas of greatest need. We cannot magic working class communicants and leaders out of thin air. So, we will have to rely on cultural outsiders going to working class areas in a bid to reach the people and raise them up to positions of leadership. As Mez McConnell has rightly pointed out,

There is not enough in place right now to develop any significant momentum toward indigenous leadership. We will have to train these "outsiders" to identify and cultivate "insiders" who can serve as future leaders.[22]

4.   Awareness of Blind Spots

Fourth, we must be aware that we all have personal biases and come with cultural blind spots and be willing to challenge them. Duncan Forbes has helpfully highlighted some of the implicit bias he has faced among Christians. He comments:

I would hear comments like, "So how do your people sit through sermons? What do you teach them? How come you know so much?" One good brother told me how his school told his class they were in the top 1% of the country, better than people like me, and now meeting me challenged his whole paradigm.[23]

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[21] McConnell & McKinley (2016), *Op Cit.*, 164.

[22] *Ibid.*, 162.

[23] Duncan Forbes, "My experience of implicit bias", *Council Estate Christianity*, 14 August 2017, Accessed at: https://duncanf.blogspot.com/2017/08/my-experience-of-implicit-bias.html

Another recent example came through some advertising put out for a conference. It spoke about, "the problems of immigration, and Islam in particular"[24] going on to consider how Christians ought to grapple with this "problem". As with most of these things, there was almost certainly no malice intended, but to those working in contexts with high proportions of immigrants and/or Muslims, these comments appeared clumsy at best. Duncan Forbes rightly noted on Twitter that, "These are the kind of things that get spotted quickly before publication if more minorities are at the planning table."[25] We need to recognise that we all have implicit biases and cultural blind spots and the best way to mitigate them is to build diverse teams around us.

5. Listen to the Minorities

Fifth, we need to listen to the concerns of minorities in our midst without instinctively jumping to defend ourselves. In a recent blog post, Ian Williamson – pastor of New Life Church in Middlesbrough – said:

I am constantly hearing middle class people, practitioners, charity directors wanting to lead conferences and discussions on how to help the poor and the working class... If you want a discussion on how to help the working class and the poor, you need it to be led and directed by them.[26]

In other words, we need to hear what minorities are saying about our churches and listen to their concerns. One of the reasons Ian suggests the working classes are put off the church is because the culture is dominated by the middle classes who, in turn, are very quick to wave away working-class concerns. Ian calls this attitude paternalistic. It is an imposition of cultural values on those we deem less able to grasp their significance. Instead of doing that, we must learn to critique our own culture and listen to the voices of minorities amongst us and assess their concerns biblically, rather than culturally.

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[24] Stephen M. Kneale, "Some thoughts on Tim Farron's withdrawal from the Northern Men's Convention", 12 May 2018, accessed at https://stephenkneale.com/2018/05/12/some-thoughts-on-tim-farrons-withdrawal-from-northern-mens-convention/

[25] Duncan Forbes, 11 May 2018, accessed at https://twitter.com/UrbanMinistryUK/status/994872037255598080?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E994872037255598080&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fstephenkneale.com%2F2018%2F05%2F12%2Fsome-thoughts-on-tim-farrons-withdrawal-from-northern-mens-co

[26] Ian Williamson, "Why I hated a blog post the middle class loved", *New Life Boro Blog*, 22 September 2018, accessed at https://newlifeboro.com/why-i-hated-a-blogpost-that-the-middle-class-loved/

Conclusion

In his book, Centre Church, Tim Keller says, "we cannot avoid contextualization."[27] We cannot simply claim to preach the Word and allow the Spirit to do his work as though such is happening entirely in a vacuum. Paul recognised this need to contextualise the gospel when he said:

> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some (1 Cor 9:20-22).

Paul had a cultural flexibility that permitted him to share the gospel with all kinds of people – planting churches among all kinds of people – whilst offering the same gospel message to all of them.

Sadly, our churches have almost accidentally fallen into the Homogenous Unit Principle. We have created church cultures that are essentially middle class and we filter the criteria for eldership through our middle-class cultural spectacles. Keller has pointed out that though we may have diverse churches, when we push into the diversity, it is clear that this tends to be ethnic but rarely class or even cultural diversity.[28] As John Stevens noted on Twitter, "higher levels of education flatten cultural difference making it easier to grow multi-ethnic graduate churches".[29] This may lead to a great increase in ethnic diversity, but it does very little for class or cultural diversity.

We must recapture something of Paul's cultural flexibility. We need to recognise the importance of contextualisation and realise that much of what we do is culturally, rather than biblically, informed. That is not to say our cultural values are necessarily wrong, it is simply to note that they are not, of themselves, sanctified. We must learn to be suspicious of our cultural assumptions and be willing to take a scalpel to the cultural forms that have built up around our Christian beliefs. If we are to genuinely seek after the oneness in Christ to which we called, it will mean laying aside our cultural values and seeking to bring all under the rule of Christ and the values of scripture.

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[27] Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 95.

[28] Cf. Adrian Reynolds, "Diversity in the Local Church", *FIEC blog*, 21 June 2018, accessed at https://fiec.org.uk/news/article/diversity-in-the-local-church

[29] Cf. Stephen M. Kneale, "To improve working class representation we must reach the working classes", *Building Jerusalem*, 21 June 2018, accessed at https://stephenkneale .com/2018/06/21/to-improve-working-class-representation-we-must-reach-the-working-classes/

"THIS WAY OF LIVING": GEORGE MÜLLER AND THE ASHLEY DOWN ORPHANAGE

Ian F. Shaw[*]

I seek to bring to light the inner workings and principles of George Müller's provision of residential care for children in nineteenth century Bristol, and to make clear ways in which Müller's life and work may prove relevant for twenty-first century Christians. Müller (1805-1898) was born in what then was Prussia. After his conversion he moved to England and, following a period as a missionary and pastor, moved to Bristol and initiated with Henry Craik, first the Scriptural Knowledge Society and soon after what became his lifelong work among orphaned children. I make extensive use of archival records held by Müllers[1] which have not been drawn on in any of the published accounts of his life. Influenced by the life of August Franke, Müller's work was marked by his refusal to adopt the norms underlying financial arrangements in the mainstream welfare provision of his day. I describe the daily round of life in the orphan houses, including periods of spiritual blessing; the detailed registers of who was accepted into the homes and why; the information we gain regarding leaving the homes; how Müller recorded and regarded sickness and death on the homes; and the basis underlying how the homes dealt with issues of behaviour and discipline. I conclude by exploring how he understood living in faith and consider in what ways his life and work may be an exemplar for today.[2]

A tall, sparsely built man, in his mid-forties was bent over his desk in deep thought. For fifty-two days he had wrestled with the decision which now he had made. He had disclosed his thoughts to no-one, not even his wife. The great debate had gone on between himself and God alone, as witnessed by the numerous papers of carefully written notes in front of him.

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[1] This article draws primarily on archival records from what was at the time of the research Müller Homes (now Müllers). The main records are Admissions Registers, Dismissals Registers, and the annual reports of the orphanage. I also draw on a recorded interview with someone who lived in Ashley Down early in the 20th Century. The website offers a rewarding visit, including transcripts of his sermons - https://www.mullers.org/ Additional material of interest can be found at David Fisher's blog - http://georgemuller.blogspot.com/2011/06/

[2] The archival research that provides the original basis for this article was undertaken early in my career. A much-abbreviated version was published in *Evangelical Times* in 1975, and I gratefully acknowledge permission to use much of that article within the present expanded and updated manuscript. The then Director of Müller Homes (now Müllers), the late Mr Jack Rose, gave unstinting help in pointing me to the invaluable resources.

It was early in 1851, and George Müller already had sole responsibility for the welfare of some 300 children, bereaved of both mother and father. He had now decided to make plans for housing an additional 700. It was essential, so he had decided, to care for the very poorest children who otherwise would be left either to the somewhat unpredictable mercies of the Poor Law Guardians, or to the scramble for admission to orphanages where entry depended more on influence wielded among supporters of the orphanage, than on the child's degree of need. In 1845 he had discovered that there were approximately 6,000 orphaned children in the country's prisons.[3] Already he had 170 children awaiting admission, and he feared for the moral welfare of children from "respectable" families forced into the local Poorhouses.

Yet he anticipated that criticisms would be made. He would be told that he was "going beyond measure" and exceeding both his natural abilities and the warrant given him by God. And how would he be able to provide for the daily needs of a thousand children, even if he could erect the buildings? He could not lightly disregard this objection. "I am too much a man of business, and too much a person of calm, quiet, cool calculation, not to feel its force." Again, what would happen after his death? Who would care for the children then?

In considering this Müller was supported by the memory of August Francke, the German Pietist, who provided for two thousand children in his orphan houses at Halle and found in his son an eminent successor after his death. In caring for the next generation, we should not forget to serve our own:

Then, though we be dead, yet should we be speaking. Auguste Franke is long since gone to his rest, but he spoke to my soul in 1826,[4] and he is speaking to my soul now; and to his example I am greatly indebted in having been stirred up to care about poor children in general, and poor orphans in particular.[5]

The purpose of this article is to bring to light the inner workings and principles of George Müller's provision of residential care for children in nineteenth century Bristol, and to make clear the particular ways in which his life and work may prove relevant for twenty-first century Christians. The title has a dual sense, referring to both the patterns and Christian values as understood by Müller, and to his use of the expression in reference to his refusal to adopt the norms underlying financial arrangements in the mainstream welfare provision of his day. I make extensive use of archival

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[3] I have not been able to confirm this figure. The Jubilee Campaign has an account of child prisoners in Victorian times. http://www.jubileecampaign.co.uk/archive/child-prisoners-in-victorian-times-and-the-heroes-of-change

[4] This appears to be linked to the occasion of his conversion, although the Dictionary of National Biography dates that to late 1825.

[5] August Francke, 1663-1727, German Pietist Lutheran theologian. An introduction to Franke can be found in Ian Shaw, 1975, "August Franke: Man of Active Faith", *Banner of Truth Magazine.* #142, 23-28.

records held by Müllers which, to my knowledge, have not been drawn on in any of the published accounts of his life. To maintain narrative flow the possibilities of development and historical contextualisation are suggested mainly in the footnotes.

From Prussia to Bristol

George Müller was born at Kroppenstaedt (now Kroppenstedt) in Prussia, in September 1805.[6] His father was a tax officer. Almost the first words of his autobiography tell us,

> As a warning to parents, I mention that my father preferred me to my brother, which was very injurious to both of us. To me, as tending to produce in my mind a feeling of self-elevation; and to my brother, by creating in him a dislike both towards my father and me.

The indulgence of his parents (his mother died when he was only fourteen), coupled with a marked inconsistency towards their son, yielded a young man notorious for his financial debts and extravagances. At the age of sixteen he spent several weeks in a debtors' prison. At the Easter before his twentieth birthday, Müller entered the Halle University as a divinity student, while devoid of any marks of grace. "My father's design was to make a clergyman of me: not indeed that thus I might serve God, but that I might have a comfortable living." Yet eight months later he was the subject of a sudden work of divine grace.

The marks of a new nature were immediately evident, when Müller made the decision to remain financially independent of his hitherto inconsistently indulgent father. The financial loss was made good by giving instruction in German to a group of American students, one of whom was the ultimately famous Charles Hodge of Princeton. The philanthropic August Francke had provided free lodgings for poor students, and Müller made use of this accommodation for a short period in 1826, but a growing missionary interest led him to England in early 1829, having been offered an appointment by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.

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[6] I have not developed the biographical details of Müller's life, which may readily be unearthed from the sources. Perhaps the best known fairly recent biography of Müller is Roger Steer, *George Müller: Delighted in God* (Tain, Rosshire: Christian Focus, 1997). A helpful introduction to his life can be found in John Piper, *A Camaraderie of Confidence,* (London: InterVarsity Press, 2016). H. H. Rowden, *The Origins of the Brethren*, *1825–1850* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1967) is helpful on the context of Müller's role within the Brethren. The Oxford DNB carries a useful concise entry. None of the authors appears to have had access to the detailed archival materials. A helpful digest of key emphases in Muller's teaching can be accessed at *George Müller: Convictions and Teachings* 2015 Pensacola, Florida: Chapel Library https://www.chapel library.org/files/4414/2835/2242/gmca.pdf.

He soon met with Henry Craik, the son of a Church of Scotland minister, who had been profoundly influenced by Thomas Chalmers.[7] They were to prove lifelong friends. Müller did not remain in London, but moved to Teignmouth (Devon), becoming pastor of a Strict Baptist chapel in August 1829. At that time, he experienced a change in his life that he described as "like a second conversion". He came to accept a number of doctrines which deeply formed his subsequent life. He had, for example, been greatly opposed to the doctrine of God's election prior to this time, so much so that a few days after his arrival in Teignmouth he had called it a "devilish doctrine". He had not believed in God's effectual calling or in the final perseverance of the saints.

But, following a chance encounter he had with a nameless man that same year, Müller was brought to examine these truths in the light of scripture, saying he was amazed to see that God's work was full of the doctrine of God's election. Even the verses that appeared to teach the contrary only served to confirm him in the doctrines of grace. As might be expected, this had an enlivening effect on his soul:

> I am constrained to state, for God's glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might and ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with him since that period… Therefore, I say, the electing love of God in Christ has often been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin. It is only the notional appreciation of such truth, the want of having them in the heart, whilst they are in the head, which is dangerous.

"As these truths so greatly occupied the heart of Mr Craik also, we were now soon drawn closely together." Craik moved to Bristol, inviting Müller to join him as he did so. By 1836 they had renounced the title of "ministers of the gospel", and Müller declined to accept any stated salary. Indeed, when still in Devon he had set out three requirements: First, the practice of the renting of pews should be abolished, arguing that it gave unfair prestige to the rich. Second, the church would not pay him a salary. Third, the church would allow a box to be placed by the door and he would trust the Lord to move people to provide for his keep, believing that otherwise the practice could lead to church members giving out of duty, not desire. By the end of this decade he and Craik had reached their mature views on church government, which were to characterise their ministry among the early Brethren.[8]

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[7] Henry Craik, 1805-1866, bears revisiting. A tribute and brief account of his life was written shortly after his death. First published in *The Baptist Magazine* 58 (1866), 162–169, it can be accessed at http://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/morriscraik.pdf. W. Elfe Tayler, *Passages from the Diary and Letters of Henry Craik.* (London: J. F. Shaw and Company, 1866) is fairly extensive and can be located online at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=s0kBA AAAQAAJ&redir_esc=y Müller's Introduction repays reading for their relationship. Chalmers' influence was apparent soon after his conversion in 1826.

[8] In 1830 he married Mary Groves, the sister of Anthony Norris Groves, a prominent figure among what came to be called the Open Brethren.

> ### A Note on Müller's theology.[9]
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> A general account of Müller's theology requires a stand-alone article, but it is essential to gain a limited understanding of his position insofar as it both shaped and was exemplified in his orphanage work. The theology that guided his ministry was shaped by an experience in his mid-twenties when he came to prize the Bible alone as his standard of judgment. He had a central conviction of the work of the Holy Spirit. An extract from his narrative encapsulates his position, when referring to this moment. He came to accept:
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> *"That the word of God alone is our standard of judgment in spiritual things; that it can be explained only by the Holy Spirit; and that in our day, as well as in former times, he is the teacher of his people. The office of the Holy Spirit I had not experimentally understood before that time. Indeed, of the office of each of the blessed persons, in what is commonly called the Trinity, I had no experimental apprehension.*
>
> *I had not before seen from the Scriptures that the Father chose us before the foundation of the world; that in him that wonderful plan of our redemption originated, and that he also appointed all the means by which it was to be brought about. Further, that the Son, to save us, had fulfilled the law, to satisfy its demands, and with it also the holiness of God; that he had borne the punishment due to our sins, and had thus satisfied the justice of God."*
>
> Further on the doctrines of grace, speaking forty years later to young people he told them,
>
> *"it pleased God then to show to me the doctrines of grace in a way in which I had not seen them before. At first I hated them… But when it pleased God to reveal these truths to me, and my heart was brought to such a state that I could say, 'I am not only content simply to be a hammer, an axe, or a saw, in God's hands; but I shall count it an honour to be taken up and used by Him in any way.'"*

The Scriptural Knowledge Society

The 1830s were years during which the young pastor was doing more than develop his thoughts about church government. Bristol, in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, had its fair share of delinquency, poverty and parents unable to care for their families. The city's population had grown by around 20% in each of the first three decades of the century. Its prosperity was deeply tied to the slave trade. Industrially, it was losing its former edge in comparison with Liverpool, Newcastle and Southampton. A report commissioned by the Corporation of Bristol lamented that "Far below her former status as the second port of the Empire, she now has to sustain mortifying competition with second-rate ports in her own channel".[10, 11] 1831 had witnessed violent riots.

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[9] I am primarily indebted to Stanley Murrell's concise account of Müller's life and in particular his summary of Müller's understanding of the gospel. Stanley Murrell, n.d. *George Muller: His Life and Ministry* https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/george_muller_seminar_stan_murrell.pdf

[10] No doubt ports such as Cardiff and Newport were the cause of this mortification!

[11] Graham Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government, 1820-1851*, Bristol Records Society, 1976:5. http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/bristolrecordsociety/publications/brs29.pdf

Müller, fresh from the country, was keenly aware of his city environment, and in June 1833 recorded his plans to set up a school and provide a daily meal for the poor children of the district from "the central city, infested with dank, dark lanes"[12]. He was able to carry out the later idea and hoped to do the same for adults. The thought had been in his mind for two years. Müller, despite his trust in the faithfulness of God, was never a man to act precipitously. In February 1833 he had read part of Francke's life and been deeply impressed:

The Lord graciously help me to follow him, as far as he followed Christ. The greater part of the Lord's people whom we know in Bristol are poor, and if the Lord were to give us grace to live more as this dear man of God did, we might draw much more than we have as yet done out of our heavenly Father's bank, for our poor brethren and sisters.[13]

Hence, on 5 March 1834, The Scriptural Knowledge Society was formed to:
- Establish and assist Day, Adult and Sunday Schools "in which instruction is given upon scriptural principles."
- Place children of poor families in such schools.
- Circulate copies of the scriptures at reduced price or "in cases of extreme poverty" free.
- Give financial aid to needy missionaries.[14]

The reasons Müller gave for the formation of a new society are significant, giving evidence of his characteristic careful thought. The existing religious societies were, he argued, too closely bound up with the wider society:

Everyone who pays a guinea is considered a member. Although such an individual may live in sin; although he may manifest to everyone that he does not know the Lord Jesus; if only the guinea or half guinea be paid, he is considered a member, and has a right to vote. Such things ought not to be!

Still more fundamentally, Müller objected that "the end to which these societies propose to themselves, and which is constantly put before their members, is that the world will gradually become better and better, and that at last the whole world will be converted."[15] Müller gave other objections in the pages of his journal. To ask the unconverted for money and to contract debt were alike unacceptable to him. He had, of course, relinquished a

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[12] Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government,* 1976: 3.

[13] Several of the unattributed quotations from Müller are from his four volume *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller* (London: J Nisbet) of which several of the various editions from 1837 onwards can be found online. I have drawn mainly on the 1845 edition.

[14] They probably had in mind city missionaries.

[15] It is not immediately clear what Müller had in mind. The British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) was founded in 1831 in York and was associated with the popularisation of William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802). Both Paley and the BAAS had come under fire for undue optimism about the human condition and for religious pluralism.

ministerial salary for himself a few years previously. He complains of unconverted committee members and patrons, and in one of his memorable remarks laments "Never once have I known a case of a poor, but very devoted, wise and experienced servant of Christ being invited to fill the chair at such public meetings." This was strong medicine for Müller's contemporaries, and it does not surprise to read in the first report of the Institute in October 1834 that Müller and Craik decided to remain separate from all such societies.

The Orphans of Wilson Street

By May of the following year the Institution was supporting five-day schools containing 254 pupils; already 439 children had passed through their hands. With respect to the circulation of the scriptures, they had reached the conviction that they should not wait for poor people to apply for help, but employ "an experienced, steadfast Brother" to visit the poor. The brother concerned was John Corser, a former Anglican minister and now a city missionary. Yet as we read of Corser's work it appears that Müller and his friends soon were impressed with the inadequacy of what they were doing. A real change of heart was so rarely evident from the teaching given in the Sunday schools. Furthermore, Corser found that,

In going from house to house among the poor, it happens continually, that he meets with the scenes of the greatest distress, and being able to do but little for their temporal relief, he feels it a great trial to go on with this work.

Müller had revisited Halle and the Francke orphanage early in 1835, and in December a public meeting was held, following which a statement was issued proposing the establishment of an orphan house linked to The Scriptural Knowledge Institution, but independently funded, "in which destitute fatherless and motherless children should be provided with food, clothes and scriptural education". The statement included Müller's established position that he would make no general appeals for funding. By April of the following year a house had been opened and furnished in Wilson Street in the centre of Bristol, and orphan girls were soon found to fill the accommodation. In November Müller opened an Infant Orphan House in the same street "in which both male and female orphans, under 7 years of age, might be brought up in the fear of God". By the end of 1836 Müller was caring for 46 children and following the opening of a boys' house in November 1837, the number grew to 86.

The First Rented Houses in Wilson Street (Photograph 1880s)

Although a fourth house was rented in 1843, Müller became aware of the difficulties of caring for so many children in a street environment and, after prayer and careful deliberation, he decided to build the first of the large orphan houses at Ashley Down, Bristol, in 1845, the children moving into the house in 1849.[16] In May of the following year 275 orphans and 33 staff were housed in the new building, a number which grew to over 2000 by the 1860s when five houses were in operation.

In all this Müller endeavoured to pursue the principles he had laid down in 1834. The patronage of unconverted persons was not to be sought, nor were unbelievers to be asked for money. The management of the orphanage was also to be in the hands of believers. The work was never to be enlarged by contracting debts. If scriptural ground could be adduced for altering their methods they were ready, so he affirmed, to respond to it. In short, "while we

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[16] The contract was for seven acres (28,000 m²) of ground at £120 per acre for the accommodation, feeding, clothing and education of 300 destitute and orphan children. By the time of his death this had grown to five houses. Details of the expansion programme are given in the Wikipedia essay at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Orphan_Houses,_Ashley_Down,_Bristol

would aim at avoiding needless singularity, we desire to go in simply according to scripture, without compromising the truth."

Ashley Down Homes

Life in the Orphan Houses

The daily round of life in a large nineteenth century institution of this nature was some way removed from child care arrangements today. No running water, very limited heating, early rising, limited leisure, strict discipline and considerable regimentation marked the children's lives at Ashley Down. As the twentieth century dawned[17] the children were woken at 6am and congregated in the school rooms at 6.30. From there they went by parties of about fifty to wash in cold water. Breakfast followed at 8am – porridge every day whether the children liked it or not! At 8.30am all children and staff gathered for a morning service. From then on it was a mixture of work and lessons until the mid-day dinner time, followed by more lessons in the

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[17] I am indebted in this section of the article to a recorded interview with the late Miss Jones of Nugent Hill, Bristol, who had been a resident in Ashley Down at that period.

afternoon. By 7.30pm the children were in bed – two to a bed in large dormitories.[18]

Food was, by later standards, unexciting. As late as the First World War the main meal menu was recalled with slightly depressing exactitude. On Sunday it was rice and treacle, which was regarded as a body building meal. Hence the rhyme,

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle.
Mix it up and make it nice,
Pop! goes the weasel.'[19]

On Tuesdays it was the same meal. On Mondays corned beef, potatoes and cabbage were served, and again on Thursdays and Fridays. Broth was the third meal, and this was offered up on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Desserts were unknown.

Training varied between the boys and girls. Girls stayed in the homes until they were old enough and ready to go out into service. As this was not until they were 17 or 18 years old, many girls lived at Ashley Down for up to fifteen years. They worked hard before leaving and the housework fell largely on their shoulders. Their lessons included reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, English history, and "all kinds of useful needle work and household work". Boys were apprenticed at fourteen or fifteen. "But in each case we consider the welfare of the *individual* orphan, without having an fixed rule respecting these matters." Boys were given a free choice as to the kind of trade they wished to enter, but once apprenticed, in the custom of the time, the decision was practically irrevocable.

Entering Ashley Down

We have noted that Müller restricted entry to those who were without both parents and in destitute circumstances.[20] Full details were asked and recorded regarding the family background of the child, and statements were checked against relevant documents. We read of Charlotte Hill, the very first child admitted to Wilson Street on 11 April 11, 1836, of her parents' deaths, the date and place of her birth, and the fact that her father "kept the Plume of Feathers in Gloster Lane", a pubic house that continues to this day. On the

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[18] Miss Jones told me that for the rest of her life she had slept on the edge of the bed, a habit formed from her Ashley Down bed-sharing days.

[19] Treacle was apparently prescribed by doctors to the poor who could not afford education. "Pop" means to pawn and "weasel" is rhyming slang: weasel > stoat > coat.

[20] According to the Office of National Statistics, in 1841 life expectancy at birth was 40 years for males and 42 years for females. It was lower in the major cities – in Liverpool, for example, it was 26.

financial side we read "the mother at the time of the Bristol riots put out £300 without telling her husband where she had put it". She suddenly was taken irreversibly ill "and died without telling where the money was, which seems to have caused the father's death". The image below is of indifferent quality but conveys the form in which admission details were recorded for many years.

Charlotte Hill: First Admission to Wilson Street, 1836

The stories of some children are filled with pathos. Mary Griffiths was a little girl of six. On the death of her parents she had subsisted on the weekly allowance of the Poor Law Guardians. "The parish allowed 2/6, afterward only 1/6, and would not have allowed even this but wished to put the child in the poor house, but were influenced by the tears of Elizabeth Nicholls to

allow her the money and leave the child with her. The child has no property at all; has some relations who are also poor, and allow nothing for the child."

Müller repeatedly argued that, by reserving the decision on admission solely with himself, he ensured that the genuinely needy were admitted. His criticism of existing orphanages and his convictions about the poor moral and spiritual state of the Poor Law Unions remained throughout his long life.

Leaving Ashley Down

The numbers of children passing through were considerable. By 1875, more than twenty years before Müller's death, 2,460 children had entered and then left the orphan houses. The greatest number of these went either into service or were apprenticed. Others were withdrawn or left without consent. A number died or were sent home for health reasons, and a small number were expelled. An examination of details recorded about those who left probably gives us the clearest insight into the character of George Müller's work, and what he meant to convey by his wish to set it on scriptural principles.

There were clearly periods of considerable spiritual blessing, and in general behaviour problems do not seem to have been extensive. "Though most of them had been brought up in a very different manner from what one could desire, yet God has constrained them on the whole to behave exceedingly well, so much so that it has attracted the attention of all observers." Jane Holder, for example, had entered the orphanage from a very unhappy home. Her father had remarried on the death of her mother. He had then died, and the stepmother had run off with the club money.[21] Jane was then moved to her grandmother's – a washer woman. On her leaving Ashley Down Müller remarks, "from being a very sickly and delicate child she has become a healthy and fine young woman, and behaves exceedingly well. How great the privilege of being allowed to care for the orphans! Lord help thy servant to continue in this work, though it is connected with so many trials!" Some children, like Elizabeth Scamp who had been "instrumental as an orphan to the spiritual benefit of many", were taken on as staff members.

The years from 1838 to 1840 saw particular blessing. In one year, eight girls out of the 96 children were admitted into fellowship, and 1840 witnessed a number of striking conversions, despite the fact that Müller's faith was repeatedly tested during the year, and there were occasions when basic necessities were denied him through lack of money. Special meetings had been started specifically for expounding the scriptures to the children.

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[21] "Club money" refers to the widely employed savings schemes.

"An almost universal attention is manifested by them" and fourteen more children were admitted into fellowship.

In 1857 a second period of spiritual blessing occurred, following the conversion and death from TB of one of the girls. Her letters to another believing orphan tell of her physical pain, conviction of sin and eventual conversion: "I trust I have found peace in Jesus. I know my faith is very weak. Sometimes I feel full of joy then, at others, doubts rise up... I should like a nice note from you." She longs for "that happy place prepared for those who love the blessed Jesus... I feel I have so much sin in my heart now, but there we shall have no sin." She died in May 1857 at the age of seventeen, but not before more than fifty of the older girls were brought under concern for their souls, "some with deep conviction of sin accompanying it, so that they were exceedingly distressed."

Müller appears to have been a wise counsellor of souls, and knew that such impressions sometimes are transient, but more than a year had passed before he recorded these events, and there were then 23 girls of whom "there has been no doubt as to their being believers" and 38 others under concern for their souls. We read of Sarah Jones who died of TB in 1857. She had been one of the least promising orphans before her conversion. When she became a Christian, she was asked if she had told others. "No", she replied, "I want them to find it out by my behaviour". "And this", Müller remarked, "they could not fail to do. The fruits of the Holy Spirit were manifested in her patience under suffering, and her submission to the divine will." Speaking to a girl who had been converted during her illness, Sarah wrote, "I was so glad to hear you had found Jesus. I should have written to say how glad I was; but I had not the strength."

Indeed, there were numerous who could say with the correspondent to Müller in December 1857, "It was in the dear Orphan House that I heard of Jesus. It was there I first saw myself to be a sinner, and Jesus the Saviour."

Sickness and Death

These records show that sickness was a constant fact of life at Ashley Down, and Müller did not find it easy to deal with the problem. He was faced with the choice of keeping them or sending them back to their home parish and the attentions of the Poor Law. Tuberculosis was the biggest single cause of illness, and it was Müller's policy – unflinching to later eyes – to tell the child immediately the diagnosis was made, and that no recovery could be expected. Children with enuresis (involuntary urinating, especially at night) usually were sent home to surviving relatives. In Müller's day it seemed "an incurable disease, most offensive to other children".[22]

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[22] We have heard the memory of a later resident that children slept two to a bed.

These were not the only problems. Of Helen Campbell we read, "She has little mind, weak sight and short fingers." Müller adds, in words that have a note of unintended humour, "with no prospect of being able to improve her in any of these things". Some children were emotionally or mentally disturbed. William Pratt "feigned himself mad, told many lies, and behaved exceedingly bad in many respects". As he was considered "a great injury to the other children" he was sent home to his relatives. Again, Jane Weaver, age 13, "sought in a most pernicious way to corrupt the minds of the other children". After repeated prayer it was decided to expel her. She was taken ill that very day "with fitts", and was allowed to remain, hoping she might benefit through her illness. She did not, and Müller reached the conclusion that she had been pretending to be ill "for the sake of being out of school, and having liberty in other respects". She was sent home to her grandmother.

Death, when it occurred, caused sadness, as when a "sweet and lovely" infant died of croup. Müller was anxious to draw instruction from the death of children. In a year of spiritual blessing one girl, dying of TB, grew increasingly hostile and indifferent to the gospel.

At last, she was evidently dying, yet altogether unprepared for death. In this stage all the orphans in the Girls Orphan Home were assembled together, and the awful state of this dying child was pointed out to the unbelieving orphans as a warning, and to the believing orphans as a subject for gratitude to God. It was laid on their hearts to give themselves to prayer for their dying companion.

Discipline

George Müller lived in an age of stern discipline, yet his reports on the orphanage reveal a considerable degree of understanding, as witness his insight into the effects of his father's favouritism. Problems were not long in coming, and the ways in which they were resolved reveal perhaps more than anything else the core of Müller's attitude to caring for children. Less than a month after opening the first orphan house, Eliza Ryan was dismissed along with two other girls. One had run away after being "guilty of many lies, impudence, and theft in small matters" (Image on the next page). The reasons entered into the register for dismissal were various – theft, persistent bad behaviour, blasphemy, running away, etc. Müller was, as we have noticed already, very concerned at the effects of such behaviour on others under his care, and the phrase "he was very injurious to others" repeatedly occurs in the reports.

Yet in matters of discipline, as in all else, Müller never acted hastily. His patience was seemingly endless. One boy, "a great source of trial to us repeatedly, and having given us no comfort whatever, at last was expelled out of this house for stealing pears in a garden opposite the New Orphan House, after having been received back into the house four times after

running away". Another boy, Joseph Bolitho, was dismissed five years after entering the home. He had boasted of his delinquency and membership in a gang of thieves and had twice run away after stealing from other children. Yet he had been received back, "hoping that by bearing with him, admonishing him, speaking to him privately, praying with him, and using a variety of other means, he might be reclaimed". Then, "solemnly, with prayer, before the whole establishment (he was) expelled, if by any means this last painful remedy might be blessed to him. Yet we follow even this poor sinner with our prayers."

Eliza Ryan: Dismissals Book 1836

This incident is particularly instructive, as it suggests that in disciplining the children Müller was drawing on the New Testament model of church discipline, with its fine mingling of compassion and faithfulness. This seems to be confirmed in the example of three girls aged 15 to 17 sent home in 1852, They were,

Sent away in disgrace out of the establishment to their relatives, after having been long born with, and hope having been gone to get them not a different state, in order that this last remedy might be used and others be warned. They are all three able to earn their bread, all three having been trained for a good while for a situation as servants.

A strength of Müller's position derives from his biblical view of sin, and from how he was not easily dispirited. This is echoed in his repeated affirmation that he was not discouraged in the work and had always expected trials from it.

Running the Orphan Homes

If such a work was to be successful, care was needed in the selection of suitable staff. Müller generally was fortunate in this respect, and in Robert Brown, an early Master of the Boy's Orphan House, he had a colleague in full sympathy with him. When Müller was temporarily absent, Brown writes, "I think we all felt your absence a little, although not cast down on that account... The sisters send their love to you." A few days later he writes "we felt the poverty a little more I think on account of your absence".

To Müller it was a blessing "whereby it has been most particularly manifested that the work is of Him... that He has given to us such brethren and sisters to take care of the children, who serve not for filthy lucre's sake, but constrained by the love of Jesus... being willing to give what they have rather than that the children should lack." Nonetheless, obtaining "suitable, godly persons" remained one of the greatest challenges:

So many things are to be taken into account. Suitable age, health, experience, love for children, true godliness, a ready mind to serve God and not themselves, a ready mind to bear with the many trials and difficulties connected with it, a manifest purpose to labour not for the sake of the remuneration, but to serve God in their work.

Not that perfect staff were expected or found. "I am myself", Müller writes, "far, very far, from being without weakness, deficiencies and failings". However, "by God's grace it is my purpose never to give to any brother or sister a situation in connection with the Institution, for the sake of providing for them, if they are not suitable for it according to the light which God gives me."

A Man of Faith

As one reads the records of Müller's work, the unrelenting demand of circumstances, that he lived in dependence upon the provision of God is remarkable, particularly during the first six years of the work:

Not once, or five times, or five hundred times, but thousands of times in these three score years, have we had in hand not enough for one more meal, either in food or funds; but not once has God failed us; not once have we or the orphans gone hungry or lacked any good thing.

"This way of living", he reflects, "brings the Lord remarkably near. He is, as it were, morning by morning inspecting our stores, that accordingly He may send help." From 1834 until his death in 1898, Müller received a total of £989,000 for the orphans, plus almost £400,000 for the other work of The Scriptural Knowledge Institution. During the same period more than 10,000 children had entered the orphan homes. Yet at the time of his death the total value of his estate was only £160.

In 1851 Müller was handling a correspondence of about 300 letters a year without any secretarial help, in addition to the multitude of other responsibilities – am amount of work that by 1861 was sufficient to keep three secretaries busy.

While he steadfastly refused to publish lists of subscribers, Müller was scrupulous in his methods of accounting. In addition to the careful enumeration of every gift in cash received, he kept a meticulous record of the gifts in kind which were lodged with him. In some reports up to fifteen pages are devoted to this record. For example:

19.12.36: Two large cheeses weighing 38¾lb. – 21st. 14lbs. of flour – a quart of honey – 1 doz. of babys' bibs.
16.1.37: 2½yds of linen, 2½yds of calico, 1 old jacket, I pair of trousers, 3 old bonnets, 4 pairs of old stockings, 1 little chemise.
10.3.37: A ton of coals and an old bedstead.

Blankets, bread, broaches, apples, ointment, nightcaps, pin cushions, petticoats and patchwork quilts were among the gifts received.

The story of C. H. Spurgeon's visit to Bristol is worth repeating, illustrating as it does the close friendship between the two men.[23] Spurgeon had been preaching in Bristol with the hope of gaining £300 needed for his own orphanage. He received the money, but on retiring to bed was convinced that he should give the money to Müller. On arriving at Ashley Down the following morning he found Müller in prayer, asking God for that very amount. On his return to London Spurgeon found a letter awaiting him. It contained 300 guineas; his £300 with interest as Spurgeon character-istically remarked.[24]

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[23] For an account of Spurgeon's work that also draws on archival materials – many of which subsequently have been lost in a fire, see Ian Shaw, 1976, "Charles Spurgeon and the Stockwell Orphanage", *Christian Graduate* 29 (3): 71-79.

[24] One guinea was 21 shillings (£1.05).

Accountable to God

We already have noted the care with which Müller approached all decisions. No impetuous acting "on faith" was sufficient for him. Space does not permit the extensive setting out of the pros and cons of moving from Wilson Street in 1845. Take the absence, for example, of proper play space. "The dear orphans ought, I know, to be trained in the habits of industry, but children are children and need to be treated as such, and they should, on account of their health, have the full benefit of a playground."

This care was related to his feeling of being accountable to God for all that he did. The Reports illustrate this. By 1844 the annual reports were over seventy pages in length. In 1838 Müller had commenced preparing lists of all people who had subscribed. He defended this practice, "as a few individuals have stated to us that they consider it unscriptural". He distinguishes this from issuing lists of donors – "such a thing we abhor". He sent the list only to those who actually had given rather than publishing it to the readers in general. He justifies his practice from Paul's statement to the Corinthians that, in respect of money entrusted to us, we are to provide for honest things "in the sight of men" – "that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us". Müller was wise in this respect; Dr Barnado was to find himself at the centre of a major legal proceeding later in the century, for his failure to keep account of monies given him.

As he carried out his work, Müller was convinced that the basic witness of his efforts was to the fact that "the Lord in these last days is as willing as in times of old to hear prayer, and to show Himself mighty on the behalf of those who trust in Him. That such a testimony is needed we have no doubt." This argument is carried forward repeatedly:

The chief and primary object of the work was not the temporal welfare of the children, or even their spiritual welfare, but to show before the whole world and the whole church of Christ that God is ready to prove Himself as the living God so that we need not go away from Him to our fellow men.

If His glory is dear to you we affectionately and earnestly entreat you to beseech Him to uphold us: for how awful would be the disgrace brought upon His holy name, if we who have so publicly made our boast in Him, and have spoken well of Him, should be left to disgrace Him, either by unbelief in the hour of trial, or by a life of sin in other respects.

Despite what some have said, Müller did not regard his ministry as the result of a special gift of faith:

It is indeed a cause of deep sorry and humiliation... that persons who live in this way are considered extraordinary persons. These things all the children of God ought to be familiar with, from their own experience, that there should be no need of speaking and writing about them.

Concluding

Why might we think the long-ago work of Müller should call for record? We would not wish to imitate his particular mode of operation, and indeed our contemporary sensitivities, even as Christians, might be brought up sharp on more than one occasion. Who of us would feel comfortable with telling a young child that they had a terminal disease and that they should hold out no expectation of recovery?

Yet Müller is in several ways an exemplar. Within a few years of arriving in a foreign country and still not fully at home in the English language,[25] he set about understanding the assumptions undergirding the system of charitable interventions, both secular and Christian, and established principles that set him apart from the majority of his contemporaries. Müller may not have known the work of the Scottish minister Ralph Erskine, but Erskine's words apply well to him: "The faithful man studies to be faithful to the present generation." [26] Furthermore, unlike, for example, his later contemporary, Charles Spurgeon, he remained closely and personally involved. He lived – and indeed died – in the same orphan homes that he built. But perhaps most significantly, he applied a considered sense of what he believed consistent biblical norms required of him. What this required in terms of specifics in 1830s Bristol is not what will be required in twenty-first century UK. But the considered commitment certainly is.

Müller's theology was, we might say "practical", in the sense that it may be inferred from, and was exemplified by, his practice. For example, we noted how his practice, most explicitly in relation to how he handled dismissals and problems in the lives of those in Ashley Down, was premised, albeit tacitly so, on central themes and dimensions of the gospel. His theology was practical in a second sense, in that it should be seen wholly as a piece with his practical concerns. As Murrell remarks, in the context of the divisions over end-time prophecy that vexed and divided the Plymouth Brethren, "George Müller did not want to become embroiled in the controversies. His over-riding desire was to preach Christ, and feed the hungry, while providing for the poor and proving that God answers prayer."

The question of if, and in what circumstances, Christians should collaborate with those of other faiths or none was understood in varying ways over the nineteenth century, even among those who held with varying emphases, the doctrines of grace. Ian J. Shaw's important study of the "high Calvinists" in Manchester and London[27] illustrates how place, personal

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[25] The main changes he made in the second and third editions of his *Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings* were occasioned by his growing ease in the English language.

[26] Taken from his *Sermons and Other Practical Works* (1821 edition).

[27] Ian J. Shaw, *High Calvinists in Action* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

backgrounds and doctrine played their role in the lives and ministries of Joseph Irons, William Gadsby and others, shaping their stances on such matters. By contrast with Müller, some were ready to support controversial positions such as Catholic Emancipation and to collaborate widely in educational reforms, without setting these engagements in an explicitly soteriological context.

We cannot say Müller was innovative in organisational terms, but he definitely was so in his principles of financial support. Spurgeon, for example, apparently did not follow Müller's avoidance of holding votes through which individuals could canvas for admission. The challenge of his *modus operandi* also faces us when we realise that he chose to make rooms in Ashley Down his own home. In practical terms, Müller's life certainly teaches us that a simpler trust in God's faithfulness is desirable, and that they who devise liberal things, by liberal things they shall stand.

BOOK REVIEWS

Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology
James K. A. Smith, Baker Academic, 2017, 233 pp, £12.48 (Amazon)/£9.01 (Kindle)

Awaiting the King is the third volume of James K. A. Smith's "Cultural Liturgies" series of studies. In his Preface Smith traces the origins of this volume: having set out to engage with the legacy of Abraham Kuyper, and in particular to confront the triumphalist strain which some have taken up and developed, Smith sought to balance the affirmative with the more antithetical in Kuyper's theology. In the process he found himself engaging with the massive contribution of Augustine's *City of God* and also with the contemporary thinking of Oliver O'Donovan and Peter Leithart. As a result he envisages his place in the world as being a "resident alien" *and* investing in the state. His goal in *Awaiting the King* is to reform Reformed public theology rather than raze it to the ground, nuancing the work of Kuyper, Bavinck, Wolterstorff, Mouw and others. Thus, drawing on Augustine, Smith says, "the first political impetus is one of calculated ambivalence and circumspection tempered by ad hoc evaluations about selective collaborations for the common good" (xiv). The question is *how* we are to be resident aliens.

Smith's Introduction sets out the main lines along which his thinking has developed. He indicates that he has two aims in *Awaiting the King*: The first is to work out the implications of what he terms a "liturgical" (more on this term later) theology of culture for how we imagine and envisage political engagement. The second is to offer an alternative paradigm that moves beyond contemporary debates in theology, or, as he puts it, that "reframes the questions in view *of*, and with a view *to*, practice" (8). He offers a "catholic proposal" based on a Reformed model that draws on Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, Wolterstorff, Mouw and Chaplin.

There are, Smith believes, two problems that must be confronted. The first is a tendency to think of Christianity and politics in largely "spatialized" terms (the language of "the public square") and the second a rationalising that assumes people are "rational actors". These ignore the fact that "the *polis* is a *formative* community of solidarity" (9) and political participation assumes such formation.

At this point something needs to be said about Smith's use of the terminology of "liturgies". He defines liturgies as "rituals of ultimate concern" that "are formative for identity", inculcating visions of the good life (10). He argues that, since our identities are rooted in desire/love (drawing on Augustine), liturgies are love-shaping practices "that function as pedagogies of ultimate desire" (10). Based on this, Smith argues that if politics is habit-

forming, it is also love-shaping and so we enter the realm of liturgies. Although the terminology may be unfamiliar, it is clear that Smith seeks to widen our view of "politics" considerably.

Politics, Smith argues, is bound up with virtue and the dynamics of virtue require a *teleology*, a vision of the good to animate our common life. For the Christian, teleology is inseparably related to eschatology and that eschatology is one of hope. This, Smith says, runs counter to the cynical political ideologies of despair that reduce human life to what he terms the machinations of power and domination, as well as running counter to postmillennial progressivism.

He concludes that Christian hope reframes the political in the light of eternity and resituates it in the light of creation. He prefers the term "public" theology to "political theology" to avoid a narrow fixation on electoral politics. Much that constitutes the life of the *polis* is modes of life in common that fall outside the interests of the state or of government. Thus "public theology" deals with "how to live in common with neighbours who don't believe what we believe, don't love what we love, don't hope for what we await" (11). This involves institutions and communities beyond those of government, involving the forces of the market and society which outweigh the influence of government.

In contrast to many treatments of the Christian's relationship to state and community, Smith's position is that citizens are not just thinkers or believers – they are *lovers* (drawing on Augustine, as indicated previously). In building his argument he is aiming to make things more complex, not more simple. He wants to move away from a rationalist/intellectual paradigm which equates religion with beliefs and worldviews, to identifying the religious with "rituals of intimacy" (14), i.e. liturgies. Cultural institutions and practices are "religious" if they try to shape our *loves*; they have formative pretensions. Smith sums up his aim as reprising Augustine's liturgical analysis of the earthly city's "civic theologies" in the context of late modern liberalism.

Careful readers will have noticed that so far this review has addressed only the Introduction to *Awaiting the King*. That is not a cover for failing to read the rest of the book, but a recognition that Smith's project is radical in its fundamental sense of going to the roots of the matter. The Introduction sets out the main lines along which he will develop his engagement with "public theology" and so it is essential to grasping the "big picture" he is painting.

In the body of the book Smith works out in detail the implications of the position he has outlined. In Chapter 1 ("Rites Talk: The Worship of Democracy") he seeks to clarify the Augustinian perspective on the "two cities", arguing that the identity of the cities is determined by the loves that they promote and also that Christians are citizens of only one city. They are,

however, to be engaged as disciples of Christ in the earthly city where they are resident aliens. Chapter 2 ("Revisiting the Church as *Polis*") deals with the identity of the church as an organised community with a God-given *telos* and so one with an eschatological orientation. Whilst some have argued that Augustine's perspective on the cities is exclusively antithetical, Smith in chapter 3 ("The Craters of the Gospel: Liberalism's Borrowed Capital") presents a more nuanced view of Augustine, drawing on his idea of the *permixtum* of the two cities in the present world. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 then offer Smith's consideration of how Christians can collaborate in the public sphere for the common good, including issues of the place of common grace, pluralism, social reform and Christendom. The contribution of Neocalvinist thinkers such Abraham Kuyper is both mined and critiqued in the course of Smith's wide-ranging exposition.

Many of the issues Smith deals with are highly controversial, both inside and outside the Christian Church. Approaches differ radically, from the "Benedict Option" through to those who look for substantial transformation as a result of Christian engagement in society. Most will disagree with Smith at some points, some profoundly and comprehensively so. Those who engage thoughtfully with his arguments will, however, find much to challenge and illuminate.

The book is not easy reading. Smith evaluates and critiques a wide range of authors from all periods of history, drawing on philosophical and theological discussions which will not be common currency for all readers, and sometimes using unfamiliar terminology. He frequently refers to matters discussed in the previous two volumes of the trilogy and does not repeat material found there, which can at times be frustrating and perplexing. *Awaiting the King* is not a book that can be read quickly or casually: It demands hard thinking and critical engagement. It will, however, repay the effort in the stimulus it provides to wrestle with the key issues of Christian life and witness as citizens of the heavenly city currently located in an increasingly hostile earthly city.

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Faith. Hope. Love. The Christ-Centered Way to Grow in Grace
Mark Jones, Crossway, 2017, 287pp, £13.18 (Amazon)/£6.71 (Kindle)

Ten years (or so) ago, few people were interested in vinyl. Today, its resurgence has inspired a new generation to slow down and savour their enjoyment of music.

The same could be said of catechisms. In recent decades, only a very small minority of Christians have faithfully persisted with the time-honoured question-and-answer format of catechetical instruction. But in the last few years – particularly with the wide circulation of The New City Catechism – the irreplaceable value of catechisms in helping Christians slow down and savour their faith has been rediscovered.

Mark Jones' latest book, *Faith. Hope. Love.,* makes a unique contribution to the catechetical resurgence. His 58 questions and answers focus on the "three beautiful sisters" of faith, hope, and love – the triad of theological virtues beloved by Paul, and employed by Peter and the writer to the Hebrews. Although theologians have written on this famous triad for two millennia, as Dr. Jones observes, there has been little over the past few hundred years from a Reformed perspective. And so his first objective in this book is to help contemporary Christians rediscover the beauty and importance of these foundational virtues.

His second objective is to systematically explore what the Scriptures teach about each virtue by asking practical but profound theological questions of each. As with all good catechisms, *Faith. Hope. Love.* digs increasingly deeper into each topic, turning this volume into a brief and accessible ethics textbook. So, for instance, the section on love moves from establishing love as the foundation of Christianity, to exploring why and how we are to love and respect human life; how our generosity in love is to be shown in the local church; and how we show love with regard to our speech.

Throughout each chapter, Dr. Jones weaves the wisdom of previous generations by drawing on the insights of the Reformers and Puritans. Like the most accomplished of tour guides in a museum, the author dips into the enormous contributions of John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, Herman Witsius, John Owen and others in an accessible and undistracting way that leaves the reader eager to learn more.

I found Dr. Jones' exploration of faith encouraging and inspiring. His explanation that "faith lays hold not of something irrational but of truths that we cannot attain in our natural state" (39) is very helpful, particularly in our materialistic, post-Christian context. His nuanced discussion emphasising the essential importance of good works – "Good works are the necessary path believers must walk to final salvation", amidst the all-sufficiency of faith, "When we first believe, we are as justified as we will ever be" – is excellent. And the wonderful reminders that, "Christ would have to relinquish his office

as priest in order for someone to lose his or her justification", and "God could bar us from heaven only if he were prepared to excommunicate his own Son from heaven. As safe as Christ is in heaven, so are his people", are almost worth the price of the book in itself!

The section on hope begins by distinguishing how we commonly understand "hope" today with the Christian's understanding of hope ("a Spirit-given virtue enabling us to joyfully expect things promised by God through Jesus Christ"), and lifting our eyes to the uniquely trinitarian nature of the Christian hope. As the author guides us still deeper, he draws the strands of faith and hope together by emphasising that, "The already of faith gives birth to the not yet of hope" – which he helpfully and very practically connects with the Lord's Supper.

Inevitably, there are a couple of chapters – regarding the salvation of our children (28) and our comfort in the face of their death (29) – where Dr. Jones' Presbyterian understanding of covenant theology comes to the fore. Personally, I found his emphasis on a hypothetical analysis of God's covenant to Adam's children before the fall unconvincing. Similarly, I disagree with the presumption of salvation in the children of believers that is stated in the Canons of Dort (though not in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the confessional standard of the Presbyterian Church of America in which Dr. Jones serves), and which forms the basis for his hope in the face of the death of the children of believers.

However, whilst we disagree on these issues, I am thankful that he had the courage to include and answer these questions. Even if we come to different conclusions, the questions and presentation of the biblical data alone should prompt serious Christians to further study. I am also thankful for the pastoral way in which Dr. Jones engages with these deeply personal issues. His ministry experience is evident not only in the gentle way that he answers these profound questions, but also in the way that he guards against false hope (for instance, by not giving in to the temptation to evade our theological convictions about original sin).

The chapters on love are warm and challenging in equal measure. Dr. Jones draws on various Scriptures to establish that love is the foundation of Christianity, and quotes from Geerhardus Vos and Martin Luther to demonstrate that the great hope we have as sinners is not that we can make ourselves attractive and loveable, but that we become attractive because we have been loved by the free grace of God. His brief explanation of how Jesus satisfied each of the Ten Commandments by loving God perfectly is helpful and thought-provoking. Similarly, the way he draws faith back into the discussion and emphasises (quoting Richard Gaffin) that, "Paul does not teach a 'faith alone' position… Rather, his is a 'by faith alone' position" – thereby emphasising the essential importance of good works – is very balanced.

If I could have asked Dr. Jones to add an extra chapter in the practical outworking of love, it would have been to engage with how we should love our non-Christian friends who live very non-Christian lives. Although the chapter (44) on loving those who are in higher/lower positions than ourselves is a helpful, big-picture reminder of the counter-cultural way Christians are to love people who are (in some ways) different to us, I would have appreciated more emphasis on how we can best live out Christ's love whilst we are surrounded by questions of sexual and gender identity, and the other contemporary pressures Christians are facing in the West.

But these are small criticisms. *Faith. Hope. Love.* is an inspiring read that draws its readers into the wonderful truth that, through the Lord Jesus Christ, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecc 4:12).

As the author observes, "The proliferation of catechisms in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras was a sign of health in the church" (16). I pray that the same would be true in our day and generation, and that God would build up and bless his church through catechisms like this book.

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Urban church planting: Journey into a world of depravity, density and diversity
Stephen Mark Davis, 2018, 66pp, £7.80 (Amazon)/£3.89 (Kindle)

I have read this book several times in the last week. From reading the introduction I thought this book is a banger! I have pored over it again and again, looking for something to dislike, but the more I have read it, the more I like it.

The author, Stephen Davis, has almost forty years' experience as a church planter, pastor, missionary and academic. Stephen has been there, done it, worn the T-shirt and now he is giving the opportunity for potential church planters to try the T-shirt on for size, and make sure it fits, before they have to go there. He has planted churches in his home city in the USA, been involved in cross-cultural church planting abroad, been a missionary and has trained missionaries and church planters in countries including France, Romania and China.

Unlike other church planting books that I have read, this one deliberately avoids glamourising the work. It is clear from the start that this is not a book that offers "practical tips to help you plant churches". Its focus is to share the author's experiences – both good and bad – in order to prepare potential

church planters mentally and emotionally for the rollercoaster ride that is ahead.

This book is real and honest; there is enough information in the introduction to help church planters avoid the mistakes that I made in my first few years of planting New Life Church: Making sure you don't neglect the importance of culture or your marriage and managing unachievable expectations are just three things which would save church planters a lot of hassle in their early years.

Regarding culture, the author tells us that in 1982, after successfully planting a church in Philadelphia, "We left the US for the mission field as heroes and arrived in France as idiots (in that we couldn't really function on our own)" (Kindle loc. 124). He continues "I knew something about the struggles and challenges of church planting. The problem was that I knew little to nothing about planting churches in France" (124-5). He then recognised the need for an insider, a local French man, to help guide and introduce him to the culture. This is something, from my experience, that UK church planters and sending churches are failing to do, when building church planting and mission teams.

Regarding marriage, he stresses the importance of making sure that a church planter's wife is "...on board, not as a reluctant woman following her man and guilted into following you, but committed and content to live and serve the city. Unfortunately, this is something that isn't always thought through" (163). Many wives that I have spoken to have either been reluctant to live in the community of the church plant or reluctant to serve its community, leading to a huge strain on marriages and the ministry.

One of the reasons that I have found myself feeling defeated was that I entered into church planting with unrealistic expectations and this is something that the author also warns against: "All your plans, expectations and dreams will not be accomplished. You will at times alternate between joy and sorrow, between grateful and begrudging ministry, between delays and display, between encouragement and disappointments in yourself and in others" (163).

He reminds us that we may see failure where God sees success. And we may see success where God sees failure (162). But all we are called to do is faithfully live out the gospel, make disciples and represent the faith well in our world (163). His best nugget in the book is when he writes that we should "...adjust our ambitions in surrender to God's sustaining grace, even if that means that our results do not pass muster in the eyes of others" (181). Ambitions of a big church, a good salary and a nice house are what get in the way of many potential church plants in gospel priority areas, and also cause many planters to feel defeated and give up when their ambitions are not met.

I have previously spoken about why the working class are missing from UK churches: Because the dominant culture places barriers in their way, based on culture, tradition and preferences. So when Stephen warns against putting our preferences – for which Bible version we use, how we should dress for church, or our style of worship – above the gospel, I give a hearty amen.

The author's forceful words convict, comfort and reassure me when he explains that as urban church planters we need to know who we want to please and where we want to go; ultimately, we need to be pleasing God and going where the gospel is not. He writes frankly about how, if we choose to plant in an area of the city which is less desirable, we will struggle to build a team, struggle to be accepted by the local community, will have to do evangelism and church differently, will struggle to find funding, and some people that do join us will leave because they cannot hack it. He is also honest enough to admit that eventually some of the planters themselves will have had enough of doing church in hard places, and leave.

Although he recognises that planting churches in hard places is inherently difficult, he suggests that the culture of denominations, organisations and churches does not help the situation either. This can lead to the sending out of ill-equipped planters, not providing sufficient financial and practical support or failing to send out planters in the first place.

As helpful as I found this book, I am critical about two things: the promotion of working bi-vocationally and the fact that there is no chapter on raising and training indigenous gospel workers/planters.

Bi-vocational ministry does not work in our context; even with the qualifications and experience to command a great salary and flexible hours, to reach urban areas in the UK requires a presence on the ground 24/7. There is no way to plant a successful church in a "hard place" whilst working in another job; both mental health and ministry will eventually suffer.

I also believe that Stephen misses a trick by not featuring a chapter on training indigenous leaders. To be fair to him, this may be something on his mind, and at times he seems to allude to it. His comments on the church's failures to raise, train and equip planters and his years in facilitating foreign church plants suggests that he sees this as valuable. For me, a section reflecting on his experience of discipling, training and employing indigenous urban Christians would have made this book complete.

However, read in context and alongside some contemporary books and articles from working-class Christians in the UK, this book could help to make changes in the culture of recruitment, training and support for church planting in the UK's "hard places".

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Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ
David B. Garner, P&R books, 2016, 366pp, £19.56 (Amazon) /£7.91 (Kindle)

Reading *Sons in the Son* had an effect on me similar to my experience of first reading J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*; John Stott's *Cross of Christ* and John Murray's *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*. Here is profound theology, which led me to doxology. Very few academic, theological books have so gripped me that I could not wait for the next available hour to carry on reading.

As the title suggests, this is a book about our adoption – a neglected doctrine; not many sermons are heard on the subject (possibly because only a few biblical texts contain the actual word). However, in Part 1 of the book, which deals with the hermeneutics, history and etymology of adoption, Garner shows that there are many more occurrences of variants of the word and the idea of adoption than perhaps we realise. So throughout the book he uses the transliteration *huiothesia* as a catch-all substitute for our word adoption, and the supernatural reality of our adoption.

Sons in the Son has a particular contemporary relevance. Today there is confusion surrounding the role of fathers in families. Rampant feminism has intimidated the church into being afraid to emphasise the Fatherhood of God. However, Garner is not particularly concerned about restoring any perceived loss of the place of God the Father in our consciousness of the Trinity. His main thesis is that in God's eternal purposes, the Father desired "sons" (i.e. brothers – and, if you like, "sisters") for his Son, and that could only be accomplished by means of the Incarnation. "In short, in the sent Son of God, redemption attains its goal in adoption" (15). Adoption, therefore, is as much a part of Christology, as it is of Soteriology. Garner's survey of adoption in historical theology demonstrates that neither Calvin, nor the Westminster Confession, neglected the subject. On the contrary, they very much emphasised our union with Christ, and that is reflected in the title of this book: "... specifically for Paul, it is adoption that serves as an organizing principle [for soteriology]" (33). Indeed, Calvin referred to God's "Gospel of Adoption".

Part 2 of the book is an "Exegetical and Theological Survey of the Key Texts". In some sympathy with Murray, Garner divides his material into three parts: Adoption Purposed, Accomplished and Applied.

The first shows how even the *pactum salutis* (the Covenant of Redemption) between Father, Son and Holy Spirit has, as its focus, our "predestination unto adoption" (Eph 1:4-5): "...the holy purposes of sovereign election are realized only through Christ Jesus as Son of God, who effectuates and secures believers" (75).

How our adoption is accomplished is explained by an exegesis of Galatians 4:4-7. Again, the Son of God became incarnate "so that we might receive adoption as sons".

Adoption Applied focuses on the Spirit's work via three texts in Romans 8 and 9. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Adoption, "in whom believers are transferred, transformed and confirmed as sons in this Christological/ pneumatological age" (124). He is the "Eschatological Spirit", enabling us to live in the already/not-yet kingdom, becoming more and more like the Son, who learned obedience. So, "identifying fully with their Elder Brother, glorified sons are first suffering sons" (127). Garner convincingly shows that virtually every reference to Spirit in Romans means Spirit (and not spirit), even in 8:15. But "in the epochal transition from covenant curse to covenant blessing, the Spirit of fear is now the Spirit of adoption for those in Christ" (123).

Garner shows how Christ's resurrection is the key to the consummation of our adoption – "adoption reaches its *telos* with [our] bodily redemption" (141). This is an important emphasis, and a corrective to any gnostic tendency to treat the physical and material as insignificant.

Part 2 concludes with a very helpful exposition of Romans 9-11. These chapters are not a later insertion between chapters 8 and 12, but a necessary part of Paul's flow of argument to show that God's covenant faithfulness to Israel is unwavering, despite their disobedience. Paul has "missiological motives" (150) for interrupting his argument, before proceeding with his "therefore" of Romans 12:1. God's purposes have always been to have many sons from many nations who are true sons of Abraham. Those who were "not my people" (Hosea's gentiles) will be called "sons of the living God" (Rom 9:26). So Israel's sonship is "typological": "Adoption in Christ fills and fulfils ancient Israel's corporate adoption as son" (156). This progressive development of sonship is not exclusively futuristic (as Piper has argued); it embraces Israel's too, because of "covenantal continuity" (160) towards a "realized Christological adoption (true Israel) in the age of the Spirit" (161).

Some readers of this review will be better able to judge how Garner's soteriological and eschatological (*et al*) frameworks influence his exposition of Romans. But this reviewer – a cautiously-amillennial reformed Baptist – is persuaded that he is "spot-on".

Part 3 (the most demanding) examines how this eschatological adoption is secured by considering Christ's own "progressive sonship". We should not be alarmed by that phrase; he firmly rejects the ancient errors of adoptionism, upholding the high Christology of Chalcedon and Westminster. "God sent his Son" indeed presupposes a pre-existent sonship. However – taking issue with Donald Macleod's "static sonship" – Garner argues for a "progressive functional dimension" to Christ's sonship: "The pre-incarnate Son became the incarnate Son, and then at his resurrection was adopted as Son of God in power" (183). Christ's resurrection (see Romans 1:3-4) – much more than his investiture – marked his adoption, and for those in Christ, the guarantee of theirs also. So, in "bringing many sons to glory", union with Christ requires us to follow the "Calvary Road" of trustful obedience and cross-bearing.

Garner defends the use of *huiothesia* to describe our sonship, by showing that the word doesn't exclusively describe the practice of Roman Imperial adoption. In Paul's adoption (excuse pun!) of *huiothesia* the Holy Spirit may well be guiding him to allude to Roman adoption practices, showing how Christ's adoption is higher, in a similar way that he adopts slavery and sporting metaphors.

So, where does adoption fit into the *Ordo Salutis* (order of salvation)? Whilst affirming that justification is indeed a *sine qua non* of our salvation, Garner warns of the danger of "forensic fixation". He exposes the weaknesses of the New Perspective and Federal Vision, but cautions us not to exaggerate the priority of justification in the *Ordo*. He persuasively argues that our adoption as sons in the Son ought to have more emphasis: "Vindication by a Sovereign Judge does not make the acquitted a son" (234). It is our adoption which provokes even more love and gratitude.

This is a demanding academic book. If you are, like me, a theological pygmy, then you may need to read slowly so as not to miss any nuggets. But in case you did not quite grasp something, Garner helpfully re-iterates what he has just been saying by using complementary phraseology. He is also good at summarising where he has come so far in his thesis, so that you can confidently make progress through the book and understand. It will take me some time to reference all my underlinings, which will undoubtedly mean reading it again! Helpfully, Garner's own references are on the same page below, so you don't have to keep looking in the back of the book. The bibliography runs to 32 pages, referencing about 400 authors! I think it would be shame if the book's complexity put people off getting to grips with the subject. For that reason, I wonder if Garner would produce a shorter, simpler, (popular?) abridged version?

I think the teaching in this book can be applied to many contemporary situations. Here are some that came to mind: a) It is not being misogynistic to use the Bible's word sons, for it emphasises our joint inheritance (sons and daughters) of all that belongs to The Son; b) Muslims express their horror at the "blasphemous" thought of God giving up a Son to death, but because of his resurrection, he brings many sons to glory, who reflect that glory back to God; c) With my "missions hat" on, I pondered why the church is not willing to risk her best people to "fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"? Could it be that we have not properly grasped what it means to be a son in the Son (see 274)?

My favourite quote is on page 311, where John Calvin's own assertion, in his last will and testament, well sums up adoption's importance: "I have no other defence or refuge for salvation that his gratuitous adoption, on which my salvation depends".

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The Robots are Coming: Us, Them and God
Nigel Cameron, Care, 2017, 160pp, £9.99

Here is an excellent treatment of artificial intelligence and robotics from a Christian perspective. Well researched, informative and thought-provoking, it is a topic which will have a growing impact on us all.

In seventeen short chapters the reader is taken on a journey covering the history of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), the massive developments that have taken place in recent years and the consequences on society at large, along with a reflection on the pastoral issues raised. Each chapter is followed by questions useful for personal or group study. The book ends with a helpful glossary of terms and an appendix of further resources.

The book explains the range of robotics now available: A robot is in essence an intelligent machine, a computer designed and trained for a specific task. It was in the 1920s that a Czech playwright coined the word "robot" to describe slave labour. Today, robots range from the car assembly line, to automated voices on our phones, as well as programming algorithms to seek out information or perform specific tasks. Search engines, SatNav, ATMs, Siri and Roomba are a ubiquitous part of life. What was once thought impossible, e.g. self-drive cars able to turn right when facing oncoming traffic, has now been achieved by companies such as Uber. The "smart house" where everything is interconnected online, enabling remote adjusting of heating etc. is already with us. As a consequence, "A regular person has more technology in their life now than the whole world of one hundred years ago". The question of at which point robotic intelligence gets cleverer than humans ("singularity"), is a cause for debate; some anticipate its arrival as soon as 2045, others that it will never happen. The author warns us to "never say never".

Recent decades have seen the following milestones: In 1996 the IBM computer "Deep Blue" beat Gary Kasparov the famous Russian chess grandmaster. According to Gordon Moore who developed and marketed the Intel chip, "every single year (for the past fifty years) the chip keeps doubling in power and computer technology gets more potent". As a result, the average smartphone has a million times the computer power used to land Neil Armstrong on the moon in 1969. The combining of man and machine (cyborgology) took a step forward in 2002 when Kevin Warwick, a lecturer at Reading University, underwent a surgical implant of a hundred electrodes into the median nerve fibres of his left arm. As a result he was able, by squeezing his hand, to activate a robotic hand 3,400 miles away in the USA. The impact on world stability is chillingly expressed in a quote which closes the book: "Artificial intelligence is the future, not only for Russia, but for all humankind. It comes with colossal opportunities, but also threats that are

difficult to predict. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world." The speaker? Russia's President Putin.

Are these developments for good or bad? Among those at the cutting edge is Ray Kurzweil. Bill Gates says of him, "He is the best person I know at predicting the future of artificial intelligence." In Kurzweil's opinion, "we will build our moral values into robotics, then solve our problems". There, of course, is the rub: Whose moral values are being programmed into machines? Others are more pessimistic. Bill Joy believes, "humans might not have much of a future… We will either kill ourselves or the robots we make will intentionally malfunction resulting in the terminator scenario!" Likewise Vernon Vinge, a science fiction writer, states, "The longer we can keep our hand on the tiller the better". Bill Gates and Elon Musk (billionaire founder of PayPal and promoter of AI) are pouring vast amounts of money into research to safeguard its future use. All believe there are seismic changes ahead, changes we have to prepare for and think through now.

Various consequence of these developments are considered: the impact on care for the elderly; the moral values we will teach our children, one example cited being the talking Barbie doll; the large-scale loss of jobs – how will we provide for ourselves without work; and our relationship with robots, including sex robots, which is already becoming big business worldwide.

The biblical teaching of mankind made in the image of God is addressed, albeit briefly. We have brains to reason with, moral choices to make, an ability to create, a responsibility to rule the earth and a need for relationships.

The book closes by drawing attention to some hard questions we need to be asking: Do we need to work? Who will decide how robots make decisions? How do we treat robots? Will having robots turn us into slave-masters and make us power mad? How do we protect our children? Is robotics part of God's plan for our dominion over the earth or should we stop because of the dangers involved? Does it matter that we may be putting our children and the elderly into robotic, rather than human, care at such critical ages? Positively, will this free up the elderly and young for evangelism? Do we need a break – a Sabbath – from technology? Where do we go from here?

All in all this is a very helpful book, big on technology, somewhat repetitive towards the end and brief on the biblical assessment of God's image in man.

For those wanting to pursue this topic further, Care organised a day conference with a list of notable speakers, including John Lennox. He spoke with typical brilliance on humanity's creation in the image of God and its implications for us. All the talks on the day are freely available at www.care.org.uk/robots.

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Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and its Significance
John Frame, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2017, 107pp, £9.88 (Amazon)

This is an interesting and stimulating book, rather like a taster menu at a new restaurant. We are expected to try to understand how the chef has put something together in a new and interesting way and not just enjoy the food. The foreword calls it a short, simple book. It is certainly short but I did not find it simple.

I was not familiar with John Frame's work or with that of Vern Poythress with whom he has collaborated in developing the theological ideas of triperpectivalism. You should probably read at least one review by someone who already knows something about it. The book is meant to serve as an introduction so I cannot comment on how successful a summary it is. What it has succeeded in doing is piquing my interest to discover more. It is an invitation to see if this way of approaching theology might deepen and enrich our understanding of God, the gospel and everything.

The foreword is definitely worth reading. Written by Donald Sweeting, it acts as a helpful summary of what is to come. The term triperspectivalism will not win the prize for the catchiest original theological term but Sweeting encourages the reader:

Now don't let the term "triperspectavilism" scare you. Triperspectivalism is simply a teaching tool to help us grasp some of the deep things in Scripture. It highlights a pervasive pattern of threefold distinctions, or triads in the Bible. These perspectives are helpful in knowing God and in knowing ourselves.

In the preface John Frame focuses this still further: "I have argued for the value of looking at theological issues from multiple perspectives, particularly a threefold set of perspectives related to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity". On the same page he writes,

Triperspectivalism is, in the main, a pedagogical approach, a way of teaching the Bible – that is, doing what theology is supposed to do. Beyond pedagogy, it may help us to get deeper into the doctrine of the Trinity in its implications for our thought and life.

This dual claim is part of what makes this so intriguing. I can see that this approach could be a helpful way to think about the truths of scripture and theology as a teaching tool. I could see how it might help us to categorise, clarify and interact with all sorts of theological and other subjects. There is a list of "triadic hooks" on pages 78-80 which show that there are loads of places where things can be divided into groups of three. This is useful as a teaching tool and an *aide memoire* but I am not sure that it confirms the more fundamental thesis of the book. Some of them are clear and classic such as Jesus as prophet, priest and king. Others seem to have something missing: Salvation is outlined as God's decree, atonement and the application of

redemption and while I suppose one could cram everything into these categories, they do not seem to be as good as a classic *ordo salutis*. If the author believes that all of these can fit into the three main categories and then be linked somehow to the Trinity then I will definitely need a bigger book in which I can see it demonstrated.

The study of systematic theology inevitably involves taking a subject and examining it in a variety of ways. It is always however, connected to the whole of God's revelation and must always be carefully placed back into that context. Triperspectivalism helps us to do this. Its key perspectives are situational, normative and existential (introduced to us in the second part of chapter 2). These are defined in one of the many very useful glossaries at the end of each chapter.

- The situational is a perspective of knowledge in which we focus on the objects of the world
- The normative is a perspective of knowledge in which we focus on the world as a revelation of Gods will
- The existential is a perspective of human knowledge, focussing on our internal subjective experience in close proximity to God's presence.

These are further explained in chapters 5, 6 and 7. This takes us into the realms of philosophy as it interacts with systematic theology. These chapters are helpful in developing our understanding.

I think, however, that the author wants us to accept that this does go beyond pedagogy. The first part of chapter 2 deals with the Trinity and what the author refers to as the Lordship attributes of God – control, authority and presence. He wants us to accept that the nature of God as Trinity is built into the nature of everything. Intuitively this seems likely and I want to accept it but I am not sure that the book succeeds in establishing it. The flow of the discussion from Trinity, Lordship attributes to the three types of perspective and back again does not quite convince me. I remind myself again that it is an introduction to something new to me. Further reading might clarify this further.

Up to chapter 7 I was beginning to conclude that although this book is interesting, I might not read any more on the subject. Chapter 8 drew me back. The approach is applied to a variety of subjects. The OT law, for example, is clearly normative. It is not however revealed as a list of several hundred precepts that we are simply to work through. There is a situational perspective to consider as the law was given in history, to a particular people and must be understood in the light of this. The giving of the law is part of a bigger story and the life and commands of Christ develop the situational perspective. As we are called to faith in him so the situational becomes existential as the commands of Christ come to dwell within our hearts. Whatever our understanding of the law and Christian ethics we can use the

three perspectives to examine our knowledge and understanding to see if anything is missing. Thoughtful Christians and especially preachers and teachers are hopefully doing something like this anyway but this is a useful tool.

There are further applications to the understanding of specific Biblical texts. As with the pedagogic triads I can see that there are several sets of three in the passages e.g. the nature of temptation and sin in Gen 3:6, Matt 4:1-11 and 1 John 2:16. Once again however, I wonder if the connection between Trinity, Lordship attributes and perspectives is established. Considering the Lordship attributes in relation to the Trinitarian structure of Eph 1:15-23 is, however, useful.

Only time will tell if I read further on this subject but some of the other titles by Frame and by Poythress are certainly on the "to be read list". In this the book has succeeded. The basic triperspectival framework is something which I think is useable even at a very basic level and I am going to have a go at applying it. If you like being challenged to think in a different way then I can happily commend this book.

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Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision-Making at the End of Life
Bill Davis, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2017, 300pp, £7.41 (Amazon)

Books dealing with end-of-life issues make me apprehensive. Why? Because their first few pages set out authors' mindsets and I have already read too many ethically-flawed such books. *Departing in Peace* allayed most of my fears early on. In the Preface Bill Davis explains that, "...Bible-believing Christians are too often persuaded that the Bible requires us to use medical means to extend physical life as long as possible. I will be arguing against this supposed requirement". And again on page 6, "This book is driven by the most common source of anxiety expressed by Christians as they have faced end-of-life decisions. They have often thought that they are obligated to do everything medically possible to extend earthly life as long as possible." Phew! Yes indeed, Christians are not latter-day vitalists.

Chapter 2 – the flagship chapter

So intent is Davis to correct this apparent wayward thinking that he makes it the *raison d'être* of this book. In particular, Chapter 2 is his flagship chapter.

It is entitled "Foundational Considerations" and consists of 45 pages of biblical exegesis starting with the threefold tasks of multiplying, stewarding and honouring derived from Genesis 1. Davis makes the latter task of honouring bear directly on end-of-life decision-making. The relationship between a suzerain king and his subjugated vassals is used as an analogy of our role as divine representatives or ambassadors of God to speak and act for him. Thus, "Killing a human is an act of treason against this Master because it deprives the Master of a member of his ambassadorial team" (27). Another grand theme is drawn from Matthew 25 where those who feed, water, welcome and visit "the least of these" are commended by Jesus, they are "blessed by my Father". In other words, "The task of defending and protecting those without a champion is explicitly given to God's people" (29).

The chapter continues with an examination of "choice". As image-bearing stewards we have authority to choose not only for ourselves, but also for others, including children, the unconscious and the incapable. These choices are first to serve God's purposes and second our own. No Christian will disagree with these august biblical principles. Less convincing, and more problematic, is their application to specific twenty-first century medical scenarios. Davis is a formidable advocate for the use of modern-day advance directives. Clearly the Bible has nothing explicit to say in this area, but Davis' call to look ahead and anticipate such choices is based on Paul's vague instructions in his letters, such as Col 4:10 (32). This is straining the book. Similarly, if no advance directive exists, others must step up. As Davis explains, "The legal hierarchy is clear – spouse, children, parents, siblings, etc." (34). And Davis defends this order by reference to Genesis 2:24 and the Fifth Commandment, though he later sidesteps it, such as on page 245. There is a fretting trend throughout this book that everything must be adjudicated as "biblically permissible" and that every such ruling must be accompanied by a proof text. This is too affected, too artless.

Which brings me to another of Davis' idiosyncrasies – he refuses to use the word "patient". He prefers "sick person" or "person in the bed". Well, OK, I get his fear of dehumanising individuals, but even "patient" will usually be replaced by "Mr Smith" or "Tom" or "Mum" in the real world. That notwithstanding, Davis is happy to refer, somewhat abstrusely, to a patient's decision-maker as the "agent" or "surrogate".

Chapter 2 also further expands Davis' fundamental theme of doing less than everything that is medically possible. Over the last sixty or so years, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and ventilators have brought wonderful benefits and dreadful burdens into the medical mix. Previously if a person's heart stopped beating, that was it, she died. Similarly, once his breathing ceased, he died too. Nowadays, both patients could be hooked up to life-sustaining equipment and their lives could be extended almost indefinitely. Such treatments can be curative life-savers when employed for

short-term infections or injuries, but end-of-life maladies are not curable. Then the ethical dilemmas arise – should we switch on or switch off? Davis is clear: "…the principles taught by God's Word… make it permissible in some cases to decline or discontinue life-sustaining treatments" (37). The Word has not changed but the range of medical options has. His "in some cases" is the glitch. Who decides? Davis answers with a biblical discourse on life and death. He concludes that "Human life is precious… Earthly life is not the highest good… There is a time to die… Death is defeated" (38-40). And there are treatments that are futile and burdensome – they will never produce a cure and they can cause extra suffering. And although the Christian life can be a pilgrimage of suffering we are not obligated to suffer merely to stay alive for as long as possible. When the benefit-burden balance is unattractive, it may be time to discuss a DNR (do-not-resuscitate order). Moreover, Davis insists that we also weigh up spiritual burdens and benefits. Are the ordinary means of grace – corporate worship, prayer, sacraments and fellowship – still being enjoyed? Are spiritual burdens creating additional hazards? While considering these matters will not necessarily resolve, or even soften, some of the knotty end-of-life dilemmas, they will invariably signpost what is right and wrong and hence the most appropriate, the most God-honouring path to take.

Davis spends several pages considering the topic of suicide both from the Bible and the contemporary physician-assisted variety from the Western world. He, of course, rightly condemns both. This is followed by a section on pain, and particularly unmanageable pain and its relief. Davis' scope here is too limited. While many dying people suffer from physical pain, many more suffer from other adverse symptoms, such as breathlessness, restlessness and depression. It is the wonder of palliative care that seeks to bring relief with not just analgesics, such as morphine, but also sedatives and other drugs to ensure that the dying patient is comfortable. And finally in this chapter, the role of prayer is discussed. Some pray for healing, some pray for a miracle, some use the latter as a tactic to delay facing reality, and some pray for the doctors and nursing staff. You know what is right and proper! But remember your loved one is dying, and death is crouching at the door. Above all, get real.

Some of the challenges

Chapter 3 is entitled "End-of-Life Treatment Decisions: Challenges". This is based largely on US state-wide protocols and questionnaires that seek to determine what the patient wants in terms of restricting possible treatments. Four conditions of permanent unconsciousness, permanent confusion, terminal illness and dependence for daily living are discussed. Then four treatment options of CPR, life support, treatment of new conditions and artificial nutrition and hydration are considered. The text is rather pedestrian and its attempt to provide general answers from real-life

cases mostly fail because the examples are inevitably too specific – they prompt minor questions rather than major answers. Nevertheless, all is not lost. One of the recurring treatment decision-making yardsticks used throughout the book is found, for instance, on page 85 in the case of Gloria, a wheelchair-bound, stroke victim. In discussing and then approving the use of kidney dialysis by Gloria, the author concludes, "The treatment would have the prospect of restoring and maintaining her ability to use her talents and other resources to serve God's purposes". That is a refreshingly proper aspect of decision making.

Chapter 4 consists of six real end-of-life situations together with several questions, each with three possible answers. Perhaps I have read and written too much in this area, but I found the "correct" answer always obvious. Chapter 5 is all about advance directives. It rather laboriously teaches you how to complete one, specifically, the Tennessee Advance Care Plan. This will not particularly appeal to non-US readers.

Nor will much of Chapter 6, which covers "Money and End-of-Life Decisions". This is hardly an issue with the UK's NHS system of "socialized medicine" where "decisions about end-of-life care are made by government agencies" (209). In the US, money and medicine are intimately intertwined. An example is that of 5-year-old Joel who needs expensive surgery for a brain tumour. Can the family afford to go ahead with it? They cannot pay immediately but,"...they can make the promise on his [Joel's] behalf to pay for it with his [Joel's] future earnings" (221). Yes, I was astounded too. And I was also surprised at the minimal role given to a patient's pastor – he is rarely mentioned. Yet a pastor is beyond useful – he is typically younger, biblically-minded, generally accessible and largely responsible for his congregation's well-being. And in Davis' mind there is a seemingly uneasy separation between patient and church as exemplified by, "The church should not announce or publish that you need prayer for your medical condition without your agent's permission" (186). Really? Would the congregation be unaware, or unwilling? Furthermore, organ donation is blithely accepted as, "...a great way to bless others, so we should look for a way to help by making our organs available" (181).

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with some realities for inside hospitals and some practical advice for outside. Let me endorse some of Davis' wise suggestions. While in the hospital, try to get the big picture – ask, ask and ask again about current treatments and prognoses, and so on. If in doubt, ask for a second opinion. And pray. Outside the ward, talk about these issues with family and friends. Draft your own memorial service – choose the hymns and readings. Consider volunteering at a local hospice. Endeavour to connect with unbelieving neighbours. I have always thought how odd it must seem to them when us Christians have apparently nothing to say or offer to them in their times of perplexity and grief.

The US slant of the book

As already noted, unsurprisingly, the book is entirely US-oriented. High-priced, hi-tech medicine dominate the pages – there is little here for third-world Christians. Much is made of the 1988 PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) Report on Heroic Measures and the current Tennessee Advance Care Plan. Clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration (CANH) is discussed in the light of the US 2005 Terri Schiavo case, whereas the UK's 1993 Tony Bland landmark judgment is overlooked. Nevertheless, fans of US hospital TV dramas will recognise Americanisms such as EMTs (emergency medical technicians), code blue (slang, typically for a cardiopulmonary arrest), and the roles of "hospitalists" and "intensivists". And there are gaps. For example, there is no appreciation of the foundational roles that the historic doctrines of Christianity and the Hippocratic Oath have played in undergirding the ethics and practice of wholesome Western medicine. The story of modern palliative care is also nothing but inspiring, but it is missing here. The current and contentious issues of brain death and its diagnosis are also lacking. And while Davis is a strong advocate of advance directives he says nothing to encourage their revision in the light of either change of heart by the patient, or the introduction of novel and improved medical procedures.

The author is a professor of philosophy at Covenant College, Georgia and an elder in the PCA. The structural comprehensiveness of his book is almost overwhelming. It consists of 8 chapters, each divided into about 4 subsections with some key terms, a dozen or so study and discussion questions, and a list of half a dozen or more articles and books for further reading. In addition, there are 3 appendices, a glossary, a bibliography, an index of Scripture and a general index. There are even complete lesson plans for accompanying four sessions of adult Sunday school classes that can be downloaded from the publisher's website.

And finally

But my experience is that any book, conversation or sermon that discusses dying and death is invariably a tonic. Indeed, Davis opens the Preface with this sentence, "This book is for people who suspect that they may eventually die." Yes, that's me (and you). And this book's overall message is undeniably crucial. There is a growing awareness within medicine that dying and death have become over-medicalised. For an alternative, albeit from a non-Christian perspective, let me suggest Atul Gawande's splendid 2014 book *Being Mortal – Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End.*

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