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Editorial: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Stephen J. Wellum

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One of my most favorite portions of Scripture is Hebrews 11, the great chapter of faith. In order to encourage these early Christians to run the race that is set before them in light of a number of serious external and internal pressures (see for example, 10:32-39 and 5:11-6:12), the author of Hebrews not only presents the supremacy of Christ in all of his beauty and splendor, but he also challenges them to persevere as did the ancients of old. By naming many an Old Testament saint, who not only believed in the covenantal promises centered in Christ but also acted upon those promises even though our Lord Jesus Christ had not yet come, the author challenges these Christians—even in a greater way—to take God at his Word, to live in light of his promises that now have been fulfilled in Christ and thus to persevere to the end, no matter what may come, as people of faith looking unto Jesus. In this way, Hebrews 11, along with countless other biblical examples, presents us with the importance of role models as we live our Christian lives. Scripture constantly reminds us that none of us function as islands to ourselves; rather we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, seeking to learn from them, positively and negatively, both in terms of their way of life as well as their theological convictions and formulations.

In this way, even though all of our life and thought must be subservient to Scripture and ever being reformed in light

of Scripture—*sola Scriptura* and *semper reformanda* respectively—“tradition” also serves an important, critical, and corrective role for us today as we seek to apply and live out the Scripture. As the old statements remind us—“there is nothing new under the sun” and “those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes”—we neglect our theological forefathers to our detriment. In reality, tradition and the study of historical theology ought to be viewed as a kind of laboratory in which the strengths and weaknesses of past practices, ideas, and doctrines are tested under the pressures of real-life circumstances, denials, and challenges with the goal of learning from the past in order to better address the issues, debates, and challenges of our contemporary world.

However, today, one of our problems in the evangelical church, which no doubt reflects our larger culture, is that we do not know history, let alone church history and historical theology well. This is especially the case in regard to the era that we have now dubbed: “the Patristic era.” It is safe to say that for most evangelicals, including Baptists, we are more familiar with key people and theological ideas from the Reformation and post-Reformation era than we are of the people and ideas from the earliest years of the church. However, for the life and health of the church today, this lacuna in our knowledge of church history must be remedied for at least two important reasons.

First, we often forget, especially living in the West due to the incredible influence of the gospel upon our larger society and culture, how pluralistic the first centuries of the church were. In our day, we wrestle with the implications of living in and proclaiming the gospel in light of a post-modern, post-Christian, and pluralistic culture. But what we sometimes fail to remember is that in the early years of the church, as the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea and then to the uttermost parts of the world, it was first proclaimed in the philosophically and religiously pluralistic culture of the Greco-Roman world, very much similar to our present day. It should not surprise us, then, that some of the issues we wrestle with today—such as the exact status of people outside of Christ from other religions, or how to defend the gospel to people who did not believe in truth or who come from entirely different worldview frameworks, or how to live faithfully in the midst of a pagan and corrupt society—teach us invaluable lessons as we face a similar or analogous situation. No doubt, it must be admitted that their culture was more pre-Christian in outlook, while ours is post-Christian (which raises a number of challenges that the early church did not have to face), but with that said, the early church has a lot to teach us in how to live and proclaim the gospel faithfully today.

Second, it is also vital to remember that the Patristic era, in light of various heretical challenges, hammered out central doctrines of the Christian faith, especially in the area of the doctrine of God in its Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy. It has often been stated that the early church councils gave us theological statements that are no doubt subservient to Scripture, but which we neglect and

ignore to our peril and which it is very difficult to improve upon no matter how much we try. In fact, many of the heresies the church sought to combat in these statements—such as Arianism, Modalism, Adoptionism, Apollinarianism, Gnosticism, and so on—have not only been demonstrated to be false starts, but also, unfortunately, are still with us today. If it was not for the hard work, theological convictions, and personal sacrifices and perseverance of the early church fathers and theologians such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Jerome, Cyril, and many others, our understanding of these important areas would be greatly impoverished. Truly, we stand on the shoulders of giants and we honor them by knowing more about them, learning what they have taught, and seeking to apply insights from them, in light of Scripture, for us today.

It is for these two reasons, as well as many more, that this edition of *SBJT* is devoted to the Patristic era of church history. Even though we can only provide a snapshot of this era through some of its key theologians, it is our prayer that the articles and forum contributions will whet our appetites for more. Knowing this era of church history will not only enable us to be alert to trends in our own day that basically re-invent ideas from the past, but it will also help us better to live and proclaim the gospel faithfully today, for God's glory and for our good.

Irenaeus in the Hands of Soteriological Inclusionists: Validation or Tendentious Historiography?

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Introduction

Defending orthodox Christian doctrines does not allow for much creativity. After all, the church has been commanded to contend for, not amend or alter, “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Faithful contending certainly demands discernment, wisdom, and knowledge, an ability to listen and detect a challenge to the gospel that is often concealed in a pastiche of modern sensibilities and fallen philosophies. Faithful contending also requires a Christ-like character united with a commitment to the Lord; a Spirit-enabled co-mingling of grace and truth that is so beautifully and remarkably exemplified and personified in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful defending may require creativity in articulation; the ability to present a defense of the gospel that communicates to those governed by differing worldviews. But because the faith was “once for all delivered,” that “creativity in articulation” is limited to expressing truths that have been previously revealed. Though often difficult to discern, creating new ways to say the same thing is altogether different than creating new things to say.

The faithful defense of the gospel comes with boundaries that have historically been governed by systematic theology, developed throughout the history of the church. Faithful systematic theology must be built upon solid biblical theology,

which must be rooted in faithful exegesis of God’s inspired word, Holy Scripture. Admittedly, these are broad boundaries, but they are boundaries nonetheless and the gospel-defender is faced with the reality that there are only so many ways of saying the same thing. Of course, those who choose to ignore the boundaries do not face this dilemma. When historical and systematic theology are ignored, all bets are off, as it were, and the theologian is limited only by conscience and imagination (a troubling thought given the fallen nature of humanity). Further, new ideas sell well. Sadly, there is not as much interest in saying the same thing as there is in saying something new. What is the faithful contender to do? A critical tool in the gospel-defender’s arsenal is appeal to church history. If it can be demonstrated that an idea runs contrary to the historical doctrines of the church, then one has gone a long way towards demonstrating that the idea does not belong in the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.” On the other hand, marshalling the support of church history is an invaluable way of validating a proposal as orthodox.

Making appeals to church tradition has always been and is rightfully a powerful technique in demonstrating the validity of a position. One need look no further than the Magisterial Reformers to find appeals to the church fathers used with great persuasiveness. For example, John Calvin

quoted from, among others, Ambrose, Augustine, Athanasius, Clement of Rome, Cyprian, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Origen, and Tertullian. His references to Augustine and Athanasius are most insightful, because it is through appeal to these men that Calvin sought to make his case that the Roman church had departed from the orthodox faith.¹ But the writing of history (historiography) is by its very nature subjective. Interestingly, Peter Enns explains, historiography is not the objective restatement of facts, but involves a “shaping of these facts for a particular purpose.”² As such, historical appeals can often be tendentious, distorting historical reality for the purpose of garnering support for contemporary proposals. The subjective nature of historiography demands that historical appeals be scrutinized for accuracy and legitimacy.

One area in which the church is struggling to hang on to its doctrinal moorings is soteriology and the fate of the unevangelized. Some are suggesting that gospel proclamation and conscious faith in Christ are not necessary for salvation because the Holy Spirit is applying the work of Christ to those who do not believe in Christ (usually through no fault of their own), even in the context of other religions. In an attempt to validate this proposal as orthodox, appeals are made to the great Patristic theologian, Irenaeus. If it can be demonstrated that the proposal is not materially different than what was being taught by one such as Irenaeus, then it can be argued that the proposal is really not a “new proposal” at all, but is part and parcel of what the church had taught and ought to teach today.

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Religious Pluralism

The emergence of the postmodern age, the rise of relativism as the prevailing epistemological standard, and the shrinking of the world due to rapid advancements in transportation and communications technology have caused a radical alteration in the theological landscape. The changes that have occurred in culture and the academy with regard to the perception of the nature and accessibility of truth have occasioned a subsequent call for the revisioning of evangelical theological method and the reformulation of Christian doctrine. This is perhaps best exemplified in Christian theology’s interaction with world religions. “Religious pluralism” no longer simply reflects the recognition that there are a multiplicity of worldviews or that Christianity has to confront the major religions of the world. Rather, there is a call for a renewed Christian theology of religions—an investigation into the biblical understanding of world religions and how the major religions of the world fit into the redemptive purposes of God.³

The typical taxonomy for discussing the relationships between salvation, the claims of Jesus Christ, and world religions employs the categories of exclusivism (or particularism), inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivism is the historic orthodox Christian position and maintains that salvation is possible only through conscious faith in Jesus Christ. Inclusivism argues that one can only be saved by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but that conscious faith in the work of Christ is not necessary. In other words, inclusivists defend the ontological necessity of the death and resurrection of Christ, but deny the epistemological necessity of conscious faith in Christ for salvation.

Religious pluralism rejects the claims of both exclusivists and inclusivists, believing that one can find salvation through various religious traditions, belief systems, and ethics.⁴

Many recent attempts by inclusivists to answer the question of how Christianity and world religions relate center on the possibility that the Holy Spirit is at work in a salvific sense in other religions. These proposals are motivated by a struggle over the seemingly irreconcilable axioms that (1) God has a universal salvific will and (2) salvation is based upon the historical work of Jesus Christ.⁵ While maintaining the work of Christ as the basis for redemption, some inclusivists posit that the Spirit could be applying that work to individuals apart from conscious faith in Christ. That is, the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, perhaps even in and through world religions, drawing people into a reconciled relationship with their Creator apart from the gospel.

Of course, to make such an assertion will require that one engage in a fair amount of theological revisionism at the Christological, pneumatological, ecclesiological, and soteriological levels, just to name a few. Specifically, one must create a hypostatic independence between the Son and the Spirit in order to posit a relative autonomy of the Spirit in his global operations. But evangelicals such as Clark Pinnock and Amos Yong are not intimidated by the prospects. Indeed, Pinnock suggests, "Let us see what results from viewing Christ as an aspect of the Spirit's mission, instead of . . . viewing Spirit as a function of Christ's."⁶ Yong believes that only a pneumatological approach will lead to a robust trinitarian theology. "I propose that a pneumatological approach to theology (in general and

theological hermeneutics in particular) opens up toward a trinitarianism that is much more robust than that which has emerged to date from a christological starting point."⁷

It is my firm conviction that contrary to those who assert either an independent work of the Holy Spirit apart from the Son or a work of the Son that is subordinate to the Spirit in world religions, the roles of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are inextricably linked, and they are linked in this way: the Holy Spirit always seeks to glorify the Son. When Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14), Christ was not merely defining one aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, he was declaring the nature of the relationship between himself and the Holy Spirit within the broad scope of trinitarian life and redemptive history. Therefore, those who posit an independent salvific work of the Holy Spirit in world religions are denying the essential relationship of the Son and the Spirit in the economic Trinity. That is, I believe that the pneumatological inclusivism posited by some current evangelicals fails on the grounds of proper theological method, historical theology, biblical theology, and systematic theology.

A full-scale critique of pneumatological inclusivism at all of those levels lies outside the scope of this article but my attempts can be found elsewhere.⁸ The purpose of this article is to examine the appeals by inclusivists to the theology and writings of Irenaeus to support their claims. As any student of church history realizes, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had not received much attention until the last century. As Killian McDonnell observes, "Anyone writing on pneuma-

tology is hardly burdened by the past and finds little guidance there.”⁹ It is precisely because of the relative dearth of writing on the Holy Spirit that current theologians must be careful when making appeals to church history to support their proposals. I want to demonstrate that any attempt to appeal to Irenaeus for support in advocating an independent economy of the Holy Spirit from the Son is to engage in serious misrepresentation. Irenaeus, far from justifying the claims of relative independence, actually speaks against such a proposal.

Irenaeus and the “Two Hands” of the Father

Irenaeus is the earliest and most significant figure in most contemporary pneumatological inclusivists’ appeals to church history. This is so, not because he developed a theology of the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, but because of the “two hands of God” metaphor that he employed a number of times in his monumental work *Against Heresies*.¹⁰ Discussion of Irenaeus’s work will focus on *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.¹¹

Illegitimate Appeals to Irenaeus’s “Two Hands of God”

In the current postmodern climate, where many theologians are rethinking how to reconcile the exclusive claims of Christ and the reality of religious pluralism, much has been made of Irenaeus’s teaching on the “two hands of God.”¹² Appeals are made to Irenaeus to assert a “hypostatic independence” of the Spirit from the Son, authorizing pneumatology as the starting point for a theology of religions. In the non-evangelical world, Georg Khodr provides an excellent

example. Paul Knitter quotes Khodr at the Baar Consultation in 1990:

The Spirit is omnipresent and fills everything in an economy distinct from the Son. The Word and the Spirit are called the “two hands of the Father”. We must here affirm their hypostatic independence and visualize in the religions an all-comprehensive phenomenon of grace.¹³

Irenaeus is also a favorite of evangelical pneumatological inclusivists Clark Pinnock and Amos Yong. For example, Pinnock appeals to Irenaeus’s work on recapitulation as evidence of a wider hope: “The work of Christ as last Adam who represents all humanity was emphasized by Irenaeus. God came into the world in Jesus in order [sic] save humanity from sin and death, to restore and perfect the creation. This indeed is a broad concept of redemption.”¹⁴ From Irenaeus’s recapitulation model of the atonement, which Pinnock sees as a “broad concept of redemption,” Pinnock attempts to characterize Irenaeus as emphasizing a broader hope in salvation, thereby rejecting the “sort of harsh views” that were introduced by soteriological exclusivists such as Augustine.¹⁵

Pinnock’s commitment to Irenaeus as an advocate of a wider hope causes him to interpret Irenaeus’s works in that light. Although Irenaeus did not write anything that could be interpreted as expressly supporting an inclusive view of salvation, Pinnock is not discouraged by the silence. Irenaeus may not have possessed an explicit openness to salvation outside the church, but he cannot be blamed for this attitude. He was “unaware of the existence of a large number of unevangelized people and thus of our entire problem. We cannot say what he might have thought

had he lived in our day.”¹⁶

Another example of Pinnock’s appeals to Irenaeus is when he quotes from *Against Heresies* 3.12.13: “God by various dispensations comes to the rescue of humankind.” Pinnock, who is already committed to viewing Christ as an aspect of the Spirit’s mission in Scripture, uses Irenaeus’s quote to suggest that “[t]he Spirit is ever working to orient people, wherever they are, to the mystery of divine love.”¹⁷ In his argument, Pinnock asserts that the Spirit has been at work in the cosmos dispensing grace in advance of the incarnation. Elsewhere, Pinnock uses the same quote from Irenaeus and immediately writes, “Spirit is present everywhere, and God’s truth may have penetrated any given religion and culture at some point.”¹⁸

Both Pinnock and Yong place great emphasis on Irenaeus’s “two hands” metaphor. Yong is more contextual and, therefore, slightly more circumspect than Pinnock in his use of the figure of speech. In *Spirit-Word-Community*, Yong traces the development of Irenaeus’s metaphor and summarizes, “Throughout *Against Heresies*, then, Spirit/Wisdom and Word are thus understood as the two hands of God which formed the visible world, including its inhabitants, and accomplish the purposes of God.”¹⁹ He also traces the development of the motif to the Magisterial Reformers who recaptured the image, arguing for the inseparability of the Word and the Spirit, with strong regard to illumination. Yong, however, finds fault with the Reformers for not following through with a full re-appropriation of the metaphor.²⁰ In Yong’s economy, Irenaeus developed a “motif which has since proven to be a rich source for reflection in the Christian theological tradition.”²¹ In contrast to the Reformers, Yong “proposes a

fully trinitarian hermeneutical vision that builds on Irenaeus’s insight concerning the relationship between the Spirit and the Word.”²² Yong understands rightly that the metaphor is a polemic against Gnosticism and its doctrine of creation. It teaches the full ontological equality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father. But Yong advances the metaphor beyond ontological equality when he suggests:

More important theologically, however, is that the two hands explicitly posits an intratrinitarian egalitarianism. . . . Yet at the same time, because of its non-subordinationist vision of Spirit and Word, it also contained the seeds for the radically relational trinitarianism developed by the fourth century Greek fathers.²³

Perhaps Yong knows that Irenaeus would not have used the figure of speech to assert an “intratrinitarian egalitarianism,” but he is happy to use Irenaeus’s metaphor as a springboard to advance his own proposals.²⁴

For Pinnock’s part, Irenaeus’s metaphor suggests a “double mission” of the Son and the Spirit.²⁵ Elsewhere, he claims that Irenaeus’s “two hands” metaphor teaches a joint mission of the Son and the Spirit: “The missions are intertwined and equal; one is not major and the other minor.”²⁶ Ironically, in the very next paragraph, Pinnock states, “We begin by placing Christology in the context of the Spirit’s global operations, of which incarnation is the culmination.”²⁷

Pinnock also appeals to Irenaeus in an attempt to justify an ethical criterion for salvation. He quotes Irenaeus from *Against Heresies* 4.13.1: “The Lord did not abrogate the natural precepts of the law by which man is justified, which those who were justified by faith and pleased God did observe previous to the giving

of the law.”²⁸ Immediately following this quotation, Pinnock begins a discussion of Vatican II and its experimentation with “holy pagans;” those who meet an ethical criterion for salvation but do not meet any sort of faith in Christ criterion.²⁹ The flow of Pinnock’s argument leads the reader to believe that Irenaeus’s writing on the non-abrogation of the Law in the life of a justified believer supports the inclusivist assertions of both Vatican II and Pinnock. But is this a legitimate reading of Irenaeus? On analysis, it is clear that Irenaeus was addressing the need for both belief and a changed life that continually grows into conformity with the character and nature of God.

Such is the way that Irenaeus is utilized by pneumatological inclusivists. Our next task is to examine Irenaeus in order to determine whether or not he can be legitimately used or appealed to in this manner. It is significant that Terrance Tiessen, who has offered an inclusivist proposal of his own, did his doctoral work on Irenaeus and his teaching on the unevangelized. In a telling footnote, he writes:

The work of the Holy Spirit is given much attention in recent discussion of the state of the unevangelized. For this reason, the paucity of material in Irenaeus is somewhat disappointing. However, it is not surprising when one considers the time in which he wrote and the Gnostic context he addressed.³⁰

Irenaeus and His Theology

Background

Irenaeus, born in Asia Minor, served as Bishop of the church in Lyons, France from A.D. 178 until his death in 200. He had the distinction of being disciplined by Polycarp of Smyrna, who was himself the disciple of the Apostle John.³¹ On a trip to Rome during a time of great persecu-

tion, Irenaeus was first introduced to the Gnostic teachings of Valentinus and his followers. In the years following, during his service as Bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus sought to fight the growing influence of Gnosticism. A brief overview of the Gnostic threat as perceived by Irenaeus is important because it is only by understanding this context that Irenaeus’s use of the “two hands of God” can be properly understood. His five-volume *Against Heresies* was the first systematic refutation of the Gnostic heresy by a Christian leader and his link to the Apostle John via Polycarp no doubt served to enhance the credibility of the work.³²

Gnosticism

Though beginning to flourish, the Gnostic movements of the second century were fragmented and disunited.³³ Rather than a particular uniform set of teachings, Gnosticism is best known for its syncretism.³⁴ Such syncretism and eclecticism presented a unique challenge and opportunity to the early church. Without a systematized set of doctrines, it was up to early church leaders to formulate many biblical doctrines such as salvation, knowledge of God, revelation, and creation in the context of fighting urgent heretical challenges. It is beyond the scope of this article to give a thorough accounting of the diverse teachings of Gnosticism and the challenges that Gnostic theology presented the early church, but some particular Gnostic teachings must be covered to set the stage for Irenaeus’s writing.³⁵ It is evident that Irenaeus considered the Gnostics to be worse than the godless heathen. He took it upon himself to present their teaching in a coherent form and systematically refute it.³⁶ Discussion will be limited to those areas that are germane

to the topic of Word and Spirit to which Irenaeus responded, namely revelation, salvation, and creation.³⁷

Irenaeus was most concerned with the radical dualism of Gnosticism that impacted creation, epistemology, Christology, soteriology, Scripture, the church, anthropology, and hamartiology.³⁸ This sharp Gnostic dualism expressed itself most fundamentally in the nature of God and the nature of man. God was the ineffable unknowable Absolute, while material existence was evil and the active enemy of the spirit and spiritual living. Because of its material nature, the world was base and brought only despair. This caused a seemingly unbridgeable gap between God and the world. It fell to religion to attempt to bridge that gap.

There was diverse Gnostic teaching on creation, but given the nature of both the unknowable Absolute and the inherent evil nature of matter, Gnosticism was consistent in denying that God was actively involved in creation. In some Gnostic thought, the Archons or gods created the world. These evil gods also created the soul and flesh of humankind (not the spirit), whose body was shaped “in the image of the divine Primal (or Archetypal Man) and animated it with their own psychical forces.”³⁹ In other Gnostic teaching, emanations came from the unknowable Absolute. One of the lower emanations (very distant from God) was responsible for creation.

The Teaching of Irenaeus on Son and Spirit

Although, Irenaeus did not develop a theology of Son and Spirit *per se*, references to the relationship between the Son and the Spirit abound in his writings. In Irenaeus’s economy, the Spirit is

inextricably bound to the Son. Irenaeus had discourses on the Father and the Son often in isolation from the other Triune members, but never the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ Irenaeus was not silent on the Holy Spirit however. He taught the equal divinity of the Holy Spirit, and was the first theologian to bring attention and focus to the work of the Holy Spirit in creation.⁴¹ But even when discussing the role of the Spirit in creation, ecclesiology, or revelation, the Son was always in view. Throughout Irenaeus’s writings, the Spirit was never mentioned in isolation from either or both the Father and the Son.⁴²

Irenaeus consistently taught a symmetric order within the Godhead. The Son is sent by the Father to reveal the Father. The Spirit is sent by the Son to reveal the Son. The Spirit reveals the Son and brings people to the Son. The Son in turn presents these to the Father.⁴³ As will be demonstrated, this general order is repeated over and over again in the doctrines of Irenaeus. For example, in discussing the process of regeneration, Irenaeus writes,

And for this reason the baptism of our regeneration proceeds through these three points: God the Father bestowing on us regeneration through His Son by the Holy Spirit. For as many as carry [in them] the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is to the Son; and the Son brings them to the Father; and the Father causes them to possess incorruption. Without the Spirit it is not possible to behold the Word of God, nor without the Son can any draw near to the Father; for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit; and, according to the good pleasure of the Father, the Son ministers and dispenses the Spirit to whomsoever the Father wills and as He wills.⁴⁴

In Proof 7 of *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, he summarized well the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in revelation and salvation. Irenaeus described the Son as “the knowledge of the Father,” while knowledge of the Son comes “through the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵ The Word reveals the Father and the Spirit reveals the Word.⁴⁶ This economy stems from their inner-trinitarian relationships. Irenaeus, like most of the early church fathers, did not see a large distinction between who God is in his being and the economic Trinity: how God’s acts flows out of who God is.⁴⁷ This general economy is very clear from Irenaeus’s writings on the doctrines of revelation, salvation, ecclesiology, and creation.

Inspiration

Irenaeus’s understanding of inspiration was that the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and through the writers of both the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁸ As in all things, the purpose of the Spirit’s speaking is to reveal the Word. This economy is evident from Proof 5 of *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, where Irenaeus commented on Eph 4:6:

Well also does Paul His apostle say: *One God, the Father, who is over all and through all and in us all. For over all is the Father: and through all is the Son, for through Him all things were made by the Father; and in us all is the Spirit, who cries Abba Father, and fashions man into the likeness of God. Now the Spirit shows forth the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God; and the Word utters the Spirit, and therefore is Himself the announcer of the prophets, and leads and draws man to the Father.*⁴⁹

The Spirit “shows forth the Word” so that the prophets announce the Son of God.⁵⁰ But it is the Word who “utters

the Spirit” and the Word who is the “announcer of the prophets.” Thus while the Spirit speaks to the prophets, it is actually the Son who is speaking to and through the prophets. The purpose in Irenaeus’s thought was not to confuse the Spirit and Son, or to separate the Spirit and the Son, but rather to demonstrate that the mission of the Spirit is to reveal the Son.⁵¹

Soteriology

Irenaeus did not treat the procession of the Spirit in a systematic manner, but much can be inferred from his writings. The Spirit’s role is determined by who he is: The Spirit of the Word. MacKenzie suggests that this points to a procession of the Spirit. In summarizing Proofs 5-8 of *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, MacKenzie writes,

The cry of the Spirit, “Abba Father”, is the utterance of the Son in His eternal relation to the Father in the relations which the Godhead is. We therefore have at least an implicitly pointed trinitarian formula indicating the procession of the Spirit: that He comes “through” the Son in such a way that the Son is personally present with us.⁵²

The Holy Spirit brings people to the Son and the Son “brings them to the Father . . . to possess incorruption.”⁵³ In principle, this does not limit the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of non-Christians, but in the salvific economy of Irenaeus, the Holy Spirit is tied immediately and expressly to the church. In responding to the false teachings of the “heretics” and “Gnostic impiety,” Irenaeus declares,

“For in the Church,” it is said, “God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,” and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers

who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behavior. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water out of the mire, fleeing from the faith of the Church lest they be convicted; and rejecting the Spirit, that they may not be instructed.⁵⁴

Irenaeus was clearly granting to the Spirit a role in salvation that is exalted and necessary, but he did not leave any room for a relative autonomy. The Spirit, in bringing salvation, is simultaneously building the church, which is the body of Christ. The convictions of Irenaeus on the economy of the Spirit are consistent: God has granted to the church apostles, prophets, and teachers. The Spirit has spoken to and through these to bring people to the Son. The Spirit continues this work in the Son.⁵⁵ Where the Spirit is, there is the church. To flee from the "faith of the Church" is equal to "rejecting the Spirit." To reject the Spirit is to have no part in Christ.

Interestingly, Pinnock laments that the real weakness in the traditional theology of the Spirit has been its "almost exclusively ecclesial understanding of his work, as if God's breath were confined within the walls of the church."⁵⁶ Of course this is precisely what Irenaeus believed and explicitly taught.⁵⁷ Given this, how can Pinnock appeal to Irenaeus? Pinnock does interact with *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (quoted above) to teach that the Spirit guides the church into truth. But Pinnock is selective in his quotation, ignoring the

broader context that makes strong claims of ecclesiological exclusivism.⁵⁸

Salvation and the church are clearly linked in Irenaeus's theology, but this is consistent with his understanding of the trinitarian economy. "The Father is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ; but the Word is through all things, and is Himself the Head of the Church; while the Spirit is in us all, and He is the living water, which the Lord grants to those who rightly believe in him, and love Him."⁵⁹ The Spirit's role in salvation does not and cannot stand alone in Irenaeus's economy. Believers are carried to the Son by the Spirit, through whom they then ascend to the Father.⁶⁰ The mission of the Spirit is important, but the reality of the Spirit's work in the church makes salvation a trinitarian work. Ochagavia summarizes well:

In conclusion we can say that the Spirit works upon the faith revealed by Christ and transmitted by the apostles to the Church. A purely charismatic Church—as we find it in the Montanist Tertullian—is completely absent from Irenaeus's perspective. In his conception the Church is very much rooted in the visibility of the Word made flesh—that *corpus de terra*, to speak with Irenaeus's realism—and in the apostles and their successors in the episcopacy.⁶¹

In the economy of Irenaeus, Jesus Christ is the head of his church. The Holy Spirit bears testimony to this reality.

In light of this, one wonders how an appeal can be made to Irenaeus in support of a wider hope for the unevangelized. Whereas Pinnock quotes Irenaeus's discussion in *Against Heresies* 3.1.13: "God by various dispensations comes to the rescue of humankind" to garner support for a universal work of the Spirit whereby "truth may have penetrated any given

religion and culture at some point,"⁶² Irenaeus consistently united the witness of the Spirit to the building of the Body of Christ. Any attempt to call on Irenaeus for support of a paradigm that asserts a relative autonomy between the Spirit and the Son is misleading.

Creation

Perhaps the most important thing that Irenaeus could say about God was that "God is creator."⁶³ Gnostics believed that God is completely transcendent and unknowable. The sharp dualism of Gnosticism entailed an inability of God to create unless he did so through emanations or intermediaries. It is in the context of creation that Irenaeus used the striking metaphor of the "two hands of God" to describe the work of the Son and the Spirit. God was actively at work in the creation of the world and he had no need of intermediaries to help him,

. . . as if he did not possess his own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously he made all things, to whom also he speaks, saying, "Let us make man after our image and likeness."⁶⁴

Irenaeus returned to the metaphor to describe the creation of Adam, where the Son and the Spirit were both involved: "For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'"⁶⁵ Irenaeus also saw continuity between the creation of the first Adam and the second Adam, attributing that continuity to his hands. "And for this reason in the last times . . . his hands formed a living man, in order that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God."⁶⁶ Irenaeus

saw this as a consistent theme throughout redemptive history, citing the translation of Elijah and Enoch:

By means of the very same hands through which they were molded at the beginning, did they receive this translation and assumption. For in Adam the hands of God had become accustomed to set in order, to rule, and to sustain His own workmanship, and to bring it and place it where they pleased.⁶⁷

So for Irenaeus, all the work of the Father, including creation and providence, is carried out by the two hands of God, namely, the Son and the Spirit.⁶⁸

Conclusion

In the hands of pneumatological inclusivists such as Georg Khodr, this metaphor becomes a statement of "hypostatic independence."⁶⁹ For Irenaeus, it was a polemic against Gnosticism. Pinnock is right to affirm that the missions of the Son and Spirit are intertwined;⁷⁰ such usage of the metaphor is consistent with how Irenaeus used it. But to use the work of Irenaeus to enable one to view Christology as a function of the Spirit's global mission,⁷¹ or to authorize an "intratrinitarian egalitarianism" per Amos Yong,⁷² is to stretch the metaphor past the point of breaking.

Historiography is, by its very nature, subjective. Unless one is intentionally careful, references to history can be tendentious. This is the case with pneumatological inclusivists' appeals to Irenaeus. Readers are not free to interpret him however they wish; rather, readers have a moral obligation to read and interpret in context.⁷³ Christian scholars, of all people, should recognize this. Irenaeus's "two hands" metaphor has become a playground of free interpretation in the

hands of pneumatological inclusivists. Of course, authors can use metaphors, even metaphors that have been developed by others. But when that use concurrently smuggles in the illegitimate affirmation of church history then the metaphor is being used irresponsibly. This is what is happening with pneumatological inclusivists' use of the "two hands" metaphor. Appeals to Irenaeus, when the context is ignored, make an attempt to claim the support of church history that is simply not there.

ENDNOTES

¹See A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and Medievals," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 149-205.

²Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 60. He elaborates, "To put it another way, historiography is an attempt to relay to someone the significance of history" (*ibid.*).

³H. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 12. Netland's book provides an excellent treatment of the issues surrounding religious pluralism, although he leaves the door open for salvific faith through general revelation (*ibid.*, 323).

⁴This taxonomy is used by D. Okholm and T. Phillips, ed., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Pluralism "maintains that the major world religions provide independent salvific access to the divine Reality" (*ibid.*, 17). Inclusivism believes that "because God is present in the whole world . . . God's grace is also at work in some way among all people, possibly even in the sphere of religious life" (C. H.

Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic Age*, 98). This taxonomy was earlier developed by A. Rice in his *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁵See, for example, P. F. Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 34; C. H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 13-14; J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 1993), 125-51.

⁶C. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 80.

⁷A. Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 9.

⁸See, for example, T. L. Miles, "Severing the Spirit from the Son: Theological Revisionism in Contemporary Theologies of Salvation" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006); *Idem*, *Son and Spirit: A Christian Theology of Religions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, forthcoming).

⁹Killian McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?" *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 191. J. I. Packer notes that prior to the twentieth century, "Only one full-scale study of the gifts of the Spirit had been written in English, penned by the Puritan John Owen in 1679, 1680" (*Keep in Step with the Spirit* [Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984], 28).

¹⁰Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*; trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut; 10 vols. 1; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899; repr., Grand Rap-

ids: Eerdmans, 1975).

¹¹Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (in *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation*; trans. J. Armitage Robinson, in Iain M. MacKenzie; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002). These two works of Irenaeus provide his most thorough work on salvation and the Holy Spirit. It is also in these two works that the "two hands" metaphor is developed and utilized.

¹²Interest in the metaphor is not limited to issues surrounding inclusivism and theology of religions. Kevin Vanhoozer also utilizes the "two hands" metaphor in the development of his theological method proposal in *The Drama Of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 69. In utilizing the metaphor he does not explicitly reference Irenaeus.

¹³Paul F. Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 36.

¹⁴Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 36.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶Clark H. Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 101. Such a statement strains the limits of credulity. It could be granted that Irenaeus did not have the awareness of the world's population and diversity that twenty-first century inhabitants possess, but it is farfetched to suggest that Irenaeus was "unaware of the existence of a large number of unevangelized people."

¹⁷Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 83. See

also idem, "An Inclusivist View," 104-05.

¹⁸Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 202.

¹⁹Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 51. Yong believes that the "doctrine of coinherence logically follows from Irenaeus's two hands model and therefore presupposes it" (*ibid.*, 53).

²⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

²¹*Ibid.* Yong then suggests that the trinitarian doctrine of coinherence follows logically from Irenaeus's "two hands" metaphor (*ibid.*).

²²*Ibid.*, 52.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴For example, Yong uses the "two hands" metaphor to establish the Word representing concreteness and the Spirit representing dynamism. From this, Yong develops a metaphysics of spiritual discernment. Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 43, 130-39.

²⁵Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 58.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 97.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 98.

³⁰Terrance L. Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized* (ATLA Monograph Series, no. 31; Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1993), 258 n. 3.

³¹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 19.

³²Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 69. See

also Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 11ff.; and Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (vol. 1 of *The Story of Christianity*; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984), 68ff.

³³Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 36.

³⁴Justo L. Gonzalez, *From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (vol. 1 of *A History of Christian Thought*; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 128-29.

³⁵By way of brief summary, Gnostics did share a common belief that they possessed a higher knowledge or teaching than that offered by the church or its bishops. Matter was seen to be inherently evil, while the spirit was inherently good or divine. The material body, therefore, was a "prison" or "tomb" to the essentially good human soul or spirit. Salvation was seen as release from the "tomb" of the body that came through special knowledge or *gnosis*. Borrowing from and perverting Christian doctrine, Gnostics believed that the Spirit was an emanation or offshoot from the unknowable and ineffable God. Jesus Christ was an immaterial being (the incarnation being impossible due to the inherent evil of matter) who was sent from God to deliver a message of salvation to the other divine "offshoots" trapped in a material prison. See Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 28-29; Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 128-40; McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 40-41; Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, 18-19; William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theol-*

ogy: *An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 45-59; and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963).

³⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1, Preface 2.

³⁷See especially Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 35-63.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 44.

⁴⁰Undoubtedly, this is due to the lack of attention given to the Holy Spirit in early church doctrinal formulation, but the historian and theologian can only examine the texts before him. To suggest that Irenaeus meant something other than what he wrote is to leave the path of exegesis and wander into speculation.

⁴¹MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 83-84.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 84.

⁴³Thus Irenaeus could rightly argue that the penultimate mission of the Holy Spirit is to bring people to God. "The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God." Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 6.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵So connected are the roles of the triune members in the thought of Irenaeus that Ochagavia is led to comment, "The only difficult point is to distinguish the function of the Son from that of the Spirit" (Juan

Ochagavia, *Visibile Patris Filius: A Study of Irenaeus's Teaching on Revelation and Tradition* [Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1964], 61). Ochagavia's confusion is exaggerated and misplaced. The economy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Irenaeus's thinking is Johannine. The Father sends the Son who glorifies the Father. The Son sends the Spirit who glorifies the Son.

⁴⁶Tiessen explains, "The pattern is clear. The Father initiates a self-manifestation according to his own good pleasure. The Son mediates this revelation to those whom the Father wills, and he does so by giving them the Spirit. The Spirit leads them back to the Word, who presents them to the Father, who gives them eternal life, and the circle is complete" (*Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 181).

⁴⁷MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 82.

⁴⁸See for example, ". . . to whom the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that 'he believed God, and it was imputed . . .'" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.8.1).

⁴⁹Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 5.

⁵⁰Again Irenaeus, "The second point is: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the dispensation of the Father" (*ibid.*, 6).

⁵¹Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 179-80.

⁵²MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*

of the Apostolic Preaching, 86.

⁵³Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 7.

⁵⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1.

⁵⁵Tiessen summarizes the work of the Spirit in the unevangelized: "Not to have the Spirit is to be without life. But, not to be a part of the church, to which the Spirit gave apostles, prophets and teachers, and in and through which the Spirit does all his work, is not to have a part in the Spirit" (*Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 185-86).

⁵⁶Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 105.

⁵⁷"For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth" (*Against Heresies* 3.24.1).

⁵⁸Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 221.

⁵⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.18.2.

⁶⁰McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?" 208.

⁶¹Ochagavia, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 133.

⁶²Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 202.

⁶³Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.1.1.

⁶⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.1. Letham points out that Irenaeus taught here that the Son and Spirit are both coeternal with the Father and that they both also share with him his work of creation. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 93.

⁶⁵Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.3.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.5.1.

⁶⁸Letham points out that though this

may seem to subordinate the Son to the Father, Irenaeus was clear that the two hands are not external to the Father, but “unmistakably divine, always with the Father” (*The Holy Trinity*, 94).

⁶⁹Georg Khodr, quoted by Paul F. Knitter, “A New Pentecost?” 36.

⁷⁰Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 82.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 52.

⁷³See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 367-441.

Contending for Christ *Contra Mundum*: Exile and Incarnation in the Life of Athanasius¹

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Best-Loved Bishop

Athanasius was born in A.D. 298 in Egypt and became the bishop of Alexandria on June 8, 328, at the age of thirty. The people of Egypt viewed him as their bishop until he died on May 2, 373, at the age of seventy-five.² I say he was “viewed” by the people as their bishop during these years because Athanasius was driven out of his church and office five times by the powers of the Roman Empire. Seventeen of his forty-five years as bishop were spent in exile. But the people never acknowledged the validity of the other bishops sent to take his place. He was always bishop in exile as far as his flock was concerned.

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389) gave a memorial sermon in Constantinople seven years after the death of Athanasius and described the affections of the Egyptian people for their bishop. Gregory tells us that when Athanasius returned from his third exile in 364, having been gone for six years, he arrived

amid such delight of the people of the city and of almost all Egypt, that they ran together from every side, from the furthest limits of the country, simply to hear the voice of Athanasius, or feast their eyes upon the sight of him.³

From their standpoint none of the foreign appointments to the office of bishop in Alexandria for forty-five years was valid

but one, Athanasius. This devotion was owing to the kind of man Athanasius was. Gregory remembered him like this:

Let one praise him in his fastings and prayers . . . another his unweariedness and zeal for vigils and psalmody, another his patronage of the needy, another his dauntlessness towards the powerful, or his condescension to the lowly. . . . [He was to] the unfortunate their consolation, the hoary-headed their staff, youths their instructor, the poor their resource, the wealthy their steward. Even the widows will . . . praise their protector, even the orphans their father, even the poor their benefactor, strangers their entertainer, brethren the man of brotherly love, the sick their physician.⁴

One of the things that makes that kind of praise from a contemporary the more credible is that, unlike many ancient saints, Athanasius is not recorded as having done any miracles. Archibald Robertson, who edited Athanasius’s works for *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, said, “He is . . . surrounded by an atmosphere of truth. Not a single miracle of any kind is related of him. . . . The saintly reputation of Athanasius rested on his life and character alone, without the aid of any reputation for miraculous power.”⁵ Then he goes on with his own praise of Athanasius:

In the whole of our minute knowledge of his life there is a total lack of self-interest. The glory of God and the welfare of the Church absorbed him fully at all times. . . . The Emper-

ors recognized him as a political force of the first order . . . but on no occasion does he yield to the temptation of using the arm of flesh. Almost unconscious of his own power . . . his humility is the more real for never being conspicuously paraded. . . . Courage, self-sacrifice, steadiness of purpose, versatility and resourcefulness, width of ready sympathy, were all harmonized by deep reverence and the discipline of a single-minded lover of Christ.⁶

Athanasius: Father of Orthodoxy

Contra Mundum

This single-minded love for Jesus Christ expressed itself in a lifelong battle to explain and defend Christ's deity and to worship Christ as Lord and God. This is what Athanasius is best known for. There were times when it seemed the whole world had abandoned orthodoxy. That is why the phrase *Athanasius contra mundum* (against the world) arose. He stood steadfast against overwhelming defection from orthodoxy, and only at the end of his life could he see the dawn of triumph.

But in a sense it is anachronistic to use the word *orthodoxy* this way—to say that the world *abandoned* orthodoxy. Was it already there to abandon? Of course, biblical truth is always there to abandon. But *orthodoxy* generally refers to a historic or official or universally held view of what is true to Scripture. Was *that* there to abandon? The answer is suggested in the other great name given to Athanasius, namely, "Father of Orthodoxy."⁷ That phrase seems to say that orthodoxy came to be because of Athanasius. And in one sense that is true in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. The relationships between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had not received formal statement in any representative council before the time of Athanasius.

R. P. C. Hanson wrote, "There was

not as yet any orthodox doctrine [of the Trinity], for if there had been, the controversy could hardly have lasted sixty years before resolution."⁸ The sixty years he has in mind is the time between the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople⁹ in 381. The Council of Nicaea established the battle lines and staked out the deity of Christ, and the Council of Constantinople confirmed and refined the Nicene Creed. In the intervening sixty years there was doctrinal war over whether the Nicene formulation would stand and become "orthodoxy."

This was the war Athanasius fought for forty-five years. It lasted all his life, but the orthodox outcome was just over the horizon when he died in 373. And under God this outcome was owing to the courage and constancy and work and writing of Athanasius. No one comes close to his influence in the cause of biblical truth during his lifetime.¹⁰

Arius Fires the Shot Heard 'Round the Roman World

The war was sparked in A.D. 319. A deacon in Alexandria named Arius, who had been born in 256 in Libya, presented a letter to Bishop Alexander arguing that if the Son of God were truly a Son, he must have had a beginning. There must have been a time, therefore, when he did not exist. Most of what we know of Arius is from others. All we have from Arius's own pen are three letters, a fragment of a fourth, and a scrap of a song, the *Thalia*.¹¹ In fact he proved to be a very minor character in the controversy he unleashed. He died in 336.¹²

Athanasius was a little over twenty when the controversy broke out—over forty years younger than Arius (a lesson in how the younger generation may be

more biblically faithful than the older¹³). Athanasius was in the service of Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. Almost nothing is known of his youth. Gregory of Nazianzus celebrates the fact that Athanasius was brought up mainly in biblical rather than philosophical training.

He was brought up, from the first, in religious habits and practices, after a brief study of literature and philosophy, so that he might not be utterly unskilled in such subjects, or ignorant of matters which he had determined to despise. For his generous and eager soul could not brook being occupied in vanities, like unskilled athletes, who beat the air instead of their antagonists and lose the prize. From meditating on every book of the Old and New Testament, with a depth such as none else has applied even to one of them, he grew rich in contemplation, rich in splendor of life.¹⁴

This was the service he was to render for forty-five years: biblical blow after blow against the fortresses of the Arian heresy. Robert Letham confirms the outcome of Gregory's observation: "Athanasius' contribution to the theology of the Trinity can scarcely be overestimated. . . . He turned discussion away from philosophical speculation and back to a biblical and theological basis."¹⁵

In 321 a synod was convened in Alexandria, and Arius was deposed from his office and his views declared heresy. Athanasius at age twenty-three wrote the deposition for Alexander. This was to be his role now for the next fifty-two years—writing to declare the glories of the incarnate Son of God. The deposition of Arius unleashed sixty years of ecclesiastical and empire-wide political conflict.

Eusebius of Nicomedia (modern-day Izmit in Turkey) took up Arius's theology and became "the head and center of the

Arian cause."¹⁶ For the next forty years the eastern part of the Roman Empire (measured from the modern Istanbul eastward) was mainly Arian. That is true in spite of the fact that the great Council of Nicaea decided in favor of the full deity of Christ. Hundreds of bishops signed it and then twisted the language to say that Arianism really fit into the wording of Nicaea.

The Council of Nicaea (325)

Emperor Constantine had seen the sign of the cross during a decisive battle thirteen years before the Council of Nicaea and was converted to Christianity. He was concerned with the deeply divisive effect of the Arian controversy in the empire. Bishops had tremendous influence, and when they were at odds (as they were over this issue), it made the unity and harmony of the empire more fragile. Constantine's Christian advisor, Hosius, had tried to mediate the Arian conflict in Alexandria, but failed. So in 325 Constantine called the Council at Nicaea across the Bosphorus from Constantinople (today's Istanbul). He pulled together, according to tradition,¹⁷ 318 bishops plus other attenders like Arius and Athanasius, neither of whom was a bishop. He fixed the order of the council and enforced its decisions with civil penalties.

The Council lasted from May through August and ended with a statement of orthodoxy that has defined Christianity to this day. The wording today that we call the Nicene Creed is really the slightly altered language of the Council of Constantinople in 381. But the decisive work was done in 325. The anathema at the end of the Creed of Nicaea shows most clearly what the issue was. The original Creed of Nicaea was written in Greek, but here it is in English:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible, and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς), God of God (Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ), and Light of Light (καὶ Φῶς ἐκ φωτός), very God of very God (Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ), begotten, not made (γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα), being of one substance with the Father (ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ); by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he cometh to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

And those who say: there was a time when he was not; and: he was not before he was made; and: he was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or thing (ἢ ἐξ ἐτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας), or the Son of God is created, or changeable, or alterable; they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.

The key phrase, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ (one being with the Father) was added later due to the insistence of the emperor. It made the issue crystal-clear. The Son of God could not have been created, because he did not have merely a similar being to the Father (ὁμοιούσιον τῷ πατρὶ), but was of the very being of the Father (ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ). He was not brought into existence with similar being, but was eternally one with divine being.

Astonishingly all but two bishops signed the creed, some, as Robertson says, “with total duplicity.”¹⁸ Bishops Secundus and Theonas, along with Arius (who was not a bishop), were sent into exile. Eusebius of Nicomedia squeaked by with what he called a “mental reservation”

and within four years would persuade the emperor that Arius held substantially to the Creed of Nicaea—which was pure politics.¹⁹

When Athanasius’s mentor, Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, died on April 17, 328, three years after the Council of Nicaea, the mantle of Egypt and of the cause of orthodoxy fell to Athanasius. He was ordained as Bishop on June 8 that year. This bishopric was the second in Christendom after Rome. It had jurisdiction over all the bishops of Egypt and Libya. Under Athanasius Arianism died out entirely in Egypt. And from Egypt Athanasius wielded his empire-wide influence in the battle for the deity of Christ.

Athanasius, the Desert Monks, and Antony

We’ve passed over one crucial and decisive event in his role as Alexander’s assistant. He made a visit with Alexander to the Thebaid, the desert district in southern Egypt where he came in contact with the early desert monks, the ascetics who lived lives of celibacy, solitude, discipline, prayer, simplicity, and service to the poor. Athanasius was deeply affected by this visit and was “set on fire by the holiness of their lives.”²⁰

For the rest of his life there was an unusual bond between the city bishop and the desert monks. They held him in awe, and he admired them and blessed them. Robinson says, “He treats . . . the monks as equals or superiors, begging them to correct and alter anything amiss in his writings.”²¹ The relationship became a matter of life and death because when Athanasius was driven out of his office by the forces of the empire, there was one group he knew he could trust with his

protection. “The solitaries of the desert, to a man, would be faithful to Athanasius during the years of trial.”²²

One in particular captured Athanasius’s attention, affection, and admiration: Antony. He was born in 251. At twenty he sold all his possessions and moved to the desert but served the poor nearby. At thirty-five he withdrew for twenty years into total solitude, and no one knew if he was alive or dead. Then at fifty-five he returned and ministered to the monks and the people who came to him for prayer and counsel in the desert until he died at 105. Athanasius wrote the biography of Antony. This was Athanasius’s ideal, the combination of solitude and compassion for the poor based on rock-solid orthodoxy.

Antony made one rare appearance in Alexandria that we hear about, namely, to dispel the rumor that the desert monks were on the Arian side. He denounced Arianism “as the worst of heresies, and was solemnly escorted out of town by the bishop [Athanasius] in person.”²³ Orthodoxy, rigorous asceticism for the sake of purity, and compassion for the poor—these were the virtues Athanasius loved in Antony and the monks. And he believed their lives were just as strong an argument for orthodox Christology as his books were.

Now these arguments of ours do not amount merely to words, but have in actual experience a witness to their truth. For let him that will, go up and behold the proof of virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the young men that practice holy chastity, and the assurance of immortality in so great a band of His martyrs.²⁴

Athanasius’s biography of Antony is significant for another reason. It was translated from Greek to Latin and found

its way into the hands of Ponticianus, a friend of St. Augustine, some time after 380. Ponticianus told St. Augustine the story of Antony. As he spoke, Augustine says, he was “violently overcome by a fearful sense of shame.” This led to Augustine’s final struggles in the garden in Milan and his eventual conversion. “Athanasius’ purpose in writing Antony’s *Life* had gained its greatest success: Augustine would become the most influential theologian in the church for the next 1,000 years.”²⁵

Athanasius Embroiled in Controversy

Within two years after taking office as Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius became the flash point of controversy. Most of the bishops who had signed the Creed of Nicaea did not like calling people heretics, even if they disagreed with this basic affirmation of Christ’s deity. They wanted to get rid of Athanasius and his passion for this cause. Athanasius was accused of levying illegal taxes. There were accusations that he was too young when ordained, that he used magic, that he subsidized treasonable persons, and more. Constantine did not like Athanasius’s hard line either and called him to Rome in 331 to face the charges the bishops were bringing. The facts acquitted him, but his defense of the Nicene formulation of Christ’s deity was increasingly in the minority.

The First Exile of Athanasius (336-337)

Finally his enemies resorted to intrigue. They bribed Arsenius, a bishop in Hypsele (on the Nile in southern Egypt), to disappear so that the rumor could be started that Athanasius had arranged his murder

and cut off one of his hands to use for magic. Constantine was told and asked for a trial to be held in Tyre. Meanwhile one of Athanasius's trusted deacons had found Arsenius hiding in a monastery and had taken him captive and brought him secretly to Tyre.

At the trial the accusers produced a human hand to confirm the indictment. But Athanasius was ready. "Did you know Arsenius personally?" he asked. "Yes" was the eager reply from many sides. So Arsenius was ushered in alive, wrapped up in a cloak. When he was revealed to them, they were surprised but demanded an explanation of how he had lost his hand. Athanasius turned up his cloak and showed that one hand at least was there. There was a moment of suspense, artfully managed by Athanasius. Then the other hand was exposed, and the accusers were requested to point out whence the third had been cut off.²⁶

As clear as this seemed, Athanasius was condemned at this Council and fled in a boat with four bishops and came to Constantinople. The accusers threw aside the Arsenius indictment and created another with false witnesses: Athanasius had tried to starve Constantine's capitol by preventing wheat shipments from Alexandria. That was too much for Constantine, and even without condemning evidence he ordered Athanasius banished to Treveri (Trier, near today's Luxembourg). Athanasius left for exile on February 8, 336.

Constantine died the next year, and the empire was divided among his three sons, Constantius (taking the East), Constans (taking Italy and Illyricum), and Constantine II (taking the Gauls and Africa). One

of Constantine II's first acts was to restore Athanasius to his office in Alexandria on November 23, 337.

The Second Exile of Athanasius (339-346)

Two years later Eusebius, the leader of the Arians, had persuaded Constantius to get rid of Athanasius. He took the ecclesiastical power into his hands, declared Gregory the bishop of Alexandria, put his own secular governor in charge of the city, and used force to take the bishop's quarters and the churches. Athanasius was forced to leave the city to spare more bloodshed.

This was the beginning of his second exile—the longest time away from his flock. He left on April 16, 339, and didn't return until October 21, 346, over seven years in exile. Constantine's other two sons supported Athanasius and called the Council of Sardica (now Sophia in Bulgaria), which vindicated him in August 343. But it took three years until the political factors fell into place for his return. Constans threatened Constantius with war if he did not reinstate Athanasius. In the meantime the Arians had fallen out of favor with Constantius and the substitute bishop Gregory had died. So Athanasius was restored to his people with rejoicing after seven years away (346).

During the following season of peace Alexandria and the surrounding districts seemed to have experienced something of a revival, with a strong ascetic flavor. Athanasius wrote:

How many unmarried women, who were before ready to enter upon marriage, now remained virgins to Christ!²⁷ How many young men, seeing the examples of others, embraced the monastic life! . . . How many widows and how many orphans, who were before hungry

and naked, now through the great zeal of the people, were no longer hungry, and went forth clothed! In a word, so great was their emulation in virtue, that you would have thought every family and every house a Church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God. And in the Churches there was a profound and wonderful peace, while the Bishops wrote from all quarters, and received from Athanasius the customary letters of peace.²⁸

The Third Exile of Athanasius (356-362)

On January 18, 350, Constans was murdered. This freed Constantius to solidify his power and to attack Athanasius and the Nicene theology unopposed. The people of Alexandria held off one armed assault on the city by the emperor's secretary Diogenes in 355, but the next year Constantius sent Syrianus, his military commander, to exert the emperor's control in Alexandria.

On Thursday night, Feb. 8 [356], Athanasius was presiding at a crowded service of preparation for a Communion on the following morning . . . in the Church of Theonas . . . the largest in the city. Suddenly the church was surrounded and the doors broken in, and just after midnight Syrianus . . . "entered with an infinite force of soldiers." Athanasius . . . calmly took his seat upon the throne (in the recess of the apse), and ordered the deacon to begin the 136th psalm, the people responding at each verse "for His mercy endureth for ever." Meanwhile the soldiers crowded up to the chancel, and in spite of entreaties the bishop refused to escape until the congregation were in safety. He ordered the prayers to proceed, and only at the last moment a crowd of monks and clergy seized the Archbishop and managed to convey him in the confusion out of the church in a half-fainting state . . . but thankful that he had been able to secure the

escape of his people before his own. . . . From that moment Athanasius was lost to public view for "six years and fourteen days."²⁹

He had spared his people briefly. But in June the hostility against the supporters of Athanasius were attacked with a viciousness unlike anything before.

In the early hours of Thursday, June 13 [356], after a service (which had begun overnight . . .), just as all the congregation except a few women had left, the church of Theonas was stormed and violences perpetrated which left far behind anything that Syrianus had done. Women were murdered, the church wrecked and polluted with the very worst orgies of heathenism, houses and even tombs were ransacked throughout the city and suburbs on pretence of "seeking for Athanasius."³⁰

The secular authorities forced a new bishop on the people. It proved to be a disaster. Bishop George instigated violent persecution of any who sided with Athanasius and did not support the Arian cause. Many were killed and others banished. At last, in December 361, the people's patience was exhausted, and George was lynched.

Such was the mingling of secular and ecclesiastical forces in those days. But at the darkest hour for Athanasius and for the cause of orthodoxy, the dawn was about to break. This third exile proved to be the most fruitful. Protected by an absolutely faithful army of desert monks, no one could find him, and he produced his most significant written works: *The Arian History*, the four *Tracts Against Arians*, the four dogmatic letters *To Serapion*, and *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*.

This last work was a response to the two councils called by Constantius in 359 to settle the conflict between the Arians and the supporters of Nicaea. Four hundred bishops

assembled in Ariminum in Italy, and 160 assembled in Seleucia in Asian Minor. The aim was a unifying creed for Christianity. The upshot of these councils was a compromise, sometimes called semi-Arian, that said the Son is “like the Father” but did not say how. It basically avoided the issue. For Athanasius this was totally unacceptable. The nature of Christ was too important to obscure with vague language.

The Triumph of God’s Fugitive

It is one of the typical ironies of God’s providence that the triumph over Arianism would happen largely through the ministry of a fugitive living and writing within inches of his death. Here is the way Archibald Robertson described the triumph of the third exile:

The third exile of Athanasius marks the summit of his achievement. Its commencement is the triumph, its conclusion the collapse of Arianism. It is true that after the death of Constantius [November 3, 361] the battle went on with variations of fortune for twenty years, mostly under the reign of an ardently Arian Emperor [Valens] (364-378). But by 362 the utter lack of inner coherence in the Arian ranks was manifest to all; the issue of the fight might be postponed by circumstances but could not be in doubt. The break-up of the Arian power was due to its own lack of reality: as soon as it had a free hand, it began to go to pieces. But the watchful eye of Athanasius followed each step in the process from his hiding-place, and the event was greatly due to his powerful personality and ready pen, knowing whom to overwhelm and whom to conciliate, where to strike and where to spare. This period then of forced abstention from affairs was the most stirring in spiritual and literary activity in the whole life of Athanasius. It produced more than half of . . . his entire extant works. . . . Let it be noted once for all how completely the amazing power

wielded by the wandering fugitive was based upon the devoted fidelity of Egypt to its pastor. Towns and villages, deserts and monasteries, the very tombs were scoured by the Imperial inquisitors in the search for Athanasius; but all in vain; not once do we hear of any suspicion of betrayal. The work of the golden decade [the period of revival before the third exile] was bearing its fruit.³¹

Athanasius returned to Alexandria on February 21, 362, by another irony. The new and openly pagan emperor, Julian, reversed all the banishments of Constantius. The favor lasted only eight months. But during these months Athanasius called a Synod at Alexandria and gave a more formal consolidation and reconciliation to the gains he had accomplished in the last six years of his writing. It had a tremendous impact on the growing consensus of the church in favor of Nicene orthodoxy. Jerome says that this synod “snatched the whole world from the jaws of Satan.”³² And Robertson calls it “the crown of the career of Athanasius.”³³ The rallying point that it gave for orthodoxy in 362 enabled the reuniting forces of Eastern Christendom to withstand the political Arianism under Emperor Valens, who reigned from 364 to 378.

The Fourth Exile of Athanasius (362-364)

But in October 362 Athanasius was again driven from his office by Julian’s wrath when he realized that Athanasius took his Christianity seriously enough to reject the pagan gods. Again he spent the next fifteen months among the desert monks. The story goes that he was freed to return by a prophecy by one of the monks that Julian had that very day fallen in battle in Persia. It proved true, and

Athanasius was restored to his ministry on February 14, 364.

The Fifth Exile of Athanasius (365-366)

A year and a half later Emperor Valens ordered that all the bishops earlier expelled under Julian should be removed once again by the civil authorities. On October 5, 365, the Roman Prefect broke into the church in Alexandria and searched the apartments of the clergy, but the sixty-seven-year-old Athanasius had been warned and escaped one last time—his fifth exile. It was short because a dangerous revolt led by Procopius had to be put down by Valens; so he judged it was not time to allow popular discontent to smolder in Athanasius-loving Alexandria. Athanasius was brought back on February 1, 366.

He spent the last years of his life fulfilling his calling as a pastor and overseer of pastors. He carried on extensive correspondence and gave great encouragement and support to the cause of orthodoxy around the empire. He died on May 2, 373.

What then may we learn about the sacred calling of controversy from the life of Athanasius?

1. Defending and explaining doctrine is for the sake of the gospel and our everlasting joy.

When Athanasius was driven into his third exile, he wrote an open letter, "To the Bishops of Egypt." In it he referred to the martyrs who had died defending the deity of Christ. Then he said, "Wherefore . . . considering that *this struggle is for our all* . . . let us also make it our earnest care and aim to guard what we have received."³⁴ "The Arian controversy was to him no

battle for ecclesiastical power, nor for theological triumph. It was a religious crisis involving the reality of revelation and redemption."³⁵ He said in essence, "We are contending for our all."

What was at stake was everything. Oh, how thankful we should be that Athanasius saw things so clearly. The incarnation has to do with the gospel. It has to do with salvation. It has to do with whether there is any hope or eternal life. The creed that Athanasius helped craft, and that he embraced and spent his life defending and explaining, says this plainly:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father . . . very God of very God . . . being of one substance with the Father . . . *who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again. . . .*

In other words, the deity of the incarnate Son of God is essential for the truth and validity of the gospel of our salvation. There is no salvation if Jesus Christ is not God. It's true that Athanasius deals with salvation mainly in terms of restoring the image of God in man by Christ's taking human nature into union with the divine nature.³⁶ But Athanasius does not emphasize this to the exclusion of the death of Christ and the atonement. You hear both of these in this passage from *On the Incarnation of the Word*:

For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incor-

ruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent. For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering His own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt by His death. And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection.³⁷

Substitutionary Atonement for Our Debt

Yes, Christ was incarnate that “the corruption of men be undone,” and that the “corruption might be stayed.” But the human condition is not viewed only as a physical problem of corrupt nature. It is also viewed as a moral shortfall that creates a “debt” before God. Thus a substitutionary death is required. No man could pay this debt. Only a God-man could pay it. This is seen even more clearly when Athanasius, in commenting on Luke 10:22, speaks of Christ’s taking the curse of God in our place:

For man, being in Him, was quickened: for this was why the Word was united to man, namely, that against man the curse might no longer prevail. This is the reason why they record the request made on behalf of mankind in the seventy-first Psalm [*sic*]: ‘Give the King Thy judgment, O God’ (Ps. lxxii. 1): asking that both the judgment of death which hung over us may be delivered to the Son, and that He may then, by dying for us, abolish it for us in Himself. This was what He signified, saying Himself, in the eighty-seventh Psalm [*sic*]: ‘Thine indignation lieth hard upon me’ (Ps. lxxxviii. 7). For He bore the indignation which lay upon us, as also He says in the hundred and thirty-seventh [*sic*]: ‘Lord,

Thou shalt do vengeance for me’ (Ps. cxxxviii. 8, LXX).³⁸

Beyond merely mentioning the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, Athanasius, in at least one place, refers to the wrath-bearing substitutionary sacrifice as the “especial cause” of the incarnation to rescue us from sin.

Since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all should be paid again: for, as I have already said, it was owing that all should die, for which *especial cause*, indeed, He came among us: to this intent, after the proofs of His Godhead from His works, He next offered up His sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding His Temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespass, and further to show Himself more powerful even than death, displaying His own body incorruptible, as first-fruits of the resurrection of all (*Italics added*).³⁹

Athanasius is willing to make the death of Christ for our debt, owing to our trespasses, the “special cause” of the incarnation. But he returns quickly to his more common way of seeing things, namely, restoration of the image of God.

We may admit that Athanasius did not see the fullness of what Christ achieved on the cross in terms of law and guilt and justification. But what he saw we may be blind to. The implications of the incarnation are vast, and one reads Athanasius with the sense that we are paupers in our perception of what he saw. However lopsided his view of the cross may have been, he saw clearly that the incarnation of the divine Son of God was essential. Without it the gospel is lost. There are doctrines in the Bible that are worth dying for and living for. They are the ground of our life. They are the heart of our worship. The divine and human nature of Christ in one

person is one of those doctrines. He was contending for our all.

2. Joyful courage is the calling of a faithful shepherd.

Athanasius stared down murderous intruders into his church. He stood before emperors who could have killed him as easily as exiling him. He risked the wrath of parents and other clergy by consciously training young people to give their all for Christ, including martyrdom. He celebrated the fruit of his ministry with these words: “in youth they are self-restrained, in temptations endure, in labors persevere, when insulted are patient, when robbed make light of it: and, wonderful as it is, they despise even death and become martyrs of Christ”⁴⁰—martyrs not who kill as they die, but who love as they die.

Athanasius *contra mundum* should inspire every pastor to stand his ground meekly and humbly and courageously whenever a biblical truth is at stake. But be sure that you always out-rejoice your adversaries. If something is worth fighting for, it is worth rejoicing over. And the joy is essential in the battle, for nothing is worth fighting for that will not increase our everlasting joy in God.

Courage in conflict must mingle with joy in Christ. This is what Athanasius loved about Antony and what he sought to be himself. This was part of his battle strategy with his adversaries:

Let us be *courageous* and *rejoice* always. . . . Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us, our foes can do us no hurt. . . . But if they see us *rejoicing in the Lord*, contemplating the bliss of the future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in His hand . . . —they are discomfited and turned backwards.⁴¹

So, Athanasius would have us learn from his life and the life of his heroes this lesson: even if at times it may feel as though we are alone *contra mundum*, let us stand courageous and out-rejoice our adversaries.

3. Loving Christ includes loving true propositions about Christ.

What was clear to Athanasius was that propositions about Christ carried convictions that could send you to heaven or to hell. Propositions like “There was a time when the Son of God was not,” and “He was not before he was made,” and “the Son of God is created” were damnable. If they were spread abroad and believed, they would damn the souls who embraced them. And therefore Athanasius labored with all his might to formulate propositions that would conform to reality and lead the soul to faith and worship and heaven.

I believe Athanasius would have abominated, with tears, the contemporary call for “depropositionalizing” that we hear among many of the so-called “reformists” and “the emerging church,” “younger evangelicals,” “postfundamentalists,” “postfoundationalists,” “postpropositionalists,” and “postevangelicals.”⁴² I think he would have said, “Our young people in Alexandria die for the truth of propositions about Christ. What do your young people die for?” And if the answer came back, “We die for Christ, not propositions about Christ,” I think he would have said, “That’s what the heretic Arius said. So which Christ will you die for?” To answer that question requires propositions about him. To refuse to answer implies that it doesn’t matter what we believe or die for as long as it has the label *Christ* attached to it.

Athanasius would have grieved over sentences like “It is Christ who unites us; it is doctrine that divides.” And sentences like: “We should ask, Whom do you trust? rather than what do you believe?”⁴³ He would have grieved because he knew this is the very tactic used by the Arian bishops to cover the councils with fog so that the word *Christ* could mean anything. Those who talk like this—“Christ unites, doctrine divides”—have simply replaced propositions about Christ with the word *Christ*. It carries no meaning until one says something about him. They think they have done something profound and fresh, when they call us away from the propositions of doctrine to the word *Christ*. In fact they have done something very old and worn and deadly.

This leads to a related lesson . . .

4. The truth of biblical language must be vigorously protected with non-biblical language.

Bible language can be used to affirm falsehood. Athanasius’s experience has proved to be illuminating and helpful in dealing with this fact. Over the years I have seen this misuse of the Bible especially in liberally minded baptistic and pietistic traditions. They use the slogan, “the Bible is our only creed.” But in refusing to let explanatory, confessional language clarify what the Bible means, the slogan can be used as a cloak to conceal the fact that Bible language is being used to affirm what is not biblical. This is what Athanasius encountered so insidiously at the Council of Nicaea. The Arians affirmed biblical sentences while denying biblical meaning. Listen to this description of the proceedings:

The Alexandrians . . . confronted the Arians with the traditional

Scriptural phrases which appeared to leave no doubt as to the eternal Godhead of the Son. But to their surprise they were met with perfect acquiescence. Only as each test was propounded, it was observed that the suspected party whispered and gesticulated to one another, evidently hinting that each could be safely accepted, since it admitted of evasion. If their assent was asked to the formula “like to the Father in all things,” it was given with the reservation that man as such is “the image and glory of God.” The “power of God” elicited the whispered explanation that the host of Israel was spoken of as *δυναμις κυρίου* and that even the locust and caterpillar are called the “power of God.” The “eternity” of the Son was countered by the text, “We that live are always” (2 Corinthians 4:11)! The fathers were baffled, and the test of *ομοουσιον*, with which the minority had been ready from the first, was being forced upon the majority by the evasions of the Arians.⁴⁴

R. P. C. Hanson explained the process like this: “Theologians of the Christian Church were slowly driven to a realization that the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, *because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself*.”⁴⁵ The Arians railed against the unbiblical language being forced on them. They tried to seize the biblical high ground and claim to be the truly biblical people—the pietists, the simple Bible-believers—because they wanted to stay with biblical language only—and by it smuggle in their non-biblical meanings.

But Athanasius saw through this “post-modern,” “post-conservative,” “post-propositional” strategy and saved for us not just Bible words, but Bible truth. May God grant us the discernment of Athanasius for our day. Very precious things are at stake.⁴⁶

5. A widespread and long-held doctrinal difference among Christians does not mean that the difference is insignificant or that we should not seek to persuade toward the truth and seek agreement.

What if someone had said to Athanasius, "Athanasius, people have disagreed on this issue of Christ's deity for three hundred years, and there has never been an official position taken in the church to establish one side as orthodox and the other as heresy. So who do you think you are? Half the bishops in the world [an understatement] disagree with you, and they read the same Bible you do. So stop fighting this battle and let different views exist side by side."

We may thank God that Athanasius did not think that way. He did not regard the amount of time that has elapsed or the number of Christians who disagreed to determine which doctrines are important and which we should strive to teach and spread and make normative in the church.

And so today we should not conclude that the absence of consensus in the church means doctrinal stalemate or doctrinal insignificance. God may be pleased to give the blessing of unity on some crucial areas of doctrine that are not yet resolved in the Christian church. I think, for example of the issue of manhood and womanhood, the issue of justification by faith, the issue of how the death of Christ saves sinners, and the issue of the sovereignty of God's grace in converting the soul. I don't think we should assume that, because much time has gone by and many people disagree, it must always be this way. Who knows but that, by God's amazing grace, wrong views on these things could become as marginal as the Arianism of the Jehovah's Witnesses is

today. I don't mean that all these issues are as essential as the deity of Christ, but only that a much greater consensus may be reached on the true interpretation of Scripture than is often thought. I think that would be a good thing for the church and the world and the glory of Christ.

6. Pastors should not aim to preach only in categories of thought that can be readily understood by this generation. Rather we should also aim at creating biblical categories of thought that are not present.

Another way to put it is to use the terminology of Andrew Walls: Don't embrace the indigenous principle of Christianity at the expense of the pilgrim principle.⁴⁷ The indigenous principle says, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). The pilgrim principle says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Some of the most crucial and precious truths of the Scripture are counterintuitive to the fallen human mind. They don't fit easily into our sin-soaked heads. The orthodox understanding of the Trinity is one of those. If the indigenous principle had triumphed in the fourth century, we might all be Arians. It is far easier for the human mind to say that the Son of God, like all other sons, once was not, and then came into being, than it is to say that he has always been God with the Father, and there is only one God. But the Bible will not let its message be fitted into the categories we bring with our fallen, finite minds. It presses us relentlessly to create new categories of thought to contain the mysteries of the gospel.

The Danger of Adapting to the “Seekers”

Archibald Robertson points out that with the conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313), which gave legal status to Christianity, “the inevitable influx of heathen into the Church, now that the empire had become Christian, brought with it multitudes to whom Arianism was a more intelligible creed than that of Nicaea.”⁴⁸ And if you want to grow a church, the temptation is to give the people what they already have categories to understand and enjoy. But once that church is grown, it thinks so much like the world that the difference is not decisive. The radical, biblical gospel is blunted, and the glory of Christ is obscured.

Rather, alongside the indigenous principle of accommodation and contextualization, Athanasius would plead with us to have a deep commitment to the pilgrim principle of confrontation and transformation—and brain-boggling, mind-altering, recategorization of the way people think about reality.

And we must not treat these two principles as merely sequential. They start and continue together. We must not assume that the first and basic truths of Christianity fit into the fallen mind of unbelievers, and that later we transform their minds with more advanced truths. That’s not the case. From the very beginning, we are speaking to them God-centered, Christ-exalting truths that shatter fallen, human categories of thought. We must not shy away from this. We must do all we can to advance it and to help people, by the grace of God, to see what is happening to them (the shattering of their categories) as the best news in all the world.

From the very beginning, in the most winsome way possible, we must labor to create categories like these (to mention

a few):

- God rules the world of bliss and suffering and sin, right down to the roll of the dice and the fall of a bird and the driving of the nail into the hand of his Son; yet, though God wills that such sin and suffering exist, he does not sin, but is perfectly holy.

- God governs all the steps of all people, both good and bad, at all times and in all places, yet such that all are accountable before him and will bear the just consequences of his wrath if they do not believe in Christ.

- All are dead in their trespasses and sin and are not morally able to come to Christ because of their rebellion, yet they are responsible to come and will be justly punished if they don’t.

- Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, such that he upheld the world by the word of his power while living in his mother’s womb.

- Sin, though committed by a finite person and in the confines of finite time, is nevertheless deserving of an infinitely long punishment because it is a sin against an infinitely worthy God.

- The death of the one God-man, Jesus Christ, so displayed and glorified the righteousness of God that God is not unrighteous to declare righteous ungodly people who simply believe in Christ.

These kinds of mind-boggling, category-shattering truths demand our best thought and our most creative labors. We must aim to speak them in a way that, by the power of God’s Word and Spirit, a place for them would be created in the minds of those who hear. We must not preach only in the categories that are already present in our listeners’ fallen minds, or we will betray the gospel and conceal the glory of God. Athanasius’s

lifelong struggle is a sobering witness to this truth.

7. Finally, we must not assume that old books, which say some startling things, are necessarily wrong, but that they may in fact have something glorious to teach us that we never dreamed.⁴⁹

For example, Athanasius says some startling things about human deification that we would probably never say. Is that because one of us is wrong? Or is it because the language and the categories of thought that he uses are so different from ours that we have to get inside his head before we make judgments about the truth of what he says? And might we discover something great by this effort to see what he saw?

For example, he says, “[The Son] was made man that we might be made God (θεοποιηθῶμεν).”⁵⁰ Or: “He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us.”⁵¹ The issue here is whether the word “made God” or “deify” (θεοποιεῶ) means something unbiblical or whether it means what 2 Peter 1:4 means when it says, “that you may become partakers of the divine nature” (ἵνα γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως). Athanasius explains it like this:

John then thus writes; Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. . . . And the Son is in the Father, as His own Word and Radiance; but we, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit’s which is in us and abides in us. . . . What then is our likeness and equality to the Son? . . . The Son is in the Father in one way, and we become in Him in another, and that neither we shall ever be as He, nor is the Word as we.⁵²

What becomes clear when all is taken into account is that Athanasius is pressing a reality in the Scriptures that we today usually call glorification. But he is using the terminology of 2 Peter 1:4 and Romans 8:29. “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.” “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Athanasius is pressing the destiny and the glory of being a brother of the second person of the Trinity and “sharing in his nature.”⁵³

Are We Created Finally to See or to Be?

And thus Athanasius raises for me in a fresh way one of the most crucial questions of all: What is the ultimate end of creation—the ultimate goal of God in creation and redemption? Is it being or seeing? Is it our being like Christ or our seeing the glory of Christ? How does Romans 8:29 (“predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”) relate to John 17:24 (“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory”)? Is the beatific vision of the glory of the Son of God the aim of human creation? Or is likeness to that glory the aim of creation?

Athanasius has helped me go deeper here by unsettling me. (This is one of the great values of reading the old books.) I am inclined to stress *seeing* as the goal rather than *being*. The reason is that it seems to me that putting the stress on *seeing* the glory of Christ makes him the focus, but putting the stress on *being* like Christ makes me the focus. But Athanasius will not let me run away from the

biblical texts. His language of deification forces me to think more deeply and worship more profoundly.

Created for Delighting in and Displaying the Glory of God

My present understanding would go like this: the ultimate end of creation is neither being nor seeing, but *delighting* and *displaying*. Delighting in and displaying “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). And the displaying happens both in the *delighting*, since we glorify most what we enjoy most, and in the *deeds* of the resurrection body that flow from this enjoyment on the new earth in the age to come. The display of God’s glory will be both internal and external. It will be both spiritual and physical. We will display the glory of God by the Christ-exalting joy of our heart, and by the Christ-exalting deeds of our resurrection bodies.

How then should we speak of our future *being* and *seeing* if they are not the ultimate end? How shall we speak of “sharing God’s nature” and being “conformed to his Son”? The way I would speak of our future *being* and *seeing* is this: by the Spirit of God who dwells in us, our final destiny is not self-admiration or self-exaltation, but *being* able to see the glory of God without disintegrating, and *being* able to delight in the glory of Christ with the very delight of God the Father for his own Son (John 17:26),⁵⁴ and *being* able to do visible Christ-exalting deeds that flow from this delight. So *being* like God is the ground of *seeing* God for who he is, and this *seeing* is the ground of *delighting* in the glory of God with the very delight of God, which then overflows with *visible displays* of God’s glory.

An Ever-Growing Wave of Revelation of God through Man

In this way a wave of revelation of divine glory in the saints is set in motion that goes on and grows for all eternity. As each of us sees Christ and delights in Christ with the delight of the Father, mediated by the Spirit, we will overflow with visible actions of love and creativity on the new earth. In this way we will see the revelation of God’s glory in each other’s lives in ever new ways. New dimensions of the riches of the glory of God in Christ will shine forth every day from our new delights and new deeds. And these in turn will become new seeings of Christ that will elicit new delights and new doings. And so the ever-growing wave of the revelation of the riches of the glory of God will roll on forever and ever.

And we will discover that this was possible only because the infinite Son of God took on himself human nature so that we in our human nature might be united to him and display more and more of his glory. We will find in our eternal experience of glorification that God’s infinite beauty took on human form so that our human form might increasingly display his infinite beauty.

I am thankful to God that I did not run away from the ancient and strange word “deification” in Athanasius. There is here “a grace the magnitude of which our minds can never fully grasp.”⁵⁵ Thank you, Athanasius. Thank you, not only for pressing the meaning of 2 Peter 1:4 (partakers of the divine nature), but even more for a lifetime of exile and suffering for the glory of Christ. Thank you for not backing down when you were almost alone. Thank you for seeing the truth so clearly and for standing firm. You were a gift of God to the church and the world. I join Parker

Williamson in one final accolade to the glory of Christ:

Athanasius set his name to the creed which expressed his belief, and for fifty years he stood unswervingly by that confession. Every argument that ingenuity could invent was used to prove it false. Bishops met together in great numbers, condemned his views, and invoked upon him the curse of God. Emperors took sides against him, banished him time and time again, and chased him from place to place, setting a reward on his head. At one time all bishops of the church were persuaded or coerced into pronouncing sentence against him, so that the phrase originated, "Athanasius against the world." But with all this pressure bearing on him, he changed his ground not one inch. His clear eye saw the truth once, and he did not permit his conscience to tamper with temptations to deny it. His loyalty to the truth made him a great power for good, and a great blessing to the churches of his own, and of all times.⁵⁶

ENDNOTES

¹Reprinted from John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius*, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 39-75. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, www.crossway.org.

²Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19.

³Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 21: On Athanasius of Alexandria*, in Gregory Nazianzus, *Select Orations, Sermons, Letters; Dogmatic Treatises*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [NPNF], Vol. 7, 2nd Series, ed. Philip Shaff and Henry Wace (reprint: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 277 ¶27.

⁴*Ibid.*, 272 ¶10.

⁵*NPNE*, 4:lxvii.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*, lviii.

⁸R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), xviii-xix.

⁹See the chapter on "The Council of Constantinople" in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 167-83.

¹⁰"The Nicene formula found in Athanasius a mind predisposed to enter into its spirit, to employ in its defense the richest resources of theological and biblical training, of spiritual depth and vigor, of self-sacrificing but sober and tactful enthusiasm; its victory in the East is due under God to him alone." *NPNE*, 4:lxix.

¹¹Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 109.

¹²Archibald Robertson recounts the death of Arius like this: "From Jerusalem Arius had gone to Alexandria, but had not succeeded in obtaining admission to the Communion of the Church there. Accordingly he repaired to the capital about the time of the Council [of Tyre]. The Eusebians resolved that here at any rate he should not be repelled. Arius appeared before the Emperor and satisfied him by a sworn profession of orthodoxy, and a day was fixed for his reception to communion. The story of the distress caused to the aged bishop Alexander [Bishop of Constantinople] is well known. He was heard to pray in the church that either Arius or himself might be taken away before such an outrage to the faith should be permitted. As a matter of fact Arius died suddenly [A.D. 336] the day before his intended reception. His friends ascribed his death

to magic, those of Alexander to the judgment of God, the public generally to the effect of excitement on a diseased heart. Athanasius, while taking the second view, describes the occurrence with becoming sobriety and reserve (pp. 233, 565).” *NPNF* 4:xli.

¹³The Bible encourages us to hold older people in honor. “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:32). In general, wisdom is found with age and experience (1 Kings 12:8), but not always. Timothy is exhorted in 1 Timothy 4:12, “Let no one despise you for your youth.” There are situations when he would have to correct the elderly (1 Timothy 5:1). And in the book of Job the young Elihu proved to be wiser than Job’s three older friends. “Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger. And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said: ‘I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you. I said, “Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.” But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right’” (Job 32:4-9).

¹⁴Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 21, 270-271 ¶6.

¹⁵Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 145.

¹⁶*NPNF*, 4:xvi.

¹⁷Archibald Robertson estimates the bishops at something over 250, and attributes the number 318 to the symbolic significance it had. “According to Athanasius, who again, toward the end of his life (ad Afr. 2) acquiesces in the precise figure 318 (Gen xiv. 14; the Greek numeral τϛη combines the Cross [τ] with the initial letters of the Sacred Name [ιη]) which a later generation adopted (it first occurs in the alleged Coptic acts of the Council of Alexandria, 362, then in the Letter of Liberius to the bishops of Asia in 365), on grounds perhaps symbolical rather than historical. *NPNF*, 4:xvii n. 1.

¹⁸*NPNF*, 4:xx.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, xx. “In 329 we find Eusebius once more in high favor with Constantine, discharging his episcopal functions, persuading Constantine that he and Arius held substantially the Creed of Nicaea.”

²⁰F. A. Forbes, *Saint Athanasius* (1919; reprint: Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989), 8.

²¹*NPNF*, 4:lxvii.

²²Forbes, *Saint Athanasius*, 36.

²³*NPNF*, 4:xl. (July 27, 338).

²⁴*Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵David Wright, “The Life Changing ‘Life of Antony,’” in *Christian History* 28 (1999): 17.

²⁶*NPNF*, 4:xl.

²⁷It is partly paradoxical that Athanasius, the great defender of the incarnation and of the honor God paid to the physical world by taking it on himself, would also be such a strong defender of celibacy as a great virtue. In fact, he sees the incarnation not so much an endorsement of the

good of marriage as an empowerment to abstain from the imperfect sexual impulses that inevitably accompany marriage. “Let him that will, go up and behold the proof of virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the young men that practice holy chastity, and the assurance of immortality in so great a band of His martyrs” (*NPNF*, 4:62) “Is this, then, a slight proof of the weakness of death? Or is it a slight demonstration of the victory won over him by the Savior, when the youths and young maidens that are in Christ despise this life and practice to die?” (*NPNF*, 4:51). The ascetic influence of Origen is seen here (*NPNF*, 4:xv). Thus Athanasius, with most Christians of his day, saw the body not only as a gift for experiencing God’s creation, but as a fallen hindrance to rising to intellectual and spiritual enjoyment of God. For a different assessment of the function of creation in the spiritual life see John Piper, “How to Wield the World in the Fight for Joy: Using All Five Senses to See the Glory of God,” in *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 175-208.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 4:278.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰*Ibid.*, lii.

³¹*Ibid.*, li.

³²*Ibid.*, lviii.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, 234.

³⁵*Ibid.*, lxvii.

³⁶I think Robert Letham’s judgment is too sweeping when he says, “For Athanasius the decisive fulcrum is the Incarnation. As a result, the Cross has diminished signifi-

cance. [R. P. C.] Hanson likens his theory of salvation to a sacred blood transfusion that almost does away with a doctrine of the Atonement. Athanasius lacks reasons why Christ should have died. For him, corruption consists in fallenness, rather than in sin." Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 133. More balanced and fair is the observation of Archibald Robertson: "Athanasius felt . . . the supremacy of the Cross as the purpose of the Savior's coming, but he does not in fact give to it the central place in his system of thought which it occupies in his instincts" (NPNE, 4:lxix).

³⁷NPNE, 4:40-41.

³⁸Ibid., 88.

³⁹Ibid., 47

⁴⁰Ibid., 65.

⁴¹Ibid., 207.

⁴²See the critical interaction with these movements in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

⁴³These sentences are from E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1925), 155-57. I cite this older book because it is being used with enthusiasm by some today to buttress a vision that beclouds the importance of doctrine.

⁴⁴NPNE, 4:xvix.

⁴⁵Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, xxi.

⁴⁶Another way that Athanasius and the orthodox bishops at Nicaea protected the truth was to include denials as well as affirmations. In

their case they were called anathemas. The point here is this: When mistaken teachers are looking for a way to have their views accepted in the mainstream, they are often willing to agree with affirmations and give them a different meaning. Or sometimes the affirmations are broad and general and so do not make clear what is being excluded as false. But if a denial is included, which explicitly names what is being rejected as false, then the mistaken person cannot as easily weasel around the denial. For example, an open theist may affirm the statement "We believe in the full omniscience of God." But he would have a difficult time making the denial, "We deny that God is ignorant of anything that shall come to pass."

⁴⁷Andrew Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 7-9.

⁴⁸NPNE, 4:xxxv.

⁴⁹See the quotes from C. S. Lewis in the Preface to Piper, *Contending for Our All*, 9-11.

⁵⁰NPNE, 4:65.

⁵¹Ibid., 329.

⁵²Ibid., 406-07.

⁵³"Glorification (in Western terminology), or deification (according to the East), is brought to fruition at the eschaton and lasts for eternity, and so is the final goal of salvation. . . . According to the Eastern church, the goal of salvation is to be made like God. This the Holy Spirit effects in us. It involves no blurring of the Creator-creature distinction, but rather focuses on the union and communion that we are given by

God, in which we are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3)." Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 474, 498.

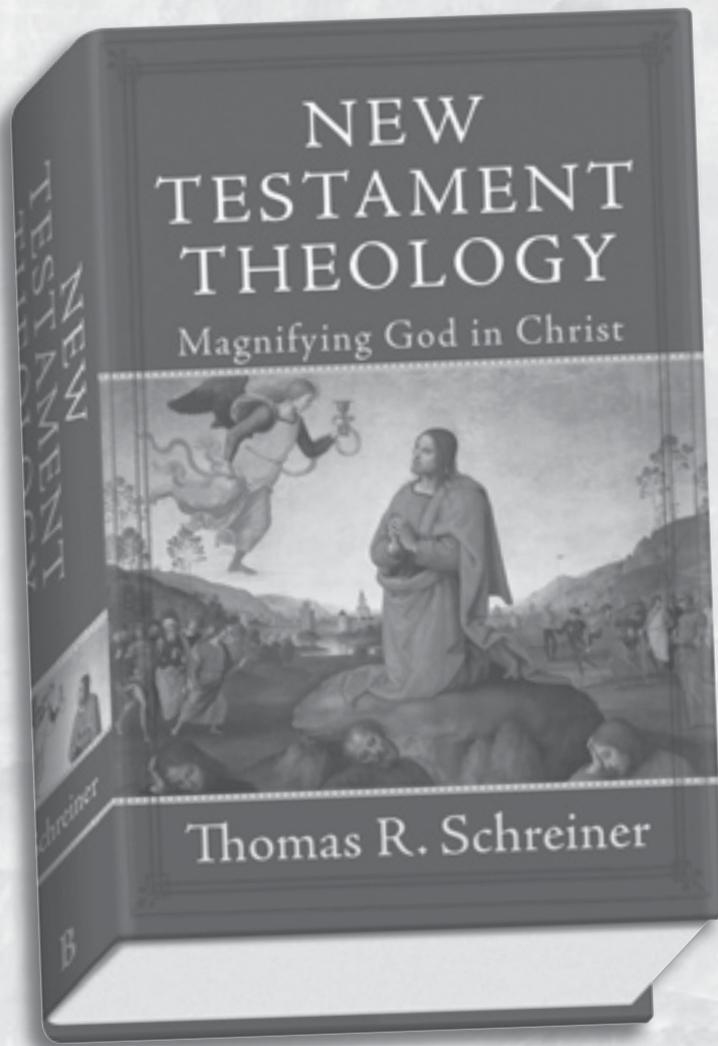
⁵⁴John 17:26, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

⁵⁵John Calvin, quoted in Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 472.

⁵⁶Parker T. Williamson, *Standing Firm: Reclaiming Christian Faith in Times of Controversy* (Springfield, PA: PLC Publications, 1996), 38.

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Augustine of Hippo: The Relevance of His Life and Thought Today

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Introduction

Traditionally, four of the Latin fathers of the church have been given the illustrious title “Doctor” (teacher)—Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory the Great. All four deserve our affectionate acquaintance; but the greatest of them must surely be Augustine, both for the sheer depth and richness of his thought, and for his unparalleled influence on subsequent generations. A. N. Whitehead once quipped that the history of Western philosophy was simply a series of footnotes to Plato. By a pardonable exaggeration, one might say that the history of Western theology is simply a series of footnotes to Augustine. The fifth century African father towers mightily over the succeeding centuries like some spiritual version of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar:

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about.

We are sometimes fond of saying that we stand on the shoulders of the great Christians who went before us. In the case of Augustine, I suspect most of us may feel less a dwarf on his shoulders than an ant on his ankle. In the words of the “Old Catholic” scholar Johann Nepomuk Huber,

Augustine is a unique phenomenon in Christian history. No one of the other fathers has left so luminous

traces of his existence. Though we find among them many rich and powerful minds, yet we find in none the forces of personal character, mind, heart, and will, so largely developed and so harmoniously working. No one surpasses him in wealth of perceptions and dialectical sharpness of thoughts, in depth and fervor of religious sensibility, in greatness of aims and energy of action. He therefore also marks the culmination of the patristic age, and has been elevated by the acknowledgment of succeeding times as the first and the universal church father.¹

Huber does not overstate. For we are dealing in Augustine with one of the truly seminal minds of human history, and it is no self-depreciation on our part to entertain a due sense of modesty and humility. Few scientists will ever be Einstein; few theologians will ever be Augustine. In the post-apostolic church, he has been to Christian piety what David is in the Psalms, and to Christian theology what Paul is in his letters. The writings of Augustine have proved a perpetual stream of outstandingly fruitful influence on Christian spirituality and doctrine down through the ages. Many of the noblest movements of church renewal have taken their inspiration from the bishop of Hippo, notably the Lollards, the Hussites, the Protestant Reformation itself, the Puritans, and the Jansenists. Many of the most brilliant thinkers, preachers, and saints of Western church history have been devout disciples of Augustine; one has but to name the

Venerable Bede, Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, John Wyclif, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, and B. B. Warfield. It seems, then, that if Western Christians are to understand their own heritage, they cannot escape engaging with the titanic figure of Augustine.

There are other reasons for acquainting ourselves with the bishop of Hippo. Let me suggest three. First of all, there is no personality of the ancient world, Christian or Pagan, so intimately known to us as Augustine. His *Confessions* more or less invented autobiography, and give us the most entrancing and self-revealing portrait of a soul in all literature. The father of the Renaissance, Francesco Petrarch, after his mid-life conversion to Christ, carried with him a copy of Augustine's *Confessions* wherever he went. Countless hosts have echoed Petrarch's verdict. Can we neglect this unique literary monument of a soul's journey, without succumbing to the charge of being spiritual and cultural ignoramuses?

Second, Augustine wrestles endlessly with the most fundamental questions of existence. What can the human mind truly know? What is God? What is truth? What is beauty? What is time? What is history? What is the soul? What is memory? What is faith? What is reason? What is the relationship between faith and reason? What is justice? What is human destiny? What are the proper limits of political action? Where does evil come from? How can we reconcile evil and suffering with a belief in a good and almighty God? Augustine sets the example par excellence of a Christian thinker determined to view the whole of life in the light of his faith, rather than give a little private corner of it to Christ, leaving the rest to be

squeezed into the mold of contemporary non-Christian culture.

Third, there is Augustine's decisive role in the historical development of Christian doctrine. The church's theology has always been hammered out on the anvil of heresy. Where would our understanding of the Trinity and the incarnation be, without the purgative storms of the Arian controversy? Men like Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers forged a newly refined, more lucid and articulate conception of the Godhead and of deity incarnate, in the context of the convulsive dispute with Arius and his ilk. This refined theology was summed up in the great Nicene Creed. Augustine's friend, the celebrated Jerome, admitted that many of the utterances of the orthodox fathers prior to Arius did not quite come up to the standard of this more coherent Nicene doctrine, wrought out in the furnace of the fourth century debate: "It must be admitted that before Arius arose in Alexandria as a demon of the south, things were said incautiously which cannot be defended against a malign criticism."²

Augustine likewise was the principal theologian who wrought out a more articulate and coherent doctrine of human nature, its fall and restoration, in the fifth century setting of the Pelagian controversy. If we owe our developed Trinitarian theology and Christology to Athanasius and the Cappadocians, we owe our developed anthropology and soteriology, our understanding of the Bible's teaching on the relations between human sin and divine grace, to Augustine. He carried the Latin West with him on these matters (although not the Greek East), embedding in the Western Christian consciousness a high, awesome, man-humbling, God-exalting vision of original sin, predestina-

tion, and efficacious grace in regeneration, which has renewed itself in every epoch and endured to the present. If we would grapple with these tremendous issues, where better to go than the first and greatest “doctor of grace,” the bishop of Hippo?

Biographical Sketch

Let us now offer a sketch of Augustine’s life, and then look in more detail at some of these weighty themes. Briefly, Aurelius Augustine was born in Thagaste in Roman North Africa in 354, to a Pagan father, Patricius, and a Christian mother, Monnica. His mother, a spiritually minded lady, did her best to instill the Christian faith into her son, but the growing Augustine met moral shipwreck on the shoals of his burgeoning sexuality. Abandoning the Christianity of his youth, he began living with a girl whom he never married, by whom he had an illegitimate son, Adeodatus.

To add to his mother’s anguish, Augustine also joined the cult-like Gnostic sect of the Manichees. In desperation over her wayward child, Monnica turned to a Catholic bishop who was himself a converted Manichee, and pled with him to reason with Augustine. (By “Catholic” in the early church period, we mean simply the mainstream orthodox church, distinguished from dissident groups like Montanists and Arians.) The bishop refused. “Only prayer, not arguments, will bring your son to Christ,” he insisted. When a weeping Monnica persisted in beseeching his help, the bishop famously said, “Go. It cannot be that the son of such tears will perish.”

The words were prophetic. Now a teacher of rhetoric in Italy, Augustine began to lose his faith in Manichaeism. Its

pretensions to a perfectly rational worldview seemed hollow when compared to the higher and deeper philosophy of Plotinus, father of Neoplatonism—a reinvention of Plato that transformed his teaching into a mystical religious faith in a Supreme Being, “the One.” Plotinus introduced Augustine to a truer conception of God as the absolute spiritual entity, exalted far above space, time, and matter, whose image was reflected in the human soul.

Intellectually liberating though this was, Neoplatonism did not challenge Augustine’s moral lifestyle. This came through the preaching of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, whose pulpit eloquence captivated Augustine. Here was an orthodox Christian preacher who both made the faith of the church seem credible, and lived it out in his own life of steely, shining integrity, before which even emperors trembled (Milan was at that time the Western imperial capital).

Ambrose’s preaching soon induced a spiritual crisis in Augustine. Let us hear him tell it in his own words. He is in a garden in Milan, overwhelmed by a consciousness of his sin, especially his bondage to sexual desire:

I flung myself down, I do not know how, under a fig-tree, giving free course to my tears. The streams of my eyes gushed forth, an acceptable sacrifice to You. And, not in these very words, yet to this effect, I spoke much to You: “But You, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord? Will You be angry for ever? Oh, do not remember against us our former iniquities!” For I felt that I was enslaved by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries: “How long, how long? Tomorrow, tomorrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?”

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when I heard the

voice of a boy or girl, I do not know which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting and repeating the words, "Take up and read, take up and read!" Immediately my attitude changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing words like this. I could not remember ever hearing it before. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it as a command to me from Heaven to open the Scripture, and to read the first chapter my gaze fell on. For I had heard of Antony [the great desert father of Egypt], that accidentally coming in to church while the gospel was being read, he received the exhortation as if the reading were addressed to him: "Go and sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." And by this oracle he was immediately converted to You.

So I quickly returned to the place where Alypius [Augustine's friend and companion in the search for truth] was sitting; for that is where I had put down the volume of the apostles, when I had risen from that spot. I grasped it, opened it, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in lust and debauchery, not in strife and envy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts." I would read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, a light of assurance was infused into my heart, and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.³

That was in 386. The following year, Augustine was baptised by Ambrose, along with his 15 year-old son Adeodatus, who had also been converted. (Adeodatus died young, three years later.) Returning to Thagaste, Augustine founded a pioneer monastic community. In 391, however, he was on a visit to Hippo Regius, the second greatest city of Roman North Africa (after Carthage), when providence unexpectedly

changed the whole course of his life. He was worshipping in the Catholic church in Hippo one Sunday, when the elderly preacher, bishop Valerius, recognized him. Was this not Augustine, the recent convert from Thagaste, whose writings had already begun to make an impact on the Christians of the day? Valerius was a Greek, and could not speak Latin very well; he had prayed for a long time that God would send him an assistant pastor. He began preaching on this very topic; the congregation caught his meaning, surrounded Augustine, and cried out that here was the very man for the job!

Augustine was horrified, but could do nothing against the unanimous and enthusiastic acclamations of the people. Like the child's voice in Milan, "Take up and read," it seemed that through the voice of the Christian people of Hippo, God was once again intervening directly in Augustine's life. He submitted, and was ordained assistant bishop to Valerius. When Valerius died five year later, Augustine became sole bishop of Hippo's Catholic church, a position he filled until his own death in 430.

Augustine soon exercised an intellectual and spiritual pre-eminence over the whole African Catholic Church, by virtue of his preaching (he is commonly regarded as one of the great preachers of the Christian centuries), his endless stream of superior writings, his role in the key controversies of the day, and his personal influence on the other Catholic bishops of Africa. By the end of Augustine's life, his distinguished French disciple, Prosper of Aquitaine, could say this of his master without any sense of exaggeration,

Augustine, at the time the first and foremost among the bishops of the

Lord.... Among many other divine gifts showered on him by the Spirit of Truth, he excelled particularly in the gifts of knowledge and wisdom flowing from his love of God, which enabled him to slay with the invincible sword of the Word not only the Pelagian heresy, but also many other previous heresies. This doctor, resplendent with the glory of so many honours and crowns which he gained for the exaltation of the Church and the glory of Christ.... Augustine, the greatest man in the Church today.⁴

The Relevance of Augustine for Today

How relevant, then, is Augustine for us in the twenty-first century? Let me suggest three areas in which, though dead, he yet speaks.

Spirituality

First, the African father ranks as one of the classic spiritual writers of all time. Devotional literature holds few works comparable to Augustine's *Confessions*, while his *Soliloquies* have also awakened and inspired many. We would have to place these writings in the same select league as Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Loving God*, Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

Testimonies to Augustine's outstanding worth in this regard flood in from all quarters, even the unlikeliest. Consider, for example, the Eastern Orthodox Church, which has never given a commanding place to Augustine as a theologian, partly because Orthodoxy rejects the Augustinian view of human bondage to sin and the sovereign efficacy of divine grace in salvation. Despite this, Augustine's *Confessions* have been warmly embraced as a classic of Christian

spirituality by the Orthodox. Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, for example, says this of Augustine:

The highest quality in him is the profound, sincere piety with which all his works are filled... [especially the *Confessions*] which without doubt can strike anyone to the depths of his soul by the sincerity of their contrition, and warm one by the warmth of the piety which is so essential on the path of salvation.⁵

Closer to home, the great nineteenth century evangelical church historian Philip Schaff says this:

The *Confessions* are the most profitable, at least the most edifying, product of his pen; indeed, we may say, the most edifying book in all the patristic literature. They were accordingly the most read even during his lifetime, and they have been the most frequently published since. A more sincere and more earnest book was never written... Certainly no autobiography is superior to it in true humility, spiritual depth, and universal interest. Augustine records his own experience, as a heathen sensualist, a Manichean heretic, an anxious inquirer, a sincere penitent, and a grateful convert. He finds a response in every human soul that struggles through the temptations of nature and the labyrinth of error to the knowledge of truth and the beauty of holiness, and after many sighs and tears finds rest and peace in the arms of a merciful Saviour.⁶

None of the writings of the early church fathers have so quenched people's spiritual thirst down through the centuries as have the writings of the bishop of Hippo. They offer a perennially needful corrective to two equal and opposite errors faced by Christians in every age: either to gravitate to a cold theological orthodoxy devoid of heart, or to a sentimental spirituality that sits light to

doctrine. Augustine is the antidote to both false tendencies. In him we discover heart and mind married in an intimate union where deep, thoughtful theology, rooted in Scripture and never afraid of condemning error, nonetheless burns and sings with a spiritual vibrancy that makes most modern piety seem pale and sickly by contrast. If we do nothing else over this coming year in our Christian reading, we could scarcely do better than read Augustine's *Confessions*, either for the first time, or to rekindle our acquaintance with this universally recognized devotional classic. Here is a taster:

What is it that I love in loving You? Not physical beauty, nor the splendour of time, nor the radiance of the light, so pleasant to our eyes, nor the sweet melodies of songs of all kinds, nor the flagrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, nor manna and honey, nor limbs pleasant to the embraces of the flesh. I do not love these things when I love my God. And yet I love a certain kind of light, sound, fragrance, food, and embrace in loving my God; for He is the light, sound, fragrance, food, and embrace of my inner man. There, a light shines upon my soul which no place can contain, and a sound is heard which time cannot snatch away. There breathes a fragrance which no breeze can disperse, a food which no eating can diminish, and an embrace which no fullness of satisfaction can dissolve. This is what I love, when I love my God. And what is He? I asked the earth; and it answered, "I am not He." And everything on earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things that lived, and they replied, "We are not your God. Seek higher than we." I asked the breezy air; and the universal atmosphere with its inhabitants answered, "I am not God." I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars: "Neither," they said, "are we the God whom you seek." And I answered all these things which crowd about the door of my flesh, "You have told me con-

cerning my God that you are *not* He. Tell me something positive about Him!" And with a loud voice they exclaimed: "*He made us.*"⁷

The Meaning of History

Next, there is the longest and profoundest theological work Augustine ever wrote, his *City of God*. Its overarching message remains as pertinent today as when Augustine first penned it. Schaff again says,

The *City of God* is the masterpiece of the greatest genius among the Latin Fathers, and the best known and most read of his works, except the *Confessions*. It embodies the result of thirteen years of intellectual labour and study (from AD 413-426). It is a vindication of Christianity against the attacks of the heathen in view of the sacking of the city of Rome by the barbarians, at a time when the old Greco-Roman civilization was approaching its downfall, and a new Christian civilization was beginning to rise on its ruins. It is the first attempt at a philosophy of history, under the aspect of two rival cities or communities—the eternal city of God and the perishing city of the world.⁸

Essentially, the treatise is a meditation on the meaning of history, which Augustine interpreted as a conflict between two communities, which he called "the city of God" and "the city of the world." Ever since the fall of Adam, Augustine argued, the human race had been divided into two spiritual societies: the unregenerate whose head was Satan, and the regenerate whose head was Christ. Human history was the unfolding of the story of how these two "cities" interacted. The city of God, while not *identical* with the visible church (she harbored tares alongside wheat), was nonetheless *nurtured* in her bosom by the Word of God and the sacraments; while the city of the world

found its most concrete manifestation in the state, especially powerful states—the empires of man.

Arguably, the most important thing Augustine does for us today in *City of God* is to offer a piercing Christian critique of the pretensions of the city of man. The reality of original sin and human depravity, Augustine insisted, are as applicable to human institutions as to human individuals. He had no time for Messianic posturings by any state, whether the Christianized Roman Empire of his own day, or any successor in the future. Whatever their rhetoric, Augustine had little doubt that earthly kingdoms were ultimately based on the *realpolitik* of power. The only kind of unity they understood was the unity of force: join with us in happy brotherhood, or else we shall kill you!

Indeed, the bishop of Hippo pronounced pessimistically as he surveyed history, all the kingdoms of this world were, at the end of the day, little better than vast, organized conspiracies of robbers. What were the most illustrious earthly rulers? What was Alexander the Great, that idol of Greek civilization? What Alexander did on a grand scale by his supposedly glorious wars and conquests, Augustine felt, was no different in principle from what a pirate does in a single ship. When earthly cities and kingdoms fell, therefore, as they all eventually did, their punishment was just. For “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”—all men and all kingdoms.

This was a radical assertion in Augustine’s context, because many Christians regarded the Christianized Roman Empire of his day as tantamount to God’s kingdom on earth. They found it all but impossible to distinguish between the

interests of Rome and the interests of God, and all but inconceivable to contemplate the Empire’s fall (despite the fall of its ancient capital city of Rome to Alaric the Visigoth in 410—the Empire’s functional capital by then was in fact Constantinople).

Augustine dissented from this idealization of the Roman Empire; no matter how Christian it might profess itself, it was just as fallible and mutable, as caught up in the flux of history and human sin, as any other kingdom. There was nothing sacrosanct about it. Its fall was perfectly conceivable. And when or if the Empire crumbled, the Christian would discern therein the righteous providence of God, which ever humbles the pretentious and self-exalting cities of men. History knew only one enduring city, Augustine affirmed—the city of God. And she was not a political entity, but a spiritual entity, dwelling not in the swords of proud armies but in the hearts of lowly believers, outlasting the vanity of all earthly kingdoms.

As a corollary to this critical level-headedness about human states, Augustine also rebuffed any romantic idea that Christianity would ever bring about global peace and prosperity. The gospel was not the means to a socio-political paradise. This was not because Augustine doubted the relevance of the Bible to secular affairs: the Bible was a fountain of wisdom for the whole of human life. Unfortunately, original sin meant that the human mind, even in Christians, was a fountain of never-ending folly and sinful perversion. Therefore, Augustine advised, we must have an ice-cold realism in our expectations of what fallen and foolish human beings could achieve in the world. Even the best and wisest Christians were

still corrupted by sin, and capable of much that was evil and destructive. The quest for an earthly utopia was, in Augustine's view, the pursuit of a mirage, doomed to failure. Heaven was in heaven, and never on earth.

Yet Augustine did not recommend political withdrawal and quietism on the part of Christians, as we might possibly have anticipated. On the contrary, he declared, the values pursued by the city of man—peace and prosperity—were good in themselves, as far as they went. Christians could cooperate in the endeavor to establish those values, even though a faithful follower of Christ would not be driven by political utopianism in the venture. Augustine therefore repudiated the notion that Christianity was incompatible with good citizenship. The citizens of the heavenly city could and should collaborate with the citizens of the earthly city in seeking its earthly good. The values of the earthly city became false and evil, however, when made into the *ultimate* goal of human life, and pursued at the expense of *justice*.

Does human political life not always need this Augustinian warning? We would surely do well to hear Augustine's insistence that any exaltation of the earthly city and its values to absolute status is false and destructive. Man's ultimate destiny lies beyond the earthly city, beyond this perishing life, in the transcendent God who created him; and this supernatural destiny will be fulfilled only when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, returns at the close of history and creates new heaven, new earth.

Augustine's position here was well summed up by the nineteenth century Danish Lutheran thinker, Søren Kierkegaard: "Relate yourself relatively to the

relative, absolutely to the absolute." The soul-destroying error of utopian dreamers and imperialists is that they relate themselves *absolutely* to the *relative*: they make an ultimate goal out of man's earthly life and secular well-being. In so doing, they reveal that they love the creature more than the Creator. But true Christians, Augustine emphasized, would never confuse the relative good of the fading and fleeting city of this world, with the absolute good of the eternal city of God. Indeed, it was precisely by turning their backs on the city of God that unbelievers had made such a bloody and ruinous idol of the earthly city:

They neglect the higher goods of the heavenly city, which are secure through eternal victory and never-ending peace, and thus they inordinately covet the good things of the present life, believing them to be the only desirable things, or loving them better than those things which faith reckons to be better. The inevitable consequence is fresh misery and an increase of the wretchedness that was already there.⁹

By striving for a secular heaven on earth, social engineers and empire-builders were more likely to turn earth into hell. For Augustine, Christian faith alone enabled people to pursue earthly goals with a humble sense of realism, and without the damning sins of idolatry (our country or political party is an absolute value) or injustice (those who oppose us have no value). If biblically informed, prudent, humble Christians of Augustine's stamp were to act as a leaven within the politics of their country and their day, we might hopefully expect—not indeed the building of Jerusalem in England's (or America's) green and pleasant land, but at least the sabotaging of the building of Babylon. Such Christians are the state's

unsung heroes, putting crucial checks on its tendencies to idolatry and injustice.

There is much more that could be said about *City of God*, but perhaps enough of an appetizer has been given to stimulate readers to drink from the fountainhead. In the words of Marcus Dodds, its nineteenth century translator,

[T]he interest attaching to the *City of God* is not merely historical. It is the earnestness and ability with which [Augustine] develops his own philosophical and theological views which gradually fascinate the reader, and make him see why the world has set this among the few greatest books of all time. The fundamental lines of the Augustinian theology are here laid down in a comprehensive and interesting form. Never was thought so abstract expressed in language so popular . . . And though there are in the *City of God*, as in all ancient books, things that seem to us childish and barren, there are also the most surprising anticipations of modern speculation. There is an earnest grappling with those problems which are continually re-opened because they underline man's relation to God and the spiritual world—the problems which are not peculiar to any one century.¹⁰

The Doctrine of Grace

Finally, Augustine's ongoing relevance to today's church may be discovered in the fabulous theological wealth of his anti-Pelagian treatises. If we are confessionally Lutheran or Reformed, we find in these writings the first clear, coherent articulation of the biblical anthropology and soteriology so dear to our own hearts: the total spiritual inability of unregenerate human nature to respond savingly to God, the unconditional divine election of those who are to be saved, the manifestation of this grace in the mission of Christ the Savior, the sovereign efficacy of the Holy Spirit in giving faith and repentance

to sinners, and the perseverance of the elect to the end of their earthly pilgrimage and entrance into heaven at last. In many ways, Augustine's discourses on grace are simply an extended meditation, profound and awe-inspiring, on the "golden chain" of Rom 8:29-30: foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified.

Prior to Augustine, we are hard pressed to find this developed theology of human nature and divine grace in the writings of the fathers. We discover scattered utterances, hints, premonitions, embryonic ideas: but no sustained or articulate exposition. There is a good reason for this. As Augustine himself pointed out, prior to Pelagius and his optimistic humanism masquerading as Christianity, the controversy over sin and grace had never before arisen in that precise form, as the specific, conscious, and systematic focus of theological reflection and disputation. Referring to previous church fathers, Augustine said,

What need is there to search into their works, who before this heresy arose were under no necessity of troubling themselves to solve this difficult question; which without doubt they would have done, had they been obliged to answer such things? Hence it is, that what they thought of the grace of God, they have briefly and cursorily touched on in some places of their writings, whereas they dwelt at length on those things in which they disputed against the enemies of the church, in exhortations to every virtue by which to serve the living and true God for the purpose of attaining eternal life and true happiness.¹¹

Augustine showed a critical awareness of the development of doctrine. As James Orr argues in *The Progress of Dogma*,

Every doctrine, I have urged, has its "hour"—the period when it emerges into individual prominence, and

becomes the subject of exhaustive discussion.¹²

The “hour” of the Trinity struck in the fourth century; the “hour” of justification by faith struck in the sixteenth century; and, Orr maintains, the “hour” of grace struck in the fifth century, with the Pelagian controversy. It is not surprising, therefore, that we do not (for example) observe the same kind of systematic clarity in the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the ante-Nicene fathers that we *do* find in the aftermath of Arianism, with the linguistic and conceptual precision forged in the fires of controversy by Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers.

The same reasoning, both Augustine and Orr maintain, must be applied to the doctrine of grace before and after Pelagianism. To quote Orr again, regarding the fifth century:

[T]hat the “hour” had come for them [the doctrines of sin and grace]—that they were “in the air”, waiting to be discussed—is seen in the simultaneous emergence of two men who represent the opposite poles of doctrine on this subject—Augustine and Pelagius. What Athanasius and Arius were in the Arian controversy; what Anselm and Abelard were in the Soteriological controversy; what Calvin and Arminius were in the post-Reformation controversy on the application of Redemption—that Augustine and Pelagius were in this Anthropological controversy.¹³

Augustine was the foremost figure of the early fifth century to explore as never before the teaching of Scripture, especially the apostle Paul, on the extent of sin and the sovereignty of grace. But Augustine was not alone, and we should not allow his towering stature to obscure the widespread support he received in the Latin West from fellow theologians.

In particular, we should bear in mind how the Catholics of North Africa were practically as one man in their “Augustinian” theology against Pelagius’s exaltation of human free will. A very conservative body of men, those North Africans; and they had no sense of adopting novelties when they took up the sword of God’s sovereign grace to split the skull of Pelagian pride. This lends credence to Orr’s judgment that predestination was “in the air” breathed by Catholic theology, at least in North Africa, and needed only the heat of the Pelagian controversy to condense into a distilled dew of explicit doctrine. In the century after Augustine’s death, a noble company of theologians arose to defend and enlarge his legacy, among them Prosper of Aquitaine, Fulgentius of Ruspe, Avitus of Vienne, and Caesarius of Arles. Prosper’s treatises were translated into English in the 1950s in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series, and make stirring and edifying reading.

Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings are among the most accessible of his theological works. They are full of thoughtful exegesis; they burn with spiritual passion; they touch issues of salvation that resonate in every Christian heart; and they lay a solid biblical and theological foundation for “the doctrine of grace” (as Augustine as his co-workers called it—we today tend to make it plural, “doctrines”), which has been tried and found trustworthy in every succeeding age. Next after the apostles Paul and John, it is Augustine who has bequeathed to the church a truly God-centered vision of grace; and if we who hold this vision are to be named after any post-apostolic man, we are Augustinians rather than Calvinists. (Calvin once said he would be happy to confess his faith purely in the words of Augustine.) C. H.

Spurgeon puts it in historical perspective like this:

The man who preaches the doctrines of grace has an apostolic succession indeed. Can we not trace our pedigree through a whole line of men like Newton, and Whitefield, and Owen and Bunyan, straight away on till we come to Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli; and then we can go back from them to Savonarola, to Jerome of Prague, to Huss, and then back to Augustine, the mighty preacher of Christianity; and from St. Augustine to Paul is but one step. We need not be ashamed of our pedigree; although Calvinists are now considered to be heterodox, we are and ever must be orthodox. It is the old doctrine.¹⁴

Perhaps the only real difference between Augustine's exposition and that favored by mainstream Reformed theology today lies in his understanding of perseverance. Both Augustine and modern Reformed theology have a doctrine of "temporary faith"—those who profess faith for a time, perhaps very credibly, but then fall away and are lost. Reformed theology has tended to emphasize the discernible difference between temporary and saving faith; Augustine, by contrast, emphasized how similar they were. As a result, Augustine was notably less confident than Reformed theologians have generally been in offering assurance of final salvation to the professing believer. Most of the time, the bishop of Hippo preferred warning people against presumption: you may profess faith today, but the heart is deceitful, and rather than presume on your final salvation, you should continually cry to God for the salvation that endures.

Augustine's position here was complicated (needlessly, in the view of mainstream Reformed thinking) by his belief in infant baptismal regeneration. He had

to find a way of accounting for why so many regenerated infants failed to grow up into credibly godly believers. He found it by postulating that regenerating grace could be lost. In other words, what distinguished God's elect was not the possession of regenerating grace alone, but persevering grace.

The African father's problem here is, however, rendered all but immaterial if we discard his belief in infant baptism, and affirm that the spiritual blessings of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's supper) always flow *through* the channel of saving faith. Consequently, rather than regenerate a person, whose regeneration must then be reckoned lost if he finally apostatizes, baptism instead imparts strengthening grace to those who are already regenerate believers. An unregenerate unbeliever who receives baptism merely gets wet (not to put too fine a point on it!). Arguably, then, the most robust and consistent Augustinianism is found among "Augustinian Baptists," whose understanding of perseverance is no longer burdened by Augustine's moot conviction about infant baptismal regeneration.

But let us not paint too critical a portrait of Augustine's doctrine of perseverance. When addressing himself in a pastoral context to believers troubled by lack of assurance, he could sound very much like a Reformed pastor of today:

You, therefore, ought to hope that perseverance in obedience should be given you by the Father of Lights, from whom come down every excellent gift and every perfect gift (James 1:17), and you should ask for it in your daily prayers. And in doing this, you ought to trust that you are not strangers to the predestination of His people, because it is He Himself who bestows even the power of so praying. Far be it from

you to despair of yourselves! For you are bidden to put your hope in Him, not in yourselves. Indeed, cursed is every one who has hope in man (Jeremiah 17:5); and it is good rather to trust in the Lord than to trust in man, because blessed are all they that put their trust in Him (Psalm 2:12). Holding this hope, serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice before Him with trembling (Psalm 2:11). No one can be certain of the life eternal which God who does not lie has promised to the children of promise before the times of eternity (Titus 1:2) — no one, unless that life of his, which is a state of trial upon the earth, is completed. But God will make us to persevere in Himself to the end of that life, since we daily say to Him, ‘Lead us not into temptation.’

When these and similar things are said, whether to few Christians or to the multitude of the church, why do we fear to preach the predestination of the saints and the true grace of God — that is, the grace which is not given according to our merits — as the Holy Scripture declares it? Or must it be feared that a person should despair of his salvation, when his hope is shown to be placed in God? Should he not rather despair of his salvation, if in his excess of pride and unhappiness, he should place his hope in himself?¹⁵

The Christian, then, will find rich food for his soul in Augustine’s treatises on grace. These are found gathered together in volume 5 of Schaff’s *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series One*, with a valuable introduction by B. B. Warfield. Augustine deals with these matters in other places too, e.g., in *City of God* and the *Enchiridion* (a sort of mini-handbook of doctrine). Warfield passes the following noble verdict on Augustine’s theology of grace:

Its central thought was the absolute dependence of the individual on the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It made everything that concerned salvation to be of God, and traced the source of all good to Him.

“Without me ye can do nothing,” is the inscription on one side of it; on the other stands written, “All things are yours.” Augustine held that he who builds on a human foundation builds on sand, and founded all his hope on the Rock itself. And there also he founded his teaching; as he distrusted man in the matter of salvation, so he distrusted him in the form of theology. No other of the fathers so conscientiously wrought out his theology from the revealed Word; no other of them so sternly excluded human additions. The subjects of which theology treats, he declares, are such as “we could by no means find out unless we believed them on the testimony of Holy Scripture.” “Where Scripture gives no certain testimony,” he says, “human presumption must beware how it decides in favor of either side.” “We must first bend our necks to the authority of Scripture,” he insists, “in order that we may arrive at knowledge and understanding through faith.” And this was not merely his theory, but his practice. No theology was ever, it may be more broadly asserted, more conscientiously wrought out from the Scriptures. Is it without error? No; but its errors are on the surface, not of the essence. It leads to God, and it came from God; and in the midst of the controversies of so many ages it has shown itself an edifice whose solid core is built out of material “which cannot be shaken.”¹⁶

Concluding Reflections

Here, then, is Augustine, most eminent of the Latin fathers of the church. Like all theologians and saints, he had his defects, and an essay on the defects of Augustine would doubtless paint a somewhat different picture than this essay. Most of those who take the time to get acquainted with the bishop of Hippo, however, come to feel that his faults were spots in a blazing and beautiful sun. A trophy of grace both in his life and writings, may God then continue to bless the example and the labors of his servant to us today, as we learn

through Augustine to know Augustine's God and to rejoice in the same mystery of saving grace. in *NPNF¹*, 5:lxix.

ENDNOTE

¹From Johann Nepomuk Huber, *Die Philosophie der Kirchenväter* (Munich, 1859), 312. Cited in Philip Schaff, "Prolegomena" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (hereafter *NPNF¹*) (ed. Philip Schaff; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:9-10.

²Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus* 2.17.

³Augustine, *Confessions* 8.28-9 in vol. 1 of *NPNF¹* (trans. J. G. Pilkington)

⁴Prosper, *Letter to Rufinus* 3 and 18.

⁵Quoted in Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (rev. ed.; Wildwood, CA: St. Xenia Skete, 1997), 80.

⁶Schaff, "Prolegomena," 11-12.

⁷Augustine, *Confessions* 10.8-9.

⁸Philip Schaff, "Editor's Preface" in *NPNF¹*, 2:5.

⁹Augustine, *City of God* 15.4 in vol. 2 of *NPNF¹* (trans. Marcus Dods)

¹⁰Marcus Dods, "Translator's Preface" in *NPNF¹*, 2:xiii-xiv.

¹¹Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints* 27 in vol. 5 of *NPNF¹* (trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis).

¹²James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma: Being the Elliot Lectures, Delivered at the Western Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Penna., U.S.A., 1897* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 243.

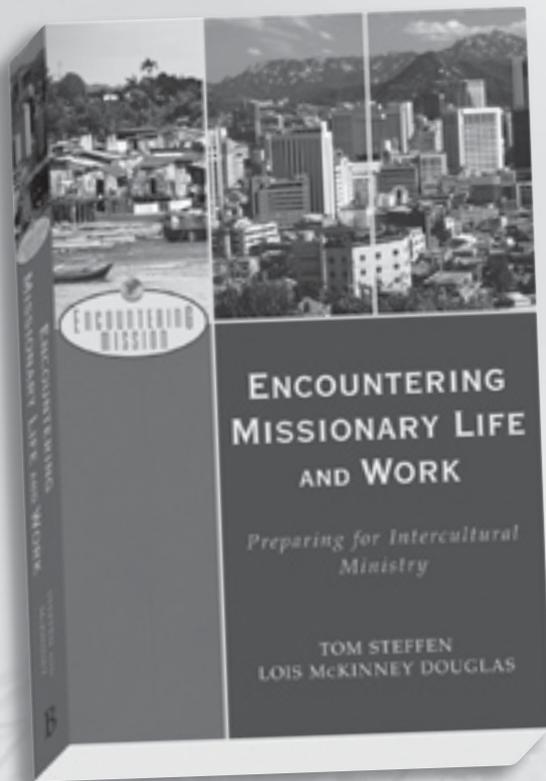
¹³*Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴C. H. Surgeon, from the sermon "Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility," 1 August 1858.

¹⁵Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance* 62 in vol. 5 of *NPNF¹*.

¹⁶B. B. Warfield, "Introductory Essay on Augustin and the Pelagian Controversy"

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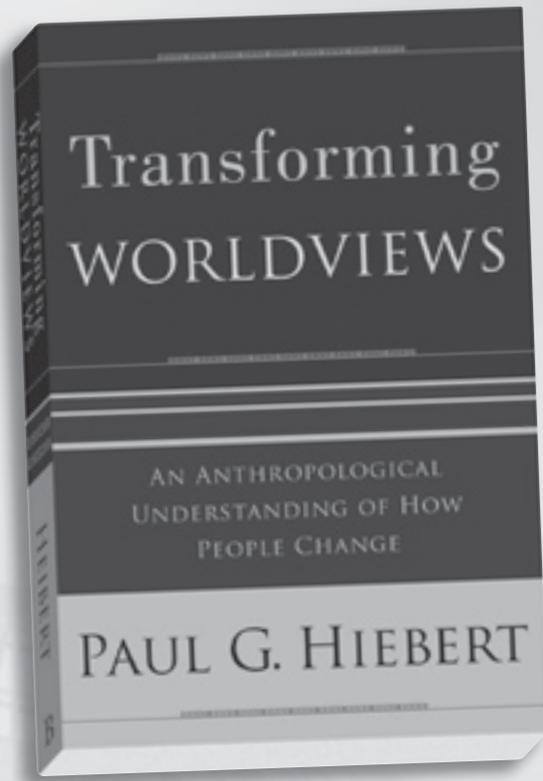
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Patristics And Reformed Orthodoxy: Some Brief Notes and Proposals

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The renaissance of studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Protestant theology over the last three decades has helped to put to death a number of caricatures, dogmatic and methodological, which had been perpetuated by the older traditions of scholarship. Foremost among these was the idea that Reformed Orthodoxy was increasingly driven by a speculative metaphysical principle, specifically that of predestination, and that the older dogmatics had no interest in biblical exegesis, preferring instead to do theology via proof-texting and crude dogmatism.¹

While the overturning of these old misconceptions is important, it should also be noted that a further aspect of the reassessment of Protestant Orthodoxy has been an emphasis upon its essential catholicity: Reformed Orthodoxy did not represent a break with the past, either in terms of content or even its own self-understanding; rather, its exponents operated within a framework where the significance of the theological, exegetical, and polemical labors of previous generations were assumed as dialogue partners in the contemporary exposition of the Christian faith. Indeed, Reformed Orthodoxy was, in a very important sense, catholic in terms of both sources and intention, as will be clear from this discussion of John Owen, an outstanding, yet in many respects entirely typical, theologian of the Reformed Orthodox tradition.²

John Owen and the Patristics

At the outset, we should note that the standard category of patristics was not one that the Reformed Orthodox would have recognized. The standard historical division with which we now operate (patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation/modern) are of later vintage. A writer such as Owen thought rather in terms of earlier and later writers, and of earlier and later schoolmen. Nevertheless, when we examine Reformed Orthodoxy in the light of our later taxonomy, it is very clear that what we refer to as patristic authors played a significant role in the theological construction of Reformation and post-Reformation writers.

The empirical evidence for this is easy to find. The posthumous auction catalog of Owen's library is replete with patristic texts, indicating the importance that these foundational theological writers had for him.³ Clearly his library contained all the standard patristic authors on key topics such as Christology, Trinitarianism, grace (Augustine, Athanasius, Cyril, Basil, etc.), as well as numerous other, perhaps more obscure writers: Johannes Climacus, Gregory Thaumaturgus, etc. The holdings are not restricted to Latin or Greek fathers, either, with Syriac authors also being represented. Of course, the mere possession of a book does not indicate that Owen read it, but the constant references throughout his works to patristic authors, and his ease with classical and Ancient Near Eastern languages, would

suggest that we can take the library catalog as representative of his reading and his scholarly interests.

Indeed, that this is the case, and is indeed typical of Reformed Orthodoxy, is evidenced by the recommended reading list for theological students that was written by Thomas Barlow, Reformed theologian, conformist Bishop of Lincoln under the Restoration, and Owen's Oxford tutor and lifelong friend. Published posthumously, *Autoschediasmata, De Studio Theologiae; or, Directions for the Choice of Books in the Study of Theology* (Oxford, 1699) was found among Barlow's papers at his death, and clearly represents the kind of basic reading with which he thought a student moving on to a Bachelor of Divinity should be acquainted. In this work, patristic writers feature both in the first section, dealing with the biblical text and canon, where they are seen as significant for discussions of the extent of the canon; but Barlow also lists contemporary works on patristic history, as well as other manuals on how to read the Fathers. He does not bother so much with the listing of primary texts—after all, this is simply an introductory bibliography—but the skill of reading and using the Fathers is clearly considered by him to be a basic element of the theologian's task. Owen would have been impacted by precisely the kind of curricular emphases outlined by his tutor, Barlow, and thus patristic authors would have formed a staple of his basic theological diet.

This had a wide impact on Reformed Orthodoxy in general and Owen in particular. Indeed, his writings are full of references to ancient Christian authors, so much so that little more can be offered in a short paper than some suggestive notes which might prove fruitful as pointers to

further research. For example, when we come to examine the actual substantive impact of patristic writing on Owen's theology, perhaps the most obvious area is that of the language of polemic. No matter what the theological controversy, Owen is able to relate the battles of Reformed Christianity in the seventeenth century to parallel struggles in the early church. Thus, while Roman Catholicism is typically characterized as Judaism (with its legalistic connotations), other errors are ascribed a more distinctively Christian heretical pedigree: Arminianism is (of course) Pelagianism;⁴ while Socinianism, often a catch-all term for numerous radical groups, is a heady mix of Photinianism, Macedonianism, and Pelagianism.⁵

Indeed, in Owen's earliest published work, *A Display of Arminianism* (1642), he sets the scene in the Epistle Dedicatory, with a quotation from Augustine, a reference to holy war taken from Gregory Nazianzus, and a clear rhetorical connection between the fifth century Pelagian controversy and the differences between Calvin and Arminius ("One church cannot wrap in her communion Austin [Augustine] and Pelagius, Calvin and Arminius").⁶ Then, throughout the work there are constant reminders that what is being witnessed is simply a recapitulation of the age-old Pelagian fascination with the idea of human free will and the repudiation of divine sovereignty.

This approach is interesting and is no doubt the result of various factors that underlie the self-understanding of Reformed Orthodox theologians. First, we can see it as evidence of the desire of premodern theologians to avoid novelty. Orthodoxy is the norm; heresy is the innovation. Thus, by setting up contemporary debates using the categories of archetypal

heresy, a twofold polemical point is being made about both the opponents' theology and the time-honored orthodoxy of the Reformed. The Reformed Orthodox, as did the Reformers themselves, conducted their polemics in significant measure over the reception and interpretation of historic Christian texts, particularly those patristic authors of universal significance. That this is the case is demonstrated by Owen's concern even to establish quintessentially Protestant doctrines on the basis of patristic precedent. For example, when it comes to the scripture principle, Owen will cite extensively from Clement of Alexandria to establish his point.⁷ He does much the same with justification by faith, where he particularly uses patristic citations to support his argument for mystical union as the basis for justification and imputation.⁸

Second, it indicates the limited sense of historical development with which the Reformed Orthodox operated. To say that they had no conception of historical development would be incorrect, but that development was generally seen as theological, more specifically covenantal. Thus, in his discussion of the role and place of liturgy in the church, Owen sees church history as a continual ebbing and flowing of idolatry; and, under the impact of the work of Cocceius, Reformed Orthodoxy developed an understanding of the flow of history, from creation to consummation, which was aware of the different epochs of covenantal history as they unfolded. Nevertheless, the kind of historical consciousness that is prevalent in today's post-Hegelian world where there is a distinct sensitivity to development and change over time, was really alien to men like Owen. Thus, not only could past texts be plundered with minimal atten-

tion to the wider original context, but it was inevitable that the taxonomy of the past could be transposed to the present with little or no difficulty. This was not a cyclical view of history because it was heading towards eschatological consummation; but it was a view of history which minimized the contextual differences between eras.

Having said this, there is some evidence that the Reformed Orthodox had developed a somewhat more nuanced sense of the significance of their polemics than had been the case, say with Luther. Luther saw the struggle over justification as the equivalent of the Augustine-Pelagius controversy; but it is clear that the issue at stake in the fifth century was the framework of salvation (the nature of grace) more than the content of that salvation (imputation of Christ's righteousness). In Luther's thinking the two seem to be different sides of the same coin; but in actual fact they are conceptually separable. For Owen and his contemporaries, however, it was clear that within Catholicism itself there was a struggle which paralleled that between Calvinists and Arminians: that between Jansenists and Jesuits; and Owen saw this, again, as the result of residual Augustinian influence in the Roman Church:

The system of Doctrines concerning the Grace of God, and the wills of men, which now goes under the name of *Jansenisme*, as it is in general agreeable unto the Scripture; so it has firmed itself in the common profession of Christians, by the Writings of some excellent persons, especially *Augustin*, and those who followed him, unto such a general acceptance, as that the belief and profession of it could never be utterly rooted out from the minds of men in the *Roman Church* itself.... Moreover, one whole Order of their Fryers, out of zeal for the Doctrine

of *Thomas*, (who was less averse from the sentiments of the Antients in this matter, than the most of that litigious crew of Disputers, whom they call Schoolmen;) did retain some of the most material Principles of this Doctrine, however not a little vitiated with various intermixtures of their own. Not a full Age since. . . . after the lesser attempts of some more private persons, *Jansenius*, a Bishop in *Flanders*, undertakes the explication and the vindication of the whole doctrine of the Effectual Grace of God, with the annexed Articles principally out of the works of Austin [Augustine].⁹

It is clear from this kind of statement that Owen sees both his own movement within Protestantism and the attempts at theological reform within Catholicism as essentially recovery of Augustine's thinking on grace.

The archetypal nature of the early church for contemporary church life was not restricted merely to polemics or the citation of authorities for establishing the antiquity of Protestant distinctives. Augustine is particularly significant here. Of course, the role of Augustine in later anti-Pelagian thought, both Catholic and Protestant is basic. Indeed, we have already noted how Owen understood the Reformed-Arminian struggle as a recapitulation of the Augustine-Pelagius battle of the early church. Yet the influence of Augustine in this matter is not restricted simply to issues of more or less abstract doctrinal significance. In his major work on the Holy Spirit, Owen uses Augustine's *Confessions*, the classic statement of Christian psychology, as the paradigm for understanding the nature of conversion and the Spirit's role in the same. Whether Augustine means the same by conversion in the fourth century as Owen does in the seventeenth might be a moot point; what is significant is, once again,

the archetypal use of patristic sources as keys to understanding the present, if not perennial truths of Christian experience.¹⁰ Thus, Owen uses Augustine's narrative as proof that human beings are born sinful, and that courses in specific sins leads to a significant changes in moral psychology which increasingly harden the individual and lead to alterations in behavior as we grow and mature, both physically and mentally. Further, general moral dysfunction manifests itself in specific sins which manifest the basically divided nature of each individual as one who knows, by the light of nature, the difference between good and evil, and yet cannot help sinning. Most significant perhaps is the way in which Owen sees Augustine as paradigmatic for the immediate pre-conversion struggles, where the two sides of the individual—the one driving towards sin, the other wanting to follow the way of God—are effectively engaged in mortal combat, powered by the Spirit working through the word. The psychological urgency and conflict which pervades Augustine's work clearly had a significant impact upon Owen's understanding of Christian experience. For example, see how he moves here from the specific case of Augustine to a general observation on the pre-conversion state of an individual under conviction of sin:

And he confesseth that although, through the urgency of his convictions, he could not but pray that he might be freed from the power of sin, yet through the prevalency of that power in him, he had a secret reserve and desire not to part with that sin which he prayed against. . . . These endeavours do arise unto great perplexities and distresses; for after a while, the soul of a sinner is torn and divided between the power of corruption and the terror of conviction.¹¹

While Owen is nonetheless careful to qualify what he says by indicating that God is sovereign and is not required to work conversion through a pre-conversion struggle of this kind, the overall thrust of the chapter is that Augustine's experience perhaps represents more of the norm than the exception.¹²

Nevertheless, it is true to say that Owen's use of Augustine represents a reception of his *Confessions* rather than a simple restatement of, or running commentary on, what the book actually says. There is little to nothing about the intellectual aspects of Augustine's pilgrimage or the impact of crowd psychology on the individual, both themes that are significant for Augustine. Rather, it is the individual experience, and then what one might call the peculiar providences—so precious to the Puritan mind—which are so attractive and useful to Owen in his seventeenth century context.¹³

Post-Chalcedonian Christology and John Owen

One example of where the more rarified climates of patristic theology provided the Reformed such as Owen with extremely important paradigms and insights is that of Christology. Of course, the Reformed did not question the basic formulation of the Chalcedonian Creed, but they were aware both of the questions it generated and left unanswered, and of the need to connect it to the specific requirements of the kinds of debate with the Lutherans that marked the era of orthodoxy for both traditions. Furthermore, the Protestant emphasis on Christ as mediator according to his person (and thus both natures) and not simply according to his human nature, as was the normative position in medieval Catholicism, gave Christologi-

cal discussion of subsistence/natures a renewed urgency.

In this context, the patristic distinctions between *Logos asarkos* and *Logos ensarkos*, and, crucially, between *anhypostatic* and *enhypostatic* human nature in the incarnation proved extremely fruitful. The latter was developed by the sixth century theologian, Leontius of Byzantium, as a way of explaining why the union of divinity and humanity in Christ did not lead to the positing of two persons, or better, two subsistences, in Christ: Christ's human nature was like ours in every way except that, in itself, it had no subsistence outside of its union with the divine nature.¹⁴ In other words, its hypostatic status was the result of the union with the second person of the Trinity, and totally dependent upon the divine.

Given the Reformed acceptance that Chalcedon reflected sound biblical teaching, it was inevitable that the conceptual problems which the language of Chalcedon created, even as it solved others, would also be of interest. Indeed, the distinctions introduced by Leontius actually allowed the Reformed to provide terminological clarification for their belief that Christ's mediation was an act of the one person and not of either nature in particular. A good example of the use of the anhypostatic distinction is provided by Thysius's disputation on the incarnation in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*. While the human nature never has any anhypostatic existence outside of the union with the Logos, nevertheless, its personhood or subsistence is that of the Logos. This avoids Nestorianism while yet maintaining the integrity of the human nature.¹⁵

Owen uses this patristic insight, as adopted by the Reformed, to address the issue of the communication of attributes

within a Trinitarian context. This is in somewhat polemical contrast with both the Lutherans and the Socinians. While Lutherans too held to the idea of the anhypostatic nature of Christ's humanity, they believed that communication of divine attributes to the human nature of Christ took place directly between the natures, and this was regarded as the *necessary* result of the hypostatic union.¹⁶ This was the christological underpinning of Luther's insistence that God was manifest as gracious only in and through the flesh of Jesus Christ, and that Christ was present according to both natures in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Socinians—for Owen the more immediate threat—denied any consubstantial divinity between God the Father and Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Thus, what Owen has to do is tread a line between a Lutheran position which faces potential difficulties in accounting for the limitations of Christ, and that of the Socinians, which suffers from the opposite: accounting for Christ's uniqueness and apparent access to supernatural knowledge and power. In contrast to both of these positions, Owen describes the hypostatic union as follows:

The only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself.... That the only necessary consequent of this assumption of the human nature, or the incarnation of the Son of God, is the personal union of Christ, or the inseparable subsistence of the assumed nature in the person of the Son.... That all other actings of God in the person of the Son towards the human nature were voluntary, and did not necessarily ensue on the union mentioned.¹⁸

In other words, the only direct act of the Logos on the human nature was the assumption of the latter into a union that

gave it personhood. The anhypostatic human nature of Christ had personhood enhypostatically. The argument has a strange feel to it, given what one might call the "common sense" notion that human nature and personhood are inseparable; but in fact that refinement makes perfect sense given the new problems that the Chalcedonian formula generates even as it solves others.

Owen's conceptual presuppositions here are impeccably patristic: the idea of the anhypostatic nature of Christ, which Owen articulates very clearly in his christological discussions elsewhere;¹⁹ and the desire to give an appropriate Trinitarian account of all God's external actions.²⁰ What we see, therefore, is the deployment of patristic creedal theology and concepts in the service of contemporary Protestant debates. Faced with the challenges posed by Lutheranism and then by Socinianism, Owen is able to offer an orthodox Christology which answers both sets of contemporary concerns while yet drawing on, and remaining consistent with, trajectories of Chalcedonian thought.

Indeed, we might go further and point beyond the polemical exigencies of Owen's time to the constructive use of this distinction in emphasizing the historical movement within the life of Christ himself as Owen conceives of it. Protestant, especially Reformed, Christology, placed such dynamic development and movement at the heart of its project, moving away from the more abstract and metaphysical concerns of the Middle Ages. This is reflected in the standard categories of humiliation and exaltation which both Luther and Reformed used to characterize the earthly ministry of Christ.²¹ That the attributes of deity are communicated to the incarnate person via

the work of the Spirit, and not by virtue of the union in and of itself, allows Owen to give an account of Christ's growth in knowledge which grounds the historical growth of Jesus in knowledge once again in solid Christology which draws on patristic formulations and trajectories. Thus, the historical insights of Reformation Protestantism build directly upon, and mesh seamlessly with, established catholic theology.²²

Some Concluding Proposals

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in evangelical quarters regarding patristic theology. In the hands of Thomas C. Oden, this has led to a resurgence of interest both in patristic biblical commentary and devotion, placed, one might add, in the service of an evangelicalism with a simple, ecumenical aesthetic which bears comparison, say, with the mere Christianity that has been such a part of the evangelical heritage.²³ Oden's work is a treasure trove of theology; but the tendency of the project overall to relativize that which comes later, not least the great Protestant truths of justification by grace through faith, and personal assurance of God's favor, render the overall project, in my opinion, less than Protestant. In the hands of others—most notably the recent work of Craig Allert—the patristic testimony has been placed in the service of contemporary critiques of established evangelical positions, such (in the case of Allert) as that on the inspiration and authority of scripture.²⁴ Of the two movements, that symbolized by the life and work of Oden is arguably constructive and helpful even to those, like myself, who wish to maintain a more elaborate doctrinal confession; the latter is rather an iconoclastic phenomenon, less easy to assimilate to orthodox,

creedal Protestantism.

I would suggest that sound orthodox theology of today, however, can find a third way to do theology which both respects the insights of patristic theology while yet avoiding both the tendency to downplay later confessional developments and the desire to set the ancient church against the modern. It is that represented by the approach of such as Owen in the seventeenth century. Owen had an acute sense of the fact that there are a limitations to patristic theology, yet his Protestantism, far from making him dismissive of patristic theology, requires that he take patristic writers seriously. A commitment to scriptural perspicuity means that he examines in detail the history of exegesis relative to any passage of scripture he addresses. A commitment to the church as God's means of transmitting the gospel from age to age means that he takes very seriously what the church has said about scripture and about God throughout the ages. A realization that there are a set of archetypal heresies, particularly focused on God, Christology, and grace, means that the early church provides him with much fuel for contemporary debate. A commitment to the fact that the church's theological traditions, especially as expressed in her creeds, provides both resources, parameters and, at times, unavoidable conceptual problems for doctrinal formulations in the present drives him again and again to look at traditions of theological discussion from the early church onwards. Further, a belief that theology is talk about God, and not just communal reflection upon the psychology of the church in particular context, means that Owen regards it as having universal, referential significance; and thus he sees those who have worked

in formulating doctrine over the years as having a significance which transcends their own time and geographical locale. In this context, he also understands that each solution to a doctrinal problem generates new problems of its own, and thus to understand why the church thinks as she does, one needs to understand how the church has come to think as she does (e.g., the anhypostatic nature of Christ's humanity, a point likely to be incomprehensible to biblical theologians and/or no-creed-but-the-Bible types, but surely central to a sound understanding of incarnation in the post-Chalcedonian era). Each of these makes interaction with patristic authors necessary as Owen and others in his tradition work to ensure that the gospel is not reinvented anew every Sunday but, rather, is faithfully communicated from generation to generation.

In short, biblical orthodoxy is, and always has been, catholic in its ambitions and its sources. The sorry state of contemporary theological thinking, cut off from its roots by ideological commitments to radically imperialistic, monopolistic, anti-historical, anti-systematic, anti-metaphysical, anti-ecclesiastical forms of biblical theology or no-creed-but-the-Bible evangelicalism, has de-catholicized Protestantism, particularly conservative Protestantism, in a way that would have been unthinkable in the seventeenth-century. For example, negatively, Arianism now is as deadly as it was in the fourth century; we should learn the lessons from that time and apply them today, for time does not improve the value of heresy. Positively, the Trinity is as life-giving now as it was in the fourth century, for time has not diminished the being or the power of God. Let us learn from the past, not waste time reinventing the wheel or, worse still,

naïvely inviting back into the camp those our ancestors threw out, at great cost to themselves, so many centuries ago.

Patristic theology is indeed the inheritance that orthodox evangelicals have all but forgotten; thus we should be striving even now to recover its historic usefulness, refusing to cede the ground either to those friends who see patristics as a way of returning to a simpler Christianity or as a means of undermining central truths of Protestantism. Our Protestant forefathers built their theology upon the basis of careful patristic study; and indeed our Protestantism demands that we continue to do so if we are not to squander our inheritance.

ENDNOTES

¹See Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); and Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

²See, for example, Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

³*Bibliotheca Oweniana* (London, 1684).

⁴John Owen, *Works* (24 vols; London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-55), 10:11.

⁵*Ibid.*, 3:8. Cf. William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng* (London, 1607), 27-28, where he advises the preacher to study ancient writers because "the Antitrinitaries have newly varnished that opinion of Arius and Sabellius. The Anabaptists renew the doctrines or sects of the Essees, Catharists, Enthusiasts, and Donatists. The Swenkfeldians revive the opinions of the Eutychians, Enthusiasts, etc. Menon followeth Ebion, and the Papists resemble the Pharisies, Encratites, Tatians, Pelagians. The Libertines renew

the opinions of the Gnosticks ad the Carpocratians. Servetus hath revived the heresies of Samosatenus, Arrius, Eutyches, Marcion and Apollinaris. Lastly the Schismatiques, that separate themselves from evangelical Churches, receive the opinions, facts, and fashions of Pupianus in Cyprian, of the Audiens, and Donatists. Therefore in like manner, wee must not so seeke for new repealing and confutations of these heresies as wee are for our use to fetch those ancient ones out of Councils and Fathers, and to accompt them as approved and firme."

⁶Owen, *Works*, 10:7. Interestingly enough, on this same page, Owen also speculates that the introduction of Arminianism into England was the result of a Spanish conspiracy between the Cardinal of Lorraine and the German Lutherans, a story he apparently originating with posthumous papers of Jerome Zanchy, and communicated at some point to the English parliament.

⁷*Ibid.*, 4:111-12.

⁸*Ibid.*, 5:176-77, citing Leo, Augustine, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Athanasius, and Eusebius.

⁹From Owen's preface to Theophilus Gale, *The True Idea of Jansenisme* (London, 1669), 18-20.

¹⁰Book 3, chapter 6, "The Manner of Conversion Explained in the Instance of Augustine": Owen, *Works*, 3:337-66.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 3:355.

¹²*Ibid.*, 3:360-61.

¹³See, for example, *Ibid.*, 3:346-48, where "outward means" are not what one might usually expect

(word, sacraments) but providences, afflictions, miraculous deliverances, etc.

¹⁴See Aloys Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* 2.1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 210. This became a standard distinction in Lutheran Orthodoxy as well: see the quotations from Hollazius, Quenstedt, and Gerhard in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 300-01.

¹⁵*Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (ed. H. Bavinck; Leiden, 1881), Disp. XXV. xxiv.

¹⁶See J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 272; H. Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1961), 322. On the anhypostasis, see Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 295-96, 300-01.

¹⁷On Socinianism, see H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: OUP, 1951); Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

¹⁸Owen, *Works*, 3:160-61.

¹⁹E.g., *ibid.*, 1:225-26, 233; 12:210.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 3:162.

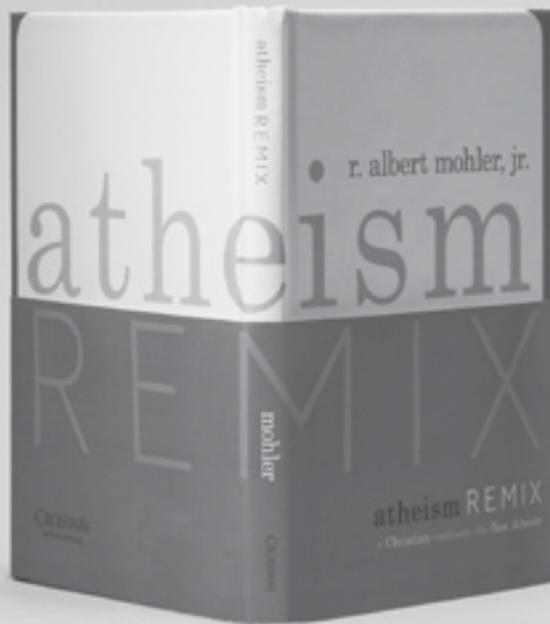
²¹On Lutheran notions of humiliation, see Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 290 ff.; Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 381 ff; for the Reformed, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 331-32.

²²Owen, *Works*, 3:169-71.

²³Oden is the General Editor of the series for InterVarsity Press, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*,

which has done brilliant work in making ancient exegesis available to the general Christian public; also, his three volume *Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 1992) draws deeply on patristic writings. Most recently, his *Ancient Christian Devotional* (Carol Stream: InterVarsity, 2007) is a superb introduction to patristic Christian devotion, practically applied to the Christian today.

²⁴Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). This is part of a series, *Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church's Future*, designed to bring patristic study to bear on contemporary evangelical theology.



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Recovering Ancient Church Practices: A Review of Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*

Michael A. G. Haykin

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In this introductory volume for a new series being published by Thomas Nelson entitled “The Ancient Practices Series” (that will include volumes on prayer, the Sabbath, and tithing), well-known author and speaker Brian McLaren sounds a call for the recovery of some of the spiritual riches of our Christian past, in particular those associated with what are called the spiritual disciplines. In this regard, his book, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*,¹ is part of an interest in and fascination with spirituality that is now central to both evangelicalism and the cultural ambience of our time. McLaren rightly wants to move beyond the fairly limited range of spiritual expression associated with mid-twentieth-century Fundamentalism (his own roots are described as “mildly fundamentalist,” 54-55) and evangelicalism. Our riches as evangelicals—in the Puritans, Reformers, and the Fathers—are vaster than the classical Fundamentalists of the early twentieth century ever imagined. McLaren is confident that the time is right for “a fresh, creative alternative—a fourth alternative, something beyond militarist scientific secularism, pushy religious fundamentalism, and mushy amorphous spirituality” (5). Does this book deliver that alternative? No. As a spiritually reliable and helpful alternative to the regnant patterns of

living in our culture, the book has to be judged a failure.

First, it needs to be noted that stylistically the book reads well and McLaren is alert to the latest modes of expression, though I must admit some of them grated on this reader. His use of the word “sexy,” for example—“the sexy young word *spiritual*” (19)—is very much in tune with the ways in which that word has come to be used, though I for one have trouble dissociating it from meaning actual sex-appeal. McLaren is also attuned to the contemporary interest in discovering how the church functioned in relation to various secular empires that claimed—and do claim—the complete subservience of their subjects (23). Even the subtitle of the book is culturally hip, recalling the title of Episode VI of the *Star Wars* movie series—*Return of the Jedi*.

Affirming the Spirituality of Islam

McLaren first outlines why spiritual practices matter (1-10) and how they are vital to “becoming awake and staying awake to God” (18). But problems soon emerge in the heart of the narrative about the various practices of piety that McLaren wishes to recapture. McLaren affirms that Muhammad had a “genuine encounter with God” that led to the movement of Islam (22). Even though McLaren

affirms his commitment to Jesus—he is, in his words, “at heart a Jesus-y person” (31)—his warm embrace of Islam, one of the “three Abrahamic faiths” (6) alongside Judaism and Christianity, continues throughout the book. Thus he mentions Eid ul-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr, Muslim holy meals, in the same breath as the Passover and the Eucharist (26), following Muhammad is parallel to following Jesus (37), the way in Islam—*deen*—leads to peace, wisdom, and joy like the gospel (51), and the Christian contemplative tradition has a counterpart in the Muslim Sufi tradition (92). Given that McLaren wishes to draw heavily on the wisdom of the Patristic era—the source of the Ancient Practices—this completely positive view of Islam would have been quite disturbing to the Fathers.

Take, for example, the man who can be called the last of the ancient church fathers, John of Damascus (c. 655-749), whose *The Fount of Knowledge* is one of the great systematic theologies in the history of the church. John appears to have been an Arab by ethnicity, his family name being Mansur, a name common among Syriac Christians of Arab descent.² His grandfather, Mansūr b. Sargūn, played a key role in the surrender of Damascus to the Muslim army of Khalid ibn al-Walid (died c. 641). Early rulers of Syria were tolerant of the presence of Christians, and John’s grandfather became a key administrator in the Muslim government of the region. John’s father, Ibn Mansūr, was known as an extremely devout Christian but also one of the most trusted officials of the Muslim regime. John succeeded his father as a key advisor to the Muslim ruler, Caliph Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705). After a long life of service in the public realm, John left his public position around

725 in order to embrace a monastic lifestyle.

John studied the Qur’ān in the original Arabic, and having known something of the domination of Islam at first-hand, he proved to be a deft respondent to Islam, or “the heresy of the Ishmaelites,” as he called it.³ He isolated two issues central to the self-identity of Islam: its rejection of the Trinity and its denial of the death of Christ. For Islam, Allah has no son, no co-equal associates, and rules in utter solitude. Moreover, it affirms that Christ was not crucified, but was snatched away before the cross—“God raised him up to himself”—and thus Christ did not see death.⁴ For John, however, if Christ did not die for sinners and if he is not God, then there is no salvation and we have a religion that offers no hope of redemption. For John, the devotee of God the Holy Trinity, Islam can thus only be regarded as a heresy. He would be utterly surprised that a self-professed believer in “the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation” and “the affirmations of the ancient creeds” (33)—like the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed that John of Damascus honored as an accurate summary of biblical doctrine about God—could speak so positively of Islam without any hint of real critique.

Where Is the Cross?

In an insightful study of McLaren’s theology, Greg Gilbert has noted that

McLaren ... seems blind to, or at least relatively uninterested in, the most central moment of the entire Christian faith—the cross. One of the most consistently puzzling things about McLaren’s books is how little space or time he has for Christ’s work of atonement.⁵

Finding Our Way Again is no exception to this pattern. In the whole of the book

there appears to be only one explicit reference to the cross. This occurs in the context of the trendy declaration that “Jesus didn’t come to start a new religion,” for he “wouldn’t have been killed simply for starting a new religion,” since the Roman Imperium was religiously tolerant (34).⁶ Yet, throughout its history, healthy Christian piety has directed people desirous of knowing how to draw near to God to the cross.

For instance, in the New Testament sermon that we call Hebrews, the author emphasizes a number of times that inner purity—discussed by McLaren in a chapter on the so-called *via purgativa* (151-158)—is found ultimately through the blood sacrifice of Christ to his Father (Hebrews 9:14, 26; 10:10, 12, 14; 7:25). And it is solely on the basis of this sacrifice that human beings can boldly draw near to God, confident that the crucified Christ has dealt once and for all with their guilt and shame (Hebrews 10:19-22; cp. 10:1). All of the spiritual disciplines draw their efficacy from this sacrificial death of Christ. Without rootedness in that death, the decisive event in the history of piety, they are merely human ritual.

Or consider the answer that the late second-century text *The Letter to Diognetus*—anonymous like Hebrews—gives to the question raised by Diognetus, a pagan deeply interested in Christianity, as to why Christians are a people marked by love.⁷ The author has been arguing that God revealed his plan of salvation to none but his “beloved Son” until human beings came to the point of realizing their utter and complete inability to gain heaven by their own strength. Then, when men and women were conscious of their sin and impending judgment, God,

did not hate or reject us or bear us ill-

will. Rather, he was long-suffering, bore with us, and in mercy he took our sins upon himself. He himself gave his own Son as a ransom for us—the Holy One for the godless, the Innocent One for the wicked, the Righteous One for the unrighteous, the Incorruptible for the corruptible, the Immortal for the mortal. For what else was able to cover our sins except his righteousness? In whom could we, who were lawless and godless, have been justified, but in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange! O the inscrutable work of God! O blessings beyond all expectation!—that the wickedness of many should be hidden in the one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of the One should justify the many wicked!⁸

Here, as so often happens in Scripture, theology leads to doxology. In a marvelous, Pauline-like mini-meditation on the salvific work of God for sinful humanity, the author has laid out the heart of the Christian faith. Only then does he tackle the question as to why Christians are a people of love:

God loved humanity, for whose sake that he made the world, and to whom he subjected everything in the earth. He gave them reason and intelligence, and they alone have been allowed to look up to him. He formed them according to his own image. He sent his only-begotten Son to them and promised them the kingdom of heaven, and he will give it to those who have loved him. Once you have acquired this knowledge, with what joy do you suppose you will be filled? Or how will you love him who first loved you in such a way? Loving him you will imitate his goodness.⁹

At the heart of God’s love for humanity is the cross—and it is because God has so loved human beings to the point of delivering up his own Son for their sins and in their stead, that they now can love him and be imitators of God.

Numerous other examples about the vital importance of the cross for piety and life could be given from the experience and thought of the ancient church, but these two are sufficient to state that it is simply amazing that a cross-centered focus is absent from a book seeking to be a guidebook to the spiritual life.

Via Unitiva

Three of the final chapters—entitled “Katharsis (Via Purgativa)” (151-58), “Fotosis (Via Illuminativa)” (159-68), “Theosis (Via Unitiva)” (169-79)—are deeply indebted to the systematization found in medieval Roman Catholic and Orthodox piety,¹⁰ and are problematic from both the vantage-point of the New Testament and the thought of much of the ancient church. While McLaren believes that this three-fold path, which he argues leads to union with God, originates in figures from the ancient church (146), he does not give any sources for his assertion.

A casual reading of some of the fourth-century authors, like the Cappadocian Fathers, could leave a reader with the impression that they adhere to some of the elements of the schema McLaren lays out. Basil of Caesarea (c. 329-379), for instance, can talk of the Spirit coming to believers when they “withdraw themselves from evil passions” that alienate them “from a close relationship with God.”¹¹ But in other Basilian texts, the bishop of Caesarea emphasizes that it is the Spirit who makes any movement towards God possible in the first place: “it is impossible for you to recognize Christ, the Image of the invisible God, unless the Spirit enlightens you.”¹² For Basil, salvation ultimately rests on a foundation of grace.¹³

What is also noteworthy about patristic authors is their theocentricity and

Christocentricity. They speak and act as if they were already in union with God and Christ, not laboring for it, which McLaren is claiming was a hallmark of ancient Christian piety. And, of course, the New Testament assumes that union with Christ is a given for any form of genuine Christian spirituality. The indwelling of the Spirit, the bedrock of spirituality, entails nothing less than union with Christ.¹⁴ In this connection, it is noteworthy that Christ is not mentioned at all in these three chapters except in a quotation from the seventeenth-century French theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) (172).

The Importance of Studying History

Along with these problems with McLaren’s argument is a shoddy use of historical data. He argues at one point that what he longs to see are churches becoming “schools of practice that make history”—“breathless, history-changing learning” communities—rather than simply writing history and arguing about it (145). Although he is quick to add that he is not denigrating “the importance of studying history” (146), that concern was often contradicted by the way history was used in the book.

There is some confusion regarding dates and events.¹⁵ McLaren appears to adopt a liberal reading of the dating of the Gospels (145). His reading of the battle to abolish the slave trade highlights Margaret Middleton (d. 1792), the wife of an important British admiral, Sir Charles Middleton (1726-1813), as the centerpiece of the abolitionist movement (134). No doubt Margaret is “an undervalued hero,” but there is also little doubt that William Wilberforce (1759-1833) is the key figure.¹⁶ He asserts that Methodism was expelled

from the Church of England, when, in fact, the key impetus for schism came from the side of the Methodists (129).

Most importantly, McLaren keeps referring to “the ancient practices” in his book, but, at the end of it, I was no wiser as to what exact period he is thinking of. I suspect that he would like the reader to think of the ancient church, which is usually dated from around 100 A.D. to 500 A.D., although some would like to extend that period to include John of Damascus, mentioned above, and the Venerable Bede (c. 673-735). The truth of the matter is that much of what he said regarding these ancient practices is no older than the late Middle Ages.

Lest one think that this reader found nothing of value in the book, I must hasten to note that in a number of places I found McLaren’s argument very illuminating. For example, his discussion of hospitality is both helpful in understanding certain New Testament passages and their larger social and cultural background (103). His emphasis on the importance of humility and of being teachable is also commendable (137). Yet, overall, I cannot recommend this book as a helpful guide to either the spirituality of the ancient church or that of the Scriptures. McLaren emphasizes that he wished to provide his readers with something more than a “mushy, amorphous spirituality” (5). But that, in the opinion of this reader, is exactly what he has served up for his readers.

ENDNOTES

¹Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

²Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 7. For the most com-

prehensive recent study of the life and theology of John, see Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: University Press, 2002).

³John of Damascus, *Concerning Heresy* 101 (PG 94:763-773). For an online version of this paragraph, see “St. John of Damascus’ Critique of Islam,” n.p. [cited 2 May 2008]. Online: http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn_islam.aspx.

⁴Qur’an 4.157-158. Yet, there are two other texts, Qur’an 3.54-55 and 19.29-34, which imply that Christ died.

⁵Greg Gilbert, “Brian McLaren and the Gospel of Here & Now,” n.p. [cited 11 May 2008]. Online: http://sites.silaspartners.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID314526%7CCCHID598014%7CCIID2340066,00.html.

⁶This statement ignores the early Christian insistence that their faith was a religion—the true one—see, for example, James 1:27 and *The Letter to Diognetus* 1. At a later point in his book, McLaren asserts that the goal of the spiritual disciplines is not “to make us more religious.” Rather, they are designed to make us “more alive” to God and other human beings (182).

⁷This question is raised in *The Letter to Diognetus* 1.

⁸*The Letter to Diognetus* 9.2-5. Translation mine.

⁹*The Letter to Diognetus* 10.2-3 in *Early Christian Writings* (trans. Maxwell Staniforth; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), 142, altered.

¹⁰It is noteworthy that, in the final chapter, McLaren admits that the Christian hero of the past he would most like to meet is Saint Francis (191).

¹¹Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 9.23 (trans. David Anderson; Crestwood,

New York: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1980), 44.

¹²*On the Holy Spirit* 26.64, *ibid.*, 97.

¹³For a similar emphasis in another great spiritual master of the fourth century, Macarius-Symeon, see David Roach, "Macarius the Augustinian: Grace and Salvation in the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius-Symeon," *Eusebeia*, 8 (Fall 2007): 75-96.

¹⁴See, for example, the Pauline use of the phrase "in Christ"; John 14:17-18, 23; Romans 8:9, 11; Galatians 2:20; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 1:3.

¹⁵For example: Michael Polanyi was born in 1891, not 1871 (124); the splits within the American Baptist community and American Presbyterianism did not take place after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, but in 1845 and 1857 respectively (135).

¹⁶See, for example, William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008).

The *SBJT* Forum

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. Chad Brand, Gregg Allison, Stephen Nichols, and Everett Berry have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: Why should Baptists be interested in the life and thought of Augustine?

Chad Brand: Anyone who knows much about Augustine (A.D. 354-430) might wonder what indeed he has to do with Baptists at all. And we would certainly want to emphasize the contrasts as well as the similarities. The African Father inherited a tradition of ecclesiology from people such as Cyprian upon which he based his work, even further developing that approach, an approach we now associate with Roman Catholicism and its close relatives such as Orthodoxy, and to a lesser extent Anglicanism. He made a case for such practices as universal infant baptism and even a prototypical form of inquisition, both of which are abhorrent to Baptists. Interestingly, though, his final views on baptism stemmed from his evangelicalism, and not merely from liturgical or moralistic notions. And his desire to see imperial forces aid in ending the Donatist system grew from his genuine conviction that the schismatics were damning the souls of their communicants. (By the way, we still reject both practices.) Yet, Augustine has much to contribute to Baptists today. I will note briefly three items for consideration.

First, Augustine may have been the first consistently evangelical theologian since Paul (though Athanasius came

close). The post-NT period was marked by writers whose primary focus was moralism, largely due to defections from the church caused by persecution. Though they may have experienced grace, these thinkers tended not to say much about it. Athanasius addressed this problem to a degree in his Trinitarian treatment of salvation by noting that God must be law-giver, law-keeper, and law-enabler. But he still fell short of explicating the genuine evangel. But by 396 in his work addressed to Simplicianus, Augustine is noting that the problem is sin and the solution is God's grace extended freely through the cross. That notion was expanded in his *Confessions* (ca. 400), and developed fully in his anti-Pelagian works (ca. 412-421). Though he never fully rejected the tradition that grace comes through the church, in these writings he explicates the notion, seemingly to us to contradict the Cyprianic understanding, that grace comes immediately to the soul through Christ by faith. In later years Augustine wrote his *Retractions*, a volume in which he specified all the ways he had changed his mind on various issues. One wonders whether, had he lived longer, he might have eventually rejected the Cyprianic understanding of grace extended through the church and adopted a more Lutheran or Calvinian way of articulating the con-

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nection between soteriology and ecclesiology. I guess we will never know. As it stands, Augustine is the truly Catholic/Protestant church father of the patristic period.

Second, Augustine developed a philosophy of history that included a serious attempt to analyze the role of the church within the *polis* (society). This was spelled out especially in his magisterial work, *City of God* (ca. 413-426). The book is divided into two parts. The first part is an attempt to show how and why Rome had fallen into decay and weakness. He demonstrates that at one time men of stoic character and high-mindedness led Rome. Families were large and strong, and Rome's governors were, generally, men of noble character. The Empire's founders had virtually created civil law and encouraged justice and equity. Yet, at its heart there lay the seeds of its own destruction, seeds in the form of the ancient Roman religion. That religion was replete with encouragements to immorality and decadence. Eventually, many Romans rejected the facticity of their mythology, but were still moved by, and eventually dominated by, its moral decadence, a decadence which came to characterize the lives of many of its key leaders. Anticipating many of Edward Gibbon's later observations, Augustine blamed the impending fall of the Empire to the German hordes on its ethical debasement, and not, as many Romans were doing, on the flourishing Christian church.

In the second part of the volume, the African Father explained that history was the working out of two rival societies or cities. Since the rebellion of Satan and his minions, there had been two kingdoms in the world—the city of God and the city of man. The earthly city is marked by love

of self and contempt for God, and the heavenly city is marked by love for God even to the point of contempt for self. On the one hand we have Babylon and Rome, while on the other hand stands Jerusalem. And one day the city of God will overtake the city of man once and for all.

The devil, they say, is in the details (or the decal). This model eventually became the architectural design for the Holy Roman Empire. Charlemagne loved to have this book read to him in the evenings by the fireside as he plotted his next campaign against Swedish barbarians or Iberian bandits, thus extending the “city of God” further over the godless in his day. This intersection of church and state is antithetical to our Baptist convictions about voluntarism and soul accountability, but that ought not to turn us away from Augustine's main thrust. In our day it is clear that he was right in his basic thesis. A new barbarism has emerged right under our noses in the forms of the new sexuality, violent terrorism, and resurgent atheism, making it clear that the city of God has not yet overcome the city of man.

Finally, there is much that we can learn from Augustine's best-known work, *Confessions*. We Baptists are big on testimonies of salvation, and this is one of the first great testimony stories in the history of the church. In fact, one recent translation titles the book, *Testimonies*. The first autobiography handed down to us, the first work of religious psychology, the first novel (though a true one, contrary to some critics), this volume is a real must-read for every pastor, indeed every serious Christian, and especially Baptists, who love a good story of lost sinners who have come to the end of their rope and have been seized by grace. This little volume stands

beside John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, next to C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*, alongside Nicky Cruz's *Run Baby Run* (and this is probably the first time Augustine and Nicky Cruz have appeared in print in the same sentence) as powerful stories of salvation for desperate sinners.

Augustine. Not exactly from Gulf Shores or Valley Forge. But still an important read for Baptists in our day.

SBJT: Today, in light of some of the hermeneutical trends within postmodernism, there has been a sustained attack upon the clarity of Scripture. What did the early church teach, and what can we learn from them in regard to this important issue?

Gregg Allison: The doctrine of Scripture is one area about which we can learn from the early church. In particular, the church fathers articulated and defended the clarity of Scripture while also taking note of its obscurity in parts. This was in keeping with the Old and New Testaments themselves, which are characterized by the presumption of continued intelligibility.

The patristic writings are full of quotations and allusions to both the Old and New Testaments, appeals based on the conviction that the Bible is understandable. For example, Clement of Rome called his readers' attention to Moses' intercession on behalf of the Israelites (Exodus 32). Clement introduced his discussion simply: "You know the sacred Scriptures, my friends. You know them well, and you have studied the divine words. Therefore I write to remind you" (*First Letter to the Corinthians*, 53). Clement assumed that his readers would understand the biblical narrative because it was clear. Clarity of the New Testament was assumed as well, as Polycarp indicated in an address to the

Philippians: "I have no doubt that you are well versed in sacred Scripture and that it holds no secrets for you." He then proceeded to quote Eph 4:26, encouraging his readers to follow this clear instruction (*Letter to the Philippians*, 12).

Some of the early church fathers addressed this issue directly. Irenaeus, for example, encouraged believers to meditate upon the truths that God has revealed to humanity: "These things fall under our observation and are clearly and unambiguously in plain terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures.... The entire Scriptures—the prophets and the Gospels—can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them" (*Against Heresies*, 2.27.1-2). In accordance with 2 Pet 3:15-16, Tertullian acknowledged that certain parts of Scripture are hard to understand and so formulated this principle: "Because some passages are more obscure than others, it is right that uncertain statements should be determined by certain ones, and obscure ones by statements that are clear and plain." (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 21). By this method the meaning of even the difficult portions of Scripture could be brought forth.

With Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) came an emphasis on the mysteries and enigmatic nature of all of Scripture, probably due to the influence of some aspects of Gnosticism on his thinking. For him, any and all truth about God is inexpressible; thus, he wrote of "the impossibility of expressing God: What is divine is unspeakable by human power" (*Stromata*, 5.12). God alone can communicate truth about himself, and this can only be conveyed "in enigmas and symbols, in allegories and metaphors, and in similar figures" (*Stromata*, 5.21.4).

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Thus, Scripture is thoroughly like a parable (see for e.g. *Stromata* 6.15). Because the divine mysteries are expressed in parables, they cannot be understood by everyone. Indeed, for Clement, spiritual believers can grasp biblical mysteries, but not common Christians (see *Stromata* 6.15). Thus, a two-tiered system of Christians was erected, with spiritual believers being able to understand the mysteries of Scripture that simple believers could not appreciate.

Clement's emphasis on a mysterious meaning of Scripture was developed by Origen (A.D. 185-254). On the one hand, Origen held that the Bible is clear for all believers whenever it addresses crucial truths. These he listed as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the eternal destiny of people, angels, the creation of the world, and Scripture. In regard to these, Origen believed "that the holy apostles, in preaching the Christian faith, expressed themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points that they believed to be necessary for everyone, even to those who seem somewhat dull in the study of divine knowledge" (*First Principles*, preface 3). He also emphasized the plain language of Scripture that anyone could understand (see for e.g. *Commentary on John* 1.6; *Against Celsus* 3.20; 6.5). On the other hand, he believed that Scripture contains much mystery—spiritual truth hidden under its words—that can only be understood by those "who, by means of the Holy Spirit himself, should obtain the word of wisdom and knowledge" (*First Principles*, preface 3). Specifically, Origen found three levels of meaning in Scripture, corresponding to what he believed were the three parts of human beings, namely body, soul, and spirit. These three senses—the body, the soul,

and the spirit of Scripture—are understood by Christians according to their progress in the faith. As a result, everyone receives benefit from Scripture, but only mature believers can understand its deeper, divine sense. Thus, the multi-tiered system of Christians and their understanding of Scripture, begun by Clement, was reinforced by Origen. He also stressed the inexhaustible depths of the divine mysteries hidden in Scripture and the consequent inability of Christians to understand them.

Augustine affirmed that God had clearly revealed in his Word whatever was necessary for Christians to know (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2:9). He posed this series of rhetorical questions: "Why were the words of God spoken unless that they could be known? Why have they been made known, except that they may be heard? Why have they been heard, except that they may be understood?" (*Tractate on the Gospel of John*, 21.12). But Augustine also acknowledged the presence of "many and varied obscurities and ambiguities" in Scripture. Indeed, he admitted "some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness" (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2.6). Augustine detected a divine design for this clarity-obscurity mixture: "With admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, the Holy Spirit has arranged the Holy Scriptures so to satisfy our hunger by the plainer passages and to stimulate our appetite by the more obscure." (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2:8; cf. *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.6). But how are believers to grasp the obscure portions of Scripture? In a way reminiscent of Irenaeus and Tertullian, Augustine articulated this principle: "we draw examples from the plainer expressions to throw light upon

the more obscure, and use the evidence of passages about which there is no doubt to remove all hesitation in regard to the doubtful passages" (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2.9; cf. 2.12).

Similarly, John Chrysostom offered that "the Scriptures are so balanced that even the most ignorant can understand them if they only read them studiously" (*Concionis VII de Lazaro* 3). This is especially true of any and all Scripture that is necessary. In defense of Scripture's clarity, Cyril of Alexandria responded to a heretic who criticized Scripture for its common language by explaining the reason for its simplicity: "That it might be understandable to everyone, small and great, Scripture has for practical purposes been written in familiar language. Thus, it is not beyond anyone's comprehension" (*Against Julian the Apostate*, book 7). Furthermore, Gregory the Great noted, "In public use, Scripture provides nourishment for children, just as in private use it strikes the loftiest minds with wonder. Indeed, Scripture is like a broad and deep river in which the lamb may wade and the elephant swim" ("Introduction," 4, *Moralia* [a commentary on the Book of Job]).

In conclusion, the early church affirmed both the clarity and obscurity of Scripture. Its affirmation of biblical clarity resonates with Scripture's own presumption of continued intelligibility. Its affirmation of scriptural obscurity, when limited to the relative obscurity of certain portions of the Bible, also accords well with Scripture (e.g., 2 Pet 3:15-16). But early church affirmations of a general obscurity of all of Scripture, like those of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, besides being supported by unbiblical arguments, eviscerate affirmations of scriptural clarity of all sense and power. Patristic attempts

at a nuanced approach—affirming that Scripture is both clear in its necessary parts while affirming that some Scripture is obscure—seem to capture the hermeneutical tensions with which the church of the twenty-first century still grapples. We should, then, look to the early church's lead of how to make progress in the midst of this tension. Its calls to follow sound interpretive principles, including the principle of the analogy of Scripture (that the more obscure portions of Scripture should be interpreted and understood by shining the light of the clearer portions of Scripture), should be heeded. May we, like those before us in the early church, approach Scripture with a conviction of its clarity and anticipate that our reading and study will result in fruitful understanding.

SBJT: Many voices in our day seriously question the value of traditional creedal statements that Christians historically have confessed as orthodoxy. Why should contemporary Christians honor an ancient creed such as the Creed of Chalcedon?

Stephen J. Nichols: The new media ecology of the blogosphere has fanned the flames of many a theological controversy. One recent controversy played out over a paper delivered by Tony Jones, National Coordinator of Emergent Village, at the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference. The paper was axed from a place in the table of contents of the conference essay book, published by InterVarsity Press. Tony Jones took to his blog, and from there the whole matter spun out like a web. The paper, according to Tony Jones, was deemed too far "off message" to be included. Others proffered that it just wasn't that good of a paper. Regardless, in the abstract to the

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paper he asks, “Does Chalcedon Trump Minneapolis?” Here’s how he answers his own question in the paper, “Whence Hermeneutical Authority?”

[The Council of Chalcedon] was a messy, messy meeting. That’s another way to say that it was a *human meeting*. That’s why I can only imagine what Michel Foucault would have said, had he been in attendance in 451. It’s not too hard to imagine: he would have found an event laced with the politics of power. That’s what Foucault opened our eyes to, that power is endemic to the human situation: “Wherever two or three of you gather, power dynamics will be among you.”

And what came out of this messy meeting? Oh, only the standard, orthodox articulation of Christology. The Chalcedonian creed of the two natures—one person of Jesus Christ, as well as every other theological construction from every other council, has human fingerprints all over it. These were messy meetings, rife with power and politics.

This leads Jones to advance his thesis: “[O]rthodoxy happens. (And here, I could just as easily say, ‘Truth Happens,’ ‘Gospel Happens,’ or ‘Christianity Happens.’) Orthodoxy is a *happening*, an occurrence, not a state of being or a state of mind or a state-ment” (Tony Jones, “Whence Hermeneutical Authority?” Paper delivered at the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference).

Jones understands Chalcedon to be messy because of the controversy over Dioscorus, claiming it centered around Leo’s attempt to excommunicate Dioscorus. Consequently, the council forced Dioscorus to sit in the lobby. Jones, however, fails to tell the whole story. Leo’s attempt to excommunicate Dioscorus did not spring from an ambitious power play. In 449 Dioscorus convened a synod at Ephesus, dubbed the “Robber Council.” In

a power play, he oversaw this council that sought to creedalize the views of Eutyches, who held that the union of the two natures in Christ resulted in a new being altogether: Christ was neither human nor divine, but a third thing (*tertium quid*). Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, refused to sign this synod’s statement. Dioscorus, having the blessing of the emperor, Theodosius II, dispatched an armed guard to pressure Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, to sign this errant statement of the synod. Flavian refused. He was then beaten so badly he died a few days later. And that is why Leo sought to excommunicate him. Only after Theodosius II died in 450 could another council be convened, the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the council which produced its eponymous creed. Indeed, power politics were present at Chalcedon. Fortunately for the church, they were situated in the lobby.

The crucial issue here is not so much that Tony Jones didn’t quite relay the whole story. The issue is the “therefore” part of his thesis. Since Chalcedon was rife with power politics, he argues, it has nothing more to say to the church than any other similarly contextual or situated group or even individual at any moment in the church. Again, Jones declares, “For there is no orthodoxy *out there somewhere*, only here, in me and in you and in us when we gather in Christ’s name.” In his view Chalcedon does not trump Minneapolis and his church, Solomon’s Porch. Chalcedon warrants more credence, however, than Minneapolis or even Louisville or Lancaster.

Before the argument is made in favor of Chalcedon, a caveat is in order. The Chalcedonian Creed is not Scripture, not inerrant and not authoritative. For that matter, the Chalcedonian Council was

an historically situated event, with flawed human participants, not biblically and theologically and epistemologically perfect, neutral, objective automatons. Nevertheless, Chalcedon trumps us. First, the creed is a faithful retelling of Scripture, always the criterion for orthodox theology. To be sure it employs extra-biblical language, but by the time of Chalcedon the heresies had grown rather complicated. Complex heresies require a complex response. In that complex response, however, the Chalcedonian Creed echoes Scripture. Secondly, can the church of today, in any city, improve on declaring, as Chalcedon does, that Christ is fully God and fully human, with two natures united perfectly in one person?

Finally, and this is the often overlooked beauty of Chalcedon, this creed is not only immeasurably helpful because of what it says, it is also immeasurably helpful because of what it does not say. Heretical formulations boldly go where Scripture does not. Heretical formulations refuse to leave a particular doctrine in mystery. Instead, they prefer to “help” it, which of course causes far more harm than benefit. In light of this dynamic, the restraint of Chalcedon is remarkable. The 520 bishops at the council could have followed suit with the heretics, to somehow explain the mystery of the incarnation, of the God-Man, but they did not. How do these two natures, which are in our sense of things absolutely diametrically opposed, come together in one person? Chalcedon simply and artfully and wisely declares that they do, without attempting to explain how they do. Such restraint can be a theological virtue, an often times lost virtue in our present contexts.

As the pages of church history unfolded, more moments like Chalcedon

occurred in the life of the church, at places like Wittenberg and Geneva, and even at American cities, like Chicago, host to the three hundred signatories of the “Chicago Statement” of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Given current trends, the next generations will likely be adding the names of cities in African or Asian or South American countries. When it comes to Christology, however, the church in any city would do well to be trumped by Chalcedon, as well as Nicea, and these orthodox statements. Of course, Jerusalem trumps them all.

SBJT: Are there are any apologetic lessons that can be gleaned from the Church Fathers for us today?

Everett Berry: Today because the intellectual landscape of western culture is openly hostile toward Christianity, evangelicals are experiencing somewhat of a similar plight that late first- and early second-century Christian apologists faced. During that time, confessional allegiance to Christ went against the religious grain of both Jewish and Roman worldviews to the extent that many eagerly slandered believers by circulating unsubstantiated accusations of dubious behavior hoping it would denounce them to civil authorities. Likewise, as more sophisticated intellectual arguments began to challenge the rationality of Christian belief, the church gradually came under the onslaught of local persecutions beginning with the reign of Emperor Domitian. Eventually these scenarios compelled numerous Christian thinkers to express their convictions so they could hopefully achieve some level of civil tolerance as well as possibly persuade their opponents to embrace Christianity. And it is here where they proved to be involved in an activity with

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which we as evangelicals are concerned—namely, dialoguing with antagonists in the public square regarding our faith so as to delineate its impact on the issues which we all face as law-abiding citizens.

One of the more accessible thinkers from the patristic era who highlights this commonality is Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), because he remains as one of the most prolific writers of his time. Currently we have three works that are considered to be authentic: two *Apolo-gies* and a treatise entitled *Dialogue with Trypho*. Justin was a native Samaritan who initially followed a complex journey through Stoicism and several other philosophical systems that ultimately led him to Platonism. He finally converted to Christianity after an apparent encounter with a wise sage who conversed with him about the theological significance of the Old Testament prophets. Afterwards, he oversaw a catechetical school in Rome where he invested his time in exposing the inconsistencies of pagan worldviews and emphasizing the continuity between Christianity and the Messianic hopes of Judaism. We see these endeavors being fulfilled in all of his works. For instance, Justin writes *First Apology* (155-177 A.D.) as a polemic rebuking Roman authorities for their unwarranted treatment of Christians because their charges had not been sufficiently investigated. Additionally *Second Apology* (140-160 A.D.) acts as a supplemental treatise addressing both an assortment of local scenarios where various believers had been misrepresented and likewise clarifying misconstrued notions of what believers affirm about numerous theological topics. Finally, *Dialogue with Trypho* (150-155 A.D.) is a more theologically complex summary of an apparent two-day conversation held in

Ephesus between Justin and an inquiring Jew named Trypho. Herein, he establishes hermeneutical techniques for a Christian reading of the Old Testament by creating a kind of Messianic neo-midrash so he can illustrate the continuity as well as the superiority of Christianity to Judaism.

Now in retrospect as we examine Justin's work, it cannot be said that contemporary evangelicals are in the exact same cultural predicaments as those of the second century. Yet there are some undeniable points of commonality, because, just as there were unwarranted accusations against the life styles of the early Christians, hostile attacks on their central beliefs, and violent attempts to suppress their growth, so there are today around the world. The only difference is that the church's enemies wear different methodological masks as history progresses. Initially the first century accusation was a Roman-Hellenistic caricature, claiming that Christ followers were merely a quasi-Jewish anomaly. Then, centuries later, the Enlightenment critique was that Christianity was a cultural absurdity that was scientifically and rationally untenable. Now the current postmodern herald is that it is culturally scandalous because of metaphysical delusions of epistemic authority. No matter what its expression though, the same basic ethos exists within all of them, that is, to prevent the witness of Christ from influencing the issues pertinent to any given culture.

The question, then, that remains for us is whether early Christian apologists like Justin left any strategies which can still be utilized to preserve the faith now, and the answer is *yes*—two in particular. One is to recognize along with Justin that part of defending Christianity necessarily entails the exposing of the “unjustness” of other

religions. This element is critical today because, while evangelicals must be sensitive to people's backgrounds and thereby meet audiences in their religious contexts in hopes of explicating the Christian faith coherently, we must not be hesitant to repudiate other worldviews because of the delusion that the only way to maintain a voice at the public table of discourse is to concede a kind of pluralistic equality among religions. For believers like Justin, this capitulation fosters an atmosphere of injustice toward Christianity because part of its epistemic *justification* is the fact that other religions have no epistemic *warrant*. Joined with this conviction is a second assumption that complimented Justin's apologetic: the faithful activity of the church itself. Here part of the consistency of Justin's plea for fair treatment was based upon his confidence that believers were living up to the standards he described. In recent decades, this correlation between doctrine and behavior normally has been emphasized at levels that are focused upon training new converts. Yet for thinkers like Justin, it also was a critical part of his apologetic tone because the reality of faith being lived out by believers was one of the very reasons why injustice toward them was opposed. Today this kind of setting is woefully vacant because the lifestyles of average evangelical church members are virtually identical to nonbelievers, if not observably worse. But be that as it may, somewhere in our search for a more robust apologetic, we must re-establish a kind of *orthopraxic verificationism*. We must find ways to make doctrines observable so that they can be seen and not just heard. Perhaps, then, there is a kind of Christian empiricism—and it's called discipleship.

Book Reviews

Pistis and the Righteous One: A Study of Romans 1:17 against the Background of Scripture and Second Temple Jewish Literature. By Desta Heliso. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd Series 235. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, 292 pp., \$110.00 paper.

This recent dissertation was completed at the London School of Theology under the direction of Max Turner, with significant input from faculty at King's College London, especially Douglas Campbell. The author now serves as dean of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology in Addis Ababa.

The appearance of this study marks the continuing development of African theological scholarship and the encouraging progress that is taking place in theological education in the developing world. It is therefore to be applauded. Moreover, despite his focus on current discussion, it is no small topic which the author engages here, but one which goes to the center of the Christian faith and upon which rest centuries of theological tradition and debate. For this reason too, the author is to be commended. The study itself, it must be said, leaves much to be desired. Its weaknesses to a large extent reflect myopic tendencies of recent scholarship. Perhaps the author will yet find his way past these problems. At least one may hope so.

As the title suggests, Heliso attempts to establish a so-called

"christological reading" of Rom 1:17, particularly in respect to Paul's citation of Hab 2:4, namely, that the Righteous One who lives by faith is none other than Christ. Yet even in the conclusion of his work, Heliso hesitates, arguing merely that "the christological reading should be afforded more weight . . . than has been the case thus far" (254). Perhaps he is reluctant to let go of his favored reading, but recognizes that the evidence in favor of it is lacking. Perhaps he wants to find a *via media* (as he says in another context, 252), but cannot quite articulate it. Perhaps he cannot make up his mind. Whatever the case may be, such reserve is not warranted here. Exegesis entails being led by the text to *judgments* about the text, judgments that will be controversial so long as the Word causes offense.

Heliso develops his case (such as it is) for the "christological reading" in a series of exegetical decisions, in which he demonstrates a good understanding of recent debate. We may briefly follow his chain of argument. The actual citation of LXX Hab 2:4b comes first in line. Does it refer to a messianic figure? It may well be that LXX Hab 2:3-4a (the preceding context) reflects an anticipation of a messianic or eschatological figure. But Heliso overlooks the shift in topic marked by the particle *de* and the fresh introduction of the named subject in LXX Hab 2:4b. There are *two* figures in the text, the one who announces the divine word and promise (LXX Hab 2:2-4a) and the

one who hears it (LXX Hab 2:4b), as (for example) the Qumran *pesher* recognizes in its distinction between the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers. If anything, LXX Hab 2:2-4a intimates the role of the apostle, not that of the Messiah. Heliso likewise fails to consider the context of Habakkuk, which is characterized by the conflict between the righteous and the wicked (Hab 1:4, 13). The language recollects the contentions of the psalms in new form. There it is the "godly"—often appealing to their "righteousness"—who are attacked and oppressed by the "wicked." Habakkuk speaks instead of the "righteous one" who is called to wait for the divine promise of salvation. The new language may well recall the figure of Abraham (Gen 15:6; cf. Isa 51:1-8). Quite understandably, Heliso wants to retain some validity for the variant reading "*my righteousness one* (shall live by faith)" in LXX Hab 2:4. But this transposition most likely is due to the influence of Heb 10:38 on the transmission of the text, just as the reading in which the first-person pronoun is omitted is due to the influence of Rom 1:17.

Does Paul cite it in reference to Christ? Heliso points to Paul's reference to "God's power" and "God's righteousness" in Rom 1:16-17 as potential references to Christ. No one would deny that Christ's person and work are theologically implicit to Paul's understanding of these expressions. The question remains, however, whether Paul refers directly

to Christ in this context, and more particularly, if he refers to Christ in his obedience and faithfulness to God. As with much of current discussion, Heliso's attention is focussed narrowly on words and phrases. He thus overlooks that aside from the theologically significant exception of Rom 5:15-19, it is consistently *God*, not Christ, who is the actor in Romans. That is also the case in Rom 3:21-26, where Paul unpacks Rom 1:16-17. Why not simply listen to the immediate context of Rom 1:16 which speaks of the *gospel* as God's power because God's righteousness is revealed in it? The text is about Christ, yet not as the faithful human being, but as the One crucified, *risen and now proclaimed*. As Heliso notes, Paul does not refer to Christ as "the righteous one," not even in Rom 5:19. References to "the righteous one" in the Parables of Enoch and elsewhere in the NT do not help Heliso's cause. Hebrews 10:38 may seem more promising, but it can hardly be the case that the One who comes (Heb 10:37) and the righteous one who waits (Heb 10:38) are one and the same Messiah—as Heliso seems to wish to say (see 153, cf. 246).

Nor do other elements of Rom 1:17 come to the aid of the "christological" reading. Is it really the case, as Heliso argues, that God's righteousness (understood as saving power) cannot be revealed by means of faith? Is it really "absurd" to speak of "human faith" as the means by which God's power and righteousness are revealed? (36). What then of apostolic preaching? What if "faith" is *God's work* in the human being (Rom 10:17)?

What if Paul has apostolic preaching in view in his reference to "faith" in Rom 1:17 (see Rom 1:11-12)? The proclamation of the gospel, after all, is Paul's topic (Rom 1:15)!

This reading of Rom 1:17 as a reference to the faithful Christ obviously is bound up with the interpretation of the expression "faith of Christ." While we cannot here pursue Heliso's discussion of the relevant texts and arguments, his concluding statement deserves comment. He opines that Rom 1:17 could provide the framework for "the idea of *God's act of salvation through Christ's faithfulness-to-death*" (254). His formulation, typical of those who want to read "faith of Christ" as a subjective genitive, conceals a significant problem. To speak of "Christ's faithfulness" is to speak of Christ as a *human being* who offers representative obedience to God. But how could it be that the saving work of God takes place through the faithfulness of a human being? The view comes precipitously close to Nestorianism. Nor does it correspond to the letter to the Hebrews, where Christ is not merely a faithful high priest, but also the Son who is God: were he merely a human high priest, he would offer no benefit. Even when representatives of the "subjectivist" reading take care to speak of salvation in terms of our participation in Christ's faithfulness (thus avoiding the danger of making Christ a mere example), the question remains as to what precisely the object and content of faith then becomes. As Karl Friedrich Ulrichs has observed, the event of the cross here is relativized in favor of Jesus'

obedience. Jesus in the end threatens to become dispensable. Once I possess and act in his faithfulness, I no longer need him. One might wish for more careful theological reflection on the implications of this new reading, not only from Heliso, but from all representatives of this approach.

As Heliso realizes, the traditional (or "anthropological") reading of the text is not limited to Luther and Protestant theology. The understanding that Rom 1:17 speaks of the justification of the fallen human being by faith in Christ has deep and wide roots in Christian interpretation, even if nature and place of "faith" has been debated since the Reformation. To read the verse otherwise as Heliso and others would like to do is to read it differently from most of the Christian tradition. With reference to Luther himself it should be said that the common view (which Heliso repeats) that Luther's reformational discovery rested simply in his fresh reading of the "righteousness of God" as that righteousness which makes us righteous is misleading. This understanding of justification was still alive within the Augustinian tradition—and appears within the Tridentine decrees. Here we may follow Oswald Bayer, who has shown the fundamental breakthrough lies in Luther's new understanding of "promise," as the word of God that performs what it says. Only as this understanding of "promise" determines Luther's understanding of justification does the latter take on reformational form. With respect to Heliso's thesis, the interpretive question that Luther's reading raises is

not small. It makes some difference whether one finds in Rom 1:17 the effective word of God or a faithful human being.

Mark A. Seifrid

Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma pistis Christou und zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung. By Karl Friedrich Ulrichs. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd Series* 227. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, 311 pp., \$120.00 paper.

Ulrichs's dissertation, completed under the supervision of Michael Bachmann (Universität Siegen), makes a welcome contribution to the seemingly unending debate over the usage and meaning of the Pauline expression, "faith of Christ." The author engages the recent debate—which largely has taken place in the theological scene in North America and the UK—thoroughly, carefully and competently. Above all else, the work displays a considerable concentration on lexical and grammatical details and is studded with useful and significant exegetical and theological judgments. Even if many of these insights are not entirely new, they deserve to be restated and underscored in the debate.

Ulrichs begins with a lengthy introduction in which he discusses the significance of the genitive, the noun *pistis*, and the christological "titles" that are then attributed to it as *nomina recta*. He likewise addresses the relation of the noun (*pistis*) and the verb (*pisteuō*), and favors Moisés Sil-

va's appeal to (Martin Joos's) principle of "maximal redundancy"—allowing it perhaps even more strength than it deserves. The introductory chapter also includes an exploration of the theological dimensions of the debate and (finally) provides an all-too-brief *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the expression.

Four exegetical chapters follow, in which Ulrichs treats the passages of the core Pauline letters in which the seven occurrences of the "faith of Christ/Jesus" appear—that is, seven plus one. Ulrichs appeals that the usage appearing in 1 Thess 1:3 should be included among the other instances of the expression. Yet, despite the legitimacy of Ulrichs appeal that this text should be considered, the distance of the noun "faith" from the genitive "of the Lord," the orientation of "love" in the letter toward others (and not God), and the usual usage of the genitive following "hope" to express its content (or object) make it altogether likely the genitive "of the Lord" is related only to "hope," the last member of the triad.

The work concludes with an exceedingly brief theological assessment of the debate. Ulrichs then provides a summary in English of the essential points of his work.

One of the most significant of these points is the observation that recent discussion in large measure suffers from a form which is "a bit naïve philologically" (10, 21, 253). To set the reading of *pistis Christou* in terms of an objective genitive over against the reading of it in terms of a subjective genitive without further

reflection is premature. The genitive case has broad valence, which includes, of course, the expression of author, source, or quality. Ulrichs recognizes that these categories (and perhaps others) must be taken into account in assessing this contested expression, and rightly appeals for their consideration its interpretation (see especially 19-23). One wonders a bit why he did not make this insight more fruitful within his own work, in which he mostly prefers the objective genitive.

Some of Ulrichs finest points appear in his exegetical and theological summaries. He rightly recognizes that both sides of the current debate, or at least significant representatives of both sides, read the text in such a way that salvation remains *sola gratia*—and that despite criticism from the opposing side. Likewise both sides assign fundamental significance to christology *and* faith in their construals of Pauline christology. The true question in the debate is *how* "Christ" and "faith" are to be understood (251-52). The question of the meaning of "faith," or more properly, the Greek term *pistis* stands clearly in the center of the storm. Does Paul in the critical passages speak of "faith" or "faithfulness," or perhaps, as is now often argued, "faithful faith," so that he has in view Jesus' faith(fulness) toward God? Ulrichs rightly picks up on and calls into question Richard Hays's attempt to thereby link faith with ethics (252). He likewise rejects the attempt to link Paul's reference to the obedience of Jesus Christ (Rom 5:19) to his faith (210-18). Even when it insists

that Jesus is not a mere example, but that believers somehow participate in his faith(fulness), the scheme suffers from the danger of a “christological deficit.” Once we possess this faith(fulness), mediated and given to us by Jesus, he becomes dispensable (250). To put the matter differently: for Paul faith is always related to God’s word of promise and to the gospel. Within *this* theological framework (Hebrews is another question), Jesus does not (and indeed, cannot) appear as a generic representative of human believing or faithfulness. The same applies to the obedience of which Paul speaks in Rom 5:19. Jesus does not simply do what all human beings should have done. He acts as the one, new Adam—and in identification with God himself (Rom 5:15)—for the justification of all humanity (56).

Here we arrive at questions concerning Paul’s christology, as Ulrichs recognizes and nicely brings out at various points. Is it the cross *itself* (that is to say, God’s work), which is of significance for Paul, or *only* the (human) relationship to God which is manifest in it (6)? In reference to Rom 3:21-26, Ulrichs rightly asks, “Is Jesus’ cross here an example for “faith” or is it the atoning event? . . . Is it Jesus’ motivation to suffer death on the cross that is the salvifically relevant event, or is it the death of Jesus Christ *hyper hēmōn*?” (193). Even though one must protest that Jesus’ purpose is in fact highly relevant to Paul—particularly as an act of love and grace (Rom 5:15)—in a certain sense Ulrichs’s point stands. Paul clearly has in view Jesus’ saving

death, not his faith(fulness) *per se*, not even when it extends to a willingness to die. In a similar way, Ulrichs rightly takes up the important criticism that the “subjectivist” focus on Jesus’ faithfulness leaves no room for the saving significance of his resurrection (250-51)—a rather embarrassing gap! Underlying these problems is a nearly Nestorian christological deficit: the *solus Christus* becomes a *solus Jesus*. Ulrichs raises this issue in his own way in relation to Rom 3:22. How is it possible to understand “the faith of Jesus Christ” as a manifestation of *God’s* righteousness when Jesus otherwise (in the “subjectivist” reading) is regarded as *purus homo* (168-69)? One might add: Does Paul conceive of Jesus—to whom he gives the title *kyrios* in the face of the usage of the LXX—acting *simply* as a human being? How can it be that the grace of God is nothing other than the gift and grace of the human Christ (Rom 5:15)? The christological deficit bears soteriological implications, as Ulrichs recognizes. How is it that Jesus’ faith is the basis of our emancipation from sin? Is “sin” here understood with Paul as a death-dealing power, or simply as a moral weakness? (64).

Ulrichs by no means paints all those who adopt a subjective genitive reading in one context or another with one black brush. His comments are consistently nuanced and careful. The stronger remarks that I have taken up generally take the form of questions directed to programmatic representatives of the subjective-genitive reading.

As the title indicates, Ulrichs’s dissertation is essentially a series of stud-

ies from which he does not develop a synthesis, or at least, not one that corresponds to the depth and scope of his work. One might have wished for more. A fuller history-of-research, taking into account earlier debates in the wake of Haußleiter’s work might have proven fruitful.

Materially, Ulrichs might have considered more fully the significance of the massive shift in usage of the term *pistis* from “faithfulness” in contemporary literature to “faith” (as both act and content) in the New Testament. As Ulrichs notes, “faith” for Paul is not an appellative: there is only one right and true faith with specific content, the gospel of Christ incarnate, crucified and risen, in whom we meet God savingly. The apostle generally presupposes that his addressees share that understanding, even when it is contested. If it is so that the object and content of “faith” is already implicit in the term itself, then, perhaps, the genitive modifier “of Christ” signals something more than the mere object of faith. “Maximal redundancy” has its limits, else we would say nothing new. Given the title of his work, *Christusglaube*, Ulrichs might well have taken further than he did his own recognition that the genitive may signify author, source, quality, or content. Nevertheless, he is to be thanked for a useful and at many points thoughtful work.

Mark A. Seifrid

William Carey: Missionary and Baptist. By Keith Farrer. Kew, Victoria, Australia: Carey Baptist Grammar

School, 2005, viii + 156 pp.

Books on William Carey (1761-1834) are legion and rarely does one display a significant amount of new ground. This does not mean that new material is not there for the discovery. Rather, most biographers are quite content to traverse the same old ground, with maybe a short venture from the pathway of the traditional story. For instance, apart from Timothy George's biography of Carey, no one as of yet has really dealt with the theological footing and ground upon which Carey stood for his entire ministry, namely Edwardsean Calvinism.

But this new biography of Carey by Keith Farrer, an Australian scientist with an M.A. in history as well, does traverse new ground, although in this case it is Carey's work as a botanist and scientist. Failure to know anything about this side of Carey or to appreciate it has been common from the very moment Carey died. John Dyer, who was the first full-time secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) and who wrote a small memoir of Carey shortly after his death, could declare that from 1815 till his death in 1834, "few incidents occurred in the life of Dr. Carey of a nature requiring notice in a brief memoir" (61)! Farrer easily shows how short-sighted is this comment:

Serampore College was built and the steam engine and the continuous papermaking machine bought and installed (both at the personal expense of the missionaries), the Agricultural Society was founded, new periodicals were introduced and books published to say

nothing of Carey's significant contributions to botany and the expansion of the missionary enterprise (61).

Essentially, the second half of the book (67-125) deals with this work of Carey as a gardener, then botanist, and finally, as one who wisely used the technology of his day to alleviate the condition of many of the Indian people in Bengal, where he was laboring for the gospel. Chapters 6 and 7, which deal with the transition of Carey from gardener to botanist, helpfully clear up many myths about Carey as a gardener and reveal the depth of his work in botany. The importance of Carey's gardens and botanical work to the missionary's life can be seen when it is recognized that the gardens which Carey created at Serampore were so extensive it took fifty gardeners to look after them (83). But while botany and more generally the biological sciences were Carey's first love when it came to things scientific, Farrer also notes that he had an interest in other areas of science and technology, especially geology (107).

The importance that Carey placed in knowing science can be discerned from some remarks he made to his one-time acquaintance William Staughton (1770-1829), the first president of Columbian College, later known as George Washington University. Carey's trusted co-worker William Ward (1769-1823) had spent three months in America raising funds for Serampore College, which Carey and his colleagues had established as a place of theological education and training in the liberal

arts. Ten thousand dollars had been raised. Ward had left the money in the hands of American trustees, with the interest to be sent regularly to Serampore. But Staughton, who had been involved in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society that had sent Carey to India, informed Carey that none of the interest would be forthcoming until Carey gave assurance that the money would be used *only* for theological training, and not for the teaching of science. Carey's reply was blunt and forthright: "I must confess," he wrote, "I have never heard of anything more illiberal. Pray can youth be trained up for the Christian ministry without science? Do you in America train youth for it without any knowledge of science?" Farrer rightly comments, "The question is still relevant." (110; also see 45).

In the first half of the book (7-65), Farrer traverses familiar ground as he tells Carey's story, from his birth in Paulerspury to his death in Serampore. It is a great story, though there are some mistakes in Farrer's telling of it. It simply is not true to say that although "Carey was a Particular, i.e. Calvinist, Baptist, and maintained some Calvinist views into later life, his whole approach to mission was Arminian" (18). Here is where we need that theological study of Carey! Then, the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society was a logical outflow of Carey's evangelical Calvinism, not something at odds with it as Ferrar maintains (21). In fact, it was Carey's Calvinism—the solid conviction that the entirety of the world is the Lord's—that sup-

plied the underpinning of Carey's commitment to botany and science, as well as his zeal in mission. While these mistakes are not negligible, they should not deter a wide reading of this new study of Carey that is beautifully produced and reveals Carey as something of a nineteenth-century Renaissance man who revealed in the revelation of God both in his Holy Word and in every nook and cranny of creation.

Michael A. G. Haykin

The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors. By Thabiti M. Anyabwile. Wheaton: Crossway, 2007, 191 pp., \$15.99.

This book made me realize that, like far too many church historians trained in the West in the past thirty to forty years, I am woefully ignorant of the spiritual experience of African-American pastors and congregants. Rightly does John Piper state in his foreword to this volume by the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Grand Cayman Islands, that it "mines the unknown riches of the African-American experience" (9). Now, I had heard of one of the figures treated in this book, the Edwardsean Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), but the other two men—Daniel Payne (1811-1893) and Francis Grimké (1850-1937)—were completely unknown to me. And what I knew about Haynes could have been told in less than a minute!

When he was ordained in 1785, Haynes was the first African-Amer-

ican ordained by a religious body in the United States. Deeply influenced by Edwardsean Calvinism, his ministry involved not only pastoral care but also a defense of Calvinistic truth. His longest pastorate was located in Rutland, Vermont, where he labored from 1788 till 1818, when he was dismissed from his charge, probably because of racial prejudice.

Daniel Payne labored in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) for most of his life, becoming a bishop in this denomination in 1852. In detailing Payne's career, Anyabwile focuses on his vision of a learned ministry. Grimké was the son of a slave-owner, Henry Grimké, and of one of his slaves, Nancy Weston. After Henry Grimké's death, and in an attempt to avoid further enslavement to Grimké's eldest son, who was a half-brother of Francis, Francis enlisted in the Confederate Army. After the Civil War, Francis Grimké was able to do further study in Massachusetts and eventually get admitted to Princeton Seminary, where he studied under that Calvinistic titan of a theologian, Charles Hodge. Most of his ministry after graduating in 1878 was in a Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

What makes this volume especially useful is that Anyabwile combines his narrative discussion of the lives of these three pastors with three or four primary sources from each of their writings. Thus, for example, there is Haynes's first published sermon, *The Character and Work of a Spiritual Described* (1792), where Haynes outlines how the pastor must guard the flock from theological

error. Payne's *The Christian Ministry: Its Moral and Intellectual Character* (1859) is an excellent overview of the moral and intellectual armament with which every pastor needs to be equipped. A couple of pieces from the pen of Grimké grapple with the issue of racism, still very germane to our day.

This work is ideal as a source-book to be included in any study of American Christianity. But it is also good for the souls of those called to be pastors and leaders in the church of the living God. Here, for instance, is a deeply challenging statement from the Methodist Bishop Payne:

[I]t is not the omnipotence of God that constitutes His glory—it is His immaculate holiness. And such must be the fact in the moral character of the Christian minister—not his talents ... not his learning ... but his holiness (95).

Michael A. G. Haykin

The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007, 704 pp., \$69.95.

No doubt the biggest obstacle to reading the Greek NT with proficiency is acquiring an adequate vocabulary. After taking an elementary-level Greek class, most students will have learned the meanings of words that occur fifty times or more in the Greek NT. With the completion of an intermediate-level course, many will know words that occur in the range of twenty to thirty times or more. But what then? There are certainly many good tools available for building

one's Greek vocabulary further. Yet reading the text cannot await mastery of all NT vocabulary. At some point, a student must simply jump in and begin reading. The obvious problem, though, is that reading the text is seriously slowed when one is continually looking up unfamiliar words in a lexicon.

This is where *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition* comes in. It employs the text of the UBS⁴ GNT, used by most beginning Greek students. As the subtitle indicates, it is *A Reader's Edition*. Its goal is to enable students to acquire the skill of reading the Greek text without undue dependence on other tools. The student who has a first-year level Greek vocabulary is provided, at the bottom of each page, with glosses for words that occur thirty times or less. As one comes across these words in the text, they are numerically marked to facilitate finding the corresponding number and definition at the bottom. As a result, students spend less time searching a lexicon and more time in the text—and are, thus, enabled to read larger sections more quickly.

Other features of the running dictionary at the bottom of each page include the following: (1) The definitions for each word are chosen according to the context. Thus, the reader is given a concise meaning that fits the context, rather than a list of possible meanings from which to choose. (2) If significant differences of opinion exist regarding a given word, alternate definitions are provided. (3) On occasion, one is given the meaning of an idiomatic phrase or word combination—if it is hard to deter-

mine this by merely combining the individual meanings of the words. For example the definition given for *hyperbole* in Rom 7:13 is “outstanding quality.” However, since it appears in this verse with the preposition *kata*, the idiomatic rendering “beyond measure” for this combination is also provided. (4) Irregular forms of words are identified and defined. So, even though the common verb *echō* (“I have”) occurs more than thirty times, its irregular aorist subjunctive form (*schōmen*) found in 1 John 2:28 is defined. (5) All defined verbs, participles, and infinitives are parsed.

In addition to the running dictionary, the *Reader's Edition* contains an appendix that provides translations of all words occurring more than thirty times in the Greek NT. The maps from the UBS GNT are included as well, and the burgundy hard cover resembles the UBS GNT; although, the size is larger (approx. 6 x 9).

Unfortunately, the price is steep (list price: \$69.95)—especially when compared to a similar product, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* by Zondervan (2nd ed., 2007), which is more affordable (list price: \$34.99). However, I prefer the UBS *Reader's Edition* for the following reasons: (1) The Zondervan *Reader's GNT* (2nd ed.) is based on the Greek text that underlies the TNIV (Today's New International Version), while the UBS *Reader's Edition* contains the standard critical text of the UBS⁴ and the NA²⁷, used by most students and scholars. (2) The layout of the running dictionary in the UBS *Reader's Edition* is much more user-friendly, appearing in two numbered columns. The

definitions in the Zondervan *Reader's GNT* appear in a paragraph and are, in my opinion, more difficult to find. (3) The appendix in the UBS edition with definitions of words occurring thirty times or more is more extensive than the similar glossary found in the Zondervan edition. (4) The UBS *Reader's Edition* includes parsing information for defined verbs, participles, and infinitives.

This last point is also a potential weakness. Students who consistently rely on the running dictionary to do their parsing for them will weaken their abilities. Another danger is that a student may become too dependent on the running dictionary and spend little time becoming familiar with and learning from the standard Greek-English lexicon, BDAG. Neither of these concerns, though, prevents me from commending this resource. The *Reader's Edition* of the UBS GNT is an extremely useful tool that will benefit those wanting to become more proficient readers of the Greek NT.

Christopher W. Cowan

The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations. 3rd ed. Edited and translated by Michael W. Holmes. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007, 832 pp., \$42.99.

Most students of the Bible have, at some point in their studies, become familiar with the “Apostolic Fathers,” a collection of post-apostolic writings that date from the late first- to mid-second century. In New Testament surveys, Bible students learn

of bishops like Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and faithful martyr, and Papias, who provides early testimony regarding authorship of the Gospels. They read of Ignatius and Clement of Rome and their quotations from and allusions to the New Testament. They hear of fascinating early writings such as *The Didache* that testifies to early Christian morality and practice. But how many students, ministers, and scholars have actually read any of these significant works for themselves?

This critical edition of *The Apostolic Fathers* serves not only as a valuable and useful primary source tool for one's library, but also offers readers an opportunity to become familiar with the earliest post-biblical Christian documents. As indicated by the subtitle, both the Greek (or Latin) texts and English translations are included on facing pages. This handsomely bound volume includes 1 Clement, 2 Clement, the seven letters of Ignatius, *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, *The Didache*, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Epistle of Diognetus*, the Fragment of Quadratus, and the Fragments of Papias.

In this 3rd edition whose roots date back to the 1891 work of noted New Testament scholar J. B. Lightfoot and his colleague J. R. Harmer, Michael W. Holmes (also responsible for the 2nd ed.) provides a thoroughly revised English translation (based on the 3rd edition of Holmes's *The Apostolic Fathers in English* [Baker, 2006]), an expanded and revised critical apparatus, and a few revisions to the Greek texts. Improvements also include

modifications in format, design, and typography to enhance presentation and ease of use. Each writing includes an introduction, addressing issues of authorship, occasion, date, text, etc., as necessary. Also included are bibliographies of classic and recent treatments of each document. Holmes has expanded the introductions with updated information on textual witnesses and problems, and he has extended the bibliographies. The size is compact (5.25 x 7.5), the Greek and English fonts are very readable, and the English translations include subheadings indicating section content. The indices are broken down according to subject, modern authors, and ancient sources (biblical and non-canonical). Also included with the indices is a "thematic analysis" which lists the section headings used within the English translation of each document and their corresponding page numbers.

This is an excellent resource that serves as a window into the early development of Christianity. It should appeal to a wide variety of readers: those doing patristic or New Testament research, those wanting to improve their ability to read Koine Greek, and those who simply desire to read for themselves these important writings.

Christopher W. Cowan

The Art of Reading Scripture. Edited by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xx + 334 pp. \$32.00 paper.

This book consists of essays pre-

sented to the Scripture Project at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey. The consultation produced a set of affirmations that, after the introduction, open the volume. These "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture," unfortunately, fail to address the most pressing questions of our day. The choice not to use terms such as *infallible*, *inerrant*, or *totally true and trustworthy* in any of these nine theses locates the project on the theological map, and thus the door is open for the question posed after thesis 2, "does God speak through *all* the texts of Scripture?" (2, emphasis original).

No decisive conclusion was reached by the Scripture project on the pressing issues of the day. For instance, thesis 7 reads, "The saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture" (4). Below this statement is a paragraph "For ongoing discussion" that asks, "How much of a gap can be endured between one's right interpretation of Scripture and one's failure in performance (e.g., churches that practice racial exclusion or unjust divisions between rich and poor)? How do we understand what goes wrong when the Bible is used as an instrument of oppression and division?" These are important questions, but it seems that they could be applied to more relevant cultural issues. I know of no Christian church that openly advocates racism and oppression of the poor. Some churches may commit these sins, but they probably agree that the Bible condemns these things and desire to change. It would seem more pressing

to address ecclesiastical advocates of positions that are expressly forbidden by Scripture. I have in mind such topics as same-sex “marriage,” the church’s relationship to practicing homosexuals (to say nothing of their ordination), and the disputed question of whether women can serve as pastors, elders, or bishops.

Seemingly in spite of the direction of the project, the book does have its bright spots. The essays by Richard Bauckham, David C. Steinmetz, R. W. L. Moberly, Gary A. Anderson, and Richard B. Hays are both stimulating and in step with historic Christianity. Hays’s essay is a brilliant presentation of how to read the Bible in light of the resurrection of Jesus, which provides a legitimate method for reading the whole Bible Christologically. Bauckham’s essay explores the Bible’s “metanarrative,” the over-arching story that binds up the variety in the Scriptures in beautiful unity. Steinmetz points out that once we have “read the end of the story,” we not only cannot, we should not try to re-read it as though we do not know the end. Moberly’s first essay devastates negative interpretations of Genesis 22, and his second explores truth and the necessity of faith for interpreting the Bible from John 7:14–18. Anderson’s essay shows the typological relationship between Joseph and Jesus. There is much to ponder in these essays.

Aside from these fine essays, the general tenor of the project provides more evidence that the conservative resurgence in the SBC was necessary. A wide range of scholars representing mainline Protestantism and the

Roman Catholic Church (but none from the SBC) gathered to address the question, “Is the Bible authoritative for the faith and practice of the church? If so, in what way?” (xiv). In *The Art of Reading Scripture*, different answers are given by the various authors. Thankfully, for those of us in the SBC, our confessional stance settles such questions. This does not mean we do not wrestle with difficulties, but it does give us healthy starting points. The problem that remains for us in the SBC is that while we confess the Bible’s authority, we too often set it aside when the time comes to do ministry, revealing our lack of confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. Paul followed the statement, “All Scripture is inspired by God,” with the words, “and profitable” (2 Tim 3:16, emphasis added). Let us bear witness not only to the authority of Scripture but also to its usefulness—in our pulpits and in our practices.

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Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature. By Craig A. Evans. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005. xxxvi + 539 pp., \$34.95.

Craig Evans of the Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, presents a survey of the ancient texts that are relevant for New Testament study. While he primarily has students in mind, the volume will also be of help to scholars (if only for the

bibliography which points them to the most recent English scholarly editions and secondary literature!). It is an augmented version of Evans’ earlier volume *Non-Canonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation*.

Evans notes that “there are many teachers of biblical literature who are not sure exactly what makes up this literature, how it is relevant, and how it is to be accessed. The purpose of this book is to arrange these diverse literatures into a comprehensible and manageable format” (xi). After a detailed table of contents and list of abbreviations, Evans writes in the introduction,

[I]f one is to do competent NT exegesis, one must know something of these writings and of their relevance for the NT. Some of these writings are vital for understanding the NT, some much less so. But all are referred to by the major scholars. Thus, intelligent reading of the best of NT scholarship requires familiarity with these writings ... if for no other reason (1).

He then sets out with a brief overview of these writings (1-3) and describes their value for determining the meaning of words and syntax, for the meaning of concepts, for history and historical, social, and religious context, exegetical context, hermeneutical context (how Scripture could be interpreted, applied, and adapted), and the canonical context (what was regarded as Scripture and why?, 3-6). He further outlines the method to be used when reference is made to these texts (6f, general bibliography on 7f).

The following chapters survey

the OT Apocrypha, the OT Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, versions of the Old Testament, Philo and Josephus, the Targums, Rabbinic literature (including summaries of Talmudic literature, Tannaic Midrashic literature, Amoraic Midrashic literature, later midrashim and even medieval), and the NT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (a section that is relatively short in view of the attention that these writings receive in recent academic and popular literature for better or worse!).

Further chapters deal with early Church Fathers (the Apostolic Fathers and authors up to the fourth century), Gnostic Writings (Coptic Gnostic library and Mandaean materials), and "Other Texts," which provides a survey of Greco-Roman authors and of the passages in Greco-Roman authors on Jesus and Early Christianity as well as the *Corpus Hermeticum* and various Samaritan writings. It closes with references to papyri, inscriptions, coins, and ostraca.

In each chapter Evans starts with a list of the works under discussion, a brief introduction, exact titles, and summaries of the works in various detail. For each work, bibliography including editions of the text and critical studies is included. The chapters close with a survey of the major themes addressed by them and general bibliography.

This broad survey is followed by seven examples of New Testament exegesis drawing on such texts for interpretation, including Jesus' Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:16-30), the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30), the Parable of the Wicked Vineyard

Tenants (Mark 12:1-11), "I said 'You are gods'" (John 10:33), "The Word is near you" (Rom 10:5-10), Ascending and Descending with a Shout (1Thess 4:16), and Paul and the first Adam (1Cor 15:45-47).

Several appendices round off the volume starting with a chart of the canons of scripture that include the Apocrypha; a detailed ("not comprehensive, it is illustrative only," 342) list of quotations, allusions, and parallels to the New Testament; a list of the parallels between NT gospels and a selected number of pseudepigraphical gospels; as well as a list of the parables of Jesus and those by the rabbis (close parallels and resemblances in theme, style, or detail). This is followed by a brief comparison of Jesus and the miracles of (other) Jewish holy men. A further chart lists Messianic claimants of the first and second centuries covering biblical and historical precedents, Messianic kings, priests, prophets, and later Messianic claimants. The volume closes with detailed indexes of modern authors, of ancient writings and writers, and of ancient sources.

Evans has provided an up to date useful guide to a wealth of literature and the maze it creates. His focus is clearly on Jesus and the Jewish *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies* (cf., e.g., a statement like "The literatures surveyed in this book help us understand how biblical literature was interpreted and what role it played in the life of the Jewish and Christian communities of faith," 5). The section on Greco-Roman literature is comparatively

short. Would Greco-Roman authors not have deserved at least a chapter of their own, rather than simply being classed as "Other Writings" and be mentioned in the introduction simply as follows: "A few of the most relevant pagan authors will be included" (3)? Evans starts his comments on the exegetical value of ancient texts with an immediate limitation: "Of major importance is the fact that the noncanonical writings quite often shed light on the interpretation of the OT passages quoted or alluded to in the NT" (5). Is there not also exegetical value in other ancient texts? However, in the list of "Quotations, allusions and parallels to the New Testament" a good number of non-Jewish sources are included (easy to be traced through the index of ancient sources).

A mere page on the use of such texts for NT interpretation (5f.) is short in a volume of this length. The preceding pages on the value of these texts (3-6) indicate what kind of insights they might provide ("How is NT exegesis facilitated by studying these writings?", 3), yet without developing methodological steps. What Evans provides directly on their use refers exclusively to the use of the OT in the NT. He writes,

In order to understand a given passage one must reconstruct as much as possible the world of thought in which the NT writer lived. Since the NT frequently quotes the OT (hundreds of times) or alludes to it (thousands of times) and everywhere presupposes its language, concepts, and theology, exegesis should be particularly sensitive to its presence and careful to reconstruct the exegetical-

theological context of which a given OT quotation or allusion may have been part (6).

This statement is as correct as it is one-sided. What of the historical, religious, literary, and cultural developments in the intertestamental period? NT authors also quote and may allude to *non-Jewish* sources. Not all their readers shared the authors' world of thought. Evans moves on to provide seven steps for this quest. The concluding sentence is Evans's only advice for using the texts discussed in this volume for NT exegesis: "Although the above steps have been applied to passages where the OT is present, either explicitly or implicitly, most of these steps are relevant for exegesis of any passage, for it is indeed a rare passage that alludes to or parallels no other" (6). Some guidance on methodology may be gleaned from the examples, though Evans's aim is "to show how the noncanonical writings at times significantly contribute to the exegetical task" (329), rather than to provide guidelines for students.

The developing methodological debate over intertextuality and its implications for interpreting individual texts is not sufficiently addressed. This is surprising in view of the emphasis Evans puts on the function of the OT in the NT. Despite these criticisms, Evans succeeds in providing "a tool designed to encourage students to make better use of the various primary literatures that are cognate to the writings of the Bible" (xi). A similar source book for the history of interpretation of the Bible beyond the early church would be

much welcome.

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